



Ornaments of Rumah Bolon in pematang purba: A semiotic study

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Abstract

The ornaments of Rumah Bolon (literally means 'big house'), or RB for short, in Pematang Purba, Purba Subdistrict, Simalungun Regency have cultural meanings and tend to show the characters of family, traditional figures and Simalungun society. With the discussion using semiotic study, the purpose of this research is to find out the form, function and meaning of RB's ornaments. The study is to find out assumptions that can be developed for future generations and to preserve the prevailing norms. The research used library, observation, and interview methods was helped by semiotic theory proposed by Zoest and Peirce. The results show that the RB's ornaments consist of bohi-bohi (face), sullepat, hambing mardongan (fighting goats), jombut uwou, ipon-ipon, morodor porkis, bodat marsihutuhan, hail putor, pahu-paku patundal, bindu matoguh, gatip-gatip, andor ni tabu mangganupi desa, boras pati, rumbuk sinandei, tanduk horbo, silobur pinggan, appul-appul, bunga sayur matua, rumbuk-rumbuk sihala, bunga hambili, palit, tali simuor-muor, bunga bongbong, sisik ni tanggiling, paria-paria, harungguan, simaronong-onong, andor hadukka, bunga tarompet, sulih ni rotak, limut ni tao, horis ni hotala, bulung ni anduhur, and gundur manggolapa.

Keywords: ornament, rumah bolon, pematang purba, semiotic study

1. Introduction

Simalungun Batak is one of Batak sub-ethnics which inhabits Simalungun Regency and has its own uniqueness. Umpasa, limbaga and several types of Tor-tor still exist today as well as woodcarving which can be found especially in RB which became the palace of the ancient king at that time and which is still occupied by the descendants of the ancient king. Carving arts are often referred to as ornaments having decorations which contain meaning and symbols in each carving and show the ancestor's life.

The RB's ornaments have certain shapes and are closely related to local culture, which is in line with its definition that culture is thought, reason and custom (Dictionary of Bahasa Indonesia, 2005). Ornaments also have functions and symbolic values or certain intentions both in the form of views and philosophy of life of the makers. De Boer (1920: 1) argued that ornament is a sign of a highly valuable traditional design that is closely related to the original mysticism and beliefs, where the ornament has the meaning and happiness of its inhabitants.

The RB is located in Pematang Purba and becomes the typical Simalungun but now the condition of this RB is going to collapse. This research was carried out to respect the local and to create character building for local generations in particular and for Indonesians in general.

The RB has an area of $\pm 20,000$ m² in the plateau surrounded by ravines and valleys at an altitude of 1200 meter above the sea level. It is astronomically located at coordinates 02° 54' 50" North Latitude - 98°40' 50" East Longitude. The RB is the main building which is classified as horbou pinar type whose proportion includes the building length 2.5 to 3 times from the width of the building, and the height 1.5 to 2 times from the

width of the building. Horbou pinar is always made facing toward the rising sun. The building is equipped with 2 doors, such as, front (east) and rear (west) doors. The RB does not have windows and, instead, the rhombic holes, cross, oval, triangle, and so on are available (Sipayung, 1994/1995: 8).

2. Theories of Semiotics

The RB's ornaments have many meanings and functions that can be studied with semiotics which is a branch of science dealing with the study of signs and all things associated with signs, such as sign systems and processes that apply to the use of signs (Zoest 1993: 1). Peirce stated that sign is what represents something for a person or something that comes from experiences, thoughts, feelings, ideas and others. Signs can be in the forms of writing, art, literature, painting, and sculpture. In this case, Peirce proposed the terms icon, index, and symbol.

1. Icon is a sign that has relationship between the marker and the signature have simultaneous natural forms. Or in other words, an icon is a relationship between sign and object or reference that are similar, for example, portrait and map.
2. Index is a sign that indicates a natural relationship between sign or marker that has causal relationship, or a sign that directly refers to reality. The most obvious example is smoke as a sign of fire.
3. Symbol is a sign that indicates a natural connection between the marker and its marker. Relationship is arbitrary and based on conventions (or covenants) of society.

