THE SEMIOTICS OF BANYAN TREE SPACES IN DENPASAR, BALI

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Banyan space (spaces under Banyan tree) possesses both secular and ritual values. Secular values are related to the use of space for socio-economic activities, such as trading to others and meeting with friends. Ritual values are related to activities that take place around the Banyan tree as an expression of belief on the tree’s “tenget” (sacred) values. Secular and ritual values create the concept of space on Banyan tree, based on the elements of space and the conception used of these spaces. A system of signs (signifier and signified) mark the values or meanings of “sekala” and “niskal” space. This research aims to find out the elements that create the “sekala” and “niskal” space by analysing the space system of signifier and signified. “Sekala” is tangible or visible space which can be perceived by five senses. “Niskala” is intangible or invisible space, yet it exists and Balinese Hindus believe in its presence. The research focuses on the system of activities from selected cases by purposive sampling using qualitative naturalistic method and approach. The results of this research emphasize that (1) there are elements (signifier and signified) that create the “sekala” and “niskala” space and (2) there are normative and scientific concepts of Banyan trees as the background for the creation of the “sekala” and niskala space.

Keywords: sekala space, niskala space, secular and ritual values, signifier and signified space

INTRODUCTION

Space, especially public space in Denpasar (as the case study), is used for economic and social activities. For instance, space for trade and social interaction. These activities occur in public spaces that are easily accessible to anyone, which also serves as a place to accommodate both individual and group activities (Hakim, 2003). Activities in the public space are influenced by behavioral settings, a stable combination of activities, places, and characteristics of the place which have physical, administrative, and symbolic boundaries (Adhitama, 2013). Take the use of space under and around the Banyan tree that grows in public areas as an example: at a crossroads, by the river, or in the market area. Such use of space is caused by its strategic values (its comfort and recognizability) as meeting spaces.

Sellers use these strategic values to promote and sell their goods meanwhile, the youth and the locals use them to socialize, to play, or to talk about something trivial. In addition, people also use Banyan space for a ritual space. It is common to see the Balinese Hindu people who live near a Banyan tree give offerings, both regularly and incidentally.

There are rules that regulate the use of space under which area seen as the “main” space on the Banyan tree. This is creating an impact on spatial practices especially the “core space” of the Banyan tree. Core space is a space marked by physical boundaries (tembok penyengker) and inside it there is signifier of ritual activities in the form of pelinggih, pelangkiran or poleng saput. These
elements represent symbolic nature of the sacred space on the Banyan tree which is bound by the rules in entering it. Users who are experiencing cuntaka - such as menstruation for women or users in the state of grieving whose relatives are passed away are not allowed to go through the area.

Strategic values of the space around the Banyan trees create various interest spaces. According to Lefebvre (1991) space is created based on three conceptions: (1) spatial practices, (2) representations of space, (3) representational space. Real activity of the use of space, the conception of space as a space with strategic values, and an illustration of the physical existence represent the symbol of that conception. Rapoport (1982) states that space consists of three elements: (1) fixed, (2) semi-fixed, and (3) non-fixed. There are several elements used to identify strategically (secular) and ritual values of a Banyan tree, for instances, saput poleng (cloth with chessboard motif), pelinggih (a place to worship the gods), and tembok penyengker, a wall separating the ritual and secular space on a Banyan tree. Warung (small shops) and chairs are examples of semi-fixed elements. Non-fixed elements include space users, namely the local people, street vendors, motorbikes, and cars that do not routinely use these spaces.

The ritual context of the use of space around a Banyan tree is related to the tenget (sacred) value of the tree. The tenget (sacred) value affects the system of activities carried out by the people living around the Banyan and the community that uses the space (Wijaya, 2017). Sellers (the Balinese Hindu ones) who sell their goods in that place usually perform a ritual that they believe to have niskala power, such as pelinggih or pelangkiran on the Banyan tree, a crossroads near the place where the Banyan tree grows, or space near the bridge. Their actions help the community to maintain the cleanliness of the space and to avoid forbidden activities around the space. As for space users (non-Balinese Hindu), they follow the normative rules. There are elements that mark the tenget (sacred) spaces as interpretations of the niskala spaces of Banyan trees, such as saput poleng (cloth with chessboard pattern), pelinggih, pelangkiran, and tembok penyengker (Wijaya, 2009). Tembok penyengker, in particular, separates these elements from the space used for secular activities (Wijaya, 2009). This is in line with Eliade's (1957) opinion about sacred space and profane space. According to Eliade, sacred space is characterized by hierophany in the form of signifiers and rules in the use of the space. The concept of tenget (sacred) value as an interpretation of the use of space around the Banyan trees can provide positive vibration on the maintenance of the space, namely rituals and ethical behavior.

