



Ethno-Semiotic Studies: Symbolic Meaning and Philosophy Surombasa Tradition Labuhan Kertasari Village, West Sumbawa Indonesia

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Abstract

This article aims to describe and analyze the meaning of symbols and philosophy of the Suro'mbasatradition. This research uses a type of qualitative research with an ethno-semiotic approach, which is a mixture of ethnographic and semiotic approaches. From the results of the research, it shows that 1) Historically, the Suro'mbasa tradition has been carried out since the occupation of the Labuhan Kertasari area by their ancestors from the Selayar tribe with the aim of spreading Islamic values to the people of Labuhan Kertasari Village. 2) Suro'mbasa tradition is classified into three, namely; based on the type, based on the time of implementation, and based on the implementation of traditional ceremonies. 3) Food offerings from the Suro'mbasa tradition are symbols and meanings of Islamic messages and values as provisions for humans to live life.

Keywords: *Semiotic; Suro'mbasa; Symbolic; Philosophy*

Introduction

Religion is identical to culture, both are guidelines for guidance in life. The difference is that religion is guidance from God while culture is guidance that comes from human agreement (Alif et al., 2020). In spreading religion and its values, culture plays an important role in reaching the lowest levels of society. The development of culture in society is heavily influenced by religion. This means that religion and culture have a mutual influence and dialectical relationship (Shufya, 2022, p. 95).

This dialectical relationship provides a new style of Islamic teaching and a diverse cultural style. The richness and diversity of culture in Islam is reflected in the traditions and culture carried out by the community for generations. These traditions and cultures are carried out from generation to generation, ranging from wedding traditions, thanksgiving traditions, to the tradition of commemorating Islamic holidays. The commemoration of Islamic holidays has meaning and purpose, every region in Indonesia has a tradition of commemorating Islamic holidays or thanksgiving traditions. The community's belief in the continuation of a tradition and culture is not deliberate but arises because of unrest and goals to be achieved. Tradition is not only a celebratory activity, but also a medium to spread values and meanings. Tradition as a form of gratitude for God's favors to us (Magtufah & Syafii, 2024). The tradition of gratitude carried out by the community has become an inseparable part. Therefore, the community

upholds the symbols and meanings of traditions that have been carried out from generation to generation starting from pre-tradition, tradition process to post-tradition. The symbols and meanings of the tradition are closely related to the philosophy, geographical location and historical reasons held by the community, especially the Selayar community.

One of the regions in West Sumbawa, West Nusa Tenggara, is Labuhan Kertasari Village. The village is geographically located in the southern part of Sumbawa Island. Historically, the village is closely related to the arrival and conquest of the Bugis-Makassar Kingdom of Taliwang (Ilmiawan & Sarah, 2024, p. 378). The second reason was not only conquest but also the Selayar people's disapproval of the agreement between the Dutch East Indies government and the kingdoms in South Sulawesi.

Labuhan Kertasari Village became an area inhabited by Bugis, Makassar and Selayar tribesmen. In the first phase of the arrival of the Selayar tribe who opened Labuhan Kertasari Village into a residential area, bringing language, traditions and culture which until now Labuhan Kertasari Village is the only village that still uses the language, traditions and culture. The tradition that is still preserved by the Labuhan Kertasari village community is the tradition of thanksgiving for the favors given by God Almighty, which they know as Suro'mbasa (Sarah et al., 2023).

The Suro'mbasa tradition is one of the traditions that is still preserved by the people of Labuhan Kertasari Village. This tradition, usually carried out on Islamic holidays such as Muharram, Sya'ban and Rabbul Awwal or Maulid Nabi. The Suro'mbasa tradition is identical to the food offerings in this tradition. currently the Suro'mbasa tradition is also packaged in the annual Ballona Festari activity (Suara NTB, 2023).

Some of the results of research that are relevant to research have been carried out including, research conducted by Dzarna (2022) "The Symbolic Meaning of Bakalan Special Food: An Ethnographic Study", the Bakalan tradition uses food as a medium to convey feelings for the Madurese community. This research uses a type of qualitative research with an ethnographic approach, from the results of his research the use of food as a medium to convey feelings because there are messages that are considered taboo to be expressed by the community itself.

