



# The Semiotic Study: Decoding the Symbolic Meaning of the Nokeso Tradition in the Salena Environment

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative research explores the *nokeso* tradition in the Salena environment of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. It aims to uncover the significance of the symbols within this cultural practice. Conducted in Tipo Village, *Ulujadi* District, Palu City, the study employed observation, recording, and interviews to gather evidence-based data. *Nokeso* is an indigenous tradition upheld by the Salena community, originating from the Kaili tribe. While traditionally associated with children entering adolescence, the research revealed that in Salena, it also involves the readiness of *vati* (male parents) of girls based on their social status. The *nokeso* ritual includes the symbolic act of tooth brushing, performed by Salena's traditional leaders using a whetstone or *guma* (traditional machete). The research findings highlight that the 16 tools used in *nokeso* carry distinct meanings, symbolizing positive outcomes and the well-being of *toniasa* (daughters) in the collective consciousness of the Salena people.

## KEYWORDS

Semiotics;  
The Symbolic Meaning;  
Nokeso Tradition.

## ABSTRAK

Penelitian kualitatif ini mengkaji tradisi *nokeso* di lingkungan Salena di Sulawesi Tengah, Indonesia. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengungkap makna dari simbol-simbol dalam praktik budaya ini. Dilakukan di Desa Tipo, Kecamatan Ulujadi, Kota Palu, penelitian ini menggunakan teknik observasi, perekaman, dan wawancara untuk mengumpulkan data berbasis bukti. *Nokeso* adalah tradisi asli yang dipegang teguh oleh masyarakat Salena dan berasal dari suku Kaili. Meskipun secara tradisional terkait dengan anak-anak yang memasuki masa remaja, penelitian ini mengungkap bahwa di Salena, *nokeso* juga melibatkan kesiapan *vati* (ayah) dari anak perempuan berdasarkan status sosial mereka. Ritual *nokeso* melibatkan tindakan simbolis menyikat gigi, yang dilakukan oleh para pemimpin adat Salena menggunakan batu asah atau *guma* (parang tradisional). Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 16 alat yang digunakan dalam *nokeso* membawa makna yang berbeda, melambangkan hasil yang positif dan kesejahteraan *toniasa* (anak perempuan) dalam kesadaran kolektif masyarakat Salena.

## KATAKUNCI

Semiotika;  
Makna Simbol;  
Tradisi Nokeso.

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## How to cite:



Suparni, S., Saputra, Rian. (2023). The Semiotic Study: Decoding the Symbolic Meaning of the Nokeso Tradition in the Salena Environment. *Pulchra Lingua: A Journal of Language Study, Literature, & Linguistics*, 2(1), 32-55. <https://doi.org/10.58989/plj.v2i1.23>

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia, being a country renowned for its cultural richness, showcases a plethora of distinctive cultural characteristics that are deeply ingrained in its diverse regions. The very foundation of this cultural diversity lies in the ethical principles, norms, and behaviors that define each locality's unique identity. Within this captivating tapestry, local wisdom emerges as a vivid manifestation of positive conduct towards the natural environment, steeped in religious beliefs, customs, and ancestral wisdom. The term "culture" itself finds its roots in the Sanskrit language, particularly in the word "buddhayah", which encapsulates the collective consciousness and rationale of a community. Culture, in its boundless entirety, encompasses an expansive realm of knowledge, beliefs, morals, customs, laws, habits, and skills that individuals acquire as integral members of their society. At its very core, culture revolves around a tangible guiding principle, which establishes a system of ideas and values. These ideas, in turn, shape intricate social systems that thrive on established norms, and their profound impact can be observed both conceptually and through tangible, palpable manifestations. Even the objects that adorn cultural contexts carry profound intrinsic values that are deeply rooted in belief systems, religion, language, social dynamics, customs, arts, and livelihoods. Culture, therefore, becomes an inseparable essence intertwined with human existence, embodying a comprehensive way of life intricately woven into an interconnected system.

Traditions are the ingrained customs that have been cherished and passed down from one generation to the next within a close-knit community. These time-honored practices endure because they hold profound significance and meaning, serving as a vital thread that weaves together the fabric of people's lives. Cultural values take shape through the accumulation of deeply ingrained habits, behavioral patterns, and shared knowledge that spans across past and present circumstances. Among the diverse tapestry of cultural expressions embraced by various communities, one finds a rich tapestry of customs and beliefs. Palu City, nestled in the heart of Central Sulawesi, emerges as a captivating region brimming with cultural heritage that has been faithfully transmitted across generations.

The Kaili community, nestled in the heart of Palu City, radiates with a vibrant tapestry of culture and heritage. Among these remarkable people, the Kaili tribe emerges as custodians of a cherished legacy, treasuring the myriad customs and traditions passed down through generations. With unwavering devotion, they hold these ancestral treasures close to their hearts, a testament to their deep-rooted connection to their forebears. In the realm of tangible existence, these traditions find their essence embodied in sacred ceremonies, each unfolding with its own distinct symbolism and profound significance. Among these precious customs, the *nokeso* tradition holds a revered place, a living testament to the enduring ties between the Kaili tribe and their cultural heritage. It stands tall, an emblem of their unyielding commitment to preserve and honor the cherished traditions that define their collective identity.

The Kaili people, scattered across various areas of Palu including the Salena neighborhood, Buluri sub-district, and Ulujadi sub-district, diligently uphold the revered *nokeso* tradition. Within the close-knit Salena community, this time-honored practice assumes immense importance, guiding young girls on their journey into womanhood, nurturing their emotional well-being and

balance. Each object utilized in the poignant *nokeso* ceremony carries profound symbolism, conveying powerful messages that resonate deeply within the community.

