



The Symbols of Water in Cultural Perspective of the Rote Dengka Ethnic

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Abstract. The title of this research is ‘The Symbols of Water in Cultural Perspective of Rote Dengka Ethnic’. The aim of this research is to describe the symbols of water in cultural of the Rote Dengka Ethnic and its expressions. Theoretical approach used is semiotics by Pierce and the method used is descriptive qualitative. Water is very useful for the Rote Dengka Ethnic as the daily necessary, therefore it is must be kept of its spring. It is could be seen of their residence always near to the spring or near to the well to fulfil their necessary of water every day. The result of this research, there are nine data symbol of water in the Rote Dengka Ethnic. The nine data namely: 1) The symbol of love, 2) the symbol of peacefulness, 3) the symbol of strength, 4) the symbol of recovery, 5) the symbol of victory, 6) the symbol of harmony, 7) the symbol of forgiveness, 8) the symbol of patience and 9) the symbol of reborn. This research is expected to obtain a culture document for the young generations. The cultural document is meaningful both for readers and the researchers, especially who are planning to conduct further researches about the symbols of water.

Keywords: *Symbol, Water, Perspective, Cultural, Rote Dengka Ethnic.*

1 Introduction

East Nusa Tenggara Province as an archipelago Province that consists of twenty one Regencies and one Municipality, namely Kupang City. Every Regent occupied of each ethnic spread from East to West. Each Ethnic in this Province has signs and symbols of culture that has been agreed by them. Every culture sign and symbol as culture properties and as a specific characteristic that representing of each ethnic, therefore it is must be kept. The culture sign and symbol in an Ethnic such as an animate and unanimated can be representing positive values life for them. The culture signs and symbols are not only found in East Nusa Tenggara Province Ethnic, but also in each Ethnic from Sabang to Merauke and from Nias to Rote Island as a culture properties and the uniqueness of Indonesia.

The researchers choose one of an Ethnic at East Nusa Tenggara Province, namely Rote Dengka Ethnic at Rote Island as the Southernmost Regency of Indonesia. The focus of the research in the Ethnic is close related to one of culture symbol that has been agreement of the Ethnic. So far, it has been discovered seven culture symbols at Rote Dengka Ethnic are found namely, the symbol of water, color, animal, plant, fire, betel chew canister and the symbol of Tii Langga hat. Among the seven reference-symbols in Rote Dengka Ethnic, this research is focusing on one symbol, namely the symbol of water. The symbol of water has been set up as a culture symbol that has moral message, values culture and also as a culture property for the Ethnic. There are nine symbols of water discovered in the Rote Dengka Ethnic, namely: **1) The symbol of love, 2) the symbol of peacefulness, 3) the symbol of strength, 4) the symbol of recovery, 5) the symbol of victory, 6) the symbol of harmony, 7) the symbol of pardon, 8) the symbol of patience and 9) the symbol of reborn.** The nine symbols functions as moral to be learned by the young generations and core-families.

Semiotic theoretical approach is applied to analyse the nine symbols of water in cultural perspective of the Rote Dengka Ethnic. According to Sobur, semiotics is a method to analyse signify and signifier. Sobur semiotics focus on analysing every sign. A sign is as a signifier that has a meaning to substitute another [1] [2]. Zoest in Piliang stated that semiotics is a knowledge study about sign and sign production [3]. Zoest in Sobur said, semiotics as a sign knowledge and all have correlation to sign, how to use of sign, correlation to another word, its sending, and its receiver by the user of sign [4][5]. Pateda divided semiotics into nine types namely: 1) Analytic semiotics that is the semiotics analysing the system of sign. 2) Descriptive semiotics, that is the semiotics that focus to system of sign that we see now, even though some of sign always the same from the past until now. For example, dark cloud with the wind fastest blow it is indicated the rainstorm will become soon, the sign always the same form the past until now. 3) Fauna semiotics or zoo semiotics is the semiotics that focuses to analyse the sign that produce by the animal. For example, the hen's chirping is indicated for the hen laying eggs. 4) Cultural semiotics is the semiotics that study about the sign system that

