

A Semiotic Meaning Analysis of the Tradition “Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö” in a Traditional Wedding Ceremony in Afulu, North Nias

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the semiotic meanings and symbols used in the tradition of “Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö” in the traditional wedding ceremony of the Nias community in Afulu, North Nias. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative with a semiotic approach by Charles Sanders Peirce, which views signs as representamen, object, and interpretation. Data collection techniques included literature review, field observation, and interviews with local figures from Afulu, North Nias. The data consisted of words, sentences, images, texts, and dialogues. The primary data sources were journals and an interview a cultural expert from Nias. The results of this study reveal that the symbols in the “Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö” tradition carry semiotic meanings that reflect respect for women, the sanctity of marriage, and the sociocultural structure of Nias society.

Keywords: Nias wedding tradition, Semiotics, Analysis, Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna semiotik dan simbol-simbol yang digunakan dalam tradisi “Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö” pada upacara pernikahan adat masyarakat Nias di Afulu, Nias Utara. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan semiotika dari Charles Sanders Peirce, yang melihat tanda sebagai representamen, objek, dan interpretasi. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui studi pustaka, observasi lapangan, serta wawancara dengan tokoh masyarakat Afulu, Nias Utara. Data dalam penelitian ini berupa kata, kalimat, gambar, teks, dan dialog. Sumber data utama adalah jurnal dan wawancara tokoh adat Nias. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa simbol-simbol dalam tradisi “Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö” memiliki makna semiotik yang mencerminkan penghormatan terhadap perempuan, nilai kesucian pernikahan, dan struktur sosial budaya masyarakat Nias.

Kata kunci: Adat pernikahan Nias, Semiotik, Analisis, Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelago with immense cultural diversity. This diversity is a highly valuable asset that must be preserved. Each region has its own distinct culture, ranging from marriage and death ceremonies to belief systems, all of which communities take pride in. These traditions are shaped by people from different groups and regions, resulting in cultural richness.

In Nias culture, there are three essential components in a wedding ceremony: cultural rituals (custom), church blessing (religion), and civil registration (government). These three aspects are considered fundamental, as they establish a person's new social status within their family, relatives, and society. In Afulu subdistrict, North Nias, marriage is seen as a sacred event, and its implementation must adhere to established customs and regulations (according to Mrs. Nuriba Gea).

The Nias ethnic group, particularly in Afulu, has a traditional wedding ceremony that is uniquely their own. Before the wedding ends, the phrase “Fametou ono nihalo” is spoken,

which refers to the bride being lifted or carried out of the house by her brother. This symbolizes the family's love and respect for the bride (according to Mrs. Nuriba Gea).

After all ceremonial events are completed, the bride is lifted and carried a tradition known as "Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö." This act symbolizes the sanctity of marriage. That sanctity is reflected in the special treatment of the bride, who must not walk or touch the ground on the wedding day. She is treated like a queen [2]. "Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö" is a hallmark tradition of the Nias community and marks the culmination of a series of traditional marriage ceremonies. This oral tradition has been passed down through generations and holds symbolic messages and cultural significance for the community.

The reason for conducting this study is the observable decline of the "Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö" tradition. The lack of understanding regarding cultural preservation and the influence of modernization have led to reduced interest in the custom, with some viewing it as outdated. Furthermore, the influx of foreign cultures and globalization has led to a gradual erosion of Nias traditions. The absence of informational resources such as books, journals, and social media content about the tradition has contributed to a lack of public awareness. Interviews with residents in Afulu and individuals outside Nias revealed that even among Nias people, especially younger generations aged up to 25, many know the tradition by name only but do not understand its meanings and symbols.

According to Cerdasman Telaumbanua, the head of KAMNI (Nias Student Association), many people outside Afulu and even younger generations within the Nias community are unfamiliar with the symbolic meanings embedded in this wedding tradition, as there are no available books or written references for them to study.

This study aims to identify and interpret the symbols used in the "Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö" wedding tradition, to analyze them using a semiotic approach, and to uncover the traditional meanings they represent. Semiotics is the study of signs and meanings and provides a framework for examining value-laden and meaning-bearing elements in traditional wedding customs. This research is based on the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce. The semiotic meanings explored in this study are derived from symbols and processes involved in the ceremony, such as the bride's traditional attire, red umbrella adorned with beads, bamboo tied to the red bridal chair (which must produce the sound of *faritia* when lifted), and the customary messages and procedures within the "Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö" tradition.