The *nokeso* tradition encompasses a wide array of objects, ranging from intricately crafted garments made of *ivo* wood to sarongs woven from mesa cloth, and elaborate headdresses adorned with golden stretchers or galas, feather adornments known as *velo*, and vibrant beads called *gongga*. Each element holds its own significant meaning, symbolizing distinct messages that reverberate within the fabric of the Kaili tribe. Despite the rapid pace of technological advancements and the ever-changing cultural landscape, the symbolic meanings enshrined within the *nokeso* tradition remain cherished in the hearts of the community. While some individuals may have gradually forgotten these values, their enduring essence persists, serving as a testament to the timeless legacy of the Kaili tribe.

The *nokeso* tradition carries immense importance within the Kaili tribe, especially for young girls who are embarking on the transformative journey of puberty, known as *nabalego*. It encompasses a ceremonial ritual where the meticulous brushing of both upper and lower teeth serves as a symbolic gesture, marking their passage into womanhood, referred to as *karandaa*. This deeply rooted tradition serves a profound purpose, nurturing the girls' overall well-being, encompassing not only their physical health but also their emotional and mental happiness. It signifies the parents' proclamation that their daughter has crossed the threshold from childhood to adulthood, carrying with her the wisdom and customs inherited from her ancestors. In the Salena neighborhood, the community upholds the responsibility of organizing and facilitating the *nokeso* tradition, considering it an integral and obligatory practice for young girls. The ceremony is believed to bestow positive values, blessings, and good health upon the participants' lives. With deep roots in the rich heritage of the Kaili tribe, the *nokeso* tradition remains steadfastly preserved to this day. Depending on individual preferences, the *nokeso* ceremony takes place multiple times throughout the year in Salena, serving as a timeless testament to the cultural significance and enduring legacy of this cherished ritual.

Motivated by the previously presented information, the researcher is captivated by the opportunity to embark on a captivating study that explores the profound Significance of Symbols inherent within the *Nokeso* Tradition, specifically within the unique setting of Salena. Fueled by curiosity and a desire for deeper understanding, the researcher undertakes this investigation with the intention of unraveling the intricate nuances surrounding the process and execution of the *nokeso* tradition, while also unearthing the profound and hidden meanings that lie within the symbolic elements it encompasses. This study seeks to shed light on the rich tapestry of cultural symbolism that permeates the *nokeso* tradition, opening a gateway to a deeper appreciation and comprehension of its significance within the Salena community.

### **1.1. Exploring Symbolic Meanings by Contrasting Perspectives on Traditional Symbolism in Different Cultural Contexts**

Upon conducting an extensive search on the selected subject matter, the researcher realizes that the chosen title bears resemblances but diverges from the specific aspects the researcher aims to explore or gain insights into through the research findings. Numerous journals and papers indicate that the application of symbolic interaction theory aligns with the approach

employed by other researchers. However, due to variations in the research title, objectives, and ultimate outcomes, the current study stands out as distinctly dissimilar from previous research endeavors.

Tirayoh (2020) explores the Significance of the Diamond Symbol in Wedding Traditions in the Lais District, Musi Banyuasin Regency. The researcher sheds light on the intricate process and symbolic meaning associated with the diamond in wedding traditions. Employing qualitative methods and adopting an ethnographic approach, the researcher collected essential data and information through meticulous observation, interviews, and comprehensive documentation. A notable similarity between Tirayoh's (2020) research and the current researcher's work lies in their shared focus on unraveling the meanings behind traditional symbols, as well as the utilization of qualitative research methods. However, the difference lies in the specific tradition examined. While Tirayoh's (2020) study delves into the symbolism within the context of marriage traditions, the present researcher explores the age-old tradition of young girls transitioning into adulthood.

Pinusi (2021) explores the Significance of the *Nujuh Likur* Night Symbol as a Traditional Medium of Communication in the *Semende* Community in Muara Sahung District, Kaur Regency, Bengkulu Province, the researcher adopts a qualitative research approach with descriptive methods. The primary objective of this study is to unravel the profound meanings embedded within the symbols associated with the *Nujuh Likur* night tradition. Similar to Pinusi's (2021) research, the current study shares a common theme, as well as the utilization of qualitative research methods. However, there are notable differences in the chosen research focus. While both studies explore the meaning of symbols within traditions, Pinusi's (2021) research delves into the interpretation of symbols within a communication medium utilized by the community. On the other hand, the present researcher's study focuses on comprehending the meanings behind symbols present in traditions, without emphasizing their role as a means of communication within society.

The studies differ from the research that the present researcher intends to investigate in terms of their chosen objects of study and data sources. The researcher's focus lies in examining the "meaning of the symbol of the nokeso tradition in the Salena environment" to unravel the profound significance behind this *tradition* originating from the city of Palu. Upon analysis, the researcher discovered numerous distinctions in the types of symbols and their respective meanings between the two studies. However, the studies prove to be highly beneficial to the researcher, serving as valuable initial references for the selected research topics.

## **1.2. Semiotics in Artistic Expression and Human Perception**

It is undeniable that semiotics holds great appeal among professionals in various artistic fields such as theatre, film, design, painting, music, and dance. In the realm of literature, semiotics has long been highly sought after and developed in diverse forms. Etymologically rooted in the Greek word "semeion," meaning sign, semiotics encompasses the pervasive presence of signs in our lives—be it in gestures, intimate relationships, ritual practices, or wedding ceremonies. It serves as the foundation from which works like drama, literature, cinema, dance, and music are constructed, essentially functioning as signs themselves.

