

Symbolic Communication Offerings in the *Bancaan Bayi* Ceremony: A Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis in The Kediri, East Java

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Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyze the symbolic communication that contains the names and forms of culinary offerings in the traditional *Bancaan Bayi* ceremony for believers in Kediri, and how these symbols are understood by the local religious community in the context of intercultural communication. The study uses a qualitative narrative method, observation, interview, and document analysis techniques. The data consists of the names and representations of culinary offerings, which are treated as cultural signs and communication media both with other humans and symbolic communication with God. The findings show that each type of offering contains symbolic messages regarding prayers, hopes, and salvation values that are negotiated through the process of ritual communication. Through Barthes's semiotic perspective, offerings function not only as cultural symbols but also as a form of spiritual and social communication that allows for the exchange of meaning between people from different religious backgrounds. Thus, *Bancaan Bayi* becomes an arena for intercultural communication that reproduces social harmony through culinary symbolism. This research has implications for supporting interfaith inclusion, thereby encouraging social sustainability and cohesion among community groups.

Keywords: *Symbolic Communication, Intercultural Communication, Bancaan Bayi, Offerings, Roland Barthes' Semiotics*

1. Introduction

Understanding symbolic communication is important because symbols in cultural practices not only represent meaning but also serve as a medium for exchanging messages that shape social relationships and intercultural harmony. In other words, symbols are not only interpreted as cultural ornaments but also as a way for people within a community to convey ideas, thoughts, and collective values. This aligns with the definition of communication itself, namely the process of conveying messages through symbols and symbols with the aim of achieving understanding (Fatimayin, 2018). Therefore, when a collective maintains its cultural symbols, understanding these symbols becomes crucial so that the values and understanding of a particular collective are fully conveyed

to future generations and to other different collectives (Usman, 2024). A society that is closely familiar with the use of cultural symbols is the Javanese people of Indonesia, especially symbols represented in the form of food used in various cultural practices.

The problem is that many people still ignore this understanding of symbolic communication in the context of a multicultural global culture (Widyanarti et al., 2024). For example, the Pendet Dance controversy that occurred in 2009. This case is a concrete example where the misrepresentation of Balinese cultural symbols in foreign advertisements triggered a strong social and diplomatic reaction, because the Indonesian people felt their cultural symbols were being misinterpreted and reduced. This shows that ignorance or neglect of the need to understand the meaning of other people's cultural symbols can lead to symbolic conflict between countries.

Many studies have been conducted on the meaning of cultural symbols. (Ferguson, 2023; Jahoda, 1984; Li et al., 2023; Shimizu et al., 2017; Voyer et al., 2022). However, targeting the community of believers in the One Almighty God is still rare because their value system is considered different from that of the majority. Believers themselves are defined as citizens who practice the teachings, rituals, and values of belief in the One Almighty God, which are derived from tradition, local wisdom, and ancestral culture (Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, 2003). This community group is often stereotyped because its values and cultural practices are perceived as different from those of the majority. Therefore, examining the cultural values and meanings of symbols represented in offerings for the community of *Kepercayaan Kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* is urgent.

One area that still maintains traditions among its adherents is Pagu, Kediri, East Java. Pagu consists of 13 villages and is located north of Kediri City. Kediri is known for its relationship with Sri Aji Jayabaya, who established its own social patterns, distinguishing it from other areas. One prominent tradition in Pagu is the bancaan tradition, a ceremony held to celebrate the birth of a child. This tradition remains deeply rooted among adherents of the "*Penghayat Percaya ke Tuhan Yang Maha Esa*" belief framework in Pagu. Interviews with the leader of the belief system there, Suko Priyanto from Pagung Village, showed that approximately 90% of the population still practices this tradition, especially among adherents of the belief system. Therefore, the researcher chose Pagung Village, Pagu Regency, as the research location. Furthermore, this tradition is very interesting because of the detailed and comprehensive nature of the ceremony, which provides a valuable opportunity for in-depth reflection

and understanding of this tradition, especially in a community still considered a minority in Indonesia. The implication is the creation of a more empathetic cross-cultural communication process, thereby fostering harmony in a multicultural environment.

This research has social significance because it can minimize public misunderstanding of the religious practices of adherents. Many adherent communities have been marginalized due to the general public's ignorance of their value systems. Symbolic analysis enables a reframing process that positions adherent rituals as cultural practices with social, ecological, and spiritual logic. Thus, this research contributes to strengthening cultural diversity and building more inclusive interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Therefore, selecting an appropriate theory is necessary to clearly reveal this cultural meaning. This research will utilize Roland Barthes's semiotic theory, arguing that this theory can provide a second meaning to cultural symbols. Furthermore, this theory also provides a critical analysis of the construction of cultural meaning in the public sphere. This is crucial given that adherent communities often experience stereotypes regarding the rituals they perform. Therefore, by examining symbolic meaning and its relationship to forms of symbolic communication using Roland Barthes's theory, the wider public will understand that the symbols represented in offerings among adherents of the One Almighty God have a cultural logic that is scientifically understandable and accountable.

