



## The Cultural and Semiotics Dimensions of *Benjang Helaran* on the Three Elements of *Wirama*, *Wirasa* and *Wiraga*

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### **Abstract**

Benjang Helaran is a traditional Sundanese performance art which offers a rich representation of the cultural and semiotic dimensions embedded within Sundanese society. This paper examines Benjang Helaran through the three foundational elements of Sundanese dance: *Wirama* (rhythm), *Wirasa* (emotion), and *Wiraga* (physical movement). These elements are not only essential to the structure and performance of the dance but also serve as semiotic tools that convey complex cultural meanings and social values. This paper explored the interconnection between dances (movement) to semiotics dimensions. The theories applied in this paper were Blaniari (2023) regarding deeper meanings encoded within the movements, costumes, and music of Sundanese dance and Indraswara (2024) about Benjang in aspect of culture and local wisdom. The findings showed that *Wirama* reflected the harmony between the dance and the natural cycles, symbolizing cosmic order and community balance. Meanwhile *Wirasa* let dancers to communicate feelings and spirituality, creating a connection between performers and the audience. The last part was *Wiraga*; embodied Sundanese ideals of beauty, discipline, and grace, each gesture and posture carrying symbolic weight within the cultural narrative. Through this exploration, the paper argues that Benjang Helaran, when analyzed through the triad of *Wirama*, *Wirasa*, and *Wiraga*, functions as both a cultural artifact and a semiotic system. It not only preserves and transmits Sundanese cultural identity but also communicates complex messages about societal values, beliefs, and emotional experiences. This integration of cultural and semiotic dimensions underscores the deep interconnection between performance and meaning in Sundanese traditions.

**Keywords:** *Semiotics Dimensions; Benjang; Sundanese Cultural Identity*

### **Introduction**

*Benjang*, a traditional martial art and cultural performance originating from Sunda (West Java), Indonesia, reflects deep-rooted cultural and spiritual values embedded within Sundanese society. The practice, which encompasses a fusion of martial arts, music, and dance, is more than just a physical spectacle. It embodies the intricate balance between body, emotion, and rhythm, represented through the three central elements of *Wirama* (rhythm), *Wirasa* (emotion or feeling), and *Wiraga* (body or physical movement). The process of choosing, discovering, and mastering different dance conventions and regulations so that they are intrinsic to the dancer's actions during dance time is known as internalization.

To produce a dancer of superior quality, the internalization of *Wiraga*, *Wirama*, and *Wirasa* necessitates an ongoing process carried out both independently and under the supervision of a qualified teacher.<sup>1</sup>

These three elements are foundational not only in the performance of *Benjang* but also in its cultural and linguistic significance. *Wirama* refers to the tempo and rhythm that guide the performance, ensuring harmony between the movement and the accompanying traditional music. *Wirasa* represents the emotional and expressive dimension of the practice, reflecting the feelings conveyed through the movements. *Wiraga*, on the other hand, speaks to the physical aspect of the body's discipline and form within the martial performance.<sup>2</sup> In exploring the dimensions of *Wirama*, *Wirasa*, and *Wiraga*, we gain insight into how *Benjang* is more than just an art form—it serves as a vessel for cultural transmission, preserving the unique language, identity, and values of the Sundanese people. This study delves into how these elements interweave to create a complex cultural and linguistic tapestry, offering a deeper understanding of the spiritual, social, and artistic dimensions of *Benjang*. *Wirama* (rhythm) is the musical and rhythmic foundation of *Benjang*. The term refers to the tempo and flow that dictates the pace of both the performance and the martial techniques. Traditional Sundanese instruments, such as the *kendang* (drum) and gamelan orchestra, often accompany *Benjang* performances, helping to synchronize the movements of the performers with the beats of the music. The role of *Wirama* extends beyond simply maintaining time; it also acts as a cultural symbol, representing the harmony between individuals and their environment. In Sundanese tradition, rhythm connects participants to nature, their community, and their cultural heritage, reinforcing *Benjang*'s role as a form of social cohesion.<sup>3</sup>