It is hoped that this study will serve as a platform for preserving and appreciating local traditions in the face of modernization, which often threatens the continuity of traditional culture. Moreover, the study aims to contribute significantly to cultural research on North Nias, especially the village of Afulu, and to enrich the understanding of traditional wedding practices through a semiotic lens.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study utilizes a semiotic approach to analyze the symbols and meanings embedded in the tradition of "Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö" within traditional Nias weddings in Afulu, North Nias. A semiotic analysis is crucial because the tradition is not merely ceremonial, but carries cultural signs with historical and social significance.

The primary theoretical framework employed is Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, which categorizes signs into three types: icon, index, and symbol. An icon represents an object by resemblance, an index through cause-effect relation, and a symbol by social convention. Peirce's triadic model consisting of representamen, object, and interpretant is used to interpret the signs in the wedding ritual.

This study is supported by several prior studies on Nias traditional wedding practices using semiotic methods. For instance, [1] examined the symbolic meaning of *Mamabea Ni'owalu* (carrying the bride), applying a descriptive qualitative method with structured interviews [2]. While using a similar approach, Mora's study differs in its focus on the *Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö* tradition.

[3] studied the meanings and symbols in Nias marriage rituals using field observations, interviews, and documentation. Although the thematic concern is comparable, the object and region studied differ, with Mora focusing on Afulu's specific customs [10].

Additionally, [4] applied Peirce's semiotic theory to analyze traffic signs [1]. This study supports the methodological application of Peirce's model across various contexts for structured symbolic analysis. These studies demonstrate the adaptability of Peirce's semiotic theory in exploring the deep cultural meaning within local traditions [10], [9].

In light of these studies, this research fills a gap by offering an in-depth semiotic interpretation of the “Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö” tradition, which has not been previously examined thoroughly. The tradition includes significant symbols such as the bamboo litter chair, red umbrella, and *faritia* (canang), all of which carry strong social and spiritual meanings in Nias culture.

3. RESEARCH METHODE

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a semiotic approach, aiming to identify and analyze the symbolic meanings in the *Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö* tradition, which is part of the customary wedding ceremony of the Nias people in Afulu, North Nias. The semiotic framework is based on Charles Sanders Peirce’s theory, which divides signs into three key elements: representamen, object, and interpretant.

Data were collected through literature review, field observation of traditional ceremonies, and interviews with cultural figures. The collected data include words, sentences, cultural narratives, and visual representations of traditional symbols.

The symbolic objects analyzed in this tradition include ten main elements:

1. Wayo (red umbrella),
2. Lembe (shawl),
3. Baru Ladari (traditional bridal dress),
4. Ati-ati (earrings),
5. Naya (necklace),
6. Galadanga (bracelet),
7. Böböhögö (crown),
8. Lewuö (bamboo poles),
9. Gurusi (ceremonial chair), and
10. Faritia / Aramba / Göndra (musical instruments used during the procession).

Each symbol was analyzed using Peirce’s triadic structure to reveal its deeper cultural meaning. The analysis involved identifying the representamen (the physical form of the sign), object (what the symbol refers to), and interpretant (the interpreted cultural meaning). The findings were presented descriptively to illustrate how these symbols convey traditional values such as honor, protection, marital sanctity, and social transition.

3.1. Algorithm/ Pseudocode

| Algorithm 1. Semiotic Analysis of the “Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö” Tradition |
|---|
| INPUT: Symbols in the Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö tradition |
| OUTPUT: Semiotic meanings based on Charles Sanders Peirce’s theory |
| 1: Identify the main symbols used in the traditional ceremony |
| 2: Document the physical form, function, and context of each symbol |
| 3: Classify each symbol using Peirce’s model: icon, index, or symbol |
| 4: Determine the representamen, object, and interpretant for each symbol |
| 5: Relate the meanings of the symbols to the cultural values of the Nias community |
| 6: Conclude the symbolic role within the social and spiritual structure of the ceremony |
| 7: Present the analysis results in a descriptive and narrative form |

4. Results and Discussion

This study reveals that the symbols in the *Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö* tradition contain deep semiotic meanings closely tied to the cultural values of the Nias people, especially in Afulu Village, North Nias. Based on Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotic theory, each symbol was analyzed through three core components: representamen, object, and interpretant.

In the traditional Nias wedding ceremony, particularly within the *Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö* procession, various symbols are used as essential elements of the ritual. These symbols are not merely decorative or ornamental but are rich in cultural meaning. Each component, from the red umbrella to the ceremonial instruments, embodies values such as honor, sanctity, protection, love, and social status.

The following table presents the ten key symbols found in the *Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö* tradition, accompanied by descriptions and interpretations of their symbolic meanings based on a semiotic approach.