happens in a cultural. 5) Narrative semiotics, that is the semiotics that study about the sign system narratively like myths and folkloric. 6) Natural semiotics, is the semiotics that focus to study about the sign system that produced naturally. 7) Normative semiotics is the semiotics that investigates about sign system that produces by human such as norms. For example: the traffic light and no smoking area. 8) Social semiotics is the study that focuses to analyse the sign system in language. 9) Structural semiotics is the semiotics that specifically studies about sign system that manifestation through language [6].

The theory of semiotics is divided in some concepts, namely semiotics according to Ferdinand De Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Umberto Eco, John Fieska and concept semiotics according to Roland Barthes. Concept semiotics by the expert that have mentioned above in general all of them concepts is not significant in their statement of semiotics. Eco has developed a classification in which he distinguishes between artificial and natural signs. Fieske focuses to three main concepts, namely: sign, code and cultural. De Saussure with the concept, namely: signifier and signified. Peirce divided his concept into three main concepts namely: representamen, interpretant and object. This theory is so well known with trichotomy concept. Meanwhile, Barthes focuses his concept to connotation, denotation and myth.

This research is referring to the theory of semiotics by Peirce, namely Trikotomic Concept, especially to object. Based on object, Peirce divided it into three parts, namely: 1) **Icon**, icon is a sign has similarity with the original sign, for example 'Map'. 2) **Index**, index is a sign that has related to a thing clausal or it has causality relationship. The sign has causality relationship with the object, for example smoke as indicated of fire. 3) **Symbol**, symbol is a sign be related to signified and signifier. A symbol through a sign that has an agreement by its signifier as is a general conventional. For example traffic light, when the red lamp is on it means that every car and motor cycle must stop.

Some cases were found related to symbol of water based on the Rote Dengka ethnic perspectives. Every symbol of water in the Rote Dengka Ethnic that becomes a convention, therefore the researcher wants to become as culture documentation. The researchers not found former research in Rote Dengka Ethnic that has related to the symbol of water. To support the analysis of the symbol of water in Rote Dengka Ethnic, some related studies were found, namely, Masan in *The Symbol of Belo Brekane Traditional Ritual Carried Out* by Lakonawa Horinara Village [7]; Hendro in *Arti, Fungsi, dan Implikasi Metodologisnya* [8]; Rafiska in *Analisis Tanda dan Simbol pada Ekosistem Serta Proses Belajar di SMAN 1 Palembang Tentang Penghargaan dan Penghayatan Identitas Bangsa Indonesia* [9]. Based on some references that have related to symbol above, it has differentiate to the research that did by the researchers. The things can see of the result of analyse and research problems, even though it has the same theoretical approach. The research findings present the original results. Based on the findings about the symbol of water in Rote Dengka Ethnic culture, it is interested to analyse the symbols by using the Charles Sanders Peirce semiotics theory.

2 Method

The method is used in this research is qualitative method to explain all symbol of water in cultural perspective of the Rote Dengka Ethnic based on the fact and the findings explainable with words not statistics. The researcher makes some citations of experts about the relevant qualitative method. Moleong qualitative research is a research that produces an analysis procedure which does not use statistics analysis procedure or another quantitative approach [10]. Chony dan Almanshur have a notion that, qualitative research is a research approach that produce results not use statistics procedures or quantification ways [11]. Mahsun, said that, qualitative research focus to meaning, description, purification and data placement based on its context and it is explainable with words not statistics [12].