In addition to the tenget (sacred) value, a Banyan tree also has thermal value because the tree is able to provide comfort and shade to the users of the space. Wijaya (2009) states that Banyan tree is a type of forest tree with a large, shady canopy, which enables the tree to protect the spaces below it from direct sunlight. It is for this reason that the space around a Banyan tree becomes a magnet for the production of economic and social activities. Its comfort triggers the production of space for various activities and functions, such as trading activities, social interaction, playground, a base for ojek (motorbike taxis) or pedagang bermobil (sellers who use car or mini truck to sell their goods), and other activities. The relation between the activity system, the natural setting of space, and the Banyan anatomy form the elements of space as signifiers and signified as well as mental functions of space.

Belief in the existence of Banyan trees is contained in tri hita karana, the concept of harmony between humans and God, humans with each other and humans with the environment (Peters & Wardana, 2013). Human relations with the environment (the Banyan tree) are characterized by ritual elements on the tree as well as ritual activities carried out by the local community and users of the Banyan space. It is a way to respect the tenget (sacred) values of the tree and also
to maintain the balance between the Banyan tree and the surrounding space. The concept of "balance" on the Banyan tree is characterized by saput poleng that wraps the tree trunk (Rupawan, 2008).

Respect for the tenget value is based on the concept of the original belief in Nusantara that the universe is inhabited by spirits, this concept of belief bring up attitudes and behaviors and symbols (Suantika, 2007). If that concept is connected to the anatomy concept of the Banyan tree, in which the tree is capable of producing thermal in the surrounding areas, the result will be the tenget concept, which acts as a control to maintain the Banyan thermal aura through the ritual elements on the tree. The ritual elements are markers of the niskala space as the Banyan core spaces, which provide thermal vibration for the sekala (secular) space. Saput Poleng elements and ritual activities in Banyan trees is a concept of local wisdom in protecting the environment (Banyan tree). Like Wibowo’s statement that environmental problems have a very close relationship with local wisdom (Wibowo, Wasino, & Setyowati, 2012).

The sekala and niskala spaces in a Banyan space are the result of the belief on the tenget concept of a Banyan tree as well as the thermal concept of the Banyan space. Signs of the value and the nature of space can be divided into two: signifier (the physical existence) and signified (the mental concept) which are often referred to as the semiotics of space (Saussure, 2013). The sekala and niskala spaces of a Banyan tree are characterized by the physical existence and the meaning behind that existence. The sekala space is interpreted as a space for economic and social activities, while the niskala space is a space for rituals. Although the theory presented by Saussure is general, the existence of this theory is needed as an approach in interpreting the system of signifier and signified of space combined with two other theories namely Lefebvre and Rapoport.

The existence of the elements of signifier and signified space in the banyan tree is an interesting phenomenon to be studied. This can be seen from the belief system of Hindu-Balinese people that originated from the concept of animism and it is still well maintained nowadays. The concept of trust contains an understanding of the concept of conservation nature (banyan tree), considering that the Banyan tree has benefits as a means of Hindu-Balinese ritual activities and is able to maintain the balance of the groundwater cycle. To maintain the preservation of the Banyan tree, local wisdom through a paradigm of trust such as the existence of sacred elements and rules for entering the space becomes a control in maintaining the Banyan tree. In addition to these activities, the Banyan tree is also used for trading or selling or gathering activities. This phenomenon has been existed since years ago. The space under the Banyan tree at that time was often used for economic activities.

Spatial practices created are interpreted as ritual, economic, and social activities on the Banyan tree. These activities are characterized by spatial elements (fixed, semi-fixed and non-fixed elements). The use of space is constituted by representations of space on the Banyan as a space that has a tenget value (sacred) and public space. This understanding produces a space symbol in the form of taster and room marker for ritual, economic, and social activities. The three Lefebvre, Rapoport, and Saussure theories are used to analyze spatial phenomena on the Banyan tree in Denpasar.

The aim of this research is to examine the elements that mark the sekala and niskala spaces in the context of signifier and signified of space as well as the system of connection between the two spaces. This research used interpretive, qualitative, naturalistic methods. This method is based on empirical studies which include empiric sensual (the five senses), empiric emic (public truth), empiric ethic (idealization of reality), empiric logic (thought), and transcendental (belief or related to divinity). The results of the research are (1) there are elements that form the sekala and niskala spaces as the
signifier and signified beyond these elements; and (2) the normative and scientific concepts of Banyan trees as the background for the formation of sekala and niskala spaces of Banyan trees.

