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The Semiotic Meaning and Philosophy of Symbols in the Gayo Ethnic Marriage Processions in Central Aceh

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THE SEMIOTIC MEANING AND PHILOSOPHY OF SYMBOLS IN THE GAYO ETHNIC MARRIAGE PROCESSIONS IN CENTRAL ACEH

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Abstract

This research critically studied the verbal and nonverbal symbols in the processions of the marriage tradition of the Gayo ethnic in Central Aceh by tracing back, exploring and examining all symbols and their symbolic meanings and philosophy as an effort of preserving one of the Gayo traditional heritages. Its main aim was to describe unique verbal and non-verbal symbolic features with semiotic meanings and philosophical messages based on the local values of the Gayo ethnic. The study employed a qualitative research design. The data were collected from observation, interviews and documentation. The data were analyzed with the Miles and Huberman interactive models consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Meanwhile result analysis was based on the semiotic analysis of Roland Barthes. The result showed that most of the series of phases of Gayo ethnic marriage processions were filled with verbal and non-verbal symbols, which have semiotic meanings and philosophical messages which are still used until this day. However, many of those verbal and nonverbal symbols have no longer been understood well by Gayo young generation. Consequently, they only perform the series of processions as a formality without understanding the meaning of each symbol.

Keywords: *Gayo; Marriage; Procession; Semiotic; Symbols.*



A. Introduction

Gayo refers to an Aceh sub-ethnic group and an area in Central Aceh Province's highlands. As the spread of Gayo people today, the majority of the Gayo ethnic can easily be found in three Districts of Aceh Province, namely Aceh Tengah, Gayo Lues, and Bener Meriah (Ruhmi et al., 2019). Gayo ethnic has its own sociocultural and traditional identity, which is quite different from the family ethnics surrounding Aceh Province (Manan, 2014).

Of the various socio-cultural contexts of Gayo ethnic in Central Aceh as the place of this research, the traditional phase of the marriage processions still stands strong until the present day. Gayo marriage tradition is unique because a series of the procession is done by a particular actor and must be conducted through a successive ritual, each filled with verbal and non-verbal codes and symbols with semiotic symbolic meanings and philosophies. According to Utwente (2014), as cited in Felicia (2014) that "social semiotics examines semiotic practices specific to culture and community for the making of various kinds of texts and meaning in various situational context and context of culturally meaningful activity".

In the context of procession of marriage tradition, Gayo ethnic also uses various codes and symbols in the form of action, in the form of materials, and the form of verbal utterances or speeches through traditional ritual language (*melengkan*) what the so-called ritual speaking or ritual speech by Bowen (1991), a well-known anthropologist on Gayo People. All these codes and symbols play essential parts that are mutually inseparable in the whole steps of Gayo marriage tradition processions which have very high cultural values, which, in some ways, relates with Islamic teachings (Manan, 2020). Each procession is carried out with meaningful sacred verbal and non-verbal symbols. According to Geertz (2013), the power of symbols is the ability to identify facts with values at the most fundamental level.

The strength of religious symbols enables integration and establishes unification (Manan, 2015, 2017; Manan et al., 2021; Turner, 1979; Suyadi & Sabiq, 2020). In Gayo traditional marriage procession, various phases must be passed and conducted based on cultural and ritual

aspects before the bride and groom are united as a husband and a wife; otherwise, it is considered '*munyalahi edet*' (literally means deviance from tradition).

Based on the description above, this research is designed to trace back, explore and examine all symbols and their symbolic meanings and philosophy in the processions of traditional Gayo ethnic marriage. Therefore, their connotative, denotative, and philosophical meanings, which have been invented by the Gayo indigenous philosophers and ancestors, can be revealed through the results of this research as an effort to preserve one of the Gayo traditional and cultural heritages.

