

CULTURAL SEMIOTICS LITERACY ON SONAF TUNBABA

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Abstract

Sonaf Tunbaba is a house for the King, while it becomes the center for the continuity of all cultural activities, including the customs of the Tunbaba community. The culture of the Tunbaba community is reflected through symbols or signs as differentiating meanings used in everyday life. As a differentiator of meaning, Sonaf Tunbaba is rich in cultural symbols that are meaningful and need to be known by all levels of society. The symbols on Sonaf Tunbaba are suspected to have a correlation with the symbol of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). The main problem discussed in this study was how to express cultural semiotics in Sonaf Tunbaba. This study was carried out to determine and describe the meaning of cultural symbols contained in Sonaf Tunbaba. The researchers applied a descriptive qualitative method in this study. This study took cultural symbols on Sonaf Tunbaba as the object of this study. Sources of data were in the form of primary and secondary data. The primary data were taken from Sonaf Tunbaba, while the secondary data were in form of interview's result with informant. The data were analysed using semiotics theory. The result reflected that there were ten symbols found inside and outside the sonaf. Outside the sonaf, there were two symbols, namely an inscription monument and an offering altar. Inside the sonaf, there were eight symbols, namely terrace pillars with human face pictures, hangers, the main pillars of the sonaf, a king's pillar, an empress' pillar, a storeyed altar, and a tribute.

Keywords: *Literacy, Sonaf Tunbaba, symbol, semiotic, and cultural semiotics*

INTRODUCTION

A community's culture is reflected by the symbols or signs used in everyday life. The symbol used to convey messages or beliefs that are practiced and contain certain meanings. Symbols are restricted on conventional signs created by communities or individuals with certain meanings. Symbols are not only functioning as mediations for any messages to compile epistemology and beliefs, however symbols are also used as cultural identity differentiators among communities (Lastaria et al., 2018).

In relation to cultural identity differentiators, people in Timor Tengah Utara (TTU) Regency also own cultural symbols shown by properties of Sonaf Tunbaba. Sonaf Tunbaba is a house for the King and, at the same time becomes the center for the continuity of all cultural activities including the customs of the Tunbaba community. Sonaf Tunbaba is located in East Meomaffo District, TTU Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. The sonaf owns more symbols that reflect communities' culture of East Meomaffo. The following is one of symbols contained in Sonaf Tunbaba that becomes a part of analysis in this study.



The picture above shows an inscription located right in front of Sonaf Tunbaba. This inscription showed the overall cultural identity that refers to the beliefs of the East Meomaffo people. There were ten steps on which the foundation of the Sonaf Tunbaba inscription stood. This inscription was made to resemble the typical type of Sonaf Tunbaba's traditional house with two supporting pillars. Above the stele, there was a pointed spear that soared into the sky. In the center of the spear, there was a symbol of a cobra wrapped around two rooster-headed swords that shaped an X letter. The heads of the two roosters on the hilt of the sword were facing each other in different directions. The tip of the sword formed an isosceles triangle that rested on a curved piece of wood. If observed, the meeting between the two ends of the sword with a curved wooden pedestal resembled the tail of *Garuda Pancasila*, which is the symbol of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). On the symbol of the Republic of Indonesia, there is a ribbon gripped by the leg of an eagle, while on the symbol of Sonaf Tunbaba the curved wood on the pedestal of the tip of the sword is wrapped around by the tail of a cobra. The curved wood on the pedestal at the tip of the sword could be analogous to the ribbon on the Garuda symbol. On the Burung Garuda's ribbon, there is the inscription "Bhineka Tunggal Ika" as the motto of the Republic of Indonesia, while the ribbon on the Sonaf Tunbaba symbol is written Sonaf Tunbaba".

The above brief description provides an interpretation that the people of East Miomaffo wanted to show themselves as a territory with a symbol of their identity as the Republic of Indonesia with the symbol of the identity of the eagle. Description related to symbols in the data above show that Sonaf Tunbaba contains more symbols that reflect people's culture of East Meomaffo that are necessary to be studied and are locally, nationally, and internally known. All the symbols in this study can be analyzed by using the semiotics of Roland Barthes.

