

The Representation of Identity Politic of Banyumas Culture As a Javanese Sub-Culture in Banyumas Style T-Shirt Design

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ABSTRACT

Banyumasan T-shirt is one of the creative industry products in Banyumas that has function as cultural display as well as expression of identity politics. This is because the various designs in Banyumasan T-shirts show various cultural identities of Banyumas that different from other cultures, especially with the Javanese culture that has been regarded as the core culture. Therefore, this study aims to find out how the identity politics of Banyumas society are represented in Banyumasan T-shirts. The research method used is qualitative research method with semiotic approach from Rolland Barthes. Research materials are in the form of the design of five brands Banyumasan T-shirts that circulate in the region Banyumas. From the research, it was found that Banyumasan T-shirt design represented Banyumas culture as a sub-culture that has different culture with Javanese culture. The visual and verbal texts display the Banyumas character of the cablaka (honest), egalitarian, critical and humorous. This is different from the construction of Javanese characters that tend to be closed, stratified, obedient and serious.

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Introduction

What t-shirts mean in social life have undergone changes. Nowadays, t-shirt is interpreted not just as a casual clothing, rather it has other meanings related to lifestyle, social relations and expression of identity. These changes in t-shirt meanings and function is called by (Bangsawan, 2014) as a cultural shift because the function of clothing in t-shirt has evolved into a sort of message of many things and interests; from business to music to ideology to even politic.

One of the frequently-shown message in t-shirt is cultural identity. T-shirt which promotes cultural identity has reached nearly every part of Indonesia, including Banyumas Regency, Central Java Province. In this part of Indonesia, there are tens of t-shirts with local brands showing Banyumas cultural identity, such as its language, people's characters, local dishes, tradition, arts and so on. Some of those t-shirt brands

are quite well-known, such as Dablongan Clothing, Ngapak, Inyong Oblong, Maning, Bengkong, etc.

Many texts (writing and drawings) in Banyumas-style t-shirt design are extremely interesting to be studied since it can be read as a representation of identity politic of Banyumas culture. These texts show elements of Banyumas culture which are different from Javanese culture, such as its language and its people's characters. From the language perspective, Banyumas people have specific dialect known as ngapak dialect. This ngapak dialect has been stigmatized as lower than informal Javanese language (ngoko), rather than the formal and polite Javanese language (krama) which is usually used by Yogyakarta-Solo people as a symbol of Javanese culture. In addition, from the character perspective, Banyumas people also have different characters from Javanese culture. One of these are Cablaka character. According to Priyadi (2007: 21), cablaka can be defined as an expression uttered spontaneously to a phenomenon appearing right before one's eyes. It is done frankly and undisguisedly, even when the utterance is addressed to someone of honorable position. Thanks to this cablaka character, many find Banyumas people know no unggah-ungguh (manner), frank, or even possibly sharp-tongued (nylekiti) for those who have not known or do not know it.

These Banyumas people's characters which differ from Javanese culture are grounded by the socio-political history of this region which has once been under the Mataram kingdom and Dutch colonial authorities at the same time. Purwoko (2009) suggests that at the beginning of its formation (15th century), the region of Banyumas was still under the authority of Mataram Kingdom. After Mataram split into two (mid 17th century), Banyumas was ruled by the Surakarta part. However, when Diponegoro War broke in 1825-1830, Banyumas was shifted directly to the authority of Dutch colonial government. This was what made Banyumas unique. The Javanese Kingdom's hegemony was not that strong. Likewise, even the Sundanese Kingdom closest to its position had no meaningful dominance, leading to its own particular culture, a phenomenon known as marginal survival culture area.

It is this historic, socio-political background of Banyumas as a marginal area which is interesting to be studied as it is connected to the context of the appearance of Banyumas cultural identity in the popular cultural products in the form of t-shirt. (Nelson et al., 2013) states that in popular culture an interrelatedness can be found between power, ideology and even cultural hegemony. Meanwhile, according to (Saraswati, n.d.), popular culture cannot be deemed merely as an entertainment phenomenon which is free of ideology and power contents. The same applies to t-shirts, in this case the Banyumas-style t-shirts. Many texts in Banyumas-style t-shirts do not serve merely for commercial purpose, they are also a representation of cultural identity politic which produces certain meanings such as power, hegemony, resistance and others. Therefore, the question in this research is: How is the identity politic of Banyumas people as a sub-culture of Javanese culture represented in Banyumas-style t-shirts?

