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Rumah Gadang as Symbolic Representation of Negeri Sembilan Ethnic Identity

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Abstract

Minangkabau is one of the important ethnic groups in Negeri Sembilan. Every ethnic group has common visual identity use for their identification. One of the symbolic representations of Minangkabau's is Rumah gadang the traditional house of Minangkabau. In Negeri Sembilan this unique form of rumah gadang can be identified in many visual identities of Minangkabaus' people in Negeri Sembilan such as corporate identity, restaurant's logo, building's design and virtual identity. This phenomenon is becoming the visual language in Negeri Sembilan's culture. I intend to analyze the visual form of rumah gadang as the symbolic representation of Negeri Sembilan Minangkabau's ethnic identity in this paper. The focus is on rumah gadang as a visual object and the analysis is using semiotic method. Based on this study, rumah gadang is becoming the icon of Negeri Sembilan Minangkabau's ethnic group and becoming their strong ethnic identity. As a conclusion for this research rumah gadang is a symbolic representation of Minangkabau's ethnic identity.

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Key-word: - rumah gadang, minangkabau, icon and symbolic representation

1. Introduction

The Minangkabau comprises a majority of the state of Negeri Sembilan in Peninsular Malaysia. As descendants from the Minangkabau people from West Sumatra, Indonesia, the Minang of Malaysia has a distinct culture and

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their own royal line that dates back several centuries. The Minangkabau speak the national language of Malaysia, but they have their own dialect that reflects lingual roots in the language of their Indonesian heritage (Joshua 2014). Within Malaysia, the Minangkabau refer to themselves as Orang Negeri or person from Negeri Sembilan. Malaysia is a developing country that struggles in a mainstream of globalization. Globalization always tends to change the direction of any culture in modern ways. In Negeri Sembilan this form of modernization reduces the greatness of ethnic culture. It also minimizes the symbolic meaning of traditional culture of minang in Negeri Sembilan. Globalization also creates different identity. Minangkabau is one of the ethnic group in Negeri Sembilan is also effected by the globalization itself. Cultural characteristic of any ethnic is related to their identity. *Rumah gadang* is the traditional house for Minangkabau people. In Negeri Sembilan the modernization and globalization have transferred *rumah gadang* into symbolic tradition of Minangkabau people. Many shape of rumah gadang can be seen in various places in Negeri Sembilan (Intimate Indonesia 2013). This paper will focus on the graphic form of *rumah gadang* as the representative of Minangkabau identity that appear in different form of graphical language.

2. Ethnic Identity

Identity may be defined as the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group (Trimble et. al 2010). Identity is thus best construed as being both relational and contextual, while the act of identification is best viewed as inherently procession. Identity is a self-definition of biological and psychological aspects of a person. In social context, identity can be referring to as a different occur between people (Trimble et.al 2010). It is a way that anybody can help perception on himself. Identity also can be defined as a specific message of representation for a person or a society. As a conclusion identity can be translated as a language of differentiation. The nature of identity for any person or society can be identified easily through race and ethnicity. Identity through race can be classified by gender, biological aspects and shaped on the other hand the culture of a society shaped a societies' behaviour, lifestyle and the psychological aspect (Trimble et.al 2010). Ethnicity is based on the physical fact and a cultural style. It can be refer to a group of people based on a distinct heritage. Ethnicity also can be based on the values, beliefs, cultural features and cultural practices. It is being formed upon how people discuss about group identities and any graphical features that identify the group ethnicity (Trimble et. al 2010). Through the cultural conception of self-identities and public perception defined the cultural self-identity.

3. Graphical Representation

The main issue in cultural studies is representation. The world is socially constructed in meaningful ways with graphical representation. The magnifying practice in the study of culture is through representation. Through this study images, objects and other material symbols being embedded. Graphical representation is important in constructing culture, meaning and knowledge (Lyons 2010). Graphical representation is designed into a sequence that brings meaning through the cultural convention of their usage within a particular context (Lyons 2010). For this reason graphical representation is called cultural codes. In visualization every meaning requires a motif. Graphical representation can be a good symbol of any cultural society. Graphical convention can be a communication tool for any cultural society. An icon takes its identity from its imitation of the signified, and stands for itself. The most obvious icons are photographs, image, painting, sculpture, and also the artifact architectural form such as *rumah gadang*.

