



# Masks in Thathakan Performing Arts in Tuban: Ethnosemiotics Study

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**Abstract.** The background of the study was to give the academic sense of Thathakan performance in Tambakboyo district, Tuban Regency. The purpose of this study is to describe: 2) denotative meaning; b) connotative meaning, c) Ideology myths) the masks of Thathakan art performance in Tuban. The theory used in this study is ethnosemioticsvisual, the combination between ethnography and semiotic visual. The semantics theory which was chosen was Roland Barthes' theory. The approach was descriptive–qualitative. The data collection used observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with the artists and stakeholders. The data analysis was operated on two levels, those are 1) analyzing signs individually which include marks, codes, and marks' meaning; 2) the sign analysis which formed texts. The findings of the study are to understand that the masks used in Thak-thakan performances in Tuban are part of the mythologies for Javanese in the coastal area to cast out the evil spirits around them.

**Keywords:** Denotative · Connotative · Myth · Ethnosemiotics visual

## 1 Introduction

Based on the identification result in Tambakboyo district, Tuban Regency. There are twelve art performance groups. They are Thak-thakan in Tambakboyo village, Thak-thakan Bledug kenanti in Kenanti village, Thak-Thakan in Sendang Budoyo in Klutuk village, Thak-thakan in in Sobontoro Village, Thak-thakan in Dasin village, Pulogede, Thak-thakan Surolawe from Dukuh Pasatan, Cokrowati village, and Thak-thakan Gembong Singolawe from Belikanget village.

Thak-Thakan Bledug Kenanti in Kenanti Village, Tambakboyo District, there are 12 (twelve) masks, namely: *Thak-thakan Tirta*, *Landung*, *Sungkono*, *Gendruwo*, *Wewe Gombel*, *Bogem*, *Wewe*, *Basmo*, *Cokro*, *Untup*, *Slewah*, and *Kikik-Kirik*. The masks were inlaid, carved, and colored by Mbah Sadikan, the owner of the Thak-thakan group. The existence of Thak-Thakan Bledug Kenanti, since the 1960s as self-expression in the performing arts and entertainment for the surrounding community. The Thak-Thakan Bledug Kenanti can be seen as original because of the simplicity of the mask, clothing, and musical accompaniment compared to the Thak-Thakan Gembong Singolawe in Belikanget Village, Tambakboyo District, Tuban Regency.

This study was conducted to study the masks of Thak-Thakan Bledug Kenanti in Kenanti village, Tambakboyo district from the perspective of ethnosemiotics visual because, 1) coloring, shape, space, shade, texture, and typography of the original mask of Thak-Thakan Bledug Kenanti before the influence of modern art; 2) The masks of Thak-Thakan Bledug Kenanti can be understood as the ethnicity symbols of the Javanese fishermen who live along the coastal areas in Tuban; The value of mystical ethnicity of the Javanese fishermen is exposed on the Thak-Thakan Bledug Kenanti.

Ahdiyati study aimed to 1) explain the structure of the visual sign on the cover illustration of the "Second Trap (*Jerat Kedua*)" edition of Tempo magazine; 2) reveal the codes contained in the cover illustration. The theory used by Roland Barthes' visual semiotics includes the structure of visual signs and "Barthes' Five Codes." Qualitative research approach with interpretive descriptive analysis. The conclusion shows that the structure of Tempo Magazine "Second Noose" edition is composed of denotative markers that change their meaning into connotative markers [1].

Ari and Nuriarta's study aims to describe the visual signs and verbal signs as well as the meanings presented in Kuncir's two works. The two selected works are works that have a close relationship with *rerajahan*. This study uses a descriptive design with qualitative methods. The type of data in the form of visual text and verbal text is contained in the visual communication design work by Kuncir [2].

Institutional Research; Irianto; Adib reveals the meaning of budgets in local governments. The theory used is Roland Barthes' semiotics, at the denotative, connotative, and mythical levels. Roland Barthes explains the relationship between signs and the personal and cultural experiences of their users. Research informants consist of executives and legislators who are experienced in the process of preparing regional budgets. The connotative meaning of local government budgets is the result of an agreement between the executive and the legislature [3].