*Wirasa* (emotion or feeling) adds an expressive, emotional layer to the performance. In *Benjang*, movements are not performed mechanically; they must convey emotion, spirit, and intent. *Wirasa* emphasizes the internal experience of the performer, reflecting the depth of their connection to the practice and their ability to evoke certain feelings or moods during the performance. This emotional expression is a crucial aspect of *Benjang*, as it transforms the martial art into a more profound cultural experience. It is believed that without *Wirasa*, the performance loses its soul—becoming a mere physical exercise devoid of meaning.<sup>4</sup> *Wiraga* (body or physical movement) refers to the disciplined, technical execution of martial arts forms within *Benjang*. The term captures the importance of physicality and precision, highlighting how the body moves in response to rhythm and emotion. *Wiraga* encompasses the strength, flexibility, and coordination required to perform *Benjang* effectively, ensuring that movements are fluid yet powerful. It is through *Wiraga* that performers demonstrate their mastery of martial techniques, but it also symbolizes the physical embodiment of Sundanese cultural values such as resilience, grace, and respect for tradition.<sup>5</sup>

These three elements—*Wirama*, *Wirasa*, and *Wiraga*—are interdependent and inseparable in *Benjang*, each contributing to the overall meaning and experience of the performance. Their interconnection speaks to the deep philosophical underpinnings of Sundanese culture, where harmony between body, mind, and spirit is essential for achieving balance and fulfillment. Moreover, *Benjang*, through these elements, serves as a means of transmitting linguistic and cultural knowledge. The specific

<sup>1</sup> Sarjiwo, . (2020). *Internalization of Wirasa in the Body Processing for Role-playing in the Yogyakarta-style Dance*. *Iconarties* 2019, 29–36. <https://doi.org/10.5220/0008544600290036>

<sup>2</sup> Dawana, I. R., Safitri, A. I., & Admoko, S. (2023). Identification of Physics Concepts in the Local Wisdom of Remo Surabaya Traditional Dance as One of the Efforts to Preserve Culture in East Java. *JIPF (Jurnal Ilmu ...)*, 8(3), 345–360. <https://doi.org/10.26737/jipf.v8i3.4178>

<sup>3</sup> Argiandini, S. R., Sumarwati, S., & Suhita, R. (2023). Symbolic Meaning and Local Wisdom Education of the Traditional Performing Arts Reog Ponorogo. *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Social Science (ICSS)*, 2(2), 83–96.

<sup>4</sup> Asrial, A., Syahril, S., Sabil, H., Kurniawan, D. A., & Novianti, U. (2022). Integrating Local Wisdom of Nek Pung Dance in Grade 4 Elementary School Science Learning. *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pembelajaran IPA*, 8(1), 60. <https://doi.org/10.30870/jppi.v8i1.9330>

<sup>5</sup> Ramlan, R., Iskandar, D., Permana, J., & Husin, M. R. (2023). Character Values of Elementary School Education from the Perspective of Local Wisdom of Sundanese Culture. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 13(3), 119–129. <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2023-0062>

movements, chants, and rituals involved in Benjang performances carry layers of meaning that reflect the history, language, and societal norms of the Sundanese people. For example, traditional chants, prayers, and songs often accompany performances, offering insight into the Sundanese worldview, belief systems, and linguistic richness.<sup>6</sup>

In examining the cultural and linguistic dimensions of Benjang through the lens of *Wirama*, *Wirasa*, and *Wiraga*, this study aims to uncover how these elements not only contribute to the aesthetic and technical aspects of the performance but also serve as a medium for preserving and transmitting Sundanese cultural identity. By looking at the ways in which rhythm, emotion, and physical movement intersect, we can gain a deeper understanding of how Benjang functions as both an artistic practice and a living cultural tradition. This exploration highlights the critical role that traditional arts like Benjang play in maintaining the cultural and linguistic diversity of Indonesia, especially in the face of modern challenges and global cultural homogenization.<sup>7</sup>

Sundanese dance, a traditional art form from West Java, Indonesia, is deeply intertwined with the cultural and semiotic dimensions of the Sundanese people. The following literature review explores the cultural significance and semiotic analysis of Sundanese dance, focusing on how the movements, costumes, and music serve as a language of expression within the community. The cultural aspects of Sundanese dance are rooted in the history, beliefs, and daily life of the Sundanese people. Sundanese dances are often performed during important cultural and religious ceremonies, making them a reflection of the community's social norms and values. Sundanese dances are traditionally tied to the agricultural cycles and spiritual beliefs, celebrating events such as harvests, marriages, and religious festivals. The dances, such as the *Jaipongan* and *Benjang*, not only serve as entertainment but also preserve the collective memory and identity of the Sundanese people.<sup>8</sup>

