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### THE MEANING OF INTERACTIVE SYMBOLS IN PATTERNS OF SEXUAL RELATIONS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF FIVE FAMILIES ON SELAYAR ISLAND, SOUTH SULAWESI INDONESIA

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper describes the nature of marriage and the symbols of interaction in the pattern of sexual relations between husband and wife in one of the sub-ethnic groups in South Sulawesi, namely the Selayar people. There are three core points of this research, namely the views of the Selayar people about the nature of marriage, the form and meaning of interactive symbols in the pattern of husband-wife sex, and the meeting point between signs and meanings in sexual relations in relation to social semiotic theory. Historically, the Selayar people have had interactive symbols, both verbal and non-verbal, regarding patterns of sexual relations. The symbol incarnates ethics in sex and is a mutual agreement. The patterning of a number of interactive symbols is in fact not only a communicative value but also a symbol that can stimulate sexual desire when one partner shows it. The forms of symbols that are discussed are signs of an invitation to have sex, a sign of agreeing or refusing, and expressions of sexual satisfaction.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia's long history, which has a pluralistic society in terms of language and culture, has created various cultural products that have transformed into a social system in the form of traditional heritage. This is inseparable from the course of history, that culture in Indonesia has layers that are characteristic of each era. Alisjahbana's writings (Garna, 1996) divide these cultural layers into:

indigenous Indonesian culture, Indian culture, Islamic culture, modern culture, and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika culture.

The plurality and various cultural heritages of the Indonesian people are always interesting to study, especially in relation to the realities of today's society. Many cultural values and meanings of past traditions have been linked to the facts of modern society (Meliono, 2011). The two values are a unity that ideally becomes part of social life as well as its socio-cultural characteristics and attributes. Patterns of social interaction that have been regulated according to the socio-cultural system in society since the past, are always expected to become part of modern society as a way of individual self-existence and society collectively from the influence of other cultures.

This research is an attempt to trace socio-cultural values in one of the sub-ethnic groups in South Sulawesi (Ahmadin, 2021) who inhabit the southernmost island of this peninsula, namely the Selayar people. The people who inhabit the Selayar Islands have a cultural treasure that is interesting to study. Apart from being a cross-cultural island that is a meeting point for various ethnic immigrants (Ahmadin, 2016), the Selayar people are also famous for a number of historical and cultural heritages that have always been of special concern to researchers.

One of them that is interesting to explore is the local community's view on the nature of marriage and the patterns of interpersonal interaction in relation to husband-wife sex. Based on the results of the research that has been done, it is known that the Selayar people have a special view of the nature of the marriage process which greatly determines the continuity of the husband-wife relationship. Likewise, this society has interactive symbols in the pattern of sexual relations which are the language of non-verbal and verbal communication. Since ancient times, the people of Selayar have considered it taboo to directly express their sexual desire and desire to have sexual relations between husband and wife (Ahmadin, 2009). Thus, the desire is then conveyed through non-verbal language in such a way through certain symbols that contain meaning and messages addressed to the couple, both husband and wife. This repetitive behavior in showing various interactive symbols among families in society is what later becomes interpersonal agreements and then institutionalized as shared values.

On the other hand, the patterning of a number of interactive symbols in the relationship between husband and wife, then creates not only communicative value but also symbols that can stimulate sexual desire when one partner (both husband and wife) shows it. In other words, the stimulus to have a husband and wife relationship will start from a visible symbol which is also a sign of an invitation to have a husband-wife relationship.

This symbol of interaction in the sexual relationship of husband and wife is examined in the perspective of historical sociology studies (Sztompka, 2014). This is based on the assumption that the sociological approach allows an in-depth study of interactive communication patterns through a number of symbols in several families in the Selayar community. Meanwhile, the historical

approach makes it possible to trace the roots of tradition (customs) historically and at the same time to be able to have a dialogue with the present habits in synchronicity with the past. The focus of this study is to describe the form and meaning of interactive symbols in the pattern of ex-husband and wife relationships in the Selayar community. The interactive symbols in this study range from pre-sexual signs and markers, namely when inviting, symbols of agreeing or refusing, expressions of satisfaction, to symbols that show expressions of gratitude from both parties by those who are satisfied in the relationship.