Ornaments as semiotic forms and symbols might appear in

very diverse contexts and are used for various purposes. Symbols are a term in logic, mathematics, semantics, semiotics and epistemology. They have symbol to represent an element in a traditional work that contain their own meanings. The RB's motifs become the symbols related to culture and such motifs are priceless. The purity of each engraving leads to its creator who has aesthetic and imaginary values and has devoted his hidden mind into realization and the ornaments are of course different from another.

In everyday life, signs and symbols are considered to have the same understanding. Symbol means inserting, mixing and comparing together, so there is an analogy among objects. Nobody can describe all symbol systems completely. The study of symbols (see Noth 1990: 119-120) there are, in general, four main meanings:

1. *Essential meaning.* It presupposes the existence of a certain hidden meaning and must be sought which is contrasted with the literal meaning.
2. *The Meaning of Vague.* The ambiguous meaning also presupposes a hidden message to be searched for. The seeking process can be done by way of interpretation.
3. *Irrational Meaning.* The irrational meaning is found in cultural anthropology as proposed by Frazer and Tylor.
4. *Meaning of Unconsciousness.* The meaning of unconscious exists in psychology referring to the unconsciousness of Freudian ideas and the collective consciousness.

Sometimes, symbols depend on collective agreements although Geertz sees more symbols as conceptualizing reality. Symbols are also history and suitability between lifestyle and universal order and this is revealed in symbols. Relationship of the above symbol theory relates between the symbol and also the ornament in which in the ornament there are symbols that have certain meanings in each carving. Noah Webster defined the ornament is something that works to decorate the decoration and jewelry. Ornaments can be formed by building elements although the basic form of the element is not a decorative form such as the standard board assemblies as the wall is not an ornament, but when the board is cut and shaped into certain patterns and has aesthetic value or looks beautiful then arrangement of the board into a decoration on the building is an ornament. It can be concluded that between the ornament and the decoration is identical or synonymous because it has a certain philosophical meaning. The form of ornament with the concept of interrelated theory of symbol are both related to form the meaning of the sign intact. Every phenomenon of the birth of the ornament is inseparable from the symbolic trait which is the experience of the mind, knowledge, and requires the emotional interpretation of its creator. Meaning of symbols in ornaments facilitate the Batak Simalungun to understand every form of each carving.

3. Results and Discussion

The RB is a Batak Simalungun traditional building that was built around 15th century and has 52 pieces of ornaments; however, there are only 35 ornaments which can be understood by the writers. The choices and places for ornaments in the house must be discussed in family meetings and hence, the determined ornaments are taken to the experts.

The followings are the names of ornaments which were installed in the RB.

1. Bohi-bohi (face) Ornaments

The shape of the ornaments (see Figure 1) look like human's face and resembles human head and this ornament is essentially made of wood that can be carved neatly in front of the RB. The function of this ornament is to safeguard the home owner from calamity and evil spirits. The Simalunguns still believe in the forces of evil spirits. They also feel sure that evil people are always not happy to see people who experience rejoices. For this reason, the ornament of face and head will be able to be a guard. The meaning of Bohi-bohi ornament is to keep a sense of harmony among people with different ethnics or with those who are member of the same ethnic. The Simalunguns' characters are marked by having good-tempered face among their fellows. This ornament is also addressed to avoid other people's bad intentions.

2. Sullepat Ornaments

These ornaments (consider Figure 2 in appendices) look like an elbow and is put on the wall. There are interconnection among the middle part of the square-shaped flowers which are black, white and red in colours. This ornament has the power to maintain the survival of the house owner. The shape of this ornament becomes the symbols of human beings' closeness with their nature and is believed to help them away from evils living around their neighborhood.

The function of this ornament is to anticipate plans of bad people who can disturb the sense of tranquility that lives in the RB. In ancient times, the Simalunguns and other tribal ethnics always possessed envies when they looked other people happy. So, the Simalunguns made ornaments that they trusted could dispel all sorts of evil intentions. This ornament means to unite family members who should maintain their harmonious kin relationship and their secure conditions, to look after their country's unity, to avoid conflicts among races, and to guard local customs. Sullepat ornaments can also protect people from bad people's intentions. Since evil is usually invisible, it moves like wind that can infiltrate into any directions; as a result, the invisible bad intentions may destroy the RB into pieces. When an RB has the sullepat ornament, the spirit in the ornament will have fights with bad intentions. With the existence of this ornament the Simalunguns are saved from evils.

