



BULANG (WOMEN'S HEAD COVERING) SIMALUNGUN BATAK ETHNIC

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Naskah Diterima Tanggal
21 Maret 2024

Direvisi Akhir Tanggal
20 Juni 2024

Disetujui Tanggal
22 Juni 2024

Abstrak

Artikel ini ditulis untuk mengungkap makna penutup kepala bagi perempuan atau bulang bagi masyarakat Batak Simalungun. Penggunaan bulang atau penutup kepala bagi wanita dan apa makna dan fungsinya bagi kaum milenial, terutama yang tinggal di perkotaan, sangat sedikit yang memahami. Oleh karena itu, penulis membuat artikel ini untuk mendeskripsikan jenis-jenis bulang dan apa fungsi dan makna bulang bagi masyarakat etnis Batak Simalungun. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode deskriptif serta menggunakan teori semiotika oleh Charles Sanders Peirce dan pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan cara observasi, wawancara dan studi pustaka. Analisis data dilakukan dengan menggunakan reduksi data, penerjemahan serta kesimpulan dan saran. Terdapat 4 jenis bulang, yaitu Bulang Sulappei, Bulang Teget, Bulang Suyuk/Gijang dan Bulang Hurbu Salalu. Bulang adalah penutup kepala dan untuk memberikan identitas. Makna dari pemakaian bulang ini adalah sebagai simbol kedewasaan bagi wanita Simalungun.

Kata kunci: Etnis Simalungun, Bulang, dan Semiotika.

Abstract

This article was written to reveal the meaning of the head covering for women or bulang for the Simalungun Batak community. The use of bulang or head coverings for women and what the meaning and function are for millennials, especially those who live in urban areas, has very little understanding. Therefore, the author created this article for describing the types of bulang and what the function and meaning of bulang are for the Simalungun Batak ethnic community. This research uses a qualitative approach and descriptive method and uses semiotic theory by Charles Sanders Peirce and data collection is carried out by observation, interviews and literature study. Data analysis was carried out using data reduction, translation and conclusions and suggestions. There are 4 types of bulang, namely Bulang Sulappei, Bulang Teget, Bulang Suyuk /Gijang and Bulang Hurbu Salalu. Bulang is for head cover and for giving identity. The meaning of wearing this bulang is as a symbol of maturity for Simalungun women.

Keywords: Simalungun Ethnic, Bulang, and Semiotic.

INTRODUCTION

Bulang is a traditional head covering worn by Simalungun Batak women, an ethnic group originating from North Sumatra, Indonesia (Damanik et al., 2023). More than just an accessory, the bulang is laden with cultural and spiritual significance, reflecting the identity, social status and expertise of Simalungun women. The bulang, or women's headdress, is one of the most important elements in Simalungun Batak ethnic culture. As

part of traditional clothing, the bulang not only serves as head protection, but also has a deep symbolic meaning for the Simalungun Batak community. Bulang reflects the identity, status, and cultural values embraced by Simalungun Batak women (Siregar et al., 2021).

The Simalungun Batak tribe is one of the Batak sub-ethnic groups originating from North Sumatra, Indonesia (Sitohang et al., 2024). They inhabit the Simalungun Regency and surrounding areas. Despite having the same Batak cultural roots, Simalungun has its own uniqueness and characteristics. One of the things that distinguishes Simalungun from other Batak sub-ethnicities is its language. The Simalungun language is unique and is considered to be in an intermediate position between the northern and southern Batak families. Simalungun culture is also rich in traditions and customs. Their kinship system, known as Tolu Sahundulan, is similar to Dalihan Natolu in Toba Batak and Rakut Sitelu in Karo Batak (Tandi & Siagian, 2023). The life of the Simalungun people is closely related to agriculture. Rice and corn are their staple foods, reflecting their long agrarian life. In the arts, Simalungun has a distinctive woven fabric called Hiou, which is an important part of various traditional ceremonies. Although Simalungun is part of the Batak tribe, they have a strong cultural identity that is distinct from other Batak sub-ethnicities. The uniqueness of language, customs and traditional arts makes Simalungun one of Indonesia's cultural treasures that needs to be preserved.

