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## **Semiotics of Kafeena: Integration of Verbal and Nonverbal Symbolic Communication in The Wedding Ritual of The Muna Tribe**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines symbolic communication in the Kafeena (pinangan) tradition at the wedding of the Muna tribe in Wali Village, Watuputih District, Muna Regency. The background of this study is the lack of understanding of the community, especially the younger generation, regarding the meaning of verbal and nonverbal communication in the Kafeena procession, which has caused the erosion of local cultural values. This study aims to reveal the symbolic meaning contained in the verbal and nonverbal elements of Kafeena, as well as to provide cultural education as an effort to preserve traditional heritage. The method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, documentation, and literature studies. Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is used as an analytical tool to unravel the denotative and connotative meanings of the symbols in the proposal procession. The results of the study show that Kafeena contains spiritual, social, and cultural meanings conveyed through traditional questions in the form of amenakomu ini and abhentamo pongke ini as well as symbolic objects such as rings, the Qur'an, bathing equipment, and other objects. These findings confirm that Kafeena is a complex cultural communication medium. The conclusion of this study shows that understanding symbolic communication in Kafeena is important to be maintained and passed on through cross-generational education programs to strengthen the cultural identity of the Muna tribe in facing the current of modernization.*

**Keywords:** *Kafeena, Symbolic communication, Semiotics, Local Culture, Wedding*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Marriage is a spiritual bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife. It is a gateway to family life, which influences offspring and community life. A strong and good family is an important requirement for the welfare of society and the happiness of humanity in general (Malisi, 2022). Marriage traditions are still believed in and practiced today based on customary rules that must be obeyed by all members of society. Customary marriage procedures differ between ethnic groups, symbolizing the identity of each tribe in the region or archipelago (Maulana et al., 2022). In the context of the Muna ethnic group, the Kafeena (proposal) tradition plays an important role in the marriage process. Kafeena not only serves as a symbol of seriousness and commitment, but also as a means of communication rich in meaning.

In this study, the author connects five relevant journals on the Kafeena tradition and dowry in the context of marriage. The journal (Hijra et al., 2020) highlights the meaning and social function of the Kafeena tradition (proposal) itself. In the journal (R et al., 2024) the authors analyze the symbolic meaning in the appabbajikang bunting procession in traditional

Makassar weddings, showing how symbols in this tradition are used to convey messages in the context of marriage. In the journal (Siregar & Rochelman, 2021), the authors explain the concept of *seserahan* in traditional Betawi weddings, emphasizing the importance of symbolic communication in strengthening the bond between the two parties. In the journal (Erwin et al., 2016), the symbolic meaning of traditional engagement items in Muna tribe weddings is discussed, showing how these items function as social control in married life. And in the journal (Riftiansyah et al., 2023), the authors examine the tradition of *seserahan* in the preservation of local culture and wisdom, as well as the Islamic perspective on this practice.

However, when viewed critically, these studies tend to be partial. Most studies focus more on the symbolic meaning of objects (nonverbal), while aspects of verbal ritual communication such as traditional speech, question formulas, and symbolic dialogue are often treated as complementary or formalities. As a result, verbal and nonverbal communication in marriage rituals are often analyzed separately, even though in cultural practice they are simultaneously present and mutually construct meaning. This gap is the starting point for this research. The *Kafeena* tradition is actually a complete system of signs, in which traditional utterances such as *amenakomu ini* and *abhentamo pongke ini* cannot be deeply understood without being linked to the accompanying symbolic objects, and vice versa. Therefore, an analytical approach that is capable of reading meaning in a layered and integrative manner is needed.

Unlike previous studies, this study positions *Kafeena* as a meeting place between language and objects, between speech and visuals, and between verbal and material symbols. This research serves as a conceptual bridge that unites verbal and nonverbal communication analysis within a coherent semiotic framework. Thus, this study not only fills an empirical gap in the study of *Kafeena*, but also makes a theoretical contribution to the development of cultural communication studies and symbolic anthropology in Indonesia.

Roland Barthes' semiotic approach is crucial in this context because it allows for the reading of signs on two levels of meaning: denotative and connotative. Barthes does not only view symbols as markers of literal meaning, but also as cultural constructs laden with ideology, social values, and the worldview of society (Fauziyah, 2021). With this framework, verbal and nonverbal communication in *Kafeena* can be understood as an interconnected network of signs, forming a cultural narrative about gender relations, moral responsibility, spirituality and the social structure of the Muna tribe. In this study, the researcher raises the issue of the community's lack of knowledge about the meaning of verbal and nonverbal communication in the *Kafeena* tradition. This limited knowledge can hinder the understanding and implementation of the engagement tradition, which is an important part of the local culture. Verbal communication, which includes the delivery of questions and intentions from the suitor, is often conveyed only as a formality without understanding the intentions and meanings behind the questions. This is due to the community's lack of knowledge about effective communication between generations in the context of the *Kafeena* tradition. As a result, the questions asked of the bride can be ambiguous to some people, causing misunderstandings and tension.