B. Method

This research is descriptive and qualitative. Qualitative research concerns individuals' opinions, experiences, and feelings in producing subjective data. It describes social phenomena as they occur naturally. No attempt is made to manipulate the situation under the study, as with experimental, qualitative research (Hancock et al., 2001). This research used two main sources – primary and secondary. The primary source is all data gained and collected from the field of research through direct observation and interviews. In this study, the data collection was carried out by conducting In-depth interviews with the Gayo people in Central Aceh. For this, ten important key informants of various backgrounds were selected who have deep knowledge of the study scope, which deals with verbal and non-verbal symbols explicitly used in the marriage procession of Gayo ethnic in Central Aceh (See Table 1). In conducting the interview, the researchers used interpersonal communication technique through questions and answers with the selected informants using structural interview guideline, which covers some open questions, so that all information related to the research object could be found entirely, deeply, and adequately. Two other sources, direct observation and documentation on implementing the phase and procession of the Gayo wedding ceremony at Central Aceh, were also used to support and complete this research. In addition to the data collection, this study employed an



analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion. The data collection process starts with observing and documenting the phase and procession of the Gayo marriage. The exploration of each verbal and non-verbal sign of codes and symbols was identified and presented. The codes and symbols which are found are then double-checked with the sources. Meanwhile, the collected data were analyzed using a descriptive approach based on Roland Barthes's theory of semiotics which includes the discussion on denotative and connotative meaning as well as myth (Passandaran, 2019; Jazeri, & Susanto, 2020; Siregar, 2022).

Table 1. Demographic Details of Informants

Initial	Age	Sex	Description
YS	67	M	Former Head of Gayo Traditional Board
BCA	64	M	Current Head of Gayo Traditional Board
NK	70	F	Female figure
JI	60	M	Custom experts, writer, academician
NSH	74	F	Custom figure
SY	52	M	Custom experts, writer, academician
SPN	62	M	Custom expert and adviser
BTR	56	M	Member of Gayo Traditional Board
NF	50	F	Member of Gayo Traditional Board
MG	73	M	Religious figure

As the study is concerned with meanings, semiotics becomes the base of interpreting the objects of this research. As a result, through this approach of Roland Bathes of the meanings of signs, the study's results can inform those meanings found in each phase of Gayo ethnic marriage processions.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Result

Based on the data gained, it can be concluded that marriage processions of Gayo ethnic consist of a series of phases and rituals, each of which interestingly and uniquely has various verbal and non-verbal symbols



which have their respective connotative and denotative meanings based on Gayo local values. The following explanations depict supporting statements from the selected vital informants to clearly describe those signs and symbols. These statements were inserted, paraphrased, and then displayed based on the relevant concern or focus of the discussion in the following research results.

a. The Process of Determining Mate Phase

Nonetheless, determining a mate in marriage is crucial before entering the subsequent phases of the marriage procession in the Gayo ethnic.

The following excerpts depict the information from informants.

E1: Usually, determining a mate of marriage in the traditional Gayo ethnic is done through beramal tidur, bernipi jege, which successively consist of three steps, namely risik, kono, and kilo. (YS)

Further, the informants mentioned that the three steps have their respective meanings, as depicted below.

E2: Risik means the beginning stage of deep thinking of parents in determining a mate. Kono means inviting the prominent family to convey the plan and discuss the parents' decision of determining a mate, which they have decided in the risik stage. (BCA)

E3: Kilo means measurement. Here kilo connotatively means taking a consensus within the family before coming to the phase of pre-prosng a mate. (NK)

b. Pre-proposing Phase

In the phase of pre-proposing, the prominent family of the future groom selects a particular middle-aged woman outside the future groom's family as the intermediary and to be sent to the family of the future bride's place. Usually, this chosen woman knows or at least knows the family members of the future bride to be proposed. This intermediary actor is called *kekelang rukut*.