The Simalungun Batak community has a unique and diverse cultural wealth, including in terms of traditional clothing. Bulang, as part of traditional women's clothing, has become a cultural icon that is passed down through generations (Ovellia Putri et al., 2022). An in-depth understanding of the bulang can help preserve and better understand Simalungun Batak culture. Unlike other head coverings in Indonesia, the Simalungun bulang has a unique and distinctive shape. Made from cloth that is wrapped and shaped in such a way, the bulang resembles a horn or crescent moon that rises above the head. This shape symbolises: Life: The crescent shape pointing upwards represents life that continues to grow and develop, Fertility: For agrarian societies such as Simalungun, this shape also symbolises the crescent moon which is a sign of fertility and a bountiful harvest., Honour: The height of the bulang indicates the social status and honour of a woman in society. The higher and more elaborate the decoration, the higher the social status.

Traditionally, bulang is made from ulos, a typical Batak woven fabric that has sacred and symbolic values. The motifs and colours used in ulos bulang also vary, each with its own meaning. The process of making bulang is usually done by Simalungun women themselves and is passed down from generation to generation (Panjaitan & Ammamiarihta, 2023). In the past, bulang was worn by Simalungun women almost every day. However, as time goes by, the use of bulang is mostly seen on traditional and ceremonial occasions, such as: Wedding ceremonies: Bulang symbolises a woman's maturity and readiness to build a household, traditional ceremonies: In many Simalungun traditional ceremonies, the bulang is an integral part of the traditional dress., Art performances: Bulang also enhances the appearance of dancers in traditional Simalungun art performances.

In this modern era, the use of Simalungun bulang has been increasingly displaced by modern fashion trends. However, various conservation efforts continue to be made so that this cultural heritage does not become extinct, such as: Introduction of bulang to the younger generation: Through education in schools and art centres. bulang design

innovation: Young designers have started to create bulang with a modern touch to attract the younger generation., Tourism promotion: Bulang became one of the cultural attractions introduced to tourists.

The existence of the bulang is not just a head covering, but a reflection of local wisdom and Simalungun Batak cultural identity that needs to be preserved. Through various conservation efforts, it is hoped that the bulang can continue to be passed down to future generations as an integral part of Indonesia's cultural treasures.

Bulang is still worn today during traditional ceremonies or other ceremonies that show Simalungun identity(Damanik et al., 2023) . Bulang is made of woven cloth which is 150 cm long and 30 cm wide(Ovellia Putri et al., 2022) . In the Simalungun-Indonesian dictionary, bulang is defined as a head covering for married women. Nowadays, the use of bulang is not only used when attending traditional parties, Simalungun women also use bulang for daily activities, usually used at home or when leaving the house, such as going to the market or the fields. Bulang has many meanings contained in it. Bulang is interpreted as a symbol or form of motherhood (Parinangon) for a Simalungun woman(Damanik et al., 2023) . This research aims to explore the meaning, function, and development of bulang in the context of Simalungun Batak ethnic culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Semiotics or semiology are terms that refer to the same science. Semiotics comes from the Yunani word which means sign(Behera, 2024). Semiotics is defined as knowledge about signs . Pierce says the sign is something else, because it resembles the thing that was taken. Something that is taken means the form of the properties of the object that evokes the same sensation in thought because of its similarity to Umberto Eco(Fabbrichesi, 2018) . Meanwhile, the term semiology is used by Barthes. From the responses above, it can be concluded that semiotics is the science of signs which leads to the development of signs, the use of signs and ideas as a general philosophical theory which systematically communicates the information or messages it contains.

In the inductive analysis stage and interpretation of the meaning of the data, researchers used the semiotic theory used by Sumbo Tinarbuko which refers to the theory of Charles Sanders Pierce. Semiotics according to Tinarbuko in (Sidik, 2018) is an effort to provide an interpretation of semiotic science itself, namely semiotics as a method of reading visual communication works. Signs are everywhere, 'words' are signs, as are gestures, traffic lights, flags and so on. According to Pierce, semiotics is the study of signs, the functioning of signs, and the production of meaning. Pierce proposed the theory of triangle meaning which consists of three main elements, namely sign, object, and interpretant. A sign is something physical that can be captured by the five human senses and is something that refers (represents) something else outside the sign itself. Signs according to Pierce consist of Symbols (signs that arise from agreement), Icons (signs that arise from physical representation) and Indices (signs that arise from cause-and-effect relationships). While the reference of this sign is called an object.

