

## THE ANALYSIS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE *KABELA* AS A SYMBOL OF TRADITIONAL HONOUR FOR THE PEOPLE OF BOLAANG MONGONDOW

Sumardiko<sup>1</sup>, Ronald M. P. Kolibu<sup>2</sup> & Ferdinand Pangkey<sup>3</sup>

*Art & Music Study Program, Faculty of Language and Arts*

*Universitas Negeri Manado, Tondano, Indonesia.*

*Email: [smardi875@gmail.com](mailto:smardi875@gmail.com)*

**Abstract** : This research aims to explain the development of *Kabela* in Bolaang Mongondow culture and its philosophical meaning. *Kabela* is a container for placing betel (obuyu'), areca nut (mama'an), whiting and tobacco (tabaku') as a banquet for guests. The type of research used in this study is qualitative using a descriptive approach. Data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data sources in this study are divided into two, namely primary data from interviews and secondary data from written records. Data analysis in this study uses data reduction, data review and conclusion drawing. The results of this study show that there are several developments in the form of *Kabela* from simple forms to having decorations. There are past motifs such as *pata' lumandai*, *pata' malasai*, and current motifs such as coconut, flower and geometric motifs. The colours used in the past were red, white and black while today additional colours such as green, yellow, blue, purple and others are used. Each creation of *Kabela* used to have various philosophical meanings while the current *Kabela* emphasises more on aesthetic value. It is hoped that the community, especially Bolaang Mongondow, can continue to preserve this historical art object so that it is not lost or forgotten by future generations.

**Keywords** : *Bolaang Mongondow, Kabela, Betel nut container*

### INTRODUCTION

Every region in Indonesia has many traditions that are inherent and become a culture that is passed down. One of the many traditions in Indonesia is eating betel nut which is a characteristic of a community group. In several regions in Indonesia, betel nut is used as a banquet for visiting guests. From several centuries ago, the people of Bolaang Mongondow have used betel nuts as a form of treat for guests who come, what makes the difference between the people of Bolaang Mongondow and other regions in Indonesia is the container used as a place to place betel nuts. *Kabela* was common among the people of Bolaang Mongondow at that time. Heri Kusmanto (2014:46) states that society is a group of people who are scattered and have the same habits, traditions, attitudes, and feelings. This means that the community referred to here

is a human group that has similarities in everyday life. In the culture of the Bolaang Mongondow people, placing betel nuts in a beautiful place is a symbol of honouring guests. According to W. Rosliya (2016:8), culture is a way of life that develops and is shared by a group of people and passed down from generation to generation. Culture is formed from many complex elements, including religious and political systems, customs, languages, tools, clothing, buildings, and works of art. According to Yayah Rukiah (2015: 185) states that symbols are images, shapes, or objects that represent an idea, or the amount of something. Symbols can be used for any purpose. Such as science, social life, and religion. The form of symbols is not only in the form of visible objects, but also through movements and speech. Symbols are also used as one of the infrastructures of language, known as

symbol language. *Kabela* has been used since the beginning of the reign of the Bolaang Mongondow kingdom. At that time, *Kabela* was used as a treat for visiting royal guests. In ancient times, the *Kabela* used was not shaped like it is now but was still a simple container that did not have certain decorations or motifs, which later made a more beautiful container and had a variety of motifs and colours like today. On the *Kabela* box there are various ornamental motifs used to add a beautiful impression, such as plant motifs and geometric motifs. But there are some motifs that have been used since long ago and also became the first motif used as a *Kabela* decoration. There are also various types of colours that decorate the *Kabela*, but there are some colours that have been used since ancient times. For each motif and colour used as a *Kabela* decoration represents a certain meaning and expectation of the *Kabela* maker.

In a previous study by Moh. C.P. Sabunge entitled *Designing Kotamobagu's Visual Identity Through the Development of Kabela Motifs on Letter Media and Its Applications*, Universitas Komputer Indonesia (2019) found several results that discussed the *Kabela* motif. In the study, it was found that *Kabela* has three common motifs found as *Kabela* decoration. Like the coconut motif, inspired by the coconut plant which is one of the largest natural products in North Sulawesi. Then there are geometric motifs that are often found as *Kabela* decorations and floral motifs inspired by several flowers such as sunflowers, orchids, and jasmine flowers. In addition, there are several colours that have certain meanings such as blue as a fertile forest, yellow as a rice fruit that is ready for harvest, red as courage, white as sincerity of a pure heart and black as fertile soil.

