

# **A Study on the Genesis of Minahasa: Symbolism in the Plot of “Toar and Lumimuut” Myth**

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**Abstract:** Toar and Lumimuut is a genesis myth from Minahasa, ethnicity in the northern tip of Sulawesi island, as an attempt to explain the emergence of the Minahasan people. This article will examine the symbolism in the plot of the myth. The method applied in this article is descriptive qualitative, with a formalistic approach. By examining the plot in search of symbolism, it appears that the myth of Toar and Lumimuut shows a rebirth from catastrophe and the attempt to repopulate the earth.

**Keywords:** minahasa, myth, plot, symbolism

## **RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

Folklores, myths, and legends are important aspects of early human communities and the culture of their descendants. Whether it be great, prominent civilizations, or small, less-heard communities, all of them have unique and precious tales to tell their descendants and even people across the world. Myth, for example, is said to have four functions: mystical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological (Campbell, 2004:3-10). For many communities, myth expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; safeguards and enforces morality, vouches for the efficiency of ritual, and contains practical rules for the guidance of man (Malinowski, 1926:82). Thus, despite its apparent irrelevance of it in modern life, the myth may open a new insight about a particular culture.

Much the same can be said of the myths from Minahasa. Minahasa, as it is used widely, refers to the region at the northernmost tip of the Sulawesi. It is as abundant and unique in terms of culture, and therefore should not be dismissed. Unfortunately, the situation nowadays is not so bright for the culture itself. The pressure of the modern norm has driven many parts of the culture into assimilation or oblivion. This is particularly true in regard to the myths of Minahasan people. While indeed many of the myths survived and still exist among the people, they are currently neglected and get less attention in contrast to other folktales.

Because of the aforementioned reason, this paper has chosen to take on the myth of Minahasa as its subject of research. Among many of the myths in Minahasan folklore, this paper selected the creation myth of Minahasan. A creation myth is a narrative of the beginning of the world as understood by a particular community (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2022). They

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explain the identity of their community in the world, and thus the priorities and prejudices of the community (Leeming, 2009:138). In the Minahasan community, the one and only myth that narrates about the creation of the people is Toar and Lumimuut. It is a myth that attempts to explain the origin of the Minahasan people, and as such, offers a favorable opportunity to research on.

Research regarding the myth of Toar and Lumimuut appears to be almost nonexistent. Apart from a claim that there exist two documentations of the myth, one is part of a report by a Dutch traveler and the other an analysis by a German missionary<sup>1</sup>, it seems there is no further study on this myth. Both of them are dated as far as the beginning of the twentieth century. Although one of the documentation might give some answers to support the claim<sup>2</sup>, it is still not enough to be called research. In addition, the internet-based search on related research on this myth has turned out to be unfruitful. Thus, it is safe—and also unfortunate—to assume that this myth has been overlooked over the past few centuries.

Considering the importance of myth in a culture, and its characteristic of narrating topics metaphorically, it is natural to analyze the symbolic value of the myth; that is, to reveal the symbolism in the narrated story. Among many intrinsic elements any narrative has, the plot of the myth is chosen to be the main subject of the analysis. Therefore, this paper is aimed to examine the symbolism in the plot of Toar and Lumimuut myth.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Related Theories

#### Myth

Myth is a narrative symbolic in nature, usually of unknown origin and partly traditional, relates ostensibly to actual events, and is especially associated with religious belief (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2022). The existence of myth is arguably as old as human civilization exists. Lauri Honko (1972:15) states that “myth expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms, ... provides a pattern of behavior to be imitated, testifies to the efficacy of ritual with its practical ends and establishes the sanctity of cult.” Myth, as introduced earlier, encompasses belief, morality, ritual, practice, and guidance to the people holding to it. It describes and explores the image of the community. Because of that, the study of myth can be considered crucial in the study of societies and also the human culture as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> These claims are found on the internet. The names claimed to have made the documentations are H. van Kol in his work “Uit Onze Kolonien” and J. Alb. T. Schwarz with his work “Tontemboansche Teksten” (cf. Saerang, 2013). However, limited, internet-based search on this claim resulted in little-to-none proof to base the claim.

<sup>2</sup> The softfile of this documentation by H. van Kol is available on the internet, but it is written in Dutch and by the time of this research there is no English translation provided both on the internet and in an accessible library. In addition, the claimed documentation seems to not contain the data. More research should be performed regarding this.

