

Reflections on Taboo Symbols in Tamkesi Sacred Spaces

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Abstract—The purpose of this study was to examine the symbols in taboo expressions in the sacred places of the Tamkesi traditional village. The symbols in taboo expressions were examined through an ethnosemiotic lens to explore the deep cultural meanings that represent the cultural values of the Tamkesi community. By implementing a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach, this study utilised meticulous reading to reveal the meaning and cultural values of symbols in taboo expressions of the Tamkesi community. Data were collected from *usif* (king) and tribal chiefs, through in-depth interviews and continued with in-depth observations of the lives of the Tamkesi community to obtain a deep and comprehensive understanding of culture. Data were analysed through a structural systematic approach comprising data reduction, presentation, and conclusion. The results revealed that the taboo symbols of the Tamkesi community in sacred places were full of meaning, both literal or denotative meaning and cultural or connotative meaning that represent the cultural values of the local community in building harmonious relationships with God, nature, society, fellow human beings, and themselves. The existence and belief in this sacred place emphasised spiritual values that support human behaviour in building relationships with nature, society, fellow human beings, and oneself. The findings of this study contribute to the fields of ethnosemiotics, linguistic anthropology, and several data user authorities such as village governments, the Department of Tourism and Culture, language institutions and field of education to archive and formulate policies related to taboos as part of local wisdom.

Index Terms—cultural meaning, cultural values, taboo symbols, sacred places

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, taboo as a socio-cultural phenomenon has been the object of heated discussion in various parts of the world. Studies on taboo have been highlighted from various perspectives, such as sociolinguistics (Chu, 2009), psycholinguistics (Rosenberg et al., 2017), neuro-linguistics (Hansen et al., 2019), socio-pragmatics (Gabriel & Charlotte, 2021), psycho-sociolinguistics (Alqahtani et al., 2022; Silva-Nasser, 2023), and natural Semantic Metalanguage (Ulfa et al., 2024). However, studies that specifically examine the meaning and value of taboo symbols from an ethno-semiotic perspective are still rare. On the other hand, this information is greatly needed by several data user authorities to design public policies such as village government, tourism and cultural offices, language centres, and education offices. This information vacuum is an obstacle in the context of preserving culture or formulating policies related to local wisdom. As stated by Arianto et al. (2024), taboo studies can contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, maintenance of the natural environment, and preparation for facing contemporary environmental challenges. In addition, taboo studies through an ethno-semiotic perspective can contribute to the field of education, namely as a strengthening of character, as stated by Ulfa et al. (2024) that taboos can be used as the basis for moral and ethical education.

Taboo is defined as a form of prohibition on uttering and carrying out actions related to social, religious, and cultural aspects that must not be violated by members of society (Wardhaugh, 2006; Smith, 2007). This prohibition is referred to as a cultural norm that has been believed in and inherited from generation to generation (Junaidi & Wardani, 2019). A person who violates a taboo will receive a punishment according to the type of taboo violated (Aziz et al., 2020). Violation of taboos is believed to lead to illness, death, or other disasters (Jay, 2009; Menke et al., 2020; Menke & Menke, 2024; Wardhaugh, 2006). Taboos include verbal prohibitions, such as a prohibition on speaking a language, as well as nonverbal prohibitions, such as a prohibition on carrying out an action (Freud, 2024; Wardhaugh, 2006; Macaulay, 2020; Junaidi & Wardani, 2019). Studies on taboos related to prohibitions on saying certain words are of more interest to researchers, such as the taboo on saying certain words in the Karo language (Barus et al., 2018), Kerinci language (Trimadona, 2017), Javanese language (Nuryantiningsih & Pandanwangi, 2018), Nepali (Niraula et al.,

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2022), and Acehnese language (Junaidi & Wardani, 2019). Taboo studies related to prohibitions on actions are often ignored, even though prohibitions on saying and doing these actions have an important role in regulating human life in building harmonious relationships with God, nature, society, fellow human beings, and even with oneself.

This study focused on taboo expressions in the Tamkesi indigenous community. Taboo expressions referred to in this study are expressions that contain prohibitions on saying and doing actions based on custom. In taboo expressions, there are symbols that contain deep meanings, so that they become the reason for a statement or an action to be taboo. Symbols are something that can be expanded without limits in social life, that have the potential to create new forms of meaning and interpretation (Parmentier, 2014). Symbols are used to connect concepts, demonstrate shared understanding, and convey meaning (Livingston, 1989). Symbols in taboo expressions can be words, phrases, clauses, sentences, discourses that represent the ideology of a society that is full of cultural values. Thus, the interpretation of taboo expressions must take into account the symbolic dimensions contained therein. These taboo symbols form a social order, moral code, and psychology that regulates individual behaviour in the life of a cultured society, maintains social order, and forms cultural identity (Niraula et al., 2022).