Pasoloran's research aims to understand regional budget actors and the public to interpret community aspirations funds in regional budgeting and to understand, analyze, and answer why and how narcissism is in regional budgeting. The theory used is ethnosemiotics, which departs from the semiotics developed by Barthes. The research site for this research is the budgeting of the regional government of South Sulawesi Province, especially those related to the public aspiration fund policy with fifteen research informants [4].

Rasna's research aims to examine the form, function, and meaning of the *kawisesan* area in the Aji Blêgodawa's text. This research was carried out using an ethnosemiotics approach, namely a method of text analysis that connects text readings, in the form of images (*rerajahan*) to explore their meaning from the reading community. Data was collected through literature study, observation, interviews, and documentation. Data were analyzed by: 1) identification of *rerajahan* as nonverbal text, 2) ethnosemiotics analysis, stage I (denotative), and stage II (connotative) [5].

Supriatna's research aims to understand a) visual elements (shape, color, ornamental pattern) in Renggong Horse as a means of performance communication b) the meanings of visual communication contained in *acuk Kuda Renggong*; c) the universality of the meaning of visual communication on *acuk Kuda Renggong*. The theory used by ethnosemiotics, especially in examining and reviewing problems from the point of view

of visual and cultural signs, takes into account the relationship between the context of communication [6].

## 2 Methods

The theory used in this research is visual ethnosemiotics. The term visual ethnosemiotics comes from the word *ethno*, which means ethnicity (-or nation), *semiotics* which means the science of signs, and *visual* which means something that can be seen with the sense of sight. The three words after being integrated have the meaning of the science of signs that can be seen with the senses based on the understanding of the cultural stakeholder community.

In analyzing masks from the aspect of color, the discipline of semiotics is used, which is the science that examines the system of signs, symbols, or symbols in the context of the lives of people who have this cultural system. The semiotics chosen in this study is the Barthes model. This model discusses everyday phenomena. In Barthes' concept, the connotative sign does not only have an additional meaning but also contains both parts of the denotative sign that underlies its existence [7].

There is a difference between denotation and connotation in a general sense with denotation and connotation understood by Barthes. In a general sense, denotation is understood as the literal meaning, the "real" meaning. Sometimes it is also confused with references or references. In Barthes's framework, the connotation is identical to ideological operations, which he calls 'myth', and serves to reveal and provide justification for dominant values that prevail in a certain period [8].

Masinambow divides the signs used by the community into 1) personal signs, (a) verbal signs, (b) linguistic signs, (c) paralinguistic signs, (d) non-verbal signs, 2) contextual signs, (a) fashion signs, and (b) environmental signs [9].

Analysis of the shape of the mask uses the iconographic concept of Alessandra Iyer (1998) [10]. In addition, a physiognomic approach was used to analyze the lines of the eyebrows, eyes, mouth, mustache, and the shape of the nose as suggested by Corson (1975) [11]. Physiognomy is the science that relates physical form to character and traits.

### 2.1 Research Method

This research has a descriptive-qualitative approach. Data collection was carried out using observation techniques, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with Thathakan artists and stakeholders. The visual ethnosemiotics analysis method operates at two levels of analysis. First, individual sign analysis, including signs, codes, and sign meanings. Ethnosemiotics is a scientific discipline that relates the reading of texts with the micro aspects of everyday life. Micro analysis leads researchers to observe phenomena based on the meaning that underlies social action and emphasizes the native point of view. Therefore, studying signs and language is no longer only at the syntactic level but also at the semantic and pragmatic level. The micro analysis involves direct experiences in people's daily lives dealing with texts. Second, analysis of the signs that make up the text, connecting a text with the macrostructure (myth, ideology) of a society.



**Fig. 1.** *Landhung* Mask

Text according to Piliang is understood as a combination of signs. Thus, the masks of the Thakthakan performing arts can be seen as a text [12]. At the macro level, the interpretive approach transforms into a critical approach (Fig. 1).