## Symbolism

Symbolism has been incorporated into the study of literature for a long time. It is a part of human culture and social life, and appears as old as narratives exist, including folktales and myths. Therefore, it is common to find symbols in stories and literature, hence its place in literature study. According to Kirsznner & Mandell (2000:407), “A symbol is a person, object, action, place, or event that, in addition to its literal meaning, suggests a more complex meaning or range of meanings.” Symbols can be grouped as universal (archetypal) and conventional. The former encompasses the same meaning to most people, while the latter are more confined to certain social and cultural assumptions. Both of these groups can be used as literary symbols. However, it is important to note when a thing functions as a symbol or just being itself. Examining how the thing is used, how often it is used, and when it appears will help in determining if the thing serves as a symbol or not.

## Plot

Dibell (1988:5) states that “Plot is built of significant events in the story—significant because they have important consequences.” It is more than just a series of events that occurs in the story, since such events can be regarded as incidents. The action that results in a meaningful impact to the story is what makes an event a plot. As Kirsznner and Mandell (2000:197) put it, “... it is how what happens is revealed, the way in which a story’s events are arranged.” Causal connection (be it historical, social, and personal) by the characters’ interactions and by events’ juxtaposition is what shaped a plot. A plot is divided into several parts from the beginning to the end. Usually, it starts with exposition, then a series of conflicts in the rising action until the climax of the story, then it continues to the falling action before reaching the resolution/denouement. Oftentimes, however, the plot can be constructed in a sequence that does not necessarily follow chronological order; the plot may start from any part that seems the most plausible for creating effects such as interest, suspense, confusion, shock, and many more.

## Related Studies

Across literature studies, the search for symbolism in a text usually deals with particular objects in that text as a whole and not from a specific intrinsic element of the text. For example, publications regarding the symbolism in *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson extracted the symbolism from the physical objects and characters’ names (see Schaub, 1990:79-86). Another study regarding symbolism is the publication of symbolism in the works of Ernest Hemingway such as *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* (Subekti & Wahyuni, 2021:83-92) and *The Old Man and The Sea* (Octova S., 2019:72-78), where the symbols deduced are also taken from the text as a whole, not from a particular intrinsic element in the stories.

Many studies of the symbolic values in myths have been published throughout the age. Altmann (1945:162-171) explores the connection between symbol and myth, although its aim is more toward philosophical, socio-anthropological one. Dominas (2020:109-117) examines the symbolism of pomegranate in ancient mythology. Regarding publication in Indonesia, apart from Yulianto (2016: 35-48) that explains the symbolism behind the myth of the name Banjarmasin, most of the research involving symbols is touching other aspects of folklore, such as physical objects or form of belief. The analysis of symbolism in myth from a literary

perspective, then, may be considered few in quantity, be it in Indonesia or internationally.

On the other hand, there are plenty of works in intrinsic elements, particularly plot. Publications regarding the plot of a story can be found, ranging from short stories, novels, to films. Rahayuningsih (2019:70-82) discusses the intrinsic elements of Edgar Allan Poe's short story *Murder in the Rue Morgue*, including its plot, and the relation between each intrinsic element. Dzikriya and Hartono (2019:85-94) analyzes in great detail the plot of *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, determining the type of plot used in the novel. Sholihah (2021:58-76) examines the plot in the film *The Theory of Everything*, deducing its storyline, ending, and timeline. Nonetheless, the study of plot as exemplified here is dealing mainly with the intrinsic element, and not the symbolism it conveys.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research is performed using a descriptive qualitative method. Kumar (2011:29-33) stated that the function of descriptive study is to systematically describe or provide information about the subject, while qualitative study serves as a method to explore the variation/diversity of the subject. This method is the most appropriate way to reach the objective of this paper (i.e., the symbolism) because of the flexibility it provides in describing the nature of the subject. In this research, the data are collected and compared from many sources to ensure their reliability. It is then summarized and analyzed according to the theoretical framework of symbolism. The plot as the main subject is described to examine the possible symbol-functioning objects, and the objects are inspected further to determine its symbolism. Based on the symbolism of the object, the symbolism of the whole plot is then deduced.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Myth

The myth of Toar and Lumimuut narrates the start of a new population after a great disaster. The summary of the myth is as follows.