According to Nanda (2023), semiotics is a science or analytical method aimed at studying signs. Signs are the tools we employ to navigate and understand our world, our interactions with others, and our shared humanity. Semiotics, or Barthes' term "semiology," seeks to explore how humans derive meaning from things. However, it is important to distinguish the act of making sense (signifying) from the act of communication. Signification implies that objects not only convey information, as is the case in communication, but also form a structured system of signs. An influential figure in semiotics, Charles Sanders Peirce, an American philosopher, is renowned for his sign theory. Within the realm of semiotics, Yohana (2015) repeatedly emphasizes that a sign is generally something that represents something else for someone. Yet, this simplistic definition overlooks the complex reality of the sign's function. Peirce asserts that a sign itself exemplifies firstness, its object represents secondness, and the interpreter serves as an intermediary element, exemplifying thirdness (Nanda, 2023).

Yakin & Totu (2014) discusses the relationship between signs and objects, emphasizing that this connection can arise from either a causal association or conventional ties with the signs. Peirce's (1991) trichotomy further classifies signs into symbols (which have an arbitrary association with their objects), icons (which bear a resemblance or likeness to their objects), and indexes (which have a physical connection with their objects).

Additionally, Peirce asserts that the function of a representative sign does not solely rely on its material quality or its purely demonstrative application. Instead, this function lies within the sign itself, not in its intrinsic nature or its direct relationship to its object, but rather in its connection to a thought. Peirce suggests that if we consider objects (as they are perceived through the five senses) as signs, then the concept of objects, serving as a framework for each perception, must be approached from a semiotic perspective. This leads to the understanding that even ideas can be regarded as signs. Peirce's philosophical-semiotic standpoint can be summarized by his statement that whenever we think, we present feelings, images, conceptions, or other representations that function as signs (Peirce, 1991).

### **1.3. The Multifaceted Nature of Meaning**

According to Šorli (2013), meaning emerges from the interaction between a symbol of communication (the sign) and the human mind perceiving it (the object). It is through this relationship that meaning is fundamentally constructed. The meaning of a sign-vehicle is a cultural representation that is conveyed through other sign-vehicles. As such, semantically, it asserts its independence from preceding sign-vehicles. The comprehension of meaning relies on the integrative abilities of humans, encompassing their senses, cognitive faculties, and mental capacities. The presented material is viewed as a collection of signs or indicators, leading to further interpretations, and understanding (Suparmo, 2017).

To grasp the meaning of a sign, as Ferdinand de Saussure posited, linguistic signs consist of two components: the signified (representing the concept or meaning) and the signifier (representing the sound element) (Bueno & Bueno, 2020). The signifier is formed through the phonemes specific to the language in question. Thus, every linguistic sign comprises both sound and meaning elements. These two elements exist within the realm of the language itself and

often refer to or point to an extralinguistic reference beyond the confines of language (Duha et al., 2022).

Various theories and concepts shed light on the multifaceted nature of meaning, including Brodbeck's theory, as discussed by (Campbell et al., 2019). Brodbeck presents a relatively straightforward framework for understanding meaning, which encompasses three distinct features: The first feature revolves around inferential meaning, whereby the meaning of a word (symbol) corresponds to the object, thought, idea, or concept it refers to. The second feature emphasizes the significance of a term in relation to other interconnected concepts, highlighting the contextual and relational aspects of meaning. The third feature centers on intentional meaning, which pertains to the specific meaning intended by the user of a symbol. By elucidating these three facets, Brodbeck offers a comprehensive understanding of meaning and its diverse dimensions.

Johnson & Leutenegger (1955) illuminates several significant implications for interpersonal communication, including:

#### 1) Meaning Resides in Individuals

Meaning is not confined to words alone; it resides within people. Words serve as tools to convey meaning, but they inevitably fall short of capturing the complete essence of what one intends to communicate. Furthermore, the meaning that receivers derive from a message may differ substantially from the meaning the sender intended to convey. Communication involves attempting to replicate, to some extent, what exists in one's mind within the mind of another person. However, this reproduction is always partial and susceptible to misunderstandings.

#### 2) The Fluidity of Meaning

While words may remain relatively static over time, their meanings are constantly evolving. This is particularly true when it comes to the emotional dimension of meaning. Consider words like extramarital affairs, drugs, religion, entertainment, and marriage, whose connotations have transformed over the years, especially in the United States.

#### 3) Meaning Relies on Reference

Although not all communication is rooted in the tangible world, meaningful communication necessitates some connection to the external environment. Instances where meaning lacks proper reference, such as the obsessions of a paranoid individual who feels perpetually watched and victimized, exemplify this challenge.

#### 4) The Impact of Abbreviation on Meaning

Excessive abbreviation without tying it to a concrete and observable reference leads to communication problems. Concepts like love, friendship, happiness, good, and evil, when discussed without relating them to specific instances or contexts, hinder the sharing of meaning between individuals.

#### 5) The Infinite Nature of Meanings



While the number of words in a language may be finite, the potential meanings they can convey are limitless. Consequently, most words have multiple meanings, which can create difficulties when different interpretations arise during communication.

#### 6) Partial Transmission of Meaning

Meanings derived from an event are multifaceted and intricately complex, yet only a fraction of these meanings can be effectively articulated and conveyed. The intricacies and richness of meaning often surpass the limitations of language and communication.

By considering these insights into meaning, we gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges inherent in human communication processes. Drawing from the statement, we can derive the conclusion that meaning encompasses the realm of semantics. However, it is also evident that meaning pertains to both the intention and significance behind the subject being referred to.

### **1.4. Reviving Ancestral Traditions for Young Girls through The Nokeso Ceremony**

Traditions encompass tangible objects and intangible ideas that have originated from the past and continue to persist in the present, remaining unaltered or untarnished. These traditions can be regarded as genuine legacies or inheritances from bygone eras. Haerussaleh Haerussaleh et al. (2022) views tradition as a practice handed down by our ancestors, evolving within the community over an extended period and becoming an integral part of their way of life. According to Hati & Kurniati (2022) and Rahmadani & Erlinda (2019), tradition encompasses a diverse array of symbols and meanings associated with various activities, including attire, dances, event rituals, possessions, and more. Cibro et al. (2022) argues that tradition is an inherent aspect ingrained within every cultured individual. Considering the perspectives mentioned above, tradition refers to customs inherited from our ancestors, which have been fostered and cultivated by the community throughout history.

