

Symbolism in the death ritual among the Bajaus

Abstract

The focal objective of this paper is to elucidate functions and meanings of symbols pertaining to death rituals among the Bajaus, with particular regard to non-verbal communications aspects. Apart from that, the paper also aims to investigate the significance and relevance of symbols in the real life of the contemporary Bajau society, especially among the young generation. Previous studies regarding symbols in death rituals or customs concluded that they can reflect social solidarity or cohesion, social status, traditional beliefs and even *weltanschauung* or the cosmology of a society. The problem is that, how can symbols bring meaning or make sense to people's life if they do not deeply understand or just take for granted the implicit meaning that lies behind those signs. In reality, modernization has brought new dimensions in the way of thinking among the young, who have a tendency to accomplish things more easily and quickly. Hence, this leads to a cultural transformation in which certain rituals have been simplified or even ignored. This study employs semiotic and non-verbal communication perspectives as the theoretical framework. The primary data will be obtained mostly from interviews and participant observations conducted at Kampung Kota Belud, Sabah, Malaysia.