

SEMIOTICS STUDY ON ASEI BARK PAINTING PATTERNS

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Abstrak

Adanya makna, cerita dan filosofi kehidupan nenek moyang masyarakat Asei yang digambarkan pada kulit kayu secara turun-temurun sejak tahun 1600 dan menghasilkan gambar yang terkait ruang hidup masyarakat Asei. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui makna dari bentuk-bentuk simbolik yang ada pada motif lukisan kulit kayu Asei yang berkaitan dengan kehidupan masyarakat Asei dan sistem sosialnya. Penelitian ini menganalisis warna yang seringkali digunakan dan dominasi gambar dalam motif lukisan kulit kayu Asei. Dari hasil analisis, 4 lukisan kulit kayu Asei seringkali menggunakan warna merah yang berasal dari buah pinang, warna hitam yang berasal dari arang dan warna putih yang berasal dari kapur. Kemudian gambar yang seringkali ditampilkan pada lukisan kulit kayu adalah gambar ikan, karang (*hak balu*), fow, serta tombak dan kail. Makna dari bentuk-bentuk simbolik yang ditampilkan dalam dominasi warna dan gambar pada lukisan kulit kayu Asei bahwa masyarakat Asei ingin menceritakan kondisi geografis pulau Asei yang dikelilingi oleh air, Pulau Asei sebagai pelindung bagi masyarakatnya, mata pencaharian masyarakat Asei sehari-hari, adanya hubungan kekeluargaan dan kebersamaan yang kuat pada masyarakat Asei, serta rasa hormat masyarakat terhadap leluhur yang telah melindungi Pulau Asei dengan sebaik-baiknya.

Kata Kunci: Pulau Asei, Semiotik, Lukisan Kulit Kayu, Motif.

Abstract

There are meanings, stories and philosophies of the life of the ancestors of the Asei people which have been depicted on the bark for generations since 1600 and produce images related to the living space of the Asei people. The purpose of this study was to determine the meaning of the symbolic forms that exist in the Asei bark painting motifs related to the life of the Asei people and their social system. This study analyzes the colors that are often used and the dominance of images in Asei bark painting motifs. From the results of the analysis, 4 Asei bark paintings often use red from betel nut, black from charcoal and white from chalk. Then the images that are often displayed in bark paintings are images of fish, coral (*hak balu*), fow, and spears and hooks. The meaning of the symbolic forms shown in the dominance of colors and images on the Asei bark painting is that the Asei people want to tell the geographical conditions of the Asei island which is surrounded by water, Asei Island as a protector for the people, the daily livelihood of the Asei people, the existence of family relationships and the strong togetherness of the Asei people, as well as the community's respect for the ancestors who have protected Asei Island as well as possible.

Keywords: Asei Island, Semiotics, Bark Painting, Pattern.

1. INTRODUCTION

Decreasing interest of Indonesian towards local artworks due to the lack of information in various media has caused Indonesian artworks to slowly begin to be abandoned. Artwork is the artistic work of a person or group that becomes a separate identity for the creator, such as bark paintings produced by the Asei people. Bark painting is a form of the memory, environment, and the order of the customary council to protect and preserve nature on Asei Island. The form of community memory is expressed in the bark painting patterns using various types of images that have meanings, stories, and philosophies from the lives of the ancestors of the Asei people. Asei bark painting is an artwork produced hereditary and has become an identity of the community that must be introduced to public in order to know the life of indigenous people on a small island. The purpose of this study was to determine the meaning of the symbolic forms that exist in the Asei bark painting patterns related to the Asei people's life and their social system.

The art of bark painting is a hereditary tradition that has been carried out on Asei Island. Corry Ohee [1], said the tradition of painting a bark has been carried out since 1600 by the Asei people. In the year 1600, the Asei people had a distinctive fashion of bark from the Khombouw tree, which was painted using motifs with certain meanings that became the hallmark of Asei Island. This tradition was stopped in 1800 due to the entry of a new civilization in the Papua region, which caused the Asei people to abandon bark clothing, so that the art of painting motifs on bark also stopped. In 1975 [2], the tradition of painting bark began to be revived not as a fashion, but as a painting craft and until now the Asei people are still practicing this painting.

The bark paintings that are produced now display images that have existed in the past, such as images of animals, but new images also appear while maintaining the characteristics of a small island environment in the middle of a lake. The diversity of motifs in the bark painting and each picture depicted has its own meaning related to the culture of the Asei people. In addition, according to Jackson [3], the bark paintings produced today use the bark of the Khombouw tree imported from other areas in

Papua, so this is the main obstacle for painting craftsmen on Asei Island in producing bark paintings.