Further research emphasizes how Sundanese dances carry moral lessons, particularly regarding harmony with nature and spiritual connections. The stories told through dance often include references to Sundanese myths and legends, creating a link between performers and their ancestors. This cultural transmission through dance helps sustain Sundanese heritage across generations.<sup>9</sup>

### Semiotic Dimensions of Sundanese Dance

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, offers a lens through which to analyze the deeper meanings encoded within the movements, costumes, and music of Sundanese dance. The semiotic theory posits that each gesture, rhythm, and visual element carries symbolic meaning that can be interpreted beyond its surface-level appearance. The body in motion during dance can be seen as a text that communicates culturally specific meanings. In Sundanese dance, hand gestures, eye movements, and specific footwork are not arbitrary; they are signifiers of particular emotions, social statuses, or natural elements. For instance, the sweeping arm movements in *Jaipongan* dances often symbolize the fluidity of water, which is a recurring theme in Sundanese cosmology. Some experts explore how the semiotics of

<sup>6</sup> Wahyuni, A. P., K.L., N. Y., & Yuningsih, Y. (2021). Seni Benjang Gulat Sebagai Simbol Identitas Budaya Masyarakat Ujung Berung. *Jurnal Budaya Etnika*, 5(1), 25. <https://doi.org/10.26742/be.v5i1.1590>

<sup>7</sup> Indraswara, H., & Cahyanto, T. (2024). Adat Budaya Sasamben Budak Bujang (Benjang) di Kecamatan Ujungberung Kota Bandung. *Jurnal Insan Pendidikan Dan Sosial Humaniora*, 2(1), 31–42.

<sup>8</sup> Susanti, S., & Elkirimah, K. (2021). Preservation of Sundanese Traditional Dance in Modern Day. *E-Prosiding Pascasarjana ISBI Bandung*, 1(1), 347–352. [https://scholar.google.com/citations?view\\_op=view\\_citation&hl=en&user=sRpcEeYAAAAJ&pagesize=100&citation\\_for\\_view=sRpcEeYAAAAJ:bEWYMUwI8FkC](https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=sRpcEeYAAAAJ&pagesize=100&citation_for_view=sRpcEeYAAAAJ:bEWYMUwI8FkC)

<sup>9</sup> Narawati, T., & Hapidzin, R. I. (2024). The image of Sundanese women in the Jaipongan dance of Mojang Priangan. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 197, 03007. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202419703007>

Sundanese dance can be understood as a form of non-verbal communication. Rahmat identifies three key semiotic elements in Sundanese dance.<sup>10</sup>

- a. Gestures: Movements of the hands, head, and feet often serve to express emotions or narrate stories. In *Sampiung*, for example, slow, graceful movements are symbolic of elegance and refinement, reflecting the dancer's emotional state or the mood of the story being portrayed.
- b. Costume and Makeup: The brightly colored traditional costumes, such as those in *Benjang*, carry significant symbolic meaning, representing purity, wealth, or spirituality. The use of gold and intricate patterns on fabric is associated with high status and divinity, while simpler, natural colors represent humility and closeness to nature.
- c. Music and Rhythm: The gamelan orchestra, often accompanying Sundanese dances, plays a crucial role in setting the rhythm and mood. The rhythm of the gamelan is not just a backdrop for the dancers but a semiotic element in itself, representing the passage of time or cosmic order. The music acts as a cue for dancers to change their movements in alignment with symbolic gestures.<sup>11</sup>

### Integration of Cultural and Semiotic Aspects

The intersection between the cultural and semiotic dimensions of Sundanese dance highlights its function as both a performative and communicative art form. Sundanese dance is a holistic experience where cultural values and semiotic signs converge. The dances are not only aesthetic performances but also enactments of the social, religious, and environmental relationships inherent to Sundanese life. For instance, in *Kuda Lumping*, a traditional horse dance, the semiotics of the horse mask, accompanied by rhythmic trance-like music, represents ancestral spirits and the connection between humans and the supernatural. This cultural-spiritual performance is deeply embedded in the community's cosmology and serves as a symbolic re-enactment of ancestral myths. Modern interpretations of Sundanese dance continue to draw from traditional cultural and semiotic practices while incorporating new elements to appeal to contemporary audiences.<sup>12</sup> Urban Sundanese dance troupes have adapted their performances for international audiences by simplifying the symbolic gestures and increasing the spectacle through elaborate costumes and lighting. Despite these modern adaptations, the core semiotic elements remain intact, preserving the dance's cultural essence while making it accessible to global viewers.

