

## REPRESENTATION OF ISLAMIC VALUES IN FOOD SERVED DURING ISLAMIC NEW YEAR CELEBRATION: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF BUBUR SURO

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### Abstract

The discourse on food will always be engaging and evolving, as it is a fundamental necessity that is inseparable from human survival. In addition to its vital role in human life, food is believed to have a philosophy behind the names of the respective dishes. Therefore, this research aims to analyse the semiotics of the symbols in the naming of food presented during the Islamic New Year celebration. The study uses a multidisciplinary qualitative-interpretive approach that integrates Islamic religious studies with semiology. The method employed in this study is a semiotic analysis of the symbols in the naming of food served during the Islamic New Year celebration. This research successfully uncovered the symbolic interpretation of the naming of bubur suro, which represents Islamic values related to sincerity, patience, consistency, respect, prayer, gratitude for blessings, and hope for goodness. Additionally, it also interprets the presentation of bubur suro with coconut milk, which signifies Islamic values associated with cleanliness, purity, human nature, religious moderation, and the sweetness of faith.

**Keywords:** Islamic Values, Semiotic Analysis, Food, Bubur Suro, Islamic New Year

### Abstrak

Diskursus tentang makanan akan selalu menarik dan berkembang, karena ia merupakan kebutuhan pokok yang sangat mendasar dan tidak bisa dipisahkan dari kelangsungan hidup manusia. Selain memiliki peran dan fungsi yang vital bagi kelangsungan hidup manusia, makanan diyakini memiliki filosofi di balik penamaan makanan yang bersangkutan. Oleh karena itu penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis semiotik simbol penamaan makanan yang disajikan pada peringatan tahun baru Islam. Pendekatan yang digunakan dalam riset ini adalah pendekatan kualitatif-interpretatif multidisipliner, yaitu dengan mengintegrasikan pendekatan ilmu agama Islam dengan ilmu semiologi. Metode yang digunakan dalam kajian ini adalah metode analisis semiotik pada simbol penamaan makanan yang disajikan pada peringatan tahun baru Islam. Penelitian ini berhasil menemukan interpretasi simbolik dari penamaan makanan bubur suro yang merepresentasikan nilai keislaman yang terkait dengan kesungguhan, kesabaran, keistiqamahan, penghormatan, do'a, syukur nikmat, dan harapan akan kebaikan. Selain itu juga interpretasi dari penyajian bubur suro yang diberi santan, yang menunjukkan nilai keislaman yang berkaitan dengan kebersihan, kesucian, fitrah, moderasi beragama, dan manisnya iman.

**Kata Kunci:** Nilai-Nilai Keislaman, Analisis Semiotik, Makanan, Bubur Suro, Tahun Baru Islam

### A. Introduction

The discourse on food will always be interesting and evolving, as it is a fundamental necessity that is inseparable from human survival (Munasib & Sa'dudin, 2019). Humans, in maintaining their lives and carrying out the functions of body metabolism, require energy from foodstuffs to achieve optimal health. Food serves not only to alleviate hunger but, more

importantly, to provide energy, supply building materials for the body's cells, strengthen the immune system against diseases, and ensure the smooth process of body metabolism (Sibuea, 2021).

Due to the urgency of food for human survival, it can be classified into three basic functions. First, food has a primary function if it can serve as a source of nutrients that supply the body with the energy needed for growth, maintaining tissue, regulating metabolic processes, and more. Second, it fulfills a secondary function, which is to have a good appearance and taste. This function relates to its role as a palate-pleaser, providing taste and enjoyment, meaning it has sensory qualities that are appreciated by consumers. Third, the tertiary function is that it can provide beneficial physiological effects for the body (Sibuea, 2021).

In addition to having the vital roles and functions mentioned above, food is believed to have a philosophy behind its naming. This is especially true when linked to the Javanese tradition, which often names things with acronyms. When analysed, these names possess philosophical meanings and moral messages within them. Moreover, when connected to the model of preaching by Walisongo, which incorporates Islamic values into the customs of the Indonesian (Javanese) people through performing arts, wayang (puppet shows), literature or song compositions, architecture, and also in the naming of food. Among the typical foods that are usually present during the celebration of the Islamic New Year are tumpeng, ingkung, bubur, and apem. These foods may well have philosophical meanings related to the essence and purpose of the Islamic New Year celebration.

From the background above, the author is interested in conducting research using an approach that can uncover the meaning behind the symbolism of the food naming presented during the Islamic New Year celebration. One way to explore the meaning behind the symbols is through a semiotic study. Semiotics (semiology) examines signs as part of social life, where it relies on the rules or social codes that prevail in society so that signs can be understood collectively (Yasraf Amir Piliang, 2012).

