

## **SYMBOLS AND MEANINGS IN THE MEMATUA RITUAL PROCESSION AMONG THE KAILI INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

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**Abstrak.** *This research aims to understand the symbols and meanings of the Mematua ritual procession among the Kaili indigenous people in Siniu Sayogindano Village. This research uses an ethnographic analysis. Ethnographic analysis is an approach that begins with field facts, analyzes them based on cultural theories and relevant arguments to explore the cultural situation of the community, and ultimately yields a conclusion. The results show that the Mematua ritual procession among the Kaili indigenous people is an event rich in symbols and meanings, embodying deep cultural values and reflecting local wisdom. The eight stages of this procession, from the Polele fetching the bride to both newlyweds seeking blessings from their parents, not only represent steps in a wedding ritual but also teach the importance of harmony, respect, and commitment in marital life. Each aspect of the Mematua ritual reflects harmony among individuals, families, and the broader indigenous community. This underscores that marriage in the Kaili indigenous tradition is an event uniting two individuals and a community ritual involving respect for social and spiritual values passed down through generations. Therefore, it is recommended that the Department of Education and Culture of Parigi Moutong Regency intensify efforts to document and research the Mematua ritual procession of the Kaili indigenous people to ensure that the richness of symbols and meanings in this tradition is preserved and continues to be recognized by future generations. For the Kaili indigenous people, it is advised to continue nurturing and practicing this tradition, not only as a way to celebrate significant life moments but also as a means to strengthen community bonds and honor a rich cultural legacy. Greater involvement of the indigenous community in preparing and conducting this ritual procession can effectively preserve the social and spiritual values foundational to the Kaili tribe amidst the challenges of modernity and globalization.*

**Keywords:**  
*Indigenous People;  
Marriage;  
Ritual;  
Symbol and Meaning.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia, composed of thousands of islands, is renowned for its diverse tribes and rich cultures. Each tribe in Indonesia deserves special attention due to its unique cultural characteristics, traditions, and beliefs (Arios, 2019). These cultures

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are often expressed through traditional activities passed down through generations, highlighting the importance of preserving traditions to maintain the nation's cultural identity. These traditional activities are not just ceremonial; they also manage social order and resolve issues in community life, whether trivial or complex (Rijal et al., 2020).

In terms of cultural diversity, the customs of each region in Indonesia play a crucial role in shaping the character and identity of its respective tribe (Akhirun & Septiady, 2022). This is evident from various traditions still preserved today, such as harvesting customs (Sari & Setyawan, 2022), tribal leader inauguration ceremonies (Lutiyasa & Nerosti, 2022), and marriage customs (Siswanto & Ubaidillah, 2020), which are cultural expressions and effective social regulatory mechanisms. These mechanisms assist communities in maintaining order and harmony while serving as distinctive features that differentiate one region from another. These customs prove that local traditions and cultures are vital assets enriching the nation's diversity (Peter & Simatupang, 2022).

A prime example of the richness and originality of local culture in Indonesia is the tradition of the Kaili indigenous people from Central Sulawesi. The Kaili tribe, one of the largest in this region, has historically inhabited strategic areas such as the Palu Valley, Parigi, Tomini Bay, and others (Kalesaran et al., 2017). The customs and traditions maintained by the Kaili indigenous people reflect a cultural richness essential not only to the tribe's identity but also as part of the broader cultural mosaic of Indonesia. The diversity in marriage customs, for instance, not only showcases the originality of local traditions but also serves as a means to strengthen social bonds among community members and reinforce the social values passed down through generations.

In Siniu Sayogindano Village, Parigi Moutong Regency, customs are not merely traditions but an integral part of daily life that defines the identity and values of the indigenous people. Amidst the currents of modernization that increasingly erode cultural boundaries, the community in this village steadfastly adheres to ancestral heritage as guidance and a framework for living. A tangible manifestation of local cultural richness is the Mematua ritual, which is central to the traditions of the Kaili indigenous people in Siniu Sayogindano Village (Raden, 2011). The Mematua ritual is more than a customary ceremony; it embodies a deep philosophy and worldview.