The contribution of this research to my research is the discovery of several motifs that are often used as decoration on *Kabela* such as coconut motifs, geometric motifs and floral motifs. Then in the creation of these motifs as decoration, colours that

represent certain symbols are used. The difference between this research and my research can be seen from the motifs used as *Kabela* ornaments. As for the colours used as decoration, in my research there are three colours used from the beginning of its creation while the research has more colours because it is a motif used today (Moh C.P. Sabunge, 2019).

Besides the *Kabela*, which is the container for the betel nut, there is one object that is always used together with the *Kabela*. Bolaang Mongondow people usually call it *doduya*. *Doduya* was originally made of bamboo with a stalk on the side. Then as it developed, it was made of metal or brass. This *doduya* is not seen in the *Kabela* dance performance because it functions as a place to spit making this *doduya* less ethical when performed with *Kabela* dance. The lack of knowledge about the culture of their ancestors makes most Bolaang Mongondow people unaware of the history of the development of *Kabela* and the meaning contained in it. Therefore, this research is important so that the people of Bolaang Mongondow and the younger generation can know their ancestral culture, the process of creating *Kabela* and its philosophy. They can also continue to preserve what was passed down by their ancestors as a cultural characteristic of the people of Bolaang Mongondow. This research aims to find out the development process of *Kabela* and its philosophical meaning. The benefits of the research are as follows.

1. So that the general public and especially the people of Bolaang Mongondow know the history of the development of the *Kabela* container.
2. It can be a reference for the general public and students in finding information as learning material about the philosophy of *Kabela*.
3. Can be a comparison material for similar research on the culture of the Bolaang Mongondow people.

4. Can increase students' interest in learning the history and typical arts of the Bolaang Mongondow region.

### RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research used is qualitative with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research is research that examines a relationship, activity, situation, or various materials. This means that qualitative research places more emphasis on holistic descriptions, which can explain in detail about what activities or situations are taking place than comparing the effects of certain treatments, or explaining about people's attitudes or behaviour. The data collection technique in qualitative research begins with observation, then interviews and finally document analysis. (Moh. R. Fadli, 2021). Lokasi dan Waktu Penelitian

This research was conducted in Kotamobagu City and near the border of Bolaang Mongondow, North Sulawesi. The research was conducted in several places, namely Genggulang, Bilalang 1 and Passi. Beginning with observation, looking for informants who are considered to know about *Kabela* and continuing to conduct interviews, and analysing documents recorded for approximately 6 months from 26 October 2022 to 16 March 2023.

Data sources in this research are divided into two sources, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data is data obtained directly from informants who are considered to know information about *Kabela* as a symbol of traditional respect of the Mongondow people. Meanwhile, secondary data is data obtained from books, journals, articles, and writings that discuss information about *Kabela* in Bolaang Mongondow.

In this study, data collection techniques used:

1. Observation is an activity carried out to directly observe a certain object with the aim of obtaining a number of data and information related to *Kabela* that explains the process of creation and the philosophy behind the motifs and

colours of *Kabela* as a symbol of traditional respect of the Mongondow people in Kotamobagu City.

2. Interview. The type of interview in this research used semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews provide opportunities for researchers to explore more deeply the informant's answers to each question submitted. In semi-structured interviews, researchers are free to add questions they want to ask as long as the questions that have been made before have been answered properly.
3. Documentation is the collection of data and information obtained from books, journals, articles and pictures related to *Kabela* as a symbol of traditional respect of the Mongondow people.