Table 1. Symbols in the “Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö” Wedding Tradition (Nias)

| No | Symbol Name (Nias) | Description | Symbolic Meaning |
|-----|--|---|--|
| 1. | Wayo (<i>Umbrella</i>) | A red umbrella adorned with beads, held over the bride. | Symbol of protection, honor, and blessings. It shows the bride's status as someone highly respected. |
| 2. | Lembe (<i>Shawl</i>) | A long shawl matching the color of the bride's traditional outfit. Worn over the left shoulder. | Symbolizes purity, dignity, and the bride's transition into a new social status. |
| 3. | Baru Ladari (<i>Traditional Dress</i>) | Velvet red dress with yellow and black patterns. | Red represents courage, yellow wealth and glory, black stability and seriousness. The dress represents completeness and cultural identity. |
| 4. | Ati-ati (<i>Earrings</i>) | Gold-colored, curved earrings worn by the bride. | Represents beauty, unity, and the importance of listening to positive words. |
| 5. | Naya (<i>Necklace</i>) | Large golden necklace that complements the wedding dress. | Represents authority, prestige, and the significance of the bride's role. |
| 6. | Galadanga (<i>Bracelet</i>) | Wide bracelet made of brass or silver. | Symbol of love and sacred commitment between the bride and groom. |
| 7. | Böböhögö (<i>Crown</i>) | Small decorative crown worn on the bride's forehead. | Signifies majesty, dignity, and sanctity. It highlights the bride's elevated status. |
| 8. | Lewuö (<i>Bamboo Poles</i>) | Bamboo poles used to carry the bride's chair. | Symbolizes strength, support, and the readiness of the bride to face new responsibilities. |
| 9. | Gurusi (<i>Chair</i>) | Wooden ceremonial chair placed on the bamboo stretcher. | Represents honor, dignity, and the bride's elevation in social standing. |
| 10. | Göndra / Aramba / Faritia (<i>Musical Instruments – Drum / Gong / Bell</i>) | Traditional instruments played during the procession. | Signify joy, blessing, and respect; they serve to accompany and sanctify the ceremonial moment. |

5. Comparison with State-of-the-Art

This research holds a distinctive position compared to previous studies because it specifically analyzes ten major symbols found in the *Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö* tradition using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework. The symbols analyzed include Wayo (red umbrella), Lembe (shawl), Baru Ladari (traditional dress), Ati-ati (earrings), Naya (necklace), Galadanga (bracelet), Böböhögö (crown), Lewuö (bamboo poles), Gurusi (ceremonial chair), and Faritia / Aramba / Göndra (procession instruments).

Previous relevant studies, examined the symbolic meaning of *Mamabea Ni'owalu* (carrying the bride) using a descriptive qualitative approach but did not apply Peirce's semiotic model systematically [2]. Similarly, Explored symbols and meanings in Nias traditional weddings in general, without specifically focusing on the *Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö* tradition [10].

Therefore, the uniqueness and contribution of this study include:

1. A clear focus on a specific procession within the Nias wedding tradition.
2. A detailed semiotic analysis of ten cultural symbols, each with visual and social-spiritual meaning.
3. A comprehensive application of Peirce's semiotic theory, which is not commonly applied in previous related studies.

This study reinforces the argument that oral and visual traditions must be structurally examined to uncover their embedded cultural values, particularly for the purpose of cultural preservation.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that the ten symbols in the *Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö* tradition hold deep semiotic meanings and reflect the cultural values of the Nias community, particularly in Afulu, North Nias. These symbols include: Wayo (red umbrella), Lembe (shawl), Baru Ladari (traditional bridal dress), Ati-ati (earrings), Naya (necklace), Galadanga (bracelet), Böböhögö (crown), Lewuö (bamboo poles), Gurusi (ceremonial chair), and Faritia / Aramba / Göndra (musical instruments).

Using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, each symbol was analyzed through the elements of representamen, object, and interpretant. The findings reveal that these symbols are not merely aesthetic but carry profound customary and spiritual meanings. They represent values such as honor, sanctity, protection, social status, strength, and blessings in the context of traditional marriage.

The study also found that many younger generations especially those outside Afulu lack awareness of the meanings of these symbols, signaling a cultural knowledge gap and the risk of cultural erosion. Therefore, academic documentation such as this is essential for supporting cultural preservation.

The main contribution of this study lies in its structured symbolic mapping of the *Famazawa Ono Alawe Nihalö* procession using a semiotic approach. It provides a valuable reference for future studies in cultural traditions, oral literature, and multicultural education. This research also opens the door for further exploration of symbolism in other indigenous traditions across Nias and Indonesia.

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