The Mematua ritual, the culmination of a series of traditional wedding ceremonies for the Kaili indigenous people, marks a significant moment when the bride first visits the home of the groom's parents. This process is more than just a tradition; the Mematua ritual represents a complex amalgamation of regulations, symbols, expressions, and specific tools and language that symbolize various aspects of life and belief. Each stage of the Mematua ritual is rich in rituals and contains profound meanings reflecting the interactions between individuals, higher powers,

fellow humans, and their environment. The continuation of this ceremony emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships in various life dimensions.

Every detail of the Mematua ritual conveys values that teach decorum, respect, and social harmony. Strict regulations, meaningful symbols, and characteristic expressions all function as means to communicate these values. Moreover, the specifically chosen tools and language used in the ceremony are not just communication media but also instruments to strengthen spiritual connections between humans and their creator and to tighten bonds among community members. Thus, this procession is not merely a cultural event but also an educational and unifying medium for the indigenous people.

Furthermore, implementing the Mematua ritual adheres to established customary and religious laws. Combining customary rules and religious teachings illustrates how the local community successfully integrates noble values with adherence to prevailing norms and regulations (Sari & Sutarto, 2021). This demonstrates that customs in Siniu Sayogindano Village uphold traditional values and accommodate universal principles of truth and justice. Balancing adherence to tradition and alignment with religious values creates robust social harmony, strengthens community structure, and clarifies a rich cultural identity.

Adherence to the Mematua ritual and its integration with religious values demonstrate local awareness and wisdom in preserving and perpetuating cultural heritage. This effort is crucial not only in the context of cultural preservation but also in building and reinforcing the indigenous identity of the Siniu Sayogindano Village community. The village's success in maintaining harmony between customs and religion affirms the role of traditions as a vital pillar in the social structure, helping to sustain traditions and values passed down by ancestors. This is concrete evidence of the resilience and adaptability of local culture amidst contemporary challenges.

Based on the description above, this research aims to understand the symbols and meanings of the Mematua ritual procession among the Kaili indigenous people in Siniu Sayogindano Village. Through an in-depth examination of this ceremony, the research seeks to reveal how each stage, symbol, and meaning in the Mematua ritual reflects cultural values and shapes social, spiritual, and environmental relationships within the Kaili tribe. The findings of this study are expected to provide new insights into the cultural richness and life philosophies embodied in the Mematua ritual, as well as strengthen the appreciation and preservation of this invaluable cultural heritage amidst modernity and globalization challenges.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach to understand groups of people, objects, situations, conditions, ongoing events, and even thought systems (Whitney, 1960). This research was conducted in Siniu Sayogindano Village, Parigi Moutong

Regency. This research utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Data was collected through interviews with key informants, field observations, literature study techniques, and document analysis concerning symbols and meanings in the wedding ritual processions of the indigenous people. The acquired data was then analyzed using ethnographic analysis. Ethnographic analysis is an approach that begins with field facts, analyzes them based on cultural theories and relevant arguments to explore the cultural situation of the community, and ultimately yields a conclusion (Hicks et al., 2018).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In the customary procession of the Kaili indigenous people, marriage holds a sacred and vital position, serving as a bond between two individuals and a profound spiritual journey for both parties. The Mematua ritual, a critical stage in this journey, marks when the bride first visits the groom's parents' home after the wedding ceremony. This tradition reflects respect and recognition of the newly formed family and reinforces the social bonds between the two families.

The selection of an auspicious day full of blessings constitutes the initial preparation for the Mematua ritual among the Kaili indigenous people. This auspicious day is typically set two days, five days, or one week after the wedding day. The criteria for selecting this day are based on the deep-rooted beliefs of the Kaili indigenous people and mutual agreement between both families. This shows that each aspect of the Mematua ritual is carried out with careful consideration and is not arbitrary, given its significant spiritual weight. In preparing the necessary items for the procession, the role of the *Djoboki* (female traditional elder) is crucial because they possess deep knowledge of the traditions and symbols that must be present in the Mematua ritual.

In the Mematua ritual procession practiced by the Kaili indigenous people, each stage is filled with symbols and meanings aligned with the principles of semiotics in culture. Semiotics theory, focuses on the relationship between the signifier and the signified, where a symbol (signifier) always carries a related meaning (signified) (Alexander, 2018). In the context of the Mematua ritual, each symbol presented is not just for decoration or ceremonial purposes but carries deep meanings closely related to the social, spiritual, and philosophical values of the Kaili tribe.