The fusion of tradition and modernity in Sundanese dance reflects the ongoing evolution of the art form, demonstrating how it maintains its cultural and semiotic richness even as it adapts to new contexts. The cultural and semiotic dimensions of Sundanese dance are deeply intertwined, creating a rich and complex form of expression that conveys the values, beliefs, and stories of the Sundanese people. From the intricate hand gestures to the rhythm of the gamelan orchestra, each element carries symbolic meaning that reflects the cultural heritage of West Java. Semiotic analysis reveals how dance serves as a visual and emotional language, while the cultural dimension emphasizes its role in community life and identity preservation.<sup>13</sup>

### Semiotics in Traditional Culture

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, provides a powerful framework for understanding how local cultures communicate meaning through various forms of expression. Local cultures, with their

<sup>10</sup> Argiandini, S. R., Sumarwati, S., & Suhita, R. (2023). Symbolic Meaning and Local Wisdom Education of the Traditional Performing Arts Reog Ponorogo. *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Social Science (ICSS)*, 2(2), 83–96. <https://doi.org/10.59188/icss.v2i2.14>

<sup>11</sup> Mustika, I. W. (2024). Kiamat Dance: A Reflection of Local Wisdom in Kuripan Village, South Lampung, Indonesia. *Mudra Jurnal Seni Budaya*, 39(2), 261–270.

<sup>12</sup> Blanariu, N. P. (2023). Semiotics in Performance and Dance. *Bloomsbury Semiotics: Semiotics in the Arts and Social Sciences, Volume 3*, 3(January), 207–226. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350139398.ch-11>

<sup>13</sup> Chung, J. P. (2023). Knowledge and Power in Indonesian Traditional Music: A Genealogical Approach on the Transformation of the Meaning of Karawitan. *Jurnal Kawistara*, 13(3), 295. <https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.83772>

unique customs, beliefs, languages, and practices, often embed rich semiotic structures in their art, rituals, architecture, and everyday life. This literature review explores semiotic theory as applied to local cultures, focusing on the interaction between symbols, language, and cultural identity. The theoretical basis of semiotics stems from the works of Saussure and Peirce. Saussure's concept of the *signifier* (the form of a word or gesture) and the *signified* (the concept it represents) forms the foundation for analyzing local cultural symbols. Peirce expands on this by introducing the triadic relationship between the *sign* (representamen), the *object* (what the sign refers to), and the *interpretant* (how the sign is understood). These theories provide a lens through which we can decode cultural practices as a language system with its own syntax and grammar.<sup>14</sup>

In local cultures, semiotic systems are often more deeply embedded in tradition and less standardized than in larger, globalized cultures. Eco argues that semiotics in local contexts must take into account the "open" nature of cultural symbols—these signs are frequently flexible, with meanings that shift depending on time, context, and community use.

A single symbol may have multiple interpretations, shaped by history, religion, and social norms. One of the most profound areas where semiotics is observed in local cultures is in rituals and ceremonies. These events are replete with symbols that convey community values, spiritual beliefs, and social hierarchies. The role of rituals in communicating social structure through symbols, which are used to mark transitions, from life stages (e.g., birth, marriage, death) to community rites of passage. In this context, local rituals act as a —cultural performance that both encodes and transmits knowledge through semiotic elements such as dress, gestures, and sacred objects.