Javanese social ceremonial practices are closely linked to the integration of food as an essential component of their lives. Food symbols represent Javanese society in communicating their goals. Traditional foods that are part of a particular community group serve as markers of their social character (Fidiana et al., 2024). The integration of food into Javanese ceremonies reflects the social and spiritual values of the community, as Javanese society is closely associated with symbols and riddles. Therefore, communal celebrations often reveal significant traditional meanings, including the variety of foods used in traditional ceremonies or offerings. The composition of food in offerings varies depending on the type of ceremony and the local environment, reflecting the specific conditions of each region. Thus, the tradition of offerings reflects the personality and distinctive characteristics of certain Javanese communities, especially in terms of communicating their intentions and goals through food symbols (Kistanto, 2016).

Offerings are understood as a form of symbolic communication in the form of food, symbolizing the community's gratitude to the Creator. The names of the foods used in these offerings serve as markers of the framework of beliefs, religious values, and philosophies within a particular

social group (Indriastuti Riza Fauzi et al., 2019). This aligns with findings by Wati et al. (2019), which argue that myths related to offerings convey messages about preservation (*jagadhita*) and the well-being of the world. Therefore, the study of offerings has significant potential for further research. However, the deeper meanings contained within these practices remain largely unknown to the wider community. Therefore, examining the cultural meaning of these offerings is necessary to support the achievement of shared understanding within the community. This understanding is the foundation for fostering empathy in multicultural communication in our diverse countries, thereby reducing the potential for misunderstandings within society.

This study aims to uncover the symbolic meaning of offerings in the Bancaan Bayi tradition in Kediri, East Java, as a form of symbolic communication among the community, especially those who adhere to a particular belief system. This tradition was chosen because of its unique characteristics and the need for further research on this matter, considering that its practice is carried out by a community of believers who are still considered to have negative stereotypes in the public's regard for their traditional practices. Therefore, an in-depth study is needed regarding the cultural meaning contained in the offerings of the Bancaan Bayi tradition in the Pagung area. The choice of Roland Barthes' theory was made with the aim of revealing its cultural meaning clearly so that it is understood by people outside the adherents of this belief system. This will give rise to tolerance and empathy for them and provide an illustration that the meaning contained in the offerings can be accepted as true scientifically and logically. Furthermore, the Bancaan Bayi tradition in Kediri stands out compared to other similar traditions because of the abundance and completeness of the ubarampe (traditional offerings), which are continuously maintained by the community of Believers in the One Almighty God, the Kebatinan Movement in the Pagu area, Kediri. This study focuses primarily on the ubarampe offerings, with an emphasis on their cultural meaning. Roland Barthes' semiotic theory will be used to analyze and interpret these traditional elements. So, the formulation of the problem in this research is (1) What is the symbolic meaning of offerings in the Bancaan Bayi tradition in the community of believers in the One Almighty God, viewed from the perspective of Roland Barthes' Semiotic theory? (2) How is this symbolic communication understood by the multicultural Indonesian community?

1.1 Literature Review

Traditions that have evolved globally represent the legacy of ancient ancestors. In essence, tradition encompasses practices, beliefs, institutions, or artifacts that are transmitted from one generation to the next. While the content of these traditions varies significantly, they generally incorporate cultural elements regarded as the collective heritage of a particular social group. Traditions are often viewed as a foundation for social stability and legitimacy, yet they can also serve as a tool to influence and reshape the present (Kistanto, 2016).

Tradition is inherently dynamic, with its content constantly reinterpreted by each generation and its continuity shaped to align with prevailing circumstances. Eisenstadt (1973) emphasizes that the selection of what constitutes tradition is always determined in the present, allowing elements of the past to be adjusted and redefined to suit contemporary relevance. Consequently, studying the meaning of tradition is essential to equipping society with an understanding of the past, enabling it to appreciate and adopt the positive values embedded within a tradition.

One of the traditions that continues to thrive and be preserved by the community is *slametan*. Also referred to as *wilujengan* or *bancaan* in certain regions, *slametan* represents a fundamental ceremony and a central element in nearly all ritual practices within the Javanese religious system (Geertz, 2013). (Geertz, 2013) further explains that *slametan* is conducted not only to foster a sense of solidarity among participants but also to maintain harmonious relationships with ancestral spirits. This tradition accompanies the Javanese people throughout their lives, from before birth to after death.

An indistinguishable angle of the *slametan* convention is the utilization of different offerings (sajen), which are regularly composed of assets determined from the local biodiversity (Permanasari, 2017; Sujarwo et al., 2020). This adjusts with Brillat-Savarin's point of view in his gastronomy book, initially distributed in December 1825 and deciphered by Anne Dryton in 1970, where he broadly expressed, "Let me know what you eat, and I will tell you who you're" This recommends that nourishment not as it were serves as food but too acts as a medium for social association and communication. Similarly, (Adhianata et al., 2024) emphasize that nourishment or culinary conventions offer a window into the culture and history of a locale or country. The varieties in offerings reflect the social differences of a locale or, indeed, a country. Additionally, offerings exemplify the Javanese concept of concordance, especially the adjustment and interconnection between people, nature, and God (Arif Budiman et al., 2022; Ndemanu, 2018).

