

Interpreting socio-cultural values in Toraja: The symbolism of Garonto' Sura' in Kada Tomina

 Aris Kaban Sendana¹,  Fathu Rahman^{1*}, Nasmilah¹, Harlinah Sahib¹

¹Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar, Indonesia; fathu.rahman@unhas.ac.id (A.K.S.)

Abstract: The interrelation of Toraja cultures is vividly embodied in the traditional motifs, *garonto' sura* (the basic model of the engraving. It is the oldest one of the engravings), particularly in their engraving art, *passura'*. These motifs, prominently displayed on *tongkonan* (traditional houses) and rice barns, symbolize the socio-cultural values of the Toraja people. This study focuses on the expression of *garonto' sura* in *kada tomina* (the words uttered by the Toraja traditional host. It is figurative language of the Toraja people used by the traditional host in both thanksgiving and burial rituals), verbal utterances by traditional hosts during high ceremonial events to interpret their symbolic representation of socio-cultural values. Employing a hermeneutic approach combined with communication semiotics, this research critically analyzes the meanings encoded in these motifs and their associated expressions. The motifs *pa'sussu'*, *pa'tedong*, and others are integral to Toraja rituals, such as *rambu solo'* (death ceremony) and *rambu tuka'* (thanksgiving ceremony). For example, *pa'sussu'* symbolizes purity, nobility, and unity, while *pa'tedong* reflects the significance of the buffalo as a socio-economic and cultural icon. These motifs not only highlight social stratification but also reinforce the ideological and ceremonial practices of the Toraja people, illustrating their hierarchical structure and values such as leadership, respect, and community unity. Results reveal that *kada tomina* serves as a medium to convey these values, showcasing distinctions in language, rituals, and social practices. The study concludes that *garonto' sura* expressions in *kada tomina* symbolize and perpetuate the Toraja's cultural norms, hierarchy, and heritage, reinforcing the significance of traditional art and oration in preserving socio-cultural identity.

Keywords: Embodied, *Garonto' sura'*, *Kada tominaa*, *Socio-cultural values*, *Toraja*.

1. Introduction

The Toraja culture, renowned for its unique traditions and customs, is deeply interwoven with symbolic art and rituals [1-3]. Among these cultural elements, *garonto' sura'*, represented in *passura'* (engraving art), holds a central position in defining the identity and values of the Toraja people. As noted by Wu and Cheong [4] these motifs are prominently displayed on *tongkonan* (traditional houses) and *alang* (rice barns), serving not only as decorative features but also as profound symbols of Toraja's hierarchical structure, communal ideology, and ceremonial practices. Rather than mere artistic expressions, *garonto' sura'* embodies deep cultural meanings that reflect social stratification, leadership, and collective unity.

While previous studies have explored the aesthetic and functional aspects of *tongkonan* and *passura'* Kress [5] research has largely overlooked the verbal expressions associated with these motifs, particularly those articulated in *kada tomina*—a formal ceremonial speech delivered by traditional hosts during significant cultural events. Stockinger [6] argues that *kada tomina* plays a vital role in rituals such as *rambu solo'* (death ceremonies) and *rambu*

tuka' (thanksgiving ceremonies), which are fundamental to Toraja cultural life. However, despite the acknowledged importance of these ceremonies, there is limited scholarly attention on the interplay between garonto' sura', their symbolic meanings, and their articulation in kada tomina. This gap underscores the need for a deeper hermeneutic and semiotic analysis of these motifs as transmitters of cultural values [7].

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the symbolic representation of garonto' sura' in kada tomina. As Khanmohammadi [8] suggests, a hermeneutic approach integrated with communication semiotics provides an effective framework for decoding the embedded meanings of these motifs. In particular, this research examines motifs such as pa'sussu' (which symbolizes purity and unity) and pa'tedong (which reflects the socio-economic and cultural significance of the buffalo) [9]. Furthermore, this study critically investigates how these motifs and their associated verbal expressions reinforce Toraja's socio-cultural hierarchy, leadership structures, and communal cohesion.

By focusing on the interrelation of motifs, language, and rituals, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of Toraja cultural heritage [10, 11]. It highlights the importance of preserving not only the visual and architectural dimensions of passura', but also the oral traditions that provide contextual meaning to these artistic elements. In doing so, this research fills a critical gap by demonstrating how kada tomina functions as a medium for transmitting cultural values, shedding light on the broader significance of traditional art and oral traditions in sustaining socio-cultural identities [12]. The primary aim of this study is to examine how garonto' sura' motifs are symbolically represented in kada tomina and to analyze their role in conveying and sustaining Toraja's socio-cultural values. By doing so, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural, linguistic, and artistic heritage of the Toraja people, emphasizing the significance of traditional art and oral traditions in shaping communal identity and continuity [12].

