

# **A SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION OF ORNAMENTS IN *LAPO BATAK* IN MEDAN**

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the semiotic meaning in Lapo Batak ornaments in Medan. The data of this study were taken from the interpretation of Batak Toba people who live in Medan in interpreting their cultural symbols. In analyzing the data, the research was conducted by using qualitative method. The result showed the semiotic meaning and how the cultural values were realized in Lapo Batak ornaments. The data were analyzed by using Roland Barthes' order of signification theory; denotation, connotation, and myth to emphasize the interaction between the sign with the personal cultural experience of the viewers, and the interaction between convention in the sign with the conventions experienced and expected by viewers. The researcher found that the interpretations of the personal cultural experience from the viewers were still far from the Batak Toba convention (myth) in interpreting the ornaments.

**Keywords:** *Connotation, Denotation, Lapo Batak Ornaments, Myth, Semiotic*

## INTRODUCTION

Language is a way to communicate one another. But, language is not only about words. It is symbolic in more ways that talks about how symbols can stand for something else, how they can be used to communicate, and how they can be imbued with meaning. The study of this can be called semiotics (DeMichelle, 2015).

Chandler (2007:60) states that to semioticians, a defining feature of signs is that they are treated by their users as 'standing for' or representing other things. By this, Roland Barthes proposes another term to understand the sign by his theory order of signification where the sign has three stages in meaning; denotation, connotation, and myth.

Barthes explains that the first signification is the relationship between the signifier and signified in a sign to external reality. Barthes calls this as denotation, the most obvious meaning of the sign. Connotation is a term used to show the second stage of signification. This illustrates the interaction that occurs when a sign meets the feelings or emotions of the reader as well as the values of the culture. In other words, denotation is what the sign represents an object, whereas the connotation is how to describe it. In the second orders of signification relating to the content, the sign works through myths. Myths is how culture explains or understands some aspects of reality or natural phenomena. It is the dominant ideologies of our time.

In Batak Toba culture, there are so many symbols with its hidden meaning especially ornaments in *Lapo Batak*. *Lapo*, in Kamus Bahasa Batak Toba by Op. Faustin Panjaitan (2010:130), means *warung, kedai* (food stall). The meaning behind the ornaments is inseparable from the Batak Toba cultural awareness. According to Collins Dictionary (collinsdictionary.com), someone's cultural awareness is their understanding of the differences between themselves and people from other countries or other backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes and values.

The attitudes of Batak Toba people is based on their three philosophies:

1. Dalihan Na Tolu

"Dalihan" means a stove made of a stone, while "Dalihan Natolu" is a cooking stove placed on three stones. The three stones represent *Somba Marhula-hula* (respect the male family of the wife or mother), *Manat Mardongan Tubu* (respect siblings / people from the same clan), and *Elek Marboru* (affection towards group of people from sister, and the clan of her husband or the family of a woman from a clan).

## 2. Suhi Ni Ampang Na Opat

It means four angles of a basket in the same size, function, and exist at the same time. The four angles represent *Suhut Sihabolonan* (the family who will carry out the custom), *Namarhahamaranggi* (the siblings of those who will carry out the custom), *Saboltok* (the siblings from the level of the father / grandfather who will carry out the custom), *Boru* (the clans who take the women who will carry out the custom).

The values in *Suhi Ni Ampang Na Opat* show the noble values in the human's heart; *holong* (love), *dame* (peace), *lasniroha* (joy), and *harapan* (hope).

## 3. Umpama, Umpasa, and Philosophy

Umpama means metaphor, and Umpasa means poetry contains rhymes.

As stated by Basyral Hamidi and Hotman M Siahaan (as cited in Ritonga 2012: 250-251), there are at least nine main Batak cultural values, namely:

1. Kinship, which includes tribal premordia; relations, affection on the basis of blood relations, harmony of the elements of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, *Pisang Raut*, *Hatobangon* and all related relations kinship due to marriage, and clan solidarity.
2. Religious, includes religion life, both traditional religions and later religions.
3. *Hagabeon* means hope to have many descendants and long life.
4. *Hasangapon* means glory, authority, charisma, and power.
5. *Hamoraon* means wealth.
6. *Hamajuon* means a progress which was achieved through wandering and studying.
7. *Patik Dohot Uhum* means culture upholds the truth.
8. Shelter
9. Conflict

This research conducted to identify the semiotic meaning in Lapo Batak ornaments culture and to elaborate the cultural values of *Lapo Batak* ornaments in Medan.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted by using qualitative method. Qualitative inquiry employs different philosophical assumptions; strategies of inquiry; and methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Qualitative procedures rely on text and image

data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse strategies of inquiry (Creswell, 2009: 162).