Further research results, namely Yuliani et al. (2022). Her research entitled "Lakatan in the Banjar Community's Selamatan Tradition in Kuin Sekatan Village, West Banjarmasin District" explores the reasons why people serve food in the lakatan tradition and the meaning of lakatan in the selamatan tradition. The method used in this research is qualitative research. From the results of the research, the reason why people serve food in this Lakatan tradition is because there is a kind of belief that the dish contains prayers aimed at the organizers and invited guests.

Furthermore, the results of research written by Ali et al. (2022) entitled "The Symbolic Meaning of the Maccera Ase Tradition", this study aims to describe the procession and symbolic meaning of the Maccera Ase tradition in Sipatuo Village, Patampua District, Pinrang Regency. This research uses descriptive qualitative research, from the results of the study found that the Macceraase cultural procession in Sipatuo Village, Patampanua District, Pinrang Regency is carried out after harvesting rice in the farmer's house as a form of gratitude for the harvest given by Allah SWT. The stages of the Macceraase procession go through the stages of planning the time and location of the event, preparing the goods and materials to be used and the Mabbaca Doa process. The symbolic meaning contained in the Maccera ase culture is the cutting of chickens which means a form of sacrifice, devotion and protection. The meaning of chicken blood / manu as a hope for family safety and a symbol of the implementation of Maccera ase in the house. The meaning of chicken dishes as a dish with the hope of being given a long life, sokko as a form of request for safety and guarding of farmers' crops, young coconuts as a form of

fortune that is expected to flow as clear as coconut water, and the meaning of bananas as a form of gratitude and as a form of prayer for the blessing of fortune.

Finally, research results from Jannatul Makwa & Vivin Nila Rakhmatullah (2023) with an article entitled "The Meaning of Food Serving in the Pasaji Ponan Tradition using Symbolic Interaction theory", from the results of this article research states that Pasaji Ponan which has a unique characteristic, namely that the snacks offered at the celebration must be boiled, it means that the snacks served cannot be in fried form. This research uses qualitative research with a symbolic interaction approach. He also mentioned that the meaning of the snacks served has a philosophical meaning including: 1). Serving food as a symbol of plant fertility, 2). Serving food as a medium to strengthen the bond of brotherhood, 3). Serving food as a form of prayer. The presentation process is that the snacks are neatly arranged into a dulang (tray) then covered using a serving hood. The snacks consist of 6 (six) types of snack, namely buras, peitikal, leipat, topat, dangei, onde-onde and banana with additional drinking water.

From some of the research results that have been presented, there are similarities in the food offerings in the tradition, the type of research used. But there are also significant differences, starting from the approach used, the place of the tradition that uses food as the main medium of tradition. Based on this, the researcher raised a paper entitled Semiotic Studies: Symbolic meaning and philosophy of Surombasa Tradition Labuhan Kertasari Village, West Sumbawa Indonesia with research questions including; 1) History of the Suro'mbasa Tradition, 2) Classification of the implementation of the Suro'mbasa tradition, 3) Symbolic meaning and philosophy of the Suro'mbasa tradition.

Method

This research uses a type of qualitative research with an ethno-semiotic approach (Hendra et al., 2023; Priyadi, 2013; Sugiyono, 2008). The ethno-semiotic approach is a collaboration of two approaches, namely ethnography and semiotics. The ethnographic approach itself is an approach that studies the culture and behavior of society (Dzarna et al., 2022; Nurmansyah et al., 2019). While semiotics according to Barthes (1988) is an approach or science that studies signs and the meanings they contain (Barthes, 1994; Hasbi, 2021). The choice of these two approaches is based on the Suro'mbasa tradition which is a community culture that is carried out continuously and uses food offerings as symbols or media that have meaning.

The analysis technique used in this research is the technique proposed by Milles and Hubberman (1992), The interactive technique has four stages as follows.