On the other hand, nonverbal communication also faces similar problems. The objects brought in the *Kafeena* process have deep meaning in a cultural context. However, many individuals, especially the younger generation, do not fully understand the symbolism contained in these objects. This lack of understanding can cause the intended message to be lost, thereby reducing the value and meaning of the *Kafeena* tradition. In addition, a lack of knowledge about the cultural context behind the selection of *Kafeena* objects can disrupt communication that should otherwise run smoothly.

This study aims to provide solutions to the problem of the community's lack of knowledge about the meaning of verbal and nonverbal communication in the *Kafeena* tradition. This study is expected to encourage intergenerational dialogue so that older and younger generations can share their experiences and knowledge with each other to understand how to communicate well in the context of *Kafeena*. This will help reduce misunderstandings that may arise due to differences in interpretation. This program can help the community

understand how to convey their intentions clearly and effectively, as well as avoid ambiguity in the questions asked. In addition, training on the meaning and symbolism of Kafeena objects can also increase the community's understanding of nonverbal communication, so that the message to be conveyed can be well received. By increasing their understanding of the cultural context, the community will be better able to appreciate the meaning contained in the objects brought during the engagement process.

By identifying the problem of the community's lack of knowledge about the meaning of verbal and nonverbal communication in the Kafeena tradition and providing relevant solutions, this research is expected to not only be academic in nature but also serve as a medium for cross-generational cultural reflection and education in maintaining the sustainability of the Muna tribe's cultural identity amid the tide of modernization.

## LITERATUR REVIEW

### The Concept of Symbolic Communication in the Context of Kafeena Rituals

Symbolic communication occurs when people in a group or community use symbols to share meaning. Symbolic communication plays an important role in identity formation, socialization, and the maintenance of social structures. Through the use of mutually agreed-upon symbols, community members can build a shared understanding and coordinate their actions (Valentiyo et al., 2025).

In the context of traditional rituals, symbols do not stand alone as objects or linguistic signs, but rather exist as a cultural medium that binds individuals to a collective value structure. In the Kafeena tradition of the Muna tribe, symbolic communication is evident through the integration of traditional speech, gestures, and symbolic objects used in the marriage proposal procession. Meaning in symbolic communication is not naturally attached to symbols, but is produced through cultural agreements and collective experiences of the community. This principle is clearly seen in the practice of Kafeena, where ritual phrases such as *amenakomu ini* and *abhentamo pongke ini* cannot be understood literally, but must be interpreted through the context of customs, kinship relations, and the social structure of the Muna community. Thus, the symbols in Kafeena function as tools for negotiating meaning between the families of the bride and groom, as well as markers of social legitimacy for the process leading up to marriage.

Verbal and nonverbal symbols in Kafeena also play a role in building social cohesion. The items brought, such as rings, the Qur'an, worship equipment, and other personal necessities, not only fulfill customary requirements but also represent the values of responsibility, sincerity, and moral readiness of the prospective groom. Through these symbols, the Muna tribe affirms social norms regarding gender roles, spirituality, and household ethics that are expected in married life.

Verbal messages or verbal symbols consist of all types of symbols consisting of one or more words. In this study, the verbal messages are questions in the form of *abhentamo pongke ini* and *amenakomu ini*. Language is a series of symbols used and understood by society. However, nonverbal communication occurs when messages are conveyed without words. Nonverbal communication is often compared to verbal communication. Nonverbal communication is almost always used when speaking. Therefore, nonverbal communication is always present and consistent. Nonverbal communication is more honest than what is conveyed spontaneously. In addition, nonverbal communication can be defined as human actions that are deliberately sent and considered to have a purpose, which can generate feedback from the recipient. In other words, all types of communication that do not use symbols are called verbal communication, such as words, conversations, or writing. Conversely, nonverbal communication can use symbols such as gestures, colors, and facial expressions. Nonverbal communication is very important. Even if the communicator does not use nonverbal communication at the same time, much verbal communication becomes ineffective (Kusumawati, 2016).

