

“HEROISM” AS AN ALIBI OF MASS MOVEMENT:
A BARTHESIAN READING OF THE APPAREL OF *BONEK*
(*PERSEBAYA* FOOTBALL FANS CLUB)

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ABSTRACT

Bonek refers to *Persebaya* (Surabaya local football club) supporters who are notorious for their anarchist behavior (bullying, fighting among certain football fans, breaking stadium facility). Whenever *Persebaya* plays, these *Bonek* are always present to support their favourite team, except in some occasions when they are not allowed to come to the stadiums by the national football committee for their reckless behavior. We can identify *Bonek* easily as they usually wear a certain apparel: green shirts with various pictures and words showing their support to their beloved team. This research aims to reveal certain ideology of words and pictures printed on *Bonek* shirts worn by them in the match. We are curious to know whether the shirt took part in shaping what they are and what they can do. In addition to the Barthesian semiotics used to analyze the data, we interviewed some *Bonek* to support our analysis. The study finds that the symbols printed on *Bonek* shirt represent the ideology of heroism derived from ‘Bung Tomo’ spirit during the colonial war against the Dutch. Another ideological reading reveals that the myth of heroism serves as an alibi of mass movement which often ‘justifies’ the way *Bonek* supporters conduct ‘unpleasant’ or reckless behaviors.

Keywords: Bonek; Heroism; Semiotics; Ideology; Mass Movement; Representation; Hooligan

1. Background of the Study

“*Bondho Nekat*”, a term in Javanese language, means “armed with determination”, stands for the word “*Bonek*”, a term for *Persebaya* football fans club. From the meaning, “armed with determination” seems to represent the sense of braveness, spirit, and full of energy towards various conditions with strong provision. It can be identified from the word “*Nekat* (*tekat*)”(determination or will power) which “provides” as representation of the word “*Bondho*”(provision). This statement is also asserted by *Cak Nun*, a cultural expert, who believes that *Bonek* can be the conveyer of cultural packets which cheer people up, because *Bonek* has energy that other group does not own (“*Cak Nun: Bonek Pasti Bisa Ekspresikan Budaya Kreatif!*”). Hence, it indicates that *Bonek* has its own energy and identity which is special and may be different from other football fans clubs.

At first, the reputation of *Bonek* was positive, but recently, it tends to have negative connotation with bad report in various media. For instance, as reported in online news media, *Antara* in 23rd January 2011, there were 30 *Bonek* members arrested because of murder and persecution toward *Persela* (Lamongan Football Club Association) supporters. (“*30 Suporter Bonek diserahkan ke Polres Lamongan*”). This case shows how *Bonek*’s behavior and actions in some occasions tend to be bad and become the focus of public attention, so that it is very often to be issued in several media.

The existence of *Bonek* has been recognized since some years ago. As reported by a site, the enthusiasm of *Bonek* formerly was represented in Senayan yard where the match was held. The society, then, paid attention toward the braveness of *Bonek* for their motivation to crowd Senayan. To get into Senayan and occupy spectator seat, they did various ways. There were so many people who went to Jakarta from Surabaya by truck while singing to gain money as a way to survive. There were even people who joined Pertamina’s train to go to Jakarta although they did not know whether *Persebaya* passed the final match or not. Their spirit and enthusiasm became an interesting phenomenon for Indonesian society (“*Sejarah Bonek Asal Surabaya*”).

In this case, we can see the way *Bonek* expresses their enthusiasm and spirit towards their beloved team, *Persebaya*. This behavior is close to what Jenkins (1992) describes about fans. According to Jenkins, "fans as isolated, emotionally and socially immature, unable to achieve a proper place for themselves in society, and thus prone to place grim with rich media fantasies" (14). In addition, it seems that *Bonek*'s action and behavior cannot be separated from the attributes they wear in such occasion. Most phenomena explained previously are apparently represented by the shirts they wear, especially in football matches. Most shirts they use represent the sense of belonging towards their team: shirt with man picture and several texts inside, Surabaya symbol, green color, and some other symbols. Yet, somehow their attributes, in which in this context is shirt, seemingly reflects the identity, who they are. According to Davis, our clothes reveal or communicate certain statement (103). That is why *Bonek*'s shirt here becomes the focus of the research because most of the symbols and words printed contain various messages. In an example, we found one shirt type, with a sentence of: "*Arema Jancok*". Based on one of *Bonek*'s member, the term *jancok* is a kind of condemnation that is uttered as representation of hate or anger towards something, which can be opposition team, *PSSI*, and other factors. In this case we see some kinds of resistance symbols of *Bonek* towards those they do not appreciate. In another occasion, we found the term of "*Persebaya is My Religion*"—a term showing a sense of admiration. Most of *Bonek*'s words that are shown on their shirts represent the great energy, bravery, enthusiasm, or even sarcasm. In the previous examples, we see how they show the pride and sense of belonging as *Bonek* members. Thus, the "messages" within *Bonek*'s symbols through fashion or t-shirt show certain ideology which will be revealed in this research by using semiotics approach.