Another interesting thing about this interactive symbol in the pattern of sexual relations is that it is formed normally and naturally without external influences. That is, their behavior is not shaped by the influence of social media as a study conducted by Farah Latif Naz and colleagues. The results of his research show the influence of social media on the moral behavior of children and also on the family system (Farah Latif Naz, 2021).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Studies on the nature of marriage, especially in the Selayar community, are still very rarely carried out. A recent study on marriage in this area only focused on the perception of early marriage which has an impact on the economic, educational, social and psychological lives of adolescents (Ningsih, 2020). Another new research on sexual relations in Makassar City, only discusses the decrease in sexual desire in women. The research study unit was 37 women. The limited study of the nature of marriage and sexual relations in this area makes this paper interesting, especially the pattern of sexual relations that use symbols as a medium of communication (Sudirman, 2020).

In general, the pattern is defined as a shape, model, or arrangement of something that is used to make and produce something. The relationship with the pattern of sexual relations is understood as a set of forms or models of sexual relations that are patterned in such a way as a result of social construction. Thus, the pattern of sexual relations among families in the Selayar community is the repeated practices of husband-wife relationships which are symbolically expressed as markers (form) and signifiers (meaning).

Ernst Cassirer who developed the philosophy of culture into a theory of symbols with a phenomenological approach to knowledge, imagining humans as “animal symbolicum” or animals that live and are lived by symbols (Friedman, 2004). The human world in his view is created through symbolic forms of human thought and can be found in linguistics, education, science, and the arts. All of these are shared and further developed through communication, individual understanding, search, and expression. Even the author of the book *An Essay on Man: Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, (Cassirer, 2021) explains that humans as symbolic beings are able to fulfill their self-knowledge needs through the interpretation of symbols. Humans are the only creatures who are able to distance themselves from physical stimuli by processing these stimuli into a symbolic substratum (Piliang, 2012).

As a study approach in explaining the sex pattern of the Selayar people, the concept of social semiotics needs to be explained first. This is intended so that the terms semiotic and social can be understood clearly. Semiotics is a science that studies signs in human life, where everything present in our lives is seen as a sign, which is something that must be given meaning (Hoed, 2014). Meanwhile, social which comes from the word socius can be interpreted as everything that is born, grows, and develops in life together. In other words, from the dimension of its structure, social means an order of social relations and society that places certain parties, namely individuals, families, groups and classes in social positions according to the system of values and norms that apply to certain societies (Salim, 2002).

In the next study of semiotics, an interesting question is what is meant by the sign? Structuralists who refer to the view of Ferdinand de Saussure, see signs as a meeting between form (which is imaged in one's cognition) and meaning (or content, which is understood by humans who use signs). In this context, De Saussure uses the term "signifiant" in terms of the form of a sign and "signified" in terms of its meaning. Thus, the sign is explained as something that is structured and structured in human cognition (Hood, 2014).

Then what is meant by social semiotics? Hoed explains the meaning that is formed in society about various socio-cultural realities. According to his explanation, each of us unconsciously follows other citizens in giving certain meanings to things, institutions, ideas or people, namely the socio-cultural reality around us. It is exemplified that color is created as a label for socio-cultural reality and forms social semiotics (Hood, 2014).

Another theory used in studying interactive symbols in the pattern of husband-wife sex in families in the Selayar Islands is the tori of symbolic interactionism. The birth of this theory is related to the scientific situation when the theory of action is less developed, both theoretically and empirically, especially in terms of the intensity of the application of the theory. Therefore, according to Ritzer (Ritzer, 2004), it was in this void that a new perspective emerged which later became the main force in sociology called symbolic interactionism. This theory which is a legacy of the University of Chicago scientific tradition, in its development and popularity cannot be separated from a number of names that have contributed to it.

In this perspective known the names of the sociologists George Herbert Mead [1863–193] (Mead, 2013), Charles Horton Cooley [1846–1929] (Cooley, 2017), who focused on the interaction between individuals and groups. They found that these individuals interacted by using symbols, which contained signs, cues and words. Other contemporary sociologists of symbolic interactionism are Herbert Blumer and Erving Goffman (Blumer, 1986).

When referring to the perspective of Blumer (Ritzer, 2004), then symbolic interactionism refers to the distinctive nature of interactions between humans. Its peculiarity is that humans interpret and define each other's actions and are not mere reactions of one person's actions towards another. A person's response is not made directly towards another person, but is based on the "meaning" given

to that other person's actions. Thus, interactions between individuals are mediated by the use of symbols and interpretations. Within the framework of the concept of symbolic interactionism which considers humans to translate and define each other's actions, the pattern of sexual relations between husband and wife in the Selayar Islands will be examined.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research is a type of qualitative descriptive research that explains the interactive symbols used by married couples in the Selayar community in having sexual relations. Qualitative descriptive research is intended to provide a comprehensive description and explanation of several social phenomena that are related to the main concepts discussed in this paper. The qualitative approach is intended to explore the background of the phenomenon under study as a complete concept, viewed from the aspect of historical sociology studies (Ahmadin, 2013).

