

Recognizing The *Mangongkal Holi* Tradition Ceremony of The Toba Batak Tribe As A Khazah of Local Wisdom: A Semiotic Study

¹Firdaus Aritonang, ²Raheni Suhita, ³Budhi Setiawan

¹(Student of Magister Program in Department of Indonesia Language Education, Sebelas Maret, Central Java, Indonesia)

^{2 3} (Lecture of Sebelas Maret University, Central Java, Indonesia
Corresponding author: Firdaus Aritonang

ABSTRACT: This article aims to explain the implementation of the Mangongkal Holi ceremony tradition. The focus of this research analyses the semiotic meaning of Roland Barthes which includes the meaning of myth in the tradition of the Mangongkal Holi ceremony. This research uses a descriptive method. The object of this research is impressions at the mangongkal holi ceremony and then collect data using interview guidelines and documents. The data that has been obtained is then analysed using the stages of data reduction, data display drawing conclusions, and verifying the data. The results of this research and discussion illustrate that there are myths in the implementation of mangongkal holi both during the initial implementation, namely martonggo raja (preparing for the implementation of mangongkal holi) to the closing of the laying of bones to a new place called batu na pir (hard stone). Suggestions for the reading public hopefully this article can be taken from the positive side of the implementation of the mangongka holi tradition

KEYWORDS: *Semiotics, mangongkal holi, local knowledge*

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the countries that is rich with a variety of regional customs and cultures. Customs and culture are parts that cannot be separated from humans individually or communally because they contain values, rules, norms, traditions, rituals, and laws. [1]. This also applies to the Toba Batak tribe. The Toba Batak tribe has unique, sacred and magical customs and culture, so it is considered something important, respected, valued and well preserved. One of the sacred traditional rituals is the Mangokal Holi ritual.

In the Mangokal Holi ceremony, bones are exhumed from previous graves and reburied separately. Once the bones of their ancestors have been collected and washed, they are put into small crates and reburied in a memorial (Batu Na Pir) that has been built. It is in this memorial that the bones are put together. The procession of digging up the bones and moving them back to the memorial usually takes days. This procession requires funds that reach tens to hundreds of millions of rupiah and for the Batak people to build the monument is comparable to respect for their parents and ancestors. [2].

The Mangokal Holi ceremony is believed to aim for *hagabea*, *hasangapan* and *hamoraon* (longevity, honour and wealth). [3]. Although times are changing, this tradition is still maintained to this day. However, this traditional ritual has undergone changes since Christianity came to Batak land. Christianity considers that this ritual contains elements of dynamism, animism, spiritism, and so on, so it is contrary to Christian teachings. [4] Therefore, religious institutions such as the church tried to monitor and adjust this ritual to the prevailing Christian teachings. Even so, there are still some values that still survive in the ritual, so this Mangokal Holi ceremony is still preserved until now.

Research on Mangongkal Holi has been conducted by [5] with the title "Local Wisdom Found In Mangongkal Holi" this study aims to look at local wisdom in the Mangongkal Holi tradition in the study found nine local wisdom values including humility, gratitude, responsibility, respect, blessing, mutual cooperation, prayer, prestige, and leniency in dialogue. This research uses Miles and Huberman's theory. The second research has been conducted by [6] with the title "Theological Review for Added Development of Batak Toba Community" this research discusses from a theological view. The findings that get first asking for blessings to ancestors is a sinful

act the gift of life is a blessing from God not from ancestors, then in the third study by [7]"Jakarta Batak Toba Subject Position in Toba Batak Mangongkal Holi Discourse: Laclau Discourse Analysis, the purpose of this study is to see how the discourse around the Mangongkal Holi ritual based on the results of the analysis shows that there is a contingency of Jakarta Batak Toba identity in the Mangongkal Holi discourse caused by individual involvement with traditional institutions.