### **Ritual as a Medium of Cultural Communication**

James W. Carey in (Hadirman, 2016) first introduced ritual communication, where he described communication as sharing, participating, friendship, gathering, or association, as well as sharing the same beliefs. In this perspective, communication aims to maintain the community and strengthen social bonds, not merely to convey a message from the sender to the receiver. The Kafeena tradition clearly reflects Carey's concept of ritual communication. The marriage proposal procession is not intended to inform others of the intention to marry, as this intention is already known to all parties, but rather to strengthen the social relations between the two families and the indigenous community as a whole. The repetition of ritual questions three times, the involvement of indigenous leaders, and the use of symbols established by indigenous customs show that communication in Kafeena is participatory and communal. Through Kafeena, the Muna community creates communion, a sense of togetherness and social attachment that is strengthened by shared beliefs and values. Every symbol used, whether traditional speech or material objects, serves as a medium for reviving cultural values that have been passed down from generation to generation. Thus, Kafeena is not only a step towards marriage, but also a ritual arena that renews and maintains the collective identity of the Muna community.

Within the framework of ritual communication, the boundary between message and medium becomes blurred. This is evident in Kafeena, where traditional symbols are not freely chosen by individuals, but are inherited by culture and must be used according to traditional rules. Meaning is not generated solely from personal interpretation, but from the individual's involvement in an established symbolic structure. Therefore, understanding Kafeena requires an understanding of the cultural and ritual context, not just a separate interpretation of symbols. Therefore, these signs are common and understood, even though they have diverse and unclear meanings. Ritual communication requires an understanding of the meaning of rituals. One way of communicating is through rituals. All rituals are intended to communicate. There are three main terms when discussing ritual communication, namely communication, fellowship/celebration, and togetherness (Miharja et al., 2024).

### **Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory**

Roland Barthes' semiotic approach complements the perspective of ritual communication by providing analytical tools to read the layers of symbolic meaning in Kafeena. Barthes distinguishes denotative meaning as literal meaning and connotative meaning as cultural meaning influenced by ideology, values, and the community's worldview. In the context of Kafeena, traditional objects and speech function as signs that produce layered meanings. For example, rings in Kafeena are denotatively jewelry, but connotatively they symbolize social bonds and traditional legitimacy of the relationship between the prospective bride and groom. Similarly, the Qur'an is not only interpreted as a holy book, but as a symbol of spiritual foundation that is expected to be the basis of household life. Using Barthes' approach, the symbols in Kafeena can be understood as a system of signs that represent the moral values, social structure, and religious ideology of the Muna community.

Barthes' semiotic theory is relevant to this study because it explains how symbols function as a system of meaning in social practice. With this approach, verbal and nonverbal communication in rituals can be understood as a series of signs that reflect the social structure, moral values, and worldview of a society.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this study, the researcher used qualitative methods and a descriptive approach. The qualitative research method is a naturalistic method because the research was conducted in natural conditions (natural environment) (Tanjung & Ahmad Sampurna, 2024). The approach used in this study is field research because understanding the kafeena tradition among the Muna tribe in Wali Village, Watuputih District, Muna Regency, requires researchers to be directly involved in community activities in order to obtain in-depth and

accurate information. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria relevant to the research objectives. Six informants were considered representative because they were directly involved in the Kafeena ritual, either as traditional leaders, ritual performers, or family members involved in the procession. The informants also had a deep understanding of traditional symbols and narratives obtained through empirical experience and repeated involvement in rituals. The variation in the social positions of the informants allowed for diverse perspectives to be obtained, while the number of informants was considered adequate because the research emphasized data depth and had reached data saturation.

The data collection techniques used included observation, documentation, and interviews, as well as library research, which involved studying and reading literature related to the research topic (Riftiansyah et al., 2023). In this study, the author describes and explains the events as best as possible based on actual field observations, supported by primary and secondary data obtained from interviews with informants directly involved in the kafeena tradition. Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and cyclical conclusion drawing. At the reduction stage, data from interviews and observations were selected and coded into initial categories such as verbal symbols, nonverbal symbols, social functions, and cultural meanings. The reduced data were then analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework through the grouping of denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings. Denotative meaning refers to the literal meaning of symbols in rituals, connotative meaning indicates the social and cultural interpretations of the Muna community, while myth represents ideological values and collective beliefs that are reproduced through the practice of Kafeena (Tanjung & Ahmad Sampurna, 2024)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the Muna tribe community, especially in Wali Village, Watuputih District, Muna Regency, marriage is regulated according to unwritten Muna customary law based on social stratification by *the sarano wuna* (Muna Customary Council) since the time of the Muna kingdom. Based on the interview with informant 1, marriage in the Muna tribe community consists of several stages, namely:

*"There are many stages in marriage in Muna. From Dekamata, Dempali-mpali, Fenagho tungguno karete, Kafeena, Kataburi, Paniwi, Sara-sara, Lolino ghawi, Kaokanuha, Kafoatoha, Matano kenta, Katangka, Dhoa salama, Kafelesao and finally Kafosulino katulu".*

The purpose of the above interview was for the researcher to find out whether kafeena itself is included in the stages of marriage, whose existence is considered important as a requirement for a marriage to take place. This is supported by the results of an interview with informant 2, who is also a community leader, who said that if *kafeena* (the proposal) is not accepted by the bride, the marriage ceremony cannot take place.

*"Obviously, before the kafeena is handed over, the ijab Kabul process cannot be carried out. This is because the kafeena is a symbol of the bond between the bride and groom. So, the kafeena must be handed over first before the marriage contract can be carried out."*

The interview results above explain that the marriage ceremony can be carried out after the *kafeena* (proposal) items have been accepted by the bride because *the kafeena* contains very important items such as a ring, which is a symbol of the bond that the bride is ready to be married or become the wife of the groom. Furthermore, another informant conveyed the meaning of kafeena, which is an important part of the stages of marriage in Muna society.

*"Kafeena is a sincere gift from the prospective husband to the prospective wife in the form of a wedding ring and other items packaged in a beautiful container, with the hope and prayer that the woman will sincerely and wholeheartedly accept to become his wife."*

The interview above explains that *kafeena* (proposal) is a sincere gift from the prospective husband to the prospective wife in the form of a wedding ring and other items packaged in a beautiful container, with the hope and prayer that the woman will sincerely and wholeheartedly accept to become his wife.

From the results of field observations, the researcher saw that in order to reach the stage of *ijab Kabul* by the groom, the man must go through a long traditional process, especially in terms of the handover and acceptance of containers containing *kafeena* to the woman, and must uphold the value of modesty.

### **Verbal Communication of Kafeena**

During the process of handing over the wedding ring, which is a major requirement before the ceremony and is also the contents of one of the *Kafeena* containers, there is verbal communication conveyed in advance by the male delegation to the bride in the form of questions. The questions are *amenakomu ini* and *abhentamo pongke ini*, which are asked three times.

*Amenakomu ini* is a question addressed to the bride. Furthermore, the meaning of the sentence *amenakomu ini* is explained by the informant as follows:

*"Amenakom ini is asked to the bride three times, then the woman answers umbe also three times. Now, if the bride answers umbe, it means that this woman is truly ready to become the groom's wife."*

Another informant explained the meaning of the phrase *abhentamo pongke* as follows:

*After the bride answers umbe to the amenakoom question, the male delegation from the bride's side says abhentamo pongke, which means that the ring ceremony will take place. If the bride still has her hands covered, it means she is waiting, but if she has uncovered her hands, it means she is ready to have the ring placed on her finger. Abhentamo pongke is also said three times.*

Based on the results of the interviews with the two informants above, the researcher can conclude that the questions asked have very deep emotional, spiritual, and social meanings. The researcher will include the meaning of the verbal communication contained in the interviews above in the following table:

Tabel 1. Verbal Meaning of Kafeena

Sentence form	Denotative meaning	Connotative meaning
Amenakomu ini	I ask you	indicates whether the bride-to-be is ready to become the wife of the man who has proposed to her.
Abhentamo pongke ini	I pierce the ear	to give the bride an understanding of something that has never been heard before about the official relationship between a man and a woman.

Source: Researcher Data

The function of the questions asked to the bride is to strengthen the relationship between the man's and woman's families and to emphasize the importance of politeness and respect towards parents and prospective spouses.

Several items used in the *kafeena* (proposal) ceremony are part of a traditional wedding ceremony that forms a whole to create the meaning of *kafeena* (proposal) itself. All items included in the *kafeena* (proposal) ceremony to the bride must be complete and nothing can be omitted. This is because each item has its own symbolic meaning that is important in the tradition. Based on interviews with informants, they explained that the items that must be provided in the *kafeena* (betrothal gift) include the following:

*"There are 18 types of items in the kabintingia (kafeena container) and they are placed in 13 kabintingia (kafeena containers). The first container contains kampanaha. Kampanaha consists of bhea, karoro, tagambiri, ghefi, tabhako wuna, and gola-gola. The second container contains a long sarong with a ring. The third container contains the Qur'an. The fourth container contains talqum and a prayer mat. The fifth container contains a mirror and a comb. The sixth container contains a knife. The seventh container contains thread and needles. The eighth container contains soap and a toothbrush. The ninth container contained towels. The tenth container contained women's underwear. The eleventh container contained clothes/kebaya. The twelfth container contained cosmetics. And the last container contained sandals/shoes.*