Painting bark is one part of folk craft, Suzuki [4], said traditional crafts produced by ethnic minority groups in villages and remote mountainous areas that still retain traditional elements without replacing original raw materials and production technology, which later these traditional crafts are sold in the craft market and used daily. The definition explained by Kunik [5], bark painting can be categorized as a folk craft, because the Asei indigenous people still retain their original raw material in the form of Khombouw bark and the production process is still traditional, then the resulting bark paintings are sold to tourists visiting Asei Island.

Regarding the pictures seen on the bark paintings, there are many pictures depicted in the form of images of animals, such as fish, turtles, lizards and monkeys, pictures of equipment used daily by the Asei people, as well as other abstract images in the form of symbols. Symbol, seems to be related to the living space of the Asei people. The Asei people's living space is surrounded by water, making the Asei people take advantage of Lake Sentani by becoming fishermen who catch fish in the lake to meet their daily needs, including using fish caught as the main food ingredient. This is confirmed by the statement of Taylor and Aragon, fishermen on Asei Island are women who also draw bark paintings [6].

Based on the background regarding the tradition of painting bark by the Asei people since 1600, the diversity of bark painting motifs that have their respective meanings related to the culture of the Asei people as well as the dominance of animal images, equipment, and abstract images which are symbols, encourage researchers to want to examines the meaning in the images displayed on the bark painting motifs produced by the Asei people.

This research is framed by literature related to C.S Morris semiotics, symbols, ornament studies, and Papuan culture. These four literatures were used in the analysis of the Asei bark painting motifs. Charles Morris [7] says that language is a sign system distinguished by signals and symbols, but semiotics is not only

related to language signs but also relates to non-language cues in communication between humans. Symbols [8] can be interpreted as signs, symbols or characteristics about something to someone through a morphological approach. In the study of ornaments, motifs [9] are defined as a description of the shape which is the nature and style of an embodiment. In a study of Papuan leadership institutions, J. R. Mansoben [10] found that there are four types of leadership, namely the leadership of an authoritative man, the leadership of chief, royal leadership, and mixed leadership.

The results of this study are expected to be a source of reference and interest for further research on the study of semiotics on Asei motifs, can be a complement to previous research on semiotic studies on other Asei motifs, can introduce Asei bark painting motifs as traditional art of the archipelago, and be able to contribute in studying the meaning of symbolic forms in Asei bark painting motifs to various parties to introduce the traditional arts of the archipelago.

2. METHOD

This study uses a semiotic approach through three-dimensional analysis [11], namely the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions, all of which are related to each other to analyze each image that appears on the bark painting patterns. In the technique of data collection is done by survey techniques, observation, participation, interviews, and literature study. The interview approach was carried out to obtain accurate information directly from cultural leaders as well as traditional leaders of the Sentani community. Observational approaches and survey techniques were carried out to observe the object of research directly and to know the condition of the research location. In the initial stage, researchers collected 30 Asei bark paintings and classified them from various painting patterns, namely coral (Hak Balu), Fouw, spear and hook, and fish. From 30 Asei bark paintings, the researcher only chose 1 painting from each category for analysis.

2.1 Analyzing Colors in Asei Bark Painting Patterns Method

Researchers conducted an analysis of the colors used in each pattern of the four Asei bark paintings, which were adapted from the cultural identity of the Asei people as a cultural adaptation strategy. Each object is analyzed based on the color dominances that are often used in the bark painting patterns. Researchers found that there are three colors categories that often dominate Asei bark painting patterns, namely red, black and white.

2.2 Analyzing Images on Asei Bark Painting Method

The researcher analyzed each object of the image displayed in the four Asei bark paintings using three dimensions in semiotic analysis, namely syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. Syntactic can explain the meaning of the sign itself individually or in combination, semantic explains the relationship between symbolic forms as signs and meanings that exist in the Asei community, and pragmatic explains the relationship between symbolic forms as signs and the Asei community as users.

3. RESULT

Bark Painting is a native Papuan craft produced by the people of Kampung Asei. This painting was originally a tradition that was passed down from generation to generation since the ancestors of the Asei people and not just anyone could do it. At first, paintings were made as symbols and warnings for everything related to the life of the village.

The patterns used in the bark painting are taken from traditional decorations, namely geometric ornaments and fauna decorations. Geometric ornaments are created from measured patterns in the form of curved lines or straight lines. From ancient relics, geometric patterns are widely applied to pottery and metal. Then it is applied to the woven fabric [12]. Some forms of geometric patterns, namely Banji and Meander. Meanwhile, faunal decoration is an ornamental variety that is shaped like an animal. In this study, the faunal decoration that is often used in Asei bark painting patterns is fish.

Fish is the visual code of the characteristics that are well known to the Indonesian people. There

are fins on the top and bottom of the body of the familiar fish, which are then simplified in two dimensions. Daily activities also influence the depiction of Asei's bark painting patterns in Sentani, Papua. What they see in nature, such as around Lake Sentani, is then poured into a variety of decorations/good patterns in a simplified way. In addition, the creation of geometric patterns, such as the coral pattern or Hak Balu and Fouw, influences the depiction of warnings on everything related to the Asei people life. The patterns painted on the bark do not contain symbols that are associated with certain symbols, but are the creations of Asei craftsmen in expressing their forms and daily life.