Based on the description above, researchers are interested in conducting research on Recognizing the Mangongkal Holi Tradition Ceremony of the Toba Batak Tribe as a Khazah of Local Wisdom: A Semiotic Study. This research was conducted to find out how the preparation for the implementation of Mangongkal Holi and the myths contained in the Mangongkal Holi ritual procession using Roland Barthes theory. The findings of this research are expected to provide insight into the heritage of the ancestors, increase knowledge and increase tourism.

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Local Wisdom

Local knowledge is a form of cultural wealth in which there is original knowledge derived from the noble values of local culture. They claim the knowledge as their life to regulate the local community life that is passed down from generation to generation. Local wisdom has become a lifestyle for habits that are traditionalised by a group of people who are maintained to have a positive meaning that creates order between social life and the preservation of natural resources around them. [8]

Local wisdom is seen as very valuable and has its own benefits in people's lives[9] [10] The system is developed because of the need to live, maintain, and sustain life in accordance with the situation, conditions, abilities, and values lived in the community concerned. In other words, the local wisdom then becomes part of their wise way of life to solve all the life problems they face. Thanks to local wisdom, they can continue their lives, and even develop sustainably because it has its own benefits and values for people's lives.

2.2 Mangongkal Holi Tradition

Mangokal Holi tradition which means digging up human bones". The Mangokal Holi tradition is believed to be a belief in ancestors. This tradition was carried out before the entry of religion and the Mangokal Holi tradition was carried out in the form of a sacred Toba Batak traditional ceremony and lasted for 3-7 days depending on the type of implementation this tradition also requires a lot of money. The procession of this ceremony also invites the entire extended family of the bride and groom to perform the Mangokal Holi ceremony. Therefore, in the procession of the Mangongkal Holi ceremony, the bones of the ancestors buried in the tomb building will be removed. This requires the consent of the elders in the family. After obtaining approval, the bones are then cleaned and moved to the pond (Batu Na Pir), of course with a traditional ritual procession.

2.3 Roland Barthes Semiotics

According to Barthes, myth is signification at the level of connotation. When a sign is adopted repeatedly in the syntagmatic dimension, the adopted part appears more appropriate than other paradigmatic applications. This naturalises and normalises the connotations of the sign. The naturalisation of myth is a cultural formation. A sign in the first system becomes a signifier in the second system. According to Barthes, the sign is the first system, or language, as the language of objects, and myth as the language of metaphors. Mythical signification erases the history or narrative of the sign and fills the empty space with new meaning[11].

This research chose to use Roland Barthes' semiotic theory because it is more critical than other semiotic theories. According to Barthes, semiology aims to study how humans make meaning. Meaning, in this case, cannot be equated with communication. Meaning means that objects not only carry information that is communicated but are also structures of signs. Therefore, Barthes sees signification as a total process with a structured order. Signification is not limited to language, but also to other things beyond language. Barthes sees social life, in whatever form, as a system of signs itself.[12]

Roland Barthes Concept Map

Figure 2.1

1. Signifier	2. Signified
3. Denotative Sign	
4. Denotative Sign	5. Connotative signified
6. Connotative signifier	

Source: Sobur 2013:69 [13]

III.METHODOLOGY

This research is in the form of qualitative research which intends to describe the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subject, such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, beliefs, and thoughts of people individually or in groups [14] This research is a field research that uses Roland Barthes' theory on the third meaning, namely Myth. Data were taken from important sources from the Mangokal Holi video, moreover, researchers conducted in-depth interviews to obtain complete data from informants.

IV.RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

Based on the formulation of the problem, objectives, and research methods that have been set out in the previous section, the researcher will describe and detail: (1) how is the preparation of the Mangongkal Holi ritual ceremony procession and how is the myth contained in the Mangongkal Holi ceremony. The results of this research were obtained after observing the Mangongkal Holi video repeatedly carefully and thoroughly and conducting interviews with religious leaders, traditional leaders, local government, and people in the Toba region. The results of the research from each of the points mentioned are as follows;

4.1 Preparation for the Toba Batak Mangongkal Holi ceremony

Mangongkal holi (digging up bones) is one of the traditions in the culture of the Toba Batak tribe in North Sumatra province. This tradition has existed and has been practised long before the Toba Batak people knew Christianity [15]. At that time, they lived based on traditional beliefs known in the Toba Batak language as *hasipelebegun* (belief and worship of spirits).

