

# Symbolic Representation As a Social Mechanism: A Study of Hegemony and Character Formation in The Bugis Tradition

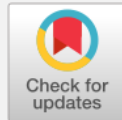
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## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to uncover the symbolic meaning of Kawali, a traditional Bugis weapon, as a social mechanism and instrument for character formation in the South Sulawesi cultural system. Using a qualitative-ethnographic approach, this study was conducted over 9 months in the Bone and Luwu Regencies and involved 15 informants. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation studies of lontara manuscripts and ritual practices. Then, they were analyzed thematically using Antonio Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory framework and Clifford Geertz's symbolic anthropology. The results show that Kawali is not merely a physical artifact but also a social symbol rich in traditional values, norms, and the Bugis' philosophy of life. Through pamor motifs, colors, and inheritance rituals, Kawali functions as a medium for communicating the values of siri (honor), pangaderreng (customary ethics), social responsibility, and loyalty to tradition. The symbolism of Kawali shows how Bugis cultural hegemony is exercised through moral consensus and aesthetic practices, rather than through coercion. In a modern context, Kawali is also reinterpreted as a symbol of identity and resistance to cultural homogenization. These findings confirm that traditional Kawali artifacts have contemporary relevance in character education, cultural preservation, and the formation of national identity. As living symbols, Kawali unites art, faith, and ethics in a single, evolving system of meaning.*

**Keywords:** Bugis Tradition; Character; Hegemony; Social; Symbolic Representation

## 1. Introduction

The culture of the Bugis people in South Sulawesi is a rich cultural heritage, marked in traditional values, social norms, and complex symbolic systems (Abdullah, 2017; Alamsyah, 2022). As one of the largest ethnic groups in Indonesia, the Bugis people have a value system deeply rooted in their social structure and daily lives. One important element of this culture is symbolization through artifacts, including the *Kawali*. *Kawali* is not just a weapon but also an integral part of the Bugis community's cultural identity, representing social status, spiritual values, and a deeply held belief system (Ashar et al., 2018).

*Kawali*, as a cultural artifact, serves as a symbol in strengthening social norms and shaping individual character in Bugis society. Its existence is not only historically significant but also has a social function in maintaining local cultural identity and values. In traditional Bugis structures, *Kawali* marks a transition in social status, particularly during ceremonies in which *Kawali* is given to adult males considered emotionally mature and ready to shoulder social responsibilities (Mursalim, 2023; Regina, 2021). This tradition demonstrates how physical artifacts can play a crucial role in character education and the transmission of values.

In addition to its social function, *Kawali* also has an aesthetic dimension that reflects the Bugis people's cosmology and worldview. Each part of the *Kawali* contains specific symbols and meanings, from the pamor of the blade to the ornamentation on the scabbard. The aesthetics of *Kawali* are not merely visual beauty but also a form of cultural communication that involves a deep understanding of life values, such as courage, honor, and responsibility (Ashari et al., 2024; Rais, 2010). Thus, *Kawali* becomes a means of cultural expression that unites aspects of art, belief, and social structure.

Historically, narratives about *Kawali* are often associated with the concepts of *siri'* and *pangaderreng*, which are core to the Bugis philosophy of life. *Siri'*, as a symbol of self-respect and honor, and *pangaderreng* as a customary value system, are the main foundations for understanding *Kawali's* position in social and cultural contexts. In various ancient manuscripts, such as the lontara, it is stated that *Kawali* owners must maintain their own dignity and that of their community. Therefore, the existence of *Kawali* becomes a symbolic instrument that strengthens the collective identity and social structure of the Bugis community.