*Nokeso* is one of the rituals performed in the pre-adolescent stage, known as *nabalego*, for young girls of the Kaili tribe. This ceremony involves rubbing the front and lower teeth. Its purpose is to guide the young girl into her maidenhood, known as *karandaa*, ensuring her happiness and well-being both mentally and physically. It is a hopeful celebration, marking the entrance into marriage with blessings of longevity, prosperity, eloquence, adherence to customs, and the preservation of ancestral traditions. Undoubtedly, the *nokeso* ceremony serves as an initiation or declaration by parents that their daughter has concluded her childhood and stepped into the realm of adulthood.

The ceremony is often held prior to a girl's first menstruation or menarche. Once the young girl has experienced her first menstruation, the *nokeso* ritual is typically performed during daylight hours, presided over by the leader of the royal council. The ceremony takes place in a traditional house (*rumah adat*), a *baruga*, or an open field. Within the *nokeso* tradition, numerous elements and objects play a significant role. The ceremonial attire worn by the young girl consists of wooden or ivory garments, a sarong made of mesa fabric, and a head ornament comprising a golden *tandu* or gala, a velo adorned with rooster feathers, and colorful beads

known as *gongga*. Each element carries its own meaning and message. The symbolic significance of the *nokeso* tradition holds deep meaning for the Kaili community, persisting to this day, although some individuals have gradually forgotten its importance due to technological advancements and evolving customs that differ from those of the past.

## 2. Method

This study takes a qualitative descriptive approach, immersing itself in the enchanting *nokeso* tradition's profound depths. By embracing this research methodology, the focus is directed towards generating vivid descriptive data, meticulously collected through written and spoken words, as well as keen observations of individual behaviors. Deliberately opting for this approach, the researcher aims to gain profound insights into the intricate nuances of the *nokeso* tradition. To achieve this, the research plan involves conducting interviews with key informants, particularly esteemed residents of the vibrant Salena hamlet. Through direct and oral methods, these interviews aim to gather firsthand information, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the captivating *nokeso* tradition. Carried out within the captivating Salena neighborhood, nestled between the Buluri sub-district and Ulujadi sub-district of Palu city, this location is specifically chosen for its rich cultural heritage and the enduring practice of the treasured *nokeso* tradition within its community.

To achieve a comprehensive and nuanced understanding, an extensive array of data collection methods will be employed, embracing diversity and variation. The goal is to extract firsthand insights from knowledgeable informants through captivating interviews, delving deep into their experiences and perceptions of the captivating *nokeso* tradition. These interviews will be supplemented by meticulous documentation of relevant materials and direct observations, intertwining them to create a vibrant tapestry of information. Moreover, esteemed community leaders and revered traditional figures will provide secondary data, individuals who possess invaluable wisdom and a profound understanding of the historical roots of the *nokeso* tradition within the dynamic fabric of Palu city. By integrating these multifaceted approaches, this research aspires to construct a comprehensive mosaic of knowledge, encompassing a multitude of perspectives and shedding light on the intricate layers of the subject matter.

To establish a comprehensive and robust research endeavor, a meticulously selected group of individuals possessing valuable insights were chosen as informants, with utmost care and deliberation. This esteemed ensemble comprised two esteemed traditional leaders, one vibrant youth leader, one perceptive cultural observer, and one representative from the city government. Their diverse perspectives and areas of expertise played a crucial role in enriching the study and facilitating a nuanced exploration of the subject matter. Their active involvement proved instrumental in guiding and shaping the research process itself. To ensure a thorough collection of data, the researchers employed an array of methods, including scrupulous observation and interviews conducted at different stages of the study. These interviews were conducted with unwavering attention and meticulousness, ensuring the accurate and comprehensive capture of every intricate detail. The recorded interviews were then transcribed



and diligently documented, creating a reliable and detailed repository of the gathered information.

The intertwining of data collection and analysis was a nuanced process that empowered the researchers to scrutinize and interpret the gathered information in real-time. Throughout the analysis phase, an array of techniques was deftly employed, ensuring a diverse and dynamic approach. Skillful application of data reduction techniques condensed and organized the copious amount of information gathered, resulting in a coherent and accessible presentation of the data that fostered a profound understanding of the research subject. Furthermore, the analysis process entailed generating meaningful inferences and rigorously validating findings through meticulous examination and verification. This stringent approach guaranteed the credibility and reliability of the research outcomes. Ultimately, these scrupulous steps culminated in the formulation of comprehensive conclusions, intricately crafted based on the robust data and profound insights accumulated throughout the research journey.

### 3. Results and Discussion

*Nokeso*, a significant cultural tradition upheld by the Salena community, holds deep roots within the Kaili tribe. This tradition involves the ritualistic act of brushing a girl's front teeth until they are aligned, both on the upper and lower arches. The *nokeso* ceremony typically takes place at a designated location known as the "bantaya," drawing the participation of nearly the entire community. Embedded within the practice of *nokeso* are sacred meanings and symbols that hold profound significance. The *nokeso* tradition is not only captivating but also deserving of wider recognition within the community. It entails the utilization of various tools, each carrying symbolic connotations that relate to society. However, it is worth noting that not all individuals possess comprehensive knowledge about these tools and their associated meanings. Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness and understanding about this tradition among the broader community. By delving into the symbolic aspects and significance of the *nokeso* ritual, the community can gain a deeper appreciation of this cultural practice.

