

# Babalu Art Reconstruction in Batang: Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis

Galuh Fatma Hedianti, Agus Cahyono, Sunarto Sunarto

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: galuhhedianti72@gmail.com

**Abstract.** The purpose of this research is to analyze and interpret the timeline of Babalu art and analyze to find the production and consumption of the meanings contained in the signs of the various movements of the Babalu Dance in the contemporary era. This research uses a qualitative approach with semiotic methods. Data and data sources come from primary data (artists, culturalists, and the people of Pekalongan-Batang) and secondary data comes from documents or historical records and events in Pekalongan-Batang and related scientific articles about the Babalu art. Data collection techniques were carried out by in-depth interviews, participant observation, document studies, and life history analysis. Data analysis was carried out by digging deeper into how the meaning of various movements is conveyed through signs in an archive, historical records, and historical events. The results showed that Babalu art is a folk art from the north coast of Java. Babalu art performances combine drama (implied messages about meaning in life), literature (moral speech), music (flying, kentongan, accordion), dance (insert fragments between acts). Pure motion is used in the Babalu Dance as a connecting and sweetening movement in the Babalu Dance performance, and the various meaningful movements of the Babalu Dance are analyzed using denotative and connotative meanings which result in the conclusion that the various meaningful movements in the Babalu Dance represent the meaning of human life, both physical and metaphysical.

**Key words:** Babalu Art, Semiotics, and Signs

**How to Cite:** Hedianti, G.F., Cahyono, A., Sunarto, S. (2022). Babalu Art Reconstruction in Batang: Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis. *ISET: International Conference on Science, Education, and Technology*, (2022). 981-986.

## INTRODUCTION

Babalu art is a traditional art that embodies the symbol of cultural expression from the people of the north coast of Java (Pekalongan-Batang) which developed during the Dutch East Indies colonial period. Babalu art is art that has a function as profane art. Where, Babalu art is not closely related to sacredness, Babalu art is only entertainment from time to time.

Babalu's art represents the struggle against colonialism as the basis for the people's struggle (disguise). Art performances combine drama (implied message about the spirit of defending the country), literature (moral speech), music (flying, kentongan, accordion), dance (insert fragments between acts). Babalu's art disappeared during the turmoil of domestic rebellion. Babalu art reappeared in the New Order (1970), with several discussions (messages about national unity and using gamelan as musical accompaniment), and experienced a period of receding due to the lack of inheritance. Babalu art has undergone reconstruction through a revitalization process (only in the dance fragments).

Dance is a form of aesthetic expression found in pre-modern societies. Dance is found in remote communities whose cultural level is very simple. However, dance is also found in modern societies, people who are aware of technology,

and in metropolitan societies (Alkaf, 2012). Dance can be assumed as a form of expressive human behavior and an activity that has traditional appeal (Aleksandrovich, 2016).

James Danandjadja said that behind folklore (dance) there is a meaning to be conveyed as a form of discourse to the next generation (Danandjaja, 1991) This needs to be read in depth using semiotic theory, in order to find the implied meaning behind the elements of the dance so as to make it easier for the next generation the successor understands and inherits the meaning of the dance. Research on performing arts has been carried out both in Indonesia and in other countries in the world. Concern for researching performing arts was carried out by Sangye Dondhup, namely Tibetan performing arts, although many determining factors were complicated but still carried out, researchers wanted to find opportunities and challenges in researching Tibetan performing arts (Dondhup, 2017).

## METHODS

This research is a qualitative research using semiotic methods. Rachmah Ida in her book *Research Methods for Media and Culture Studies* (2011: 86) says semiotic research, a researcher uses the semiotic analysis method of the Roland Barthes model with an interpretive approach, this

effort is made to decode or decipher the meaning that forms and is attached to visual image objects which exists. Researchers examine how the connotation and denotation meanings contained in the Babalu Dance. Researchers also look at what is the intention behind the creation of the Babalu Dance. The data obtained was then analyzed using Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis to see how the meaning of motion in the Babalu Dance is.