Taboo symbols that embody deep meaning represent the cultural values of a particular society. Soepono et al. (1999) state that cultural values are abstract concepts regarding fundamental and valuable bases to be used as guidelines for behaving in a cultural community. Yayuk et al. (2022) emphasised that taboos contain cultural values that are relevant to national values that can be applied in the era of modernisation. Arianto et al. (2024) found that the prohibition of cutting down sacred trees, picking leaves, and defecating around trees, is an ethic in environmental maintenance that represents the cultural values of the community that are rooted in harmonious interactions between humans and nature. Djamaris et al. (1996) classified cultural values based on human relationships with several elements, namely human relationships with God, nature, society, fellow human beings, and oneself.

Taboo is a rule in culture (Chu, 2009; Ulfa et al., 2024). Words that are considered taboo in one culture may not be considered taboo in another culture (Alqahtani et al., 2022) so that it can lead to misunderstanding, obstacles, and conflicts in cross-cultural communication (Junxuan et al., 2025). Therefore, knowledge of cultural differences is crucial in cross-cultural communication (Yin, 2009). However, cultural knowledge, such as understanding the meaning of cultural symbols, is not very common among today's young generation (Nursalam et al., 2024; Auni & Nidawati, 2023). In fact, by understanding the meaning of cultural symbols, the younger generation will appreciate local wisdom, social norms, and their cultural principles as a guide to life. This is in accordance with Ofori et al. (2023), who state that the ability to interpret symbolic meaning is a means to maintain one's identity in a cultural context. This study will provide a solution to this gap by providing cultural knowledge related to the meaning of taboo symbols that represent the cultural values of the Tamkesi indigenous community.

Tamkesi is one of the areas that is famous for its commitment to preserving its culture, located in North Central Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. Thus, cultural heritage is manifested in tangible and intangible heritage (one of which is taboo) owned by Tamkesi, making it an attraction for local and foreign tourists (Taolin & Nugroho, 2016). The rich cultural assets in these areas are the reason behind the decision of the government of North Central Timor regency to inaugurate Tamkesi as a traditional village on May 9, 2005. Tamkesi traditional village has been the centre of the Biboki Kingdom Imperial Palace since 1865 and is popular as a megalithic and sacred village. In the centre of Tamkesi Traditional village, there is a traditional house located on the back of two stone hills, namely Tapenpah hill and Oepuah hill. In the western part of the Traditional house, there is also a spring, namely Haunenis spring and Haunenis forest. These places are believed to be sacred places, thus giving rise to various rules, such as taboos on saying and taboos on actions when interacting with these places.

By considering the urgency of the research described above, this study aims to explore the meaning and cultural value of taboo symbols in sacred places of Tamkesi through ethnosemiotic studies. Ethnosemiotics is the study of the interpretation of signs' meanings in a certain culture (Galofaro, 2020; Wissang & Pratiwi, 2023; Mensah et al., 2024). Ethnosemiotics is utilised to investigate the sign system or process of forming meaning in a culture (Galofaro, 2020). Voigt narrows down the ethnosemiotic study to traditional culture (Wissang & Pratiwi, 2023). This study not only analyses the sign form but also explores the sign's meaning by referring to the cultural elements of certain communities. Hence, in the context of this study, ethnosemiotics can supply a framework for a deep understanding of taboo symbols' meaning in the Tamkesi sacred place that represents cultural values in forming the identity of the Tamkesi community.

In general, semiotics is the science that studies signs and meaning (Chandler, 2002; Wiley, 1994). In other words, semiotics refers to everything that is interpreted as a sign (Atoofi, 2015; Elleström, 2022; Chandler, 2002). The science of sign in semiotics was formerly introduced by Ferdinand De Saussure, who classified it into two parts. They are the signifier and signified (Hoed, 2014). The form of a signifier is language, picture, speech or utterance, sound, and letters in writing, while the form of the signified is the concept, idea, or meaning contained in the signifier (Asriningsari & Umay, 2010). Barthes developed Saussure's semiotics concept which stops at the denotative level (Hoed, 2014). He continued Saussure's semiotic concept by separating the meaning of signs into two levels, namely denotation as the primary meaning system and connotation as the secondary meaning system (Barthes, 1968; Tohir et al., 2023). Denotation is a primary meaning system that produces true, explicit, direct, and definite meaning (Barthes, 1968; Fatimah, 2022; Piliang, 2004). Connotation is a secondary meaning system that produces meaning based on cultural, political, ideological, and emotions or feelings. Ideology shows values and cultural interests (Sériot, 2016). Thus, the

ethnosemiotics approach allows studies to reveal how taboo symbols have deeper meanings and represent cultural values that form the behaviour, identity, and social structure of the Tamkesi community.