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Result

##### 3.1.1 Thakthakan Analysis: The Mask of Tirto and Landhung

In denotation analysis, the dominant color is dark with the mouth dominated by red. Three-dimensional shapes and representations of dragons, lions, or tigers are interpreted as hard and cool *Bathara Kala*. The texture is firm, and rough, the hair is disheveled with the black, red, and brown tones brightening each other. Connotation analysis, the color is firm and full of courage, and the hair color gives the impression of being dull with a three-dimensional shape and living in the astral space. Representation of the law of space and time with a straight rough texture, hair, and color that better reflect the world of darkness. Typography of a horny mask, temperamental gentle hidden but brave, always in the forefront and strong in power.

The myth of the mask is related to the ideology of the people of the north coast of Java towards wild animals: dragons, lions, and tigers, as creatures who have magical powers to resist logs (Fig. 2).

##### 3.1.2 Thakthakan Analysis: Sungkono Mask

The denotation analysis is the domination of dark coloring, red and white with three dimensional oval shapes. The texture is rough and strong, mainly dark and scary typography. The connotation analysis is the black domination makes the red highlighted and the white color on the teeth gives a more scary impression. It represents the face of astral creatures with strong, tough, and vicious. The hair color domination and the facial complexion express the untouched dark world. The typography of the mask is fierce and uncontrollable.

The myth of the mask is related to the ideology of the people of north coast Java against the narrative of the *gendruwo* spirits, Banaspati, who likes to throw tantrums, wild and out of control (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 2.** Sungkono Mask



**Fig. 3.** Kirik-kirik Mask

### 3.1.3 The Analysis of Kirik-Kirik Mask

The denotation analysis is the dominant of black coloring, the red mouth, the white fans, and the combination of black and red hair color on the oval head. The head shape is a three-dimensional forward oval. The texture is strong and tough, the strong color is combining dark elements with firm and fierce typography. The connotation analysis is the red, black, and white colors as the primary colors. In primitive civilization, it has a magical impression. The fanged face in Javanese is identical to *kala*, the evil spirit with a rough and straightforward texture which is a natural and pure expression as a symbol. There is an impression of the dark. The typography of the mask is firm, ferocious, and wild which represent evil spirit.

The myth of the mask is about mystical narratives about *kirik kikik*, *asu kikik*, *asu baung* as bad omens about the plague, disease, and the presence of evil spirits (Fig. 4).

### 3.1.4 The Analysis of Bogem Mask

Denotation analysis is black red white yellow primary colors with round face shapes and three-dimensional astral. The typography is straightforward, rough, wild texture with bright dominant colors and dashing brush. Connotation analysis is the primary colors of black, red, white, and yellow giving the impression of magical power. In this primitive civilization, it has a magical impression. The three-dimensional shape symbolizes life in the astral representation of *kala*. It symbolizes the dark world with a straightforward



**Fig. 4.** *Bogem Mask*



**Fig. 5.** *Wewe Mask*

rough texture with an unexpected natural and wild impression. The typography gives the impression of magical, spooky, and scary emotions.

The myth of the mask is about the ideology of the north coast Javanese community towards spirits who like to kidnap humans and be hidden in haunted areas. It can only be seen after the ritual is carried out (Fig. 5).

### **3.1.5 The Analysis of Wewe Mask**

Denotation analysis is a predominance of white color on the face, black hair with an oval shape, and three dimensions. The texture is rough, the typography seems magical with the dominant white color contrasting and looking bright. Connotation analysis is white color which gives the impression of the unordinary life of surrealism. Three-dimensional form is three-dimensional life living in astral space which is also known as *Wewe*, *Sundel Bolong*. There is a bright impression in a dim space with a straightforward rough texture that creates a wild, irregular impression. The typography is the character has matrimonial spiration (*raben*), tease (*kemenyek*), and flirty characters.

The myth of the mask is about the ideology of the people of the north coast of Java towards the spirits of *Wewe* and *Sundel Bolong* (Fig. 6).