3. Haming Mardugu (the Fighting Goats) Ornaments

This ornaments (consider Figure 3) are made of wood being carved and sculpted to look like goats that are fighting. Fighting here means that the goats may maintain harmony among family members and guard them from evils. The function of haming mardugu ornament is to provide beauty among the Simalungun indigenous people and to show the art home. This ornament is meant to show the ability to solve house problems and to give passions to the RB.

4. Jombut Uwou (Peacock Crest) Ornaments

The ornaments (look at Figure 4) are positioned under the RB's entrance and its basic materials are made of wood; moreover, they are carved in the shape of peacock crest because peacock becomes an image of beauty, elegance and

artistic appearance. The ornaments are red and white as well as essentially black in colour. The motifs of the ornaments depict the signs of mutual respect among people in society. This ornament is trusted by the Simalungun people because it destroys evil intentions that seems to disrupt the harmony and tranquility of the home owner.

The function of jombut uwou ornament is to ward off evil intentions that will disrupt the consolation of the empress and family tranquility, as well as to provide harmonious relationships for the house family members. In ancient times, the Simalunguns believed in the existence of evil spirits that can disturb peace in family life. So the people of Simalungun made a denial by putting the ornament to ward off the evil spirit. The meaning of this ornament is to reject the evil intention in the family since every evil intention never seems to be straightforward.

5. Ipon-ipon (Teeth) Ornaments

The shape of this ipon-ipon ornaments (consider Figure 5) is positioned below and used as a pole or foundation. This ornament is designed to look like teeth which are red, black, and white in colours, and has regular teeth arrangement which is considered to be the basic patterns in the curve shape and is made of wood. All these colors are meant to show the honesty and mutual harmony in every life in the Bolon house. The function of the ipon-ipon ornaments are to describe the nature of honesty between the RB's residents and the people in the neighbourhood. The ornaments also serve to resist reinforcements when there is anyone who is jealous. These can give a good impression of two carvings or embellishments. The meaning of these ipon-ipon ornaments show the beauty of a respectable family. The meaning of beauty here is shown to look like well-arranged teeth. The main point is that the community has harmonious relationship with Simalungun society.

6. Porkis Marodor (Ants in Queue) Ornaments

Marodor Porkis ornaments (look at Figure 6) are placed at the left front position in the RB and are adjacent to other carvings; these other carvings can create beauty to the porkis marodor. The technique of making is by carved and then sculpted so that the ornaments look like ants lining in queue. There are no negative or mystical elements while making these ornaments. Basically, these ants show the regularity and craft to create a good cooperation in the RB.

The function of this marchorous porkis ornament is to reject all forms of reinforcements that come to the people of Simalunguns who do not want to feel disturbed by their tranquility in the RB. These ornaments also explain the unforeseen state of danger. Family members must know each task so that they can be protected from harm. The meaning of these ornaments are to deliver a lesson about how ants go hand in hand, are diligent and regular in carrying out their respective duties.

7. Bodat Marsihutuhan (Monkeys looking for lice each other) Ornaments

The ornaments (see Figure 7) are placed behind the RB being adjacent to other ornaments. The motifs are taken from images of two monkeys looking for lice mutually. The ornaments are formed in house and purely give a sense of beauty. The

function is to reject all intentions of bad people who try to disturb the peace within the customary family of the bolon house. The meaning is remind the Simalunguns to work together in solving their burdens, avoiding noises and maintaining order or tranquility in every family.

8. Hail Putor Ornaments (Swivel Hook)

These ornaments (Have a look at Figure 8) are interrelated with the bolon house poles. The motifs look like black, white, and red hook. The ornaments have no mystical elements and their function is to show a familial relationship, so that the kinship position looks better and more harmonious. In the past, the Simalunguns believed in supernatural beings; therefore, they prayed for the creatures to give happiness. The meaning is to expand and strengthen kin relationship, to give a very beautiful impression, and to glorify for the house bolon.