This semiotic method is employed by the author as an analytical tool to reveal the symbolic meaning in the naming of food (bubur suro) presented during the Islamic New Year celebration. This research is essential because the semiotic analysis addresses three types of issues that are intended to be discussed within it. First, the problem of meaning. Second, the problem of action. Third, the problem of coherence (Alex Sobur, 2001). This research aims to uncover the implied meanings of the symbols present in the naming of food presented during the

Islamic New Year celebration and to potentially influence the actions of Islamic adherents in Indonesia.

## B. Research Method

This research employs a semiotic method, which focuses on signs and texts as its objects of study, as well as how researchers interpret and understand the codes behind signs and texts. This method operates on two levels of analysis. The first is the analysis of signs individually. The second is the analysis of signs as a group or collection of signs that form a text (Budiman, 2011).

In the analysis of signs individually, various models of sign analysis can be utilised, such as typological analysis of signs, structural analysis of signs, and the meaning of signs. Among the well-known typologies of signs is the classification of signs articulated by Charles Sander Pierce, which consists of index, icon, and symbol. An index is a sign where the relationship between the signifier and the signified is causal. An icon is a sign where the relationship between the signifier and the signified is based on resemblance (similitude). Meanwhile, a symbol is a sign where the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary (Alex Sobur, 2001). The semiotic analysis here narrows down to analysing the symbolic meaning of the names of foods (bubur suro) presented during the Islamic New Year celebration.

The sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling, which involves deliberately selecting samples in accordance with the research objectives (Yasraf Amir Piliang, 2012). This is a technique for determining samples based on certain considerations (Danesi, 2010). This involves selecting and determining the sample of foods presented during the Islamic New Year celebration, which is then analysed semiotically.

In this study, there are several steps undertaken by the author. First, the author identifies the sample of foods presented during the Islamic New Year celebration that will be analysed intentionally in line with the research objectives. Second, data collection is carried out. In this collection, a documentation method is used. Third, the symbolic names of the foods presented during the Islamic New Year celebration are analysed using a semiotic analysis paradigm (Munasib et al., 2024). This will lead to a semiotic interpretation of the Islamic values embodied in the names of the foods (bubur suro) presented during the Islamic New Year celebration.

### C. Islamic Values

Etymologically, value means price. It has different meanings when placed in different contexts. In an academic context, value can mean a score of intelligence. In another context, value can mean a measure (Language Centre of the National Education Department, 2003).

In everyday life, value is something that is precious, of quality, indicative of excellence, and useful for individuals. Value is something abstract, ideal, not a fact, not a concrete object, not merely about right and wrong that demands empirical proof, but rather about the appreciation that is desired and undesired, liked and disliked (Isna Mansur, 2001).

Meanwhile, Islamic values are principles of ethics and morality based on Islamic teachings, referring to the Quran and Hadith. These values can encompass concepts such as honesty, justice, responsibility, compassion, and simplicity. Additionally, they also teach the importance of worship, caring for others, and mutual respect (Hidayat, 2021).

Islamic values demonstrate that these values are universal and relevant across various cultural contexts and eras. For example, the principle of justice is not only important in a legal context but also in economic and interpersonal relationships. This creates a foundation for a society that is fairer and more socially just. Furthermore, Islamic values often encourage individuals to develop a sense of social responsibility and concern for those who are less fortunate. This aspect also supports sustainability and the well-being of society (Azhari, 2024).

As for the Islamic values in this study, they point to ethical and moral principles based on Islamic teachings, drawn from the results of a semiotic analysis of the food (bubur suro) served in commemoration of the Islamic New Year.

### D. Semiotic Analysis of the Symbolism of Food Naming (Bubur Suro) Presented in the Celebration of the Islamic New Year

Semiotics is defined as the study of signs; fundamentally, it is a study of codes, that is, any system that allows us to perceive certain entities as signs or as something meaningful (Tamam Hasan, 2007). Semiotics originates from the Greek language, specifically from 'semeion', which means sign, or 'seme', which means 'interpreter of signs' (Rusdiana & Suryana, 2015).

A sign itself is defined as something that, based on previously established social conventions, can be considered to represent something else (Baidhaw, 2014). It is a branch of knowledge that deals with the study of signs and everything related to signs, such as sign systems and the processes that govern the use of signs.