Actually this study is not the only study on *Bonek* Surabaya. A research was conducted by Sukartiningsih (2006) entitled: "*Makna 'Bonek Sejati': Studi Interpretif Tentang Makna Bonek Sejati Pada Komunitas Bonek (Pendukung Persebaya) di Surabaya*" (The Meaning of '*Bonek Sejati*': Interpretative Study about *Bonek Sejati* Meaning in *Bonek* (Persebaya Supporter) in Surabaya). This study discusses about meanings given by *Bonek Sejati* ("true Bonek") to "true *Bonek*'s" symbol. "True *Bonek*" symbolizes braveness, masculinity, and pride. Another meaning found is *Bonek* as inspiration source, life spirit, and second religion (Ibid.). Our study here attempts to add what is not analyzed by Sukartiningsih, which is the attribute *Bonek* wear to show their identity. In this article, the cultural codes of *Bonek* printed on their apparel are examined to reveal the ideology represented. Hoed states that semiotics is a science to study the sign in human life, because human has skill to give the meaning towards various social-culture and natural (Hoed xix). Thus, the study about *Bonek*'s shirt by using semiotics is needed to reveal what ideology, culture and societal convention internalized by *Bonek*. Knowing the ideology of *Bonek* itself is useful to understand and criticize society's culture because they are also included as part of our society.

2. Methodology

The data used in this research are the pictures and words printed on *Bonek* shirts during *Persebaya* football match in Tambaksari field, where the match is held on 13 November 2011. *Bonek* shirts, which become the data source in this study, are worn by supporters who attend *Persebaya* match as audience. Almost all *Bonek* use it everywhere and every time; the users also come from various age and gender: children and adult, male and female. The writer considers all *Bonek* shirts as data, regardless the users' position in the audience seating area (whether they buy the executive or economy tickets) This data then is considered as primary data.

The match time chosen was 13 November 2011 because it was the only time when the match was held in that month. The match time was considered as proper time to see various patterns of pictures and words on *Bonek* shirt because almost all spectators used them in the match. The match held in Surabaya Tambaksari field is proper to be used as context because almost all of *Bonek* are usually there. In addition, this place was chosen because it was the only field that held the match in that month. Besides place and time contexts, the data taken is also limited to *Bonek* who watch the match in spectator seat only. This data was taken for reducing risk to take pictures from those who did not have ticket to watch the match or those who just waited outside the court. Thus, it is possible that there are still many words and pictures not yet covered by this study.

Besides the primary data, the writer also uses in-depth interview to some *Bonek* as additional or complementary data. In this step, the writer conducted three interviews: interviews with *Bonek*, common society, and a cultural observer. The writer conducted in-depth interview with *Bonek* to gain information about *Bonek* and their issues which is used as supporting data of meaning interpretation of words and pictures printed on the shirts (denotation level). Then, interview towards common society and cultural observer are also used to gain data about their perspective about *Bonek* phenomena. This step is important to support analysis on myth level of the text on shirt.