*This myth opens with the appearance of Karéma, a female priest, who is shown to be the first survivor of a great flood. After facing toward the four intercardinal directions, another woman come to her from the southwest. Her identity is Lumimu'ut, escaped the disaster by the help of her parents, who laid her down in a raft-boat and gave her seeds and an egg. Upon reaching the place, she found out the objects given to her have become plants and animals. Karéma and Lumimu'ut then live in wellness for some time.*

*Driven by the urge to have offspring, Karéma ask Lumimu'ut to pray to the heaven to give them a man. After performing a rite, the heaven answers her pray in a northwest wind, and Lumimu'ut gave birth to a son. They name him To'ar. To'ar grow up to be a strong, deft, and diligent man. Then, one day Karéma make them two sticks with the same height, first one from an asa plant and second one from tu'is plant. Karéma give the first stick to To'ar and*

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*the second to Lumimu'ut. Afterward she instructs them to journey around the land in a different direction, To'ar to the left, and Lumimu'ut to the right. Should they meet each other in their journey, they must compare the height of their sticks and go back to her. Thus, the mother and the son journey on their separate ways.*

*After journeying for some time, To'ar and Lumimu'ut meet each other. They do as Karéma instructed them: comparing the sticks. They find out that the tu'is stick has grown longer. Now that they have finished their responsibility, they go back to Karéma. Upon finding out that their sticks have different heights now, Karéma pronounced them as mother and son no more, but as wife and husband. Thereafter, they give birth to offspring who will become the Minahasan people.*

Besides the problem of previous research mentioned before, several problems are encountered in reviewing this literature. First, even though this myth is variably popular among the Minahasan people, it is traditionally considered sacred and inherited only in the form of a ritual song, not a written medium. Therefore, it is awfully normal to find many different versions of this myth written. Awfully, because there exist some versions of the myth on the internet that just sound aberrantly fabricated and implausible, particularly regarding the real origin of its character. Two versions found lurking on the internet—and very, unfortunately, make their way into the printed book—the claim that the characters either originated in mainland East Asia or Japan, an argument highly imaginative considering the Minahasan people are linguistically and anthropologically belong to the Austronesian group<sup>3</sup>.

Second, because this myth has so many variations even when the story agrees with each other on some aspects internally, it poses difficulty in selecting the most correct narrative to deal with. As a result, the summary provided in this paper is virtually a combination of a few versions, albeit adhering to the seemingly most plausible version. It is of deep concern that this situation exists, and a more refined, unified story of the myth has proven to be necessary to be disseminated publicly.

## The Plot

Table 1 Plot of Toar and Lumimuut Myth

Exposition	A great flood wiped out almost all living beings, leaving only two separate survivors.
Rising Action	The survivors meet each other and try to survive together. The need for an offspring emerges.
Falling Action	The survivors receive an offspring by supernatural help after they make a plea. They live together by themselves.

<sup>3</sup> see Blust (2013), for example, for details about the relationship of Minahasan in the Austronesian world.

Rising Action	When the offspring becomes an adult, a sort of separation journey is done, with a set of carefully arranged instructions.
Climax	The persons meet again on their journey and find out there has been a change between them.
Falling Action	They went back home as was instructed to them. Thereafter, they are pronounced as husband and wife.
Resolution	The couple gives birth to generations of people, repopulating the land.

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The given table provides the plot of the myth. The myth consists of an exposition, two pairs of rising and falling actions, a climax between the second rising-falling action, and a resolution. The exposition mainly introduces the background as well as the main motive that drives the whole story. There are two rising actions and two falling actions in the story, and this will be discussed further in the next subsection. A climax is found in between the second pair of rising-falling action, highlighting the (possibly) most significant chain-of-event of the story—that is, the second pair of the action. It is immediately followed by a resolution that resolves the story.

### **The Symbols**

The myth of Toar and Lumimu'ut starts at the end of a catastrophe; namely, the great flood. Flood is frequently found in myths and legends across cultures, including the Middle East, the Indian, and the Greek. When flood is involved in such stories, it is almost always followed with a destruction of a civilization (and to some extent, the earth) and a rebirth of a new one. Therefore, cross-culturally, flood is associated with renewal and rebirth. However, unlike many of the myths involving flood that usually narrate the situation pre-flood and the reason for the flood, the cause of the flood is unknown in Toar and Lumimu'ut myth. The myth sets the flood as an exposition for the main story, and here, the flood acts as the cause that drives the characters to survive. Structurally, the flood is the reason why the characters are trying to survive and repopulate the earth.