The consideration of *ubarampe* could be a basic zone of the center because it holds noteworthy significance and a one-of-a-kind meaning (Adinugraha et al., 2024). The plant components utilized in *ubarampe* envelop different parts, such as leaves, blossoms, seeds, fruits, tubers, and rhizomes. Inside the setting of custom conventions practiced in locales, these plant components frequently serve as basic components in conventional ceremonies. Takes off, specifically, are commonly utilized as wrappers for *ubarampe* (Permanasari, 2017)

Traditional ceremonies typically include offerings as a key component (Koentjaraningrat, 1984). These offerings can be food, objects, or other items dedicated to ancestral spirits. Offerings serve as a fundamental complement to traditional ceremonies, symbolizing the community's gratitude to God Almighty (Astina et al., 2021; Ndemanu, 2018; Saddhono et al., 2019) for the gift of happiness and prosperity. This aligns with the opinion of Ekawati & Ayuningtiyas (2024) who state that traditional cuisine is a cultural expression that reflects the unique characteristics of a region, demonstrating its diverse characteristics and the natural potential of its environment.

Therefore, a theory of cultural symbols is needed to reveal the meaning behind these offerings. The theory chosen in this study is Roland Barthes's semiotics. Semiotics encompasses considerations of sounds, words, signs, logos, monograms, images, and their explanations. The human ability to form images reflects a high level of civilization and culture, as it illustrates the ability to create basic images. According to Ullah & English (2015) Human behavior can be understood as something general, extending even to the framework of dialectical signs. Roland Barthes developed Saussure's concept of a "first-order framework" by examining the relationship between signifier and signified. In this framework, a word or image, such as "scale," serves as a "denotative" signifier, while the concept of estimation is an "implicative." The sign itself demonstrates the relationship between indication and connotation. Barthes later expanded this hypothesis by applying myth to create a "second-order framework," where a first-order sign serves as a signifier for another sign, as seen when "scale" transforms into an image of "equality." This "meaning-making" approach is central to the study of print and visual art (Jadou & Ghabra, 2021). In this study, Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis serves as the foundational framework, reinforced by an interpretation of cultural aspects. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the symbolic meaning behind the food served in the Bancaan Bayi tradition in Kediri, East Java, Indonesia.

1.2 Symbolic Communication of Javanese Society in the Form of Offerings

Javanese society is known for its strong emphasis on symbols in daily communication and rituals (Pohan et al., 2025; Sophia Novita, 2024). One such symbolism is represented in offerings. Javanese people frequently use food elements, not only as material offerings but also as a medium for cultural and spiritual communication. This finding aligns with the research of (Pratiwi et al., 2025a) who found that the use of food elements such as water, coffee, and other foods represents an inner dialogue between humans and God. From a symbolic communication perspective, offerings serve as a system of ritually exchanged signs, conveying hope, gratitude, and moral learning as part of religious practice. Furthermore, offerings are also interpreted as cultural events, offerings of hope and protection to God (Rohman et al., 2024). This confirms that offerings enable both vertical and horizontal communication, representing symbolic communication.

This research is crucial because it focuses on a community of religious groups that continue to uphold the Bancaan Bayi tradition. Believers themselves are defined as citizens who practice the teachings, rituals, and values of belief in the One Almighty God, which are derived from tradition, local wisdom, and ancestral culture (KEMENTERIAN KEBUDAYAAN DAN PARIWISATA, 2003). This community group is often stereotyped because its values and cultural practices are perceived as different from those of the majority (Anggraeni et al., 2022; Budijanto, 2016; Hermina, 2024; Novianti et al., 2023). This study aims to uncover the general implications behind the offerings used in this tradition, making it an interesting subject for research, especially from a communication perspective. The cultural practices carried out by this community have good meaning and are acceptable to logical thinking. Therefore, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the cultural meaning of the Bancaan Bayi offerings in the community of believers, this study utilizes Roland Barthes's semiotic theory, which analyzes meaning through two layers: the first layer analyzes lexical or denotative meaning, while the second layer explores connotative and social implications. The goal is to create and foster cross-cultural communication that fosters empathy and sympathy for all groups.

Another point is also made in research by Permatasari & Pratiwi (2022), which shows that offerings are interpreted as strengthening group identity. Offerings are interpreted as a narrative of a group presented in a routine annual ritual. Within this framework, the ritual offers serve as a vehicle for communities to carry out symbolic affirmations of identity, social relations, and the connection between humans and the invisible

world, allowing complex meanings to be understood and experienced collectively.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design that provides an in-depth overview of reality (Sutopo, 2002). The research location was Pagung Village, Kediri Regency. According to information from Pagung Village elders, 90% of the community still practices the Bancaan Bayi tradition. This village was chosen as the research location due to its continued preservation of ancestral traditions and the presence of many residents who adhere to religious beliefs. Purposive sampling was used to select interview participants. Data collection methods included interviews and observation. Interviews were conducted with Suko Priyanto, a community leader of the *Aliran Kepercayaan Kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* community in Kediri. Observations were conducted while the tradition was being practiced by residents.