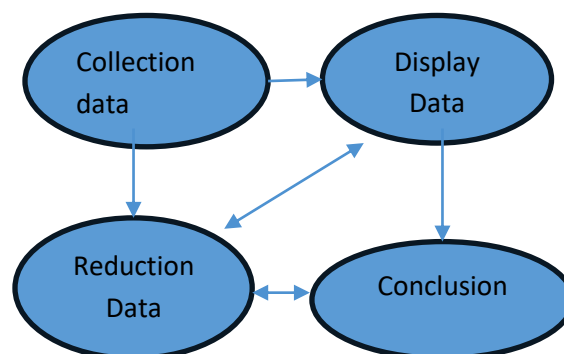


Figure 1 Milles and Huberman stages

The first stage is Data Collection or collecting data. The data collected is divided into two types, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data is the main data obtained through interviews, observation, and documentation. Informants or respondents totalled 15 people. Interviews were taken from traditional leaders (TA), the village community (MD), represented by the majority of women, and the Suro'mbasa tradition prayer-reading priest himself (PD). Meanwhile, the observation and documentation stages were carried out by researchers who participated in the implementation of the Suro'mbasa tradition which was carried out for three months, from December 2024 to February 2025.

The second stage, which presents the data that has been collected, is followed by the third stage, namely data reduction. The data reduction stage is the stage of criticizing and filtering the data obtained to answer research questions. At this stage, secondary data obtained through books, articles, magazines and news become supporting data to strengthen primary data. The last stage is drawing conclusions, at this stage the researcher lays out the research questions clearly.

Finding and Discussion

1. History of the Suro'mbasa Tradition

Oral sources based on the results of interviews by researchers with sources said, Suro'mbasa comes from two words, namely Suro' which means to order and Mbasa which means reading (Traditional leader or TA). These two languages are the languages of the Selayar tribe who have inhabited Labuhan Kertasari village since ±1667, as a result of the Bongaya agreement which had many negative impacts on the community, then immigrated to Sumbawa island, precisely Labuhan Kertasari village (A. Yani, 2018).

As a result of this immigration, the Selayar people brought their culture to the land where they stopped, namely Labuhan Kertasari Village, one of which was Suro'mbasa. Initially, Suro'mbasa was a medium for da'wah to spread the values and messages of the Prophet. In line with this, this tradition is part of cultural da'wah, which is a form of da'wah that utilizes local wisdom as a strategy in maintaining religious harmony between and among religious communities (Hendra et al., 2023, p. 78). The choice of tradition as a medium for da'wah, because in his day to reach the community without using violence, one of them was the Suro'mbasa tradition. At that time, there were still many who did not understand the values of religion and could not read, so the Suro'mbasa tradition became a medium for spreading God's messages through the Symbols of food offerings in the Suro'mbasa tradition (village community or MD).

In the procession of the Suro'mbasa tradition, food dishes are placed in a dulang or tray and then covered with a serving hood wrapped in white cloth and on top of it there is a bowl containing tobacco, siri leaves and money which will later be given to the priest who reads the prayer in the procession. The use of betel leaves, tobacco and gambier, apart from the many people who used to consume it, has its own meaning, according to research conducted by Palanjuta & Ruja, p. (2022, p. 130). The use of betel means a form of prayer, while tobacco and gambier which have a bitter taste when chewed, but will be sweet when chewed for a long time symbolizes that every human being will definitely feel the bitter and sweetness of life and humans must be patient to live it. But over time betel leaves are no longer consumed. So, in the bowl there is only tobacco or modern cigarettes and money from the organizers of the Suro'mbasa tradition, found in the figure below.



Source: Researcher Dokumentation

Figure 3 Retrieved Surom'basa

After the Suro'mbasa dish is placed, the procession of reading the safety prayer is led by the prayer priest. Before reading the prayer, the priest first lights a candle/coconut husk with fragrance as in the picture below.



