

A Semiological Approach to Representing Banyumasan Culture as Begalan in Library Collections

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Abstract. This paper seeks to examine a set of *Begalan* in the library collection of Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Islamic State University Purwokerto as one of the library's efforts to increase the representation of Banyumasan cultural identity in the library space. *Begalan*, recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage in 2018, is a mode of performing arts that was developed in the Banyumas region of Central Java. The library has an important role in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of its community, so that the information contained within can be preserved and used by its patrons. This research uses a semiology approach to connect library collections with cultural identity. This research seeks to contribute to an increasing aware of the existence of the Banyumasan culture as a sub-culture of Javanese culture and toward a collective awareness within the community of the importance of cultural identity as a part of national identity.

Keywords: cultural identity, begalan, banyumasan, semiology, library collection

1 Introduction

Libraries are important to building a nation's civilization [1], [2]. The existence of libraries in Indonesia has been regulated in Law No. 43 of 2007 in Article 1 which states that a library is an institution that manages written works, printed works, and recorded works professionally with the use of a standardized system to answer the needs of education, research, preservation, information, and recreation for users [3]. The law strengthens library institutions in carrying out their duties and functions as centers of knowledge that support the nation's cultural resilience. Libraries perform a cultural function [4], [5] by providing knowledge, history, and cultural heritage from generation to generation. Through this cultural function, libraries are expected to revive and preserve the noble values of the nation's cultural heritage.

One library that strives to realize the law's mandate is the Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Islamic State University Library. The library has a special service called corner service. Corner service is a special library service that provides themed information sources through collections tailored to the theme it raises [6]. The corner service owned by the Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Islamic State University Library was initially called *Pojok Panginyongan*, which has a unique collection and is separated from other collections [7]. The corner service at *Pojok Penginyongan* has developed into the "*Penginyongan Museum and Library*", which provides a unique collection with the theme of local wisdom of Banyumasan Cultural heritage.

The corner service collection titled "*Penginyongan Museum and Library*" is in the form of printed works, recorded works, and artifacts of *Banyumasan* cultural heritage. Printed works include books, papers, journals, magazines, and final assignments with *Banyumasan* cultural themes. The recorded works consist of performing arts such as *lengger*, *calungan*, *campur sari*, *wayang*, *thek-thek*, *ebeg*, short films and *dagelan*. Other recorded works include documentaries on customs or rituals, culinary, batik, history, and tourist attractions in the *Banyumasan* region. Other collections include cultural artifacts such as batik, Banyumasan *punakawan* puppets, *Bawor* paintings, old Banyumas photographs, pottery, Banyumasan weapons, duplicates of ancient manuscripts, traditional clothes, and *brenong kepeng begalan*.

Banyumasan culture is one of the Javanese subcultures that represents the people, language, or culture originating from the southwestern part of Central Java. This culture has a cultural area that covers five regencies, namely Banjarnegara, Purbalingga, Banyumas, Cilacap, and western Kebumen. Banyumasan culture is often called Penginyongan culture by using a distinctive marker with the term *inyong*. Penginyongan is commonly used by Banyumas people in their daily lives to describe themselves. *Penginyongan* comes from the word *inyong*, which means "I" or "me" in *Banyumasan* language [7].

Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Islamic State University Library Corner Service entitled "*Penginyongan Museum and Library*" has a collection of cultural artifacts which is symbolized by a set of *brenong kepeng*, commonly used by the Banyumas community in the traditional *begalan* ceremony. *Brenong Kepang* is a set of kitchen utensils tied to bamboo sticks that function as a *pikulan* or a tool to lift these items. *Brenong Kepang* is placed on the left side of the service corner, close to the mannequin wearing Banyumasan traditional clothes. The presence of the *brenong kepeng* shows that the library is trying to highlight this artifact as a representation of *Banyumasan* culture in the *begalan* tradition.

The presence of *brenong kepeng*, a ritual tool of *begalan*, in the corner service of the "*Penginyongan Museum and Library*" at the Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Islamic State University Library provides a cultural experience for its patrons. The cultural heritage collected by the library can be a "bridge" to a new world for people who do not know it but can create a person's desire to reminisce with their past experiences [8]. This research project seeks to collaborate the field of cultural studies with library and information studies concerning representing *Banyumasan* culture.