Peirce's theory serves as a grand theory in semiotics. His ideas are comprehensive, providing a structural description of all sign systems. In his theory, he mentions three relationships concerning signs. Firstly, the relationship of reasoning with the types of signs. This relationship includes qualisigns (signs related to quality), sinsigns (signs related to reality), and legisigns (signs related to rules).

Secondly, the relationship of reality with its basic types, which consist of icons, indices, and symbols. An icon is something that functions as a sign that resembles its object. An index is something that functions as a sign that indicates its referent. A symbol, on the other hand, is something that functions as a sign that has been conventionally used in society according to rules.

Thirdly, the relationship of thought with its sign types. This relationship includes rheme or seme, dicent or decisign or pheme, and argument. Rheme or seme are markers associated with the possible understanding of the sign's object for the interpreter. Meanwhile, dicent or decisign or pheme are markers that present information about the sign itself. Argument, on the other hand, signifies that the sign's referent is not an object but a rule (Yasraf Amir Piliang, 2012).

From these three relationships, the author employs the relationship of reality with the fundamental type that converges on the symbolic meaning used as an analytical tool for the symbol of naming food (bubur suro) presented at the Islamic New Year celebration. In its application, this semiotic method requires a comprehensive observation of all religious symbols. Researchers are asked to demonstrate the coherence of meaning among these symbols and the coherence of religious symbols with their context.

This research has successfully identified symbols related to Islamic values in the food (bubur suro) presented at the Islamic New Year celebration. Bubur itself is a general term referring to a mixture of solid and liquid ingredients, with a greater proportion of liquid than solid and the state of solid ingredients being fragmented. In the culinary world, bubur is a type of food typically cooked by boiling ingredients until very soft. The term bubur, if not specified, usually refers to rice porridge that is simply cooked, where the rice is washed, added to boiling water, stirred until the water boils again, and the rice becomes soft. To enhance the flavour of the bubur, coconut milk or grated coconut can be added, made according to the desired thickness (Pringgodigdo et al., n.d.). Furthermore, there are several meanings that the author has successfully interpreted referring to the semiotic analysis of the philosophy of bubur suro. Firstly, bubur suro in terms of firstness represents the meaning that shows the actual form of bubur. That is, food made from rice or other grains cooked with boiling water until soft and thick.

The second meaning (secondness) shows rice that is simply cooked, previously washed clean and then added to boiling water, stirred until the water boils again, and finally the rice becomes soft. To give the bubur a delicious and tasty flavour, coconut milk or grated coconut can be added (made to the desired thickness) and topped with various toppings.

The first and second meanings hold Islamic values related to sincerity, patience, and steadfastness in doing something so that the results will be maximised. The values of sincerity, patience, and steadfastness are implicitly attached to the process of making Suro porridge, which requires a long time, a non-instant method of preparation, not rushing in its making (the flame is maintained at a moderate level), and consistently stirring the porridge evenly while cooking in boiling water until soft and thick.

Istiqamah itself means to stand firm, with strong determination, and to be upright (just, not leaning to the left or right) (Mahmud al-Mishri Abu Ammar, 2009). Meanwhile, being sincere means to strive with all one's might and effort, with a sincere heart, and with full interest (Sugono, 2008). If someone does not have a strong motivation to achieve their goals, they will not succeed. Failure will occur if they are not consistent (not istiqamah) with their stance and are easily swayed (Khasanah, 2021).

The third meaning (thirdness), signifies the porridge topped with seven types of beans served at the Islamic New Year/Suro celebration. The fourth meaning (fourthness) indicates porridge as a symbol of *uberampe* or the tools and media used in the Islamic New Year celebration. In the context of Islamic education, the two meanings above can be linked to respect and the use of media to achieve Islamic educational goals effectively and efficiently. The presentation of Suro porridge with toppings of seven types of beans and other *uberampe* represents the use of complete, representative, and comprehensive media (*wasilah*) as a form of respect, supplication, and hope that it may be granted by Allah SWT.

The fifth meaning (fifthness), this Suro porridge reflects the Javanese community's gratitude for the blessings and sustenance that Allah SWT has bestowed upon them. This meaning relates to the Islamic value associated with gratitude for blessings. From this reflection arises the philosophical meaning of the celebration of the Islamic New Year/Suro night with Suro porridge and other *uberampe* that represent the Islamic values of prayer, gratitude, and hope from Muslims in Indonesia, particularly in Java. In this context, prayer is the weapon of Muslims and serves as a medium to communicate directly with Allah SWT as an embodiment of gratitude for the blessings of the past year and as a medium of hope for the acceptance of prayers for the coming year.

