

# **The Antihero with the Mask: Slipknot and *Mesin Tempur* Represent the Criticism of Social Condition**

**Deswandito Dwi Saptanto**

English Literature Department, Ngudi Waluyo University  
Ungaran, Indonesia  
deswanditodwi@unw.ac.id

## **ABSTRACT**

For a long time, music has been a medium to convey expressions of anger, dissatisfaction, anxiety and also direct criticism of certain people or groups. The lyrics conveyed in this musical accompaniment are loaded with various messages both implicitly and explicitly. This research uses literature studies with a comparative literary approach and uses qualitative descriptive methods that focus on comparisons of two Nu-Metal bands, namely Slipknot and *Mesin Tempur*. The combination of noisy music, rude lyrics, eccentric costumes and masks characterize these two bands. The purpose of this study is to compare two bands from two different countries, namely Slipknot from America and *Mesin Tempur* from Indonesia. This study analyzes the semiotic meaning of masks and costumes worn by them, as well as revealing the messages from social criticism expressed in their harsh and arrogant lyrics. This study concluded that there are several similarities in the meanings, messages and symbols used in masks and their costumes. Some similarities can also be revealed that the harsh words from the lyrics criticize the situation and conditions that are currently occurring. Some of the differences that exist are the forms of sarcasm and criticism that are conveyed through the lyrics of these songs have different coverage. Slipknot has a wide range of criticisms and allusions to a wider audience; because of the meanings conveyed around the crisis of self-confidence, depression, anger, hatred and anti-social that is certainly experienced by anyone in the world. *Mesin Tempur* has the peculiarity of narrower coverage of social criticism, which revolves around everyday problems in Indonesian culture.

**Keywords:** costume, culture, lyrics, mask, social criticism

## INTRODUCTION

The journey of rock music has undergone various evolutionary phases that have led to this very diverse sub-genre of rock music. In the period from the 1990s to the 2000s a new form of rock music was born called Nu-Metal (New Metal) which is a combination of several types of music, namely hard rock as the basic element combined with funk, hip hop, grunge, blues, alternative rock. Several band names from the United States, such as KoRn, Mudvayne, Incubus, Static-X, Coal Chamber, Slipknot, Deftones, Rage Against the Machine, 311 have successfully carried this new genre of rock music called Nu-Metal. The distinctive features of unique appearance, harsh and strong song lyrics, distortion of noisy guitar effects combined with massive scratching turntables seem to be a uniformity as well as a convention of diversifying their musicality. With the popularity of this new genre, various Nu-Metal bands emerged in different parts of the world, after the Nu-Metal fever became popular in the United States. One of the Nu-Metal bands from Ujungberung, West Java, Indonesia; called the *Mesin Tempur* is emerged as the representation of the new wave of metal music.

The existence of metal music which then transformed into a new seed called Nu-Metal still has a major theme in common, namely reflecting on aspects of rebellion that are generally carried out by the younger generation. Song lyrics created based on the theme of rebellion and dissatisfaction with the situation in society. The theme and song lyrics of this metal music genre have a scope of social criticism on problems of violence, sex, politics that actually occur in the community; however, many metal genre also insert fantasy contents, satanism, mythology and poetry. These lyrics and performances of Nu-Metal musicians often have a bad influence on the younger generation which leads to wrong ideology and triggers radical actions. Referring to this, the label "Parental Advisory: Explicit Content" is embedded in every album cover of Nu-Metal's bands, so that every generation of young people who listen to this music remains under supervision and explanation from their parents. (During, R., & Muilwijk, 2007)

Gaines in Phillipov (2012) states that he is in line with Cashmore's idea Phillipov (2012) that metal music does not exert a direct influence on political criticism, Metal music is a form of representation of anger and dissatisfaction with rules, this is what distinguishes between metal music and punk and hip hop genre. The thing that separates the metal and punk or hip hop music genres is that metal music is more of a practical critique that focuses on freedom, escape and satisfaction with sex, drugs and alcohol. On the other hand, punk and hip hop focus more on sarcasm to sharp criticism of social, cultural and political problems of the government as a form of concern for the surrounding circumstances. This mix of metal and hip hop as well as punk is a new phenomenon that complements each other and is currently called the Nu-Metal genre.