E4: Kekelang means intermediary and rukut is the name of a little bit bitter-tasted vegetable. (JI)



E5: *So, kekelang rukut is the attached name to a chosen match-maker woman who plays an intermediary in the pre-proposing phase in the Gayo marriage procession. (NSH)*

c. *Proposing Phase*

Mujule peramalen, the proposing, is the process of sending a small delegation consisting of five or six prominent family members of the groom, what is called *wali sejuk* or cold guardians (excluding parents and grandfather whose status are placed as *wali porak* or hot guardians) and *kekelang rukut* whose primary function now is as both direction pointer and a member of the formal delegation.

E6: *In Gayo tradition, this coming delegation is called telangke sange. This term comes from two words, telangke and sange. (NF)*

E7: *Telangke means intermediary; sange is a small tree usually used for fishing float in the Gayo community. (SY)*

In the coming of the delegation of this proposing stage, as in the traditional rule, they have to bring with them some materials or objects called *Penampong Kuyu*, like one bamboo of rice, a needle with white sewing thread whose tip is spun and suffocated to a piece of turmeric, an egg, a small amount of money which are all placed in *tape belintem* or a small traditional Gayo bag, betel leaves of five in number and seven in number. According to three primary informants, each of these items is a sign and symbol with its philosophical meaning, as restated below.

Items or Attributes of Proposing

E8: *Oros senare, gere nguk lebih gere nguk kurang, senare opat kal, seneta roa jengkal. This expression means traditional measurement in which one bamboo of rice is not less and not exceeded, one bamboo of rice measures 4 cups of rice, and a cubit measures two spans. (YS)*

E9: *In the Gayo marriage tradition, the exact measurement of rice is a symbol that expresses that the process of proposing is not playing a game. It shows seriousness and has been decided as a consensus by the groom's family. (SPN)*

E10: *Jarum bertelenting benang, bercucuk ku kuning*. The collective item composed of a needle with a white twisted-end sewing thread pricked to a piece of turmeric is also a symbol. (YS)

E11: *If the tip of the needle with its white twisted end sewing thread goes through the turmeric, its color clings tightly to the white sewing thread, and its twisted tip is stuck. It is attributed to hoping for the proposal's success without denial and acceptance.* (BTR)

E12: *Tenaruh ni kurik or a chicken egg*. An egg is considered to consist of three parts, namely egg yolk, egg whites, and air space in it. Therefore, an egg here is also a symbol. (BTR)

E13: *These three parts have their messages. Connotatively, this egg expresses the compositions of the delegation and giving time; the members of the delegation are the groom's prominent family referring to egg yolk, and also outsider(s) referring to egg whites, the giving time and chance or opportunity to think, discuss and do further beramal tidur, bernipi jege (check and recheck) for the bride's family, and to request a time for the delegation to come back to get the consensus of the bride's family.* (SPN)

E14: *Sen alakadare or a small sum of money (not so much)*. It is also a symbol that expresses the simplicity of the groom's parents. It means showing the simplicity that the one who proposes is not rich or poor. (NK)

d. *Mujule Emas (Handing Gold) Phase*

Traditionally, handing gold is usually when the sun has shown its bright, between 09.00 and 11.00. This coming delegation is composed of the former delegation in the proposing stage and significantly, *sarak opat* (a traditional four authoritative leaders consisting of the headman, imam, adviser to the headman, and community representative (Bowen, 1991, 23). The inclusion of village leaders is the traditional rule since this process is done through a formal act. The *mujule emas* means handing dowry, but in this stage, the process is not giving the gold.

According to one key informant, the items given to the bride's family are only *teniron* (things requested by the bride's family), followed by other series of essential events.



E15: After giving *teniron*, we do the discussion of *mutongkoh waktu*, setting up the proper time and day of solemnization. At the same time, the gold as dowry will be handed out on the day of the solemnization of marriage. (JI).

e. *Pakat Sara Ine Phase*

In Gayo ethnic community, this phase is also an essential part of the Gayo marriage procession. This phase gathers parents, the nuclear and the prominent family to discuss reaching a consensus. There is a saying “*Perang berpangkal, kerje bersukut*”. An informant revealed its meaning.