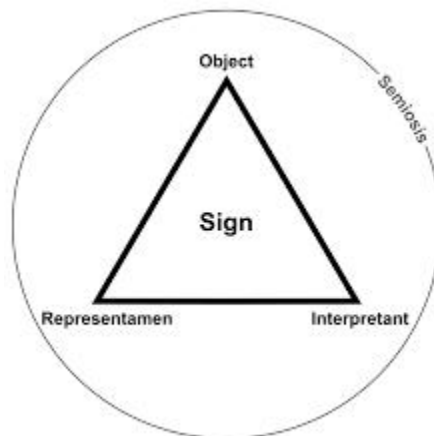


Figure 1 Pierce's Triangle Theory of Meaning

A sign is something that represents something. That something can be an experience, thought, idea or feeling. If something, for example A is black smoke billowing in the distance, then it can represent B, which is for example a fire (experience). Such a sign can be called an index; that is, there is a contiguity between A and B. A photograph or drawing is a sign called an icon. A photograph represents a certain reality on the basis of similarity (a photograph of former president Suharto, represents the person concerned, so it is an experience). A sign can also be a symbol, if the relationship between the sign and what it represents is based on convention, for example a red light that represents a "prohibition (idea)" based on the agreements that exist in society. The Dara bird is believed to be a sign or symbol of peace; it cannot simply be replaced with another bird or animal. The object or reference of the sign is the social context to which the sign refers or something to which the sign refers. Interpretant or sign user is the concept of thought of the person who uses the sign and derives it to a certain meaning or the meaning that exists in a person's mind about the object that a sign refers to. The most important thing in the process of semiosis is how meaning emerges from a sign when it is used by people when communicating (Sidik, 2018).

According to Pierce, there are 3 types of signs based on the relationship between the sign and the signifier, namely:

1. Icons, namely signs that inherently have the same meaning as they indicate. For example, a photo with the person being photographed, or a map with the geographical area;
2. Index, namely a sign that contains a causal relationship with what is signified. For example, smoke indicates fire, clouds indicate rain;
3. Symbols, namely signs that have a meaning relationship with the signified, are arbitrary, in accordance with the conventions of a particular social environment. For example, the white flag is a symbol of death (Szkudlarek, 2020) .

RESEARCH METHOD

Data collection methods are systematic and standardised procedures for obtaining accurate data (Jannah, 2019) . Data collection is a very important step in the scientific method, because the data collected is used to test the hypothesis formulated. The data collection method uses a descriptive qualitative method that tends to use analysis. The data collection methods used in this study are: 1. The literature method,

namely the researcher tries to find books as reference material to complement the data so that it is more concrete in the completion process, 2. The observation method, namely the researcher goes directly to the research location to make observations of the data objects to be studied. Interview method, which is a method that is a conversation carried out with a specific purpose, and this conversation is usually carried out by two parties, namely the interviewer (interviewer) who asks questions and the interviewee (interviewee) who provides answers to the questions. In this interview method, researchers will conduct interviews with parties who know about Bulang.

a) Data and Data Sources

This research data includes primary data and secondary data. Primary data is taken directly from the field, while secondary data includes various references and journals relevant to the research problem. Various important information obtained from key informants, namely native Simalungun speakers who are appointed as community leaders, as well as ordinary people who are considered to have knowledge about Bulang Simalungun.

b) Research Location

This research was conducted in Raya Sub-district, Simalungun Regency. This location was considered appropriate by the researcher because this area is an ethnic Simalungun native speaker who still uses the Simalungun language in daily introductions and in Simalungun traditional ceremonies.

c) Research Informants

This research involves parties who have a relationship with the research, namely:

1. Community leaders, and traditional leaders.
2. Local government in the research location area, (village heads) in Raya sub-district, Simalungun district.
3. People who understand the original Simalungun language, without being mixed with other languages living in the research location who understand Bulang Simalungun.

d) Data Analysis Technique

The data was analysed simultaneously with data collection and also attempted after all the data was collected, then the analysis of local wisdom in Bulang Simalungun was carried out

e) Research Stages

The initial activities carried out were;