The data collection instrument used an in-depth interview guide addressed to the interviewees. The procedure involved requesting permission to conduct research on the Bancaan Bayi tradition from the community leaders who believe in One Almighty God. After that, the researcher developed an interview guide to be used as a data collection instrument. Furthermore, the researcher also observed and documented the tradition during its implementation.

The data were analyzed using Roland Barthes' three-stage semiotic model. The first is denotative analysis, which analyzes the true meaning of the offerings in the Bancaan Bayi tradition of the Belief in One Almighty God community. The second is analyzing the connotative meaning, which arises from social, cultural, emotional, and ideological factors, and myth, which is the deepest meaning that is then naturalized by the community as a natural truth (Barthes, 1964; Jadou & Ghabra, 2021)

Source triangulation was conducted through interviews with community leaders who adhere to the *Aliran Kepercayaan Kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* in Pagung Village, Kediri. Technical triangulation involved direct observation in Pagung Village during the Bancaan Bayi tradition. Researchers also conducted member checking with community leaders who adhere to the Belief in One Almighty God to ensure that interpretations of meaning were not misinterpreted. The illustration can be seen in this image.

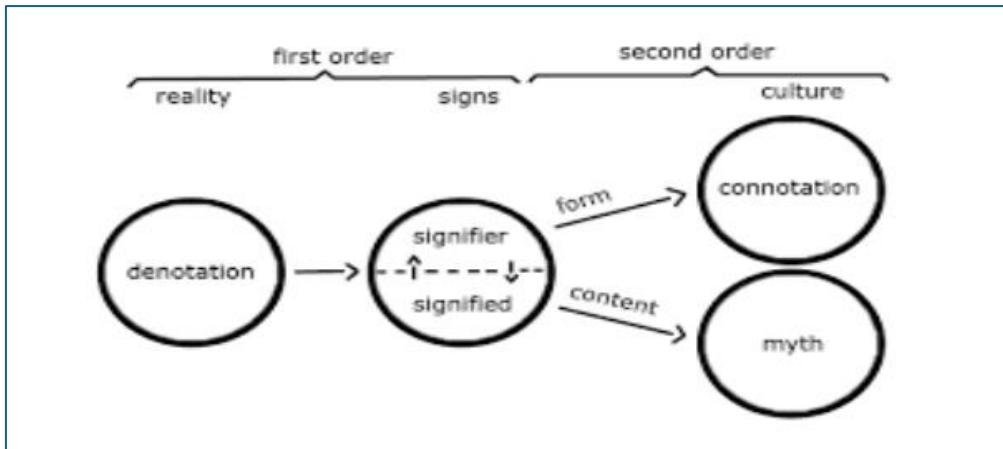
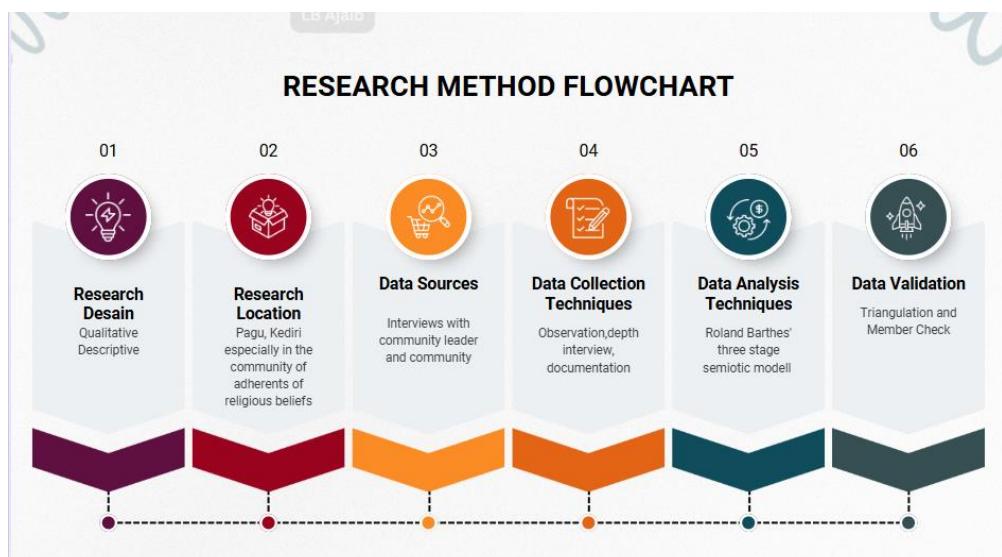


Figure 1. Analysis of the meaning of Myth by Barthes (1964)

For further details, this research method can be seen in the flowchart below.



Flowchart 1. Research Method

3. Results

For Javanese people, offerings have significant symbolic meaning. Offerings reflect a strong connection between traditional knowledge and biodiversity (Adinugraha et al., 2024). Food serves as a medium that reveals hidden symbols related to people's daily activities (Wulandari, 2017). This uniqueness is clearly seen from the frequent use of offerings in

various traditional ceremonies. Javanese society is closely associated with the concept of harmony and balance (Geertz, 2013), which highlights the Javanese people's efforts to show respect and appreciation to all living things with wisdom, justice, and compassion. Offerings are an expression of gratitude and affection for God and all creatures. Therefore, ubarampe or the completeness of offerings is often symbolized through food. There are two discussions, namely: How is the symbolic meaning of offerings in the Bancaan Bayi tradition in communities that believe in God Almighty viewed from the perspective of Roland Barthes's Semiotic theory? (2) How are these symbolic communication symbols understood by the multicultural Indonesian people?