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The birth of Nu-Metal which became a popular culture in the 1990s-2000s successfully produced many musicians who had an idealism in common, for example: looking eccentric, creating noisy songs with rude words and combining metal genres with hip hop and funk. During, R., & Muilwijk, M. (2007) refers to this matter as a common identity among Nu-Metal bands. Some musicians use eccentric face makeup, even use masks and specific costumes as a characteristic as well as an icon of Nu-Metal musicians. In addition to costumes as 'identity characters'; brutal stage performance, gestures, tattoos and symbols on stage have become a significant feature of Nu-Metal culture.

This research is a literature study that focuses on the comparison of two Nu-Metal bands, namely Slipknot from the United States and *Mesin Tempur* from Indonesia, which have some resemblance in the concept of costume as a characteristic identity, symbols used, song lyrics created and social criticisms to be conveyed. Furthermore, this research was carried out to try to find the meaning of the symbols in the masks and costumes used, the meaning of the rude lyrics, and the existence of Slipknot and *Mesin Tempur* in popular culture. This research uses qualitative descriptive method using comparative literary approach and semiotic theory to analyze the comparison and what is hidden behind the existence of the two bands

## **METHOD**

A researcher in conducting a research certainly performs several procedures from the beginning to the end of the research in order to produce a structured form of research. Saldana (2011) states that qualitative methods are an umbrella to become methods and approaches to matters related to social life. The research was conducted to collect information by collecting nonquantitative data from the selected research object, this is textual materials such as transcripts, daily notes, documents and visual materials such as artifacts, photos, video footage, and internet sites. This qualitative method can be applied to various disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, communication, journalism, health care, law, and various other fields.

Bulmer in Corbin, Juliet, & Strauss (2008) explains that the world is very complex, and there are a lot of things that can be researched to gain new knowledge. Therefore, to research complex phenomena must use complicated methodologies as well. A researcher must be able to view things objectively, conduct research by placing the research object neutral and viewed from various perspectives. Issues or problems related to social, political, cultural, racial, gender, and information must be examined with appropriate methodologies. The qualitative method in this study is very relevant and able to be the right tool to solve a problem in detail.

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## **Comparative Literature**

### **Original, borrow and tradition**

Comparative literature is an approach that does not produce a new theory. The existence of comparative literature helps to identify a phenomenon or problem that exists in a literary work by comparing one work with another in the same media and author, as well as comparing one work with another in different media and different authors. Comparative literature initially only compares two objects from the same media in one region or one country; however, as it develops, comparative literature can compare one work with other media and disciplines in one country or more than one country. (Damono, 2009)

Marius-Francois Guyard in Damono (2009) said that the comparative literature approach is a history of relations between nations. Guyard continued his view of comparative literature as a medium for surveying the exchange of ideas, themes, books and feelings among nations among two or several literary works. Another view was expressed by A. Owen Aldridge who stated that literature is not only limited to one literary work from one nation, but comparative literature can be a literary study of several literary works with different media and intellectual disciplines even from different nations

The most important thing in comparative literature studies is the existence of the terms 'original, borrow and tradition'. A work created by someone is very difficult to be considered an original and authentic work. It becomes difficult to determine the validity that the work is original because a work can either intentionally or accidentally adapt, borrow or even plagiarize ideas that have existed in previous works. (Damono, 2009). Referring to this, a literary work that has stolen or borrowed the concept of story or other elements from previous literary works, then this new work has lost its originality and creativity. This has often happened in the production process of a literary work, so it is difficult to determine whether this work is original or has imitated from the previous works. These copying, adapting, and borrowing activities are often done by intentionally or unintentionally.

### **Semiotic Analysis**

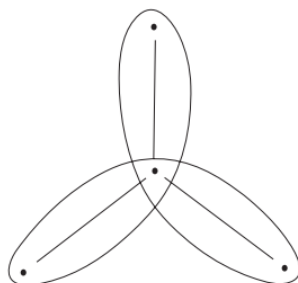
Understanding semiotics means understanding the perspective of semiotics. We live in a world of signs that are visually displayed. The existence of these signs needs to be studied and cannot be understood without semiotic studies to catch the meaning of the sign.