The events in the myth can be arranged in a sequence of two pairs of rising-falling actions. In the first pair, the first-introduced character Karéma is told as a female priest, a prominent figure in many Austronesian cultures in which Minahasa is a part of. Not long after she comes Lumimu'ut, another female who has involuntarily reflowered the earth. After they live for quite some time, Karéma invites Lumimu'ut to make a plea to heaven for a man. This can be marked as the first rising action since the need to continue the lineage rises as a challenge for the survivor. The way to overcome this is by performing a ritual that includes facing the four intercardinal directions (reminiscent of how Karéma was first introduced in the story). Their plea is answered by heaven with the blow of a northwest wind, and thereafter

Lumimu'ut gets pregnant and gives birth to a son. This indicates the falling action: the challenge faced by the survivors has been passed. In this pair, the plea to heaven is an event, an object that serves a crucial role to the plot.

The second pair introduces the third character, To'ar. Together with Karéma and Lumimu'ut, he lives and grows up to be a great man. When he becomes a grown-up man, Karéma prepares him and Lumimu'ut for another task. She makes two sticks of the same height from different materials and gives one for each of them. Along with this, she orders them to journey around the land with careful instruction. This journey marks the second rising action. It is immediately followed by the climax of the story when To'ar and Lumimu'ut meet again and compare their sticks. They find out that one of the sticks has grown longer. This event can be considered as the climax because it is the turning point toward the next event. As they meet Karéma, they show her their sticks. The difference in height she found becomes a sign for To'ar and Lumimu'ut to marry. This event functions as a falling action to the whole story and is followed by the resolution of the character giving birth to the Minahasan people. Although it is difficult to point out, the whole chain of events that leads to the marriage is another object that has a crucial role to the plot.

There are a total of three events having important purposes that can be found by observing the myth. The first one, the flood, can be thought to stand as a form of catastrophe. Whereas cross-culturally flood symbolizes renewal, in this myth the flood is specifically associated with destruction. The second and the third ones are the plea and the marriage. Both are associated with offspring and attempt to repopulate, and both are set in a ritual. The difference between them is that the plea includes more supernatural assistance, while the marriage involves a chain of events that mainly exerts human effort. Considering their role, both events can be thought of as an effort to renew and rebirth a civilization post-catastrophe.

Although the events themselves are not recurring throughout the story, there are a few considerations to conclude them as the symbols in the myth. First, the flood serves as the cause of the motive performed by the characters. Without the destruction of the earth, there would be no survivors, and the myth would essentially not exist. This means that the flood holds an important role in the story in that it sets the background and the theme. Based on the impact it created, the flood straightforwardly symbolizes catastrophe. Second, even though the plea and the marriage are practically different in the story, they are essentially the same act for the same reason: a ritual driven by the urge to produce offspring. The fact that this action occurs twice iterates its importance in the story, making it even more convincing to put them as symbols. In this case, the rituals symbolize renewal. Since the flood stands as a symbol of catastrophe and the rituals stand as a symbol of renewal, it can be concluded that the plot of the Toar and Lumimuut's myth as a whole symbolize rebirth.

## **CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION**

The myth of Toar and Lumimuut is a genesis myth from North Sulawesi. The myth attempts to explain the origin of the Minahasan people. Structurally, it can be grouped into four parts: exposition, first rising-falling action, second rising-falling action—with the climax in between this action, and resolution. There are three main events found that are important to the plot: the great flood, the plea for offspring, and the marriage. The first is associated with destruction whereas the second and the third are rituals in attempt for repopulation. Therefore,

the flood symbolizes catastrophe, and the rituals symbolize renewal. In conclusion, based on the plot of the story, the myth of Toar and Lumimuut symbolizes rebirth.

More research in regard to the local myth and folklore should be performed in the future. This is especially true for many cultures in Indonesia who have received less attention from the public. With more examination toward the local folklore, it may be prospected that the values of culture or even their origin can be uncovered furthermore. In doing so, the increase of adornment to one's own culture and the preservation of its values are expected to be the output. Learning from myth and folklore can push the spirit of local wisdom, and therefore should be promoted even more.

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