For example, Balinese culture, analyzes the cockfight as a semiotic practice. Geertz sees the cockfight as a metaphorical battleground where symbols of masculinity, status, and honor are communicated through action. The cock itself becomes a signifier of masculinity and community identity, while the event itself enacts social tensions and reinforces hierarchy in the community. In many local cultures, the design of architecture and spatial arrangement carries a significant semiotic function. Traditional houses, temples, and public spaces are often constructed according to cosmological principles, serving as physical embodiments of cultural and religious values. Bourdieu examines how the spatial arrangement of homes in Kabyle society (Algeria) reflects gender roles, social order, and cosmological beliefs, with different areas of the house symbolizing aspects of the human body or stages of life.<sup>15</sup>

Vernacular architecture functions as a semiotic system in various local cultures, where the materials used, the shape of the building, and its orientation are laden with meaning. For example, in many indigenous communities, the positioning of a home may reflect a culture's understanding of cardinal directions and their association with spiritual forces. These architectural elements act as non-verbal signs, encoding and expressing the community's worldview. Semiotics also plays a crucial role in understanding the function of language and oral traditions within local cultures. Oral traditions, such as folklore, proverbs, and myths, are rich in semiotic meaning, often relying on metaphor, symbolism, and allegory to communicate values and historical knowledge. Myths in local cultures can function as a form of ideological communication, turning specific cultural experiences into universal truths or moral lessons. In the context of indigenous languages, Linguistic structures in local dialects encode not just practical information but also deeper social and cosmological meanings. For example, in some cultures, the way

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<sup>14</sup> Lorusso, A. M., & Sedda, F. (2022). For a semiotics of culture as a critique of culture\*. *Social Semiotics*, 32(5), 577–587. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2022.2157169>

<sup>15</sup> Husain, N. F., Dj., M. Z., & Musfirah, M. (2021). Semiotic analysis to the cultural content in the EFL textbook. *International Journal of Research on English Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 1(2), 67–82. <https://doi.org/10.30863/ijretal.v1i2.1230>

people refer to natural elements, such as rivers or mountains, often reflects their spiritual significance, turning them into semiotic signs that convey more than just their physical properties.<sup>16</sup>

In different approach, further underscores the semiotic richness of oral narratives in local cultures, suggesting that myths and stories serve as a coded language that structures social and cultural knowledge. The symbolism in these narratives is often multilayered, with each myth representing both the practical and metaphysical concerns of the community. Local cultures frequently express their identity and worldview through material culture—art, crafts, clothing, and everyday objects, which act as semiotic carriers of meaning. The objects are more than functional; they are signifiers of identity, status, and cultural heritage. For instance, traditional textiles from different regions of the world often contain intricate patterns that are semiotic representations of community history, spiritual beliefs, and social standing.

In addition, "invented traditions" often emerge in local cultures, where new symbols or practices are created to serve as signifiers of cultural continuity or resistance to external influences. These new symbols can quickly become embedded in the semiotic system of a community, carrying profound meanings related to identity and cultural resilience. The semiotics of local culture is not static; it evolves, especially under the influence of globalization. As local communities interact with global culture, their semiotic systems often adapt, incorporating new signs or reinterpreting traditional ones. Globalization has led to the "deterritorialization" of culture, where local symbols are appropriated, transformed, or commodified in the global marketplace.<sup>17</sup>

However, local cultures are not passive in this process; they often resist or creatively adapt to globalization by reasserting their unique semiotic practices. For instance, traditional dances, music, or crafts may be modified to appeal to global audiences while still retaining their local semiotic significance. This dynamic interaction between local and global semiotic systems highlights the resilience and adaptability of local cultures in the face of external pressures. The study of semiotics in local culture offers a rich field for understanding how communities use symbols, signs, and practices to communicate their values, identities, and worldviews. From rituals and architecture to language and material culture, local semiotic systems are complex and deeply embedded in the social fabric of these communities. As globalization continues to influence local cultures, semiotic analysis will be crucial in exploring how traditional signs evolve and adapt to new contexts, ensuring the continued relevance of local cultural expressions in an increasingly interconnected world.<sup>18</sup>

## Research Methods

The exploration of the cultural and semiotic dimensions of *Benjang Helaran*—a traditional art form from West Java—through the lens of *Wirama* (rhythm), *Wirasa* (emotion), and *Wiraga* (physical expression) requires a deep qualitative investigation. The method combines ethnographic fieldwork with semiotic analysis to unpack the layers of cultural meaning embedded in this unique performance art. This process involves both immersive observation and interpretive analysis of the symbols and structures of the performance. Ethnographic fieldwork provides the primary framework for understanding the lived cultural dimensions of *Benjang Helaran*. The researcher immerses themselves in the context of the performances, attending festivals, community gatherings, and other spaces where *Benjang Helaran* is