The practice of *hasipelebegun* (peganism) in the Mangongkal Holi tradition aims to invoke prosperity, health and wealth to the ancestors who are worshipped as idols (*sumangot ini Ompu*). These spirits are highly respected and believed to intervene in the welfare of their descendants' lives. The practice of *hasipelebegun* (peganism) in the Mangongkal Holi tradition aims to invoke prosperity, health and wealth to the ancestors who are worshipped as idols (*sumangot ini Ompu*)[16]. These spirits are highly respected and believed to intervene in the welfare of their descendants' lives.

When the Toba Batak people became Christians, there was a debate between customs and Christian teachings. Where the church institution HKBP (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan) since 1952 has determined that all the implementation of the Mangongkal Holi tradition is a heritage of peganism because it is contrary to the Christian faith [17] [18]. When the Toba Batak people became Christians, there was a debate between customs and Christian teachings. Where the church institution HKBP (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan) since 1952 has determined that all the implementation of the Mangongkal Holi tradition is a heritage of *peganism* because it is contrary to the Christian faith.

The HKBP church council regulates the Mangongkal Holi tradition in the (*Ruhut Parmahanion dohot Paminsangon*) or HKBP RPP on pages 47-48 of 1987 which is valid until now. The church can approve the exhumation of bones for the first reason if the grave is damaged, the second reason if the grave has been displaced due to construction or natural disasters such as floods, or landslides, and the third reason if the ancestor died overseas. These three reasons are regulated in the HKBP lesson plan when the family will carry out the Mangongkal Holi tradition.

The implementation of the Mangongkal Holi tradition that is developing now can vary depending on the location and the family that carries it out [19] The following will explain the preparation for the implementation of Mengongkal Holi and the myths contained based on the results of observations while listening to videos and in-depth interviews conducted by researchers to people who know in detail the implementation of Mangongkal Holi;

4.1.1 Martonggo Raja



Picture 1. Martonggo Raja

Source: bumimerehindonesia2022

Martonggo Raja is a mandatory activity carried out by the Toba Batak community before starting customary activities such as weddings, deaths, and the implementation of the Mangongkal Holi ceremony. The purpose of *Martonggo Raja* in this tradition is to discuss and coordinate the dates, costs, and other details of the upcoming Mangongkal Holi ceremony. This is an important step in the preparation and planning process, ensuring that all necessary arrangements are made before the actual ceremony takes place. *Martonggo Raja* involves the participation of the three parties of *Dalihan Na Tolu*: (*Somba Marhula-Hula*, *Manat Mardongan Tubu*, and *Elek Boru*), [20] who are responsible for various tasks during the ceremony. Here is the myth in Picture 1 of *Martonggo Raja*;

In *Martonggo Raja*, the extended family must drop *las ni roha* (loyalty of heart) as stated by *Parhata* earlier "*Songon naung niarbis dihata patujolo, adong do ulaon sisada hasuhuton i, na sekeluarga besar (mar saompu) suhut sihabolonanna, Umumna ulaon mangongkal holi*". That this statement gives confidence that one should be careful. This is reinforced by one of the informants from Samosir who was interviewed on the day (Thursday, 19 October 2023 with Informant 1 Mr Pasogit Limbong) who said: "So the Upaca Mangongkal Holi is done very carefully, because it is believed that any mistake or disrespect can make the ancestors angry and bring bad luck to the family". He also told how when someone who carries out the tradition of the Mangongkal Holi ceremony is carried out with disrespect, usually after the event takes place or the event has been completed, there is a trance by the ancestral spirits, the family is sick, and there is a declining economy. The same thing was also conveyed in research [21]. He had seen trance during the (Batu Na Pir ritual). Therefore, when implementing Mangongkal Holi Batak people must show respect and honesty as the highest honour to parents or ancestors.