This qualitative approach is used for several reasons: (1) adapting qualitative methods is easier when dealing with multiple realities (2) this method presents directly the nature of the relationship between researchers and informants (3) this method is more sensitive and more adaptable to the environment. much sharpening of mutual influence and on the patterns of values encountered (Ahmadin, 2013).

Population is defined as the whole object of research consisting of humans, objects, animals, and plants, symptoms, test scores, or events as data sources that have certain characteristics in study. The population referred to in this study is a group of individuals who are targeted as sources and information about the expected or required data (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). Thus, the population in this study is the entire Selayar people and descendants of Selayar who have married and are scattered in various places. However, in this study only focused on five families. The type of data used in this study is the result of observations of the traces of social events and phenomena relevant to the research focus. In addition, data was also obtained through in-depth interviews and determination of key informants through the snowball technique (Handcock & Gile, 2011).

This research approach was taken because historical archives about families in the Selayar Islands Regency are difficult to find. This is different from the results of Verhoogt's research which describes an archive called Grapheion which tells of economic life and family composition and their relationship with other families (Verhoogt, 2020).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### ***The Nature of Marriage & Sexual Relations***

Socio-culturally, each resident community or society with its own characteristics, has a knowledge system that is different from each other in various ways. This condition is patterned in such a way that it is influenced or shaped by the conditions of the natural environment as well as the products and constructions of the social environment. Thus, every society has its own

characteristics in terms of its knowledge system, as well as knowledge about sexual relations between husband and wife.

Among the families of the Selayar Islands community, they believe that sexual relations or husband and wife are not just physical or biological relationships, but are relationships that can determine many things in household life. Thus, the sexual relationship must be carried out according to standard patterns according to the knowledge system in the tradition of the Selayar people. The community's knowledge system regarding the patterns and procedures for having sexual relations between husband and wife has transformed into ethics which are considered as something that is absolutely known by someone who wants or plans to get married (Ahmadin, 2016).

The importance of a knowledge system, or perhaps more accurately, pre-knowledge is possessed by a person prior to the marriage, so the expression often appears among the people that "paralluki abboja-boja riolo nampamoki bonting" (need to seek something - knowledge - first before marriage). This is at least expressed by one of the informants as in the following quote:

Nowadays, many young people are getting married just by marrying a woman who is considered beautiful or her boyfriend, without thinking about the need for knowledge about ways to have a husband and wife relationship. In fact, having sex with husband and wife after marriage will determine the nature and fate of children and wives in the future. Therefore, it is necessary to ask parents first about it (Suardi, personal communication, August 24, 2018).

The description shows that the important thing that needs to be done by a person or youth before marrying a woman is knowledge of the ethics of marital relations. This informant explained in more detail about the ethics of having sex by saying that it was actually a package with the marriage contract procession. Thus, according to him, when someone meets a prospective wife who is already legal immediately after the marriage contract takes place (apassikarawa or appadongko' nikka, Selayar), a man (husband) needs to touch the body of a woman (his wife) first with a suitable touch. according to the knowledge of tau riolota (ancestral message) (Ahmadin, 2016).

Regarding the ethics of how to touch and the meaning in question to the process of having a husband and wife relationship, the same informant explained separately as quoted below:

The first thing a man needs to do during appadongko' nikka (one of the post-marriage stages) is to make an inner agreement that the husband is a role model or leader that a wife must follow. This is done by placing the tip of the husband's middle finger to the forehead of the wife while saying these inner messages. The first touch through the tip of the middle finger to the wife's body can make the wife's body always good, never thin and never fat. This really determines the wife in the future will stay young or get old quickly (Suardi, personal communication, September 7, 2018).

The description shows that among the Selayar people who are still committed to believing in the messages of their ancestors, they always apply them in the marriage process. From the informant's information, it is also known that the "appadongko' nikka" process is the starting point or beginning that determines who will be in control of the household later, whether the husband controls the wife or vice versa the wife rules the husband (Ahmadin, 2016). In relation to this, this informant explained or imagined that a husband and wife relationship was like someone going to and or riding a horse. What does it mean and how do you do it?.