Begalan is a tradition which carried out from generation to generation by the Banyumas community usually holding on the wedding ceremony. *Begalan* ceremony as a Banyumasan traditional is one

of the rituals used by the Banyumas community to remove harmful things from the bride and groom (*sukerta*) [9]. The community believes that implementing the traditional *begalan* ceremony will provide goodness for the bride and groom in starting their new life as a family. This myth is believed by the community of Banyumas Regency; if it is not done, it would bring disaster. The *begalan* tradition has a history related to the marriage between the youngest daughter of Adipati Wirasaba, Dewi Sukesi, and Pangeran Tirtakencana, the eldest son of Adipati Banyumas. One week after the wedding procession at the bride's place, the groom held a *ngunduh mantu* or wedding reception. On the way from Wirasaba to Banyumas, the bride and groom, with their escorts, were intercepted by a group of robbers dressed in black and wearing headbands who wanted to seize all the luggage. Fighting and arguing were inevitable. After various efforts were made, at the end the robbers were defeated. Arriving in Banyumas, the Duke advised his people to hold a *begalan* ceremony if they wanted to marry of their eldest son to the youngest daughter. The ceremony was intended to avoid danger and to throw away evil spirits that would disturb the bride and groom.

Begalan is packaged in the art of dramatic storytelling performed by two men. One of them carries a *brenong kepeng* as a messenger of the groom, and the other acts as a *begal* or robber who will snatch the luggage. This tradition occurs when the groom and his family entourage enter the bride's house [10]. *Uba rampe* in the form of *brenong kepeng* has meanings that need to be solved by the robber before the groom's messenger hands over the luggage [11]. *Begalan* is full of philosophical meanings, so it is necessary to study the symbols conveyed in *brenong kepeng* so that the meaning and purpose can be understood. *Begalan* is a traditional ceremony performed with a fragmented performance that symbolizes a robbery scene. This tradition is performed before the groom's entourage enters the bride's house. The groom's messenger, Ki Gunareka, brings *uba rampe* or *brenong kepeng* in the form of kitchen utensils for the bride. On the way, they were intercepted by a robber named Ki Rekaguna. There was an argument that Ki Gunareka would give his luggage if the robber was able to explain the philosophical meaning of the *brenong kepeng* that he was carrying on. After Ki Rekaguna can explain all the philosophical meanings of the luggage, a dance is performed, and then Ki Rekaguna broke the *kedhil pratala* containing yellow rice and coins as a sign of the rupture of the *bajang sawan* feet of the bride and groom so that negative things from the bride and groom can be eliminated. After the *kendil* was broken with the *wlira* sword, the goods were brought by Ki Gunareka were contested by the audience who attend the wedding ceremony of the two brides.

The *begalan* ceremony is a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved so that the younger generation can understand the local wisdom possessed by the Banyumas community in the past. The library presents this cultural heritage again as a library collection; of course, it will provide information related to the existence of this cultural heritage. Moreover, *begalan* was recognized by UNESCO as one of the intangible cultural heritages in 2018 as a performing art that developed in the Banyumas region of Central Java [15]. Libraries have an essential role in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of their communities so that the information contained in the cultural heritage can be preserved and used by their patrons.

Research on cultural representations in libraries related to the *begalan* tradition has been carried out by many previous researchers. The research entitled "Representations of Asia in Western Australian Public Library Collections" by Hollie White and Denise Woods focuses on Asian representations in the form of Asian culture in the Western Australian Public Library collection. [8]. The following research was conducted by Reza Eqa Winastwan and Annisa Nur Fatwa with the title "*Penginyongan* Corner of Uin Prof. K.H Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto Library as a Means of Preserving Banyumas Local Culture." The focus of the research is to find out the purpose of organizing the obstacles faced in the technical aspects of collection management, both in terms of procurement, maintenance, and collection services. [7]. Furthermore, Alva Kurniawan conducted research on the *begalan* tradition, etc., entitled "Happiness Value Inside Traditional Ceremony of *Begalan*: Research on Communication Activities Ritual Wedding". This research focuses on the value of happiness that can be taken in the traditional *begalan* ceremony [9]. The following research entitled "Symbolic Philosophical Analysis in the *Begalan* Tradition in Banyumas District" by Chasanah etc. focuses on the study of the meaning of symbols in the *begalan* tradition with Islamic religious values [11]. The four studies are used as a reference to examine aspects of Banyumasan cultural representation in the form of the *begalan* tradition, which is one of the collections of the Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Islamic State University Library.