1. Collecting informants about who can be used as informants who support the research subject.
2. Determining suitable/relevant informant candidates
3. Collecting and identifying suitable equipment used in the field during data collection.
4. Classify data in accordance with the object of research.
5. Approach key informants.
6. Conduct a literature study that has a relationship with the research material.

f) Data Validity Technique

In determining the validity of data, inspection techniques are carried out, and implementation. The examination technique is based on a number of certain criteria including triangulation. Triangulation is a data validity checking technique that utilises something else outside the data for the purpose of checking or comparing the data

collected. Then in this research, the triangulation technique is used to compare the results of interviews with the opinions of key informants and several traditional leaders who know Simalungun bulang.

g) Data Processing and Analysis

Data processing will be carried out after all data has been collected. Then the stages carried out in data processing include:

1. Editing

Since the data that has been collected from the field is getting more and more, it is necessary to immediately analyse the data through editing or data reduction. Editing or data reduction here is summarising, selecting key things and focusing on important things to look for themes and patterns. In this case, the researcher will collect all data to edit incomplete data or data that is less than perfect.

2. Tabulation

After the editing process or data reduction, what must be done is to tabulate or classify the data that has been collected, because not all materials collected by researchers are in accordance with the material under study. Then arrange and systematise the data that has been obtained into a certain pattern in order to facilitate the discussion that has to do with the discussion being carried out.

3. Verification

After reducing the data and classifying it, the next step is data verification, namely checking back from the data that has been collected to determine the validity of the data whether it is really valid as expected by the researcher. In the verification stage, researchers can re-examine the validity of the data starting from the informant, whether the informant is already in the field expected by the researcher.

4. Analysing Data

The next step is to analyse the data that has been collected and then link the data that has been collected from the data collection process, namely through interviews and observations with data sources such as books, journals and so on to obtain more efficient and perfect results as expected. The next step of analysis is to analyse Bulang Simalungun.

5. Drawing conclusions

The steps above that must be done are to make conclusions from the data analysis to perfect the research later.

DISCUSSION

a. History and Development of Bulang

Bulang has been an integral part of Simalungun Batak culture for a long time. Historical records show that the use of bulang among Simalungun Batak women can be traced back to the 16th century (Pardede, 2018). At that time, bulang was used as a symbol of social status and cultural identity.

The development of bulang in Simalungun Batak culture is inseparable from the influence of outside cultures, such as Malay and European cultures. This cultural interaction has influenced the design, materials and symbolic meaning of bulang (Situmorang, 2020). However, the Simalungun Batak community has maintained the traditional essence of bulang as part of their cultural identity.

Today, bulang is still used in various traditional events and religious ceremonies by Simalungun Batak women. The use of bulang is also part of the traditional clothing worn on important occasions, such as weddings, births, and deaths (Pardede &

Situmorang, 2019). This shows that bulang still has an important role in the life of the Simalungun Batak community..

b. The Meaning and Function of Bulang

Bulang not only functions as a head covering, but also has a deep symbolic meaning for the Simalungun Batak community. Bulang is considered a symbol of pride, honour and cultural identity for Simalungun Batak women. The use of bulang also indicates one's social status and role in society.

In addition, bulang also has a practical function as a head protector from the weather, such as sunlight and rain. The distinctive shape and design of the bulang also serves to enhance the appearance of Simalungun Batak women (Situmorang, 2020). Bulang is an integral part of traditional clothing that builds the beauty and elegance of Simalungun Batak women.

In the context of Simalungun Batak culture, bulang also has spiritual and religious significance. The use of bulang in traditional and religious ceremonies shows the relationship between humans, nature and spiritual. Bulang is considered a symbol of protection and blessing for Simalungun Batak women.

c. Variations and Uniqueness of Bulang

Simalungun Batak bulang has many variations in terms of shape, material and ornamentation. Each region or village in the Simalungun Batak region has unique bulang characteristics, reflecting local identity. These variations show the richness and diversity of Simalungun Batak culture.

One of the uniqueness of Simalungun Batak bulang is the use of traditional materials, such as woven fabrics, beads and metals. The intricate process of making bulang reflects the values of the Simalungun Batak culture.