**Fig. 6.** *Basmo* Mask



**Fig. 7.** *Cokro* Mask

### 3.1.6 The Analysis of Basmo Mask

The denotation analysis is black and white color, hair variation of four colors which are green, red, white, and blue with three dimensions oval shape. The typography has a rough texture, a magical glow with a dominant dark color with white and clear lip color. The connotation analysis is that the color comes from the darkness in the form of an eerie calm face image. There is a depth of mystical feeling in the astral space with a natural rough astral texture which is a symbol of darkness. The typography is scary, vengeful, violent, and bullies.

The myth of the mask is about the ideology of the north coast Javanese people towards the spirits of *gendruwo*, *thethekan*, and other astral beings (Fig. 7).

### 3.1.7 The Analysis of Cokro Mask

The denotation analysis is the dominant color of red and black with a medium size round shape. The texture is rough and the typography seems mischievous (*gecul*), strange and scary with a dominant black color that emphasizes the red and white colors. The connotation analysis is the base color of wildfire (*alas kobong*) which is red and black. The three-dimensional form is an image of astral beings. The black color emphasizes the expression of darkness with a straightforward rough texture that creates a magical impression. The mischievous typography is weird and likes to annoy anyone.



**Fig. 8.** *Wewe* Mask

The myth of the mask is about the ideology of the people of north coast Java to the mystical narrative of the bald devil (Fig. 8).

### 3.1.8 The Analysis of Wewe Mask

The denotation analysis is red and orange with three dimensions oval shape. The texture is straightforward and distorted. The typography seems romantic with the bright and luminous color domination. The connotation analysis is red which is integrated with hair color that creates the impression of lust. The eyes, eyebrows, and teeth give the impression of being friendly (*blater*). It has a three-dimensional shape that expresses a passionate romantic face. There is a bright impression and it also has a friendly impression, it also likes to greet with a smooth texture that expresses romance. The typography is clean and loves to dress up.

The myth of the mask is about the ideology of the north coast Javanese community against the mystical narratives of Joko Pelara-lara, Jaka Mursada, Jaka Lelana (Fig. 9).

### 3.1.9 The Analysis of Slewah Mask

The denotation analysis is half red and black with an oval shape, and three dimensions. The texture has straightforward distortion. The typography looks romantic with contrasting colors and looks bright. Based on the connotation analysis, the red color contrasted with black, and the hair color made of rags gives the impression of being neglected and miserable. The three-dimensional shape expresses an ambiguous face which is hard to guess. There is a bright and friendly impression with a rough and straight texture. The typography is bold, ambiguous, and unpredictable.





**Fig. 9.** *Sleweh Mask*

The myth of the mask is about the ideology of the people of north coast Java against the mystical narrative of Joko Sliwah, *Dhemit* (ghost) *Bangsih*, *Kacung* (lackey) *Bret* who sometimes cruel and sometimes pitiful, blood-sucking astral beings.

### 3.2 Discussion

The performing arts of Reog Ponorogo featured the figures of *Singo Barong*, *Kelana Sewandana*, *Bujangganong*, *Jathilan*, and *Warok*. *Singo Barong* is the ruler of the forest who is manifested in the form of a kingpin tiger with a peacock perched on it. This figure is a picture of King Brawijaya (tiger) who is controlled by a woman (peacock). The mask worn by *Jathilan* is in the form of makeup on the face, which helps performers strengthen their facial expressions to display the impression of beauty, grace, and passion. *Warok* is a troop in the story of Reog. *Warok* is depicted as a figure wearing a white long drawstring weapon, dressed in black, having supernatural powers and *Gemblak* (a young boy as an assistant) strengthens the character of a *warok* that is tough and powerful, the *warok* model uses facial makeup, namely a mustache, beard, and make-up. This makeup includes masks [13].