3.1 The Result of Analyzing Colors in Asei Bark Painting Patterns

After analyzing the visualization of the motifs in Asei's bark painting, there are colors that dominate in the motifs. The natural colors used in the Asei bark painting motifs are adapted from the cultural identity of the Asei people as a cultural adaptation strategy. There is a relativity related to the cultural peculiarities of the Asei people which is explained based on the results of the analysis phase of the research object on the aspect of form that has been done previously, that in the Asei bark painting motif there is a depiction of the life of the Asei people from generation to generation. The following is the analysis of color with cultural adaptation strategies in **Table 1**.

There is a different treatment of each material before it can finally be used as a dye on the bark. The areca nut seeds were collected and ground into powder with a size of 35 mesh. Then mixed into the glue that has been mixed with water and finally ready to use. For charcoal, the Asei people collect it from the rest of the combustion which is then mashed and mixed with a little water and oil. while the lime material for white color is obtained from whitening pulp which has been chewed with areca nut and the pulp is mashed and the extract is taken, then mixed with breadfruit sap.

Table 1: Color Analysis with Cultural Adaptation Strategy
[Source: Author, 2021]

No.	Color	The Color Origin	Meaning
1.	Red	Red fruit juice	Symbolizes the prosperity and fertility of the land as well as courage
2.	Black	Charcoal	Papuan life and skin color
3.	White	Chalk	Symbolizing the culture of the Asei people who like to eat areca nut

3.2 The Result of Analyzing Images on Asei Bark Painting

C.S Morris [11] explains that there are three dimensions in semiotic analysis, namely the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions, all of which are interrelated with each other.

Syntactic relates to the study of the signs themselves individually or in combination, especially in this study a descriptive analysis of signs in the symbolic forms that exist in the motifs of bark paintings. This is not only seen from the meaning of each resulting image but also the meaning of each object composition that is opposite or opposite.

Semantics is a study of the relationship between signs and the significance or meaning contained in them, in this study the relationship between symbolic forms as signs and meanings that exist in the Asei community. This is not only seen from the relationship between the sign and the meaning contained in it but also the composition of each object in the image, either opposite or opposite.

Pragmatics is the study of the relationship between signs and their users (interpreters), especially those related to the concrete use of signs in various events (discourses) and their effects or impacts on users. In this study the relationship between symbolic forms as signs and the Asei community as users. Based on the explanation carried out, the semiotic analysis of the Asei bark painting motif is based on the three dimensions in it.



Picture 1. Fish Pattern
[Source: Author, 2019]

Table 2: Syntactic, Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis on Fish Pattern in Figure 1
[Source: Author, 2021]

Syntactic	Semantic	Paradigmatic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fish are a sign that the image of Asei Island surrounded by water (Sentani Lake) is a sign. The denotative meaning of the fish image means the actual image of the fish, while the connotative meaning of the fish sign connotes the symbol of the main food ingredient. The image of a saw shark is a metaphor for the memory of the Asei people to their ancestors, 	<p>The meaning of fish as an animal that can be consumed. If it is associated with the Asei people, fish is an animal that is easy to find every day for consumption and is a symbol of the main food ingredient.</p> <p>In addition, the fish image symbolizes the Asei ancestors who have lived there for a long time and to commemorate them, the Asei people depict a saw shark on the bark.</p>	<p>This fish motif is depicted on the bark by the community as a form of depicting the life of the Asei people who make fish as the main food ingredient.</p>

<p>while the metonymy of the fish mark is used to represent the concept of the food needs of the Asei people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A symmetrical composition by placing a balanced image of fish on the right and left depicts the natural balance of the island of Asei which is always well maintained, so that the people of Asei can still feel its nature well. 		
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Picture 2. Coral Pattern (*Hak Balu*)
[Source: Author, 2019]

Table 3: Syntactic, Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis on Coral Pattern (*Hak Balu*) in Figure 2
[Source: Author, 2021]

Syntactic	Semantic	Paradigmatic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coral is a sign that Asei Island is used as a place of protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meaning of coral as a fish house that functions as a place of 	<p>This coral motif is depicted on bark by the Asei people as a symbolic form of respect</p>

for the Asei people as a sign.	refuge for fish, so it can be interpreted that Asei Island is a home and a place of refuge for the ancestors of Asei and the people of Asei.	for the Asei ancestors who have made Asei Island a place of refuge in their lives from the past until now.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The denotative meaning of the coral name is the real coral name, while the connotative meaning of the coral sign connotes a place of refuge for Asei's ancestors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The border in Figure 2 shows that the painter wants people who see the bark painting to focus on the fish and coral in the middle (to be the main focus of attention), while also depicting that the Asei people only rely on fish for their daily food. In making the border, the painter tries to depict a pattern that is inspired by the pattern of Sentani which has a fertile Papuan natural philosophy. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The metaphor of the coral name is to explain how valuable the Asei island is to the Asei people, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The image of the fish depicted facing each other symbolizes the harmony of the Asei people. 	