METHODS
Research Paradigm
This research used a qualitative naturalistic paradigm. The qualitative naturalistic paradigm views the source of truth as coming from empiric sensual (the five senses), empiric logic (thought), empiric ethic (idealization of reality), empiric emic (public truth), and transcendental (the belief which related to divinity) (Muhadjir, 2000). This research involved: (1) conducting observation of the phenomena in each case, specifically the setting of space as well as activities (which are still natural without theoretical interference) using the Banyan space, (2) understanding each activity and spatial use through positive and normative knowledge of Banyan space, (3) formulating every phenomenon that occurs on Banyan space in the form of tentative themes, (4) validating these tentative themes with information from space users (sellers and the local people), and (5) drawing a fundamental conclusion from the phenomena that occur in the Banyan space i.e. the sekala and niskala space.

Steps of Research
a. Conducting a participant observation, in which the researcher took a position as a space user (a traveler) and observing every activity relating to the use of space on the Banyan tree.
b. Conducting unstructured interviews by taking a position as part of the setting of the space in order to find natural and impartial information.
c. Finding units of information from the observed phenomena, formulating (inducing) tentative themes, and testing the level of saturation through unstructured interviews.
d. Connecting the findings through local concepts and space in architecture as well as the system of signifier and signified space in architecture.
e. Drawing interpretative conclusions.

DISCUSSION
Elements of Signifier and Signified of the Sekala Space
The Banyan tree’s natural characteristics, among others are its large anatomical structure, its wide and shadowy canopies, and its capability to produce oxygen, create many communal spaces with various functions (economic and social activities). Economic activities carried out by sellers who have settled under the Banyan tree for years in terms of buying and selling. These activities begin because local people use the space as a place to get together then it changed into a place with strategic values. This causes the creation of new spaces or developments of spaces that already exist there from the start. These spaces include vendors who sell their goods using vehicles (vehicles with two wheels or four wheels), which are not permanent.

This creation of space consequently provides more spaces to carry out social activities by local people. As stated by Wijaya that the space around the Banyan tree is used as a space for social interaction (Wijaya, 2018). Those who live around the Banyan tree, as well as those who live in other areas, often use these spaces to carry out recreational activities in the afternoon or evening. For instances, young people or adults chatting and discussing something trivial, mothers accompanying their children to play, children making and flying kites during windy weather, or people buying and enjoying food from the vendors.

The boundaries of the space under the Banyan tree are limited by two aspects, namely the physical aspect and the belief on the tenget value. The physical aspect is in the form of the canopy of the Banyan tree which shades the spaces on the bottom and the noetic aspect in the form of belief and trust in the noetic value (tenget) which is signified by ritual activities carried out by the community or users. These spaces accommodate secular activities, which include activities carried out regularly as well as freedom.
regarding the use of the space (the sekala space). The sekala space, in this case, refers to a space used for activities without strict regulation, most likely recreational activities.

Additionally, the sekala space does not have a category of space users. In other words, the sekala space is related to "worldly" activities. Based on the nature of its activities, the manifestation of the sekala space is classified into two aspects: economic and social. The manifestation of the sekala space is (1) a zone consists of warung (small shop) under or around the Banyan tree; (2) a zone consists of street vendors who routinely sell their goods around the tree; and (3) parking lot for vehicles of the buyers and travelers. The warung around the Banyan tree are semi-permanent or semi-fixed, made of simple wooden and of bamboo construction. The dining place is made of simple materials as well (some even use residual materials). As for street vendors, including those who use vehicles and cart to display their goods, and the lesehan vendors (vendors who sell food or other goods while sitting on the street or on the mat), they use the remaining empty spaces. In contrast to the warung, street vendors do not have a clear space since they are not permanent or non-fixed. Additionally, it is common to find many sellers with different types of goods in one street vendors' zone. The third realization of the sekala space is a parking lot that uses empty spaces to park vehicles. The nature of parking space is not fixed to only one zone. It can change depending on the numbers of buyers and travelers in that space.

The sekala space is also used for social activities by utilizing the existing spaces under the Banyan tree, such as the river banks, sidewalks, and the warung zone. For instance, people can use the existing spaces (the fixed elements) to sit and gather while having a chat with their friends or family. In the first case, the travelers use the sidewalk or river
embankment as a place to sit while enjoying snacks sold by the nearby warung. Social activities also occur in spaces provided by the warung owners, in which the travelers interact, i.e. among young people, who come by motorcycles, meet their friends while enjoying food and drinks. These young people also like to use empty spaces to hang out. Normally this meeting takes place at noon or late afternoon. Other existing spaces, such as the river embankment, are often used by children and young people as a playground, especially during the “kite season” due to its wide space.