II. METHOD

This study utilised a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. Ethnography allows researchers to be directly involved in the situation in the Tamkesi traditional village, interact directly with participants, and understand the socio-cultural context of the Tamkesi traditional community that shapes their life experiences. The data were focused on symbols in taboo expressions that contain meaning and cultural values of the Tamkesi traditional community. The data came from key informants who met several requirements, namely 1) people born in the Tamkesi Traditional Village, 2) 50 years old and over, 3) live permanently in the Tamkesi Traditional Village, 4) physically and mentally healthy, 5) actively involved in traditional events, 6) have knowledge of taboos. Based on these criteria, the researcher obtained seven key informants, namely *Usif* (king) and six tribal chiefs. Next, the researcher conducted interviews with the informants to obtain information related to the forms of taboos that are usually expressed to members of the community in the context of interactions with sacred places in Tamkesi, namely Haunenis Spring, Haunenis Forest, Tapenpah Hills, and the Tamkesi traditional house. To strengthen the data, the researcher conducted observations of various activities of the Tamkesi indigenous community, especially events that occurred in these sacred places. Data analysis was carried out using the data analysis procedures recommended by Miles and Huberman, which consist of data reduction, data presentation, and formulation of conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 2007). Data reduction was used to simplify and categorise information, data presentation was used to organize findings for analysis, and formulation of conclusions was done to interpret data and generate insights into the meaning and cultural values of Tamkesi indigenous people's taboos in sacred places through an ethnosemiotic approach within the framework of sign analysis proposed by Roland Barthes.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Taboo Expressions in the Haunenis Spring

Haunenis Spring is one of the springs located in Tamkesi Traditional Village, which is designated as a sacred spring. This spring is believed to be one of the places where The Divine, a figure who is believed to be an entity that has the power of life over the Tamkesi people. Because of its sacred nature, this water cannot be used carelessly. This water can only be taken during the first harvest season for ritual purposes, used as an ingredient for cooking the first harvest (usually occurs in March-April), and as a sprinkling material for the Tamkesi people. Various taboo expressions regulate the procedures for interacting with this water source. These expressions are usually spoken from generation to generation of the Tamkesi people to maintain their existence.

“Jangan mengotori Mata Air Haunenis.” (“Don’t pollute the Haunenis Spring”)

Denotatively, “polluting the Haunenis spring” refers to an act that causes the Haunenis spring to become dirty, polluted or unclean as it should be. Connotatively or in cultural meaning, the symbol of “polluting the Haunenis spring” contains a much deeper meaning than just physical pollution. In the culture of the Tamkesi people, the Haunenis spring is a sacred place that is guarded and revered as the place where The Divine dwells. The symbol of “polluting the Haunenis spring” connotatively or in cultural meaning is interpreted as an act of tarnishing the sanctity of the Haunenis water. If the Haunenis spring becomes dirty, then the sacred nature of the water, which is believed to be a source of blessings, will vanish. Therefore, the Tamkesi people believe that they no longer receive blessings from The Divine because dirty water does not have its spiritual power. They also believe that by polluting the water, they will experience disaster or calamity. Not only in Tamkesi, but violating taboos in other cultures is also believed to bring illness, death, and/or other disasters (Jay, 2009; Menke et al., 2020; Menke & Menke, 2024; Wardhaugh, 2006). The Tamkesi community maintains the cleanliness of Haunenis water as an absolute obligation to achieve success in every aspect of life, especially in the fields of agriculture and animal husbandry, as the main livelihood of the Tamkesi community.

The prohibition on polluting the Haunenis spring has a cultural value that reflects the relationship between humans and God and nature. The cultural value that reflects the relationship between humans and God is the value of belief. Maintaining the sanctity of the Haunenis water is rooted in the belief in the presence of the spirit of The Divine in the Haunenis Spring. The Tamkesi community believes that the presence of this spirit makes the water holy so that it can be a blessing for the community. This belief strengthens Mircea Eliade's statement that mentions several examples of symbols of the presence of God or the Holy One in everyday objects of human life, namely stones, trees, water, and forests (Adon & Avi, 2023). For humans who have spiritual faith, God or what Mircea Eliade calls the Holy One is the center of human life and experience (Susanto, 1987). This belief leads humans to grow a harmonious relationship with God to get the blessings.