<sup>16</sup> Maknun, T., Tahir, M. D., & Suryaningsih, I. (2020). Cultural Dimension of Black Representation of Ammatoa Community: Study of Cultural Semiotics. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 3(4), 651–660. <https://doi.org/10.34050/elsjish.v3i4.12346>

<sup>17</sup> Long, J., & He, J. (2021). Cultural Semiotics and the Related Interpretation. *Proceedings of the 2021 International Conference on Public Relations and Social Sciences (ICPRSS 2021)*, 586(Icprss), 1268–1272. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211020.340>

<sup>18</sup> Subhan, R., Supratno, H., & Darni, D. (2021). Semiotics Analysis of Semar Mesem Spell Performed by The Coastal Community of Jember, East Java, Indonesia. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal): Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 2591–2599. <https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v4i2.1964>

performed. Through participant observation, the researcher not only watches but also engages with the performers, understanding the dynamics from within the cultural community; involved:

- a. Attending live performances of *Benjang Helaran* in its cultural setting, observing the interaction between performers, musicians, and the audience.
- b. Recording video footage of performances to capture the complex interplay of *Wirama* (rhythm), *Wirasa* (emotions), and *Wiraga* (physical movements).
- c. Taking detailed field notes on the variations in rhythm, physical movement, and the emotional expressions of the performers.
- d. Engaging with performers and audience members to understand their interpretations of these elements, conducting informal interviews to gather insights into their symbolic meanings.<sup>19</sup>

Through this process, the researcher gains an embodied understanding of how rhythm, emotion, and physical expression are integrated into the performance and how these elements function within the broader cultural context. Following the ethnographic fieldwork, the next phase involves a detailed semiotic analysis of the performance. Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, is used here to decode the cultural meanings embedded in the three elements of *Benjang Helaran*. Each of these elements—*Wirama*, *Wirasa*, and *Wiraga*—is viewed as a system of signs that communicates cultural values, emotions, and identity.

- 1) *Wirama* (rhythm): The rhythm in *Benjang Helaran* is closely tied to the traditional music accompanying the performance. The researcher analyzes how rhythm structures the performance, considering both its symbolic meaning and how it evokes cultural time cycles, community togetherness, or spiritual significance.
- 2) *Wirasa* (emotion): Emotions in performance are central to understanding the semiotic depth of *Benjang Helaran*. The researcher focuses on the expressive gestures and facial expressions of the performers. This involves interpreting the emotional intensity conveyed through the dance and how it resonates with the audience, linking emotions to broader themes such as communal unity, celebration, or spiritual devotion.
- 3) *Wiraga* (body/physical expression): The physical movements of the performers, particularly the body postures and gestures, are seen as cultural symbols that communicate meaning. The researcher examines the choreography, paying attention to the style of movements, their repetitions, and how they align with traditional or contemporary expressions of identity. Special attention is given to the symbolic gestures and how they convey messages related to status, power, spirituality, or heritage.

The semiotic analysis decodes the layered meanings of these elements, connecting them to larger themes such as social cohesion, cultural identity, and resistance or adaptation to modern influences.

Alongside the observations and semiotic analysis, the researcher conducts in-depth interviews with key stakeholders involved in *Benjang Helaran*, including performers, musicians, cultural experts, and older members of the community. The research method for exploring the cultural and semiotic dimensions of *Benjang Helaran* through *Wirama*, *Wirasa*, and *Wiraga* is grounded in ethnographic immersion and semiotic interpretation. By combining direct observation with interviews and performance analysis, the researcher gains a deep understanding of how these three elements function as cultural

<sup>19</sup> Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and applications: Design and methods. In *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research* (Vol. 53, Issue 5). <https://doi.org/10.1177/109634809702100108>

symbols, communicating collective identity, emotional expression, and social meaning within the West Javanese community.<sup>20</sup>

## Discussion

The findings of this study reveal the interconnection between the cultural and semiotics dimensions of *Benjang Helaran* and its expression through the three elements—*Wirama* (rhythm), *Wirasa* (emotion), and *Wiraga* (physical movement). Each of these components performs a critical role in conveying not only the artistic essence of the performance but also deeper cultural meanings related to community, identity, and tradition. The following sections detail the results and interpret these findings within the context of Javanese cultural semiotics.