Believers themselves are defined as citizens who practice the teachings, rituals, and values of belief in the One Almighty God, which are derived from tradition, local wisdom, and ancestral culture. (Kementrian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, 2003). The community of believers in the One Almighty God is a group of Indonesian citizens who practice a belief system based on ancestral traditions, local wisdom, and indigenous culture. They do not identify themselves as adherents of any of the official state religions, but they nevertheless believe in the One Almighty God, with values, rituals, and symbols passed down through generations.

At the mythical level, offerings in the Pagung community are viewed as a natural and legitimate cultural truth. This ritual is considered a proper way to ensure the safety of infants, as the human and supernatural worlds are believed to be interconnected. Offerings also reinforce the belief that ancestors are always present and play a role in protecting offspring. Therefore, infant protection is understood not only through medical or social measures, but also through a harmonious relationship with supernatural beings, manifested through offering rituals. The findings of this study show that there are 18 offerings used which, if interpreted, have their own meaning and purpose, including (1) one pair of bananas; (2) telon flower; (3) coconut; (4) *karuk gimbal*; (5) thread; (6) jug; (7) mat; (8) glass; (9) comb; (10) rice; (11) jenang blowok; (12) fragrant flower; (13) sugar; (14) *karuk gingsing*; (15) powder; (16) *kinangan*; (17) cigarette; (18) *cikal*. Each offering represents a deep meaning that reflects its community. Based on this analysis, researchers categorized the texts into several categories based on their meaning. To facilitate readability, see Table 1.

Table 1. Analytical Findings Based on Myth Categories in the Baby Reading Tradition

Myth Category	Ubarampe Represents	Patterns of Meaning Discovered	Main Findings	Function in Cultural Communication
Fertility, Sustainability, and Vitality	Banana, rice, <i>jenang blowok</i> , <i>cikal</i> , coconut, <i>telon</i> flower	The dominance of vegetative symbols	Infant safety is understood as cosmic and social sustainability, not just biological.	Nature is used as a symbolic language to convey life's hopes.
An Orderly and Virtuous Life	Comb, <i>pangilon</i> , <i>lawe</i> , mat, sugar	Domestic objects as ethical media	Moral values are naturalized through everyday objects without verbal instruction.	Life ethics are transmitted through symbolic communication.
Harmony of the Outer and Inner Worlds	Coconut, jug, <i>karuk gimbal</i> , <i>karuk gingsing</i> , fragrant flower water	Cosmological integration	Infants are positioned as part of the cosmic network of humans, nature, and God.	Rituals function as cosmological communication.
Proximity and Presence of Ancestors	Powder, cigarettes, memories	Symbols of collective memory	Relationships with ancestors are naturalized as part of everyday life.	Symbols serve as a link between the past and the present.

4. Discussion

This discussion stems from the Javanese attitude of highly appreciating nature in all its elements, both vertically (highly appreciating God and their ancestors) and horizontally (fellow humans, nature, and inanimate objects). This refers to the characteristics of the Javanese people who highly value harmony. Even in the communication process, Javanese people will highly respect their conversation partners, as evidenced by the extensive use of Javanese lexicons that are differentiated based on certain criteria such as age, rank, occupation, family relationships, and intimacy. This is further emphasized by the many symbols that Javanese people use in their daily lives.

In this discussion section, we will delve into the second level of meaning from Roland Barthes, specifically regarding the symbolic meaning of offerings in the *Bancaan Bayi* tradition within communities that

believe in God. The symbols in food served as offerings represent the Javanese way of communicating their views to future generations. This discussion will further clarify Javanese cultural communication practices, which consistently prioritize harmony both vertically and horizontally. For clarity and easier understanding, please see the diagram below.