There are three paths of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (cited in I. Agusta, 2003). Data reduction, is the stage of selecting the rough data obtained. Data presentation, is the activity of displaying narrative text in the form of field notes. Drawing conclusions is done to get the results of the findings during the research.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Definition of *Kabela*

*Kabela* is a container for placing obuyu' (betel), mama'an (areca nut) and betel lime as a traditional banquet for guests. It also contains tabaku' (tobacco). *Kabela* is a square container made of pangkoi tumpang tassels (fronds of thatch trees) wrapped in black or red cloth and decorated with beads with plant or geometric motifs of various colours. The *Kabela* is usually used in conjunction with a container called a doduya'an (spittoon). In the past, the doduya'an was made from bamboo with a stalk on the side as a handle and then developed and made again from brass. Because of the function of the doduya'an for spitting, this container is not seen in the *Kabela* dance performance.



**Figure 1.** *Kabela* in a Dutch museum. Sirihdoos van kralenwerk Bolaang Mongondow before 1935. Source, <https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl> (02/2023).

### History of *Kabela*

According to Chairun Mokoginta, *Kabela* was first made by Ibu Salamatiti during the time of King Mokodoludut as a container to place betel nut and areca nut as a banquet for visiting royal guests at that time. Mrs Salamatiti was the mother of King Mokodoludut who ruled around the 13th/14th century. Ibu Salamatiti made the *Kabela* from the inner fronds of the thatch, then wrapped it in cloth and decorated it with knitted beads on each side. In each motif used as decoration, there are meanings and wishes for people who eat betel nut and areca nut from the container. There are also several colours such as red, white and black that represent certain symbols.

Etymologically, *Kabela* comes from the word *kabel/kumabel* which means to stay or stay. The meaning of the word stay or stay here is that when we serve betel nut to people who come to visit, it is hoped that the person will be captivated or interested and feel happy, so that Bolaang Mongondow or the house he visited will always be in his heart and will always remember even though he has returned to his home area. *Kabela* was born out of the Mongondow people's habit of using betel nut as an ingredient in banquets. In an interview, Chairun Mokoginta explained that long before *Kabela* became popular and was made using thatch fronds, it was

originally a simple container called *pingku'*. After the use of *pingku'*, it then changed to *kompe'* which is in the form of a wicker. Both of these containers do not yet have a lid and do not yet have motifs as decoration. After experiencing development, it was then made into a square shape made from wood and for the first time already used a lid. To add a beautiful impression to the container, the people of Bolaang Mongondow at that time decorated the container with *sikayu* cloth tied to the side. After that, the *Kabela* underwent another change and was made from the inner fronds of thatch with certain ornaments as decoration that has survived to this day.

### 1. *Pingku'* (Plates)

*Pingku'* is an open container made from the fronds at the base of thatched leaves. This is the first container in which the betel nut is placed. *Pingku'* can also be made from areca nut fronds, but if palm fronds are used, it will last longer.



**Figure 2.** Ilustrasi *pingku'*. Piring dari pelepah pinang. Sumber, <http://images.app.goo.gl/iw79gzxSKvW5yd4R8> (02/2023).

### 2. *Kompe'* (basket)

*Kompe'* is a container made of wicker and is still in the form of an open container. In addition, *kompe'* is also used as a place for rice. From the use of this container, it can be seen that the people of Bolaang Mongondow began to pay attention to the beauty of using a container to place betel nut as a meal.



**Figure 3.** Kompe' (basket)  
Photo: Sumardiko (2023)

### 3. Wood base material

After that, it developed again and was made from wood but did not yet have a motif (plain). In using this container for the first time, *Kabela* already used a lid. Then to add a beautiful impression, the container was wrapped with cyclamen cloth as decoration. Because it was often exposed to the spit of betel nut sap, it was then replaced with knitted beads (bobol/tu'og) made from the basic material of the inner fronds of thatch leaves that have survived until now.

Nowadays, the *Kabela* no longer functions as a container for placing betel nut and areca nut to entertain guests. In the *Kabela* dance performance, the contents of a *Kabela* no longer use betel nut and areca nut but flowers. This is because the people of Bolaang Mongondow no longer use betel nut as a banquet for guests and no longer do momama' (chewing betel nut). Although it is no longer used to place betel nut and areca nut, *Kabela* is still a symbol of the respect and hospitality of the Bolaang Mongondow community for visiting guests.