For example, in one stage of the Mematua ritual, the use of specific items by the *Djoboki* serves as ceremonial tools and as representations of hopes, prayers, and values to be imparted to the newlyweds. Selecting an auspicious day for performing the Mematua ritual also holds strong symbolism. This is rooted in sacred time, which is meaningful in many traditions. In this context, time is seen as a succession of days and a chosen moment when the universe is believed to bestow blessings and positive energy for starting a new life. This understanding aligns with the theory of sacred time in anthropological studies, which states that selecting specific times for rituals

is based on the belief that these moments possess a higher spiritual quality than ordinary times (Schneggh, 2021).

The above discussion shows that the Mematua ritual procession is not merely a series of customs but a manifestation of the Kaili indigenous people's value system, beliefs, and life philosophies, handed down through generations. Accordingly, this text will detail the symbols and meanings according to their stages in the Mematua ritual procession of the Kaili indigenous people in Siniu Sayogindano Village.

#### **A. The Groom's Family Fetches the Bride and Her Family**

The fetch stage in the Mematua ritual reflects readiness and acceptance among the Kaili indigenous people, where the *Polele* (male traditional elder) plays a crucial role as a symbol of unity between the two families. The action by the *Polele* is not merely a formality. However, it represents a tangible manifestation of the communication bridge and unity to be built between the families of the bride and groom. In this context, *Polele* serves more than just as an intermediary; he embodies the values of familial connection, harmony, and sincerity in welcoming a new member to the family.

This stage also mirrors the fundamental principles of mutual assistance and strong community spirit within the Kaili tribe's culture. The collective action of the groom's family in the fetch process reaffirms the communal values foundational to the Kaili indigenous people. This principle of togetherness, vital in many agrarian and communal societies, demonstrates how individuals and families are not isolated but part of a broader social network that supports each other (Muis, 2022).

The significance of joy at the arrival of a daughter-in-law during this stage is also noteworthy. This joy is not merely a temporary emotion but also a symbol of hope and prayers for a bright future for the new couple. The happiness expressed through this stage reflects the optimism and support of both families toward establishing a new family unit, which is expected to bring blessings and happiness to all involved.

#### **B. The Couple Stands at the Door and is Showered with White Rice**

The second stage of the Mematua ritual procession, in which participants shower white rice over the couple standing at the doorstep of the groom's family home, carries profound symbolism concerning the purity of heart. The use of white rice in this context extends beyond mere tradition; its selection, due to its pure color, often symbolizes purity and cleanliness. This ritual reminds the couple and all present of the importance of maintaining a pure heart as they enter a new chapter of their lives together.

In this context, the concept of a pure heart is directed at the couple and the entire family and community involved. Showering white rice at the doorway, a new threshold the couple will cross, symbolizes the transition to a life together, hoping to be filled with good intentions, sincerity, and honesty. Through this ritual, the Kaili indigenous people emphasize the importance of starting a new relationship on a clean and sacred foundation, free from ill intentions or doubts.

During this process, reciting gane-gane or mantra adds a spiritual dimension to the ritual, reminding everyone of the values and life principles that must be upheld. The mantras recited are prayers for happiness and prosperity and serve as reminders of the importance of living with a pure heart. In this context, the spoken words function as a tool to reinforce the collective commitment to maintaining purity of heart and mind to create a harmonious and loving life together.

### **C. The Couple Steps on the Trough**

The third stage in the Mematua ritual procession, which involves the couple stepping on a trough filled with kayu nggo plants, symbolizes the deep meanings of resilience and durability in marriage. The selection of hardwoods like *kapa'* (axe wood), *silagur* (sidaguri), *siranindi* (mother of thousands), *pamanu* (nutgrass), and *ira kamonji* (breadfruit leaves) reflects not only their physical strength but also the meanings they carry; strength, resilience, and the ability to endure under any conditions. In the cultural context of the Kaili tribe, this step represents the hope that the couple's marriage will be as robust as these plants, capable of withstanding various trials and challenges.

The concept of resilience and durability in marriage symbolized through this ritual, aligns with anthropological theories on the role of symbols in mediating social relations. According to cultural interpretation, ritual symbols play a crucial role in communicating and reaffirming the existing social values and norms within a community (Kang & Yu, 2022). The couple performs a tradition by stepping on the trough filled with hardy plants and symbolically declares their commitment to building a strong and lasting relationship.