Furthermore, the myth in a common statement is enhanced by *Parhata* when *Martonggo Raja* as follows "*dipillit nasida ma sahalak nanigoaranna Partali Tali bonang*. (The selection of *partali tali bonang*, based on the priority scale of the eldest and the descendants of the firstborn)". That is, one person is chosen who is called *Partalitali bonang*. (The selection of *partalitali bonang*, based on the priority scale of the eldest and the descendants of the firstborn). This statement is based on the results of an interview with the 1st informant (Mr. Pasogit Limbong). "The eldest child is believed to have the strongest connection with the ancestors as stated by informant Mr Limbong", this statement gives the belief that the eldest child has an important role in the Mangongkal Holi ceremony because they are seen as the successor of the family line and are responsible for continuing family traditions and customs. They are also believed to have a special relationship with the ancestors, so they are the most qualified to lead the ceremony and dig up the bones of the ancestors".

4.1.2 Preparation for fertility



Picture 2. Performing the prayer

Source: Source: nitya.laksami 2021



Picture 3. The journey to the cemetery

Source: Romora mataraja 2021

Before the entry of Christianity in the Toba Batak region, the ancestors of the Toba Batak people adhered to a belief system called *hasipelebeguan* which involved the worship of idols. When carrying out the tradition of the Mangongkal Holi ceremony, begins with the construction of a monument with a special ceremony by serving special food as offerings which are placed on the *pengombari* (a kind of altar on the right/left inside of the Batak traditional house as a cover for the top pole) [22]. Then, an elder delivers prayers and rituals for the spirits of the dead Schreiner. The ritual is usually led by a *datu* (shaman) or an elder who is considered important in the Toba Batak tribe. [19] *Datu* (shaman) and *Natuatua ni Huta* (the most respected old man in the village) have high knowledge in the Batak tribe and are considered people who can connect directly with the spirit world of the dead to bless and bless the celebration of the excavation of the bones. However, after the introduction of Christianity, the Mangongkal Holi ritual was modified to incorporate Christian beliefs and practices so as not to deviate from its Christian beliefs. For the Toba Batak community, prayer is considered important when going to do *ulaon* (activities) including the Mangongkal Holi tradition because it is considered a form of respect and gratitude to God for the opportunity to carry out the ceremony. Through prayers and rituals, the Toba Batak people try to get blessings from their ancestors and protect their descendants from harm. Here are the myths in pictures 2 and 3 in making preparations for the cemetery; Myths in pictures 2 and 3 in the series of preparations for Mangongkal Holi;

In Picture 2 "Praying together before heading to the cemetery was not found to be a myth. This was revealed by the 2nd Informant (Mrs. Pastor Mercia Silaen, 4 October 2023) According to the informant, Mrs. Pastor Silaen during her dedication as a pastor did not find any strange events or events during prayer. However, he said that families when going to carry out this event must follow church rules so that God gives smoothness in the Mangongkal Holi space, on this occasion he told how an incident occurred that could be one of the families who carried out Mangongkal Holi who did not follow the rules and lied to the provisions of the church institution so that during the process of excavating the bones it was difficult to find the bones.