Research Methods

The data used in this research are textual data, both verbal (writing) and visual (drawings) in Banyumas-style t-shirts. The researcher has selected the texts in Banyumas-style t-shirts from Dablongan Clothing, Inyong Oblong, and Domong brands. These three brands are selected because they are consistent in showing Banyumas cultural identity, particularly from their use of Banyumas dialect in their designs. Furthermore, these textual data are analyzed using Rolland Barthes's semiotic approach, which emphasizes

on the disclosure of other meanings (connotation) of a denotative sign. The term “other” is also known as the Myth which can be found through second order semiotic analysis. According to Barthes (1972: 303), what constitutes a sign in the first system will only be a mere signifier in the second system. The many texts in Banyumas-style t-shirt designs can be analyzed using Roland Barthes’s semiotic model. These many writings and drawings in Banyumas-style t-shirts can be interpreted as signs which relate to ideology and myth on Banyumas-style cultural identity.

Results and Discussions

1. Semiotic Analysis of Banyumas-Style T-shirts

1.1 Design 1: *Ngapak Dupak* (*Dablongan* Clothing)



Figure 1. T-shirt design *Ngapak Dupak*
(source: researcher’s documentation)

In the first order semiotic system, the entire visual and verbal texts above are signifiers which have a signified (meaningful) of man’s left leg situated in a circle within which a writing “*ora ngapak dupak!*” is added. The set of Banyumas dialect words (*inyong-tolih-kencot, dst*) serves as a sample of Banyumas dialect vocabulary.

In the second order semiotic system, all signs in the form of visual and verbal texts above change into mere signifiers and offers some other signified (meanings) related to Banyumas cultural identity. The visual signifier in the form of foot drawing offers a connotative meaning as the foot of *wong ngapak* (*ngapak* people). This connotative can be read by referring to the relation between visual and verbal texts in the design above. The verbal text “*ora ngapak dupak!*” serves as an *anchorage* for the visual text, hence the feet drawing can be interpreted as the foot of *wong ngapak* who is doing or does the act of kicking (*dupak*). If there is no the word “*dupak*”, this foot drawing can otherwise be interpreted as the foot of someone who is taking a step, tiptoeing and etc.

The visual signifier in left foot form also offers a meaning as the positioning of Banyumas culture (*ngapak*) to other cultures, particularly Javanese culture. Until recently, there is a stigma that *ngapak* culture is a sub-culture of Javanese culture, hence the *ngapak* culture is deemed as rural or marginal culture. In addition, in Javanese culture, there is this philosophy which says that the left one is considered as worse than the right one. The right and left dichotomy with its connotation to good and bad happens in nearly all aspects of Javanese people daily life, such as the ethics for eating, coming into the house, giving and receiving something from others which should use the right foot or hand.

The t-shirt design above also has verbal signifier in the form of “*ora ngapak dupak*” writing which is ended with an exclamation mark (!). In the second order semiotic

system, this signifier offers a meaning as a warning or even a threat to anyone who think themselves as *wong ngapak* to show their identity as *wong ngapak*. One of the ways to show that they are *wong ngapak* is when they communicate, i.e. to use the *ngapak* dialect. Therefore, these words in Banyumas dialect written in small fonts in the design above (*mbekayu-inyong-tolih-kencot-nghinthung-semblonthongan-telaiya-alakaeh-kepriben*) are not just examples of Banyumas dialect words, rather they serve as a requirement, mastery of Banyumas dialect, to be acknowledged as *wong ngapak*. When they cannot use *ngapak* dialect, the risk they will have to face is to be *dupak* (kicked). Sarcastically, the term *dupak* has the connotation of being eliminated/ expelled and not acknowledged as a *wong ngapak*.

Hence, overall the t-shirt design above is a representation of cultural identity politic of Banyumas people as a marginal culture which has different identity from Javanese culture and Banyumas people or known as *wong ngapak* have such characters as firm, decisive and straightforwards, making them look harsh.

1.2 Design 2: *Ngapaknesia*



Figure 2. *Ngapaknesia*
Source: *inyong oblong.net*

In the first order semiotic system, the design above means a map of Indonesia entitled “Ngapaknesia, Ngapak for Indonesia”. The color of this Indonesia map is yellow and there are several dashed arrow coming from Java Island and spreading to other islands within Indonesia territory.

In the second order semiotic system, the visual and verbal signifiers in the design above are interrelated one another. The title or name of the map is “Ngapaknesia” and it can be interpreted as a combination of words from “Ngapak” and “ For Indonesia”. The word “Ngapaknesia” is an anchorage to bind the meaning of map drawing, i.e. that the map is a the one of *ngapak* region which also constitutes a part of territory in Indonesia. This signifier is a message to show the presence or existence of *ngapak* region in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the dashed arrows coming from one part of Java Island are a signifier to indicate the location in which the *ngapak* region is actually situated, i.e. in Java island. In geography, these dashed arrows are usually used to show a route of travel from one place to another. Therefore, connotatively the arrow signifiers spreading to all parts of Indonesia territory in the design above offers a meaning that *ngapak* community is located in a place in Java Island and has travelled and spread to all islands in Indonesia from Sumatera to Papua. In other words, *wong ngapak* are those expansive people for they like to wander, exploring the nation to islands other than Java. This activity of wandering to other regions surely brings along with them their *ngapak* cultures to their destinations, hence it enables the development of *ngapak* culture there.