Previous studies have explored *Kawali* primarily through its aesthetic, historical, and ritual dimensions (Ashari et al., 2024; Ruwaidah, 2018), emphasizing its craftsmanship and ceremonial significance. However, these perspectives rarely examine how *Kawali* functions as a cultural instrument that perpetuates social values and moral hegemony. Analyses linking its symbolic form to broader mechanisms of cultural persuasion and collective character formation are lacking. To address this gap, this study integrates Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony with Clifford Geertz's symbolic anthropology to interpret *Kawali* as a space of meaning where power, ethics, and identity intersect. It adopts an ethnographic approach to understand how symbols operate not as instruments of coercion but as tools of consensus, shaping moral consciousness and sustaining social order in Bugis society.

Therefore, this study aims to: (1) Analyze the aesthetic dimensions of *Kawali* as a traditional Bugis art product that represents visual beauty, spiritual meaning, and cultural symbolism in the context of the formation of philosophical and moral values of society; (2) Reveal the symbolic representation of *Kawali* in the Bugis cultural hegemonic system as an ideological instrument that reproduces social structures, *siri'* values, *pangaderreng*, and moral legitimacy through customary practices and artistic expressions; and (3) Explain the function of *Kawali* as a means of symbolic communication and character education media that transmits the values of courage, honor, responsibility, and loyalty between generations in Bugis society through the mechanism of

cultural hegemony. Through this framework, this study offers a new perspective on Bugis material culture, placing *Kawali* not merely as an artistic artifact but as a symbolic mechanism for social reproduction and moral governance.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Symbolic Representation in Cultural Studies**

Studies on symbolic representation in anthropology and sociology emphasize that symbols are not merely visual signs, but rather instruments of cultural communication rich in meaning. (1973) asserted that symbols function as models of social reality, connecting individual understanding with collective meaning systems. (Ashar et al., 2018) viewed symbols as tools that maintain social cohesion through rituals and cultural performances. Thus, symbols do not stand alone but are closely linked to social practices, power structures, and cultural identities. This perspective is relevant to understanding *Kawali* as a cultural text that is not only material but also symbolic, representing the collective values of Bugis society.

### **2.2. Hegemony and Cultural Power**

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony emphasizes that power is not maintained solely through coercion, but rather through agreements grounded in the internalization of values and culture (Ashar et al., 2018). In the Bugis context, cultural symbols such as *Kawali* function as instruments that perpetuate social legitimacy and maintain collective balance (Ashar et al., 2018). Research shows that the values of *Siri'* and *pangaderreng* are institutionalized through hegemonic cultural practices, leading society to accept the existing social structure consciously. Thus, cultural symbols become an important mechanism in maintaining social order as well as a tool to legitimize power.

### **2.3. Character Formation through Cultural Artifacts**

Character education from a cultural perspective emphasizes that moral and social values are transmitted not only through formal institutions but also through everyday cultural symbols and practices (Lickona, 1991). In Bugis society, *Kawali* serves as a non-verbal character education medium that internalizes the values of courage, honor, responsibility, and loyalty (Juanda & Azis, 2022; Ruwaidah, 2018). The process of passing *Kawali* from parents to children is not simply a transfer of objects, but also the instillation of values that shape an individual's moral identity. Thus, cultural artifacts can be understood as an effective means of shaping collective character in accordance with customary norms.

### **2.4. Previous Studies on Bugis Symbolism and Kawali**

Several previous studies have examined the symbolic role of *Kawali* in Bugis society. The *Kawali* blade has been understood not only as an aesthetic object and a reflection of life philosophy, but also as a cultural instrument that sustains social identity and reinforces social structure (Ashar et al., 2018). They added that the *Kawali*-making process involves spiritual and cosmological dimensions, further strengthening its status as a sacred artifact. However, research that simultaneously connects *Kawali* as an instrument of hegemony and a mechanism for character education is still limited. Therefore, this study makes a new contribution by viewing *Kawali* not only from an aesthetic and historical perspective, but also from a symbolic perspective that emphasizes its hegemonic function and role in shaping the collective character of Bugis society.