3 Research Discussion

In the discussion part related to the symbol of water in cultural perspective in the Dengka Ethnic, the researcher found nine symbols of water, namely: 1) the symbol of love, 2) the symbol of peacefulness, 3) the symbol of strength, 4) the symbol of recovery, 5) the symbol of victory, 6) the symbol of harmony, 7) the symbol of forgiveness, 8) the symbol of patience and 9) the symbol of reborn. The nine symbols of water will be analysed based on semiotics theoretical approach by Pierce as follows:

3.1 Water the Symbol of Love

Table 1

Category	Symbol
<i>Object</i>	Water
<i>Symbol</i>	Water as the symbol of Love

The Rote Dengka Ethnic observes the water as ‘**The Symbol of Love**’. Water is the symbol of love, because water can be found in evil and good people or place, or in other words, we can find water everywhere. The expression of water as the symbol of Love in the Rote Dengka Ethnic as follows: ‘*Oe fava kolo-kolo neu basa hita, neu hataholi mamasui, hatata, deuhaka no lalalilo*’, the meaning in Indonesian is ‘Air mengalir dengan limpahnya bagi kita semua, untuk orang kaya, miskin, orang jahat dan orang baik’ (English: The water flows abundantly for us, for the rich, the poor, the evil, and the good ones.). Through the utterance of water, it is giving us a life message that we must love each other without to see our ethnic, religion, race, and also we must love evil men like the water always omnipresence in every place).

3.2 Water the Symbol of Peacefulness

Table 2

Category	Symbol
<i>Object</i>	Water
<i>Symbol</i>	Water as the symbol of peacefulness

The water as is the symbol of the people that always bring peacefulness based on Rote Dengka Ethnic point of view. This case we can found in the friendship, society and couple. The popular expression using the symbol of water in the Rote Dengka Ethnic, namely: *'Dadi ono oe salalu mendi ma'asufu sa mamana manggaha kaladana'*, in Indonesia **'Jadilah seperti air sejuk yang selalu menghadirkan kedamaian di tengah-tengah amarah, panas hati dan pertikaian'** (English: Be like the cool water that always bring peacefulness in the anger, conflict and out of temper). Water is not only has a function as the cool giver for body and thirsty, but also, according to the Rote Dengka Ethnic, as the symbol of the people that always bring the peacefulness into the bad situation. For example: if a problem appear in friendships, so the other present, like the pouring cold water into the warm materials, to bring peacefulness so far that the situation back to normal. Water as the symbol of peacefulness is always taught along the Rote Dengka generations: that we must bring peace for others.

3.3 Water the Symbol of Strength

Table 3

Category	Symbol
<i>Object</i>	Air
<i>Symbol</i>	Water the symbol of strength

The expression of water as the symbol of strength in the Rote Dengka Ethnic is *'ndoe hela? mate boe sadi mendi oe na?a hulu? nea dei'*, in Indonesian, **'selapar apapun dan setelah apapun air sanggup memulihkan kekuatan'** (English: Even though we are hungry and very tired, a glass of water can restore strength). This expression indicates that water in the Rote Dengka Ethnic is inseparable from the life to the Rote Dengka Ethnic. Whenever exhaustion happened during an activity or a hard work, water is the first thing to consume. They believe that by they will be refreshed after drinking a glass of water.

3.4 Water the Symbol of Recovery

Table 4

Category	Symbol
<i>Object</i>	Water
<i>Symbol</i>	Water the symbol of recovery

The water is the symbol of recovery based on macro cosmic point of view, related to kinds of disease that a man suffered and cannot be cured by doctor or nurse. The

patience examining is normally done by a traditional healer, *Losi*, in the Dengka Dialect of Rote Language. The expression using water as the symbol of recovery that using by a healer in the Rote Dengka language, namely: *'Oe ia na meu hendi basa hedi laus, dila nggaut ma huku doki laefafu ia'*, the Indonesian meaning, 'Air ini akan menyembuhkan orang yang menderita segala sakit penyakit yang disebabkan oleh kuasa-kuasa jahat dari dunia gelap.' (English: This water heals all diseases caused by the devil from the darkness). The healing process performed by the Rote Dengka healer is still existing until nowadays because they believe the power of water that give magic by the healer has the power to destroy all diseases from the devil. The Rote Dengka Ethnic cannot be separated from their belief that related to macro cosmos and mystical power.