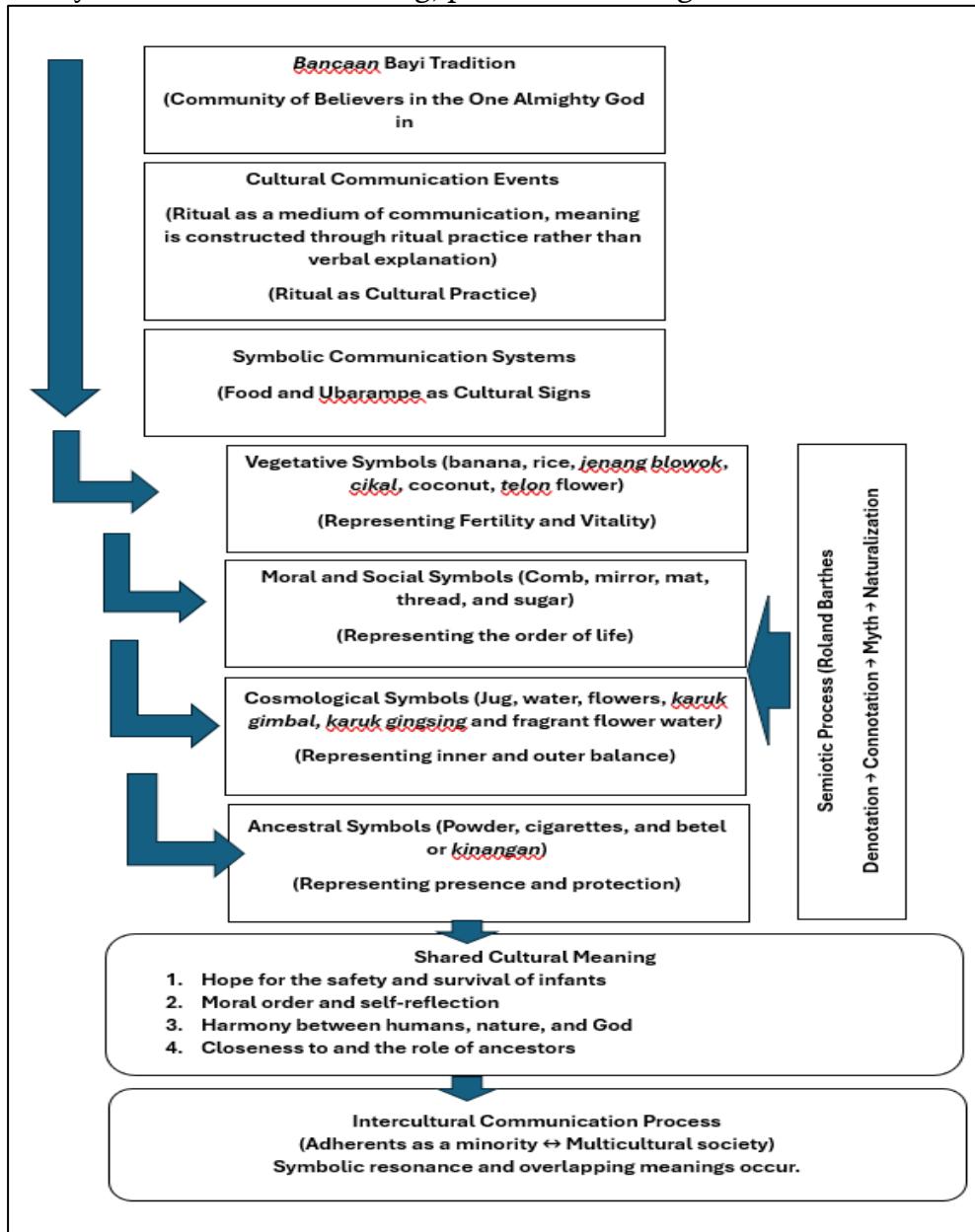


Figure 2. The Relationship Between Cultural Meaning and Intercultural Communication

We will also explain the formulation of the second problem, namely, the understanding of symbolic communication symbols by the multicultural Indonesian people.

4.1 Symbolic Meaning of Offerings in The Bancaan Bayi Tradition in Communities That Believe in God Almighty Viewed from The Perspective of Roland Barthes's Semiotic Theory

This chapter explains Roland Barthes' theoretical foundation for myth as a second-order semiological system. In the *Bancaan Bayi* ritual, all *ubarampe* are not understood merely as objects or food, but as a series of signs that operate on two layers of meaning. At the denotative level, each object has a material function. However, at the connotative level, objects transform into symbols of life, morality, and spirituality.

4.1.1 Myths about Fertility, Sustainability, and Vitality

A group of vegetative symbols, such as bananas, *telon* flowers, *cikal* (a type of fruit), *jenang* (a type of fruit), rice, and coconuts, demonstrates how natural elements are used as cultural language. Denotatively, these objects represent agricultural products readily found in Javanese agrarian society. However, connotatively, these vegetative elements are enriched with meaning: bananas symbolize flexibility, *telon* flowers convey the hope of purity and the aroma of life, rice signifies the purpose of life, and coconuts convey a unified inner and outer philosophy.

The mythical level, vegetation transforms into a depiction of a fertile, ever-circling universe. Barthes calls this stage naturalization, when symbolic meanings born of culture are perceived as natural truths. Javanese society then understands that a child must grow in harmony with the rhythm of the cosmos—developing, bearing fruit, and giving life. This is in line with research from (Adinugraha et al., 2024; Permanasari, 2017) which shows that based on research, plants such as bananas are understood as a guide to life (*pitedahing gesang*) and harmony with God, it's the meaning of *telon* flowers (Ristanto et al., 2020). The interpretations derived from religious communities differ slightly from previous research, emphasizing the characteristics and location of plants. These interpretations also differ because they originate from different sources and interpretations across communities. It's important to understand that these symbolic interpretations are not meant to be debated, but rather to be understood and complemented. Therefore, groups with differing interpretations will not view this as a matter of difference but rather as a form of communication.