Semiotics by Roland Barthes is an analytical method for studying signs. Signs are devices used in an effort to find a way in the midst of human civilization and together with humans. Semiotics basically studies how humanity interprets things (to signify), in this case not mixed up in communicating (to communicate). Sobur defines a symbol as an idea, sign, or feature that tells someone something. According to him, symbols occur based on metonymy, which means names for other objects that are attributes. Symbols are also usually metaphorical, that is, they use other words or expressions for other objects or concepts based on figures of speech or equations (Sya'dian, 2015).

In the context of the development of cultural studies, semiotics must be carried out in the context of the development of structuralism. This means that structuralism as the basis of semiotics, especially in Europe, cannot be separated from the shadow of structuralism that preceded it in the development of cultural science. The development from structuralism to semiotics can be divided into two categories those that are continuing so that the characteristics of structuralism are still very visible (continuity) and those that are starting to leave the nature of structuralism to further highlight culture as a sign system (evolution) (Sartini, 2011).

A previous study relevant to this study was conducted by Arvianto dan Kharisma (2021) entitled "Budaya dan Kearifan Lokal Kerajaan Insana di Dataran Timor". Arvianto dan Kharisma discussed all properties contained in sonaf Oelolok in Insana District. In addition, (Nalanan & Oki, 2021) also carried out research entitled "Represenasi Tema Nasionalisme dalam Film Unu Produksi Unimor: Sebuah Kajian Semiotika Roland Barthes". Nalanan dan Oki discussed semiotics behind the scenes of the Unu film that represented nationalism.

The review of the related study above is the key reason to carry out this study. Other reasons for this study urgently being conducted were (1) Sonaf Tunbaba contained culture symbols meaning; (2) study concerning literacy on cultural symbols in Sonaf Tunbaba had never been conducted; and (3) symbols on Sonaf Tunbaba were assumed to be relevant to NKRI symbols. The three reasons above are as novelty for researchers to conduct this study entitled "Cultural Symbol Literacy on Sonaf Tunbaba". As the problem solving plan, researchers used the semiotics of Roland Barthes to analyze and explain all the symbols in Sonaf Tunbaba.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative descriptive study with the intention of interpreting the phenomena that occur. The focus of qualitative research is the phenomenon of what is experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perception, motivation, and action. Everything is contained in the description in the form of words and language, in a special context that is natural, and by utilizing various natural methods (Nalanan & Oki, 2021). The reason for using this qualitative design is because the data obtained are in the form of symbols, which will be discussed qualitatively.

This research was carried out at Sonaf Tunbaba, precisely in Tunbaba Village, East Meomaffo District, North Central Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. The object of this research was Sonaf Tunbaba. The unit of analysis in this study was the entire property as a cultural symbol found in Sonaf Tunbaba. The type of data in

this study was the documentation of cultural symbols in Sonaf Tunbaba. This documentation data was the primary data in this study because it was obtained directly from the original source. In addition to primary data, this study also utilized secondary data, namely the results of interviews with informants related to the semiotics behind cultural symbols in Sonaf Tunbaba. The sources of data in this study were Sonaf Tunbaba and informants who knew the semiotics of Sonaf Tunbaba's cultural symbols well.

The instrument used in this study was symbol data of Sonaf Tunbaba. The tools used were a camera and a digital recorder. The camera was used to document data in the form of cultural symbols found in Sonaf Tunbaba. The digital recorder was used to record the results of interviews.

Data collection techniques in this study were observation, documentation, and interview techniques. Through observation, researchers observed the research location to obtain information related to the real data being studied. The documentation technique was used to document all data related to this research. The data documented were in the form of cultural symbols of Sonaf Tunbaba. The interview technique was used to find information from informants related to the semiotics of Sonaf Tunbaba's cultural symbol, which were used as secondary data and the basis of the problem analysis in this study.