Therefore, the combined verbal and visual signs in the design above offers a

meaning that *wong ngapak* are tough people for they can expand and paint some color to the social life throughout the archipelago. The *ngapak* culture with all its uniquenesses can be accepted by anyone, even by those living outside the Java Island with their different cultures.

Hence, generally speaking the design above is a representation of tough and adaptive *wong ngapak* for being able to “conquer” the archipelago by wandering to nearly every part of Indonesia. This design can also be interpreted as a message to neither underestimate nor look down on *wong ngapak*, because *wong ngapak* play significant roles in Indonesia. Therefore, the design above constitutes an identity politic to show the existence of *ngapak* culture in Indonesia and their contribution for Indonesia people.

1.3 Design 4: *Inyong Wong Banyumas (Domong)*

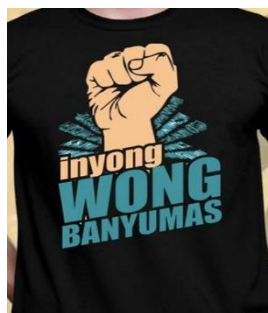


Figure 4. Design wong Banyumas (researcher's document)

At the first order semiotic domain, the design above means a drawing of light brown, upward clenched fist. This clenched fist is situated above a writing “inyong wong Banyumas”.

At the second order semiotics, the fist visual text is tightly related to its verbal text. The writing *inyong wong Banyumas* serves the purpose as an anchorage that the clenched fist in the drawing belongs to Banyumas people. In this design, the verbal text serves to explain the visual text, because in the absence of this verbal the meaning of this design –particularly the meaning of a clenched fist- becomes unreadable or too broad as mere clenched fist drawing.

Furthermore, the visual sign in the form of clenched fist is connoted with the spirit to fight against something. For example, during the independence era the spirit to fight for independence was symbolized with clenched fist and the freedom yell. Nowadays, a clenched fist is also frequently used when a group of people holds a rally in fighting for something. Hence, the fist icon in the design above connotatively offers a meaning as the Banyumas people's fight for something.

When connected to its verbal text, that is “Inyong wong Banyumas” then what they are fighting for is “inyong” or me as *wong* Banyumas (Banyumas people) or identity as *wong* Banyumas. In other words, the combination of visual and verbal signifiers above offers a meaning of spirit Banyumas people's fight to show their existence and identity as a community with their own cultures, different from Javanese culture in general, from both their custom and daily behavior. Therefore, Banyumas people have the right to determine on their own culture as a *Panginyongan* people society.

The word “inyong” in the design above signifies the difference and distance between Banyumas culture and Javanese culture. *Inyong* is the pronoun for first person

such as “I” which is used in daily socialization. For Banyumas people, the word *inyong* applies when they talk to anyone, hence it shows some tight familiarity between fellow Banyumas people. Meanwhile, in Javanese culture in general, the usual pronoun for first person is *kulo*, particularly when we talk to someone older or of respectable background.

Hence, overall the t-shirt design above is a representation of Banyumas people who want to show their existence as a community different from other communities. Or in other words, the design above constitutes a representation of identity politic built by Banyumas people as Banyumas people’s fight to show their existence.

2. Representation of Identity Politic in the Texts of Banyumas-Style T-Shirts

The texts in Banyumas-style t-shirts above present highly varied messages, both through their drawings and writings, using Banyumas dialect as one of Banyumas-style cultural identities. However, whatever the texts are and however they are represented, in general these texts in Banyumas-style t-shirts convey messages on how Banyumas culture is positioned before other cultures, particularly Javanese culture. In other words, when observed a little bit deeper, the Banyumas-style t-shirts show the existence of identity politic.

Identity politic is frequently identified as difference politic. Agnes Heller (1997, in Abdilah, 2001; 137-138) suggests that identity politic is a political movement focused on difference as its main political category. Identity politic include such views as racism, biofeminism, ethnic dispute, gender, religion and language. The forms of identity politic can be seen in the regional, religious, tribal movements and even sub-cultural movement which symbolizes certain group identity. This is what the researcher finds when studying the designs in these Banyumas-style t-shirts. In the designs above, the texts they show connotatively indicate difference politic or identity politic of Banyumas people who try to produce meanings on Banyumas cultural identities which are different from Javanese culture.