#### 3.1. The Stages of the Nokeso Tradition: Preparing, Enacting, and Executing the Ritual

The necessary preparations for the *Nokeso* tradition encompass various consumables and items that will be utilized during the ritual. These preparations include: 1) Approximately three heads of Kebe (goat), 2) Around seven heads of Manu (chicken), 3) An appropriate amount of mutton, 4) Ketupat (rice cakes) as needed, 5) Seven pieces of young coconut leaves, 6) Bongko rope (crown) as required, 7) One traditional machete called Guma, 8) A tool made of yellow bamboo known as *Vati bete*, 9) Seven pieces of *tava njambulu* leaves (areca nut leaves), 10) One piece of Bare'o (rice filter), 11) Seven pieces of *Katopa* (rhombus-shaped item), 12) Seven pieces of areca nut, 13) One piece of tobacco, 14) One piece of *gambir*, 15) One piece of *sirih* (betel leaf), 16) Balo vatu mbulava (yellow bamboo) as needed, 17) A tree of Loka sangara (banana shoots), 18) One stick of Tovu (sugar cane), 19) One sheet of Mesa cloth, 20) One piece of Gimba, and 21) Skullcap or peci as required. These preparations ensure that all the necessary items are available for the smooth execution of the *nokeso* tradition.

Before conducting the *nokeso* tradition in the Salena neighborhood, Buluri Village, Ulujadi District, extensive preparations were made, including gathering the necessary traditional equipment. The chairman of the local customary council played a significant role in informing the community about the upcoming *nokeso* ceremony. This announcement prompted the residents of the Salena neighborhood to collaborate and contribute their efforts to ensure the smooth execution of the tradition. As part of the preparation process, an official invitation or party news was disseminated well in advance, serving as a formal announcement for the community regarding the upcoming pinnacle event of the *nokeso* tradition.

Once all the necessary tools and equipment have been prepared, the *nokeso* tradition takes place in the Salena area, usually in the morning or afternoon. When the date for the pinnacle event is confirmed, a period of three days and three nights before the ceremony, known as *toniasa*, begins, during which the participants observe seclusion. Typically, among the Kaili tribe, the *nokeso* tradition is only performed by children who are entering the phase of maturity or approaching adolescence. However, in the Salena environment, *nokeso* is not limited to children at that specific stage but also depends on the readiness of the *vati* (male parents) of the girls and their social status.



**Picture 1.** *Toniasa* resides in the comfort of her home alongside her parents

Prior to the commencement of the tradition, *Toniasa*, the individual central to the *nokeso* ceremony, would be confined within the house, permitted only to engage in activities indoors for a period of three days and three nights. During meals, *Toniasa* would be accompanied by the rhythmic beats of *gimba*, a traditional musical instrument, and after each meal, their body would be treated with a special powder consisting of fragrant herbs mixed with glutinous rice. This practice aimed to enhance *Toniasa's* beauty, cleanliness, and radiance. Furthermore, their nails would be adorned with a reddish hue using henna leaves (no katute) before the commencement of the tradition.



**Picture 2.** After the meal, *Toniasa*'s dining experience

Prior to the culmination of the tradition, during the early morning hours or just before dawn, the *topokanda gimba* (singers) melodiously chant sacred songs and verses, led by 2 to 3 male parents, followed by a nourishing meal. Once the meal is finished, *toniasa* is gently carried on the shoulders with both legs hanging on the chest (*niponda*) by family members, accompanied by the harmonious sounds of musical instruments played by the *gimba*. They make their way to a nearby river or a designated water source, where *toniasa* undergoes a complete body cleansing (*nijunu*), submerging themselves in the water, and carefully washing their hair and face (*nompavela uwe*). Afterwards, *Toniasa* is escorted back home on foot, ready to continue the remaining traditions.

While traveling along the path, it is forbidden for *Toniasa* to set foot directly on the ground. Instead, they must take each step on 7 *tongkam tava njambulu* leaves (areca nut leaves) and 7 *tava nkamonji* leaves (breadfruit leaves), which have been prepared and placed alternately along the way until they reach the house. Prior to entering the house, *Toniasa* performs three rounds of circling the premises, accompanied by the rhythmic sound that repeats continuously until they step onto the traditional ascending stairs known as "lanjara." The *lanjara* is a special ladder made from golden bamboo, designed specifically for *Toniasa*'s ascent and descent. However, it is important to note that this custom only applies when a *lanjara* is present at the house or the designated location. If no *lanjara* is available, *Toniasa* is welcome to enter the house directly.

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**Picture 3.** *Toniasa* and *Uma vati* walked upon leaves of areca nut and breadfruit

Upon entering *toniasa*'s house, they receive traditional attire, although in the case of *salena*, *toniasa* can also wear women's clothing such as kebaya. Accompanied by *gane-gane* (incantations) filled with hopes and prayers, this tradition is believed to safeguard *toniasa* from mental and physical ailments, ensure a long life, provide abundant sustenance, and bring about good offspring when married. The traditional attire worn by *toniasa* consists of a bark (*ivo*) upper garment, or simply a kebaya. A headdress called a *bongko rope* or coconut leaves, resembling a crown, is adorned with various decorations including *lentilu manu* (rooster feathers), *sese beberu* (flowers), *uvi* (plants), *sandu* (flower leaves), *lelio* (leaves), and *vintu* (grass). Additionally, *toniasa* carries a *guma* (traditional machete) at the waist, and *gala* (bracelets) and anklets are worn on both arms and legs.