To analyze the data, the researcher used the semiotic analysis method. Semiotic analysis is a technique or a method for analyzing data in the form of symbols or images. The focus of this research analysis is to trace the meanings contained in symbols and signs. The analysis techniques used by the researcher were: (a) documenting the cultural symbols of Sonaf Tunbaba, (b) sorting out irrelevant data, (c) analyzing the data based on the semiotic theory, and (d) drawing conclusions. The assessment of the data found was discussed and analyzed during the study (Iskandar, 2009).

The presentation of the results of data analysis in this study used formal and informal methods (Sudaryanto, 1993). The formal method in this study led to the presentation of the results of the study by using lingual signs and symbols and in the form of diagrams. While the informal method is a way of presenting the rules with the formulation of ordinary words that are easy to understand. The technique used was an inductive technique, namely the presentation of data analysis by presenting specific things first and then drawing a general conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Sonaf Tunbaba is illustrated from the shape of the roof and walls that can be used as a differentiator from traditional houses in general. Sonaf Tunbaba's roof was conical in shape and made of thatch leaves, while the walls were round made of selected red wood. Sonaf Tunbaba had a terrace surrounding it with six trusses in front of Sonaf's entrance. The interior of Sonaf Tunbaba was rich with cultural symbols which were still part of the identity of the Tunbaba community.

Sonaf Tunbaba had a monument right in front of it. Above the monument, there were symbols such as a dragon snake, a rooster-headed sword, and a king's scepter as a symbol of the identity of the Tunbaba community. Right behind the monument, there was a round altar made of flat natural stone.

The focus data of this research were all symbols contained in Sonaf Tunbaba. The data found in this study were 19 data that were observed inside and outside Sonaf, so the data in this study were grouped based on their location. There were 5 symbols located outside Sonaf, namely: an Inscription Monument, a Dragon Snake, a King's Scepter, an Offering Altar, and Sonaf Tunbaba. Inside sonaf, there were fourteen symbols, namely: Tribal Pillars, Main Pillars, a Deer's Head, a King's Pillar, an Empress' pillar, a King's Sword, a Rooster's Head, a *Tobe*, a King and Empress Altar, a Cross, a Number Eight Symbol, an Empress Ornament, and a Tribute. The nineteen data symbols found above were the unit of analysis in this study.

The symbol data in this study were grouped into two parts according to the location of their existence, namely the symbol data contained outside and inside the sonaf. The symbol data outside the sonaf is discussed in sub-section (1) and the symbol data inside of the sonaf is discussed in sub-section (2) which is previewed as follows.

1. Symbol Data outside Sonaf

In this part, researchers discussed all findings related to symbols found outside and inside Sonaf Tunbaba. The symbols found outside Sonaf Tunbaba are presented as follows.

a. Monument Symbol of Sonaf Tunbaba

Monument is a symbol that was built as a symbol of identity and proof of respect for ancestors. The monument also symbolises wealth, honor, and glory for descendant (Manihuruk, 2014). In relation to Sonaf Tunbaba, a monument was also built as an indentity symbol for all people of Tunbaba. The monument of Sonaf Tunbaba in this study shown below.



Symbol 1. Sonaf Tunbaba Monument

The picture above is the monument of Sonaf Tunbaba with some symbols on it, namely some monument's steps, enscription, a dragon, swords, a rooster's head, and a scepter. The monuments' steps used as the foundation to build the other symbols. The symbols on the monument are an inseparable unit. The steps of the monument on Sonaf Tunbaba have a meaning related to the life of the Tunbaba community. The number of steps on the sonaf monument can be 6 and 8. The six steps symbolised the integrity of the Tunbaba community which were formed by six major tribes, namely Taus, Binsasi, Talan, Basan, Salu, and Kolo. If the pedestal of the monument consists of eight steps, then the eight steps symbolise the belief of the Tunbaba community to beg nature for rain.