*Barong Kemiren* (Banyuwangi) has the form of a giant animal with wings and a crown with big bulging eyes and protruding fangs. The crown (*mekutha* or *tropong*) worn by *Barong Kemiren* is combined with *jamang* and *supit urang* coils. *Mekutha* or *tropong* is a cone-shaped head covering (Javanese: *kuluk*) which is commonly used as an attribute of *Wayang*, while *jamang* is a complementary decoration of *mekutha* and *supit urang* coils is a motif or model of hair make-up shaped like a shrimp. *Barong Kemiren* has four wings with two wings on each of the rights and left parts of its body. *Barong Kemiren* prototype is not found in any *barong* forms. *Barong Kemiren* is played by two people who are in charge of playing on the head and tail, so *Barong Kemiren* is associated with a four-legged animal [14].

The performing arts of *Banthenang* in Malang and Mojokerto regencies wear masks of bulls, tigers, and monkeys. These masks symbolize the character of the group depicted, namely: the bull as the people's struggle, the tiger as the invader, and the monkey as the cunning instigator group. The scene in the players shows the empirical reality of the battle between the people against the invaders [15].

The masks in the performing arts of *Thak-Thakan* are adapted to the ethnic values that develop in the fishing and farming community in Tambakboyo District, Tuban Regency. In the Thak-Thakan Bledug Kinanti art, Kenanti Village, Tambakboyo, which ethnographically represents the fishing community, there are twelve masks, namely: *Thak-thakan Tirta*, *Landung*, *Sungkono*, *Gendruwo*, *Wewe Gombel*, *Kikik-Kirik*, *Bogem*, *Wewe*, *Basmo*, *Cokro*, *Untup*, and *Slewah*. While the masks in the Thak-Thakan Gembong Singolawe community, Kalianget Village, Tambakboyo District which ethnographically represent the farming community have eleven masks, namely: *Thak-Thakan*, *Kikik-Kirik*, *Buto* (Giant), *Leginah*, and Women.

The movements of the Thak-Thakan *barong* mask dance in Tambakboyo, Tuban Regency, Reog Ponorogo, Barongan in Blora, Banthenang in Mojokerto and Malang, and Kebo-Keboan in Banyuwangi have similarities, namely: *caplokan*, *nathak*, *nglemah*, *glundhungan*, *jogedan*, *serangan*, *tapisan*, and *ngaklak*. The musical rhythms produced by the musical instruments of *kendhang*, *kethuk-kenong*, *gedhok*, and *gong suwukan* are monotonous but sometimes rise and quickly follow the movements of the Thak-Thakan *barong* dance (Javanese: *srempek*).

## 4 Conclusion

The masks in the performing arts of Thak-Thakan in Tuban can be interpreted as the mythology of the Javanese Coastal people regarding the exorcism of evil spirits in their environment. Mask of Thak-thakan Tirta, Landung, Sungkono, as a creature that has magical powers to repel logs. The evil spirits are represented by *Gerduwo*, *Kirik-Kirik*, *Bogem*, *Wewe*, *Basmo*, *Cokro*, and *Untup Slewah* masks. The *Gendruwo* mask disguised as a spirit that likes to kidnap humans and is hidden in haunted areas can only be seen after the ritual is carried out. The *Kikik-Kirik* Mask is a bad sign about plague, disease, and the presence of evil spirits. *Bogem* mask disguised as a spirit that likes to kidnap humans and is hidden in haunted areas can only be seen after the ritual is carried out. The *Wewe* mask disguises the spirits *Wewe* and *Sundel Bolong*. *Basmo*'s mask disguises *gendruwo* spirits, thethekan, and other astral creatures. *Cokro*'s mask masquerades as a mystical narrative about a bald devil. Mask To disguise the mystical narrative Joko Pelara-lara, Jaka Mursada, Jaka lelana. The *Slewah* Mask represents the mystical narrative of Joko Slewah, *Dhemit* (ghost) *Bangsih*, *Kacung* (lackey) *Bret*, a sometimes cruel and sometimes pitiful character, a blood-sucker mythical creature.

**Authors' Contribution.** Setya Yuwana and Titik Indarti conceived and planned the observation, interview, and focus group discussion. Setya Yuwana carried out data collection. Titik Indarti, Arief Sudrajat, and Buntas Pradoto contributed to analyse the data and contributed to the interpretation of the results. Prima V. Asteria took the lead in writing the manuscript. All authors provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, analysis and manuscript.

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