9. Pahu-pahu patundal Ornaments (Fern turned around)

The form of a patundal orchard (see Figure 9) is an example of a fern plant that resembles the fern-tops of the fern at the top that lean against each other in different directions. Its position is above the house standing upright. The ornaments are patterned with a series of plants with a very regular arrangement facing the same direction. They are made of wood and function to show the generosity or kindness of the Simalunguns in their daily activities, to show togetherness and to provide freshness in the house because they are placed in front of the house. The meaning is to give a picture of the fern-buds leaning at different directions. The ornaments are also to show a sense of togetherness. If there are people who have bad intentions and who will disrupt the tranquility of the bolon homeowners, they will work together to fight it.

10. Bindu Matoguh Ornaments (Bindu Matoguh)

The shape of these ornaments (consider Figure 10) has two facets with four facets overlapping each other. Of the eight corners, they represent defensive strategies at all directions. The purpose is to get rid of things that are not good and to keep the environment and society away from evil spirits. The ornaments are geometrically patterned with the basic materials made of wood. The function is to get rid of bad things because the Simalunguns assume that not everyone is good so they should keep their members safe when they especially go hunting or visit another village. The meaning is to seek power to save themselves and to see the concrete and the abstract. The meaning is related to concepts of eight directions of wind: the ancient 'wind', the 'southeast', the 'south', the 'southwest', the 'western', the 'western', the 'northwest', and the 'northern'.

11. Gatip-gatip (head of Gatip snake) Ornaments

The ornaments (look at Figure 11) resemble the head of a poisonous snake which becomes the picture of ghostly snake head that lines up each other in black, red and white colours. These gatip-gatip is positioned as the decoration of yeast panie cloth, bones or hoods of Simalungun women. The function is to signal the rapid changing to invite fortune and to obtain good things. The meaning of the gatip-gatip ornaments is to wait for the arrival of fortune which can be used to have a better life for the Simalunguns.

12. Andorni Tabu Mangganupi (the tip of watermelon

leaf) Ornaments

The ornaments (see Figure 12) look like the tips of water melon leaves spreading in all directions and describe the ability of the Simalunguns to blend in and to adapt with all kinds of different societies. The function is to create beautiful atmospheres around the tubes of reeds, tullak (looms), and jewelry boxes. The meaning is to create unity among the Simalunguns in their villages and country.

13. Boraspati Ornaments

Boraspati is a kind of animal that looks like a lizard and has geometric shape. The shape of the ornaments (consider Figure 13) is found on the wall as part of the bolon house placed between the bamboo edge so it looks squiggly. The meaning is to symbolize the power to protect family members or kings from bad people or spirit.

14. Rumbak-rumbak Sinandei Ornaments

The shape of the ornaments (Figure 14) is found in the pole and it is carved in the shape of a herb (sinandei). The function is to beautify the home in order it looks like beautiful girl. The ornaments are placed between sulleppat ornaments under the bolon house. The meaning is to maintain a sense of peace and loyalty to kings.

15. Tanduk Horbo Ornament

This ornament (Figure 15) is put in the upper part of Bolon house and below the ornament is exactly where the King's hall is being used. The function is to signify that the RB belongs to the King; moreover, there are also horns in the hall. The meaning refers to the symbol of greatness of a king who should guard his people's peace and prosperity.

16. Silobur Pinggan Ornaments

The ornament (Figure 16) is the flower of a plant which is being used for the antidote of poison and does not have mystical element, but only as a medical herbal. The function is to keep the bolon house from danger. Silobur pinggan is made of meranti wood in order it can survive for years and of flower plant like pumpkin that can be used for poison anticipation. The next function is to maintain harmony within the community. The meaning is to maintain the sense of cooperation and the strength.

17. Pinar Appul-appul Ornaments

The shape of the ornaments (Figure 17) looks like a butterfly (or appul-appul) and is put on the pole of bolon house. The function is to keep the strength and to avoid the catastrophe. The meaning is to maintain the cleanliness and to establish relationship among family members.