The data would be the ornaments in two *Lapo Batak* in Medan. There were two ornaments in the Lapo Dainang; Gorga Boraspati and Gorga Simeoleol. In Lapo Batak Evi, there were four gorga on the front of the lapo; Gorga Simataniari, Gorga Ipon Ipon, Gorga Iran Iran, and Gorga Ulu Paung, and one Ulos Sadum display, and one picture of goldfish. The sources of the data were the interpretations from twenty Batak Toba people who live in Medan.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis for Gorga Boraspati



**Gorga Boraspati**

Denotation meaning in Gorga Boraspati was a lizard-shaped with two branches. Lizards were usually located above the house and on the walls of the traditional house on the right and left side of the front house beside Gorga Adap-Adop (Rayking, 2013: 39).

In connotation meaning, Gorga Boraspati was interpreted as a symbol of easy adaptation, strict people with hard tone, Lapo owner's hope to have a lot of customers, respect for Muslim, loyalty, survivor, wealth, worth, peace, and honesty. These interpretations fit to Harahap & Siahaan's theory of Batak Toba cultural values; *Hagabeon*, *Hamajuon*, *Hamoraon*, and shelter.

In myth meaning, Gorga Boraspati often gave certain signs through behavior and sound that could help humans avoid danger. Boraspati was rarely seen or appears. When it was often seen, it indicated that the plants were fertile which led to wealth.

### 2. Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis for Gorga Simeoleol



**Gorga Simeoleol**

In denotation meaning, Gorga Simeoleol was a form of tendrils that are intertwined with the impression of waddle that produces beauty and is located on each side of the traditional Batak Toba house board. Simeoleol means to waddle (Rayking, 2013: 69).

In connotation meaning, Gorga Simeoleol was interpreted by Bataknese as a symbol of seriousness, wealth, courage, harmony, shelter, values and regularities of life, justice, survivor, kinship, danger repellent, and unity. These interpretations fit to Harahap & Siahaan's theory of Batak Toba cultural values; *hamoraon*, shelter, *patik dohot uhum*, kinship, and Batak Toba cultural attitudes; *dalihan natolu*.

In myth meaning, Gorga Simeoleol was as an attitude and behavior about love for Batak Toba art, such as dancing (*manortor*, *martumba*). Gorga Simeoleol symbolized joy.

### 3. Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis for Gorga Simataniari



**Gorga Simataniari**

Gorga Simataniari in denotation meaning was in the shape of the sun. The sun in daily life was usually above the sky which gave blazing (heat) to humans. It was placed in the middle of the Batak Toba traditional house and next to it was Gong (Rayking, 2013: 48).

In connotation meaning, it was interpreted as a symbol of hope, light, wealth, power, seriousness, adaptation, leader, wholeness, courage, and unity. These interpretations fit to Harahap & Siahaan's theory of Batak Toba cultural values; *hamoraon*, *hasangapon*, and *hamajuon*.

In myth meaning, Gorga Simataniari means a source of life force and determinant of the way of life in the world, so that everyone can work to fulfil their daily lives, and will alleviate all problems if they want to work diligently.

### 4. Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis for Gorga Ipon Ipon



**Gorga Ipon Ipon**

Gorga Ipon Ipon in denotation meaning looks like teeth. Humans without teeth cannot eat. Likewise, without this gorga, the Batak Toba traditional house would not be beautiful. It was located on the edge of the board (Rayking, 2013: 44).

In connotation meaning, Gorga Ipon Ipon was interpreted as a symbol of obedience to God, openness, togetherness, beauty, kinship, courage, purity, and sadness, strength, and authority. These interpretations fit to Harahap & Siahaan's theory of Batak Toba cultural values; religious, kinship, and *hasangapon*.