Roland Barthes' semiology theory is used to reveal the representation of Banyumasan culture in the form of *brenong kepang begalan* in the Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Islamic State University Library collection. Semiology is a semiotic study developed by Roland Barthes that aims to accept any sign system, regardless of its substance and boundaries: images, gestures, music, sounds, and objects [12]. Roland Barthes developed his theory into two signification levels: connotation and denotation. According to Barthes, myth is the second level of signification after the formation of the sign-signifier-signified so that the sign will become a new signifier and have a second signifier, which then forms a new sign. Therefore, when a sign with a connotative meaning develops into a denotative meaning, the denotative meaning becomes a myth that involves symbols historical and cultural systems of society [13].

Denotation is the theory of meaning which refers to universal understanding. Every object has a meaning that is agreed upon by people in general. Meanwhile, connotation is a second level of meaning analysis that refers to interpreting an object related to emotions, feelings, and cultural conditions adapted to the reader's environment. A series of previous semiological chains form a myth with deeper meaning. The meaning in the concept of myth will see the history, origin, and reality of an object associated with previous conditions [12].

Research questions:

1. What are the semiological signs found in *brenong kepang begalan* at UIN SAIZU Purwokerto library?
2. How is the message conveyed in the *begalan* texts as a representation of Banyumasan Culture?

2 Research Method

This research focuses on the symbols or signs in *Brenong Kepang Begalan*, which is a collection of Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Islamic State University Library. This research uses qualitative research methods with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and reviewing documents and archives (content analysis). Through qualitative research, researcher tries to understand the phenomena experienced by people then analyze them to obtain thoughts, perceptions, motivations, or meanings in a product [14]. The data analysis technique in this study uses Roland Barthes' semiological theory with the concepts of denotation, connotation, myth, or metaphor.

3 Result and Discussions

3.1. Meaning of Brenong Kepang Begalan

Brenong kepeng is a set of tools used in the begalan tradition, which is a series of traditional marriage ceremonies in the Banyumas community. This tradition is not only used as a performance, but also as a ritual to ward off bad luck. In one set of *brenong kepeng*, there are fifteen objects, each of which has its own meaning. Through semiology approach, each of these objects can be read as a meaningful text. First, a Level 1 analysis is carried out, namely the denotation meaning, then a Level 2 analysis is carried out to find out the connotation meaning and the next analysis is to capture the myth based on the cultural background of the local community who has this cultural tradition.



Fig. 1. *Brenong Kepang Begalan*
Source: Feby Lestari Supriyono (2023)

3.1.1. *Pikulan* or bridge

Denotation: A tool's made from bamboo that is used to carry luggage in the traditional begalan ceremony. This mallet has four legs; if it's placed it can stand up.

Connotation: The four legs of the *pikulan* signify that the bride and groom have four parents after marriage. The *pikulan* means that after building a household, all problems and responsibilities are carried out together according to the duties of each husband and wife.

Myth: in Banyumas culture, if someone would be married one, they will have a joint responsibility as husband and wife to build a prosperous and happy household. After the two officially become husband and wife, of course, they will have four parents who must be respected, so they must uphold the honor of their parents.

3.1.2. Iyan

Denotation: A tool made of woven bamboo in the shape of a square clamped on all four sides and used by the ancient people as a base to cool rice.

Connotation: The diamond has four sides that symbolize the cardinal directions so that the household has a goal direction for a peaceful and happy life.

Myth: in Banyumas culture, it is known as *papat kiblat lima pancer*, the four cardinal directions, and the self as the pancer or center. This means the bride and groom must understand the purpose of building a household.

3.1.3. Ilir

Denotation: A fan's made from woven bamboo, its shape is square and has a handle. Ilir becomes a source of wind when flicked by fingers. Ilir has a function to get a little cooling when we feel hot, and it's also used to raise the fire when cooking using a traditional stove.

Connotation: do not believe things that have not been tested.

Myth: in Banyumas culture, people are always careful in their behavior so they do not readily believe things that are not necessarily true. Furthermore, always be cool like ilir that provides coolness to its environment.

3.1.4. Kukusan

Denotation: a tool made of woven bamboo, conical in shape, used to cook rice or *tumpeng*.