In the design themed “*ora ngapak dupak*”, the connotative message conveyed is that there is this exclusivity the *wong ngapak* (*ngapak* people) try to show in regard to the difference of themselves from other communities. In this design, it can be seen that there is a clear-cut limit (black and white) between *wong ngapak* and *non-wong ngapak*. Only those capable of speaking *ngapak* dialect will be acknowledged as *wong ngapak*. As to those unable to speak *ngapak* language, despite their stay in *wong ngapak*’s region, they are highly unlikely to be acknowledged as *wong ngapak*. In addition to being denied as *wong ngapak*, it is highly likely that they will also be ditched from *ngapak* people community. Such situation clearly positions *wong ngapak* as a different, exclusive community while giving an impression that *wong ngapak* is a unique, special and different community from others.

The location of Banyumas as a hinterland of Java (not coastal one) has to some extent influenced the characters of its people. As a hinterland, Kartodirdjo (in (Sukardi, 2014) suggests that Banyumas people reside in a non-strategic (isolated) region. In general, an isolated village society is unified in a traditional bond with their conformist views. In this context, the only identity known to them is local identity, such as ethnic (origin) identities all of which refer to a form of bond and loyalty of primordial nature.

However, no primordial-cum-isolated society characters cannot be found there, and quite contradictorily, the current Banyumas people are highly open-minded to and even expansive towards other cultures. The good example would be the “Ngapaknesia” product design from Inyong Oblong. The design indirectly shows that in Java Islan there

is a sub-ethnic Javanese community which is “not” Javanese, yet they have a marvelous ability to spread throughout the archipelago. This community’s name is “*ngapak*”. This design is a representation of characters of people which are different from what are suggested by Kartodirjo above, where the people depicted in the design above are not some confined society, rather they are so open-minded as can be seen from their ability to reach every part of the archipelago.

Another representation of identity politic can be seen in the design of “*Inyong Wong Banyumas*” theme. In this design, the message conveyed is not merely the community’s name, i.e. *wong ngapak*, rather it also presents the region which shows the place where *wong ngapak* are situated, i.e. Banyumas. The two important messages in this design are the words “*Inyong*” and “Banyumas.” The word “*inyong*” is a representation of Banyumas cultural identity in the case of the dialect used in *ngapak* region which tends to have no caste. The word “*inyong*” is equivalent to “I” in English. When we use the Javanese language standard grammar, the reference of “I” as a first person pronoun will undergo some changes based on the language registers as determined by to whom we are talking. The most polite expression would be “*kulo*” because it is deemed as more formal and respectful to the hearer, particularly when the hearer is someone of respectable position such as elderly or officials. However, in Banyumas, the reference of “*inyong*” can be used by anyone to anybody. It indicates that there is no such thing as strata in *wong ngapak* dialect system. It is this condition which triggers the stereotype that Banyumas people are somewhat less attentive to manners or *unggah-ungguh*. Yet, this is also what distinguishes *wong ngapak* from other cultures, where the absence of graded grammar makes the conversation more intimate.

Also in this design there is a writing “*Wong Banyumas*”. This phrase can be interpreted as people who own Banyumas culture and live in certain region called Banyumas. Banyumas as a region is not a physical one administratively, rather it is a cultural region consisting of several regencies with similar cultural identities, namely Banyumas style culture known as Greater Banyumas region. Here, the identity politic refers to different geographical area and culture expressed both implicitly and explicitly to convey a message on the existence of Banyumas.

The use of *ngapak* dialect in Banyumas-style t-shirts can be interpreted as a “struggle” to fight against Javanese culture hegemony and Indonesian language. As suggested by Widodo and Nursalim (2008: 7), language is a “place” (arena/ locus/ field) where various interests of human groups meet. In this case language can be deemed as a political “arena”, i.e. where various interest meet, as an arena for these interests to fight, drawing each other, with their final goal being to influence one another, dominate each other, hegemony or counter-hegemony, to conquer or fight by a group/ people against other groups/ people.

Conclusion

From the explanation above, it can then be concluded that the meanings of identity politic produced in Banyumas-style t-shirts constitute Banyumas people’s ways of trying to distinguish themselves as well as set themselves free from the confinement of Javanese culture. The confinement in this context is not a structural one, because both administratively and politically, Banyumas have been released since long ago from the authority of kingdoms, both Mataram and Yogyakarta. The term confinement here refers to the cultural confinement where it seems like Javanese kingdom culture still try to force its hegemony to the life of Banyumas people.

Ngapak dialect is one of cultural identities which distinguishes Banyumas people from Javanese society, particularly Central Java and Yogyakarta. Therefore, the use of ngapak dialect in Banyumas-style t-shirts is not merely grounded by the fact that they are produced by people of and in Banyumas, rather it has some objectives from Banyumas people to represent Banyumas cultural identity through their ngapak dialect. Thus, in this case ngapak dialect, in addition to serving as cultural identity, constitutes an instrument to produce meanings on that cultural identity.

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