Similarly, the results of interviews conducted by researchers with other informants who are female traditional leaders in Wali Village, Watuputih District, Muna Regency, stated that:

*"There are 18 items that must be in the kabintingia (kafeena container), namely kampanaha, long sarong with rings, the Qur'an, talqum and prayer mat, mirror and comb, knife, thread and needle, soap and toothbrush, towel, women's underwear, dress/kebaya, cosmetics, and sandals. These items are placed in 13 containers, which we Muna people commonly refer to as kabintingia."*

Based on the results of interviews with the two informants above, it is known that the items used in the *Kafeena* (proposal) ceremony consist of 18 types of items placed in 13 *kabintingia* (containers). These items include: *kampanaha*, long sarong and ring, Al-Qur'an, talqum and prayer mat, mirror and comb, knife, thread and needle, soap and toothbrush, towel, women's underwear, shirt or *kebaya*, cosmetics, and sandals or shoes. The 18 items are determined by customary law because they are considered to represent the basic needs of women in married life. Meanwhile, the number of *kabintingia*, which is 13, is determined based on the symbolism of the number of pillars of prayer in Islamic teachings, which is 13. The pillars of prayer are considered the pillars of religion and the main foundation for practicing religious life. Thus, this symbolism reflects the hope that the married couple's household will be built on a solid foundation that will not be easily shaken, just like the spiritual foundation established through the practice of the pillars of prayer.

In this tradition, nonverbal communication takes place through the visualization of symbolic objects chosen based on the customs and cultural norms established by the Muna tribe, where each element acts as a sign or symbol with connotative meaning. Nonverbal communication is communication whose message is conveyed without words. In this tradition, nonverbal communication is used much more than verbal communication (Kusumawati, 2016). The objects used in the *Kafeena* (betrothal) ceremony serve as a medium of nonverbal communication that has a symbolic function in conveying the cultural, social, and spiritual messages of the Muna tribe. Each object that is specially arranged and presented has a specific meaning that is not expressed verbally but can be understood through cultural interpretation.

### Nonverbal Communication in Kafeena

In analyzing the symbolic meaning contained in the kafeena (proposal) procession, this study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which distinguishes between denotative meaning (literal meaning) and connotative meaning (symbolic/cultural meaning)(Gunaepi et al., 2023) . Using this framework, the objects in the Kafeena procession can be interpreted as signs that convey specific cultural messages. The researchers classified the denotative and connotative meanings of nonverbal communication in kafeena (betrothal) based on kabintingia (container) as follows:

1. Kampanaha (betel nut, betel leaf, gambir, Muna tobacco, and candies)

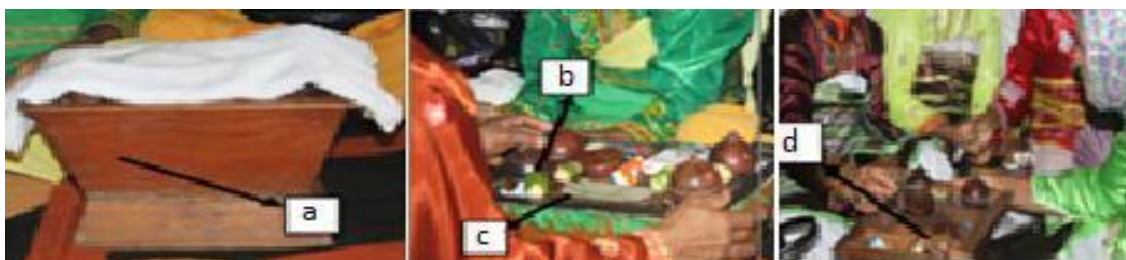


Figure 1. Kampanaha  
Source: Researcher Documentation

**Denotative meaning:** a container filled with betel nuts, gambir, and betel leaves that are commonly chewed. Tobacco is a plant used to make cigarettes, and sugar is a sweet food that is used as a sweet snack.

**Connotative meaning:** Kampanaha, which consists of betel nut, gambir, betel leaf, Muna tobacco, and sugar, has a deep symbolic meaning in the Kafeena handover procession. This set of ingredients represents the values of brotherhood and harmony, and symbolizes the bond between the two families that will be united through marriage. The presence of kampanaha in this procession marks the establishment of an official bond between the man and woman, and strengthens the social and cultural commitments that underlie marriage in Muna tribal society.