### **D. The Bride is Adorned with Botiga**

The fourth stage in the Mematua ritual procession, where the bride is adorned with *botiga*, an accessory made from thread, beads, and copper-gold, reflects a moment rich in meaning and symbolism. This process is not merely the gifting of jewelry but rather the embodiment of a strong and inseparable bond between the couple. The use of *botiga*, especially materials like copper and gold, represents the hope for a durable and valuable relationship akin to the resilience and worth of these materials.

The procedure of the *botiga* being placed by the groom's mother or grandmother adds a dimension to this ritual related to the transfer of roles and

responsibilities. In many cultures, including the Kaili tribe, the role of the mother in wedding ceremonies is often symbolic and significant, illustrating the formal acceptance and recognition of the bride into the new family (Puspani & Herdiyanto, 2016). Through this act, a symbolic process occurs where the bride is accepted as part of her husband's family and as a bearer and continuer of the family's values and traditions.

The placement of the *botiga* on the bride's left hand is also laden with symbolism. In various traditions, the left hand is often connected to the heart, the center of emotions and feelings. Therefore, wearing the *botiga* on the left hand can be interpreted as a symbol of the deep emotional and spiritual bond between the couple and between the bride and her new family, now an integral part of her life.

### **E. The Couple is Given Special Food**

The fifth stage in the Mematua ritual procession, which involves the *Djoboki* feeding the bride and groom special food, highlights the crucial role of elders in married life. In many traditions, including that of the Kaili tribe, offering food is seen as a physical caregiving act and an expression of love and care. With the *Djoboki* or female traditional elders giving the first bite, there is a strong symbolism of the continuing role of parents in providing support and guidance, even as their children enter a new phase in life as a married couple. This act reminds the couple that family support remains available, offering security and unchanged affection despite their new social status.

After the couple receives the first bites, they engage in the *nosimpasuaka* procession, where they feed each other, deepening the themes of cooperation and understanding in marriage. This ritual reflects the basic principles of communication and giving in interpersonal relationships, as discussed in theories of interpersonal communication (Rohmah et al., 2020). By feeding each other, the bride and groom demonstrate their readiness to share—not just food but also responsibilities, joys, and challenges. This ritual emphasizes the importance of mutual giving and receiving, which are essential foundations of any healthy relationship. Thus, *nosimpasuaka* symbolizes cooperation and a commitment to understanding and accepting each other as they are, appreciating strengths and lovingly accepting flaws.

### **F. Advice Given to the Couple**

The sixth stage in the Mematua ritual procession, marked by the Kaili indigenous community leader advising the newlyweds, represents a critical moment that signifies their transition into married life. This advice is not merely a formality but an effort to prepare the couple for the challenges and responsibilities of being husband and wife. In many communities, including the Kaili indigenous people, advice from an authoritative figure like the community leader is considered

a valuable guide containing essential life principles and values (Indriyana et al., 2016).

The meaning inherent in this stage is the hope that the couple's life will be directed and their household filled with *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *warahmah*—terms that refer to peace, love, and affection. These represent universal prayers and wishes in every marriage. In the context of communication theory, this advice-giving process can be viewed as a form of instructional communication aimed at equipping the couple with the knowledge and understanding necessary to build and maintain a healthy and harmonious relationship (Qureshi, 2018).

Furthermore, the role of the community leader in providing advice underscores the importance of communal wisdom and the transmission of cultural values in guiding its members. This reflects the understanding that marriage is not merely a private affair between two individuals but also a social entity whose existence is crucial for the stability and continuity of the tribe. Therefore, through this stage, the Kaili tribe teaches that the support of the indigenous community and guidance from elders are vital in forming a solid foundation for married life.

#### **G. Prayer for Safety Read for the Couple and Communal Meal**

The seventh stage in the Mematua ritual procession, which includes a prayer for safety followed by a communal meal, underscores the importance of community and togetherness in celebrating and supporting marriage. The prayer for safety reflects the belief that spiritual support and prayers from the community are crucial in bestowing blessings and protection on the new couple. The prayers offered by all present aim not only for the newlyweds' physical well-being but also their household's harmony and peace. In a sociocultural context, this act reaffirms the deep religious and spiritual values of the Kaili tribe, as well as the role of the indigenous community in nurturing and safeguarding the domestic lives of its members.