### 3. Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative study with an ethnographic approach. Its primary objective is to deeply understand the symbolic meanings associated with *Kawali* in Bugis cultural practices and how these symbols function as social mechanisms in the process of character formation and the reproduction of cultural hegemony (Nasution, 2023; Xiyuan et al., 2025).

Field research was conducted over nine months, from February to October 2024, in two major centers of Bugis culture in Bone and Luwu Regencies. These locations were chosen because they remain strongholds of traditional Bugis values, where ritual practices, *pangaderreng* (customary ethics), and the use of symbolic artifacts such as *Kawali* are still preserved. This in-depth immersion in these communities allowed researchers to witness how symbols are executed, negotiated, and internalized in everyday life. The research subjects consisted of 15 informants purposively selected, including traditional leaders (*arung*), elders, blacksmiths (*panre bessi*), artisans, and young practitioners involved in the preservation of cultural rituals (Wise, 2025; Khairani et al., 2025).

Data were collected through three main methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentary study (Nicholas, 2021; Nina et al., 2022). Interviews were conducted two to three times with each informant, lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes per session. These interviews explored the meanings associated with *Kawali*, its moral and spiritual significance, and its relationship to *siri'* and *pangaderreng*. All interviews were recorded with consent and supported by field journals to capture non-verbal nuances. Observations were conducted during cultural activities, such as *Kawali* inheritance rituals, community gatherings, and traditional ceremonies. Detailed field notes were taken throughout the process, focusing on the context, dialogue, gestures, and symbolic interactions surrounding *Kawali*. Additionally, a documentary study was conducted by reviewing lontara manuscripts, local archives, and cultural literature to strengthen contextual interpretations.

The data analysis process followed the stages of thematic analysis: data reduction, categorization of emerging themes, and interpretive synthesis. Transcribed interviews and observation notes were coded both manually and using qualitative analysis software. The coding process focused on key categories, including symbolic representation, moral authority, social hierarchy, and character formation. These themes were interpreted through the theoretical lenses of Gramsci's cultural hegemony and Geertz's symbolic anthropology, ensuring that the analysis remained true to the participants' lived experiences while connecting them to broader socio-cultural theory. To ensure the research's credibility, several validation techniques were employed. Triangulation of sources and methods was employed by comparing information from multiple informants, ceremonial observations, and documentary evidence (Qurotul et al., 2025). Member checking was conducted by returning initial findings to key participants for feedback, ensuring that interpretations accurately represented their perspectives. Debriefing sessions with local researchers and cultural experts were also conducted to refine analytical conclusions and minimize researcher bias (Rais, 2010; Ulum et al., 2017).

Ethical considerations were an essential part of the research process. Before data collection, participants were informed of the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Written and verbal consent were obtained before each interview and observation. All participant names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect anonymity, and sensitive cultural information was handled with care. Particular care was taken when interacting with sacred artifacts and oral traditions, ensuring that documentation followed local protocols and respected community boundaries. Through these methodological steps, the research remained consistent with ethnographic principles, combining sustained engagement,

cultural sensitivity, and theoretical depth. This approach not only ensured the validity of the data but also strengthened the authenticity of the findings, allowing the voices of Bugis cultural practitioners to be fairly represented in the interpretation of *Kawali* as a living symbol of moral and social order.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The symbolic representation of *Kawali* in the Bugis cultural hegemonic system is studied as a process of forming and maintaining social structures through artifacts (Al-Gasali et al., 2022). In this context, *Kawali* is seen as a symbol of power, status, and customary legitimacy, accepted and reproduced culturally, making it an integral part of collectively inherited social values and norms (Ashari et al., 2024; Nordin & Che, 2020). *Kawali* is analyzed as a means of communicating values and fostering character, with the artifact used in social rituals such as inaugurations and intergenerational inheritance. The symbolic function of *Kawali* in this context serves as an instrument of character education that instills values such as *siri'*, courage, loyalty, and social responsibility. With this approach, this section is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of *Kawali* as a cultural symbol that exists in physical form, functions as a means of symbolic communication, and supports the sustainability of the Bugis community identity.