**Picture 4.** *Toniasa* and *Uma Vati* emerged from the dwelling

The subsequent activity is the ceremonial slaughtering of goats, known as "nosambale kebe." *Toniasa* descends the *lanjara mpanau* (descending stairs) to the ground for this ritual. Once the *nosambale kebe* is completed, they proceed to the yard for the *nosungki* (teeth brushing) ceremony. Throughout these events, they are surrounded by *toposedede*, who recite verses and songs that depict the purpose and progression of the rituals thus far. These recitations are filled with hopeful prayers, wishing for the girl's spiritual and physical well-being, longevity, a harmonious marriage, and overall prosperity. Additionally, the verses offer guidance and emphasize the importance of respecting and obeying one's parents, urging the child not to bring shame upon them while emphasizing the value of obedience and loyalty.





**Picture 5.** *Toniasa* proceeded towards the location where she would perform the teeth brushing ritual

In earlier times, the front teeth were flattened using a whetstone, but eventually, this practice evolved into a symbolic act where the stone was no longer rubbed but instead bitten off. Additionally, the Salena community incorporated another method in this tradition by bringing a traditional machete close to *toniasa's* mouth three times, as well as aiming it towards her forehead, both hands, and both feet.



**Picture 6.** *Toniasa's* ceremonial procession involves the act of brushing teeth using a traditional machete

After the teeth rubbing ritual and the use of a traditional machete, *toniasa*, accompanied by Uma Vati (the child's male parent), proceeded to perform the ritual of "notalili vunja" seven times. Following this, Uma Vati cut the "vunja" which consisted of one *loka sangara* (banana shoot) and one stick of *tovu* (sugar cane). With the completion of these rituals, the *nokeso* tradition in the *salena* environment concluded.



Picture 7. *Toniasa* circulates around the *vunja* while *Uma Vati* proceeds to sever it

### 3.2. The Significance Behind the Symbolism of the Nokeso Tradition

Based on the findings of the research, the researcher discovered that the objects used in the Nokeso tradition carry significant meanings and symbols, each with its own unique concept within the Salena community. The symbols in the *nokeso* tradition encompass the following:

- 1) *Peave*: This symbol is composed of young coconut leaves, a rhombus shape, and mutton. It is positioned above the entrance of the child's house where the tradition will take place. The *Peave* symbol serves as a decorative item, signifying the upcoming *nokeso* tradition. It takes the form of a curtain made from young coconut leaves, adorned with two pieces of mutton and seven pieces of rhombus.



Picture 8. The presence of *Peave* signifies the commencement of the Nokeso tradition

- 2) During traditional processions, the children don the *bongko rope*, an exquisite headpiece that embodies their hopes and aspirations for personal growth and significance. Resembling a majestic crown fashioned from delicate coconut leaves, the *bongko rope* is adorned with an array of distinctive elements. These elements include the graceful *lentilu manu*, ethereal female chicken feathers, the vibrant *sese beberu* flowers, the verdant *uvi* plants, the delicate *sandu* petals, the verdant *lelio* leaves, and the enchanting *vintu* grass, each lending its unique charm to the splendor of the salena mountains.



Picture 9. *Toniasa* utilizes the *bongko rope* as a significant accessory

- 3) Deeply intertwined with the essence of the *nokeso* tradition, the *guma* assumes a prominent position, symbolizing the transformative power of a sharpened mind. This traditional



machete, measuring about 1 meter in length, embodies the child's journey towards wisdom, equipping them with the ability to navigate life's obstacles with discernment and skill. The *guma* fulfills a multitude of roles within the ceremony—it acts as a toothbrush, ensuring dental hygiene during the ritual, and it is also employed to delicately sever the *vunja*, consisting of a tender banana shoot and a succulent sugarcane fruit, which are then ceremoniously planted in the yard. Such a multifaceted tool epitomizes the depth of meaning embedded within the *nokeso* tradition.



Picture 10. The *guma* is employed to cleanse *toniasa*'s teeth during the ritual

- 4) The *vati bete* is a bamboo object measuring approximately one meter in length, with a hole created and filled with mutton, rhombus, and leaf ornaments. This symbol represents the tool held by *uma vati* (the girl's male parents) during the tradition.



Picture 11. *Uma vati* carries the *vati bete* in their hands

- 5) The *tava njambulu*, which are leaves from the areca nut plant, and *tava ngkamonji*, which are leaves from the breadfruit plant, symbolize the footwear worn by girls during the tradition. These leaves serve the purpose of ensuring that the girls do not step on or meet the ground, signifying the preservation of their purity.



**Picture 12.** Betel leaf (*tava njambulu*) and breadfruit leaves (*tava nkamonji*) are used in the customs

- 6) The *bare'o* (rice filter), a round rattan woven tool traditionally used for cleaning rice bran residue, also serves as a storage container for offerings such as ketupat and *sambulugana*.



**Picture 13.** The *bare'o* or rice filter

- 7) Ketupat, a woven delicacy made from young coconut leaves and filled with boiled glutinous rice, symbolizes strength, unity, and the enduring bond of brotherhood in the *nokeso* tradition.



**Picture 14.** Ketupat

- 8) Embedded within the Kaili community's fabric of customs and rituals, the *sambulugana* stands as a revered artifact encompassing betel nut, areca nut, *gambir*, and tobacco. This sacred assemblage assumes a profound role, bestowing upon its great symbolism and cultural importance during a myriad of occasions and traditional ceremonies. It serves as an embodiment of human resilience and fortitude, encapsulating the essence of strength and power within its form.



Picture 15. Sambulugana

- 9) A distinctive bamboo variant called *balo vatu mbulava*, commonly referred to as yellow bamboo, graces the Salena community with its towering stature, branching structure, and vibrant yellow hue. This cultivated species serves as a poignant symbol, embodying the concept of children blossoming into vessels of prosperity for the collective. The planting of yellow bamboo within a child's yard becomes a symbolic act, signifying the commencement of the revered tradition, as its presence encapsulates the promise of a forthcoming journey.