18. Bunga Sayur Matua Ornaments

The function of the sayur matua ornaments (Figure 18) is to bring beautiful atmosphere in the RB and the meaning is being used as the symbol of regional identity, and of a sense of unity to keep the spirit of brotherhood. Another meaning is to keep long life for those who implement harmony in the community.

19. Rumbak-rumbak Sihala Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 19) are like kincung flowers and found

in the resplank of the bolon house with the function to symbolize loyalty in society like sihala. The meaning indicates the attitude of sihala in which its leaves and stems are not disturbed when the fruits are taken. In this case, the Simalunguns must equally maintain peace among their family members. The meaning is to indicate the attitude of sihala.

20. Bunga Hambili Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 20) is carved red and white in the top pole of the bolon house and is placed adjacent to the other ornaments. The function is to be used as yarn materials for the Simalunguns and to protect from evil spirits that will disturb the peace of society. The meaning is as a decoration for a thrift ingredient in the use of yarns.

21. Pinar Palit Ornaments

The cross-shaped ornaments (Figure 21) are put in the back of bolon house. The function is to see people approaching the house. The meaning is to ward off evil spirits and to protect from infectious diseases.

22. Tali Simour-our Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 22) have red, black, and white colours and are tied with bamboo flats. The rope is twisted tight to bind, then tied to the left and right to look stronger. The function is to bind the load if the load is too heavy. The meaning is to symbolize togetherness.

23. Bunga Bongbong Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 23) are triangular, side by side with other motifs, and made of yarn with red, black and white colours and are placed being adjacent to other ornaments. The function is to reject bad plans and the meaning is to beautify and to decorate the coffin.

24. Bunga Bongbong Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 24) are place at the halikkip part of the back door of the bolon house and made of bamboo and woven in a black and white square. The function is to reject all intentions that can disturb the peace of society. Evil intentions can be sent by wind or by shaman's help and can damage the tranquility. The meaning is to ward off the serenity and to keep the security.

25. Sisik ni Tanggiling Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 25) are designed to look like fish scales which are very strong and hard-looking with black and white colours and are placed between the lesplank of the bolon house. The function is to defend from enemies' attack and to keep owners away from evil spirits. The meaning is to symbolize the power that is believed to be the defense and to protect the owners since the ornaments appear to be like fences.

26. Paria-paria Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 26) are positioned among the fish scales with red and white colours. The function is to beautify the other ornaments to look more tidy and beautiful and to destroy the evil spirits that can interfere with the tranquility of those living in the bolon house. The ornaments do not have

mystical element although they contain gentleness. The meaning is related to purity and beauty.

27. Harunguan Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 27) appear in white and red circles and symbolize the values for deliberation of consensus. The function is to overcome the problems in difficult situations and the meaning is to build relationships among family members.

28. Simaronong-onong Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 28) look like leaves of lush plants and their function is to maintain harmony and good cooperation. The meaning is to keep peace and prosperity and to avoid problems.

29. Andor Hadukka Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 29) seem to be like sweet potatoes and are installed on the bolon pole. The function is to declare fertility in the farming activities.

30. Bunga Tarompel Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 30) are found on the pole and look like trumpet flowers. The function is to mark a code or requirement and while the meaning is to symbolize a head who must be able to lead and to direct members.

31. Sulih ni Rotak Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 31) are put on the back door after being carved. The function is to create a passion for young

people to gain knowledge and virtue. The meaning is to stimulate young generation to grow like a rye bean and to have a sense of responsibility to parents.

32. Limut ni Tao Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 32) are posited on the pole. The function is as a sign to pay attention to the situation when villages are in danger. The meaning is to keep the Simalunguns away from catastrophe.

33. Horis Hotala Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 33) are located behind the door being adjacent with other ornaments. The function is to have long life. The meaning is to be used for medicinal herbs. Horis hotala leaves are kind of plants found in the local environment.

34. Bulung ni Anduhur Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 34) are positioned on the pole being adjacent to the other ornaments. The function is to make a bond of promise to persons making deals. The meaning is to establish relationships among family members and to realize promise.