##### 4.1. Kawali Aesthetics as an Artistic Product

*Kawali*, as a traditional art product, not only has practical functional value but is also rich in aesthetic value, which is an integral part of the Bugis cultural system. Visually, *Kawali* has a distinctive shape with a medium size, a sharp single-edged blade, and a handle decorated with certain symbolic motifs. *Kawali* is made by *panre besi* (traditional blacksmiths), who are considered artists rather than just artisans. Field observations indicate that forging *Kawali* is both a technical and spiritual process. *Panre besi* (blacksmiths) prepare the selected iron, read prayers, and perform rituals before forging. A craftsman in Bone explained, *Kawali* is not made simply by hand, but with the heart that remembers our ancestors. The pattern (*pamor*) of the blade and the wood of the *warangka* (sword sheath) have symbolic meanings: the fishbone motif represents endurance, the dragon motif represents leadership, and the red or black sheath represents honor and steadfastness (Akhmar et al., 2017; Hanur & Arisal, 2018).

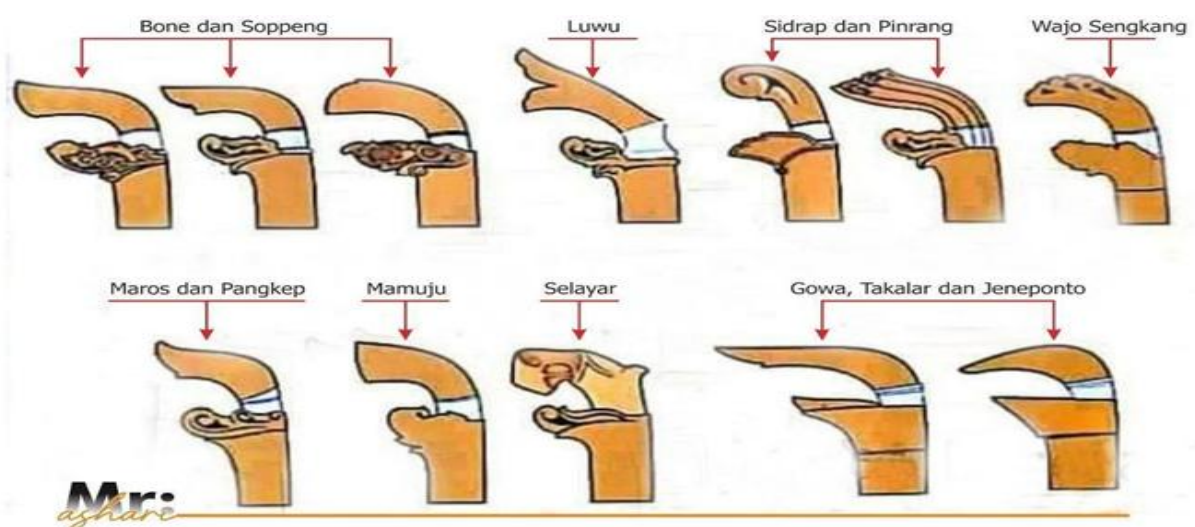


Figure 1. Kawali Bugis Aesthetics  
Source: Field work documentation

Visually, Figure 1 shows various forms of “*Kawali*” or “*Kawali sarong*” originating from several regions in South Sulawesi and its surroundings. Each region has distinctive curves, carvings, and ornaments at the base or tip of its *Kawali*. Some typical *Kawali* Pangulu ornaments are based on symbolic shapes or resemble living creatures such as certain flora and fauna, which gives an artistic impression and makes it attractive. These motifs are not only decorative elements but also convey narratives about strength, courage, and spiritual values held by the Bugis people (Amin et al., 2019; Rezki & Putra, 2022). The color and material of the warangka reinforce its representative function in traditional ceremonies, indicating the social status and responsibilities of the *Kawali* owner within their community. This aesthetic becomes a visual narrative that describes the owner’s identity, both in terms of social status and moral character.