E16: This saying means a war needs expenses; marriage needs family. However, in terms of Gayo ethnicity, this term has its philosophy that is directed to the participation of the entire nuclear and prominent family in marriage processions. (BCA)

f. *Pakat Sudere Phase*

Pakat sudere means an expanded gathering of the nuclear and prominent family and the whole village members in the respective place of the groom and the bride. Usually, the nuclear family sends a selected middle-aged woman directly as a representative, first to the village *sarak opat* (four village leaders) and second to the village members. This selected woman takes a betel nut (*alat bersirih*) and conveys an oral invitation.

The main event of this extended meeting is also called “*bepegenap dan penyerahen*” or mutual giving help in the marriage and handing over the family duty to the village leaders. In this session, two sub-sessions are done, namely *Penyerahen* and *Beguru*.

Penyerahen or the handing over the duty from the family to the village leaders, is done through traditional rule by a chosen representative of the nuclear family who gives a short sermon by a saying, as exposed by an informant as follows.

E17: “*Reje, karena kamini male naran buet, muluwahi sinte, siringen male iberati, sisara male irowan, waruse male iwajiben, keta kune tetah tentue, kami ulakken ku reje*”. (Literally means, king, because we are going to do something, namely performing a marriage, the light will be given burden, the one will be doubled, the required will be obliged as a must, so all proper orderly provisions, we hand over to king). (NSH)

By this handing over duty, all following duties are taken over by the village leaders.

The next step is *beguru*, advising the future groom or bride in their respective place. An informant voiced the meaning.

E18: Beguru is one of the traditional sacral ritual phases within the Gayo community. This process is all in the authority of the sarak opat (village leaders). In this beguru session, there are four main sub-processions taking place as manat fatanah, ejer marah, tepung tawar, and inirin. (SY)

The first session is *manat fatanah*, profound advice from all parents and close family members to the future groom or bride. This is a phenomenal and heart-breaking event which is called *sebuku* (advising while crying), when parents, brothers, and sisters, and all prominent family give advices and express their deep feeling to the groom or bride while asking for forgiveness for all mistakes, hugging and crying.

The second session is *ejer marah*, teaching with direction. Usually, this teaching and advice are given directly by the head of the village or *imam*. The purpose of giving this directive advice is to give the bride and groom to safeguard the life journey until old age.

Third session is *tepung tawar*, watering. Both the groom and the bride, again in their respective places, follow a traditional ritual. For this, the family must prepare a device that is filled with some cold water, *batang teguh* (*Dactyloctenium aegyptium*) with its root, *dedingin* (*Kalanchoe pinnata*) with its leaves, *celala* (*coleus sp*) with its leaves, *bebesi* (*Palpalun commersonii sangiunalis*) with its leaves, *ongkal* (a small creeping plant usually living in the fence) and handful of rice.

The doer of *tepung tawar* uses the tied items above to sprinkle the water and then the rice from the device to the head and then down to both right and left shoulders and stop at the hands of the bride or the groom while praying to God as to give health, happiness, peace and long life to the bride or groom.

The fourth session is *inirin ku waih*, which means taking to bath or watering the body. Traditionally, the taking bath procession was done in the river or the flowing water. The actors performing this event are the aunt for



the bride and the aunt's husband for the groom. Before that, the family prepared some juice of kaffir lime (*Citrus hystrix*) for the bride or groom.

An informant informed that after the bride or the groom takes a bath with water, he or she must pour the juice of the kaffir lime into his or her whole-body parts. The informant also explained the reason.