Chandler (2007) states that the sign can be understood with semiotic functions, but the meaning resulting from a sign has a strong idealism because information or meaning is not 'contained' around us, in books, computers, or audio-visual media. Meaning is not 'transferred' to us, we must be active in making an understanding of meaning in society according to complex codes or interaction conventions that we are usually

not aware of. Being aware of such codes is inherently very interesting and increases our intellect. We learn from semiotics, that we live in a sign world and we have no way of understanding anything except through signs and codes that are understood and determined together.

Peirce in Copley (2001) explaining the existence of 3 important elements in forming the sign, namely: the sign that often appears in our daily life is called representamen, the second element related to representamen is named as an object, and the third element as a link between representamen and semiotic objects is named as interpretant. These three things are interrelated, and can be shown by the illustration below:

Picture 1: The Peircean sign



Source: Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics The Basics, Second Edition* (2nd ed.). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

### **Symbols**

Merrell in Copley (2001) states that symbols are the most complicated aspect in semiotics, this is because it requires social conventions and mutual understanding of things. Referring to Peirce, a name does not necessarily have to relate to the thing we are talking about.

For example, the word 'Coke' is a social understanding in the community that this is the name of a type of drink, but what if 'Coke' is changed to 'Sclarch'? because it is not directly related to the object in question so that we can freely change its name in accordance with social understanding. When 'Sclarch' is mentioned by someone, then our mind is immediately thinking about a type of soda drink. Symbols become easy to understand if this social understanding spreads widely in the community.

### **Sampling Technique**

The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling.

1. Slipknot is compared to the *Mesin Tempur* in terms of the ideas, symbols, and meanings of masks and costumes worn on stage, as well as the idealism and commercialism of Slipknot and the *Mesin Tempur* in the musical world.
2. Comparison in social criticism and moral message conveyed through song lyrics created by Slipknot and the *Mesin Tempur*.

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## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The mask and who is behind the mask?**

"In the beginning, it was cool that nobody really knew who we were,"

Corey Taylor of Slipknot (2021)

The statement above is a brief statement from Corey Taylor, frontman of the Nu-Metal band, named Slipknot. Slipknot is a band formed and based in Des Moines, Iowa, United States of America that has been around for about 27 years in metal music. Slipknot is like a shining precious gem, their existence gives a new pattern in the music genre. Slipknot was formed in the 1995s and its initial debut was their first album with the same name as their band 'Slipknot' in 1999 under the American major record label, Roadrunner Records.

Slipknot is an eccentric band that has a strong character in creating their work, their appearance, and their stage perform. This band has its own peculiarities, every member of the band wears masks and mechanic jumpsuit costume as the uniform, as well as labeling each of its personnel with numbers from 0 to 8. The masks and stage costumes they wear are the most fundamental and essential for the band's identity. This eccentric existence of masks and costumes is nothing new in the world of music. Kiss, Insane Clown Pose, Mudvayne and Mushroomhead have made their debut using masks to cover themselves and try to appear 'different' as the characteristic of the their band..

Each of these Slipknot personnel has a different mask, and each of these masks implies the dark side of the character of every personnel. This can be proven by the explanation of Corey Taylor (2021) as the vocalist and spokesperson of the band, that at first they used this mask with the aim of giving fans more attention to their music and not to their physical appearance. With a mask, every Slipknot personnel feels more free to express their best performance in front of their fans without needing to know who they are.

Corey Taylor in Arnopp (2001) suggests that with an eccentric appearance of masks and costumes is how we become more familiar with music, this is how we become unconscious of who we really are. This is what sets us apart when we are on stage and when we are in our daily lives. This mask worn by Slipknot personnel is a distinctive feature. The masks have been worn by them since their early album debut in 1999. Here are some special masks worn by each Slipknot personnel at the beginning of their debut: Corey Taylor, as a vocalist, wears crash test dummies mask; Shawn Crahan, as a percussion player, wears clown mask; Mick Thomson, as a guitarist, wears hockey mask; Jim Root, as a guitarist, wears Jester mask; Craig Jones, as a music professional sampler and

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keyboardist, wears pinhead mask; Chris Fehn, as a percussion player, wears pinocchio mask; Paul Gray, as a bassist, wears pig mask; Joey Jordison, as a drummer, wears kabuki mask; Sid Wilson, as a Disc Jockey, wears gas mask.