### The Making Process of *Kabela*

#### 1. Thatch Frond Retrieval

The process of making *Kabela* starts with the collection of thatch fronds (tassels). The fronds taken are raw fronds. Taking unripe palm fronds aims to make it easier when cutting into sheets. Then drying is carried out for approximately 3 days to remove sap on the fronds.

#### 2. Making the '*Kabela*' Box

Before assembly, the thatch frond sheets are treated with kerosene by painting the surface using a brush. Hamina

explained that this process aims to ensure that the sheets of thatch fronds used can last a long time and are not easily weathered. continued on the assembly process into a box using Korean glue.

#### 3. Bead Knitting

The process of knitting beads takes 1 week or more. This time-consuming process is because when knitting beads, if the colour sequence is wrong, the process must be repeated to produce a beautiful and symmetrical motif with the pattern made. The larger the *Kabela* made, the longer it will take because the surface of the decorated *Kabela* is larger. The more complicated the ornate pattern, the more complicated the *Kabela* will be and the longer it will take.

#### 4. Final Process

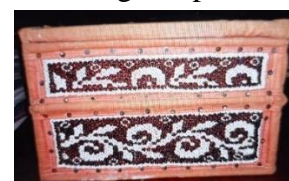
The final stage of making a *Kabela* is wrapping the *Kabela* with cloth and decorating it with beads. Usually using black or red coloured fabric. The use of black or red coloured cloth is used to wrap the *Kabela* to disguise the sap from the areca nut. Tools and materials used in making *Kabela*. Materials: Thatch fronds, beads, fabric, ribbon, thread, Korean glue, and kerosene. Tools: Wooden skap, cutter knife, needle, measuring tool and brush.

#### *Kabela* Ornament Motif

*Kabela* has several ornamental motifs that have been used for a long time, such as Pata' Lumandai and Pata' Malasai. Pata' means motif in Mongondow language. Then there are current motifs such as coconut motifs, floral motifs and geometric motifs.

#### 1. Pata' Lumandai (Crawling Plant)

This motif is taken from creeper plants. This motif is the first motif used as decoration on the *Kabela*, which means that even though it is cut, the plant will still creep to the highest peak.



**Figure 4.** *Kabela* Pata Lumandai.

Photo: Sumardiko (documentation, 02/2023).

## 2. *Pata' Malasai* (Distance Plant)

This motif is inspired by the castor plant, which in Mongondow culture, the sap and leaves are commonly used as medicine. Unfortunately, *Kabela* with this motif can no longer be found due to a number of factors. One of the reasons is the lack of public interest in preserving historical art objects at that time.

## 3. Coconut Motif

This motif has ornaments inspired by coconut plants. The ornament is in the form of a coconut tree with six coconut leaves, produced through a stilation process.



Figure 5. *Kabela* coconut motif.

Source, <https://elibrary.unikom.ac.id/id/eprint/768/> (08/2022)

## 4. Geometric Motifs

This geometric motif is a motif that is often applied to *Kabela*, this motif refers to the shape of lines, triangles, rectangles, with various variations, but still on the basic geometric pattern.



Figure 6. *Kabela* motif geometris.

Sumber, <https://elibrary.unikom.ac.id/id/eprint/768/> (08/2022).

## 5. Floral Motif

The ornaments in this motif make flowers as objects of inspiration, which consist of several types of flowers such as sunflowers, orchids and jasmine flowers.



Figure 7. *Kabela* floral motif.

Source, <https://elibrary.unikom.ac.id/id/eprint/768/> (08/2022)

## Colour of *Kabela*

In addition to the use of motifs as decoration, *Kabela* also uses certain colour combinations. There are differences in the colour combinations used for *Kabela* in the past and today. In the past, the people of Bolaang Mongondow only used three colours while nowadays there are more and varied colours. Currently, the *Kabela* has a variety of colours that are used so that it makes a beautiful impression from the combination of colours such as green, red, blue, white and several other colours. However, there are some colours that have been used since the past, namely white, red and black, each of which has a certain meaning. However, the use of colours today is no longer based on certain meanings or symbols but to produce a beauty or aesthetic value on the cable. Chairun Mokoginta also said that each colour applied does not always have the same meaning. It is possible for the colours to mean something else depending on the wishes or intentions of the artist or craftsman.