This research aims 1) to interpret the socio-cultural values embedded in the garonto' sura' through the expression of kada tomina in the Toraja traditional ceremony. 2) to reveal the symbolic meaning found in traditional motifs such as pa'sussu' and pa'tedong, and how these motifs reflect social stratification, values of leadership, respect, and unity in Toraja society. By using a hermeneutic and semiotic communication approach, this research becomes a strategy to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Hermeneutics in the Interpretation of Kada Tomina in Toraja Culture

Hermeneutics is an interpretative approach used to understand the meaning behind texts, symbols, and culture. In the context of this research, hermeneutics is applied to interpret verbal and symbolic expressions in Toraja culture, particularly in kada tomina as part of the traditional heritage. Robinson [13] emphasizes that hermeneutics not only focuses on the literal meaning of a text or symbol but also on how that meaning is understood, negotiated, and reinterpreted in various social and cultural contexts. Therefore, the expression of kada tomina is not merely a ceremonial utterance but also a cultural heritage that continues to undergo reinterpretation in every traditional ceremony. Along with the social changes within the Toraja community, the meaning of kada tomina evolves, making it an important medium in preserving, reproducing, and transmitting cultural values from generation to generation.

2.2. Roland Barthes' Semiotics and Cultural Symbolism

Barthes' semiotics focuses on the relationship between signs and their meanings, which are constructed through both denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (cultural or symbolic meaning). In this study, the motifs and expressions serve as signs that carry explicit and implicit meanings in Torajan society. For example, pa'sussu' (symbolizing purity and unity) and pa'tedong

(reflecting the socio-economic importance of buffaloes) are not merely decorative elements but function as communicative symbols embedded in Torajan culture.

Applying Barthes' concept of denotation and connotation, the motifs and expressions used in rambu solo' (death rituals) and rambu tuka' (life-celebration rituals) hold deeper, culturally embedded meanings. The denotative meaning of a buffalo motif, for instance, may simply represent the animal itself, while its connotative meaning signifies wealth, status, and sacrifice in Torajan society. Beyond this, Barthes' idea of myth is also crucial in understanding how these elements reinforce cultural ideology. The motifs and expressions function as myths, shaping and maintaining Torajan social structures, beliefs, and values.

By applying Barthes' semiotic principles, this study uncovers the symbolic layers of garonto' sura' (the basic model of the engraving. It is the oldest one of the engraving) motifs and kada tomina (the words uttered by Toraja traditional host. It is figurative language of Toraja people used by traditional host in both thanks giving and burial ritual) in Torajan rituals. It reveals how these traditional elements act as signs and myths, adapting to different ceremonial settings while maintaining their symbolic power. This analysis helps to illustrate how semiotics can be used to interpret cultural expressions that communicate identity, tradition, and social hierarchy within the Torajan community.

3. Research Methodology

The research is qualitative in nature, focusing on the interrelation of garonto' sura' motifs and their verbal articulation during ceremonial events [14]. The primary goal is to interpret how these traditional elements convey the socio-cultural values, hierarchical structures, and communal identity of the Toraja people.

Data for this study is collected through multiple methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter [15]. Photographic and descriptive records of garonto' sura' motifs, such as pa'sussu' and pa'tedong, prominently displayed on tongkonan (traditional houses) and rice barns [16]. Audio and video recordings of kada tomina, the verbal utterances delivered by traditional hosts during high ceremonial events, including rambu solo' (death ceremonies) and rambu tuka' (thanksgiving ceremonies). Ethnographic observations conducted during ceremonial events to capture the cultural and ritualistic context in which garonto' sura' and kada tomina are performed. Semi-structured interviews with traditional leaders (tomina) and cultural practitioners to gain insights into the meanings, functions, and cultural significance of the motifs and utterances [17].

The analysis follows a structured process combining hermeneutic interpretation and communication semiotics [13]. This step involves an iterative process of interpreting kada tomina utterances and their connection to garonto' sura' motifs. By situating these cultural expressions within their historical and socio-cultural contexts, the study seeks to uncover the values and ideologies they represent. The hermeneutic circle, a process of moving between the individual elements (motifs and utterances) and the broader cultural framework, guides this interpretative effort [18].