Connotation: like a steamer that functions to rip rice into rice, the bride and groom must be able to ripen their minds in facing life choices and problems. Kukusan is also a tool used to make *tumpeng*, which means *tumuju ing Pengeran*, which is in the maturity of thinking must be based on awareness as a creature of God.

Myth: in Banyumas culture, married people must continue to cultivate maturity and improve their spirituality to make their home life happily.

3.1.5. Ciri muthu

Denotation: A base is made of stone/wood/clay, used to grind spices, to mix all the flavours in. At the same time, muthu is used to grind or break complex spices to make them smooth.

Connotation: households will experience various life events so that all problems can be solved together for continuity in household life. In addition, *muthu* also has a meaning as a symbol of men, while *ciri* is a symbol of women so that the union of *ciri* and *muthu* as symbols of men and women will produce good, healthy offspring and bring happiness to the bride and groom.

Myth: in Banyumas culture, positive thinking is an attitude that is always prioritized so that problems faced can be solved wisely.

3.1.6. Centhong

Denotation: this is a kitchen tool made of wood or *glugu* (coconut tree trunk) used to take rice from the *cething*.

Connotation: married life has many challenges, so it is necessary to choose good things so that the family remains harmonious, just as *centhong* can turn hot rice to cool so that it is delicious to eat.

Myth: In Banyumas culture, the custom of *mbombongi* is a wise decision that does not cause problems for their partner.

3.1.7. Cething

Denotation: Cething is a kitchen utensil used to hold rice. The shape of the *cething* is wide at the top, convex at the middle, and narrow at the bottom.

Connotation: husbands must be able to earn a good living as much as possible to meet the household's needs, while wives can be wise in managing family finances.

Myth: in Banyumas culture, it is known as *gemi setiti ngati-ati*, which means frugality, meticulousness, and caution.

3.1.8. Tampah

Denotation: *Tampah* made of woven bamboo in a round and flat shape used to select good rice.

It is a tool used to select good rice and not; this *tampah* is round like a plate but in a large size. This *tampah* is made of woven bamboo with a divider on the side so it does not fall (*nginteri pari*) when selecting rice.

Connotation: *Tampah* comes from the word *natani lampah*, so the bride and groom have determined to choose their partner to live together as a family so that each has responsibilities as husband and wife.

Myth: household life in Banyumas culture must be physically and mentally prepared to coexist in the family.

3.1.9. *Siwur*

Denotation: *Siwur* is made of a whole coconut shell hollowed out at the top, then given a handle. This tool serves to take water.

Connotation: *Siwur* comes from the word *Isi aja diawur-awur*, meaning that the wealth obtained can be used not and adequately live extravagantly.

Myth: the culture of Banyumas is known as *adoh ratu cedak watu* (far from the king, close to the stone), so simple is used in the lives of its people.

3.1.10. *Irus*

Denotation: *Irus* is made from coconut shells, which are then given wood as a handle. The shape is flatter, not round like *siwur*. This tool is used to stir vegetables when cooking.

Connotation: husband and wife must be able to manage the situation both in joy and sorrow in married life.

Myth: in Banyumas culture, a married couple must be able to adapt to every situation.

3.1.11. *Kendhil pratala*

Denotation: Pottery's used for cooking rice. The *kendhil* is filled with yellow rice and coins that the *begalan* performer later breaks.

Connotation: The bride and groom must be able to fulfill the needs of their household in the form of clothing, food, and shelter.

Myth: in banyumas culture, people who dare to build a household must be ready to be independent in fulfilling their household needs.

3.1.12. *Kekeb*

Denotation: *Kekeb* is the pottery used to cover the *kendhil*.

Connotation: every couple in a household must have advantages and disadvantages to protect each other's disgrace from being known to others.

Myth: in Banyumas culture, it is known as *mendem jero mikul duwur*, which means maintaining family honor by disappearing family disgrace.

3.1.13. *Sorok*

denotation: a tool made of bamboo woven not too tightly, used to lift deep-fried dishes.

Connotation meaning: as a human being, you should not be *carak-corok*, which means you should not gossip about other people's shortcomings.

Myth: in Banyumas culture, it is known as *eling lan waspada*, the meaning of which teaches us always to remember and be vigilant in running life.