2. Long Sarong and Ring

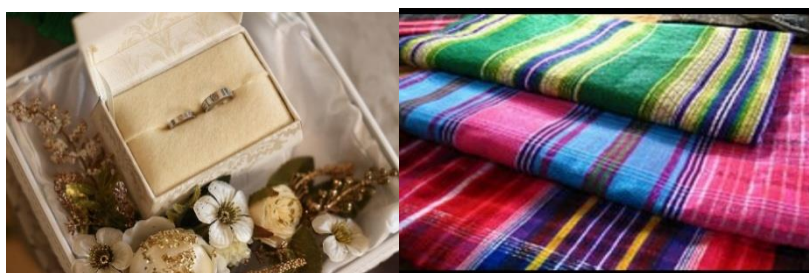


Figure 2. Muna Ring and Sarong  
Source: Researcher Documentation

**Denotative meaning:** a ring is a circular piece of jewelry worn on the finger, while a sarong is a rectangular piece of cloth used as traditional clothing.

**Connotative meaning:** the long sarong is interpreted as a symbol that the determination of class is seen in the location of the ring stored in the sarong. If it is not your class, the ring is hung on the corner of the sarong, and if it is your class, the ring is wrapped in such a way and then placed in the sarong. The ring is a bond of eternity between the bride and groom and is the basic foundation of a traditional marriage that adheres to religious values.

### 3. Al-Qur'an

**Denotative meaning:** the holy book of Islam

**Connotative meaning:** The Qur'an in the Kafeena handover procession is interpreted as a symbol of guidance in life, which is expected to become a spiritual foundation for the bride in her married life. The presence of the Qur'an reflects religious values and emphasizes that marriage is not only a social bond, but also a religious mandate that must be carried out in accordance with Islamic teachings.

### 4. Mukenah and prayer mat



Figure 3. Mukenah and Prayer mat  
Source: Researcher's documentation

**Denotative meaning:** mukenah is clothing that covers the body of Muslim women, while sejadah is a mat used for worship during prayer.

**Connotative meaning:** in the Kafeena handover procession, the mukenah is interpreted as a symbol of the groom's invitation and hope that the bride will always maintain her religious obligations, especially the five daily prayers, in her married life. Meanwhile, the prayer mat represents an invitation to always prostrate and draw closer to Allah SWT, while also reflecting the husband's responsibility to provide adequate means of worship for his family. These two objects emphasize the importance of spiritual values and piety as the main foundation in building a harmonious household according to Islamic teachings.

### 5. Mirror and comb

**Denotative meaning:** a mirror is a tool used to see one's reflection, while a comb is a tool used to tidy or comb hair.

**Connotative meaning:** The mirror is interpreted as a reflection of the sincerity and honesty of the groom in proposing to the bride. Meanwhile, the comb is interpreted as meaning that all problems in the household should be resolved with a sincere heart without being known by others.

### 6. Knife

**Denotative meaning:** A knife is a sharp tool used for cutting or slicing.

**Connotative meaning:** The knife included in the Kafeena procession has a symbolic meaning as a representation of sharpness of heart and mind in facing the various dynamics of married life. For the groom, the knife also symbolizes strength, courage, and identity as a leader in the family. This symbol emphasizes the important role of men in maintaining, protecting, and making wise decisions in building a household.

### 7. Thread and Needle

**Denotative meaning:** Needle and thread are used as tools for sewing.

**Connotative meaning:** Needles and thread in the Kafeena procession contain a philosophy about roles and responsibilities in married life. These objects symbolize attachment and harmony, where the wife is expected to be able to follow her husband's directions with

complete trust, while the husband is positioned as the leader (imam) who is responsible for guiding and leading his family towards a purposeful and harmonious life. This symbol reflects the values of mutuality in the husband-wife relationship, where the integration of guidance and obedience is the main foundation in building a strong household.

#### 8. Bath soap and toothbrush



Figure 4. Bathing supplies  
Source: Researcher's documentation

**Denotative meaning:** bath soap and toothbrush are items used when bathing.

**Connotative meaning:** In the Kafeena procession, bath soap is interpreted as a symbol of the importance of maintaining physical and spiritual purity in married life. This item represents an invitation to always maintain cleanliness and purity, which are reflections of sincerity and harmony in marriage. Meanwhile, a toothbrush symbolizes the values of politeness and ethics in speech, which are important aspects in fostering polite and respectful communication between husband and wife. These two objects symbolically emphasize the importance of cleanliness, politeness, and ethics in maintaining the quality of relationships in the household.