In addition, Simalungun Batak bulang also have different symbolic meanings, depending on the context in which they are used. For example, a bulang worn at a wedding ceremony has a different meaning from a bulang used in a death ceremony. Understanding this symbolic meaning is important to preserve Simalungun Batak culture.

Bulang Simalungun is a head covering as part of the traditional clothing of married Simalungun women. The use of bulang shows the identity of Simalungun, bulang is made of woven cloth 150 cm long and 30 cm wide and at both ends of the cloth there is a tufted thread 18 cm long. Bulang cloth has unique characteristics. Apart from being worn by women in ancient times, bulang was also worn by Simalungun housewives who would serve food so that their hair would not unravel and not fall into the food. In the past, bulang was only worn by married women, but as time progressed, it was also worn by many unmarried women.

d. Types of Bulang:

Simalungun Bulang consist of 4 types according to their function and are differentiated by the way they are tied on the head, the types of Simalungun bulang include:

1. Bulang Sulappei

Sulappei means traditional party. Bulang sulappei is a woman's head covering in the form of a handkerchief that is worn when there are traditional parties, both traditional parties of joy and sorrow. Bulang sulappei is made of red, black and white

thread. As time goes by, without reducing the values contained in it, bulang sulappei is modified with various colors to make it look more beautiful and attractive. Bulang sulappei is interpreted as a symbol of Simalungun women's identity.



Picture of: Bulang Sulappei

2. Bulang Teget

Teget means upright and beautiful. Bulang Teget is a woman's head covering that is upright and looks beautiful and elegant. Bulang Teget is used by Simalungun women when getting married. The use of the bulang teget with the right end slightly lowered and tilted to the right philosophically in Simalungun culture means that a wife must always uphold the status of her husband, must be a good, respectful and dignified wife, while the left end is slightly raised upwards to mean that after having children then the offspring must be greater than both parents. Meanwhile, the tassels at both ends of the headdress symbolize prayer and hope for having good offspring, and the wife must be able to tightly cover up the disgrace that exists in her family. Nowadays, the use of bulang teget is not only used when there are parties, but its use has shifted to being used also when there are official government events where many women wear bulang teget at these events.



Picture of: Bulang Teget

3. Bulang Gijang

Gijang is defined as the above, Bulang Gijang means a woman's head covering worn during traditional parties by older women. The difference between the use of Bulang Teget and Bulang Gijang is that if Bulang Teget is worn on joyful occasions and is only worn by the bride, then Bulang Teget is worn by older Simalungun women and is usually worn on occasions of joy and sorrow.



Picture of: Bulang Gijang

4. Bulang Salalu/Bulang Hurbu

Hurbu in Simalungun language is everyday, Bulang Hurbu or Salalu is the daily headdress often used by Simalungun women when going to the fields and to the market, which serves to increase beauty and cover the head and show identity as a Simalungun women.



Picture of: bulang hurbu / salalu

e. Challenges and Preservation Efforts

Although bulang is still used in various traditional events and religious ceremonies, there are challenges in preserving this tradition. Modernisation and globalisation have influenced the lifestyle of the Simalungun Batak community, including the use of clothing. This can threaten the sustainability of the bulang tradition. Efforts to preserve the Simalungun Batak bulang have been made by various parties, including the local government, cultural organisations and the local community. One of the efforts made is through education and training in bulang making for the younger generation. This aims to maintain traditional skills and knowledge in bulang making.

In addition, the local government and cultural organisations also make efforts to promote and introduce Simalungun Batak bulang to the wider community, both within and outside the Simalungun Batak region. These efforts aim to increase awareness and appreciation of Simalungun Batak culture, as well as encourage the younger generation to preserve the bulang tradition.

CONCLUSION

Based on the description of the Simalungun women's head covering (bulang), there are several conclusions as follows: Bulang is a women's head covering for the Simalungun community which is worn when there are happy or sad events. Bulang is divided into 4 types, namely Bulang sulappei, Bulang Teget, Bulang Gijang and Bulang Salalu. The use of bulang is different, Bulang sulappei is worn by Simalungun women when there are happy and sad events, Bulang Teget is worn by women during a wedding, Bulang Gijang is worn by Simalungun women who are old while Bulang salalu is worn when going to the market and the fields. Bulang functions as a head covering and also shows tribal identity, while the meaning of Bulang is a symbol of motherhood.

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