Praying sincerely, earnestly, and devoutly, with a gentle voice accompanied by the hope that the Creator will grant their prayers, is a key for believers to open the door to Allah swt. So that they may truly return to Allah swt. and continue to believe that no one can help or support them except Allah swt. Typically, a person who is devout in prayer will find Allah swt. as if He is truly present before them, which allows the person praying to become overwhelmed with emotion, often leading them to shed tears while sobbing.

According to Ibn Arabi, prayer is a form of communication with God aimed at eliminating and cleansing the values of polytheism within oneself (Shanty Komalasari, 2019). Meanwhile, according to scholars of Sufism, prayer is an effort to dedicate oneself to Allah swt. by recognising all forms of weakness, hope, and generosity, as well as beseeching Him, which is a manifestation of obedience to Allah swt. (Kurnia Muhajarah, 2016).

In the presentation of Suro porridge, it is usually enhanced with coconut milk to provide a delightful flavour to the porridge. From this presentation model, the author analyses it based on semiotic analysis of the philosophy of adding delightful taste to the porridge by incorporating coconut milk (made with the appropriate thickness). This has several interpretations. Firstly, Suro porridge with coconut milk signifies firstness, indicating the actual form of coconut porridge. That is, a dish made from rice or other grains that have been thoroughly washed and then cooked with boiling water until soft and thick, then garnished with coconut milk. The second meaning (secondness), “coconut milk is white” represents symbols of purity, cleanliness, and natural disposition. These first and second meanings hold Islamic values related to maintaining cleanliness or purity, both outwardly and inwardly. Additionally, it reflects the natural disposition associated with Islamic values, which encompasses theological or faith values aimed at purifying and unifying Allah swt. By preserving this natural disposition and purity, humanity can cultivate a good relationship with the Creator and also maintain good relations with one another, and even with nature.

The third meaning (thirdness), coconut milk made with the right consistency serves as a sign that represents the meaning of balance. The fourth meaning (fourthness) indicates balance in religious practice. This proper and suitable consistency of coconut milk can be likened to adherents of a religion who maintain a moderate stance (i’tidal) between being lax or loose (tafrith) and strict or exceeding limits (ifrath).

These third and fourth meanings relate to the Islamic values of religious moderation. Religious moderation can be understood as a stance that avoids excess or a middle-path approach (washatiyyah) (Umar et al., 2023). The term religious moderation is closely associated with the

concept of religious tolerance, which is a state needed by a pluralistic society to live in peace (Untoro & Putri, 2019). The parameters of religious tolerance in the context of Islamic education can be classified into six degrees of tolerance, ranging from (the lowest) ignoring differences, enduring differences, minimising differences, accepting differences, being adaptive to differences, and integrating with differences (Van der Walt, 2014). In the context of nationality and religion, there are at least four aspects that must be implemented to foster a stance of religious moderation. First, the strengthening of democracy and human rights (HAM). Second, education about Islam and the history of Muslim society. Third, the upholding of the rule of law. Fourth, the development of the concept of diversity and pluralism (Dja'far, 2018).

The fifth meaning (fifthness) refers to coconut milk made with the right consistency that evokes a delightful taste, representing the sweetness of faith (khalawatul iman). This sweetness of faith can be felt by an individual when they love Allah and His Messenger more than anything else. Furthermore, when they love something or someone, that love is based on their love for Allah. Additionally, they hold a sense of aversion towards disbelief, akin to the hatred felt when being cast into hell. In a hadith narrated, it is stated: *"From the Prophet (peace be upon him), he said: Three things, if found in a person, will taste the sweetness of faith: He makes Allah and His Messenger dearer to him than anything else. If he loves someone, he loves them only for the sake of Allah. And he detests returning to disbelief as he would detest being thrown into the fire."*

Faith has a sweet and delightful taste in the hearts of believers, such that His devoted servants will find love, feel love, and savour it towards Allah swt. Love for the Lord enhances the faith of a believer and brings them back to Allah swt. Whoever loves someone or something for the sake of the One God feels that faith. If a believer experiences the sweetness of faith in their heart, it does not fade as long as the cause of that sweetness remains.

## E. Conclusion

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that the porridge served during the Islamic New Year commemoration has seven symbolic interpretations that represent Islamic values related to sincerity, patience, steadfastness, respect, prayer, gratitude for blessings, and hope for goodness. Meanwhile, when serving the porridge, it is usually accompanied by coconut milk; this type of topping demonstrates five symbolic interpretations that represent Islamic values associated with cleanliness, purity, innate nature, religious moderation, and the sweetness of faith.

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