About nature, the prohibition of polluting the Haunenis Spring contains the value of maintaining natural resources, in this case, water resources, so that their quality is maintained for the sake of the survival of the Tamkesi community and future generations. The main factor in supporting human life is clean water, or water that is free from pollution. The customary rule of the Tamkesi community not to pollute the Haunenis Spring is an effort by the community to maintain water resources so that their quality is maintained. Water whose quality is maintained is certain to provide a better and

healthier life. The value contained in the prohibition of polluting the Haunenis Spring plays an important role in water conservation efforts. In the end, it is clear that the belief in the presence of the spirit of The Divine at Haunenis Spring supports the maintenance of clean water quality. A study of Saraswaty et al. (2022) found that spiritual values, such as local belief values, can support the conservation of water resources that can be utilised by all living things. Thus, this prohibition reflects the cultural values of the Tamkesi community in building harmonious relationships with God and nature.

“Jangan mengambil air Haunenis secara sembarangan.” (“Don’t take Haunenis water carelessly”)

Denotatively, “taking Haunenis water carelessly” refers to the act of taking Haunenis water by disobeying certain rules of time and process. Haunenis water may only be taken during the main harvest and is carried out in a ritual process. Connotatively or in cultural meaning, “taking Haunenis water carelessly” is a symbol of human greed for natural resources that should be managed fairly and wisely. The Haunenis spring is located at the head of the river, so that if it is taken carelessly, it can disrupt the flow of water downstream. This can affect the water needs of the wider community in various activities such as household activities, agricultural activities, livestock, and other activities. The act of taking water uncontrollably is seen as a symbol of greed because it inhibits the flow of water for the wider community. This action creates injustice for the entire community that depends on the availability of water. This prohibition is a manifestation of the Tamkesi community's efforts not to exploit water resources for personal interests that can disrupt the ecological balance. Hence, this prohibition motivates human awareness to change the shallow anthropocentric view (Hilmanto, 2010).

The prohibition on taking Haunenis water carelessly has a cultural value that reflects the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, themselves, and society. In relation to nature, the prohibition on taking water carelessly at the Haunenis spring contains the value of protecting and preserving nature. This prohibition is a form of control by the Tamkesi community not to exploit water resources excessively for personal purposes. Water that is taken uncontrollably in the upper reaches of the river can disrupt the ecological balance and environmental sustainability. Ecomodernist Fremaux (2019) provides an affirmation of the importance of prioritising ethical aspects in dealing with all events in the era of modernisation for environmental sustainability. Fremaux recommends handling ecological issues, ensuring social justice, and being responsible for the environment amidst the challenges of modernization. Therefore, the cultural values in this prohibition teach the importance of respecting nature by not accessing natural resources carelessly, but must maintain a balance between utilisation and preservation.

About oneself, the prohibition on taking Haunenis water carelessly contains a crucial value of self-discipline in utilising water. The community is taught to have a high level of discipline by only taking water at a predetermined time (namely during the first harvest season). The time specified in this prohibition teaches the community to practice a disciplined attitude in terms of utilising water. In addition, in the harmonious relationship between humans and society, the prohibition on taking water contains a value of justice. This prohibition teaches the Tamkesi community to ensure that the limited availability of water can be utilized fairly and evenly by the entire Tamkesi community. This prohibition also regulates the fair distribution of water from upstream to downstream of the river so that it can be used by the entire Tamkesi community. This rule shows an effort to uphold justice for the entire Tamkesi community so that they can obtain water as one of their vital needs. This prohibition provides important environmental education in the lives of the Tamkesi community. Li et al. (2022) promoting this kind of environmental education can shape behavior that obeys conservation rules.

B. Taboo Expressions in the Haunenis Forest

Haunenis forest is one of the forests in the Tamkesi Traditional Village, located around the Haunenis spring. This forest is composed of various species of large, lush, towering trees. For the Tamkesi indigenous people, Haunenis forest is also considered a sacred place, believed to be the abode of The Divine. Because of its sacred nature, various taboos have emerged that govern how to interact with the forest.

“Jangan menebang pohon di Hutan Haunenis.” (“Don’t cut down trees in Haunenis Forest”)

Denotatively, “cutting down trees in the Haunenis Forest” refers to the activity of cutting, destroying, or uprooting trees growing within the Haunenis Forest. Connotatively, or in its cultural meaning, “cutting down trees in the Haunenis Forest” is a symbol of banishing the presence of The Divine, a God believed by the Tamkesi people who manifests himself in nature such as water, hills, and trees in the Haunenis Forest. This prohibition demonstrates the very strong spiritual dimension of the Tamkesi people. This is in line with the cultural taboo of cutting down trees in Bumbum Suci, Kampung Tua Nongsa Batam, which believes that trees are intermediaries between humans, nature, and God (Arianto et al., 2024). Violation of this prohibition can damage the relationship between humans and God and nature and is believed to bring disaster to society.