In this case, data collection was carried out by watching videos of the Babalu dance, then writing down the names of the varieties. The primary data in the research was conducted to analyze the movements contained in the Babalu Dance, using semiotic analysis to become data in the form of a narrative followed by unraveling the meaning presented in the Babalu Dance. Secondary data by exploring references such as documents or historical records and events in Pekalongan-Batang and related scientific articles about the Babalu art, and used as material to dismantle the meaning of the various movements of the Babalu Dance.

Data analysis techniques by digging deeper into the meaning of the various movements conveyed through signs from the media. The stages of analysis in the research use semiotic analysis, based on the explanation of Jane Stokes in her book entitled *How To Do Media and Cultural Studies* are as follows;

1. Describe the object of research analysis. Listening and choosing every meaningful movement in the Babalu Dance video,
2. Exploring the variety of dance movements based on their types. The researcher recorded several dance movements that were considered relevant in the Babalu Dance video and analyzed the symbols contained.
3. Interpreting the essence of meaning in the various movements of the Babalu Dance. The researcher focuses on the denotation signs that appear in the various movements of the Babalu Dance. Denotation refers to a literal (denotative) image and visual description, or what the image indicates.
4. Interpret the visual range of motion. The researcher draws the connotative meaning of the Babalu Dance. The researcher analyzes, interprets, and associates visual motion with theory to complete the findings so they don't contradict the problem.
5. Draw conclusions in the form of representations of life in the Babalu Dance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Babalu Art Timeline (1930-to present)

Babalu art is a traditional theatrical art on the north coast of Java which developed during the Dutch East Indies colonial period. Babalu's art is the agreement of various regional figures on the end point of the warriors. Babalu's art was used as a binding tool to attack the Dutch troops, who were caught off guard by the performances and the serving of liquor. The Babalu players then gave a signal in the form of agreed codes to carry out the attack.

In the post-independence era, around the 1950s, Babalu art as a means of education and entertainment for the people who were in a state of post-colonial recovery. Babalu art is an introduction to the people, and carries the theme of struggle, the spirit of independence, and conveys moral values.

Art performances combine drama (implied message about the spirit of defending the country), literature (moral speech), music (flying, kentongan, accordion), dance (insert fragments between acts). Babalu's art represents the struggle against colonialism as the basis for the people's struggle (disguise).

Babalu's art in the post-independence era was performed by all men, both those who played the roles of men and those who played women. The make-up and clothes used are very simple, according to what the players have, there is only the addition of sampur or dominant attributes such as white robes and colonial clothes to strengthen the player's character.

Babalu art can be said to be the result of the acculturation of various cultures, such as those of the Middle East, Java and Europe. Evidenced by one of the musical instruments played, namely the accordion. Apart from the accordion, there are also other accompaniment instruments, such as the flyan and kenthongan which are the result of acculturation of Middle Eastern and Javanese culture.

Traditional drama arts such as Babalu still have a place in the hearts of the people, based on the fact that they are often staged at various family celebrations that have high economic capital, to the fact that they have a number of Babalu groups in various regions in Pekalongan. The Babalu groups that often performed during that era were Roda Story (Noyontaan), Bintang Kota Batik (Noyontaan), Entertainment Period (Klego), Hayam Wuruk (Sampang), Puspa Kencana (Kergon), Rama-Shinta (Sapuro), and

Selendang Pomegranate (Sapuro) in (Dirhamsyah, M. 2014: 91).

Around the 1960s, Babalu Art experienced degradation and extinction as a result of the political-economic turmoil in Indonesia. Babalu's art reappeared in the New Order (1970). After the New Order government, in 1965 with Suharto taking over political power, making the state the only party entitled to determine the direction of performing arts and other cultural productions, Hatley, B., Subanar, G. B., & Ardiani, Y. D (2014: 34).

