

The Portrait of *Noken* As A Manifestation of The Existence of Papuans

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Abstract— The Portrait of *Noken* as a manifestation of the Existence of Papuans is seen from the perspective of the socio-cultural aspect, *Noken*, as a manifestation of the indigenous Papuan representation in its mandate, is only vague but its meaning is very deep. Its meanings can be both denotative and connotative. For example, the *Noken* called *mesin*, as a medium of transporting various types of goods, has a denotative meaning. In addition, it also has a connotative meaning, namely a person who is open and likes giving whatever he/she has in his/her *Noken*. The next connotative meaning is as a mother who carries the burden of life or as it is usually called *ifaj uk aromat mowran* (a women carrying a lot of burden), starting from the period of menstruation, conceiving, giving birth and breastfeeding, which is identical to a *Noken* called *mesin*. Unlike the case of *Noken*, which is called *mecoi*, this kind of *Noken* has two kinds of meanings, namely denotatively as a means of transporting goods and connotatively as a person who is closed or stingy. Both *mesin* and *mecoi* are used for reducing the amount of garbage that has been wrapped around the life of the nation and the state.

Keywords: *noken*, socio-cultural, denotatively and connotatively

1. Introduction

Based on the title above, *Noken* (Papuan traditional bag) is a language phenomenon that represents the people of Papua collectively as a socio-cultural community. *Noken* represents the culture of indigenous people who inhabit the land of Papua collectively.

In general, the land of Papua is culturally divided into 7 zones of indigenous territories, namely: (1) Mamta, Northeast Papua, (2) Saereri, North Papua, Cenderawasih Bay, (3) Domberari, Northwest Papua, (4) Domberai, West Papua (5) Anim Ha, South Papua, (6) La Pago, Central Papua, and (7) Meepago, West Central Papua. The indigenous territory of Mamta encompasses the areas around Jayapura, and it is inhabited by 97 tribes and stretches from Port Numbay Sentani, Sarmi Mamberamo Raya up to the region of Keroom. The indigenous territory

of Saereri encompasses the areas around Cendrawasih Bay, consisting of Biak-Numfor, Supiori, Yapen, Waropen and Nabire (coastal areas).

The Domberai indigenous territory encompasses the areas of the parts of North West Papua, around Sorong-Manokwari, Bintuni, Wondama, Raja Ampat, South Sorong and Tamberau. The indigenous territory of Bomberai encompasses the areas of Fakfak, Mimika, the surrounding areas of Fakfak, Kaimana, and Mimika coastal areas. The indigenous territory of Anim HA encompasses the areas in South Papua such as Merauke, Bovendigul, Mapi and Asmat. The indigenous territory of La Pago is an area in Central Papua (eastern part), which encompasses the areas of Pegunungan Bintang, Wamena, Lani Jaya, Puncak Jaya, Puncak and Nduga, Yahokimo, Yalimo and Tolikara. The last is the indigenous territory of Meepago, which encompasses the regions of Intan Jaya, Paniai, Deiyai, Dogiyai, Nabire Gunung and Mimika Gunung (Papua Customary Council, [https // www.kompasiana.com](https://www.kompasiana.com)).

2. Research Method

The method used to present the data in this paper is the qualitative descriptive method. The use of this method is intended to describe the matters related to Noken, in terms of how to make it, like knitting, weaving, and embroidering it, as a local wisdom and a representation, and, at the same time, as a socio-cultural representation of OAP (indigenous Papuans) who inhabit the seven indigenous territories. Method is a way that must be implemented or applied in scientific research (Sudaryanto, 2016: 9). The results of this study are presented informally using ordinary words with a few technical terms. This method is contrary to formal method, in which the findings are presented using signs and symbols (Sudaryanto, 2016: 241).

3. Discussion

Before analyzing the portrait of Noken as a manifestation of the existence of Papuans, let us reflect first a phrase in a declaration stated by the United Nations, “no one left behind” in terms of socio-cultural, economic and political matters.

Seen from a socio-cultural perspective, Papua is a region consisting of 7 indigenous territories. However, Noken, as a marker of identity, does not apply specifically based on the territories, but collectively and universally. Collectively means shared knowledge. Therefore,

Noken is a representation of Papuan knowledge. Universal means that the knowledge does not connote any discrimination in terms of racial, ideological, religious and other social stratifications (Banasuru, 2012: 24).