4. Visual Communication

This is another type of communication relaying message to target through visual such as images, photo, graphic and text. The main factor of communication in visual communication is images. Seeing the images occur before the word. What we know and what we believe affect the way we see things. What we see will stimulate upon what we want to choose. Seeing is an active activity. By seeing thing perception occurs in our mind. Visual communication can have adequate capacity to identify images and message according to the ways they are referring to the world (Berger 1972). Visual literacy will have the capacity to remember the image (Berger 1972). As a conclusion images can be an important element in representing any cultural society.

5. Rumah Gadang in Minangkabau Culture

Rumah gadang as in figure 1 are the traditional homes of the Minangkabau. The architecture, construction, internal and external decoration, and the functions of the house reflect the culture and values of the Minangkabau. A rumah gadang serves as a residence, a hall for family meetings, and for ceremonial activities. In the matrilineal Minangkabau society, the rumah gadang is owned by the women of the family who live there; ownership is passed from mother to daughter (Kato 2005). The houses have dramatic curved roof structure with multi-tiered, upswept gables. Shuttered windows are built into walls incised with profuse painted floral carvings (Kato 2005). The term rumah gadang usually refers to the larger communal homes. Interior Rumah Gadang dominated by open room, except the bedroom(s). Rangkian (rice barn) as it shows in figure 2 usually put on the front yard of the house, one on the left side and the other on the right side. On the both wing of the main house always found Anjung, special rooms/place as a place where nuptial and the bride biting or coronation of customary chief. There are two groups' models of Anjung, Bodi-Chaniago and Koto-Piliang, Bodi-Chaniago not use crutches under the building, whereas in Koto-Piliang use crutches (Kato 2005). This fits the philosophy adopted for these two different groups, one group adheres to the principle of government hierarchy using anjung who use crutches, the other group Anjung (anjuang) as if floating in the air. Not far from the Tower House complex is usually also built a mosque that serves as the place of worship, a place of education and also live of the bachelor(s) in family members. Pointy shape like a buffalo horn at Rumah Gadang is also often associated with stories of Tambo Alam Minangkabau; this is memorial of event of glory when he beat Javanese on a buffalo race (Kato 2005). Of course is a hereditary oral story of Minang

peoples. Rumah Gadang rich with exteriors and interiors elements each element of a Rumah Gadang has its own symbolic meaning, which is referred to in custom speech and aphorisms. House have special carved wooden motifs in the wooden walls, pillars, and ceilings. The motifs and symbolize the culture. The main motif is floral based on a simple underlying geometric structure. The colors of the motifs derived from Chinese culture. Traditionally, the motif do not show animals on human in realistic form, because of the basis tradition is Islamic believe.



Figure 1 Rumah Gadang in Negeri Sembilan
Source: The Minangel (2014)



Figure 2 Rangkiang
Source: The Minangel (2010)

6. Rumah Gadang as Symbolic Representation in Modern Building

In Negeri Sembilan the roof shapes that form the horn of buffalo often use in modern building design. This shape gives the ethnic identity of Minangkabau. Big hall in Wisma Negeri as shown in figure 3 appears similar to *rumah gadang*. Wisma Negeri is used as meeting place for state assemblymen in Negeri Sembilan. Jelebu District Office as shown in figure 4 is another building in Negeri Sembilan that resembles the roof shape of *rumah gadang*. Many modern government and commercial buildings in Negeri Sembilan such as figure 5 for Seremban Municipal Building have adopted elements of *rumah gadang* style. The adaptation is done basically in structure and construction and the function of the modern building.



Figure 3 Wisma Negeri
Source: The Minangel (2014)



Figure 4 Jelebu District Office
Source: The Minangel (2014)



Figure 5 Seremban Municipal Building
Source: The Minangel (2014)

7. Rumah Gadang as a Symbolic Representation in Restaurant

Foods is one the famous traditions of Minangkabau in Negeri Sembilan. The activity of merantau has spread to Negeri Sembilan with ethnic culture including the cooking style, taste and practice. The main characteristic of Minangkabau food is spiciness. Traditional food of Minangkabau is famous for its nice taste of coconut milk, spicy chili and yellow colour known *gulai lemak pedas*. Rendang is also one the tasteful traditional food of Minangkabau. In daily life the Minangkabau food are sell in many restaurant in Negeri Sembilan. Figure 6 shows the roof form of *rumah gadang* use in a restaurant facade. Figure 7 also shows another strong roof form of *rumah gadang* use in commercial restaurant such as Kentucky Fried Chicken. Any facade of a building gives the identity impact beside the aesthetic and functional aspect of the building.