In myth meaning, Gorga Ipon Ipon means harmony, meaning every family that occupies the house is a harmonious family and if there are problems in the family it will be resolved peacefully and deliberately.

#### **5. Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis for Gorga Iran Iran**



**Gorga Iran Iran**

Gorga Iran Iran in denotation meaning was a kind of human face makeup material to make it look more beautiful. The gorga was usually located on the left and right sides of the Batak Toba traditional house (Rayking, 2013: 60)

In connotation meaning, Gorga Iran Iran was interpreted as a symbol of light, advice, protector, harmony, beauty, wealth, openness, shelter, simplicity, wisdom, and affection. These interpretations fit to Harahap & Siahaan's theory of Batak Toba cultural values; kinship, and *hamoraon*.

In myth meaning, Gorga Iran Iran means a symbol of beauty. So, every person who occupies the house is a person who is beautiful from the face and behavior in their daily lives.

#### **6. Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis for Gorga Ulu Paung**



## Gorga Ulu Paung

Gorga Ulu Paung in denotation meaning was a giant decoration in the form of half human and half animal, often found in the form of a buffalo horned human head. It was at the top end of the Batak Toba traditional house (Rayking, 2013: 57).

Connotation meaning of Gorga Ulu Paung was interpreted as a symbol of shelter, power, strength, hope to have a son, and braveness. These interpretations fit to Harahap & Siahaan's theory of Batak Toba cultural values; shelter, *hasangapon*, and the cultural attitudes theory; *suhi ni ampang na opat*.

In myth meaning, Gorga Ulu Paung symbolized power. So, everyone who occupied the house was a person who was alert and quick to face all the trials and distress. In addition, this gorga was also a sign to fight *begu* (ghost) coming from outside the village. So, if this gorga was on a house, then the people who occupied the house would get along in a family and produced a harmonious relationship.

### 7. Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis for Goldfish picture



#### Goldfish picture

In denotation meaning, the ornament is a Batak typical food that was served in Batak custom.

In connotation meaning, it was interpreted as a symbol of wealth, blessing and prayer, harmony, freshness, gratitude, persistence in pursuing goals, and kinship. These interpretations fit to Harahap & Siahaan's theory of Batak Toba cultural values; kinship, and *hamoraon*.

In myth meaning, *dengke* (goldfish) was a symbol of fertility or many offspring, a symbol of blessing from the bride's parents, good livelihood and a symbol of affection from the bride's parents.

### 8. Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis for Ulos Sadum Display



### **Ulos Sadum**

Ulos Sadum in denotation meaning was an *ulos* that will be given to *naboru* (sister of the father) of the bride and groom that will be worn by *hula-hula* (sister or brother of the mother) during the Batak customary marriage (Agustina, 2016: 3).

In connotation meaning, Ulos Sadum was interpreted as a symbol of marriage, warmth, blessing, advice, shelter, prayer, hope something to happen, simplicity, wealth, kinship, power, and strength. These interpretations fit to Harapan & Siahaan's theory of Batak Toba cultural values; shelter, religious, *hamoraon*, kinship, *hasangapon*, and the cultural attitudes theory; *suhi ni ampang na opat* which its values showed love, peace, joy, and hope.

Ulos Sadum in myth meaning was a proof of love from a *hula-hula* to their children.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusions**

According to findings and discussions in previous chapter, the researcher concludes that the semiotic meaning in the Lapo Batak ornaments are realized using Barthes' order of signification theory which are denotation, connotation, and myth. Lapo Batak ornaments gave certain informations to the respondents related to the ornament's characteristic, their own knowledge, beliefs, experiences, and Batak cultural ceremonies. But, most respondents did not know the real meaning of the ornaments.

Next, the researcher concludes that the cultural values which realized in the semiotic meaning of Lapo Batak ornaments were; kinship, religious, *hagabeon*, *hasangapon*, *hamoraon*, *hamajuon*, *patik dohot uhum*, and shelter.

### **Suggestion**

To increase the appreciation of Batak ornament in its development either as an appreciator nor a creator. It is expected to be able to develop and apply a semiotic approach in understanding the existence of the Batak Toba ornaments.



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