In this study, there are three steps of data collection. First is participant observation. Ritchie and Lewis argue that participant observation does “not only allow phenomena to be studied as they arise, but also offers the researcher the opportunity to gain additional insights through experiencing the phenomena for themselves” (in Budiastuti, 4). By participant observation, the writer can get additional data about *Bonek* perspective when see themselves as supporters. Hence, this data later can be correlated with the meaning behind words and pictures printed that already seen on their shirts many times. In participant observation, one of the writers acted as *Bonita* (the term for female *Bonek*) using *Bonek* attribute who followed the match held in Tambaksari field on 13 November ago between *Persebaya* and *Persibo* (Bojonegoro Football Association). There were some advantages of acting as *Bonita*. First, the writer could directly see *Bonek*'s behavior in supporting *Persebaya*. That is why this step is important to add the writer's knowledge and experience related to *Bonek*. Secondly, acting as *Bonita* could reduce the possibility of harm and conflict because the writer was considered one of *Bonek* supporters. Finally, the writer was able to take as many pictures as possible. Taking the pictures is the second technique of data collection. The writer took pictures from various seats in the field to look for various patterns printed on every shirt. The writer took three types of shirt pictures: shirt with picture only, shirt with words only, shirt with picture and words.

The third technique is interview. The data was taken from random interview. The informants were three *Bonek* in three universities in Surabaya: Airlangga University, State Islamic Religion Institute (IAIN) of Sunan Ampel, and ITATS (Adhi Tama Technology Institute of Surabaya), and three people from common society: a university student of Airlangga University and a couple in Gresik. *Bonek* interviewed were from university *Bonek*, because of their long experience in socialization with “unstructured *Bonek*”. Besides, the writer assumed that they are considered as “educated *Bonek*”, who can give brief and balance explanation about *Bonek* issues. Interview is tool for rechecking information that has been got previously (“Metode Penelitian Kualitatif”). Interview technique applied is in-depth interview. In-depth interview is used to conduct interview with small number of respondent to explore information about motive, behavior, and perspective on particular condition or situation (Boyce and Neale 3). Thus, the writer interviewed only several common people and *Bonek* in those three universities as explained previously to support the interpretation of text or pictures printed on *Bonek* shirt in myth level. analysis. Then, they will be correlated with symbols meaning represented through their shirts.

The analysis was conducted by using semiotic approach of Roland Barthes. In analysis, the writer examined linguistic message, concept of denotative and connotative of symbols (image, color, and written text), narrative concept, and myth within *Bonek* shirt. The analysis is supported and explained by previous data about history and meaning of *Bonek* symbols that got through in-depth interview with *Bonek*'s members who watch the match. Before analyzing the data, first, the writer classified the data as mentioned previously: pictures only, words only, and both pictures and words. After that the writer chooses several different pictures to represent each type.

3. Discussion

There are several symbols or words printed of *Bonek*' shirt that are portrayed in match between *Persebaya* (Surabaya Football Association) and *Persibo* (Bojonegoro Football Association) held on 13 November 2011 in Gelora Sepuluh November stadium. In this chapter, we present linguistic message, denotative message, connotative message, and the myth of pictures and words printed on three shirts.



Picture 1. ‘Ndas Mangap’

As explained before, the picture frequently seen on Bonek’s shirt is “Ndas Mangap” picture. These pictures show a man’s head opening his mouth and using hand band with Bonek word (or in some cases, ‘persebaya’) on it.

The linguistic message in this picture is the word “*BONEK*” written in bold capital letters on the handband of the figure’s head or “*Ndas Mangap*”. Next is the denotative message. As Barthes said that a non coded iconic message is about “the literal” denotation, the recognition of identifiable objects in photograph, or in the other words, this part examines on the literal visual message (“Rhetoric of The Image”) In the picture there is half of man’s head and cranium using head band with word “*BONEK*”. The man has brown skin, long hair, wide eye seeing the above, and ear pierced, while the cranium has white skin, long hair, ghost-eye, and ear-pierced. Both of them open their mouth and show their teeth, but the cranium’s mouth drips blood.

In connotative level, the pattern of man’s head or “*Ndas Mangap*” in picture 1 which can be seen in many *Bonek*’s shirts represent the character of Bung Tomo in late colonial age, as informed by Akif Al Fatih, coordinator of Bonek in Jabodetabek region. It was also confirmed by the creator of the image, Mr. Muchtar, who was inspired by the movements lead by Bung Tomo in 10 November 1945 (“*Ndas Mangap: Sebuah Trilogi (bagian 1: Mister Muchtar)*”). In the picture, the eyes of the figure are staring upward, which Akif argues symbolizes the optimism to face the future. This symbol is considered as hope for every *Bonek* to be optimistic fans club by being certain about Persebaya’s victory and also about *Bonek*’s existence. Hence, we often hear the jargon “*kalah, menang, mati, hidup tetep dukung Persebaya*” (lose, won, alive, dead, keep supporting Persebaya)” as a form of support from Bonek who attend Persebaya match in order to burn their spirit to gain victory in every match (Al Fatih).