E19: *It believes that if bathing or showering just using soap, it is not clean enough, so the last shower should be ended with the kaffir lime juice.* (NK).

g. *Mujule Bei* (The Groom's Escort)

In the phase of *mujule bei* or escorting the groom, typically, after the groom is dressed up with complete traditional Gayo clothes with various accessories and ornaments, a short blessing ritual of *tepung tawar* (watering) is again done. Furthermore, the groom is escorted by a delegation headed by *sarak opat* (village leaders). This groom's delegation will not directly go to the bride's place, but they must stop for a while in *umah selang* (temporary waiting place) in the area of the bride's village. A small delegation of the bride picks up the groom's delegation, and a short ritual is done by exchanging *batil* (a small Gayo kerawang bag of betel equipment). This ritual has a specific meaning as mentioned by an informant.

E20: *This exchange of batil of betel equipment is a symbol of respect referring to the formal acceptance of the bride's family.* (JI)

After a while, the groom's delegation, under the direction of the bride's representative, steps into the place of *Ijab Qabul* or solemnization of the marriage.

h. *Sawah Ukum* or (Marriage Contract or Solemnization)

In the *sawah ukum*, where the groom's delegation and bride's family have seated firmly, a ritual of handing over the groom from the village head to the bride's village head is conducted through *melengkan* (traditional speech). Next is a formal handing over of the agreed dowry from the groom's authoritative representative to the bride's authoritative representative, who then checks the dowry. If it is clear, then comes to the step of *Ijab Qabul*. The *Ijab Qabul* procession, done following Islamic

teaching, is the most crucial requirement in confirming the marriage. In the Gayo tradition, after the solemnization is done successfully, the groom will hand a small amount of money to his father-in-law or the so-called *Mat Jari Malem*. From this on, the calling status of the groom and the bride changed to Gayo's formal calling, *aman mayak*, and *inen mayak*. Two informants delivered their opinions regarding this.

E21: This calling of aman mayak and inen mayak, respectively attached to both the groom and the bride, has a semiotic meaning that both are formally tied with marriage, which shows their respective status in the community as a husband and a wife. (SPN and MG)

i. The Groom and Bride Meeting: Semah Tungel and Semah Pincung

After finishing the *Ijab Qabul* procession, the groom will be picked up by the bride's grandmother or aunt to a particular room where the bride, in her entire marriage's traditional ornaments clothes accompanied by three of her female relatives, has waited. Then, the couple is seated face to face. An informant coined two marriage rituals conducted in this process – *semah tungel* and *semah pincung*.

E22: Semah Tungel is the process of shaking hands followed by the bride bowing her head three times to the groom, while Semah Pincung, part of the groom, is again conducted by shaking hands and then the groom hands some sum of money over the bride. (BTR)

j. First Meeting of the Groom and the Bride as First Night

Traditionally, when the groom and bride meet for their first meeting as husband and wife, there is a particular room prepared by the bride's family. Within this particular room is again made a small special room called *dalem* or *umah rinung* in Gayo tradition. The term *dalem* or *umah rinung* refers to the inner partition of the room specially decorated for the groom and bride's special night. But again, at that first night, the white cloth must be placed on the upper part of the bed.

A female key informant disclosed a particular meaning and purpose of this white cloth as depicted below:

E23: As ruled by Gayo tradition, the bride must cover the upper part of the bed on that first night with a white cloth. This white cloth will be



examined by a female imam in the next morning as to see the blood marks, whether the bride is still virgin or not. (NK)

k. *Mujule Beru*

Mujule beru means delivering the bride to the groom's family. In this phase, local *sarak opat* (the village leaders) and family members of the bride will visit the groom's family and his village leaders in the groom's village. In this first formal meeting of both family sides, as an important informant mentions that the delegation of the bride must bring some side dishes and *kero tum*. *Kero Tum* is rice wrapped in banana leaf and placed in *sentong* or Gayo traditional large woven bag. Further, the informant clearly illustrated the details of the process.