Kurdi (75), a resident of Dukuh Pesindon, Kergon Sub-District, said that during its heyday, the Babalu group in his village often performed at several local government events, such as night markets and development fairs, and even performed outside the city. "The stage that is shown is as alive as the storyline that is played, with each player acting as a man or a woman. And the dialogue uses Pekalongan's ngoko language," he said in (Dirhamsyah, M. 2014: 91).

The era of the 1970s was the 'Revival Period' in the Batang Regency area marked by the emergence of Babalu Art by Batang artist figures. Soekimto, the artist who initiated the revival of Babalu Art, is a puppeteer who is also a local government employee, has a high social position, is a respected figure, and has an art studio that conducts training in karawitan and dance called Sanggar Putra Budaya Batang.

Babalu art is a proletarian art that is in the legitimacy of the palace, where Babalu art uses gamelan as a performance accompaniment. The identity of Babalu art originates from the claims of the cultural service version and creates polarization. In the era of revival, Babalu art during the revival period underwent changes and its practices, with several discussions (messages about national unity and using gamelan as musical accompaniment). Babalu's art experienced a period of decline in 1996, after the death of the artist Soekimto, because there was no inheritance.

Babalu art in the contemporary era (1999) experienced a revival, with the term 'Babalu' which is interpreted as aBA-aBA first. A haphazard interpretation of the term 'Babalu' is based on the sound of a whistle as a sign of the beginning and end of a performance, and it has still lost its true meaning to this day.

It is a feature of Babalu Art, that all performers or dancers are musicians, which are performed alternately. Babalu art has undergone reconstruction through a revitalization process

(only in the dance fragments) by the Putra Budaya Batang.

The revitalization of coastal populist art is a representation of the culture of coastal communities. In the period of revival, in the battle in the realm of digital media to gain legitimacy in gaining symbolic power, Babalu Art underwent several changes and developments, such as the participation of female artists in staging, patenting of dance moves, accompaniment, make-up and clothing for the Babalu Dance, to forms presentation. Babalu dance is used as a guest welcoming dance, event opening, competition materials, and learning media that can be danced by various ages and various lines of society.

## **2. Roland Barthes' Model of Semiotics in Babalu Dance (Contemporary Era)**

Semiotics is basically concerned with studying how humans make sense of things. Making sense (to signify) in this case cannot be confused with communicating (to communicate). Meaning means that objects do not only carry information, in which case the objects are to be communicated, but also constitute a structured system of signs. One of the important areas explored by Barthes in his research on signs is the role of the reader. Connotation, although it is the true nature of the sign, requires the activeness of the reader in order to function. Barthes succinctly reviews what he often refers to as a second level system of meaning, which is built on other systems that have existed before. Barthes calls this second system connotative, which in his *Mythologies* book he explicitly distinguishes from denotative or first-level systems of meaning (Basri, S. Q., Sari, E.K. 2019: 59).

Broken movements are typical of the Babalu Dance, with firm and dynamic movements that dominate. The variety of movements in the Babalu Dance originates from the representation of the lives of warriors who arrange war tactics with agreed coding. The source of inspiration for motion is the cultural life of the Batang people. The variety of movements in the Babalu Dance is based on traditional dance movements, especially in the Central Java region.

The variations of the Babalu dance movements consist of two kinds, namely meaningful movements and pure movements. The percentage of meaningful movement and pure motion is the same. Pure motion is used in the Babalu Dance as a connecting and sweetening movement in the Babalu Dance performance. The

various meaningful movements of the Babalu Dance are analyzed using denotative and connotative meanings. Roland Barthes' theory is known as the Two Way of Signification (two stages of meaning). There are two levels in the meaning of a text, namely denotation and connotation.

Denotation refers to the actual meaning of the sign, where the meaning is in accordance with what appears and can be easily recognized or defined. Meanwhile, connotation refers to the

meaning behind the denotation, but depends on it. The connotation of reading the sign by the audience with meaning outside the actual meaning and meaning that is in the rules (Kurniawan, 2001: 22-23).