The prohibition on cutting down trees in the Haunenis Forest has cultural value that reflects the relationship between humans and God and nature. In this relationship between humans and God, this prohibition contains religious values. Cutting down trees in the Haunenis Forest is seen as an act of expelling The Divine, which can bring anger or curses from The Divine in the form of disasters or calamities. This reflects the Tamkesi people's belief that The Divine is a spirit that has spiritual power over the Tamkesi community. Similarly, in Manggarai, Indonesia, there is a sacred forest called “Puar,” whose use is restricted. The Manggarai people only enter the “Puar” when they need a piece of solid

wood for house construction, preceded by a ritual (Sanubarianto et al., 2025). This also describes that there are spirits believed to be in the forest who have spiritual powers for the people who believe in their existence.

In relation to nature, the prohibition on cutting down trees in the Haunen Forest contains the value of protecting and preserving nature. The prohibition on cutting down trees in the Haunen Forest represents an effort to shift the paradigm from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, where nature is made the centre of reality. The anthropocentric view, which places humans at the center of life, makes many people feel innocent of actions such as cutting down trees and deforestation (Mantiri & Handayani, 2020). The trees growing in the Haunen Forest play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance. This kind of taboo on maintaining ecological balance also exists among the Badui people (Juansah, 2019). Trees in the forest play a role in regulating water availability, increasing soil moisture, improving soil fertility, supporting biodiversity, and creating microenvironments that benefit humans. The prohibition on cutting down trees is a very wise customary rule for environmental sustainability so that it can be enjoyed from generation to generation. This prohibition demonstrates the intelligence and ecological awareness of local communities as a form of local wisdom that is maintained and passed down from generation to generation. This rule occurs similarly to the traditional rule in North Buton, which prohibits cutting down trees to reduce the risk of disasters (Basri, 2021). This prohibition demonstrates the Tamkesi people's efforts to build a harmonious relationship with nature, thus embodying a highly valued cultural value. This cultural value reflects the understanding that humans should not exploit nature recklessly but must instead preserve it to support a stable ecological system.

“Jangan mengeluarkan kata-kata makian di Hutan Haunen.” (“Don't use swear words in Haunen Forest”)

Denotatively, “swearing in the Haunen Forest” means uttering vile, inappropriate, or insulting words to express anger or irritation in the Haunen Forest. Connotatively, or in its cultural meaning, “swearing in the Haunen Forest” is a symbol of desecrating or polluting the sacred nature of the Haunen Forest and a form of insult to The Divine. For the Tamkesi people, swearing is considered dirty. Swearing as a form of dirty speech is believed to pollute something considered sacred, such as the Haunen Forest, and insult The Divine. According to Arianto et al. (2024), in every sacred space, swear words carry negative energy that can disturb spirits, leading to undesirable consequences. Therefore, uttering swear words in Haunen Forest is a violation of spiritual values, not simply a violation of social etiquette.

The prohibition on swearing in the Haunen Forest has cultural significance, reflecting the relationship between humans and God and fellow humans. In relation to God, obedience with this prohibition conveys respect for The Divine. In the Tamkesi community's view, swearing in the Haunen Forest is seen as a form of desecration of the sacred place, reflecting an insult to a higher power. Swearing is generally prohibited in religion, so swearing constitutes an insult to the God worshipped (Asrif & Evi Olivia Kumbangsila, 2017). This prohibition teaches the Tamkesi people to respect The Divine, the entity with power over them. This cultural rule requires people to be mindful of their language to maintain harmonious relationships with the entity they trust.

In relationships with others, this prohibition embodies the cultural value of respecting others in communication activities. This prohibition teaches the Tamkesi people to respect others by not expressing anger or irritation with swear words. This prohibition indirectly regulates human behavior and speech in building harmonious social relations. Therefore, efforts to avoid swear words in the Haunen forest contain valuable values related to respecting fellow humans for the sake of maintaining social harmony. “When the community forms a harmonious social life, they support one another in kindness and serve as a reminder that relationships with others are also a key factor in determining one's level of happiness” (Andriyanto et al., 2025). In many cultures, swear words are inappropriate and considered detrimental to interpersonal harmony. According to Asrif and Evi Olivia Kumbangsila (2017), a culture of mutual respect must be maintained, including appropriate language and behaviour. By refraining from swearing, the Tamkesi community demonstrates its commitment to spiritual values and moral ethics that uphold respect for God and fellow human beings.