In Picture 3, Ogong's traditional music is believed to have magical values.[23] Results from an interview with the 3rd informant (Mr Hanaehan Banjarnahor, 10 October 2023) "*Dipalu do ongung songona mangirungi pardalanan ni keluarga lao tu tambak, Soara ni ongung i boi manjou holi-holi i*" This means that the ogung is sounded to accompany the family's journey to the cemetery and the sound of the ogung is believed to make it easier to find the bones of the ancestors of the statement. The same thing was also conveyed by informant 1 (Mr Pasogit. Limbong) "Ogong is a traditional musical instrument of the Toba Batak tribe. This musical instrument has several uses in the Mangongkal Holi tradition, (a) As musical accompaniment: Ogong is used to accompany the singing and dancing performed during the Mangongkal Holi ceremony [24]. This musical instrument provides a distinctive rhythm and melody, thus creating a solemn and festive atmosphere in the event, (b) As a means of communication with ancestral spirits: In Batak belief, the ogong also functions as a means of communication between humans and ancestral spirits. The ogong sound produced by the player is believed to call and connect the ancestral spirits with the real world, (c) As a symbol of the existence of ancestors: In addition, ogong also has a symbolic meaning in the Mangongkal Holi tradition. This musical instrument symbolises the existence of ancestors who are respected and remembered by their descendants. By using it in traditional ceremonies, the Toba Batak believe that they can maintain a good relationship with their ancestors and receive blessings from them.

4.1.3 Mangongkal Holi

Picture 4. The first digging process of the priest



Source: Jolis 2021



Picture 5. Throwing money



Picture 6. Washing the bones

Source: ginting&optionID



Picture 7. Given turmeric

In the process of Mangongkal Holi after Christianity (today) the grave digging must begin with a service held by the church followed by the organiser's extended family. before the event begins, the family guided by the church conducts a service so that the event runs according to the rules of the church. The church is also responsible if there is deviant behavior during the event [25].

The implementation of grave digging is carried out to take the bones of the ancestors, The implementation of grave digging is first opened by the church (pastor or elder) as a symbol that it is authorised and supervised by the church [6]. After the church has done the grave digging to start the grave digging event, the organising family is allowed to dig the grave and take the bones of their ancestors.

The bones that are found are handed over to the bones (relatives). The recipient of the bones from the ancestors is not arbitrarily given to just anyone but must be accepted by the bone. This is because the bone as hula-hula is a party that is highly respected by the nuclear family of the Mangongkal Holi ceremony organiser. The bones that have been taken and have been cleaned are put into the Apampang (container for storing bones) Usually the ampang is covered with Ragidup ulos. Here are the myths in pictures 4, 5, 6 & 7 in performing Mangongkal Holi; The myth in figure 4-5 from the interview conducted to informant 3 (Mr Hanaehan. Banjarnahor) "It used to be that after digging up the bones was finished, a banana tree was planted if the banana was fruitful it was believed to have prosperity, but now it is rarely done because it is against Christian teachings, he said. The same thing was also conveyed by Informant 2 (Mrs Mercia Pastor Silaen), "True, it is regulated in the HKBP RPP and it is forbidden to do because it is considered as worship or idol and contrary to Christian teachings.

In Figure 7 throwing money in the cemetery is believed to get the blessing of 3H including Hamoraon, Hagabeon, and Hasangapon. For the Batak people, blessings are not just about wealth, but also about having many descendants, honour, and authority. Next, in Figures 6-7, there is a process of cleaning the bones of the ancestors, which is usually done in three stages. Where the first stage, is cleaning with water. The second stage, with (kaffir lime). The third stage, with turmeric water. From the results of an interview with Informant 1 (Mr . Pasogit Limbong), "Turmeric serves to keep the colour of the bones from fading, Kaffir lime and turmeric are symbols of purity and prosperity for all families who carry out the Mangongkal Holi ceremony.

4.1.4 Batu Na Pir Ritual



Picture 8. Batu Na Pir (hard stone)

Source: Jakartapost

"Mangongkal Holi" is a tradition of the Toba Batak people in Indonesia. It is a series of ancient rituals involving the exhumation or removal of the saring-saring (bones) of ancestors from underground graves/ponds to a new place called "*batu na pir*" or "*tambak na timbo*" in an attempt to improve their social status in the community. "Batu na pir" is a multi-storey stone graveyard or building made of stone that contains several graves of people who are still related[21]. This ritual is performed as a form of honour to their ancestors. Nowadays, *Batu Na Pir* (hard stone) is more modern because it no longer uses carved stones, but has used cement formed like a monument. The monuments that are made are usually good and magnificent, this is because the carved stones used in the past had a side of beauty, so that they did not change the beauty of the stone monuments that were made good and magnificent. Batak customs at the time of death will be more visible if the custom is getting bigger, which means that more money must be spent, which is the origin of the statement that the more money is spent, the more visible Batak customs are [26].