In this case the movement of the Babalu Dance will be analyzed using the meaning of denotation (stage I) and connotation (stage II). Following are the various movements of the Babalu Dance with their connotation and denotation analysis:

No.	Range of Motion	Denotation Meaning	Connotation Meaning
1.	Lampah Hormat	Head: facing down and continued with facing right and left Body: crouched (flattening the back to the level of the head) and straight, Hands: both hands clenched when making a bowing motion and continued with the left hand clenching the cethik and the right hand saluting, Legs: do the walk by lifting the knee to thigh height and do it alternately starting with the right leg.	As a symbol of respect for all creatures. The downward facing movement represents the salim movement (in the Javanese tradition) with the dancer positioning those outside himself as a higher hierarchy. Followed by a respectful gesture facing forward as a depiction of warriors who are brave, brave and ethical.
2.	Sembah	Head: make a right and left tilt, Body: doing ndegeg (straight) movements and mayuk body positions (leaning forward), Hands: do the worship by pressing the palms together and the four fingers facing forward and the thumbs facing up, Feet: straight with the right leg forward and bent to form an angle and the left leg straight behind.	The worship movement as a symbol of the teachings of Keblat Papat Fifth Pancer is in accordance with Javanese philosophy which prioritizes achieving balance, harmony, harmony and unity as well as control. The concept of the Keblat Papat Fifth Pancer shows a cosmic space which is divided into four cardinal directions (Keblat papat) which are symbolized by the four fingers that are closer together facing forward and a central point (pancer) which is symbolized by the thumb which is facing upwards.
3.	Jurus	Head: facing right and left in the direction of hand movement, Body: straight facing forward Hands: left hand bent in front of the chest and holding the elbow of the right hand, right hand straight up with the back of the hand facing forward, followed by the right hand straight ahead of	The movement of the stance is likened to a human endeavor to dispel all the dangers that approach him. It is described that catastrophe is biased, it can be in the form of a physical form (which is visible) and metaphysical but its existence is felt.

		the left hand beside the ear, done alternately, Legs: the right leg is raised to the level of the left knee followed by the right leg bent to form an angle to the right side and the left leg straight to the left.	
4.	Gedrug	Head: turn right and left, Body: straight forward Hands: both palms together on the left side then together raised up, Legs: both feet are standing up with the right foot being banded behind the left foot, and doing the tiptoe movement.	As a symbol, humans begin to know the earth where they were born and navigate life. Gedrug is a movement of feet stamping the earth, as a symbol of human awareness of the life force that exists on earth, that the earth is a source of life that needs to be understood.
5.	Lir-ilir 1	Head: check to the right and left, Body: leaning to the right and left, Hands: both hands clenched in cethik, Feet: mendakak with the base of the foot moving outward and inward.	The symbol of the existence of the earth and sky that surround human life, the attachment between the earth and the sky is the space between the earth and the sky which is used as a place for life. Space as a power that interconnected, influences each other, that the heavens and the earth are two natural conditions that cannot be separated from the life of all living things it.
6.	Lir-ilir 2	Head: crouching to the right and to the left, Body: body leaning to the right and left following the movement of the hand, Hands: hands open and as if throwing something to the right and left side, Legs: both feet stomped.	Representation of shifting of small objects (sand, leaves, twigs), pushed by the wind. In this case it implies that around humans there is a power that is able to bring change to humans. Air is an element that needs to be understood as something capable of forming and changing life.
7.	Lir-ilir 3	Head: turn left and right Body: body tends to face to the left, Hands: the left hand clenches beside the cethik or beside the hip bone and the right hand makes a push and pull movement, Legs: scythe.	A symbol of self-protection, hand gestures as a tool to distance oneself from all negative or bad influences and as a symbol of removing all negative or bad things through hand gestures.
8.	Babad Atas	Head: facing right and left Body: the body follows the movements of the hands, namely to the right and left, Hands: the left hand is beside the ear and the right hand as if doing the mbabad movement above alternately, Feet: tread.	The babad atas movement is likened to that in human life one must always be vigilant, because danger can attack from any direction, including attacks from above. Babad Atas is a symbol of human readiness to face any danger that comes from above.
9.	Babad Bawah	Head: facing right and left	The babad under movement is likened to that in life humans