“Jangan berburu hewan di Hutan Haunen.” (“Do not hunt animals in the Haunen Forest”)

Denotatively, “hunting animals in the Haunen forest” refers to the activity of chasing, capturing, or killing animals that live in the Haunen forest. Connotatively, or in its cultural meaning, “hunting animals in the Haunen Forest” symbolises severing communication with nature. The prohibition on hunting animals in the Haunen forest is closely related to the idea of spiritual communication between humans and nature. The Tamkesi people consider animals in the Haunen forest as intermediaries for spiritual communication between humans and nature. Certain animals are believed to be able to convey certain messages about nature, such as birds that can give signs of rain, drought, and even natural disasters. In the context of the Haunen forest, the Tamkesi people believe that the song of the turtledove is believed to convey a message that people who enter the Haunen forest are welcomed, the Kowak bird is believed to convey a message that rain will soon fall, the Nusa bird is believed to convey a message that there is a thief, the Murai bird is said to convey a message that there will be a disaster, and the deer is said to convey a message that they will receive good fortune. Animals are not passive observers but active participants in the communication of natural events (Efendi et al., 2025). In South America, Asia, and Africa birds are considered divine messengers and symbols of spiritual power (Aticho et al., 2024). This belief reflects the deep connection between humans and nature and gives animals a special status in communication between humans and nature.

The prohibition on hunting in Haunen forest has cultural significance, reflecting the relationship between humans and nature, specifically the protection and preservation of wildlife. It also demonstrates how humans must protect and

preserve nature, particularly fauna. This prohibition teaches the Tamkesi people to live harmoniously alongside each other while respecting the existence of other living creatures, as it impacts ecological balance. Like the taboo that exists in the Dayak Meratus tribe in Kiyu village which refers to sacred forests, it has a positive impact on preserving vegetation diversity (Hamidi et al., 2022). In Tamkesi, this prohibition fosters the understanding that the Haunenis Forest is inhabited by other living creatures that should not be exploited, as each has its own function and role, mutually supporting a stable ecological system. Forests provide habitat for various species, so maintaining biodiversity is essential for ecosystem resilience (Luque & Iverson, 2018). This customary prohibition plays an important and effective role in protecting natural resources such as a study conducted by Pattiselanno et al. (2024) which highlights how customary law (customary prohibitions) in Papua is more effective in protecting wildlife than formal government law.

C. Taboo Expressions on Tapenpah Hill

Tapenpah Hill is a rocky hill located east of the Tamkesi traditional house, which is the center of the Tamkesi traditional village. For the Tamkesi community, Tapenpah Hill is a symbol of masculinity, believed to be the guardian spirit of the Tamkesi region and a manifestation of the Divine. Therefore, this hill is considered sacred by the Tamkesi traditional community. Due to its sacred nature, there are rules in the form of taboo as listed in the following data.

“Jangan naik ke Bukit Tapenpah.” (“Don't climb Tapenpah Hill”)

Denotatively, "climbing" refers to the act of moving toward a higher position, or moving one's position from a lower to a higher place. Connotatively, or in its cultural meaning, "climbing Tapenpah hill" symbolises rebellion against existing authority. This is seen as an attempt to challenge, or even undermine, established authority by attempting to assert one's power within the structures established by the traditions and social systems of the Tamkesi people. According to traditional rules in the Tamkesi traditional village, only kings and tribal chiefs are permitted to ascend Tapenpah hill to perform rituals in the event of drought, crop failure, natural disasters, or repairs to traditional houses. This occurs in the Saur Matua ritual of the Toba Batak people, where only traditional elders are authorised to lead the ritual (Sihombing et al., 2024). This role reflects the social and spiritual structures shaped by traditions and social systems within indigenous communities. Therefore, any ordinary citizen who attempts to violate this prohibition by climbing Tapenpah Hill is considered an act of rebellion against existing authority and is believed to incur a curse.

The prohibition against climbing Tapenpah Hill except for kings and tribal chiefs embodies cultural values that emphasise the relationship between humans and society, namely social awareness and respect for existing social structures. In Tamkesi society, each individual has a clear role and responsibility according to their status and position within the social order. As community leaders, kings and tribal chiefs lead not only in socio-political aspects but also in spiritual aspects that influence collective life. The study of Adon and Avi (2023) indicates that the person authorised to lead traditional rituals is the tribal chief, also known as a traditional elder. This prohibition serves to raise awareness that every individual must respect recognised authority to maintain social and spiritual balance within society.