E24: *The bag number of kero tum delivered is based on the family status of the bride. If she is the village leader's daughter, the number should be 12. If she is the daughter of the vice head of the village or at the same rank, the number should be 7, and if she is the daughter of ordinary people, the number should be 5 or 3. (BCA)*

l. *Mujule Gule*

Mujule gule means delivering fish. It is a phase in which the groom alone, after three days in his parents' house, revisits his parents-in-law to mention that his parents and nuclear family will come to visit them the next day. On his visit, as ruled by Gayo tradition, he must bring two kinds of fish: *gule bado* (snake fish) and *gule bawal* (goldfish). The specific details of this activity were described by two informants below.

E25: *The kinds of fish must be snake fish and goldfish, not other kinds of fish. These two kinds of fish are signs and symbols with denotative and connotative meanings and philosophical messages expressing the fertility of both couples. (MG and YS)*

m. *Mah Kero Opat Ingi*

Mah Kero Opat Ingi means bringing rice on the fourth day. Usually, before the visit, the groom's nuclear family has to prepare some offerings as directed by the tradition's rule. The offerings are placed in two *sentong* (Gayo traditional woven bags) consisting of 7 *kero tum* (rice wrapped with

banana leaf) in one bag and 9 *kero tum* in another. So, all together is 16 *kero tum* in number. If there are other additional numbers of *kero tum* they bring, they have to put them in other bags, but as in Gayo tradition, the only two bags which have been depicted are directly given by the groom's parents to the bride's parents.

As two informants mentioned that there are specific traditional rules applied in the process of making *kero tum*. First, the *kero tum* must be wrapped in a banana leaf. Second, both tips of the banana leaf were tied with the rope initially from the bark of *benyet* or *beldem* (small trees living in the water of the deep part of the hill. According to two informants, the banana leaf has a certain meaning.

E26: The banana leaf is a sign or symbol expressing a barn where rice is kept after harvest. Meanwhile, the ropes taken from the barks of small trees usually found in the watery and deep parts of hills have semiotic meanings that refer to a sense of responsibility of the husband to his wife's life. (YS and BTR)

This event ended with *semah ku sudere*. *Semah ku sudere* is a traditional ritual of introducing each family member, their calling, and their status within the family to both groom and the bride. Usually, in this ritual, each nuclear family member will hand over some money to both the groom and bride when shaking hands and bowing to show their respect.

n. Nero Ijin

Nero ijin means a representative of the groom or the bride who delivers a speech mainly to express thanks to everyone involved in succeeding all marriage processions. This is the final phase of the marriage procession in the Gayo community. It is performed in the respective place of the groom and the bride's place. The nuclear family invites the leaders' village and the whole family members within the village to get together. This *nero ijin*, according to an informant, has another implication.

E27: Nero ijin does not only mean to deliver thanks but also has a deep philosophical meaning of asking forgiveness from all family members to their village leaders and village members if there are misconducts or mistakes of the nuclear and prominent family that may take place in the full implementation of marriage processions. (SPN)



2. Discussion

Gayo ethnic has unique traditional marriage phases and procession, which have various verbal and non-verbal symbolic features. These various symbols, which have meanings and philosophy within the processions of Gayo traditional marriage, to a great extent, can be seen from the series of the marriage processions, the actors that play roles in the marriage processions, and the materials and objects used in the marriage processions.

In the Gayo community, searching for a mate is natural. Both actors, either parents or children, may play a role (Pandapotan, 2017). If selecting a mate is agreeable, it does not stop until that phase but is still followed by three other successive steps: *risik*, *kono*, and *kilo*. Ibrahim (2007) mentions the process of *risik*, *kono*, and *kilo*, where parents, nuclear and prominent families run through the phases of *beramal tidur*, *bernipi jege*, a ritual of the prominent family on both sides to reach a consensus because the marriage process is not only the responsibility of parents but also entirely under the responsibility of all close relatives. *Beramal tidur*, *bernipi jege* means dreaming at sleeping and dreaming at awake. This saying has its meaning that it is the process of thinking, checking and deciding, and praying to God about the mate which has been selected (Auni, 2021).