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3.6 Water the Symbol of Harmony

Table 6

Category	Symbol
<i>Object</i>	Water
<i>Symbol</i>	Water the symbol of Harmony

The Rote Dengka Ethnic well-known with their social life in their community and to each other like to a guest and to a new comer that visit their village. There is an expression about water as the symbol of harmony is **‘Bu, Susi, Odi A’a tuli minumala oe mbei dei’**, in Indonesian, **‘Kakak, adik, saudaraku, saudariku singgalah sebentar minum air dulu sebelum melanjutkan perjalanannya’** (English: ‘Dear my friend or brother or sister, please stopped over to drink a glass of water before your next trip.’). Based on the utterance in the Rote Dengka Ethnic about water as the symbol harmony, it can give us a message that the social life in this Ethnic and their way to help someone without looking at the appearance and the social status.

3.7 Water the Symbol of Forgiveness

Table 7

Category	Symbol
<i>Object</i>	Water
<i>Symbol</i>	Water the symbol of forgiveness

There is an expression that always use by the parents and the churchman to give advice for the young man and the couple that speak about the water as the symbol of forgiveness, namely **‘Oe fafa kolo-kolo nakando tasi loa, ana ngga perna fali neu mamananana’**, in Indonesian, **‘Seperti air yang mengalir ke lautan luas dan tak pernah kembali ke tempatnya atau sumbernya’** (English: Like the water flowing to the ocean, it never come back to its spring). Those expression is telling a special lesson about the high value of forgiveness. As human being, although we cannot forget the fault of our enemy, however, we do forgive since we are never being completely not guilty in each of our lives.

3.8 Water the Symbol of Patience

Table 8

Category	Symbol
<i>Object</i>	Water

<i>Symbol</i>	Water the symbol of Patience
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Water is the symbol of patience. A well-known and inspiring expression in this ethnic that is related to the symbol of water, namely ‘Patience’: *‘Oe fafa tili-tili na fanggi hendi? fatu mbia?, boema oe sisi mbei-mbei nasea? hendi mbia dongga? no fatu longgi? ma na foi? hendi hau hu mahele ala’*, in bahasa Indonesia, **‘Sedikit demi sedikit tetesan air akan menghancurkan batu karang yang kuat, mengikis sedikit-demi sedikit akan meruntuhkan tebing yang tinggi, bukit batu, gunung batu dan juga dapat menumbangkan pohon-pohon yang besar’** (English: Bit by bit the water drops, it will destroy a strong rock; eroding sooner or later it will be undermine the mountainside, mountain stones, hill stones; and even uproot the biggest trees). The moral message to us, that we must never give up of doing our best and we must never stop trying. We have to do something diligently, so that we succeed to achieve our aims, the biggest impact starts from a faithful small step.

3.9 Water the Symbol of Reborn

Table 9

Category	Symbol
<i>Object</i>	Water
<i>Symbol</i>	Water the symbol of reborn

One tradition in Rote Dengka Ethnic culture is known with ‘reborn’. This has nothing to do with the reincarnation, but the reborn tradition is actually about a living of prisoner. For example: Mr X has been put in jail for years, and the time had come, Mr X was free and picked up by his family to back home. Before back to his home or family, Mr X must clean his body in the river, or take a bath, as the symbol of cleaning his bad characteristics from his previous life. Mr X has reborn. The expression in the Rote Dengka Ethnic related to this reborn is: *‘Oe nameu hendi basa mafeo no mang-gaha? supaya ho sama ono a?ana mana bonggi feu?’*, in Indonesian, **‘Air telah membersihkan semua kesalahan dan perbuatan jahat dan engkau dilahirkan kembali seperti anak yang baru dilahirkan’** (English: The water has purifying all of your bad characteristics and your guiltiness, and now you are reborn like a baby). Mr X is a reborn man, hopefully, he become an obedient and good man in the family and society.