Certainly, each tribe that inhabits the seven indigenous territories has a different classification of Noken, and so does the meaning which certainly varies. Noken can be seen as cultural values, economic values, and political values. Noken, as a political value, has just been known in the era of 2000s instead of in the 60s.

As cultural values, Noken is seen as a socio-cultural identity of indigenous Papuan (OAP) collectively. Noken, as a socio-cultural, economic and political magnet, is a chain that cannot be separated from one another. Therefore, the existence of Noken needs to be maintained and protected as a cultural product of indigenous Papuans.

Noken has connotative and denotative meanings. Connotatively, the word Noken implies the meaning of a mother or a wife, while denotatively; it has the meaning of a means of transporting goods. Generally, the creativity and innovation in knitting, weaving, and embroidering Noken, as cultural values, have been recognized by the international community, in this case the United Nations (initiated by Unesco in France on the 4th December 2012).

Therefore, OAP (indigenous Papuans) must have constructive concepts instead of destructive ones in building the foundation of human values in a whole and civilized in the joints of community's life. In other words, there is no dichotomy of mountain people and coastal people. There are only indigenous Papuans. Noken, as a concrete form of human values, touches all of the elements of the community that inhabit the land of Papua as a small paradise that descends to earth. Therefore, Noken as an environmentally friendly transporting medium needs to be taken care of as best as possible. Those who throw garbage randomly indirectly insult the environment, both biotic and abiotic. Noken needs to be cared for as best as possible so that it can function properly.

Ecological literacy consists of two words, namely eco and literacy. Eco is derived from the Greek word *oikos* which means household, or, in a broader sense, a universe or earth as a place to live in for all habitats (Keraf, 2014: 127). Eco is then generally understood and used a word that refers to an environment. Etymologically, the word ecology is a combination of two Greek words, *oikos* and *logos*. *Logos* means science, whereas ecology means the science of how

to take care of and maintain the universe where the living things live. Ecoliteracy means a situation in which people have been enlightened about the importance of the environment.

Noken Papua will still exist if the natural environment of flora and fauna is always properly preserved and conserved. In addition, Noken gives the color to the Papuan identity as the next gold, pearl and diamond generations in the future. Noken serves a means of transporting goods and also an environmentally friendly material. Indonesia is the second largest producer of plastic waste in the world after China. Therefore, the State and its people must pay attention to environmental issues and protect the environment wisely by producing environmentally friendly materials.

Related to this, the government in the land of Papua has glanced at Noken as a replacement for plastic bags. The community needs to be creative and independent in innovating and designing various forms of Noken in order to replace plastic bags and sacks as a medium for transporting goods. The community needs to protect and conserve the forest against the threat of large-scale exploitations in the interests of capitalism, which has a negative effect leading to the degradation of forests, and also affects all aspects of life including flora and fauna. Consequently, flora, as the sources of the raw materials for knitting, weaving and embroidering Noken, will also be destroyed and disappear. Therefore, the protection and conservation need to be done, accompanied by scientific knowledge, so that the actions taken are always done using empirical ratios. There are a lot of exploitations of natural resources in the land of Papua which are massively done and in a structured way. Therefore, regulations in protecting and conserving the intellectual property and natural resources of Papua need to be issued.

In relation to what was described above, in this section, we will discuss the perspectives of Noken based on the data taken from three language ethnics that inhabit the Tambrauw regency of West Papua Province. They are (1) Irires tribe, (2) Mpur tribe, and (3) Miyah tribe. These three have the same perspective about Noken, but the way of naming the Noken is different based on the language used by each language speaker. The Irires community classifies the Noken into three types. They are (1) Noken which is called *mesin*, (2), Noken which is called *mecoi*, and (3) Noken which is called *mesino* or a small bag that is used for keeping cigarette pipes, tobacco leaves or cigarettes, matches and knives.

Mesin and *mecoi* are used as media for transporting goods in the forms of firewood, yams, sago, vegetables, bamboo, meat, small children, puppies and piglets. Therefore, based on the perspective of the Irires language, Noken is multifunctional. *Mesin* is symbolized as a woman (mother/wife) by the Irires community. So, if there is a relative asking a question *mesin bidau rekafe?* (Which is your Noken? or Where is your Noken?), it means that he or she is asking which or where your wife is. Or with the question *buk mesin fow e guros e?* (Already/bear Noken or not yet), meaning that he/she is asking you whether you are married or not (Syufi, 2014).