In addition, the representation of word “*Bonek*” or “*Persebaya*” that is printed on head band shows the pride to be part of them, because these words are placed on the most respectful position in our culture, the head. Furthermore, the picture of cranium dripping the blood expresses the spooky and magical thing. This representation, according to Akief Al Fatih, is similar with character of most of *Bonek*, who is described as the super or powerful one, in terms they are able to survive to go to each Persebaya match every time and everywhere, although they have no any preparation like money and food. This behavior then, sometimes is described by Akif as “something magical” owned by *Bonek* when they go “*Mbonek or tret..tet..tet*” or terms of Bonek for following Persebaya match everytime and everywhere without any preparation as explained before (Al Fatih).



Picture 2 and 3

In picture 2, we see the words that tend to convey powerful or proud words. They are written in capital letters: “*PERSEBAYA KEBANGGAAANKU HIJAU WARNAKU BONEK SUPPORTERKU SURABAYA KOTAKU*” which means “Persebaya is my pride, the green is my color, *Bonek* is my supporter, and Surabaya is my city”. In picture 3, the linguistic message is : “*RAKYAT BONEK SURABAYA JANGAN RAGUKAN SEMANGAT DAN NYALI KAMI SATU NYALI... WANI*” (Surabaya’s *Bonek* society, do not doubt our spirit and our courage, one courage... courageous)

As we see in the first picture, the green color becomes the background color and the capital words are printed on black color, with dropped-ink style. In the third picture, we see the words on it are printed on green, red, and white color. The distinctive feature of this shirt is that the word ‘Bonek’ is printed with red color. On the shirts above, the words printed there contain pride sense. For example, in first shirt we see words: “*PERSEBAYA KEBANGGAAANKU HIJAU WARNAKU BONEK SUPPORTERKU SURABAYA KOTAKU*”. In this shirt we understand how being part of Persebaya, or part of *Bonek* is a pride. These words also reflect the spirit owned by *Bonek* when defends Persebaya in every occasion in the match. Either being defeated or won, *Bonek* always defend Persebaya. In this case, Akif adds that the representation of being proud as *Bonek* is manifested by joining Persebaya match in every time and everywhere, regardless they are defeated or won in a match (Al Fatih). Therefore, this representation can be expressed through those shirts above.

Moreover, the pattern of green color is often seen in many shirts. The use of green color in most of *Bonek*’s shirts represents the color of Surabaya. Surabaya as Persebaya’s origin has a jargon: “Surabayaku Bersih dan Hijau” (My Surabaya is clean and green). This statement is also supported by most *Bonek* that we interviewed. They stated that manifestation of “Surabaya clean and green” is applied either on Persebaya team or *Bonek*’s shirt (Al Fatih, et. al). However, in my depth-interview with other *Bonek*, Yan Aswari, it is stated that the color of green symbolizes color of *Baya*, a crocodile in Surabaya legends. Therefore, we often see in a match that many *Bonek* bring crocodile dolls to support their beloved team on football field. Not only that, we also often see or hear the term “Bajul ijo” or “Laskar Bajul Ijo” (green crocodile) used by them to identify their identity towards public (Aswari).

We have read the three pictures in denotative and connotative levels. Next we discuss the myth/ideology. According to Barthes, there are three possible readings of myth: myth producer, critical reader, and myth consumer (129). From myth producer point of view, a reading type is focused on the empty signification, means, we let the concept to fulfill myth form without misinterpretation, and we find ourselves facing the simple system in which the signification become literal again (Barthes 184). The second type, critical reading point of view, this reading type is focused on fully reading on the signifier, in which we clearly differ meaning from the form, and as the result, we are able to see the distortion done by one side to other side, which means we cancel the signification process in myth system as the “trick”. This definition can be seen through Barthes’ observation on a Paris magazine, in which the salutation of African boy becomes the *alibi* of France imperialism (Barthes 185). Barthes adds in last part, in myth consumer point of view, that this reading type is focused on myth signification as the complete thing

consisting of meaning and form, so we accept the ambiguous signification, neither seeing a myth as just symbol nor alibi, but we consider it from its dynamic character (185).