#### 9. Towel

**Denotative meaning:** a towel is a piece of cloth used to dry the body

**Connotative meaning:** In the Kafeena procession, a towel symbolizes the hope that a wife will always maintain her physical and spiritual cleanliness as a form of responsibility in running a household.

#### 10. Women's Underwear



Figure 5. Women's Underwear  
Source: Researcher's Documentation

**Denotative meaning:** Clothing worn under outer garments that serves to provide comfort and support.

**Connotative meaning:** In the beliefs of the Muna tribe, women's underwear included in the Kafeena procession symbolizes secrecy and honor. This symbol represents moral values that teach married couples to always maintain their dignity and honor in married life, both in personal and social aspects.

### 11. Blouse/Kebaya



Figure 6. Kebaya

Source: Researcher Documentation

**Denotative meaning:** a dress is an item of clothing that is usually worn on the upper part of the body

**Connotative meaning:** In the Kafeena tradition of the Muna tribe, the dress or kebaya is interpreted as a symbol of elevated status, beauty, and modesty for the bride. This gift reflects the hope that the bride will appear elegant and dignified, and carry out her social role with ethics and honor in her married life.

### 12. Cosmetic tools



Figure 7. Cosmetic Tools

Source: Researcher Documentation

**Denotative meaning:** Cosmetic tools are devices or products used to beautify or care for the appearance of the face and body.

**Connotative meaning:** Cosmetic tools in the Kafeena procession are interpreted as symbols of beauty and self-care. In the context of marriage, this symbol reflects the encouragement for both spouses (husband and wife) to always adorn themselves and maintain their appearance, not solely for aesthetic purposes, but as a form of mutual pleasure and appreciation for one another. In addition, self-care also serves to build self-confidence in carrying out social roles in society, as well as strengthening harmony in domestic life.

### 13. Shoes/sandals



Figure 8. Shoes

Source: Researcher Documentation

**Denotative meaning:** sandals or shoes are footwear worn to protect and provide comfort to the feet.

**Connotative meaning:** The Muna tribe believes that shoes/sandals are the footwear worn by husbands to seek sustenance and a call to brides to help/support their husbands in seeking sustenance to meet their household needs. The philosophy of sandals/shoes in household life is mutual dependence, whereby if one of a pair of sandals/shoes is damaged, the other sandal/shoe is no longer useful, just as with a husband and wife; if the husband encounters a problem, the wife must help solve it.

However, after conducting field observations, the researcher found that only traditional leaders and elders residing in Wali Village, Watuputih District, Muna Regency, knew the meaning or messages contained in *kafeena* (betrothal). This was supported by the results of interviews with informants who said:

*"I am usually called to hold the kafeena (proposal) at wedding parties, but I only know that the kafeena is a requirement for the marriage to proceed. I don't know the meaning or messages contained within it, such as the ring, sandals, prayer equipment, and other items."*

Similarly, the results of interviews with informants who are local traditional leaders regarding the efforts made by leaders of the Muna tribal institution to educate the Muna tribe about the meaning of *kafeena* (betrothal) in preserving the local culture of Muna tribal marriage are as follows:

*"We have not made any efforts because there seems to be a lack of awareness about this. I also just carry out my duties without realizing that customs like this must be passed down or taught to our children. I hope that with this research, the central government can be informed to provide education about kafeena customs and other customs to our children."*

This quote emphasizes the importance of education about symbolic communication in the Kafeena (proposal) tradition, especially for teenagers who do not fully understand the meaning and cultural value behind the procession. This is very important considering that the younger generation plays an active role in the Kafeena proposal to the bride, so their involvement must be accompanied by a deep understanding of the symbolism and customs. As the next generation, teenagers have a moral responsibility to preserve the local cultural heritage in Wali Village, Watuputih District, Muna Regency, so that it is not eroded by the tide of modernization.

To address this issue, researchers have attempted to take strategic steps such as organizing local cultural education through school programs or community training, involving traditional leaders in socialization activities, and documenting Kafeena traditions in written and visual forms. With this approach, it is hoped that the younger generation will not only be involved in ceremonial activities, but will also have cultural awareness and the ability to continue and preserve the authenticity of traditional values in the social life of the community.