In addition to the pre-proposing marriage phase, the active side that plays a role is the male side. A middle-aged woman from the prominent family is appointed to take part as *kekelang rukut* (intermediary actor) to be sent to the family of the future bride's place. The attachment of *rukut*, which is the name of a little bit bitter-tasted vegetable, philosophically means that if the plan of the proposal is not agreed upon or the future bride's family members use obscene words or ways of denying the plan, the woman of *kekelang rukut* does not feel any kind of embarrassment or offense (Buniyamin, 2004).

The proposing phase is one of the sacred phases within the Gayo marriage tradition. It is a serious step and must be done correctly and follow the rule of Gayo community norms as in E13 and (Marhamah, 2017). The term *telangke sange* in the marriage procession of Gayo people is attached to

the small delegation of a formal marriage proposal. Its semiotic meaning of *telangke sange* is attributed to the delegation with a solid responsibility to succeed in proposing in the marriage tradition (Selian, 2018).

In terms of the proposal for mate, *penampong kuyu* literally means wind blocker. Those items of the match proposal are all semiotic symbols which mean that for the time being, the bride's family is hoped not to give other space for another match proposal from other families. In addition to items brought, for example, the seven and five betel leaves inserted are also symbols that express the chance for the bride's family to do research and recheck on the groom and their family within seven days and ask for direction from God within five times of prayer a day so that the proposal reaches its consensus within all family members (Ibrahim & Hakim, 2002).

Regarding the time of handing gold is usually when the sun has shown its bright: between 09.00 - 11.00. This scale of time is associated with their belief and philosophical meaning as the hope of the bright life of the couple both spiritually and materially in the whole of their life to come.

In Gayo tradition, *pakat sara ine* must be done seriously since the marriage processions are now in the hands of the entire close family. By doing so, the burden of the marriage is all under the responsibility of the prominent family. Usually, how big the marriage feast that will be performed is determined in this *pakat sara ine* consensus.

The betel nut brought while inviting (*mango*) and oral invitation are a symbol that reflects the honor, respect, and asking willingness. In addition, the process of *bepegenap* and *penyerahen* or family mutual helping and handing over the duty refers to a cultural ritual act which means asking for permission, sincerity, and time availability to take over the duty of family members, while a small amount of money given to his father in law after the solemnization is a symbol as the groom promises that he will be full of responsibility for his daughter who is now his wife. In other words, the groom can give all needs of life and express his full responsibility toward his wife.

On the first night meeting, the bride and groom are located at a small special place called *dalem* or *umah rinung* where the bed is covered with white. The room and white cover respectively express keeping confidential when



having sexual intercourse and holiness that refers to the approval of the virginity of the bride and the sexual health of the groom (Auni & Manan, 2022).

In delivering the bride to the groom's family, some codes and symbols are used: *kero tum* (number of bags of the *kero tum*), *semah ku sudere* (bow to family), and giving money. The *kero tum* (rice wrapped with banana leaf) refers to a traditional rice barn (granary), while the number of bags of the *kero tum* as 12, 7, 5, or 3 has a different meaning from its original notion. The respective number of bags of *kero tum* refers to a family's social status. The saying *semah ku sudere*, which means bowing to the family, has its philosophy in the social life of the Gayo community. In the Gayo ethnicity, each family member has a unique calling that shows his or her status among the family members. Therefore, the *semah ku sudere* has its message, not only bowing while introducing but also understanding a certain status of a family member to avoid miscalling or misplacing. Finally, the money given by the family is not meant to give money. Its philosophical message is that a collaborative act of money collected is supposed to be used as financial support for the new couple with their new life as husband and wife. That is why traditionally and usually, the money given at that gathering will be used by the couple to buy something useful for the start of their new and future life as a couple. Simply put, *semah ku sudere* is a traditional ritual of introducing the prominent family members to the bride, such as the family status within the nuclear family members and their callings (Bakti et al., 2020; Nurdin et al., 2021).