The elements forming the sekala space around the Banyan tree are:

a) Fixed elements: the existing elements under or around the Banyan tree used by the local people to carry out social and economic activities. For examples, (1) the sidewalk by the riverbank for a place to hang out, chat, or play (Figure 7 No.1); (2) the empty space by the roadside for a parking lot, warung or simply a base for the street vendors (those who use cart or motor vehicles) where they can display their goods (Figure 8 No. 2).

Figure 7. Setting of Space Utilization (Signifier and Signified) around the Banyan Tree in Case 1
Source: Author, 2019

Number 1

Number 2

Number 3

Number 4

Number 5

Number 6
b) Semi-fixed elements: the elements around the Banyan tree which are not permanent, considering their physical conditions. However, the way they use the space is permanent, similar to the food and beverage warung that take in the form of vernacular buildings, which commonly use functional wooden materials for a place of trade (Figure 7 No. 4, 5, 6, and Figure 8 No. 3).

c) Non-fixed elements: consist of (1) carts of the street vendors who stay under the Banyan tree; (2) motor vehicles used to display the goods; (3) seasonal fruit sellers who put the fruits they sold around the Banyan tree; (4) the travelers’ vehicles parked under the tree (Figure 8 No. 2; and Figure 9 No. 1, 2, 3, 4).

Those spaces are the signifiers of space on the Banyan tree, signifying the tree as a public space for economic and social activities. Space used for these activities is not influenced by rules, which, normatively, constitute interpretations of the sekala space on the Banyan tree. Then, the examples mentioned previously and the natural characteristics of a Banyan tree, the creation of those spaces are influenced by the thermal conditions produced by the tree. Comfortable, cool, and easily recognized space perceptions (cognitive mapping) become the underlying factor for the creation of those spaces (both economic and social). In addition, belief in tenget (niskala) values of a Banyan tree help the sellers to sell more of their goods through ritual governance on the place.

Elements of Signifier and Signified of the Niskala Space

The Banyan space, with its thermal value and cognitive mapping, creates the concept of space as a place for economic and social activities. Furthermore, in the context of the local culture, the tree’s anatomical characteristics create a perception that the Banyan tree has ritual values. Banyan tree’s tenget value is a
normative concept in controlling or maintaining Banyan ecosystems from damage. The belief in the tenget value manifests in the elements that signify the niskala space on the Banyan tree.

Figures 13 and 14 show that pelinggih, saput poleng, and tembok penyengker...
mark the *niskala* space on the Banyan tree. On the other hand, figure 15 shows that *pelangkiran* and *kain poleng* on the Banyan trunk mark the *niskala* space. As signifiers, those attributes affect the existence of Banyan anatomy and Banyan space (control of space use and damage to the Banyan). The signifiers of the *niskala* space on the Banyan include *saput poleng* (chessboard patterned cloth) and *canang* (offerings) on the Banyan, which signifies the existence of *tenget* space and protection of the tree itself.

Elements of the *niskala* space in the Banyan tree are:

a) Fixed element: (1) *pelinggih* (a place to worship the gods), a space for regular and incidental ritual activities; (2) *pelangkiran* is a space for worship installed on the tree trunk, with simple design and shape; (3) *saput poleng* as a general attribute wrapped around the Banyan trunk; and (4) *tembok penyengker* as a border that separates the inner space (the *niskala*) from the outer space (the *sekala*). These signifiers constitute a hierophany of the *niskala* space (*tenget*), which is characterized by elements for ritual activities as well as rules for entering these spaces.

b) Semi-fixed elements: (1) umbrellas or *tedung* as attributes of space installed on the Banyan tree during ceremonial activities; and (2) yellow and white *wastra* at the *pelinggih* which signify periodic ritual activities.

c) Non-fixed element: *banten* (offerings) placed on the Banyan tree or the *pelinggih* as a form of respect for the tree’s *tenget* values.

These elements are the signifiers of the *niskala* space, signifying the ritual space that is bound by local rules in its use. In other words, the *niskala* space in the Banyan tree means a space used for ritual (non-secular) activities.