The communal meal that follows the prayer symbolizes unity, fellowship, and collective celebration. The food served in a trough, including *konisa* (rice), *bau tunu* (grilled fish), *uta ira tomoloku* (sweet potato leaf vegetables), *uwe* (drinking water), and *penggavuisi pale* (handwashing vessel), provides not only physical sustenance but also signifies abundance, prosperity, and togetherness. Serving dishes in a trough, a recurring element in various stages of the Mematua ritual, highlights the concept of sharing and equality among all attendees, reflecting the egalitarian social structure of the Kaili indigenous community.

In the theory of ritual communication, communal eating within the context of a ritual is often viewed as a communicative act that strengthens social bonds and clarifies the community's social structure (Ashrafi, 2022). In this case, the communal meal following the safety prayer reinforces these social bonds, marking



the couple's transition into their new life with the support and blessings of their indigenous community.

#### **H. The Couple Seeks Blessings from Their Parents**

The eighth and final stage in the Mematua ritual procession, where both newlyweds seek blessings from their parents and bow in reverence, marks the conclusion of the ritual by emphasizing the importance of honoring parents. Bowing is not merely traditional but symbolizes respect, gratitude, and acknowledgment of all the sacrifices and guidance given to them. This ritual reminds the couple that even though they have entered a new phase in life as husband and wife, their relationship and obligations to their parents remain unchanged.

The parental blessing at this stage carries deep significance in many cultures, including the Kaili tribe. Parental blessings are considered an essential element that brings prosperity and protection to the new couple as they embark on their life together. Anthropological theory suggests that these blessings are symbolic and have tangible effects on individuals' social and psychological construction and relationships (Habibi & Kusdarini, 2020). The prayers and blessings from parents are seen as strengthening the spiritual and moral bonds between individuals and their families, playing a crucial role in the resilience and harmony of the household.

The farewell process from one of the families, especially from the bride's side, reflects the social transition experienced by the bride from her family to forming a new family unit with her husband. This transition changes family dynamics and signifies the expansion of social and family networks. Although there is a physical separation, the ritual affirms that emotional and social bonds remain intact and respected.

Thus, this final stage teaches the importance of maintaining family relationships and honoring the origins and traditions that have shaped both individuals into who they are today. It demonstrates how the Mematua ritual focuses on the union between two individuals and maintaining and respecting broader family relationships. Through this stage, the Mematua ritual procession reaffirms the social and cultural values that underpin the life of the Kaili indigenous community, teaching that in every step of life, especially in crucial moments like marriage, family relationships, and respect for parents, should not be overlooked.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the Mematua ritual procession among the Kaili indigenous people is an event rich in symbols and meanings, embodying deep cultural values and reflecting local wisdom. The eight stages of this procession, from the *Polele* fetching the bride to both newlyweds seeking blessings from their parents, not only represent steps in a wedding ritual but also teach the

importance of harmony, respect, and commitment in marital life. Meanwhile, the role of the *Djoboki* is to prepare symbolic items to recite safety prayers and communal eating. Each aspect of the Mematua ritual reflects harmony among individuals, families, and the broader indigenous community. This underscores that marriage in the Kaili indigenous tradition is an event uniting two individuals and a community ritual involving respect for social and spiritual values passed down through generations.

Based on the above conclusion, it is recommended that the Department of Education and Culture of Parigi Moutong Regency intensify efforts to document and research the Mematua ritual procession of the Kaili indigenous people to ensure that the richness of symbols and meanings in this tradition is preserved and continues to be recognized by future generations. Additionally, it is crucial to integrate an understanding of the cultural values contained in this ritual procession into the local educational curriculum so that the youth of the Kaili indigenous community can understand and appreciate their cultural heritage. For the Kaili indigenous people, it is advised to continue nurturing and practicing this tradition, not only as a way to celebrate significant life moments but also as a means to strengthen community bonds and honor a rich cultural legacy. Greater involvement of the indigenous community in preparing and conducting this ritual procession can effectively preserve the social and spiritual values foundational to the Kaili tribe amidst the challenges of modernity and globalization.

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