**Table 1. Aesthetic Elements and Meaning of Kawali Culture**

<i>Kawali</i> Elements	Aesthetic Characteristics	Cultural Meaning
Pamor Bila	Fishbone motif: parallel lines resembling bones; wave motif: dynamic waves; dragon motif: scaly curves	Symbolizes physical toughness, courage in facing life’s challenges, as well as the authority and power of its owner.
Handle	Lontara letter carvings and ergonomic shape adapted to the hand grip	Symbol of social status and noble descent; it reflects functional and artistic value in its use
Warangka	Decorated in red and black with ebony or teak wood, with typical Bugis carvings on the surface	The color red symbolizes courage and honor; the color black symbolizes steadfastness and loyalty to tradition.
Material	Forged steel and selected hardwoods sourced from native forests	Demonstrating sacred values, resilience, and the philosophy of eternity in ancestral cultural heritage

Source: Results of field data processing

Table 1 illustrates how each element in the *Kawali* construction contains aesthetic value and profound cultural meaning among the Bugis people. From an ethnographic and hegemonic perspective, the *lontara inscription* on the *Kawali* handle serves as a textual legitimation of cultural authority. This inscription binds individuals to the collective memory of *siri'* and *pangaderreng*, ensuring that moral discipline is reproduced through symbolic literacy. Each element of the *Kawali* aesthetic not only reflects visual beauty but also conveys complex moral, spiritual, and symbolic messages. The *Kawali* components are designed with strong cultural and philosophical intentions, making them artifacts with multiple layers of meaning. Furthermore, the table emphasizes that these symbolic elements act as carriers of moral ideology, consistent with Gramsci’s view that cultural aesthetics can reproduce power relations through consent rather than domination. Therefore, *Kawali* aesthetics is the result of a dialogue between form, material, color, and cultural meaning, functioning as a form of living art that beautifies and regulates social life.

*Kawali* is not merely an art form but also has an educational function. Through *Kawali*, the younger generation of Bugis is taught the importance of cultural values, respect for ancestors,

and responsibility towards society. The process of passing down *Kawali* from parents to children symbolizes the transmission of cultural values and character education (Yusuf, 2017). Therefore, the aesthetics of *Kawali* are not only visually educational but also morally and spiritually instructive. Therefore, *Kawali* is considered not merely a silent artifact but an active medium for conveying values, philosophy, and ethnic pride. Art in *Kawali* is a living art, an art that speaks, and an art that educates.

These aesthetic elements are in line with Geertz's (1973) view of culture as a system of symbols that communicate social order and moral expectations. From the perspective of Gramsci's theory of hegemony (1971), the aesthetic dimension of *Kawali* serves as a cultural instrument that maintains moral order and social agreement. The values of *siri* (honor) and *pangaderreng* (customary ethics) are visually encoded in *Kawali* motifs, colors, and ornaments. Thus, by internalizing these visual symbols, community members voluntarily accept the moral hierarchy embedded in the artifacts, thereby reproducing hegemonic cultural power not through coercion, but through aesthetic appreciation and shared moral obligations (Ashari et al., 2024; Nordin & Che, 2020).

#### 4.2. Symbolic Representation of *Kawali* in Bugis Cultural Hegemony

The symbolic representation of *Kawali* in Bugis society demonstrates how cultural artifacts can function as instruments of social hegemony. *Kawali*'s symbolism lies in its visual and narrative elements. Its blade, with its dragon or fishbone motif, conveys strength and resilience. Meanwhile, its hilt and scabbard, decorated with distinctive carvings and colors, convey social status, role in society, and readiness to fulfill customary responsibilities (Dalle & Jundi, 2021). Socially, the use of *Kawali* in religious rituals, weddings, and the inauguration of traditional leaders demonstrates that this artifact carries symbolic meanings accepted and shared by the community. *Kawali* functions not only as decoration but also as an instrument of moral legitimacy and social status. Thus, the symbolic representation of *Kawali* strengthens the social order in hierarchical, collectivist Bugis society.