The use of masks on each of these personnel creates its own uniqueness to the band, in addition to the large number of personnel, they also consist of several types of musicians with diverse musical instruments. The existence of these masks they wear also undergoes an evolution in accordance with the musical experiments in their albums that develop over time. Slipknot has stated that they will continue to wear masks in every performances on stage, because masks and costumes have become their special identities.

The journey of the new genre of Nu-Metal has spread around the world, even the influence of Nu-Metal has reached Indonesia. According to the development of metal music in the United States, Indonesia also has a place in Bandung which is the starting place for many musicians who are synonymous with metal music. The place is Ujung Berung, a district in the city of Bandung, West Java. Some very popular indie metal band such as: *Koil*, *Burgerkill*, *Siksa Kubur*, *Beside*, *Forgotten*, *Jasad* were formed in Ujung Berung and their popularity is not only on a regional or national scale, but also on an international level. For example, the successful bands *Koil*, *Jasad* and *Burgerkill* have performed live in several European countries. This success and achievement are achieved to an international level thanks to the persistence of the musicians from Ujung Berung which consistently maintain their idealism. They do not 'surrender' to the power of the major label industry. Their existence even as only as indie label musicians, but the sense of togetherness between one musician and another, as well as the musicians and their fans is very closely intertwined and strong.

Starting from the big names mentioned above, there is a band that carries a grindcore genre, called *Mesin Tempur*. This band keeps their identities a secret from the public. *Mesin Tempur* has similarities to Slipknot, which wears masks and costumes on all personnel. *Mesin Tempur* is a new phenomenon in Indonesian metal music. The mystery of the band's personnel is a particular attraction to love their work as it is. This is exactly like the initial ideology of Slipknot who preferred to wear masks to cover himself up and to make fans more focused on the music they created rather than their physical appearance. Slipknot's early idealism turned out not to be the same as the *Mesin Tempur*'s. Slipknot is currently not an indie label band that has a pure idealism as it was in the early 1990s. This was showed by their success with their various albums under the power of Roadrunner Records and has become a best-seller on the international market. Their original idealism and notion of secrecy had failed because as Slipknot grew in popularity, their unmasked identity had spread in various media on the internet. This was happened when Jim Root as guitarist and

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Corey Taylor as vocalist, had founded the band 'Stone Sour' in 2002 and performed their video clips without wearing a mask. Corey Taylor is also busy with his solo project called CMFT (Corey Motherfuckin Taylor) in 2020 which clearly shows the face of the vocalist without the use of a mask.

In addition to Slipknot's skyrocketing popularity through the musical career, Slipknot personnel are also actively involved in the world of the musical instrument products advertising industry. Two Slipknot guitarists have become icons in two well-known guitar brands in the United States, namely Jim Root as the icon of the Fender Jazzmaster and Telecaster guitar brands (Jim Root Signature); Mick Thomson as the icon of the Jackson Pro Series (Mick Thomson Signature). Joey Jordison as a drummer has also become a leading drum icon, Pearl (Joey Jordison Signature).

On the other hand, *Mesin Tempur* kept their originality and idealism to keep their identity hidden. *Mesin Tempur* stays focused on working with their simple identity by wearing a skull-shaped mask, all-black clothes, shorts, and boots. The symbol that the *Mesin Tempur* wants to present through stage performance, song lyrics and costumes worn means that the band still maintains their tradition of being simple, straightforward and bold. This is suitable with their statement "Grind can kill the pop!" which means their music genre can subvert the dominance of popularity.

### **Lyric is the ultimate weapon**

Slipknot is a metal band that highlighting the elements of horror and terror through their performances and through the lyrics of their songs. Some pentagram symbols and 666 which means demon symbols always decorate the stage decorations and costumes they wear, but Slipknot is not entirely a 'devil-worshipping' band, as is shown in the lyrics of their song that elevates the meaning of solidarity, in a song called 'Pulse of the Maggots' that is aimed at their fan in all around the world. Since Slipknot has very close relationship to their fans, so they made and released this song in 2004. The song tells the story of the solidarity of fellow 'Maggots' (a name for Slipknot fans) and at the same time encourages Slipknot fans to rise from the misery. This is shown by the passage in the lyrics of the song entitled 'Pulse of the Maggots': "We fight 'till no one can fight us. We live and no one can stop us. We pull when we're pushed too far".