According to this informant, a good horse rider is one who is able to hold the reins and control them and not let them go. This is what is likened to a good husband or an ideal husband and wife relationship, if a husband is the leader and believes in his wife and not vice versa, the wife functions like a husband. "Nurikuanni abbai is rare, ditte mintongi abbai surang riteteng sa'manna. Gele ia la Baiki" (ideally riding a horse is that we control the reins and not vice versa, the horse controls or rides us)", said Suardi (personal communication, September 7, 2018) emphasizing the importance of the mental process that a husband needs to do after the marriage contract. In a more specific case, this kind of process is accompanied by the act of "Nikka Bateng" (Inner Marriage)" as a necessity which is believed to be the substance or the real nature of marriage.

### *Interactive Symbols in Sexual Relationships*

The results of this study indicate that among husbands and wives in the Selayar community, there are various interactive symbols in the pattern of sexual relations. Interactive symbols as signs in communication between husband and wife, are formed through various meaning construction processes which then form an agreement between the giver and the recipient of the sign. The result of the construction is then in the form of a sign that symbolizes the message.

First, an interesting confession is studied regarding interactive symbols in husband and wife sex, namely habits or perhaps more accurately said to be a symbolic agreement through a sign from the family of Daeng Baso (72 years). According to him, before having marital relations at certain times, he first observes a symbol or sign that is in his wife. When the wife sleeps wearing a sarong which is torn in a certain part like a circle, then it is a sign that his wife is ready to serve her husband. According to this family's information, the wife's "sakti" sarong was actually an ordinary sarong that was originally used by her husband and was exposed to a cigarette fire and leaked. Long story short, the wife actually liked the sarong, even though she didn't tell why she didn't sew it (Personal communication, April 12, 2018).

The description above shows that the symbolic signifier in the story is the wife wearing a torn sarong. Thus, this kind of behavior symbolizes that the wife is ready to have a relationship with her husband. On the other hand, the husband also understands the meaning of this action which means he must be ready to provide inner support to his wife. This repetitive behavior becomes a sign as

well as a symbol of the non-verbal agreement between husband and wife to have a biological relationship.

Second, another habit also arises from the husband's side who also gives a certain sign and symbolizes the invitation to have sex with his wife, namely filling all the water containers in the house until they are full in the afternoon. This is according to Mustari (63 years old) or familiarly called Mutung that if you want to do or invite his wife to have sex, then all water containers are filled to the brim in the afternoon, even though they have to carry water several times from wells which are quite far from their homes. . It is known that in Selayar in ancient times, people who lived in villages and generally in highlands or mountains had to get water on hillsides. They carried it with water containers called bengki made of clay and tied with ropes to hang.

If the husband does this in the afternoon, it is a sign that he must be ready to serve his husband in the evening. This action symbolizes that the water container is completely filled, which is a sign that this is preparation for the obligatory bath before the Shalat Subuh (morning prayer). Once again, repeated behavior like this creates an agreement that symbolically means an invitation to have sex between husband and wife.

Third, other interesting symbolic markers are shown in certain forms of behavior without using instrumental media as an intermediary to convey messages such as the two forms of symbolic interaction above. In the story told by Patta Arung (68 years old), he actually does it by doing his stomach when he lies down during a relaxing break at his house. The husband's repeated behavior is a symbolic sign that he hopes to have sex with his wife even though it is not conveyed directly. Thus, habits like this seem to be a language of invitation to have sex and the wife understands the meaning of the symbolic message (Personal communication, April 12, 2018).

Fourth, other forms of symbolic interaction are reflected through verbal language that is conveyed indirectly or through humorous stories. Generally speaking semiotic language like this is done by the husband who starts the action by inviting his wife to listen to certain stories that are semi-porn or pornographic in tone. This repetitive practice or behavior carried out by the husband is then interpreted by his wife as a communication language to convey messages to carry out marital relations. For example, the husband asks his wife which number is greater than the number zero and number 1? If the wife answered that the number was greater than 1, then the husband would say zero. The reason is, because the number 1 can enter the number zero, where the number 1 is interpreted as a symbol of the male genitalia and the number zero is a symbol of the female genitalia (Basir, personal communication, August 10, 2018).

Fifth, this interactive symbol is very unique, namely the recognition of an informant named Saling (65 years) who is said to have 12 children. He lives with his wife and unmarried children in a stilt house with woven bamboo floors in the village. If you want to have sex with his wife, then SL makes sensitive touches on the wife's body. After that he spilled corn kernels from inside the place and fell scattered under the house by reason of accident. Furthermore,



their children were given the task of picking up the corn kernels until they were finished and that's when the husband and wife relationship was carried out. SL's wife also said that peanuts are often spilled from their place with the excuse that a cat does it, so it's the same as before that when their children pick up peanuts that fall and spill under the house, husband and wife relations are then carried out. The husband's repeated strange behavior is understood by the wife as a symbol that she must prepare to serve her husband for sexual intercourse (Personal communication, September 3, 2018).