### **The Connection Between Semiotic Theory and Kafeena**

The results of the study show that every element in the Kafeena tradition (marriage proposal) among the Muna tribe has a deep meaning, both in verbal and nonverbal communication. The symbols used, such as the Qur'an, knives, underwear, towels, and even cosmetics, are not merely complementary objects in traditional ceremonies, but contain cultural, spiritual, and social messages that reflect family values. In analyzing these symbolic meanings, this study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of the signifier and signified. The idea developed by Roland Barthes is known as two levels of meaning. The first level of meaning is the relationship between the signifier and the signified. This level describes the relationship between the signifier (object) and the signified (meaning) in a sign, as well as between the sign and its referent in external reality. This refers to the actual (real) meaning and the signifier (object). The second level of meaning is the interaction that occurs when signs meet

(connotative meaning) (Mulyazir & FAdhillah, 2023) . In Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the denotative and connotative meanings of ritual symbols function as an initial layer that then integrates at the mythical level. At this level, symbols no longer merely represent specific objects or values, but construct ideological narratives about marriage, spirituality, and the social identity of the Muna community.

The interaction between symbols in Kafeena forms a cultural myth that affirms marriage as both a social and spiritual event. Material symbols, such as rings and traditional equipment, connotatively represent social readiness and responsibility, while religious symbols, such as the Qur'an and worship equipment, affirm the spiritual foundation of household life. The presence of these symbols in a series of rituals produces a coherence of meaning that constructs an image of the ideal family according to Muna society, namely a family that is customary, religiously moral, and socially recognized. In Barthes' perspective, this myth naturalizes cultural values so that they are accepted as reasonable and established truths. This finding goes beyond previous research trends that analyzed ritual symbols separately and descriptively. This study shows that the power of Kafeena's meaning lies in the relationship between symbols that work as a mythological system. Thus, the original contribution of this study is the reading of Kafeena as a complete and cohesive symbolic communication practice, not just a catalog of cultural symbols.

In James W. Carey's perspective on ritual communication, Kafeena functions as a medium for maintaining social communion through collective participation and symbolic repetition. However, field data shows a decline in the younger generation's understanding of the meaning of ritual symbols. Rituals tend to be understood as formal customary procedures, without any appreciation of the cultural and spiritual values they embody. This condition indicates a weakening of the function of ritual communication as a medium for the transmission of values across generations. This erosion of understanding can be understood as a failure at the mythical level. When ritual symbols are no longer understood in relation to their mythological meaning, cultural values that were previously naturalized are reduced to formalities. As a result, rituals lose their pedagogical function as a means of internalizing social identity and cultural ethics. These findings confirm that the physical continuity of rituals does not automatically guarantee the continuity of cultural meaning.

Based on these findings, this study recommends strengthening the role of traditional leaders and families in explaining the symbolic meaning of Kafeena through narrative and dialogue. In addition, integrating Kafeena values into local cultural education can reinforce the function of rituals as an effective medium of cultural communication. This effort is important so that Kafeena continues to function as a mythical system that builds the social identity and spiritual values of the Muna people amid social change.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, this study also has practical implications for the preservation of local culture. The younger generation's lack of understanding of the values contained in Kafeena is a major concern. Young people often participate only ceremonially without understanding the symbolic meaning of the objects they carry in the handover procession. In fact, they play an important role in the continuity of this tradition. Therefore, cross-generational cultural education is needed through training programs, traditional counseling, or the integration of local cultural material into the education curriculum (Siregar & Rochelman, 2021). These activities are expected to increase the awareness and responsibility of the younger generation in preserving the Kafeena tradition as a cultural heritage that is not only symbolic but also rich in moral and social values.

Therefore, this discussion shows that the Kafeena tradition is not merely an engagement ceremony but a complex and meaningful form of cultural communication. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, this study successfully reveals that each symbol in the ceremony functions as a medium of communication that connects traditional values with the social life of the community.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research on symbolic communication in the Kafeena (proposal) tradition in Muna tribe weddings, it can be concluded that this tradition is not merely a traditional procession, but a cultural communication system rich in meaning, both verbally and nonverbally. This study successfully achieved its main objective, which was to reveal and analyze the symbolic meanings contained in each element of Kafeena through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, which distinguishes between denotative and connotative meanings. The usefulness of this study lies in its efforts to preserve local culture through intergenerational education, emphasizing the importance of understanding the symbols and messages contained in this tradition. Theoretically, this research expands the application of semiotics theory in the context of cultural communication and social practices of indigenous peoples, as well as enriching the knowledge base in the fields of communication and anthropology. Practically, the results of this research can be implemented through cultural education programs in families, schools, and indigenous communities to increase young people's awareness of the cultural, moral, and spiritual values in the traditional marriage process of the Muna tribe, while maintaining the continuity of traditions in the face of modernization challenges.

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