**Table 2. Symbolic Representation of *Kawali* in Bugis Social Structure**

Symbol	Location	Meaning
Fish Bone Pamor	Blade	Strength and protection
Pamor Snake Dragon	Blade	Resilience, leadership
Lontara Carvings	Handle	Descendants of nobility
Red Sarong Color	Warangka	Courage and honor

Source: Results of field data processing

Table 2 above shows how each physical element and practice of *Kawali* usage contains symbolic layers that shape the collective consciousness of the Bugis people. This symbolic code acts as what Gramsci called a "cultural apparatus," a subtle channel through which social order and moral hierarchy are reproduced. The pamor elements on the blade and hilt, and the color of the scabbard, not only reveal the owner's origin or identity but also serve as a visual code that can be culturally interpreted as a sign of respect, legitimacy, and loyalty to traditional values.

The *Kawali* symbol has been internalized as part of the Bugis way of life. This symbol does not require explicit verbal explanation because it has become part of a shared collective narrative. In traditional ceremonies, the presence of *Kawali* is not merely a fashion accessory but rather an affirmation of social identity and a symbol of customary authority. The results of the study indicate that the display of *Kawali* in public ceremonies acts as a visual reminder of *siri'* and *pangaderreng*, transforming cultural symbols into hegemonic tools that regulate behavior through shared beliefs. This symbolism strengthens one's social position in the Bugis cultural hierarchy and creates social harmony through a collective awareness of structure and values.

*Kawali* also serves as a medium for transmitting values (Abdul, 2023; Herlina & Rasyid, 2022). Hegemony here arises from the acceptance of symbols as undeniable shared truths, as they have become part of collective identity and history. *Kawali's* symbolic representation ultimately demonstrates how art, culture, and social structures reinforce one another (Rohmalita et al., 2022; Ulum et al., 2017). *Kawali* is an articulate cultural language, effective in conveying ideas, and functional in maintaining the continuity of norms and identity. In Gramscian terms, this cultural acceptance represents a "hegemonic agreement," in which the visual and ritual presence of *Kawali* serves as a moral discourse that legitimizes leadership and reinforces *siri* (honor) and *pangaderreng* (customary law). Through this mechanism, power in Bugis society is maintained not through coercion, but through shared cultural beliefs and symbolic participation in traditions centered on *Kawali*.