Using Roland Barthes' semiotic principles, the study analyzes how garonto' sura' motifs and kada tomina serve as communication tools. This includes examining the relationship between the encoder (traditional hosts), the message (symbolic meanings), and the audience (community members). The motifs, such as pa'sussu' (symbolizing purity and unity) and pa'tedong (reflecting the socio-economic importance of buffaloes), are analyzed as signs within Barthes' framework, where denotation and connotation play key roles in meaning-making. The motifs and kada tomina expressions are examined across different ceremonial contexts (rambu solo' and rambu tuka') to identify variations and commonalities in their symbolic representations. This comparative approach, grounded in Barthes' semiotic theory, reveals how these expressions function as myths, adapting to different social and ritual settings while reinforcing cultural ideologies.

This study adheres to ethical research practices by obtaining informed consent from participants, respecting cultural sensitivities, and ensuring accurate representation of Toraja traditions. By employing this methodology, the research aims to provide a critical understanding of the role of garonto' sura' motifs and kada tomina in perpetuating Toraja cultural identity. The findings are expected to highlight the significance of traditional art and oration in preserving socio-cultural values, while offering broader insights into the interconnection of visual and verbal cultural expressions in indigenous societies.

4. Results of the Study

This section presents various aspects of the socio-cultural dynamics in Toraja society, highlighting the intricate relationship between tradition, social hierarchy, and cultural expressions. It explores the class structure, from the elite Tana' Bulaan to the lowest Tana' Kua-kua, illustrating how status influences access to land, wealth, and social power. Additionally, it delves into ritual practices, such as Rambu Solo' (death ceremonies) and Rambu Tuka' (thanksgiving ceremonies), where traditional speeches like Singgi' play a crucial role in reinforcing cultural identity. Through these elements, the section provides a deeper understanding of how Torajan customs shape social interactions, beliefs, and values.

4.1. Expression of Passura' in Traditional Rituals

Data 1

Garonto' Sura' is symbolically expressed in Kada Tominaa (traditional speech) or Singgi' (Toraja literary expression).

Garonto' Sura' is symbolically expressed in Kada Tominaa, a traditional speech, or Singgi', a form of Toraja literary expression used in important ceremonies such as Rambu Solo' (death ceremony) and Rambu Tuka' (thanksgiving ceremony). These expressions, often delivered by Tongkonan Kada (traditional hosts) or Gora-gora Tongkon (ritual leaders), serve to honor the ancestors, convey wisdom, and reinforce social values within the community. Singgi' plays a crucial role in preserving oral traditions, emphasizing gratitude to God, respect for the Torajan people, and appreciation for cultural heritage, particularly the artistic and symbolic significance of Passura' motifs.

Data 2

Rambu Solo' (death ceremony) and Rambu Tuka' (thanksgiving ceremony).

Used in Rambu Solo' (death ceremony) and Rambu Tuka' (thanksgiving ceremony), these traditional expressions play a significant role in Torajan culture by conveying respect, gratitude, and social values. In Rambu Solo', they honor the deceased, guide their soul to the afterlife, and strengthen communal ties, while in Rambu Tuka', they express appreciation for blessings, celebrate prosperity, and reinforce unity among the people. Both ceremonies highlight the importance of oral traditions, with symbolic speeches, rituals, and artistic elements such as Singgi' and Passura' motifs, which preserve and transmit cultural identity across generations.

Data 3

Traditional hosts (Tongkonan Kada or Gora-gora Tongkon) express singgi' in these rituals.

In Torajan rituals, traditional hosts, known as Tongkonan Kada or Gora-gora Tongkon, play a vital role in expressing Singgi', a form of literary and symbolic speech. During ceremonies like Rambu Solo' (death ceremony) and Rambu Tuka' (thanksgiving ceremony), they deliver Singgi' to convey wisdom, honor ancestors, and uphold cultural values. These eloquent speeches reflect the community's heritage, reinforcing social harmony and spiritual beliefs. By preserving and performing Singgi', the traditional hosts ensure that Toraja's oral traditions remain an integral part of their sacred ceremonies.

Data 4

Singgi' appreciates God, Toraja people, and their cultural works.