Figure 8. *Kabela* now and then

Source, photo: Sumardiko (2023).

## Philosophical Aspects

*Kabela* has various meanings and certain expectations from the people of Bolaang Mongondow. At the beginning of its creation, the naming of *Kabela* from the Mongondow community symbolically meant to lure outsiders to linger in Bolaang Mongondow or the house they were visiting. *Kabela* was born from the Mongondow people's habit of receiving guests and always treating them with betel nut in the past. This is why the *Kabela* was created and has continued to evolve in form since its inception. *Kabela* is

deliberately decorated not without reason, namely so that something served in the container will be more valuable and it is a pride for the Mongondow people if they can entertain guests well. In the use of motifs and colours, the decoration represents certain symbols and expectations of the community. For example, the creeper motif symbolises struggle, meaning that people who eat betel nut from the container have a strong determination to achieve a goal. Then there is the motif of the castor plant which is symbolised as medicine, it is hoped that people who eat betel nut from the container will always be healthy and in prime condition.

In the use of colours, in ancient times only red was used as a symbol of humans, white means the life of the world and black means life after death or the afterlife. In addition, red can also be interpreted as courage, white as a sincere heart and black as fertile soil, as well as blue as a fertile forest and yellow as rice that is ready for harvest. According to Chairun, sometimes the meaning of colours and ornamentation depends on the maker. The creation of ornamental motifs in the past and now has a slight difference. In the past, people in creating a motif often paid attention to its philosophical meaning, while now the *Kabela* made tends to only display beauty such as in motifs and colours. This is because in the past, *Kabela* was still used or functioned as a betel-nut container for guests, while now it is used as a property and no longer contains betel-nuts but flowers. The function of the *Kabela* has changed because the momama' culture among the people of Bolaang Mongondow has now disappeared. That is the reason why *Kabela* is no longer used as a betel nut container. It is possible that if the momama' culture is revived, the *Kabela* will again function as a betel nut container.

## CONCLUSION

*Kabela* was born out of the Mongondow custom of using betel-nut as a treat for guests. *Kabela* is made from the inner fronds of thatch leaves (kumbai

pangkoi tumpang) decorated with beads (tu'og) on black or red cloth. *Kabela* has some common motifs used such as coconut motifs, geometric motifs and floral motifs. In addition, there are some ancient motifs that have been used since the beginning of its creation such as vine motifs and castor plant motifs. There are several colours that have been used since long ago, namely red as a symbol of humans, white as a symbol of life in this world and black as a symbol of life after death or the afterlife.

*Kabela* ornaments generally use floral and geometric motifs. The *Kabela* ornament has a purely aesthetic function, namely to add a beautiful impression to its appearance, while in terms of artistic function, the *Kabela* has a physical function, namely as a container and a personal function, namely as an expression of the hospitality of the community, as well as a social function, namely to show the culture of the Mongondow people in receiving guests where the motifs applied to the *Kabela* have positive meanings and expectations from the host to attract people outside the area who come to visit Bolaang Mongondow. *Kabela* ornaments have a traditional style with symmetrical and repetitive patterns, some of which are produced through a stylisation process. Since its creation until now, the *Kabela* has not changed much. Although it no longer functions as a container to place betel nut and areca nut but flowers in the *Kabela* dance performance, the *Kabela* is still a symbol of welcoming guests for the people of Bolaang Mongondow.