The delivery of snake and gold fish is connotatively associated with the spiritual and physical health of the groom and the bride. More specifically, the snake fish expresses that sexually the groom is healthy enough and not impotence, and the gold fish expresses that his wife or the bride is also healthy and fertile.

The two *sentong* or bags filled with *kero tum* (rice wrapped with banana leaves) in *mah kero opat ingi* phase philosophically means to express a seriousness of total responsibility that "we all will make every effort to earn the whole living of the bride, even though we have to seek the earn in the deep valley or the summit of the mountain". Specifically,

the number of 16 *kero tum* is divided into two bags, one bag is 7 in number, and another one is 9 in number, respectively a symbol with a deep philosophy in each. The symbolic meaning of 7 *kero tum* in number is associated with the months of pregnancy, which commonly expresses that within seven months of a woman's pregnancy, the baby has already formed in the bride's body. Meanwhile, the meaning of 9 *kero tum* in number is to express the typical time for a woman to give birth. Thus, two numbers of *kero tum*, 7 and 9, are also codes associated with the whole responsibility of the groom's family to take care of all needs within the process of the bride's pregnancy until her giving birth and not to be worried and become a burden of the side of the bride's family.

As has been discussed earlier, after the session of *beguru*, there is a session in which usually both the groom and the bride in their respective place follow a traditional *tepung tawar* or watering ritual. In this session, the family must prepare a device that is filled with some cold water, *batang teguh* (*Dactyloctenium aegyptium*), *dedingin* (*kalanchoe pinnata*), *ongkal* (a small creeping plant usually living in the fence), *celala* (*coleus* sp), *bebesi* (*Palpalun commersonii sangiunalis*) and handful of rice. All these items are symbols of hope, happiness, and togetherness of life for the groom and the bride.

According to one informant, each item has its respective semiotic meanings; namely, cold water refers to the symbol of life. It is the hope of success for every effort of the couple in earning their living; *dedingin* refers to the hope that both couples always live in peace and far from any conflicts in their togetherness until the last day of their life. *Batang teguh* is the hope of sturdy from various problems they face in their household; *Ongkal* is the symbol of unity which means the couple must always keep their togetherness and united; *Celala* refers to the hope that both couples must have good conduct and relations with their social surroundings; *Bebesi* is meant the hope to have physically and spiritually strong in running their household life, and rice is the symbol prosperity which meant the hope of being able to seek and earn their sustenance and fortune in their life.

Meanwhile, in the session of *inirin ku waih* (bathing), besides using soap while taking a bath, the groom and the bride must pour the juice of



kaffir lime (*Citrus hystrix*) into his or whole-body parts. The use of kaffir lime juice is also a symbol. It is a hope that the new couple may start their new life with a clean and pure heart and purpose. According to the local belief that bathing or showering just using soap is not clean enough. Therefore, the last shower should be ended with the juice of kaffir lime. In the sense of semiotics that kaffir lime's juice is a symbol showing both cleansing and purifying.

D. Conclusion

In the Gayo community, marriage is one of the chains of life that is implemented through various phases and procession, which includes both Islamic teaching and traditional indigenous values, which have become the blood of the flesh and are continually held until the present day. Gayo marriage tradition is unique. It is performed through interesting successive phases and processions, including total linguistic and cultural codes and symbols. This can be seen from the entire discussions in this work. Each stage of the procession of marriage in Gayo ethnic customs contains various codes and symbols which have semiotic values and philosophy. All related codes and symbols, such as in the expressions, objects, and attributes of Gayo marriage, are full of linguistic and cultural meanings directed to the expectations or great hopes of the happiness and togetherness of the life of people.

As a result of this study, the researcher can reveal back the meaning and the philosophy of the representations of signs implied in texts, codes, and symbols within the whole series of Gayo marriage phases and processions, which are useful not only for the young generation but also for those who would like to make use of these findings of this research, especially dealing with further study or research in the long run.

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