Picture 16. Balo vatu mbulava or yellow bamboo

- 10) Within the rich tapestry of the *nokeso* tradition, the *loka sangara*, or banana shoots, emerge as a symbol of remarkable significance. These tender, vital components of the banana tree embody the notion that the mere presence of children cultivates an atmosphere of warmth and hospitality, fostering an environment where sustenance and nourishment flourish. As the *notalili vunja* procession unfolds in the ceremonial realm of the *nokeso* tradition, the ceremonial act of cutting banana shoots holds deep meaning, further accentuating their symbolic importance.





**Picture 17. Loka sangara or banana shoots**

- 11) *Tovu*, also known as sugar cane, is a tall plant cultivated for its raw sugar content. Within the community, sugar cane represents the aspiration that children will encounter minimal challenges as they mature. Symbolically, sugar cane is included as one of the elements in the *vanja* procession during the *nokeso* tradition and is subsequently cut.



**Picture 18. Tovu or sugar cane**

- 12) The *mesa* cloth is a traditional fabric with a smooth texture and intricate patterns. It serves as a symbolic item used to shield and safeguard girls from the sun's rays during traditional processions conducted within the house's yard.



**Picture 19. The mesa cloth or a traditional fabric**

- 13) Within the cultural tapestry of the *Kaili* tribe, the resonant tones of the *gimba* echo through sacred rituals and traditions. This unique musical instrument, meticulously crafted from wood, anoa skin, cowhide, and rattan, assumes a rounded and elongated form, embodying both artistry and reverence. As its harmonious melodies reverberate, the *gimba* assumes the vital role of providing melodic accompaniment, harmonizing with the recitation of holy verses, and adding a sacred dimension to the ceremonial proceedings.



**Picture 20. Gimba or a distinctive musical instrument**

14) In the realm of domesticated creatures, the humble *kebe*, commonly known as goats, hold a special place as one of the earliest companions of human civilization. These remarkable creatures have bestowed numerous blessings upon humanity throughout history, offering sustenance in the form of nourishing meat, nourishing milk, and durable skin. Within the framework of the revered *nokeso* tradition, the symbolic presence of three goats serves as a poignant reminder of the intrinsic value of perseverance in the pursuit of sustenance and the fulfillment of life's essential needs.



**Picture 21. Kebe or goats**

15) The delightful creatures known as *manu*, or chickens, have long been cherished for the bountiful offerings they bestow upon humanity – delectable meat, nutritious eggs, and splendid feathers. Within the tapestry of tradition, the presence of seven chickens holds a profound symbolical meaning akin to their caprine counterparts. They embody the indispensable value of unwavering perseverance in the relentless pursuit of sustenance, reminding us of the importance of fortitude and resilience, ensuring that children remain steadfast in their pursuit of a fulfilling life.



Picture 22. Manu or chickens

16) Behold the majestic headpiece known as *peci*, an exquisite skullcap donned by men, resplendent in its timeless black hue. This cherished accessory serves as a profound emblem of nobility, elevating the wearer to a realm of esteemed stature. Within the rich tapestry of tradition, the *peci* holds utmost significance, considered an essential artifact worn with pride by the revered traditional leaders, symbolizing their elevated position and embodying the legacy of honor and respect they uphold.



Picture 23. Peci or a skullcap

### 3.3. Findings from the Interview

The *nokeso* tradition is an ancient ritual that has been handed down through generations, symbolizing the transition of girls into adulthood and signifying that they should no longer be treated as young children. It is a significant and obligatory tradition for the people of Salena, encompassing various requirements that need to be fulfilled. According to the insights gathered from an interview conducted by the researcher with the esteemed traditional leader of Salena, residing in *Buluri Village, Libu*, the following statements were shared:

“Pamulana nokeso nidiu pade nipakabelo ripokatokona, kaeyona nitauraka nolili vunja pade nompaya loka ante tovu. Naupu boa nisungki pade nipavela uwe pade nempone ranjou. Ane nempone ranjumo tandana naupumo adat nokeso nikavia, pas nggavengina nibunto nolili vunja. Kaganana tolumbengi pade nitejaka kara'ina (Libu, 2022).”

The statement can be interpreted as follows:

"In the *nokeso* tradition, the children undergo several rituals. They are first given a bath, and then they are confined inside the house and seated on a special mat. The next morning, they are allowed to come down from the mat. Their teeth are then rubbed using either a whetstone or a traditional machete called *guma*. Subsequently, they are taken to the water and given a thorough washing. Afterward, they



proceed to walk around the *vanja*, a symbolic act performed seven times, during which banana shoots and sugarcane are cut. Following this, *toniasa* is raised back to the house, marking the conclusion of the *nokeso* tradition. In the evening, after the evening prayer, there is another ritual of encircling the *vanja* with *nibunto*, the necessary equipment for the *nokeso* ceremony. This final ritual typically lasts for approximately one hour (Libu, 2022)."

*Tahmin*, the youngest traditional leader in the Salena Environment, shared a similar perspective, emphasizing the significance of the *nokeso* tradition as a mandatory practice. Furthermore, *Tahmin* highlighted the symbolic meaning embedded in the traditional equipment used during the ceremony, emphasizing its positive impact on society, particularly for girls.

"Nadea ganana nipake novia adat nokeso eva, mesnm, tali bongko, bolo watu mbulava, loka sangara, tovu, sese beberu, uvi, tava ngkaluku, balo, banja njambulu, tava njambulu, tava ngkamonji, manu, kebe, sandu, lelio, vintu, ale, lentilu manu, landode, bare'o tapis. pura-pura ganana nipake saoungungu aga kaseha niello (Tahmin, 2022)."