## REFERENCES

- Agusta, I (2003). Teknik pengumpulan dan analisis data kualitatif. *Pusat Penelitian Sosial Ekonomi. Litbang Pertanian, Bogor*, 27(10).179-188.
- Artha, IGAIB, & Nuriarta, IW (2019). Bentuk, Fungsi Dan Makna Ornamen Pada Gamelan Semar Pegulingan Saih Pitu Di Pusat Dokumentasi Seni Institut Seni Indonesia Denpasar. *Segara Widya: Jurnal Penelitian Seni*, jurnal.isi-dps.ac.id,

- Darmawan, K. Z. (2008). Penelitian Etnografi Komunikasi: tipe dan metode. *MediaTor (Jurnal Komunikasi)*, 9(1), 181-188.
- Fadli, MR (2021). *Memahami desain metode penelitian kualitatif. Humanika, Kajian Ilmiah Mata Kuliah Umum*, 21 (1), 33–54.
- Hasani, MM Al, & Jatningsih, O (2014). Makna Simbolik Dalam Ritual Kawit Dan Wiwit Pada Masyarakat Pertanian Di Desa Ngasemlemahbang Kecamatan Ngimbang Kabupaten Lamongan. *Kajian Moral dan Kewarganegaraan*, 3(2), 1220-1236.
- Hendri, Z. (2004). Pemanfaatan Semiotika Visual Untuk Memahami Karya Seni Rupa, *Imaji*, 2(1).
- Kistanto, N. H. (2015), Tentang Konsep Kebudayaan, *Sabda: Jurnal Kajian Kebudayaan*, 10(2).
- Kusmanto, H (2014). Partisipasi Masyarakat dalam Demokasi Politik. *JPPUMA: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan dan Sosial Politik UMA ( Journal of Governance and Political Social UMA)*, 2(1), 78-90. ojs.uma.ac.id,
- Mahanum, M (2021). Tinjauan Kepustakaan. *ALACRITY: Journal of Education*, 1-12.
- Mansur, TM (2018). *Hukum Adat: Perkembangan dan Pembaruannya.*, books.google.com,
- Mawikere, MCS, & Hura, S (2020). Menelusuri Dinamika Inkulturasi dan Akulturasi Etnis Bolaang Mongondow di Sulawesi Utara. *Magenang: Jurnal Teologi* ..., ejournal-iakn-manado.ac.id,
- Mu'allim, A (1995). *Adat Kebiasaan dan Kedudukannya dalam Perkembangan Hukum Islam di Indonesia.*, journal.uui.ac.id,
- Pangkey, Ferdinand (2004). *Reliaf Pada Waruga Di Minahasa Dalam Perspektif Etnografis Dan Estetis.* Program Pascasarjana Universitas Gadjah Mada.
- Rijali, A (2019). Analisis data kualitatif. *Alhadharah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah*, jurnal.uin-antasari.ac.id,
- ROSLIYA, WAODE (2016). *Perspektif Islam Terhadap Buday Kabuenga Di Kecamatan Wangi-Wangi Selatan Kabupaten Wakatobi*” (Doctoral dissertation, IAIN KENDARI), digilib.iainkendari.ac.id,
- Rukiah, Y (2015). Makna Warna Pada Wajah Wayang Golek. *Jurnal Desain*, 2(03), 183-194.
- Sabunge, M, & Cahya, P (2019). *Perancangan Identitas Visual Kotamobagu Melalui Pengembangan Motif Kabel pada Media Huruf dan Aplikasinya.*, elibrary.unikom.ac.id,
- Saud, LEN, Domili, B, Rawis, JRR, Kristanto, B, & Suharjo, S (2004). *Budaya masyarakat Suku Bangsa Bolaang Mongondow di Propinsi Sulawesi Utara.*, repositori.kemdikbud.go.id,
- Sodik, F (2020). Pendidikan Toleransi dan Relevansinya dengan Dinamika Sosial Masyarakat Indonesia. *Tsamratul Fikri*, 14(1), 1-14
- Subadi, T. (2006). Metode penelitian kualitatif.
- Thabroni Gamal, (2019). Ragam Hias-Pengertian, Fungsi, Pola, Jenis Motif & Teknik.
- Wiksana, WA (2017). Studi Deskriptif Kualitatif tentang Hambatan Komunikasi Fotografer dan Model dalam Proses Pemetretan. *Mediator: Jurnal Komunikasi*,
- Yunus, P. P., & Muhaemin, M. (2022). Semiotika Dalam Metode Analisis Karya Seni Rupa. *Jurnal SASAK: Desain Visual dan Komunikasi*, 4(1), 29-36.