D. Taboo Expressions in the Tamkesi Traditional House

The Tamkesi traditional houses are traditional houses in the Tamkesi region, the centre of the Biboki kingdom. These traditional houses are an important symbol of the social and spiritual structure of the Tamkesi people. There are seven traditional houses standing solidly in a round shape with towering thatched roofs resembling cones. These traditional houses are located on the ridges of the Oepuah and Tapenpah hills. These traditional houses are the residences of the king and his family, as well as several tribes. In addition, these traditional houses are used to store sacred objects and serve as spiritual spaces for the king and tribal chiefs or traditional elders to lead important ceremonies, such as ritual offerings to The Divine and the ancestors. These traditional houses are considered sacred by the Tamkesi people, so there are things that are considered taboo, as shown in the following data.

“Jangan merusak/mencuri benda budaya di Rumah Adat Tamkesi.” (“Do not destroy or steal cultural objects from Tamkesi Traditional House”)

Denotatively, "destroying and stealing objects in a Tamkesi traditional house" encompasses the physical act of destroying or removing objects within the house. Connotatively, or in its cultural meaning, "destroying and stealing objects in a Tamkesi traditional house" symbolises the loss of identity and history. Cultural objects in traditional houses, such as household utensils, carvings, or traditional jewelry, have symbolic meanings that hold historical stories and community identity. Therefore, destroying or stealing cultural objects in a Tamkesi traditional house means erasing the directional traces and identity of the Tamkesi indigenous community. Cultural objects in a Tamkesi traditional house serve as guardians of stories from the past. Handcrafted objects are testimonies of the history, events, beliefs, and struggles of ancestors who existed in the past. These objects serve as a link between the past and the present. By destroying or stealing these objects, someone is also severing the connection between the past and the present, ultimately losing their understanding of their history and origins. The act of damaging or stealing cultural objects can threaten the preservation of cultural heritage, which has high historical and spiritual value (Utama, 2023). Any individual who violates this prohibition is believed to be cursed by The Divine and the ancestors.

The prohibition on destroying and stealing objects in the Tamkesi traditional house contains cultural values that reflect the harmonious relationship between humans and themselves. In relationships with others, this prohibition contains the value of respect and honor for the property rights of others, in this case, ancestors. This prohibition contains the value of respect for those who have struggled to maintain Tamkesi cultural traditions. This prohibition

teaches the Tamkesi people to respect and honor the property rights of others, both living and deceased, by protecting and caring for their objects or inheritance. This action is part of the effort to preserve culture (Tahiru et al., 2023). About oneself, this prohibition teaches the values of honesty and integrity. Taking another person's belongings, especially those of cultural and historical value, is dishonest (Safitri & Saraswati, 2020). Honesty is a highly valued principle among the Tamkesi people, as it serves as the foundation of trust and the foundation for building good relationships with God, others, and oneself. Not taking other people's belongings signifies maintaining one's integrity and avoiding cheating or deceitful behavior.

The above review demonstrates that taboo symbols in Tamkesi society in sacred places are not merely normative prohibitions but represent a complex cultural system. Taboo symbols in Tamkesi society contain more than a single meaning, but rather additional meanings that are dynamic and contextual. This aligns with Roland Barthes' theory, which continues Saussure's concept of semiotics by separating the meaning of signs into two levels: denotation as the primary meaning system and connotation as the secondary meaning system (Tohir et al., 2023). In this study, the profound meaning contained in taboo symbols involves elements of the Tamkesi people's beliefs or ideology regarding sacred places believed to be the abode of The Divine and their ancestors. Therefore, the Tamkesi people strictly adhere to taboos in these sacred places to avoid disasters as curses from The Divine.

This finding also confirms the fact that taboo symbols represent the cultural values of the Tamkesi people. This finding is relevant to previous research that identified the values behind taboos (Yayuk et al., 2022; Arianto et al., 2024). The cultural values contained in taboo symbols reflect a harmonious relationship between humans and God, nature, society, fellow humans, and oneself, according to the classification of cultural values stated by Djamaris et al. (1996). These are cultural values that reflect human relationships with God, nature, society, fellow human beings, and oneself. The Tamkesi people live their lives by upholding cultural values through taboo symbols. The findings of this study also indicate that a taboo symbol in a sacred place can represent more than one cultural value, as shown in the following graph.