Source: Researcher Dokumentation . Fiure 2

Burning fragrance with coconut husk

The burning of candles or coconut fiber is interpreted as a symbol of the Prophet's struggle to fight for Islam, which we often hear about from the jahiliyah era to the age of light (tradition prayer-reading priest himself or PD).. In line with this, the use of candles and fragrances is also intended to invite the presence of angels so that the house will be blessed (Wulandari, 2021, p. 71).

In addition, Suro'mbasa is also a tradition that strengthens the community's friendship and gratitude to God, just like other traditions carried out outside Labuhan Kertasari Village, including 1) The sea alms tradition written by Palanjuta & Ruja (2022), 2) The tradition of Malam Selikuran Kraton Kasunanan Surakarta which was researched by Bakri & Muhadiyatiningsih (2019), and 3) Serarang Ritual: An Analysis of Food Dishes as Symbols of Oral Communication of the Melanau Likow Community in Dalat, Sarawak written by Salleh et al. (2021).

From the three findings of the three traditions that both use food offerings as symbols in conveying religious messages, these three traditions including the Suro'mbasa tradition are carried out to

coincide with the momentum of Islamic holidays including the months of Muharram, Sya'ban, Rabbil Awwal (Sarah et al., 2023).

2. Classification of the Implantation of the Suro'mbasa Tradition

Based on the results of interviews that have been conducted with the village community (MD), the implementation of the Suro'mbasa tradition has a classification based on its types, the time of implementation and the implementation of traditional ceremonies. The following is an explanation of the classification of the Suro'mbasa tradition below.

a. Suro'mbasa Tradition by Type

Suro'mbasa tradition based on its type is divided into two namely, Suro'mbasa Arowah and Suro'mbasa Maleka. Suro'mbasa Arowah is Suro'mbasa addressed to the Prophet Muhammad. While Suro'mbasa Maleka is addressed to the deceased family. These two types of Suro'mbasa traditions have differences in the readings or prayers that are read, according to the priest who reads the difference only in the reading of short surahs but also have in common, namely reading prayers for salvation.

Suro'mbasa is served on a large tray: one plate contains white sticky rice and black sticky rice, topped with cucur and banana cakes and topped with a boiled egg. Then, the complementary dish is kampung chicken with the right thigh. By sense of sight, the two types in the Suro'mbasa tradition clearly have significant differences of the food served. It can be seen in the picture below.



Source: Researcher Dokumentation

Figure 4 Retrieved Suro'mbasa Arowah



Source: Researcher Dokumentation

Figure 5 Retrieved Suro'mbasa Maleka

In Figure 4, Suro'mbasa Arowah is served on five plates consisting of three plates of white sticky rice and two plates of black sticky rice. While Suro'mbasa Maleka in figure 5, there are three plates consisting of one plate of white sticky rice and one plate of white rice with eggs without cucur cake and bananas, and one plate of black sticky rice.

b. The Suro'mbasa Tradition Is Based on the Time of Its Implementation

Suro'mbasa tradition based on the time of its implementation, Muharram, Sha'ban, Rabbil Awwal coincides with Islamic holidays or celebrations. First, Suro'mbasa is held in the month of Muharram, in the perspective of Islam, the month of Muharram is the beginning of the new Islamic year. In line with this, according to S. M. Yani et al., p. (2023, p. 48) 1 Muhaaram or Islamic New Year for

Sunnis The first ten days of the month are blessed and celebrated, based on a Hadith, which states that, "Whoever gives much to his household on the day of Ashura, God will bestow much on him for the rest of the year. The celebration of Muharram 1 is also a momentum to instill and strengthen the value of Islamic history, because the Companions chose the month of Muharram as the beginning of the hijriyah calculation to coincide with the momentum of the hijra, at which time the Muslims officially became a sovereign legal entity, recognized by international law (Saputra & Muhajir, 2019, p. 299).

Based on the interview, Suro'mbasa in the month of Muharram uses Suro'mbasa Maleka. Uniquely, this tradition of Suro 'mbasa in Muharram is in the house that holds Suro'mbasa family members who were also born in the month of Muharram, the Suro' mbasa dish is added to the Suro'mbasa Arowah dish and devoted to the intention of those born in that month, the dish will be given to others.