Figure 6 Restoran Warisan in Kuala Pilah
Souce: The Eats (2014)



Figure 7 KFC's Restaurant at Jalan Munawir Seremban
Souce: The Eats (2014)

8. Rumah Gadang as Symbolic Representation in Corporate Identity

Corporate identity such as logo is used by any commercial organization for getting public recognition. By having recognized corporate identity any corporate organization will gain recognition easily. Corporate identity can be in the form of graphic symbol such as logo, symbols and icons. It will convey the message of identity for any corporate organization. In Negeri Sembilan roof form of *rumah gadang* appear in many corporate logos. When appear and use in logo, *rumah gadang* is modified into stylistic form. The form of rumah gadang combines with other symbols depends on the main function of the logo. In creating brand awareness to the public colors and symbols are used creatively and become the main aspect of the logo design. Color is very important in giving any cultural identity and the root of cultural meaning. The traditional colours of Minangkabau ethnic group is red, black and yellow. These colours can be recognized in many cultural artifacts such as *rumah gadang*'s motif and traditional dresses. Logos in Fig. 8 are using those roof forms of *rumah gadang* colors to give the cultural identity of Minangkabau other than commercial representation of the brand.





Figure 8 Logos influence by the roof form of Rumah Gadang and Minangkabaus' colours

9. Rumah Gadang as a Symbolic Representation in Virtual Identity

This is an identity built in cyberspace. This is the space where information exists within a computer. In the Internet world any individual exist through log in and log out activities in a site. Certain characteristic of *rumah gadang* can be found in websites or facebook identities that being developed by people mainly originated from Negeri Sembilan. The contour of the roof form of *rumah gadang* is simplified. As the logo of any electronic media, simplicity is the main aspect of the logo design. The form of the roof is reduces to the minimum style and the multiple curved become the key identification of Minangkabau ethnic identity. In some of the image in virtual identity photographs are in certain respects exactly like the object represent. In some form it has representation to the nature of the object and has physical connection to the object. The photographic and graphical images of *rumah gadang* influence some of the virtual identity. Through my research also it is found that *Rumah gadang* becomes the symbolic representation of the virtual identity.

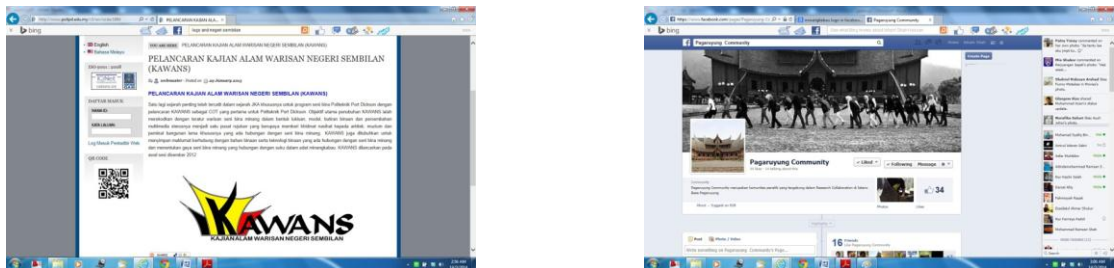


Figure 9 Minangkabau Influence in Virtual Identity

Conclusion

From this research we found that *rumah gadang* has unique form and able to be simplified in graphic visual contour. The roof form of *rumah gadang* appeared in many forms of modern building, restaurant, corporate identity and virtual identity. From table 1 below it can be concluded that different dimension and different elements of *rumah gadang* being used as symbolic representation. *Rumah gadang* used to identify the group of minangkabau in Negeri Sembilan. This house became the cultural code of Negeri Sembilan and related to the tradition and culture of Minangkabau people in Negeri Sembilan. In conclusion, the modern architectural design of a building has a certain characteristic of roof form is the iconic symbol of *rumah gadang* traditional house. All the elements mention represent message of ethnic identity of Minangkabau in Negeri Sembilan and relates to the land of Sumatera Barat. As a conclusion *rumah gadang* becomes the symbolic representation of Negeri Sembilan ethnic identity which is minang people.

Table 1: The classification of Rumah Gadang as a symbolic representation

TYPE	OBJECT	COMPONENTS	SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION
MODERN BUILDING	3D	ARCHITECTURAL FORM	MODERN MINANGKABAU
RESTAURANT	3D	ARCHITECTURAL FORM COLOUR	URBAN APPROACH MINANGKABAU MINANGKABAU
CORPORATE IDENTITY	2D	FORM TYPE COLOUR	COMMERCIAL MINANGKABAU MINANGKABAU
VIRTUAL IDENTITY	2D	FORM IMAGE COLOUR	PERSONAL/GROUP MINANGKABAU MINANGKABAU

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