The inscription symbol on the cone-shaped monument supported by two pillars as a whole that symbolised the sonaf or the house of King Tunbaba. On the inscription, there is a symbol of the king and all his powers as the main symbol that symbolized the identity of the Tunbaba community. The king on the monument was symbolised by a dragon wrapped around a scepter and two rooster-headed swords.

The dragon symbol in traditional Chinese beliefs is a source of good luck and happiness (Kustedja et al., 2013). In the view of the people of Cirebon, the dragon is considered a representative symbol of the underworld and is identified with a greedy nature (Sofiyawati, 2017). In contrast to the views of the Chinese and Cirebon people, the dragon symbol in the view of the Tunbaba community was identified with the power and greatness of the king of Tunbaba in defending his territory.

According to online Indonesian Dictionary (online KBBI), a stick means a long piece of bamboo, rattan, and wood as a support or a handle when walking. The stick or scepter also means a symbol of the wisdom and truth of the king in ruling or exercising absolute power (Arifin et al., 2016). The scepter on Sonaf Tunbaba was wrapped around by a dragon as an inseparable attribute of the king which symbolised the power of the king.

Other symbols found on the monument is two rooster-headed swords. The sword gives an indication of strength and weapons to defend oneself (Oentoro, 2012). Swords also have the meaning of warrior war weapons. The swords on Sonaf Tunbaba was symbolised as a warrior protecting the king and a symbol of strength. The symbol of a rooster's head pinned on the hilt of a sword as a reminder and motivation for the work spirit of the Tunbaba community. The rooster crowing in the morning was believed by the Tunbaba community as an alarm to awaken and motivate people to start working or earning a living on a new day.

b. Altar Symbol Outside Sonaf

One of the symbols found on Sonaf Tunbaba was the altar which was built behind the sonaf monument. The altar is a place for giving offerings to ancestors and used as a place to store sacred objects such as gold, traditional machetes, and spears and other valuable objects (Parli et al, 2019; Rema et al, 2020). Altar according to the tradition of the Tunbaba community was sacred and as a place or a container to put offerings to the

ancestors or the owner of life who is believed to be. The altar symbol found outside Sonaf Tunbaba is shown in the following figure.



Symbol 2. Altar

Symbol (2) in the picture above was an altar located outside and right behind the Sonaf Tunbaba monument. This altar was made of natural round and flat stone. The altar with a height of ± 1 meter and a diameter of ± 0.5 meter was used by the Tunbaba community as a place to store offerings to their ancestors. In addition, the altar symbol located right behind Sonaf Tunbaba monument was also a place for gathering the souls of ancestors who collapsed on the battlefield and lost their lives due to traffic accidents or natural disasters.

2. Symbol Data Inside Sonaf Tunbaba

In this part, researchers present some symbols found inside Sanaf Tunbaba to discuss in details. The symbols and the discussions are as follows.

a. Sonaf's Terrace Pillar

The first symbol discussed inside *sonaf* is terrace pillar and its connection. Sonaf Tunbaba was built as a common house that contain a main room and a terrace. The terrace on Sonaf Tunbaba were supported by six rounded-wood pillars. On each pillar there was a painting to add esthetic part of Sonaf Tunbaba. Not only did the six outer pillars contain the esthetic paintings, the terrace of Sonaf Tunbaba also had connections to the inner sonaf. The six pillars seen as a unified symbol that represented the unity of Tunbaba's people. The terrace pillars of Sonaf Tunbaba are shown in the following.



Symbol 3a. Terrace Pillar of Sonaf Tunbaba



Symbol 3b. Human Face Picture

Symbol (3a) and (3b) in pictures above were terrace pillars of Sonaf Tunbaba and their connections that become a unit of analysis in this part. The number of terrace pillars of Sonaf Tunbaba contained its own meaning. There were six terrace pillars meaning that Tunbaba's people created from six big tribes. The six big tribes were Taus, Binsasi, Talan, Basan, Salu, and Kolo.

b. Hanger

The second symbol found inside Sonaf Tunbaba is a hanger made from wood in deer's head form. This hanger founded on every pillar inside sonaf. The hanger symbol inside Sonaf Tunbaba is shown as follows.