Singgi' is a traditional Torajan literary expression that conveys deep respect and appreciation for God (Puang Matua), the Toraja people, and their cultural heritage. Through poetic and symbolic language, Singgi' honors divine blessings, acknowledges the strength and unity of the community, and celebrates the wisdom embedded in Torajan traditions. It serves as a means of preserving cultural identity, reinforcing values, and expressing gratitude for the collective efforts in sustaining their way of life. Whether recited in rituals or ceremonies, Singgi' reflects the spiritual and social essence of the Toraja people.

4.2. Social Stratification and Power Dynamics

Data 5

Tana' Bulaan (elite class) owns land, rice fields, and buffaloes, controlling people's lives.

In the traditional Torajan social structure, the Tana' Bulaan, or elite class, holds significant power and influence over society. As the highest-ranking class, they own vast lands, rice fields, and large numbers of buffaloes, which are essential in Torajan culture for rituals and economic status. Their wealth allows them to control agricultural production, dictate labor, and maintain dominance over lower social classes. Through this ownership, they play a central role in the community's economic and ceremonial life, reinforcing their privileged position.

Beyond material wealth, the Tana' Bulaan also wields authority in social and cultural matters, guiding traditional ceremonies, including Rambu Solo' (funeral rituals) and Rambu Tuka' (thanksgiving ceremonies). Their influence extends to decision-making in communal affairs, ensuring the continuity of customs and hierarchical order. This class distinction, deeply rooted in Torajan society, reflects a system where wealth and heritage determine social standing, preserving traditions that have been passed down through generations.

Data 6

Tana' Bassi (high class) includes wealthy people without noble ancestry.

The Tana' Bassi, or high class in Torajan society, consists of wealthy individuals who have accumulated wealth through trade, farming, or other means but do not have noble ancestry like the Tana' Bulaan (elite class). Despite lacking hereditary status, their financial success allows them to participate in important social and cultural activities, including traditional ceremonies such as Rambu Solo' and Rambu Tuka'. While they may not hold the same level of authority as the noble class, their wealth grants them influence and respect within the community, bridging the gap between the elite and lower classes in Torajan society.

Data 7

Tana' Karurung (lower class) are free commoners.

In Torajan society, Tana' Karurung refers to the lower class of free commoners who, unlike slaves, have personal autonomy but do not possess significant wealth or noble lineage. From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective, the denotative meaning of Tana' Karurung simply refers to a social class of free individuals. However, at the connotative level, their status symbolizes social mobility limitations and cultural hierarchies embedded in Torajan traditions. Their role in society is often tied to labor and service in communal rituals, reinforcing the implicit myth that wealth and ancestry determine one's prestige and influence in Toraja, aligning with Barthes' idea of how culture shapes deeper meanings beyond literal definitions.

Data 8

Tana' Kua-kua (lowest class) are slaves due to poverty, oppression, or being sold.

Tana' Kua-kua represents the lowest class, consisting of individuals who became slaves due to poverty, oppression, or being sold. From a semiotic perspective, the denotative meaning of Tana' Kua-kua refers to their literal status as enslaved people. However, the connotative meaning extends beyond

this, symbolizing the deeply ingrained power structures and economic disparities within Toraja culture. Their existence reflects a historical system where social hierarchy is rigid, and personal freedom is tied to wealth and ancestry. In Barthes' view, this constructs a myth that legitimizes inequality, portraying servitude as a natural consequence of misfortune rather than a result of systemic oppression.

4.3. Discussion

The cultures of Toraja are interrelated one another. One exotic culture of Toraja is the passura', the motif of engraving put generally put on the Tongkonan (traditional house) and alang, a rice barn. Passura' of Toraja are 125 recognized as communal intellectual property [19]. Four of them are the garonto' sura', the basic and oldest of first-found curving of Toraja. Those garonto' sura' are pa'sussu', pa'tedong, pa'manuk londong and pa'barre allo. The garonto' sura' are usually expressed symbolically in kada tominaa or singgi' by tongkonan kada, traditional host in the traditional event or rituals, rambu solo' and rambu tuka'. Rambu solo' is the ritual for the death ceremony and rambu tuka' is the thanks giving ceremony. In both rambu solo' and rambu tuka' ceremonies, tongkonan kada or gora-gora tongkonan expresses singgi'. Singgi' is expression in toraja literature. Singgi' is used to appreciate God, the Toraja people, and the works of the people, such as tongkonan, etc. The garonto' sura' expressed in kada tomina or singgi', symbolizes the socio-cultural values of Toraja people. To disclose the socio-cultural values in garonto' sura' expressed in kada tominaa, The hermeneutic approach is used to gain critical interpretation and understanding. As part of hermeneutic approach, communication semiotics maintains production of sign. One of them assumes six factors in communication, encoder, decoder, code, message, and reference [20].