3.1.14. Broomstick

Denotation: A tool used for sweeping, made of several sticks tied together.

Connotation: just like a broomstick, it will give good results if everything is done together.

Myth: *guyub rukun* is a Banyumas culture that means togetherness and harmony.

3.1.15. Padi or Rice

Denotation: Rice is the staple food used by the Banyumas community. When the rice plant starts to do its job, it stands tall, but when it turns yellow and old, it will bow down.

Connotation meaning: like the nature of rice, when young work hard to seek fortune, knowledge, and position, but when old must be humble and wise in living life.

Myth: in Banyumas culture, Dewi Sri is valued as Rice's compassionate and wise Goddess.

3.2. Local wisdom values in a set of *begalan*

The cultural texts in a set of *brenong kepang* (read *begalan*) have messages to convey to the audience in the form of life wisdom values that are still maintained by people who still uphold the values of Banyumas cultural traditions.

3.2.1. Self-sufficiency

In the *begalan* tradition, the explanation of local wisdom values begins with the destruction of *kendhil pratala*. The *kendhil* is filled with yellow rice and coins which are later broken by the *begalan* performer. The cultural text means that the bride and groom must be able to solve their own problems, not depending on parents or other parties in fulfilling the needs of life in the form of clothing, food, and shelter and other needs in married life.

3.2.2. Honor

The values of honor are found in the *pikulan* and *kekeb*. Through these cultural texts, it is hoped that the bride and groom can respect the four parents who have become part of their family. And can maintain the honor of their own family and extended family so that family disgrace does not need to be told to others which will tarnish the good name of the family.

3.2.3. Cooperation

The values of cooperation are found in *pikulan*, *iyah*, *tampah* and broomstick. Men and women who are bound in marriage must be able to cooperate to be able to realize common goals in the household.

3.2.4. Simplicity

The value of simplicity is found in *siwur*. *Siwur* comes from the word *isi aja diawur-awur*, which means that the wealth produced together can be used as well as possible and not live extravagantly. This simplicity is a symbol of the egalitarian Banyumas community that is far from upper-class life with extravagant patterns of life.

3.2.5. Wisdom

The value of wisdom is found in *ilir*, *ciri-muthu*, *centhong*, *sorok* and *padi*. The Banyumas community through its simplicity will increase the values of wisdom so that the bride and groom can firmly maintain their attitudes and actions to address any problems faced by both of them or problems with others. The wisdom symbolized by *ilir* is to be able to provide a cool heart in dealing with problems. *Ciri-muthu* symbolizes wisdom in solving problems to be faced by both, *centhong* symbolizes that the bride and groom must be able to think of wise ways so as not to hurt others, *sorok* symbolizes that they will not gossip about other people's problems. As well as using the knowledge of rice in running their lives, which means that the more knowledgeable the more humble and compassionate like Dewi Sri who is believed by the community to be the Goddess of Rice.

3.2.6. Carefulness

The value of carefulness is found in the *cething*. *Cething* symbolizes that the bride and groom must be frugal and careful in managing household wealth so that it can be used as well as possible to meet household needs. Can prioritize which needs are the main ones and set aside some for the future of the family.

3.2.7. Adaptive

The adaptive value is reflected in the *irus*, meaning that life in this world can go back and forth meaning that sometimes it is happy sometimes difficult so the bride and groom must be adaptive in dealing with any household situation and be able to face it together.

3.2.8. Spirituality

Spiritual value is found in the steamer. *Kukusan* is a tool used to make *tumpang* which is used in every salvation ceremony. *Tumpang* has the meaning of *tumuju ing Pengeran*, which is towards God. The realization that humans are God's creation so that in every step of life they must always remember God to get good life guidance.

3.2.9. Happiness

The ultimate goal in a household is happiness symbolized by *iyan* and *padi*. A household that fulfills its needs both physically and mentally will bring happiness.

4 Conclusion

Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Islamic State University Library not only collects books but also cultural artifacts such as *begalan* symbolized by a set of *brenong kepang*. The existence of *begalan* is one of the library's efforts to increase the representation of Banyumasan cultural identity in the library space. Cultural texts in a set of *brenong kepang* are not just read without understanding the cultural background of the Banyumas community. Through semiology reading, ancestral messages which are life policies can be understood as a way of life that is under the simple and egalitarian social and geographical conditions of the Banyumas Community.

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