### Wirama

The analysis of *Wirama* (rhythm) in *Benjang Helaran* reveals that the rhythmic patterns are essential to establishing the cultural and performative atmosphere. The music, primarily provided by traditional instruments such as the *kendang* (drums), *gong*, and *gamelan*, creates a repetitive yet dynamic rhythmic foundation for the performance. The results suggest that the rhythmic pulse of *Benjang Helaran* serves multiple functions; the repetitive nature of the rhythm evokes a sense of timelessness, linking present-day performances to historical practices. The steady, hypnotic beats remind both performers and audience members of the cyclical nature of time, which is a key feature of traditional Javanese cosmology. The rhythmic cycle reflects the communal heartbeat, representing unity and harmony within the community.

The rhythm also influences the emotional atmosphere of the performance. Faster tempos heighten excitement, while slower, more measured rhythms create a sense of solemnity. The crescendo and decrescendo of the rhythm mark key transitions in the performance, suggesting shifts in emotional intensity that corresponds with the narrative or symbolic progression of the *Helaran*. The result is a collective emotional experience, where the audience is drawn into the flow of the performance through the power of rhythm.

In the context of Javanese cultural semiotics, *Wirama* acts as more than just a musical background; it is a signifier of the community's shared time and space. The rhythm not only guides the movements of the performers but also serves as a metaphor for the cyclical nature of life and community cohesion. The consistent rhythmic structure serves as a semiotic bridge between the tangible present and the intangible past, reflecting the broader Javanese worldview that values continuity and harmony.

### Wirasa

*Wirasa* (emotion) performs a central role in *Benjang Helaran*, shaping both the performance's internal dynamics and its connection to the audience. The study's findings reveal that emotion is conveyed primarily through the facial expressions, gestures, and body language of the performers, but it also arises from the interaction between performers and musicians. Key results regarding *Wirasa* include emotional expressions in *Benjang Helaran* are not individualized but are instead collective. The emotional intensity builds up in sync with the rhythm, and it is shared among all participants—performers, musicians, and audience. The performers' facial expressions, particularly in the eyes and mouth, are exaggerated, allowing the audience to feel and connect with the emotions being conveyed. This shared emotional experience heightens the sense of community.

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<sup>20</sup> Kim, S., Nelson, J. G., & Williams, R. S. (1985). Mixed-basis band-structure interpolation scheme applied to the fluorite-structure compounds NiSi<sub>2</sub>, AuAl<sub>2</sub>, AuGa<sub>2</sub>, and AuIn<sub>2</sub>. In *Physical Review B* (Vol. 31, Issue 6). <https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevB.31.3460>



The emotional arc of the performance often culminates in moments of heightened intensity, which can be seen as a form of emotional catharsis. This cathartic release has both spiritual and communal significance, as it reflects a collective emotional journey that mirrors traditional rituals of release and renewal in Javanese culture. At the end of the performance, the audience feels a shared sense of emotional resolution, as if they have experienced a communal spiritual journey. In semiotic terms, *Wirasa* functions as the expressive medium through which individual and collective identities are performed and experienced. The emotional expressions are coded with cultural meanings that reflect the values of unity, spirituality, and shared emotional states. The semiotic power of *Wirasa* lies in its ability to transform personal emotions into collective cultural symbols, fostering a shared emotional resonance that strengthens the social fabric.

## Wiraga

The study finds that *Wiraga* (physical expression) is a vital element of *Benjang Helaran*, with movements serving as both artistic gestures and semiotic signs. The physicality of the performers is deliberate and highly stylized, with movements that are both expressive and symbolic. The performers' bodies move in synchronized, patterned sequences, with each gesture imbued with symbolic significance. For example, hand gestures often mimic natural elements (such as waves or trees), reflecting the community's close relationship with nature. Similarly, certain poses represent deference to ancestors or invoke protection from spirits. These movements are highly codified, each carrying a specific meaning that is understood by both performers and audience members.

*Wiraga* serves as an embodied form of cultural transmission. Younger performers often learn the movements from elders, who pass down the intricate patterns and gestures that have been preserved for generations. In this way, the body becomes a living text through which cultural knowledge and identity are inscribed and communicated. The ritualized postures and movements embody the community's shared history and spiritual beliefs. Through the lens of semiotics, *Wiraga* can be seen as a semiotic system where the body functions as a cultural signifier. Every gesture, posture, and movement within *Benjang Helaran* communicates deeper cultural meanings related to status, spirituality, and identity. The physical body in performance is not just an artistic instrument but a cultural text that expresses and sustains the community's heritage. *Wiraga*, therefore, operates as both an artistic and semiotic mode of cultural expression, bridging the physical and the symbolic in a living tradition.