Symbol 4. Hanger

Hanger literally means a tool to hook up something; connection; and hook (online KBBI). Regarding this literal meaning, the hanger on Sonaf Tunbaba was used as a tool to attach something. In addition, the hanger resembling a deer's head symbolised the life of the Tunbaba community which could not be separated from hunting and the deer was the main target in hunting. In regards to meaning to attach something, the hanger was also used as a tool to attach the head of the hunted animal.

c. Sonaf's Main Pillar

The third symbol found inside Sonaf Tunbaba is the Sonaf Tunbaba pillar. Commonly, the pillar is hard and long used as cantilever for the roof, floor, and bridge. As a cantilever, the Sonaf Tunbaba pillar in this study was the main support for sonaf. The supporting pillars of Sonaf Tunbaba in this study are shown as follows.



Symbol 5. Sonaf's Main Pillar

The pillar previewed on data (5) was one of the symbols found inside Sonaf Tunbaba. The sonaf was supported by four main pillars. The symbol that was analysed regarding Sonaf Tunbaba was not referring to the shape of the pillar but the height. The height of the sonaf was different from the height of common traditional house. The intended height had to be six meters. The use of the six-meters pillars as the reason that Tunbaba was formed by six big tribes.

d. King's Pillar

The fourth symbol found inside Sonaf Tunbaba was king's pillar symbol of Tunbaba community. This pillar was located right in front of the entrance of sonaf and flanked by the fourth main pillars. The king's pillar symbol is shown in the following picture.



Symbol 6. King's Pillar

The pillar presented in data (6) above was the king's pillar of Sonaf Tunbaba. In terms of shape, this pillar was different from the fourth supporting pillars. The king's pillar had an eight motif. The eight motif on the king's pillar symbolised the dependence of Tunbaba community on nature. The eight symbol represented the belief of Tunbaba community to ask for rain from the creator to irrigate the fields and provides abundant harvest.

The king's pillar inside Sonaf Tunbaba was placed in the front of the empress pillar (in the next point) and it faced the sonaf's door that symbolised the power of king to lead his people. This informed all of strengths and powers in Tunbaba's area center and was held by the king. On the king's pillar, was attached some ornaments as greatness jewellery of the king. The ornaments that found on the this pillar were a cross and a rosario, a sword, and a mash gun. The cross and the rosario symbolised religiousity of the king. The king wanted to show himself as a leader that all his life and strength came from Almighty God. In addition, the cross and the rosario also symbolised the king and his people's religion, namely Catholic. The sword and the mash gun symbolised war tools that the king and his people utilised to fortify themselves and maintain them from enemies' attack.

e. Empress' Pillar

The fifth symbol found inside Sonaf Tunbaba was an empress' pillar. An empress is a title for the wife of a leader that embraced monarchy system (king, sultan, or emperor). The empress' pillar is presented as follows.



Symbol 7. Empress' pillar

The pillar previewed on data (7) above was the empress' pillar. In form, the pillar of the empress was twin with the pillar of the king. The location of the empress' pillar was directly behind the king's pillar. This showed the role of the king and empress in the royal government system and in family life. In the realm of government of the Tunbaba community, a king had the broadest authority to run his government therefore the empress had a

role as a supporter and companion of the king. While in the realm of the empress' family, her role was to prepare all the needs of the king. Therefore, on the empress' pillar pinned several ornaments that show the duties and roles of the empress in the family. The cultural ornaments worn by the empress in this study were in the form of two *sanipis*. The large *sanipi* was hung on the front of the empress pole, while the small *sanipi* was hung on the back of the empress pole. The big *sanipi* was used by the empress as a container to store food ingredients to be brought and given to the public at the time of celebration. The small *sanipi* was used as a container for offering the community's tithes to the king.

f. Storeyed Altar

The sixth symbol found in the sonaf was the altar symbol. The altar is a place that is used as a place for slaughtering animals and a place to pray. In addition, the altar also functions as a place of offerings for the ancestors and the divine (Molebila, 2019). The altar found in Sonaf Tunbaba is displayed as follows.