The statement can be interpreted as follows:

"In the *nokeso* tradition, a wide range of tools are employed, each serving a specific purpose. These include the mesa cloth, bongko rope made from coconut leaves, yellow bamboo known as *bolo watu mbulava*, banana shoots referred to as *loka sangara*, sugar cane called *tovu*, various flowers like *sese beberu*, plants such as *uvi*, young coconut leaves known as *tava ngkaluku*, bamboo referred to as *balo*, areca nut or *banja njambulu*, areca nut leaves known as *tava njambulu*, *kamonji* leaves referred to as *tava ngkamonji*, chickens (*manu*), goats (*kebe*), flowers made from leaves known as *sandu*, leaves called *lelio*, grasses like *vintu*, other leaves known as *ale*, rooster feathers referred to as *lentilu manu*, fruit leaves known as *landode*, and rice filters called *bare'o*. All these tools are utilized during the tradition, with one tool in particular closely associated with the well-being of girls or *Toniasa* (Tahmin, 2022)."

Based on interviews conducted by the researchers with traditional leaders in the Salena community, it is evident that the *nokeso* tradition has been faithfully practiced and passed down through generations. This tradition holds a special significance for girls in the Salena environment, as the act of brushing their front teeth is considered a mandatory ritual. The primary purpose of this tradition is to bring about positive outcomes for girls, ensuring their happiness and enhancing their prospects for a successful marriage, long life, and prosperity. Furthermore, the *nokeso* tradition is believed to contribute to the overall health and well-being of the child. Each piece of equipment used in this tradition carries its own symbolic meaning.

In addition to the traditional leaders, Haerul, the Youth Leader of Salena, acknowledges the enduring nature of this tradition, passed down from parents to children, and its association with various benefits, particularly in terms of girls' health. The Salena youth actively participate in supporting and facilitating the procession of this tradition. It is noteworthy that virtually all adult women in Salena have undergone this tradition, emphasizing its widespread acceptance and adherence (Haerul, 2022).

The researcher's interviews with Salena youth leaders confirm the essential nature of the *nokeso* tradition, which is considered a necessary obligation. Active participation in the procession is crucial for its preservation. Despite societal advancements, the *nokeso*

tradition remains unaffected and continues to be practiced annually by the local community.

According to Lasira (2022) a cultural observer from Palu City, the *nokeso* tradition symbolizes the Kaili people's supplication to Allah SWT, envisioning a future where children bring positive contributions to humanity. For instance, the use of stones or machetes signifies the strength to pursue livelihoods and resist illness. However, the tradition has reportedly diminished in some areas due to the absence of elderly traditional leaders and a lack of understanding regarding the symbolism in *nokeso*. The significance of *nokeso* extends beyond its own process; it serves as a prerequisite for the subsequent circumcision ritual, ensuring a smooth implementation. By performing *nokeso*, negative elements can be expelled, while positive blessings are sought for the child.

According to cultural observers in Palu City, the researchers have concluded that the *nokeso* tradition is indeed an obligatory practice for parents to ensure the birth of virtuous children. This tradition is widespread across various regions, including the Salena environment. However, due to various factors, such as the absence of knowledgeable elder leaders, the *nokeso* tradition has become less prevalent in this area. It is essential for both the community and the government to play a role in preserving this ancestral tradition.

The Palu City Government, specifically the *Buluri* Village, led by Ariyono (2022), acknowledges that the *nokeso* tradition is still actively observed in *Buluri*, particularly in the Salena environment. The local community continues to uphold their ancestral customs, and the village administration actively engages traditional stakeholders to sustain this tradition. There are no conflicting opinions or prohibitions surrounding this tradition, as it is recognized as a vital obligation for ensuring the health and well-being of girls as they mature into adulthood. In conclusion, based on interviews conducted with the *Buluri* sub-district, it is evident that the *nokeso* tradition remains an ongoing practice embraced by the local community. The village administration, in collaboration with traditional leaders, is committed to preserving and promoting this tradition.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the research, the researchers have concluded that the *nokeso* tradition holds significant symbolic meaning for the Salena community in *Buluri* Village, *Ulujadi* District, Palu City. The key points of this tradition are as follows: 1) The *nokeso* tradition in the salena environment is typically conducted in the morning until noon, with a three-day seclusion period for girls. While traditionally, the Kaili tribe reserves *nokeso* for children approaching adolescence, the Salena environment extends it to include girls based on their social status and the readiness of their male parents (*vati*). The process involves the traditional figure of Salena brushing the child's teeth using a whetstone or *guma* (traditional machete). Subsequently, *toniasa* (the daughter) performs *uma vati* (the male parent of the child) *notalili vunja*, a ritual of cutting banana shoots (*loka sangara*) and sugar cane (*tovu*) seven times. This series of events marks the completion of the *nokeso* tradition in the Salena environment. 2) The research also

reveals that the objects used in the *nokeso* tradition carry symbolic meanings. Each tool, totaling 16, holds a special significance in the Salena people's understanding. These symbols encompass various concepts related to well-being and the health of *toniasa* (the daughter). Based on these research findings, the following suggestions can be proposed: 1) For Students: Students should familiarize themselves with regional cultures and actively participate in cultural celebrations. This contributes to the preservation and appreciation of these cultural practices. 2) For the Community: The Salena community plays a vital role in upholding and safeguarding the *nokeso* tradition. It is crucial to maintain and pass down this cultural heritage to future generations, emphasizing the significance of community involvement in its preservation within the *Buluri* Village environment. 3) For Local Government: The government bears the responsibility of actively supporting and preserving the *nokeso* tradition as an ancestral heritage and cultural tourism attraction. Their involvement and commitment are pivotal in maintaining the significance and existence of the *nokeso* tradition in the *Buluri* Village environment.

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