In this analysis, we discuss the first two readings only. From myth producer point of view, the writer found the myth of heroism in interpreting symbols on Bonek’s shirt; and from critical reader point of view, the writer found the myth of alibi of mass movement. Each of the reading is presented in the following sections.

3.1 *Bonek* and The Myth of Heroism

In understanding myth, Barthes stated that “Mythology attempts to reduce differences of interpretation and limit the excess of meaning. Its ideological dimensions structure the terms of our responses to signs, text, media representation, and more importantly, to history” (10-11). Moreover, the principle of myth is: transforming history into nature (Chandler 6). In this case, we attempt to relate the origin of myth in Bonek’s shirt with historical context which underlies the ideology behind it as well.

As explained before in the connotative level, the struggle and recklessness of “Arek-arek Suroboyo” (Surabaya society) when facing the colonizer in 10th November 1945 inspired the creation of “ndas mangap” or man’s head picture on Bonek shirt as representation of hero model at that time. This picture was created by Muchtar, Jawa Pos journalist. Moreover, Akif Al Fatih stated that the spirit, loyalty, and recklessness represented by Bonek are inspired from the history of “Arek-Arek Suroboyo” to achieve the freedom. In the official Surabaya government’s site (www.surabaya.go.id), it is explained how “Arek-Arek Suroboyo” showed their recklessness against colonizers who arrived at Surabaya on 25th October 1945 led by English general, A.W.S Mallaby. The army he led, as many as 6000 persons, consisted of Gurkha and north Indian brigade. In next days, on 26-27th October 1945, English war planes dropped a kind of leaflets announcing Surabaya society to give up and submit all the guns they had. Finally, in 28th October 1945, the big war happened in many locations. The climax was when Mallaby was dead and it led the ultimatum to ruin Surabaya on 10th November 1945 (“Periode Perang Kemerdekaan”).

In that time, Surabaya Mayor, Soerjo, gave the speech encouraging Surabaya people to struggle against colonizer until the last drop of blood. Otherwise, colonization would happen once again. Then, the battle happened in all Surabaya locations during 18 days. The interesting one was when in the war the colonizers used outstanding guns while Surabaya people just used sharp bamboo as their guns. This recklessness and great spirit was then adopted by Bonek in defending Persebaya in football match. The “recklessness” as the uppermost capital they have is used for supporting Persebaya, even though sometimes they do not prepare anything, except the recklessness capital. This statement is justified by Akif, that whenever and wherever Persebaya get the match, Bonek always stand up there, although they have no money or any preparation (Al Fatih). We have seen how linguistic messages over their shirt symbolize great loyalty and defense whether towards their community or Persebaya, like words on shirt “Bonek atau Mati” (Bonek or Dead!) which is similar with words that used by Arek-Arek Suroboyo when trying hard to achieve freedom: “Merdeka atau mati!” (Free or Dead!). Therefore, the pride of being part of “Arek-Arek Surabaya’s” struggle in the history and Surabaya’s epithet as city of hero underlies the spirit of Bonek in adopting the recklessness sense for facing everything in front of them, for defending Persebaya in every match.

The myth of heroism in this context is unfortunately understood by Bonek in terms of being reckless towards those they do not approve with. Moreover, sometimes the term of “being reckless” or “being heroic” are also expressed in bad way, for example “being reckless” in breaking public facility, “being heroic” in defending their beloved team or their peers, but using unacceptable ways like fighting, condemning, etc. Therefore, the myth of heroism in this case can be said just on having similarity on Surabaya hero’s character physically, but unfortunately the real meaning of heroism is rarely found in the context of *Bonek* today.

3.2 *Bonek* as the Alibi of Mass Movement

The myth of heroism revealed in Bonek shirt phenomenon draws another interesting point to discuss. The heroism, unfortunately, serves an alibi of mass movement which often ‘justifies’ the way Bonek supporters conduct ‘unpleasant’ or reckless behaviors. Myth, as Barthes argued, functions to naturalize a certain idea or discourse. In this case, ‘heroism’ naturalizes what Bonek do in the name of their ‘love’ to

their team or city, including some destructive behaviors. It seems that it is ‘natural’ for BONEK to do such things because of the spirit and the ‘ideology’ they bear. Mass movement, therefore, becomes their strength. .