Slipknot also often makes simple and sharp lyrics about criticisms of what is happening in this life. The song is called 'People = Shit' in which the lyrics say:

"Here we go again, motherfucker.  
Come on down, and see the idiot right here.  
Too fucked to bag and not afraid to care.  
What's the matter with calamity anyway?  
Right get the fuck outta my face.  
Understand that I can't feel anything. ...  
...Everybody hates me now, so fuck it.

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Blood's on my face and my hands,  
 and I'd on 't know why,  
 I'm not afraid to cry.  
 But that's none of your business...  
 Spin it around so I can spit in its face.  
 I want to leave without a trace  
 'Cause I don't want to die in this place...  
 People = shit,  
 People = shit,  
 People = shit,  
 People = shit (what cha gonna do?),  
 People = shit ('cause I am not afraid of you),  
 People = shit (I'm everything you'll never be),  
 People = shit"

The lyrics of this song clearly provoke the listeners to hate people with all their hypocrisy, and nowadays most people no longer care about each other. Humans today are also like incurable diseases, and their existence is further corrupting the world. This song warns us to be better individuals and not to easily trust those around us who can betray us.

Slipknot song lyrics about a motivation to listeners are shown in the song lyrics titled 'Surfacing', here are the lyrics: "...Fuck it all. Fuck this world. Fuck everything that you stand for. Don't belong. Don't exist. Don't give a shit. Don't ever judge me... ". Through this lyric, Slipknot conveys the meaning of a self-confidence 'trust and believe in yourself' and 'do not trust others, because they can only judge and hate you.

Social criticism in Slipknot's lyrics is a metaphor for California's luxurious, glamorous life when viewed from the perspective of a famous 1960s actor named Marlon Brando. Here are the lyrics of the song 'Eyeless' from Slipknot: "...You can't see California without Marlon Brando's eyes. You can't see California without Marlon Brando's eyes. You can't see California without Marlon Brando's eyes... ". These lyrics actually come from the screams of a homeless person who repeatedly shouted to Corey Taylor (Slipknot's vocalist) saying those words. It inspired Corey Taylor to create a song called 'Eyeless' which means that we would never be able to live in a luxurious lifestyle in California if we were just ordinary people living in mediocre economic conditions.

If Slipknot has succeeded in creating a song that is more loaded with social criticism on all humans problems in general on a wide scale, it is the case with *Mesin Tempur* that try to convey moral messages and social criticism but in a smaller scale, namely around the area where they live that is identical to the West Java culture. The lyrics created by the *Mesin Tempur* are more humble and filled with elements of humor and parody with their characteristic of the local traditions. Some songs even have lyrics that seem abstract and difficult to understand. For example, a song called '*Becak Tiguling*':

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*Becak Tiguling*

”*Becak tiguling,  
Becak tiguling.  
Becak tiguling,  
Becak tiguling.  
Becak tiguling,  
Becak tiguling.*”

*Watir si Emang.  
Ngaboseh terus.  
Penumpangna gendut.  
Diudag tibum.  
Becakna tikusruk.  
Abus kana cubluk.*

*Becak tiguling,  
Becak tiguling.  
Becak tiguling,  
Becak tiguling.  
Becak tiguling,  
Becak tiguling’*

The majority of *Mesin Tempur* songs use Sundanese, so it has a very strong characteristic of West Java. Referring to the lyrics of ‘*Becak Tiguling*’ above, it literally tells a portrait of the life of a ‘*tukang becak*’ (Pedicab driver), they often pursued by security officers (*diudag tibum*) because referring to local government regulations in several big cities in Indonesia, pedicabs are no longer allowed to operate on the city street. The life of these pedicab drivers is also in the lower middle class. The lyrics of this song show how hard it is to be someone who lives in the lower middle class.