Mesin is more elastic compared to the other types of Noken. Therefore, it is always analogous as a mother. It is due to the perception that when a mother is conceiving/pregnant, the baby in the womb can be well grown up and more elastic like a Noken that has a lot of load. Furthermore, *mesin* is identical to a person that has a big neck or likes to give, because it is more transparent when carrying something, compared to *mecoi* which is not transparent so that it is identical to someone who is cheapie or ego to himself. The examples of *mesin* and *mecoi* can be seen in the following picture.

Picture 1



Mesin in the Iriresh language

Picture 2



Mecoi in the Iriresh language

Culturally, Noken is symbolized as a woman who moves into adulthood (*iker mar*). In the Mpur language, there are three classifications of Noken. They are (1) *Janduor*, (2) *Kuap*, and (3) *Janduwar*, or small Noken. If someone is asking you in the Mpur language, *Ambi janduor ketiege?* (Where is your Noken?), it means that he/she is asking you where your wife is. *Janduor* can be compared to *Kuap* (the second type of Noken in the Mpur language), which is identical to a stingy person or selfish. On the other hand, in the Miyah language or Karon, Noken is also classified into three types. They are *Ta*, *Ayu*, and *Ayukrah*. *Ayukrah* is a small Noken used for keeping cigarette pipes, matches, and knives.

The above three descriptions of samples are given with the intention of giving a clear picture of what Noken is to the Indigenous Papuan (OAP) without giving discrimination to the other Papuan ethics. Thanks to our best brother, Titus Pekei, a Papuan who has presented the work of OAP (indigenous Papuans), known as a world heritage cultural object at the UNESCO meeting in France, dated December 4, 2012.

Perhaps, in the future, there is not only the voice of Noken, but also the voice of mats or as it is often called *koba-koba*, arrows, *koteka*, and *asmat* carvings which are needed to be voiced, because Noken without arrows are like vegetables without salt. This also applies to *koteka*, *mats*, arrows, *Asmat* carvings, which are needed to be voiced in order to get places like Noken. Let's use Noken, and stay away from plastic bags, sacks, and baskets, so that we can avoid instant culture, being consumptive and consumerism. By this, we have preserved Noken as a product of indigenous Papuans.

Language, mind and culture are closely related to one another due to the fact that what the speaker thinks is what is spoken (Simpén, 2008: 11). The mindset of speakers produces a particular culture, and language reflects the thoughts and culture of the speakers. Whorf states that language has a central position, language shapes the way of thinking of its speakers and, consequently, language determines how they see the world (Simpén, 2008: 11).

Noken represents the symbol of Papuan human life that is more meaningful and dignified. Noken, as a cultural product, is interpreted in a complex and unique manner that represents the competencies and intellectuals of Papuans in designing artifacts. Noken, as a cultural value, needs to be inherited from generation to generation, so that the younger

generations do not lose their identity. Cultural values that are intact and complex are narrowed down into the values of modern civilization that are determinative, leading to a cultural crisis that afflicts humans to the basic foundations in themselves and their lives (Banasuru, 2013: 41). Besides, the younger generation needs to be aware of the cultural crisis that leads to an identity crisis. The English motto that needs to be properly reflected is as follows:

I hear and I forget

I see and I remember

I do and I understand

Hopefully, the English motto above reminds us that I hear I forget, I see I remember, I do I understand. Noken needs to be preserved so that its existence is still maintained. In addition, there is an ancient poem that needs to be narrated as follows.

I come --- from nowhere

I am ---- who knows

I'm leaving --- somewhere

I will die --- somewhere

In this context, a comprehensive view of sciences and values that develops in the community is needed. It is also necessary to examine the philosophical meaning contained in the culture of Noken as a cultural representation of indigenous Papuans, such as an ancient poem listed above.

4. Environment

The existence of Noken needs to be supported by an environment that is still natural because the material for knitting, weaving and embroidering Noken is taken from the forest. The raw material is in the form of *melinjo*, forest pandanus (*moifen*); this type of tree bark is usually slimy and grows in used fields. Therefore, if there is forest degradation and deforestation, then the materials for knitting, weaving and embroidering are left to be just stories. The occurrence of environmental crises and environmental disasters that we experience globally today is our own result. The dominant perspective and model are not only in science itself, but they are also in the social, political, economic and cultural fields (Keraf, 2014: 69).