The description in 8 explains the high cost of the mangongkal holi ceremony, but as a form of devotion to parents, the ceremony is still carried out. Traditionally, mangongkal holi will rebuild the kinship system, as those who are far away will be obliged to attend. Apart from financial arrangements, it is also necessary to prepare a time for all family members to gather in the hometown. In addition to the technical details of photography, the connotation in the 8th photo means that the Mangongkal Holi ceremony is rich in animist elements, however, it has been adapted to the modernity of the beliefs of the Toba Batak community. This can be seen in the 8th photo, where there is a cross object above the grave. The cross also symbolises the identity of the religious Toba Batak community. It should be noted that after the Batu Na Pir event is completed in order to put the bones into the place, a thanksgiving will be held in the form of worship and followed by a traditional event where each family will deliver a speech accompanied by music and tor-tor as a sign of joy [27]. However, from the results of interviews conducted by researchers, no myths were found after the completion of the Batu Na Pir event, so researchers did not include the semiotic meaning of the Mangongkal Holi myth, the following is an explanation of the myth of Figure 8 of placing the bones into Batu Na Pir:

The Batak community is known for its merantaunya culture. For the Batak community, migrating is a necessity especially for young men and women who will start a family and are expected to build a personal kingdom (sahala harajaon) and self-esteem (sahala hasangapon) which refers to individuals who can build themselves as leaders and respect better than their home area.

The Mangongkal Holi ceremony creates a moment for relatives to come together so that those who are far away can return home. Feelings of emotion and joy are felt when family members who have not seen each other for a long time are reunited. There are also feelings of sadness as they see the bones of their ancestors for the last time before being moved to a new grave. The mangongkal holi ceremony is a legacy from the ancestors of the Batak tribe since the time before the entry. The dominant cultural value expressed in the mangongkal holi ceremony represents the value orientation of local wisdom based on custom and religion. The result of the friction of these two conflicting elements is syncretism. As seen in the Mangongkal Holi ceremony which is an ancestral heritage of the Batak tribe, there are now religious elements such as the symbol of the cross and led by a priest [28] [29]. Religious elements such as crosses and religious leaders. Figure 8 shows that the essence of the original traditional beliefs of the people of a region will not be displaced by the teachings of new beliefs. As with culture, a higher or dominant and active culture will influence a lower and passive culture through cultural contact [30]. In its efforts to be accepted by the community, a new teaching will try to adjust to the existing teachings in an area. If both can be accepted by society, then culture and religion will be interrelated.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on data analysis from observations while watching mangongkal holi videos and in-depth interviews with traditional leaders who know the mangongkal holi event, the researcher concluded, In the implementation of the Mangongkal Holi tradition that is developing now can vary depending on the location and family that carries it out. However, the implementation cannot be separated from: (1). Martonggoraja: This is a mandatory activity in every Mangongkal Holi ceremony. This is done to prepare or shape the implementation of the beginning to the end of the event in the Mangongkal Holi tradition, (2). Worship Activities: Before the grave is dug, all parties involved will hold worship activities and prayers according to their respective religions, (3). Cleaning of bones: After the bones are collected, they are cleaned with kaffir lime water, turmeric and placed in a new coffin, (4). Batu Na Pir or Placement of bones: The bones of the oldest generation are placed at the top while the youngest generation is placed at the bottom of the monument, (5) Feast: The family organising the ceremony is expected to provide food for all those present.

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