Pa'sussu' is a motif of Toraja's passura' (engraving) formed vertically and horizontally. This motif is generally put on the tongkonan (a traditional house) and rice barn of Toraja. Pa'sussu', in certain event, is sometimes expressed by Tomina in his singgi', "Digente, sura'rangke baktu inang madarang Banuanna Nene, dipaotonni pasussu inang tongkonan layukpi" (it is called a dried curving. It is very seldom of the ancestors house used pa'sussu' unless tongkonan layuk, the highest rank of tongkonan in the area of kaparengesan (an area leads by parenge') leadership). "Tongkonan dinai mekutana tau kebendanni pa'panandana tondok, pantan daenan malipu to ditarik gallang sangka'na tongkonan kurre kurre sumanga'na" (the tongkonan where people ask information how to perform certain ritual). This singgi' expressed by tomina or tongkonan kada, a traditional host, in the ceremony of starting the curving in the Tongkonan. Pa'sussu' is a motif of toraja carving that is not given color [21]. The motif of pa'sussu' symbolizes purity, nobility, democracy and unity. In the singgi', it is expressed "Digente, sura'rangke baktu inang madarang Banuanna Nene, dipaotonni pasussu inang tongkonan layukpi". This singgi' encodes in social culture of Toraja. Social stratification is a part of social culture of Toraja. It is classified into four classes, tana' bulaan (highest class), tana' bassi (high class), tana' karurung (lower class), and tana' kua-kua (the lowest class). This classification discloses the situation and condition of the Toraja society. Looking back to the life situation of Toraja people in the past that the dominant and the powerful people (highest class) owned much wealth, such as land, rice field, and buffalo [22]. They had the ability control the people and to build the house, called Tongkonan. People came asking for protection and working to get the needs for living. These men are rich, living in tongkonan layuk and having a large number of slaves. The people who have much wealth, power, and slaves but not the descendant from the tongkonan layuk are categorized as tana' bassi (high class). Besides that, some of the people are free [14]. They did not have lord. They are free to work to both to ma'dika or puang (highest class) or to tomakaka (high class). They are classified as layman or tana' karurung (low class) without a burden of salvation. The situation of poverty, hunger, oppression made large number of people surrendered to the powerful and rich people. They came to ask for protection from the oppression and to ask something to eat. Some of them were sold by one hand to anther hand. This situation and condition brought them to be slave. They are classified as tana' kua-kua (lowest class) [23].

Sura' rangke (dry carving) or pa' susu' wants to show the ideology of dryness. The ideology of

dryness refers to a situation of rituals performance, rambu solo'. The dryness referring to rambu solo' is a situation, a member of family experiencing death. Due to his or her status as ma'dika or puang (highest class), the family and traditional figures discussed and decided that the rambu solo' ritual taken and given as the body's class is bongi todolo or bongi tomatua. If the dead body is decided taking or following the ritual level, bongi todolo or bongi tomatua, accordingly, the family and relatives have to prepare and slaughtered at least nine buffaloes. This situation enforced the family to keep the dead body in a long time on the tongkonan. The dead body was in the condition of dried [24].

Ideology distinction of stratification classification brings urgent effect in social practice and performances of rituals [25]. From the perspective of power dynamics, the stratification of tana' bulaan (highest class) has the dominancy in many aspects of life in Toraja. Pinheiro, et al. [26] states similar case that in government and bureaucracy, the Toraja people believed that the leaders must be from the descendant line of tana' bulaan class. According to Toraja people, the leadership is strongly related to controlling of people. People obeyed the command of the highest class, in contrary people disobeyed the command of the layman, tana' karurung, moreover, tana kua-kua. In communicative expression, it is very distinctive in language use. The lower class of the people speak polite to the higher class. When the layman or the slaves speak to the tana' bulaan (highest class), the common expression they said, "tabe' ambe or indo" (excuse me, father and mother). The word father and mother are not referring to biologically parents, but it is expressed the polite manner and attitude to treat his or her lord. Another instance is "inde ki' ma'dokko" (inde means come, ki' is kita, a personal pronoun us and ma'dokko means sit). In contrary when the tana' bulaan speak to tana' kua-kua, they speak without considering the politeness. Besides that, the symbol of nobility can be seen in sitting position and the dress code. Sometimes the tana' kua-kua take the position to sit behind. They do not use red, yellow and white color of the clothes (sarong and t-shirt) in the rambu solo' and rambu tuka' [27].