Vegetative symbols serve as cultural messages affirming that fertility is not merely a biological condition, but a hope for Javanese society. This

meaning is communicated nonverbally through rituals, creating a collective understanding, and is naturalized by the collective itself, signifying the importance of harmony between humans and nature. Each word undergoes a unique process of reality coding, making words a cultural index that guides understanding of a community's mindset (Sapir, 1929)

4.1.2 *Myths about the Orderly and Virtuous Life*

The myth of an orderly and virtuous life is represented by a comb, *pangilon* (glass), *klasa* (mat), thread (*lawe*), and sugar, which are simple objects in everyday life, but that is precisely their power of sign. The denotative meaning has been clearly stated previously, a comb is used to tidy hair as well as the denotative meaning for *pangilon* (glass), *klasa* (mat), thread (*lawe*), and sugar, but in the connotation of Javanese culture, thread is a sign of longevity, the comb symbolizes the order of life, *pangilon* presents an invitation to introspection, *klasa* becomes a sign of the foundation of life, and sugar presents a picture of the sweetness of life's journey.

This is what Barthes calls the naturalization mechanism, when values born from cultural practices are elevated to universal standards within a community, particularly among the Javanese. At this stage, society no longer questions the origin of these values, as ritual objects have transformed them into something "as it should be." Javanese moral identity is patient, orderly, and self-aware (Geertz, 2013) it is perceived as an existential, not an ideological, condition.

From a symbolic communication perspective, these objects do not function as material objects, but rather as moral messages that represent cultural ethos through symbols. The baby reading ritual acts as a symbolic performance that facilitates the transmission of moral messages from one generation to the next. By placing a comb, thread, or *pangilon* in a series of *ubarampe*, the community is affirming the moral standards that children should emulate in the future. This cultural knowledge does not come through verbal instructions, but rather through embodied communication: the body, ritual space, sequence of actions, and symbolic objects together produce meaning.

4.1.3 *The Myth of the Harmony of the Outer and Inner Worlds*

Within Barthes's semiological framework, symbols such as coconut, *karuk gimbal/gingsing*, fragrant flower water, and *kendi* or jug operate through three layers of meaning. At the denotative level, they are all simply material objects, meaning fruit, food, water, and clay vessels. However, at the connotative level, Javanese society instills deeper values; the coconut is interpreted as a representation of physical and spiritual balance; *karuk* as

a sign of human connectedness with nature; fragrant flower water as a metaphor for purity and self-purification; while the *kendi* or jug reminds humans of their origins, the earth as a base and a place of return.

When this series of connotations is repeated in cultural practices, it rises to the level of myth, as Barthes describes it as "a way of culture making history appear like nature." In this context, cosmological symbols reinforce the view that harmony with the universe is not merely a teaching of the ancestors, but rather a Javanese nature. The newborn child is positioned not as a separate individual, but as part of a cosmic network connecting humanity, nature, and God. Through this process of naturalization, the order of the cosmos is presented as unquestionable a lived "truth."

These cosmological symbols function as a form of ritual communication, symbolic acts that not only convey messages but also affirm humanity's connection to the spiritual order. Their ritual allows these cosmological messages to operate not through words, but through actions and objects that symbolize the harmony of the inner and outer worlds.

4.1.4 Myths about the Proximity and Presence of Ancestors

The next myth concerns the closeness and presence of ancestors, represented in powder, cigarettes, and betel nuts. Powder, cigarettes, and betel nuts appear as simple objects with the denotative meanings of cosmetics, tobacco, and betel nut. However, at the connotative level, these objects represent collective memories of ancestors, such as their habits, preferences, and lifestyles. These three objects act as a symbol of longing, a symbol of emotional closeness and respect.

In Barthes' perspective, when these connotations are fused into social values, a myth is formed that ancestors are always present, accompanying, and protecting the journey of future generations. The use of powder, cigarettes, and betel nuts in rituals is no longer about given objects, but an ideological statement that "the relationship with ancestors is natural." This view persists because it is continually repeated, passed down, and practiced until its meaning seems to have existed since the beginning of society.

These ancestral symbols function as a form of communicative remembrance; symbolic communication connects the present with the past. These rituals communicate closeness, respect, and the continuity of family history. Through these symbols, people not only remember their ancestors, but also emphasize that their collective identity is formed from the spiritual traces and habits of previous generations.

This meaning is the same from one region to another, that some objects and foods are considered something favored by ancestors (Pratiwi et al., 2025). This uniformity of meaning indicates that there has been a repeated,

stable, and institutionalized communication process within society, so that symbolic meaning is no longer understood individually, but rather as a social agreement. Ritual symbols have operated at the level of cultural myth (Barthes), namely meanings that are considered natural and rarely questioned.

4.2 Symbolic Communication Symbols Understood by The Multicultural Indonesian People.

The discussion in this subchapter will examine the relationship between symbolic communication and intercultural communication. Before discussing this further, please refer to the flowchart below.

The *Bancaan Bayi* ritual in Kediri represents a complex semiotic system. Everyday objects ranging from vegetative symbols or plants, domestic utensils, cosmological markers, to ancestral attributes—operate as cultural signs within Barthes's three layers of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotatively, these objects are rooted in material reality. Their meaning is expanded through connotations derived from Javanese cosmology and then naturalised into cultural myths. Through this mechanism, bananas, rice, coconuts, combs, *pangilon* or glass, karuk gimbal, fragrant flowers, cigarettes, and betel quid become carriers of cultural messages. They communicate ideas of fertility, moral order, cosmic harmony, and the presence of the community's ancestors in traditional practices.