The paradigm of thinking must be more holistic so that a balance and sustainability of the environment may occur, so that people can use the media, especially raw materials for knitting, weaving, and embroidering Noken. Palm Oil Company sacrifices the forests of Papua and this affects all aspects of life both biotic and abiotic. The environmental crisis is considered to occur due to human behavior which is influenced by anthropocentric perspectives. This anthropocentric perspective causes humans to exploit and drain the universe in order to fulfill their interests and needs without giving enough attention to the preservation of nature (Keraf, 2010: 49).

The human greedy attitude destroys both the flora and fauna and this affects all aspects of human life. The anthropocentric perspective gives birth to greed, and greedy attitudes and behaviors cause humans to take all they need from the nature without considering the concept of conservation, because nature is seen as being only in the interest of humans. Anything can be exploited as long as it does not sacrifice other humans.

Corporations that have a greedy attitude do not have a view of biocentrism; inevitably the disaster of nature will approach humanity. Literally, biocentrism is also known as an environmental theory. The core of this theory is that humans have a moral obligation to nature. Back to Noken, if it is not supported by flora, then there will be no raw materials for knitting, weaving, and embroidering. Therefore, the stability of the environment needs to be preserved, so that it can give birth to a balanced environment.

5. Novelty

Seen from the perspective of the socio-cultural aspect, Noken, as a manifestation of the indigenous Papuan representation in its mandate, is only vague but its meaning is very deep. Its meanings can be both denotative and connotative. For example, the Noken called *mesin*, as a medium of transporting various types of goods, has a denotative meaning. In addition, it also has a connotative meaning, namely a person who is open and likes giving whatever he/she has in his/her Noken. The next connotative meaning is as a mother who carries the burden of life or as it is usually called *ifaj uk aromat mowran* (a women carrying a lot of burden), starting from the period of menstruation, conceiving, giving birth and breastfeeding, which is identical to a Noken called *mesin*. Unlike the case of Noken, which is called *mecoi*, this kind of Noken has two kinds

of meanings, namely denotatively as a means of transporting goods and connotatively as a person who is closed or stingy. Both *mesin* and *mecoi* are used for reducing the amount of garbage that has been wrapped around the life of the nation and the state. There is a spirit of Noken as the natural material to replace sacks and plastic bags, so that the face of environment becomes better, and the biotic and abiotic environments are more dignified.

6. Conclusion

The portrait of Noken manifests the existence of indigenous Papuans. Noken has two relations in terms of meaning. The denotative meaning or real meaning is that Noken functions as a means of transporting goods in order to meet the needs of human life as well as serving as a medium for covering the genitals. Next, Noken has an additional meaning or connotative meaning which is identical to someone's wife. The portrait of Noken shows the existence of the indigenous Papuans in terms of the preservation of the nature of Papua, so that human relations are very integrated and more harmonious with nature, and have sustainability for the next generation. Noken is a representation of the culture of indigenous Papuans. It serves as an economical resource for the community. It is from Noken that people can commercialize it in order to get results to meet family needs.

Noken has also a political element in it, since it is mostly patterned with a Morning Star motive. Therefore, Noken needs to be preserved so that it does not become extinct but has a spirit. It also needs to be narrated and documented in order to be protected and preserved. Furthermore, the new generations should continue the spirit of Noken so that it does not become extinct. Based on the explanation above, we can learn that there is no modern of primitive Noken. The most important is its function in protecting our lives.

Noken as a cultural representation and identity of Papuans need to be preserved so as not to experience an identity crisis. We must always appreciate it as our own work, so that we are not considered as an instant human. Indigenous Papuans must be creative and innovative in knitting, weaving, and embroidering of Noken so that the new generation does not stand in a crossroads but has a strong principle in maintaining and caring for Noken as an identity and socio-cultural representation of the community of Papua. Besides that, they should maintain and preserve the

environment as a home for living things, so that they are free from pollution. Noken serves as an environmentally friendly materials in replacing plastic bags.

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Biography of Author



Yafed Syufi is a lecturer at Papua University, was born in Miri, Indonesia, 5th of December 1971. He joined to doctoral program (S3) of Linguistics Department in Udayana University September 2016, and the title of his dissertation is “Leksikon *Kesaguan* Guyub T tutur Masyarakat Irires Papua Barat”.