## Cultural Implications

The interrelationship between *Wirama*, *Wirasa*, and *Wiraga* in *Benjang Helaran* demonstrates how traditional performance is a site of rich semiotic activity. Each element contributes to a cultural narrative that communicates and reinforces communal values, spiritual beliefs, and collective identity. The findings suggest that *Benjang Helaran* is not merely a form of entertainment but a living cultural practice that functions as a semiotic system. Through rhythm, emotion, and physical expression, the performance communicates complex layers of meaning that resonate both within the community and in the broader context of Javanese cultural heritage. Moreover, the study highlights the adaptive nature of *Benjang Helaran*, showing how it evolves in response to contemporary influences while still preserving its core cultural symbols. As modern elements are incorporated into the performance, the foundational semiotic principles of *Wirama*, *Wirasa*, and *Wiraga* remain intact, ensuring that the tradition continues to be relevant and meaningful to new generations. Through its intricate integration of rhythm, emotion, and movement, functions as a semiotic and cultural medium that not only entertains but also educates, unites, and sustains the community's collective identity.

## Conclusion

This research investigates and explores the cultural and semiotic dimensions of *Benjang Helaran*, constructed through the elements of *Wirama* (rhythm), *Wirasa* (emotion), and *Wiraga* (physical expression). These components not only shape the artistic experience but also operate as semiotic systems, carrying deep cultural meanings and values within the performance. *Benjang Helaran* serves as a site of semiotic activity, where cultural identity, spirituality, and community cohesion are continuously communicated, negotiated, and reaffirmed. The semiotic dimension of this traditional art form is evident in how signs—whether rhythmic, emotional, or physical—function as vehicles of cultural meaning:

- a) *Wirama* (rhythm) is a semiotic signifier of temporal cycles and community life. The repetitive, structured rhythm reflects the cultural importance of continuity and the cyclical nature of time in Javanese cosmology. Rhythm operates as a cultural symbol, not merely guiding the performance but also anchoring the performers and audience in shared cultural time and space. It represents the collective heartbeat of the community, symbolizing unity and social harmony.
- b) *Wirasa* (emotion) acts as a semiotic intersection between individual experience and collective cultural emotion. Emotional expressions are coded with cultural meanings that symbolize spiritual journeys, communal bonds, and shared experiences. The heightened emotional states conveyed in the performance foster a sense of collective catharsis, linking performers and audience in a shared spiritual and emotional journey. Through semiotic analysis, *Wirasa* acknowledged the cultural values of togetherness and emotional resonance.
- c) *Wiraga* (physical expression) performed as an embodied semiotic system, where the body becomes a cultural text. The stylized movements, gestures, and postures represent more than mere artistic expression; they are deeply rooted in symbolic traditions that signify spiritual beliefs, ancestral respect, and social hierarchies. Every movement, from hand gestures mimicking natural elements to body postures invoking deference to ancestors, communicates culturally significant meanings. The body is a symbolic vessel for the transmission of knowledge, values, and collective memory, reinforcing the connection between past and present.

In addition, the performance of *Benjang Helaran* embodies the semiotic interplay of signs that communicate complex layers of meaning. The cultural elements of *Wirama*, *Wirasa*, and *Wiraga* are not isolated but work together to form a unified semiotic system, deeply rooted in Javanese cultural heritage.

The results of this research show that *Benjang Helaran* is not just a performance art; it is a living cultural text where semiotic dimensions intersect with emotional, physical, and rhythmic elements to create a rich, multi-dimensional narrative. It operates as a powerful medium for reinforcing and preserving cultural identity, ensuring that the values, beliefs, and traditions of the West Javanese community are continually performed and passed down to future generations.

To conclude, the semiotic dimensions of *Benjang Helaran* reflect its role as a dynamic cultural practice that transcends mere entertainment. It is a significant form of cultural communication, where rhythm, emotion, and physicality come together to express and sustain the community's shared values and collective identity. As a semiotic and cultural system, *Benjang Helaran* adapts to modern influences while remaining deeply connected to its traditional roots, ensuring its ongoing relevance and vitality.

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