---

Body: following the movement of the hand to the right and left side, Hands: the left hand is beside the cethik doing the chronicle movements below alternately, Feet: tread.	must always be vigilant, because danger can attack from any direction, including attacks from below. Babad Bawah is a symbol of human readiness to fight any danger that comes from below.
--	--

---

## CONCLUSION

Babalu art is a populist art on the north coast of Java in the form of an agreement from various regional figures on the ending point of the warriors. Babalu's art represents the struggle against colonialism as the basis for the people's struggle (disguise). Art performances combine drama (implied message about the spirit of defending the country), literature (moral speech), music (flying, kentongan, accordion), dance (insert fragments between acts). Babalu's art disappeared during the turmoil of domestic rebellion. Babalu art reappeared in the New Order (1970), with several discussions (messages about national unity and using gamelan as musical accompaniment), and experienced a period of receding due to the lack of inheritance. In the contemporary era the term 'Babalu' is interpreted as aBA-aBA first. Babalu art has undergone reconstruction through a revitalization process (only in the dance fragments). It is a feature of Babalu Art, that all performers or dancers are musicians, which are performed alternately.

Broken movements are typical of the Babalu Dance (contemporary era), with firm and dynamic movements that dominate. The variety of movements in the Babalu Dance originates from the representation of the lives of warriors who arrange war tactics with agreed coding. The source of inspiration for motion is the cultural life of the Batang people. The variety of movements in the Babalu Dance is based on traditional dance movements, especially in the Central Java region. Pure motion is used in the Babalu Dance as a connecting and sweetening movement in the Babalu Dance performance, and the various meaningful movements of the Babalu Dance are analyzed using denotative and connotative meanings which result in the conclusion that the various meaningful movements in the Babalu

Dance represent the meaning of human life, both physical and metaphysical.

## REFERENCES

- Aleksandrovich, M. (2016). Psychology of Dance : Barthes ' Ideas and Semiotics of Dance. *European Humanities Studies: State and Society Maria*, 4–19.
- Alkaf, M. (2012). Tari sebagai gejala kebudayaan: studi tentang eksistensi tari rakyat di boyolali. *Komunitas*, 4(2), 125–138.
- Basri, S. Q., Sari, E.K. (2019). *Tari Remo (Ngremong): Sebuah Analisis Teori Semiotika Roland Barthes tentang Makna Denotasi dan Konotasi dalam Tari Remo (Ngremong)*. *Geter*, 2(1), 55–69.
- Danandjaja, J. (1991). *Folklor Indonesia: Ilmu Gosip, Dongeng, dll*. Garviti Press.
- Dondhup, S. (2017). Looking Back at Tibetan Performing Arts Research by Tibetans in the People's Republic of China: Advocating for an Anthropological Approach. *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, 40, 103–125.
- Dirhamsyah, M. (2014). Pekalongan yang Tak Terlupakan. Pekalongan: Kantor Perpustakaan dan Arsip Daerah Kota Pekalongan.
- Hatley, B., Subanar, G. B., & Ardhiyani, Y. D. (2014). *Seni Pertunjukkan Indonesia Pasca Orde Baru*. Yogyakarta: Universitas Sanata Dharma.
- Hartono, Agustinus. (2010). *Imaji/ Musik/ Teks Rolland Barthes*. Yogyakarta: Jalasutra
- Ida, R. (2011). *Metode Penelitian Kajian Media dan Budaya*. Surabaya: Airlangga University Press.
- Kurniawan. 2001. *Semiologi Roland Bathes*. Magelang: Indonesiatara.
- Sumandiyo. 2007. *Kajian Tari*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Book Publisher.