4 Conclusion

Based on the research discussions, there are nine symbols of water discovered in the Rote Dengka Culture. The nine symbols has been agreed by this ethnic and it has become a cultural properties taught along the generations. The nine symbols have valuable moral messages to the Rote Dengka Ethnic. To sum up the study, here are the nine symbols and the expressions:

1. The water as the symbol of love: *‘Oe fava kolo-kolo neu basa hita, neu hata-holi mamasui, hatata, deuhaka no lalalilo’*, in Indonesian, ‘Air mengalir

- dengan limpanya bagi kita semua, untuk orang kaya, miskin, orang jahat dan orang baik' (English: The water flows abundantly for us, for the rich, the poor, the evil, and the good ones.)
2. The water as the symbol of peacefulness: '*Dadi ono oe salalu mendi ma'asufu sa mamana manggaha kaladana*' in bahasa Indonesia, '**Jadilah seperti air sejuk yang selalu menghadirkan kedamaian di tengah-tengah amarah, panas hati dan pertikaian**' (English: Be like cool water that always bring peacefulness in the anger, conflict and out of temper).
 3. The water as the symbol of strength: '*ndoe hela? mate boe sadi mendi oe na?a hulu? nea dei*', in bahasa Indonesia, '**selapar apapun dan setelah apapun air sanggup memulihkan kekuatan**' (English: Even though we are hungry and very tired, a glass of water can restore strength).
 4. The water as the symbol of recovery: '*Oe ia na meu hendi basa hedi laus, dila nggaut ma huku doki laefafu ia*' the Indonesian meaning 'Air ini akan menyembuhkan orang yang menderita segala sakit penyakit yang disebabkan oleh kuasa-kuasa jahat dari dunia gelap.' (English: This water heals all diseases caused by the devil from the darkness).
 5. The water as the symbol of victory: '*basa mafefo manggaha mahatu enana dadi ma'asufu no oe*', means in Indonesian, '**Semua mantra-mantra api yang menyebabkan hawa panas yang datangnya dari si jahat akan menjadi padam dengan air atau menjadi tawar dan dingin dengan air**' (English: All fire mystical-utterances from the devil will be destroyed by the water).
 6. The water as the symbol of harmony: '*Bu, Susi, Odi A'a tuli minumala oe mbei dei*', in bahasa Indonesia, '**Kakak, adik, saudaraku, saudariku singgah sebentar minum air dulu sebelum melanjutkan perjalanannya**' (English: 'Dear my friend or brother or sister, please stopped over to drink a glass of water before your next trip.').
 7. The water as the symbol of forgiveness: '*Oe fafa kolo-kolo nakando tasi loa, ana ngga perna fali neu mamananana*', in Indonesian, '**Seperti air yang mengalir ke lautan luas dan tak pernah kembali ke tempatnya atau sumbernya**' (English: Like the water flowing to the ocean, it never come back to its spring).
 8. The water as the symbol of patience: '*Oe fafa tili-tili na fanggi hendi? fatu mbia?, boema oe sisi mbei-mbei nasea? hendi mbia dongga? no fatu longgi? ma na foi? hendi hau hu mahele ala*', in Indonesian, '**Sedikit demi sedikit tetesan air akan menghancurkan batu karang yang kuat, mengikis sedikit-demi sedikit akan meruntuhkan tebing yang tinggi, bukit batu, gunung batu dan juga dapat menumbangkan pohon-pohon yang besar**' (English: Bit by bit the water drops, it will destroy a strong rock; eroding

sooner or later it will be undermine the mountainside, mountain stones, hill stones; and even uproot the biggest trees).

9. The water as the symbol of ‘reborn’: *Oe nameu hendi basa mafeo no mang-gaha? supaya ho sama ono a?ana mana bonggi feu?*, in Indonesian ‘**Air telah membersihkan semua kesalahan dan perbuatan jahat dan engkau dilahirkan kembali seperti anak yang baru dilahirkan**’ (English: The water has purifying all of your bad characteristics and your guiltiness, and now you are reborn like a baby).

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