This phenomenon can be correlated with concept and ideology of mass movement and collective behavior in Sociology. In *Understanding Sociology: A Context for Action*, Earl Babbie said that collective behavior is “a term to describe relatively spontaneous and unstructured social behavior like rallies, panics and mobs and also in rumors, fads, and fashions” (285). In this chapter, he divided the definition between collective behavior and social movements. The term collective behavior is understood as kind of spontaneous and unstructured action of communal people, while a term social movement is known as “organized attempts to change some aspects of society” (285). Based on the explanation above, we can state that *Bonek* is categorized as part of collective behavior. In collective behavior, *Bonek* applies unstructured social behavior. Many media often report their destructive or anarchist behaviors, one of which is breaking public facility as happened in Solo, when going to Bandung in 2010 (“*Bonek Anarkis, Persebaya Menolak Bertanggung Jawab*”). Not only that, several interviews conducted by the writer towards some people about *Bonek* show that most of them describe *Bonek* as fanatic, anarchist, and reckless supporter, and also trouble maker. Those people read *Bonek* from media, while the others experience by themselves (Adibah, et al). One of the pictures which represents their anarchist act is when they confronted the police in Tambaksari field, when Persebaya and Arema got the match.



Picture 4. Persebaya supporter, “Bonek” was confronted with several polices in match of Persebaya vs Arema
(Vivanews)

This justifies how *Bonek* is understood as manifestation of collective behavior in this case. The spontaneous, unarranged movement is done by them. Moreover, the anarchist behavior that frequently shown by them is also manifestation of freedom. Getting involving in communal people is a reason or kind of legitimation to freely break public facility or freely confront the people they do not like. This argument was justified by Akif, coordinator of *Bonek* in Jabodetabek region, that the destructive, anarchist behavior of *Bonek* comes from “unorganized *Bonek*” who do those kind of bad behavior spontaneously. These problems come up because *Bonek*, in his opinion, is not like a formal organization as usual, but they tend to be considered as Persebaya lovers group with “semi-street” character which sometimes, they are not well-arranged. They are in a united group supporting Persebaya, but they consist of various group, either “well-arranged group” or “unarranged group”. Therefore, destructive, bad, or anarchist behavior, happens many times, dominantly done by those who are considered as “unarranged group” (Al Fatih). We can see those representation is reflected through symbols, picture and powerful linguistic message on shirts they wear in every occasion. Moreover, Babbie adds that one of collective behavior is about rallies. In his books, he stated that:

Individuals invest a part of their emotional being in the whole group and sometimes feel themselves to be an almost inseparable part of it. Swept up in the spirit of the moment, they can behave in ways they would otherwise avoid and do things that would seem inappropriate anywhere else (293).

In addition, Hoffer stated in “Mass Movement” that the motive of people who get involved with a mass movement is because of the will to get such substitution. For those who are dissatisfied, mass

movement offers substitution, for personality own or kind of things that help people life which cannot be found inside their own personality (12). Having "communal identity" by action together is better, to be confessed more to society (Al Fatih). Moreover, Richard Berk's (1974: 364) adds that: "...group activity will begin as soon as the consensus becomes common knowledge. Common knowledge is necessary since few crowd members will gamble on group support when the costs for acting alone are high" (Babbie 298). Based on this understanding, we are able to understand why *Bonek* have well-known identity, either being loyal to Persebaya or loyal to their peer, so that is why, the reckless and sometimes, the anarchist behavior is legitimized as their group activity. The picture of man's head using head band with Persebaya or *Bonek* word, several powerful words defending Persebaya or *Bonek*, and condemning words toward those who they hate reflects this case. Hence, we may say that this is a manifestation of loyalty form towards them which later, conducting the ideology of mass movement and collective behavior. Beside that, the use of other several words like "*Bonek atau Mati*", "*di manapun ada Persebaya, di situ ada Bonek*", etc. also reflect the image of loyalty that being constructed by them as manifestation of substituted action that they do not get individually, until joining this group.

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