Simbol 8. Storeyed altar

Symbol 8 above was a storeyed altar located in Sonaf Tunbaba and was one of the data focuses in the study. The altar inside the sonaf consisted of three layers and was made of flat natural stone with a mixture of circular sedimentary soil. The first layer of the altar was at the base which functioned as a place to store offerings for ancestors so that this altar was called the ancestral altar. The second layer was in the middle which was used as a storage place for natural products. This layer was called the natural altar. The third layer was on the top that was utilised as an offering place to the Divine. This altar was called the religious altar. The three-layered altar shown the belief of Tunbaba community in ancestors, nature, and God. The ancestors were believed as the intermediary between Tunbaba communi and God. The nature was believed as the cources of all human needs. God was believed to be the sole owner of life and the giver of blessings to the Tunbaba community which was bestowed through natural products.

g. Tribute

Tribute is a gift given to a leader or king or an individual who is considered owns a role in ruling his people in a certain community or a country (Nurwijayanti, 2015). The tribute is also a symbol of loyalty of a certain community or country to their leader (Mustofa, 2019). The tribute found in Sonaf Tunbaba is shown as follows.



Symbol 9. Tribute

The symbol (9) above was a tribute and one of the data found in Sonaf Tunbaba. The tributes found in Sonaf Tunbaba were in the form of dry corn stalks, dried cassava stalks, and other small seeds. These tributes were given by the community at the beginning of the planting season to be sacred. The tribute was placed in the sonaf should not be stepped on by anyone because it would reduce the sacred value which resulted in crop failure. Tribute in the belief of the Tunbaba community was an offering of community seeds to the king to be blessed before being planted. The person in charge of entering the tribute in the sonaf is *saku* (supreme bodyguard) who served as a guard at the gate of the sonaf.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the result and data analysis, it could be concluded that Sonaf tunbaba was literary described by the roof's shape and the wall that became the distinctive feature from general traditional houses. The roof formed a conical shape and made of weed leaves, while the walls were round in shape made of selected wood, namely red wood. Sonaf Tunbaba had a terrace surrounding it with six trusses in front of Sonaf's entrance.

Cultural symbols of Sonaf Tunbaba consisted of Sonaf Tunbaba monument, an altar outside sonaf, terrace pillars, hangers, main pilars, a king's pillar, an empress' pilar, a storeyed altar, and a tribute. The Sonaf Tunbaba monument was composed of several steps, inscriptions, dragons, swords, roaster heads, and a scepter which served as a pedestal or the basis for the establishment of other symbols. The altar outside the sonaf functioned as a place to put offerings to ancestors and as a place to gather the souls of ancestors who collapsed on the battlefield, died due to traffic accidents and natural factors. The pillars of Sonaf Tunbaba were six, which symbolized the Tunbaba community formed from six major tribes, namely, Taus, Binsasi, Talan, Basan, Salu, and Kolo. The hanger symbol was used to attach something and the head of the hunted animals. Sonaf Tunbaba's six-meter-high main pilar symbolised the six major tribes that formed the Tunbaba community. The king's pillar symbolised the power in the Tunbaba region centered or held by the king. The empress pilar symbolised the role of the empress consort of King Tunbaba as a support and companion of the king in running his government and preparing all the needs of the king in the family. The altar inside Sonaf Tunbaba consisted of three layers. The first layer was called ancestral altar that functioned as a place for offerings. The second layer was natural altar that functioned as a place for keeping the harvest. The third layer was on the top that was utilised as an offering place to the Devine. This altar was called the religious altar. Tribute was symbolised with some dried corn stalks, some dried casava stalks, and other seeds that represented offerings of Tunbaba community to the king to be blessed before planting.

This study focused only on cultural symbols as the object to be discussed, there have been still more important things can be investigated from linguistic and cultural sides. Therefore, there have been stil spaces for other reseachers who focus in linguistic and cultural study to conduct the same studies in Sonaf Tunbaba.

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