Is the husband's invitation forever accepted? Of course not because the wife is usually menstruating. How to refuse it is also done through symbols, namely the wife puts red underwear on the clothesline and does not take it off even though it is dry. The husband who sees this symbol will understand that his wife should not be disturbed. This was revealed by an informant named Mutung, while the other 4 informants did not provide information on how to refuse with symbols.

How to express signs of sexual satisfaction? Based on the recognition of the five pairs of informants, they generally expressed satisfaction with sentences of praise. For example, her husband is praised that he is like a formidable fighter or is likened to a predatory beast that pounces fiercely and is conveyed with humor.

The five family stories that show the variant of symbolic communication as an invitation to have sex with husband and wife are actually only a small part of the many habits that are owned by community members. This means that there are many other non-verbal languages that are symbols of the interaction of husband and wife relationships that require deeper study.

### ***The Meeting Point Between Sign And Meaning***

As explained earlier, the developer of the philosophy of culture became a symbol theory with a phenomenological approach to knowledge, namely Ernst Cassirer (Piliang, 2012), imagining humans as “animal symbolicum” or animals that live and are lived by symbols. This shows that in human life and life, symbols are a basic need as a mediation or a means of conveying messages in patterns of social interaction (Blumer, 1986) both between individuals and between groups in people's lives. Because it is through certain symbols that a message or information is attached with the intention of others knowing and understanding it.

This is where the importance of an analysis of the nature and function of the sign as a sign of invitation (Clark & Hatfield, 1989) and meaning as the content of the message to be conveyed by the giver to the recipient of the message as a form of interactive communication. Symbolic signs or cues as communication intermediaries at the beginning of husband and wife interactions, are formed not without reason. However, its presence is motivated by certain functions which are (Hood, 2014) an important part of the sexual intercourse process. Several informants acknowledged the importance of communication or interaction through symbolic media which is considered as the initial process of light

stimulation carried out by one of the partners who initiates action. Thus, the process of habituation and the level of familiarity of symbols that have been patterned in such a way by repeated behavior causes it to become functionally an initial level stimulus situation.

In addition, a symbolic message that is shown by one partner, both from the husband and vice versa from the wife, is transformed into a force or energy that turns on the next stage of the sexual relationship procession. The habituation or familiarity of both husband and wife on certain symbols makes him sensitive and then responds well to the invitation to have sex. An interesting question related to these signs and meanings, namely why interactive symbols become something important in the pattern of husband and wife sexual relations?. The simple reason stems from an assumption that many or sometimes intimate relationships do not produce maximum satisfaction for both partners, partly because they are not in sync or lack of cohesion of desires in a similar assumption. In this case, the invitation that is conveyed symbolically is actually also included in the category of speculative acts with a mission to want to know how big the response level of the couple is. Thus, if the symbol or sign shows that there is a positive response to the invitation through the media, then that is where the couple, both wife and husband, are stimulated to take further action to realize sexual desire.

### **CONCLUSION**

The people of the Selayar Islands believe that the sexual relationship between husband and wife is not just a physical or biological relationship, but is a relationship that can determine many things in the continuity of a household. Thus, the sexual relationship must be carried out according to standard patterns according to the knowledge system in the tradition of the Selayar people. The community's knowledge system regarding the patterns and procedures for having sexual relations between husband and wife has become an ethic which is considered as something that is absolutely known by someone who wants or is planning to get married. The forms and meanings of interactive symbols in the pattern of husband-wife sex in the Selayar community vary, which can be broadly grouped into: unique actions/behaviors, erotic humor or jokes, and speculative touches. This is reflected, among other things, through the use of communication media or signs where the wife wears a torn sarong, the husband fills the water container to the brim in the afternoon or evening, the husband tells stories that contain pornographic elements or vice versa the wife, the husband or vice versa, the wife pinches a small part of the body. partner's body, and other behaviors. The meeting point between signs and meanings in husband-wife relationships among the Selayar people is assumed that symbolic signs or cues as communication intermediaries at the beginning of husband and wife interactions are constructed not without reason. However, its presence is motivated by certain functions which are an important part of the sexual intercourse process.

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