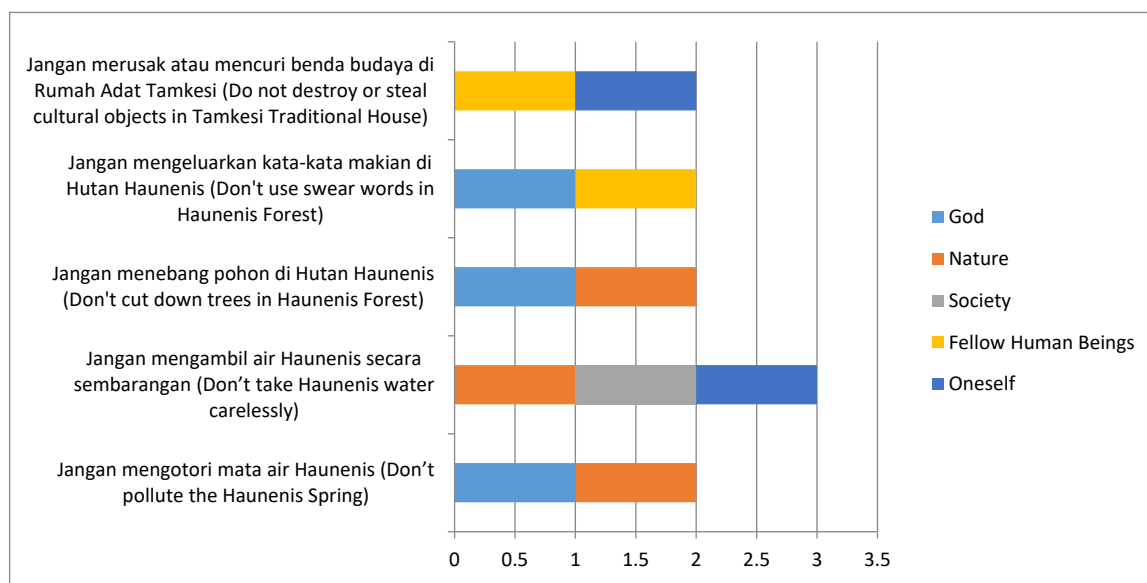


Figure 1. Cultural Values in Taboo Symbols at Tamkesi Sacred Places

This graph demonstrates the Tamkesi community's holistic perspective, where customary rules do not have a singular impact but rather address multiple dimensions. The sacred places used in this research illustrate the spiritual dimension that plays a vital role in the lives of the Tamkesi people. The spiritual dimension in these sacred sites supports other dimensions, such as ecological, moral, and social dimensions. In this regard, belief in the presence of The Divine and ancestors in sacred sites supports human behavior in establishing harmonious relationships with nature, society, others, and oneself. This enhances the understanding that cultural values are not isolated but mutually supportive within a community's cultural symbols.

The complex and precious values of these taboo symbols motivate the Tamkesi indigenous people to continue preserving their cultural heritage, especially sacred places. Preserving these cultural symbols is crucial because taboos are part of local wisdom that serve as guidelines for the Tamkesi people in building harmonious relationships with God, nature, society, fellow human beings, and themselves. In the modern context, Yayuk (2010) states that taboo values are relevant to national values and can therefore be applied in the modern era. This is a recommendation for preserving taboos in a modern context.

IV. CONCLUSION

Sacred places in the Tamkesi Traditional Village are spiritual spaces that regulate harmonious relationships with The Divine, the God who has power over the Tamkesi community. To create a harmonious relationship with The Divine, there are various rules in interacting with these sacred places, in this case, rules such as taboos. Taboos are spiritual and social rules used to control the words and actions of the Tamkesi community in interacting with sacred places, namely the Haunenis spring, Haunenis forest, Tapenpah Hills, as well as the Tamkesi traditional house. These sacred places are symbols of the transcendent presence of The Divine and the spirits of their ancestors. Through these sacred places, the community feels close to God and their ancestors. Each taboo expression that regulates the procedures for interacting in these sacred places has a deep meaning. The meaning contained in each taboo expression does not only have a literal or denotative meaning but also has a cultural meaning or connotation, as stated by Roland Barthes that the meaning of a sign is not singular, but has additional meanings according to the cultural context of the place where the sign or symbol is used. Within the taboo symbols of the Tamkesi indigenous community, there are also deep-rooted cultural values. The cultural values within a taboo are not singular but can encompass several, reflecting the harmonious relationship between humans and various elements, such as God, nature, society, fellow humans, and themselves. Furthermore, each value within the taboo supports one another; for example, the belief in the presence of The Divine in sacred places supports human behaviour in building relationships with nature, society, fellow humans, and oneself. This reflects the richness and value of taboo symbols in the context of spiritual, ecological, social, and moral education.

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