Another *Mesin Tempur* song related to social criticism is a song called ‘*Mari Membaca*’, here are the lyrics of the song:

*Mari Membaca*

“*Mari kita belajar reading  
Yo, come on  
Mari kita belajar membaca*”

*A, B, C, D, E, F, G  
H, I, J, K, L, M, N  
O, P, Q, R, S, T, U  
V, W, X, Y, Z (yuk)*

*A, B, C, D, E, F, G  
H, I, J, K, L, M, N*

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O, P, Q, R, S, T, U  
V, W, X, Y, Z

B-A, ba, B-I, bi, babi  
B-O, bo, B-O, bo, bobo  
B-A, ba, B-I, bi, babi  
B-O, bo, B-O, bo, bobo  
Babi, bobo

A, B, C, D, E, F, G  
H, I, J, K, L, M, N  
O, P, Q, R, S, T, U  
Mari membaca”

Based on the lyrics of the song ‘*Mari Membaca*’ above, the *Mesin Tempur* tries to criticize the lack of interest in reading and the lack of literacy skills of Indonesian people. This lyric also illustrates the government's lack of attention to improve the knowledge of the Indonesian people, starting from the culture of reading, criticism to the government is shown in the section “...B-A, ba, B-I, bi, babi B-O, bo, B-O, bo, bobo, Babi bobo” which it implies a satire that pigs represent the image of a government that does not give effort to increase knowledge for Indonesia people.

*Mesin Tempur* also tries to signify the typical West Java regional culture with the presence of instant noodles in traditional stalls in West Java. Instant noodles as a symbol of cheap food, community food and become an icon that instant noodles are synonymous with traditional Sundanese stalls (*warung Burjo*). This is indicated by the lyrics of the song ‘*Mana Tukang Indomie*’

‘*Mana Tukang Indomie*’

*Mana tukang Indomie?*  
*Mana tukang Indomie?*  
*Mana tukang Indomie?*

*Mana tukang Indomie?*  
*Mana tukang Indomie?*  
*Mana tukang Indomie?*

*Ada Indomie goreng*  
*Ada Indomie rebus*  
*Ada Indomie soto*  
*Ada Indomie rendang*

*Ada Indomie goreng*  
*Ada Indomie rebus*  
*Ada Indomie soto*  
*Ada Indomie rendang, oke*

*Indomie*

Indomie as one of the famous instant noodle brands in Indonesia, became the main icon in the song lyrics of this *Mesin Tempur*. Most Indonesian people have a wrong perception about the term instant noodles, because Indomie is a well-known brand with many flavors and is loved by the wider community, Indonesian people often say 'Indomie' (instant noodle brand in Indonesia) when we want to buy instant noodles. This instant noodle is very famous in all various economic levels of Indonesian people. Through a song titled '*Mana Tukang Indomie*' this proves that the moral message conveyed by the *Mesin Tempur* is to love Indonesian culture and loves domestic products.

## CONCLUSION

The difference from the ideas, symbols and meanings that can be deduced from these two bands basically have a resemblance, namely the use of masks and special costumes, as well as rude and strong lyrics as the special characteristics possessed by them. The thing that distinguishes between Slipknot and *Mesin Tempur* is the existence of their contradictory ideals. Slipknot was a very popular Nu-Metal band in the world and chose to join a major label record company, while the *Mesin Tempur* was still at the initial convention they agreed to together to stay indie and shun fame. Glamorous life and popularity have changed Slipknot which used to be very independent and eccentric, but nowadays his music and lifestyle follow the tastes of the market of the music industry. On the other hand, *Mesin Tempur* still retains its authenticity by keeping their identity hidden and retaining their authenticity.

On the lyrical side, both focus on social criticism and moral messages on this life. What makes the difference is, Slipknot seeks to give a social critique through the lyrics to the unorthodox things that are happening around us all around the world. *Mesin Tempur* focuses more on social criticism and conveys moral messages in a smaller scale, in the context of the society around them. *Mesin Tempur* are very synonymous with Sundanese culture. Slipknot is more synonymous with violence, brutality, anger and anxiety. *Mesin Tempur* is more synonymous with humor/ parody, rude words and relatively short song duration but loaded with moral messages.

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