Tongkonan is the place where Toraja people conducts, ma'kombongan, a meeting to decide the rules (sangka' or ada') related to rituals. It is called a dried curving. It is very seldom of the ancestors house used pa'sussu' unless tongkonan layuk. Pa'sussu is a motif or ornaments that is put only on certain tongkonan the ideology symbolized in pa'sussu' is strongly related to the rank and the function of the tongkonan. One function of the tongkonan layuk is to unite the family, and all the relatives. It also functions as place to solve the problem or conflict, such as conflict of heredity, conflict related to rituals performance and the criminals or fighting [28].

Pa'tedong is carving motif that similar to buffalo. It is mostly curved on the wall of tongkonan and alang (rice barn). There some passura' (carving) related to the carving, pa'tedong, those are pa'tedong tumuru, pa'tanduk ra'pe, and pa'tanduk ra'pe dibulu londong and pa'taliga tedong. It is stated by Tomina in his singgi' that "inang ada, na tongkonan inang daenanna inde osokan barung barung ditedong tedong sangkinanna, disarussu'to likulambe'na" (it means it is appropriately according to the customs, tongkonan is carved with pa'tedong) [29]. This singgi' is expressed in the rituals of thanksgiving of tongkonan. Other expression stated that "tedong maluangan dao tongkonan, kanae masindung daote isungan barung barung baktu tongkonan tomerrapu tallang". "tedong maluangan (tedong means buffalo and maluangan means wide denotatively and wise connotatively), kanae masindung (kanae means buffalo and masindung means wide denotatively and wise connotatively)", so the whole stance of the expression means wide or wise buffalo on the tongkonan or on the house of the large family or relatives [30].

Tedong maluangan or tedong masindung refers to tedong pudu', a black male buffalo. The symbol of buffalo on passura' is always express in singgi'. It aims to convey the buffalo (tedong), as a precious commodity in Toraja. It takes essential part in socio culture of Toraja people. On the agriculture aspect buffalo helped Toraja people to cultivate. It is functioning as traditional cultivator. On the economic side, Tedong is as means of exchange. People of Toraja pawned their rice field or garden if they need money. The payment was not in cash of money, but it was in the form of buffalo. Buffalo as transactional tool, is budgeted in various consideration. From the body side, the lowest is sang leso (a fourth), one leg of buffalo. The next budgeting is sang sese (a half), a half body of buffalo. Tallung sese (three-quarter),

three legs of buffalo. And then, one buffalo and so on. This pawning is budgeted in living buffalo. One consideration as mutual understanding is the prices of the buffalo following the market inflation. For example, if the rice field was pawned 10 years long, it must be redeemed according to the price of buffalo at that time. Another way to budget the price of the buffalo is from the side of horn measurement [31].

Inang ada'na tongkonan inang daenanna inde osokan barung barung ditedong tedong sangkinanna, disarussu'to likulambe'na. This expression refers to a Tongkonan that has a cultural norm to be curved using Pa'tedong. Pa'tedong is curved on the pole that connect one sheet of wall with another. This expression trying to convey the status of the tongkonan and the level of rituals have been done by the ancestors who formerly lived on that tongkonan. The ritual meant is both rambu solo' and rambu tuka'. In the ritual of rambu solo', the ancestors have slaughters buffalo in their ritual. The number of buffalo and the level of ritual are various according to every custom area [32].

Kikua tabe' lako to digente' barrena allo, lindona bulan tu tiumba' dio mai pira pira pentutuan inan daenanna lipu sanda kasalle (digente' means named or nicknamed, barrena allo means shining sun and lindona bulan is face of moon). Figuratively, this expression addressed to the noble men of Toraja. It symbolizes the noble man. This singgi' (poetic expression) is expressed by tominaa or tongkonan kada (host) to welcome the noble men in certain rituals both rambu solo' and rambu tuka'. Ia lindona bulan, ia barrena allo. Sipobayu bayunna inde todipaturu turu tomamma todipamaro'reng tometindo daote lakkean lalong, dipopengulu sau' di popenta'si lurekke ulunna salu kalua' (he/she is noble man or woman, that it is his or her custom to be put on the Lakkean, a house built specially as a place of the dead body in high level rituals of rambu solo'), this expression aims to convey the status of the body. Barrena allo, lindona bulan conveys that the dead body is a noble man/woman [33].