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![Figure 15. Elements of Signifier of Ritual Space in Case 3 (Source: Wijaya, 2019)](image)

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Figure 16. Setting of Signifier of the *Niskala* Space (no.1) and the *Sekala* Space (no.2) Case 1 (Source: Wijaya, 2019)

Figure 17. Setting of Signifier of the *Niskala* Space (no.1) and the *Sekala* Space (no.2) Case 2 (Source: Wijaya, 2019)

Figure 18. Setting of Signifier of the *Niskala* Space (no.1) and the *Sekala* Space (no.2) Case 3 (Source: Wijaya, 2019)
Synthesis: Signifiers and Signified of the Sekala and Niskala Space

Secular activities, specifically economic and social, are the signifiers of the sekala space on the Banyan tree. The elements forming these spaces consist of fixed, semi-fixed, and non-fixed elements as well as activity system which are not bound by local rules, in the sense that space is public except for semi-fixed elements as the communal space of the sellers. Secular and public meaning of these spaces is the signified of the sekala space, a space that, considering its representation of space and representational space, has strategic values and existence of space (economic and social) which are still maintained nowadays.

In addition to the sekala space, there are the signifiers of the niskala space in the form of fixed, semi-fixed, and non-fixed elements such as pelinggih and pelangkiran, saput poleng, tembok penyengker, and banten. Furthermore, there are rules in the use of the niskala space. For instance, women or men who experience cuntaka (the state of being “not sacred”) cannot come into the space. There is also another rule that state those aspect is bound by the local rules who visit the space should at least use traditional Balinese belts (senteng). These elements are representations of space (signified) of the niskala space (tenget value) or hierophany of the niskala space bound by local rules. Additionally, the representational space as a tenget space is still maintained until now.

Thus, the system of signifiers and signified under the Banyan space is an interpretation of a system of activities, both secular and ritual. Secular activities are manifested as sekala space, while ritual activities are manifested as niskala space. The meaning of the two spaces is represented as the core (the niskala space) and the periphery (the sekala space), which influence each other values in the context of local culture and natural values.

CONCLUSION

Spatial elements related to the socio-economic and ritual aspects namely fixed, semi-fixed, and non-fixed elements are the signifiers of sekala and niskala space. The elements related to the socio-economic aspects are interpreted as sekala space that is not bound by the rules in its use. On the contrary, the ritual...
regarding its use of the space.

Furthermore, the *niskala* space is the core of the *sekala* space since the *niskala* space, as a system, maintains the existence of the Banyan tree and its capability to produce thermal spaces under and around it. This affects the strategic value of the Banyan space as a socio-economic one. Additionally, the signifier and signified of space on Banyan tree are a system of (1) spatial practices: socio-economic and ritual spaces; (2) meaning of space (representations of space): elements of the space; and (3) symbols of space (representational space): elements of the space. The practice, meaning, and symbols of these spaces form a unity in the spatial system of the Banyan tree, which is influenced by its anatomical aspects of the Banyan tree and the belief in its *tenget* value.

Figure 19 show that there are two spaces on the Banyan tree, namely the Banyan core space as a ritual space that is bound by *tembok penyeengker* and the rules for entering it. While the other space is in the form of space outside the boundary of *tembok penyeengker* which is used for secular and profane activities. Both of these spaces have elements (fixed, semi-fixed and non-fixed elements) as signifier and signified of space manifested in spatial practices (ritual and secular), the meaning of these spaces (representation of spaces) and symbols of these spaces (representational of spaces).

REFERENCES


Glossary:

**Banten**: Banten is an offering to gods, but contains more items such as fruits, traditional/ceremonial snacks, and so on.

**Banyan tree**: Banyan tree is considered as a sacred tree by Balinese Hindus due to the spiritual energy it possessed.

**Canang**: Offerings to the gods usually consist of colorful and fragrant ceremonial flowers, betel nut, slices of bananas, slices of sugar cane, and so on. These items are tucked in a woven basket made of young coconut leaf.

**Cuntaka**: the state of being “not sacred.” When someone is going through cuntaka, she/he is prohibited from entering the sacred area. Cuntaka is caused by death, menstruation (for women), and so on.

**Niskala**: Intangible, invisible. But, it exists and Balinese Hindus believe in its truth.

**Pelangkiran**: Pelangkiran is a place to worship the gods, but smaller and simpler. It is usually made of wood.

**Pelinggih**: Pelinggih is a place to worship the gods and usually made of stone.

**Saput/kain poleng**: Saput/kain poleng refers to black and white squared fabric, the motifs resembling a chessboard pattern. Its colors represent a unity consist of two opposing forces (for examples: positive and negative, day and night, and so on) that build the world.

**Sekala**: Tangible, visible. Sekala is able to be perceived by five senses.

**Tembok penyengker**: Walls usually made of stone, brick, or concrete to separate sacred from profane area.

**Tenget**: Sacred, magical

**Wastra**: Wastra is considered to be some kind of fabrics for the pelinggih. It is usually wrapped around the pelinggih during religious ceremonies.