Second, the implementation in the month of Sha'ban, precisely starting from the 15th day of Sha'ban. The implementation of the month of Sha'ban coincides with the Nisfu Sha'ban. Nisfu means half and Sha'ban means the month of Sha'ban. For Muslims, the night of Nisfu Sha'ban is the night of forgiveness of sins, the night of prayer, and the night of liberation. Muslims believe that on the night of Nisfu Sha'ban all acts of worship will be accepted by Allah SWT, the door of mercy will be opened, and all the sins of His servants will be forgiven by Allah SWT. This night is a great opportunity for Muslims to repent and multiply their deeds (Ahmad et al., 2024, p. 71; Asiyah, 2016).

Third, Rabiul Awwal or widely known as the month of the Prophet's birthday. Of course, the implementation of the Suro'mbasa tradition is to welcome the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The commemoration for Muslims is a tribute and reminder of the greatness and exemplary of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. (Farid, 2016), in substance, the celebration of the prophet's maulid aims to increase the fighting spirit, not just an ordinary birthday celebration.

Finally, Suro'mbasa is held annually and simultaneously by the Labuhan Kertasari village community. If in the celebration of Islamic holidays the Labuhan Kertasari village community holds it in turns from one house to another in turn, but since 2020 the Labuhan Kertasari village community through the momentum of Ballona Festari which is an annual festival. This festival packages all forms of culture of the Labuhan Kertasari village community in one week and simultaneously and includes the Suro'mbasa series (Kabar Utama Pariwisata, 2023; Suara NTB, 2023).

c. Implementation of the Suro'mbasa Tradition at a Traditional Ceremony

The implementation of the Suro'mbasa tradition is not only carried out on the celebration of Islamic holidays, but for the Labuhan Kertasari village community Suro'mbasa also exists in other traditional ceremonies, because in substance Suro'mbasa is a tradition that reads or sends prayers for the house that organises it. Traditional ceremonies that also have Suro 'mbasa in them include; 1) Pattama or Khataman Al-quran, the type of Suro 'mbasa presented is Suro'mbasa Arowah. 2) Turun Tana ' or akikah and hair shaving, the type of Suro'mbasa served is Suro'mbasa Arowah. 3) The ceremony of laying the first stone for the construction of a house, in this ceremony the Suro'mbasa is there to give blessings and joy to the house and the owner of the house. 4) Ntek Bale or housewarming ceremony, the types of Suro 'mbasa presented are Suro 'mbasa Arowah and Suro'mbasa Maleka. 5) Planting Season and Harvest, the Labuhan Kertasari village community before planting and taking the harvest also holds a Suro'mbasa tradition which aims and intends when planting rice planted to be fertile with God 's permission and the harvest can provide blessings for those who consume it. In line with this, outside the Labuhan Kertasari Village, there are also harvest traditions that aim to seek protection from God and as a form of gratitude for the sustenance that has been given, including the Earth Alms tradition researched by Arinda & Yani (2014) and Rasulan tradition in Ngilipar village, Gunung Kidul, written by Novarel (2022) and there are still many regions that carry it out, although the name is different, but the meaning is the same.

3. Symbolic Meaning and Philosophy of the Suro'mbasa Tradition

In the Suro'mbasa tradition, the important part is the symbols and philosophy of the dishes. The people of Labuhan Kertasari village use food as a medium to convey religious values to the community, with a social semiotics approach analysing the meaning of Suro'mbasa dishes as follows.