From a symbolic communication perspective, *Bancaan Bayi* functions as a communicative performance. It generates meaning not through verbal discourse, but through material symbols, spatial arrangements, and ritual actions. The vegetative symbols convey collective hopes for energy or the ability to continue growing in harmony with nature. Domestic objects affirm a moral ethos of order and self-reflection. Cosmological markers express the balance between the outer and inner realms. Ancestral attributes serve as indices of genealogical continuity. All these symbols function as communally read cultural texts. They strengthen cohesion and the reproduction of cultural identity.

This dimension becomes even more significant when viewed through the lens of intercultural communication, particularly in the relationship between the community of believers who are a demographically and politically minority group and the wider community in Kediri. As a group often placed outside the mainstream of formal religion, believers rely on ritual symbolism as a non-confrontational medium to affirm their identity and the continuity of their traditions. In this context, the baby bath becomes an arena for intercultural symbolic communication, where the

cultural meanings of the minority group interact with the symbolic repertoire of Javanese society at large.

Although the depth of meaning attributed to ritual symbols differs between believers and the majority community, many values overlap, such as inner and outer harmony, respect for ancestors, and prayers for survival. This symbolic interplay creates intercultural resonance, enabling the negotiation of meaning without ideological friction. Through their nonverbal nature, these symbols move subtly, reducing the potential for resistance and opening space for wider acceptance of the spiritual practices of adherents.

Thus, the *Bancaan Bayi* ritual functions not only as a spiritual mechanism but also as an intercultural communication infrastructure, enabling adherents to negotiate their visibility, legitimacy, and cultural identity in a pluralistic society. This process demonstrates how minority groups utilise symbolic systems to maintain cultural continuity while building bridges of understanding with the majority group.

These findings emphasise the importance of integrating Barthes's semiological framework with intercultural communication theory to understand how local traditions function as a medium for identity negotiation in multicultural societies. The *Bancaan Bayi* ritual, with all its symbolism, demonstrates that intercultural interaction does not always occur through verbal dialogue, but through cultural symbols that are lived, felt, and practiced collectively.

In the *Bancaan Bayi* tradition, the food elements in the offerings serve as symbols of cultural communication that convey messages, values, and hopes nonverbally within the Javanese community. From a cultural communication perspective, food is not merely an object for consumption but rather a "cultural sign" that carries social and spiritual meaning (Fischler, 1988) Javanese ritual symbols serve as a medium of cultural communication that regulates the relationship between humans, the community, and the supernatural world. These symbols play a role not only in a religious context but also in organizing social and cosmological interactions within the community, reflecting the belief system and profound cultural values within the Javanese tradition (Surpi et al., 2021). The food offerings in the *Bancaan Bayi* tradition serve as symbolic representations that depict hopes, prayers, and expressions of gratitude for the baby's future. Although the offerings of each tradition differ from one another, and these offerings emerge among adherents of different faiths, they demonstrate that these meanings can be negotiated and communicated within the multicultural society of the Kediri area. Experience and in-depth interviews with elders have shown that people

outside their sects can still accept and tolerate them. This demonstrates that offerings serve as a medium for both vertical and horizontal communication (Nasir, 2019). The food elements in offerings also represent the relationship between humans and nature. The use of food elements in the form of agricultural produce represents gratitude as well as a request for blessings(Putra, 2024). As a medium of symbolic communication, offerings combine verbal (prayer, mantra) and non-verbal (ritual material elements) aspects, enabling the process of negotiating meaning within social groups, in accordance with the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. This makes offerings a dual communication arena, both with supernatural entities and between community members, strengthening social and spiritual ties within Javanese society.

5. Conclusion

The profound meaning of each *ubarampe* reflects the Javanese people's high regard for cultural values, social harmony, and an ideal quality of life. From a cultural communication perspective, these *ubarampe* serve as a symbolic medium of communication, conveying messages between generations about moral values, spirituality, and communal identity. The conveyance of meaning through food is a form of nonverbal cultural communication that allows people to express their worldview, social structure, and the relationship between humans, God, and nature without relying on spoken language.

Consequently, a more comprehensive understanding of the symbolism of *ubarampe* in the *Bancaan Bayi* tradition not only strengthens people's appreciation for local cultural heritage but also has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of intergenerational communication. When the younger generation understands that this ritual is not merely a ceremonial tradition but a system of cultural communication encompassing knowledge, ethics, and spirituality, they will be more motivated to actively preserve it. Thus, this tradition serves not only as a cultural heritage but also as a means of communication that maintains the continuity of Javanese values in the lives of the Kediri community.

While this study contributes to the understanding of Bancaan Bayi symbolism and intercultural communication among adherents, several limitations—related to local context, the subjectivity of interpretation, and limited documentation and direct interaction data—need to be addressed. These findings open opportunities for further research to expand study locations, explore the dynamics of intergenerational interactions, and

explore the empirical impact of ritual practices on the social acceptance of minority groups.

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