35. Gundur Manggolapa Ornaments

The ornaments (Figure 35) are placed in the house corridor and function to beautify the RB. The function is to signify fertility, beauty and prosperity and the meaning is to have good harvests.



Fig 1: Bohi-bohi ornaments



Fig 2: Sullepat ornaments



Fig 3: Hambing Mardugu ornaments



Fig 4: Jombut Uwou ornaments

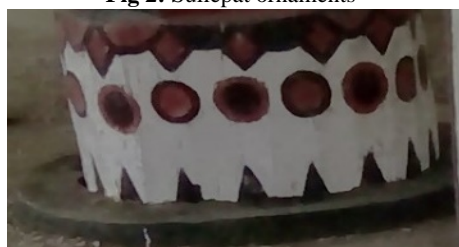


Fig 5: Ipon-ipon ornaments



Fig 6: Porkis Marodor ornaments



Fig 7: Bodat Marsihutuhan ornaments



Fig 8: Hail Putor ornaments



Fig 9: Pahu-pahu patundal ornaments



Fig 10: Bindu Matoguh ornaments



Fig 11: Gatip-gatip ornaments



Fig 12: Andorni Tabu Mangganupi ornaments



Fig 13: Boras Pati ornament



Fig 14: Rumbak-rumbak Sinandei ornament



Fig 15: Tanduk Horbo ornament

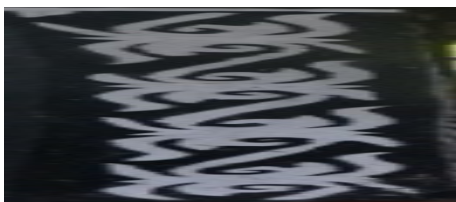


Fig 16: Silobur Pinggan ornament



Fig 17: Pinar Appul-appul ornament



Fig 18: Bunga Sayur Matua ornament



Fig 19: Rumbak-rumbak Sihala Ornament



Fig 20: Bunga Hambili ornament



Fig 21: Pinar Palit Ornament



Fig 22: Tali Simour-our ornament



Fig 23: Bunga Bongbong ornament



Fig 24: Bunga Bongbong ornament

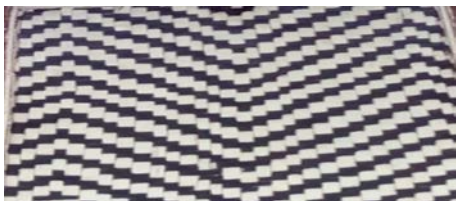


Fig 25: Sisik ni Tanggiling ornament



Fig 26: Paria-paria ornament



Fig 27: Harunguan ornament

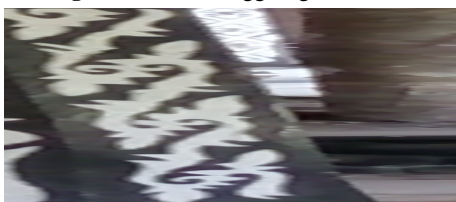


Fig 28: Simaronong-onong ornament



Fig 29: Andor Hadukka ornament



Fig 30: Bunga Tarompet ornament



Fig 31: Sulih ni Rotak ornament



Fig 32: Limut ni Tao ornament



Fig 33: Horis Hotala ornament



Fig 34: Bulung ni Anduhur ornament

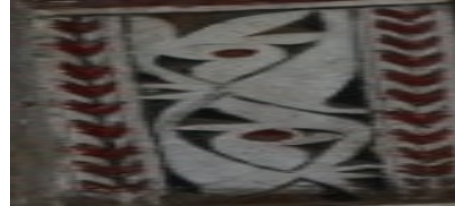


Fig 35: Gundur Manggolapa ornament

4. Conclusions

It can be concluded that the Rumah Bolon has 35 ornaments which have certain functions and meanings. The ornaments bring local values in Simalungun cultural richness and contain Simalungun's specific and traditional characters. The ornaments also show impressions about harmonious sense of kinship, about keeping family members, about loving each other, and about keeping family members as well as about avoiding the disturbances.

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