To dinai mekutana londong, meosik tanda masiang (a person where people ask question or consideration whenever there is something will be done in one custom area). In one custom area, if a family or a group of people intend to conduct something related to a custom, they come to pekaamberan (an experienced traditional figure) ask question or consideration. The expression, to dinai mekutana londong, meosik tanda masiang, refers to an experienced traditional figure who hold the responsibility of the custom in that custom area [34].

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the profound interconnection between Toraja cultural identity and its traditional motifs, garonto' sura', particularly as they are represented in passura' (engraving art) and verbal expressions in kada tomina. These motifs, prominently displayed on tongkonan (traditional houses) and rice barns, serve as visual and verbal representations of the Toraja people's socio-cultural values, such as purity, nobility, unity, and leadership.

Through the use of a hermeneutic approach and communication semiotics, the research reveals that pa'sussu', pa'tedong, and other motifs play central roles in rituals like rambu solo' (death ceremonies) and rambu tuka' (thanksgiving ceremonies). These motifs and their associated expressions not only reflect social stratification and cultural hierarchy but also function as mediums for preserving ideological and ceremonial practices. Moreover, kada tomina emerges as a critical communicative tool, transmitting cultural values and reinforcing the Toraja's heritage through its nuanced use of language, ritualistic context, and symbolic expressions.

This study concludes that the interplay of garonto' sura' and kada tomina is vital for sustaining the Toraja's cultural identity, emphasizing the significance of traditional art and oration in maintaining their socio-cultural cohesion and legacy. The implication of this research presents a new perspective on the understanding of the cultural significance of Toraja for the life of its society.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Copyright:

© 2025 by the authors. This open-access article is distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

References

- [1] A. F. Ridwan, A. Giblatar, R. Radityo, and I. Oktavia, "Semiotic Analysis of Selected Sign Interpretation in Public Space Using Saussure's Theory," *Journal of Multidisciplinary Inquiry in Science, Technology and Educational Research*, vol. 2, no. 1b, pp. 2023-2035, 2025.
- [2] A. R. Asba, F. Rahman, and A. L. Evita, "Save the forest and biodiversity: A cultural anthropology perspectives on kalumpang customary to preserve their ecological living," presented at the In IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science (Vol. 270, No. 1, p. 012005). IOP Publishing, 2019.
- [3] Nahdhiyah, F. Rahman, H. Abas, and M. A. Pattu, "Ecocritical study on relationships between humans, nature, and god in the novel the Alchemist," *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 2170019, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2170019>
- [4] Y. Q. Wu and C. Y. M. Cheong, "Corporate branding of academic institutions: Semiotic communication of logos and names," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 321-343, 2024.
- [5] G. Kress, *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge, 2009.
- [6] P. Stockinger, *The art of communication: Semiotic foundations and strategic applications*. John Wiley & Sons, 2025.
- [7] S. Aryana, "The facial expressions determine the character of 5-year-old children: A study of semiotics, psychology, and nonverbal communication," *Journal of Language Education Research*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 1-17, 2025.
- [8] K. Khanmohammadi, "Recognizing the communication elements of Ashura and its implicit meanings," *Human Sciences Elite Discourse*, 2025.
- [9] K. W. Purnawati, K. Artawa, M. S. Satyawati, and I. N. Kardana, "Unveiling communication strategies through public space signs: A linguistic landscape study in Badung Smart Heritage Market, Bali-Indonesia," *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 2444045, 2025.
- [10] C. Campbell and A. Olteanu, "The challenge of postdigital literacy: Extending multimodality and social semiotics for a new age," *Postdigital Science and Education*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 572-594, 2024.
- [11] H. Sahib, F. Rahman, A. Duli, and A. R. Asba, "Customary forest conservation through informal knowledge system of ammatowa community," presented at the In IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science (Vol. 270, No. 1, p. 012042). IOP Publishing, 2019.
- [12] N. Gakahu, "Image-centrism in Africa's political communication: a social semiotic analysis of self-presentation practices by women political candidates in Kenya's social media space," *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 27, no. 8, pp. 1687-1711, 2024.
- [13] D. Robinson, "Hermeneutic approaches," in *The routledge handbook of translation theory and concepts*: Routledge, 2023, pp. 413-442.
- [14] R. Amel, *The hermeneutical turn in semiotics*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022.
- [15] B. Gubman and K. Anufrieva, "Historical narrative and enrichment of the meaningful horizon of cultural worlds," *Semiotica*, vol. 2024, no. 260, pp. 203-219, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2024-0142>
- [16] A. Olteanu and S. Ongstad, "Utterance-genre-lifeworld and sign-habit-umwelt compared as phenomenologies. integrating socio-and biosemiotic concepts?," *Biosemiotics*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 523-546, 2024.
- [17] P. A. Agwu, P. Onwanua, and J. O. Acha, "Nonverbal communication, silence and cultural expressions in Jean-Paul Sartre's literary concept: A philosophical language and art view," *Futurity Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 60-79, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.57125/FP.2024.09.30.04>
- [18] X. Dong and Y. Zhang, "Semiotics, language and law: The linguistic turn in jurisprudence. In Chinese legal translation and language planning in the new era." Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2023, pp. 1-18.
- [19] M. H. Sumiaty, C. E. Randalele, R. Iye, and F. I. Nur Abida, "The value of Tallu Lolona and its influence to the life of Toraja people," *Cogent Social Sciences*, vol. 9, no. 2, p. 2262775, 2023.
- [20] L. Sitz, "Beyond semiotics and hermeneutics: Discourse analysis as a way to interpret consumers' discourses and experiences," *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 177-191, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13522750810864431>
- [21] I. Siregar, "Semiotic touch in interpreting poetry," *Britain International of Linguistics Arts and Education Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 19-27, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.33258/biolae.v4i1.618>
- [22] R. C. ARNETT and S. MANCINO, "Hermeneutics and semiotics," *Bloomsbury Semiotics Volume 4: Semiotic Movements*, vol. 4, p. 123, 2023.
- [23] H. He and X. Dong, "Semiotics, language, and law: The linguistic turn in Western jurisprudence," *Chinese Semiotic Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 147-168, 2022.
- [24] V. L. Gamsakhurdia, "The dialectics of ethnocultural positioning: A historical and intergenerational perspective on georgian identity construction," *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, pp. 1-18, 2025.