- 1) Based on interviews with village community (MD) and traditional leaders (TA), white and black sticky rice symbolize the existence of day and night, good and bad life. In line with this, according to research conducted by Puspitasari & Saksono, p. (2024, p. 337) with the title "Thajin Sorah and Tahjin Sappar: An Exploration of Symbolic Meaning in the Frame of Madurese Culture", explains that the white colour of sticky rice is interpreted as innocence and purity, while its sticky nature reflects a close relationship, such as family ties or intimate meetings. While black sticky rice, reflects the twists and turns in life this means that life is not always beautiful, but full of challenges and tests. Furthermore, sticky rice means strength and solid unity. Although it comes from small grains that are very hard and separated, but after cooking and processing it will be able to glue each other. This symbol means that even though the community is separated, it can unite in great strength. In addition, the long-lasting ulen is interpreted as the strength of unity and togetherness must be able to last long in order to realise harmony, happiness, and love (Setiawan, 2020).
- 2) Janno or Banana, the banana fruit in the Suro'mbasa dish is quartered and fried to symbolise the alif. The choice of banana fruit is in addition to good reasons for health for the community philosophically this banana tree does not bear fruit twice just like the life we live today (village community or MD). In line with this statement, according to research conducted by Normalia, p. (202 C.E., p. 24) entitled "Bajemuk: Ritual Tradition in Madurese Communities in Sungai Segak Sebangki Landak Village", states that bananas mean the sweetness of life and the hope that the prayers offered can bear sweet fruit with the granting of these prayers. Whereas in research conducted by Setiawan, p. (2020, p. 62) mentioning the usefulness of banana trees can be viewed from various parts of the tree that have benefits for human life. The banana tree is also referred to as a family symbol. Banana fruit as a form of prayer request to Allah SWT for an abundance of halal fortune whether it comes from rice fields or from other sources of fortune (Ali et al., 2022, p. 48).
- 3) Kue Cucur, in the Suro'mbasa tradition, kue cucur is placed on sticky rice both black and white sticky rice, according to the Labuhan Kertasari village community (MD), this cucur cake is a complement to the Suro'mbasa dish. In line with kue cucur being a complement, this cucur cake also has a meaning, its shape like an umbrella fruit symbolises that humans in their lives will be protected from heat and rain from birth to death with all their shortcomings and advantages (Normalia, 202 C.E., p. 24). The sweet flavour of kue cucur also symbolises happiness, abundance or hope (Lindayani et al., n.d., p. 226).
- 4) Eggs, in the presentation of the Suro'mbasa tradition, boiled eggs are at the top of the dish which according to the beliefs of the Labuhan Kertasari village community (MD), the white colour of the egg symbolises the holiness of God and the yellow colour of the egg symbolises the glory of God. In line with this, the unpeeled egg is a reminder for us to always peel the problem first, be patient, before meeting the egg white or the bright spot in facing the problem (Febya et al., 2022, p. 150).
- 5) Ayam Kampung's right thigh is a complementary dish to the Suro'mbasa tradition. The choice of the right thigh symbolises that everything good is recommended to use the right hand and right foot. In line with this, the use of chicken also symbolises an attitude of surrender to God Almighty and as a form of sincere sacrifice and a form of gratitude to God and ancestors for the protection given (Fauziyah et al., 2021, p. 237; Palanjuta & Ruja, 2022, p. 129)

All the symbols of this Suro'mbasa tradition are placed in Dulang or a large round tray made of iron. Of course, the placement in this dulang is a symbol of the earth or the round world. While the location of the janno between the cucur cakes has a symbol of everything in life having its own limits according traditional leaders (TA). The symbols of this Suro'mbasa tradition dish have become an important object, because it becomes an identity both for the tradition and for the Labuhan Kertasari village community.

Conclusion

The Suro'mbasa tradition is a hereditary tradition carried out by the Labuhan Kertasari Village community, not without reason the tradition is still preserved today but historically and the meaning of this tradition is closely related to the development of Islamic teachings and values represented through the presentation of this Suro'mbasa tradition.

Based on the classification of the Suro'mbasa tradition, it is divided into three, including; Suro'mbasa based on its type, Suro'mbasa based on the time of implementation, and Suro'mbasa which is carried out at traditional ceremonies. Furthermore, the symbolic and philosophical meaning of the dish has religious messages and values in it. Not only the dish, but also the procession of this Suro'mbasa tradition, is a tradition that reads prayers for safety for the Labuhan Kertasari Village community in accordance with its purpose, namely as a cultural da'wah media to spread divine messages.

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