while the metonym of the coral name is to represent the concept of a shelter for the Asei people.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The second image uses a central composition that focuses the image on the center. The wood painter focuses the image on the fish in the center which is shackled by the surrounding corals. This shows the location of the island of Asei which is in the middle of the water of Lake Sentani and has an abundant source of food, namely fish 		



Picture 3. Spear, Hook and Two Lizards Pattern
[Source: Author, 2019]

Table 4: Syntactic, Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis on Spear, Hook and Two Lizards Pattern in Figure 3 [Source: Author, 2021]

Syntactic	Semantic	Paradigmatic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spears and hooks are markers of tools for catching fish, so that they can provide an overview of the activities carried out by the Asei community on a daily basis as markers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meaning of spears and hooks as traditional tools used to catch fish, so it can be interpreted that spears and hooks as traditional tools used for the livelihood of the Asei people in catching fish. 	<p>The spear and hook motifs are depicted on the bark by the community as a form of depicting the daily activities of the Asei people as fishing or fishermen which are used as the main livelihood of the Asei people.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The denotational meaning of spear and hook forms is an image of the actual spear and hook, while the connotative meaning of spear and hook sign connotes a symbol of the livelihoods of the Asei people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The depiction of spears, hooks and lizards placed parallel shows a symmetrical and balanced image composition. The fish depicted stuck on spears shows that fish are the main food source of the Asei people who are taken by means of spears. While the picture of the lizard symbolizes the dominance of lizard species 	

	around the Asei river compared to other types of reptiles [13].	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The spear and hook metaphors account for the main livelihood of the Asei people, namely fishing. The spear also masters the metaphor of the strength of the Asei people in maintaining their lives every day relying on the natural resources around them, while the metonym of the spear and hook sign is to represent the livelihood concept of the Asei people. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spears and hooks are markers of tools for catching fish, so that they can provide an overview of the 		

activities carried out by the Asei community on a daily basis as markers.		
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Picture 4. Fouw Pattern
[Source: Author, 2019]

Table 5: Syntactic, Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis on Fouw Pattern in Figure 4
[Source: Author, 2021]

Syntactic	Semantic	Paradigmatic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fouw's spiral-shaped motif is a sign of the relationship with the Asei community and the family as a sign. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meaning of the spiral shape that moves in two directions describes the cycle of time, life, and seasons and is a common form of religious and mystical symbolism that the Asei people have in their social system. 	<p>Fouw's motif is painted on the bark by the people as a form of depicting togetherness and family in the social systems owned by the Asei people.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The denotative meaning of the spiral form is the actual spiral, while the connotative meaning of the spiral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The six circular patterns facing each other symbolize the life of the Asei people in a family manner that is interdependent (binding) 	

<p>connotes a symbol of togetherness and family.</p>	<p>with each other and the depiction of 6 patterns is only so that the object of the picture is full.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The spiral metaphor is used to describe the existing social system in the Asei community, while the spiral metonym is used to represent the concept of togetherness which is used as a social system for the community. Asei. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The difference in the depiction of the pattern on the right and left represents men and women. The left pattern represents men which can be seen from the thick and tapered line in the middle of the pattern, while the right pattern represents women because the line is made thinner than the left pattern. 	

The four Asei bark painting motifs have their characteristics that can describe the natural conditions and living things that exist on Asei Island. In addition, it can also describe the form of the Asei people's memory of their ancestors, the daily activities of the Asei people as fishermen and the beliefs of the Asei people.

The four motifs also have different visual depictions, some play with the composition of the image object, try to create a border to focus the image in the center of the painting, depict a circular pattern that is different on each side and is a symbol of gender differences, namely male and female. So that these four motifs can describe some of the uniqueness that exists in the Asei community and become a differentiator between the people on Asei

Island and people on other islands in Lake Sentani.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of color analysis on the bark painting patterns, it can be concluded that the materials used in coloring come from nature and the meaning of the colors used can describe the condition of the Asei Island is a fertile island, the prosperous Asei people and often eat betel nuts. In addition, the results of the analysis of the images displayed on the bark paintings can be concluded that the images that are often depicted can show the natural conditions of Asei Island which is surrounded by water, Asei Island as a protector for its people, the daily livelihood of the Asei people, the existence of family relationships and togetherness that strong in Asei people, as well as people's respect for their ancestors who have protected Asei Island as well as possible.

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