- [25] M. Haladewicz-Grzelak and P. García-Ramírez, *Hermeneutical narratives in Art, literature, and communication*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024.
- [26] M. A. Pinheiro, J. V. Luna, and A. N. D. de Souza, "Creativity and Body: Living Metaphors in the Context of People Undergoing Heart Transplantation," *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, vol. 59, no. 1, p. 13, 2025.
- [27] R. L. Lanigan, "Communication theory and semiotics," *Bloomsbury Semiotics Volume 4: Semiotic Movements*, vol. 4, p. 15, 2023.
- [28] Y. Li and X. Wang, "A study on commodity criticism from the perspective of marxist semiotics," *Trans/Form/Ação*, vol. 48, no. 3, p. e025013, 2025.
- [29] D. Restrepo-Quevedo, R. Cuervo, J. Gonzalez-Tobon, J. Camacho, and E. Hernandez, "Intersemiotic emergence in sketchbook-mediated design learning," *Visual Communication*, p. 14703572231206462, 2024.
- [30] Y. R. Lembang and M. Lamadirisi, "Toraja in building traditional tongkonan houses in Lembang Bau Bullian Massa'bu, Sangalla' District, Tana Toraja regency," Retrieved: <http://ejurnal-mapalus-unima.ac.id/index.php/paradigma/article/view/45>, 2020.
- [31] N. S. Latif and M. Hamka, "Mathematics learning and local wisdom. In academia.edu," Retrieved: https://www.academia.edu/download/65528857/1._Tugas_wawasan_klp_5_nila_hamka.pdf [Accessed n.d.
- [32] T. Apriyani, "Toraja cultural identity in the novel puya ke puya by faisal oddang in mimesis core.ac.uk," Retrieved: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/287171346.pdf>, 2020.
- [33] M. Hasyim, "Analisis semiotikawarna pada artikel "the connotation of english colour terms: Colour-based x-phemisms" dengan in researchgate.net," Retrieved: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hasyim-Muhammad/publication/325391700_Analisis_Semiotika_Warna/links/5b0ac8b6aca2725783e9399c/Analisis-Semiotika-Warna.pdf, n.d.
- [34] Y. Andilolo, "Deconstruction of the meaning of Tana' as a social structure of padang Dipuangi Tana Toraja," *Syntax Literate; Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia*, vol. 6, no. 8, pp. 4217-4231, 2021.