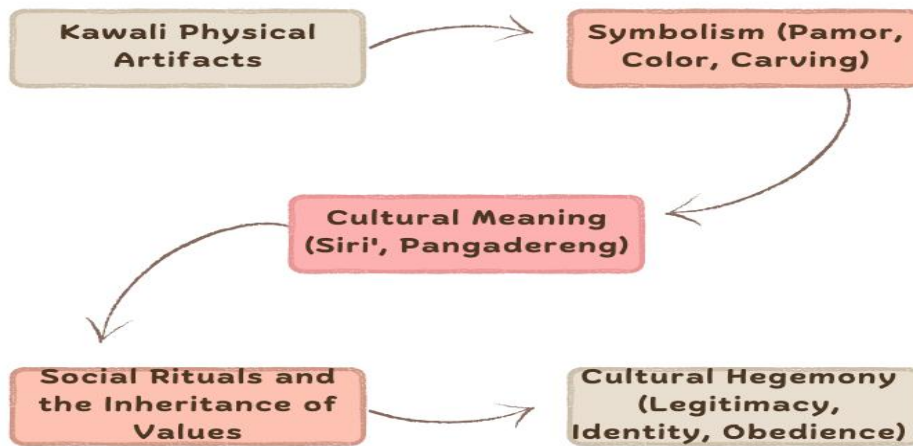


**Figure 2. Kawali in Bugis Traditional Ceremony**

Source: Fieldwork Documentation, 2024

Figure 2 above shows the use of *Kawali* as a symbol of self-representation in Bugis society. *Kawali* is worn around the waist as a symbol of legitimacy, status, and commitment to customary values. The presence of *Kawali* in customary public spaces shows that symbols can shape collective action and influence society's value system (Nordin & Che, 2020). Through strong symbolic representation, *Kawali* not only shapes perceptions of power and responsibility but also guides individual behavior in society. Observations show that the act of wearing or displaying *Kawali* is simultaneously aesthetic and political; it communicates dignity (*siri'*), reinforces social obligations (*pangaderreng*), and thus embodies cultural hegemony through voluntary adherence to moral codes.

Andi Singke explains that the *Kawali* plays a crucial role as a marker of “appropriateness.” Weapons like the *Kawali* are viewed not only as combat tools but also as symbols of social status and strong personal identity. The *Kawali*, hidden in peacetime and revealed only in battle, underscores the high value of manners and etiquette in Bugis society. Not just anyone can challenge; even in combat, what is judged is not only physical ability but also suitability for fighting. The flow of symbolic representation is clearly visible in the image below:



**Figure 3. Flow of Symbolic Representation of Kawali in Social Hegemony**

Source: Fieldwork Documentation and Author’s Analysis, 2024

Figure 3 above illustrates the dialectical process between physical artifacts and the symbolic values embodied in *Kawali*. This process begins with a physical design that conveys prestige and ornamentation, is culturally interpreted within the Bugis value system, and is represented through social practices such as inauguration and inheritance, ultimately establishing cultural hegemony.



**Figure 4. Socio-Cultural Kawali in the Bugis Traditional Structure**

Source: Fieldwork Documentation, 2024

Figure 3 depicts a Bugis-Makassar traditional procession that emphasizes the inheritance and reverence of the *Kawali* (Bugis keris) as a symbol of honor and dignity. A traditional figure, dressed formally and complete with traditional attributes, receives or hands over the *Kawali*,

wrapped in red cloth decorated with gold. Meanwhile, a man in white, wearing a traditional Bugis headdress, respectfully presents the *Kawali*. This visual representation illustrates how the *Kawali* functions as a moral and hegemonic instrument within the Bugis cultural system, bridging the values of *siri'* (honor) and *pangaderreng* (customary ethics). During fieldwork, an elder in Luwu remarked, "A man wearing the *Kawali* carries not a weapon, but his dignity." These artifacts are displayed at weddings, inaugurations, and inheritance rituals as visible markers of authority and social belonging (Dalle & Jundi, 2021). This suggests that hegemony operates through the ritualization of symbols, ensuring cultural continuity and voluntary adherence to shared moral ideals.

The relationship between *Kawali*, social structure, and the values of *siri'* and *pangaderreng*, which form the basis of Bugis cultural hegemony. Through this visual representation, it can be understood that *Kawali* is not only an ancestral heritage but also a living sign system that continues to function in shaping social ethics, loyalty to tradition, and the construction of individual character. The symbolism in *Kawali* functions as cultural infrastructure that maintains the continuity and social stability of Bugis society.

Values such as courage, leadership, honor, and loyalty inherent in *Kawali* have shaped the community's collective mindset and behavior. In this case, organic intellectuals function as a bridge between social classes and ideologies, allowing cultural values, as embodied in *Kawali* symbols, to exist and operate as a system of meaning that supports or challenges the hegemony of those in power. However, the role of intellectuals does not always perpetuate power. As hegemony here is dynamic, some young artisans reinterpret *Kawali* not as a status marker but as a symbol of cultural pride, indicating the emergence of counter-hegemonic readings in modern Bugis identity (Rohmalita et al., 2022).

While *Kawali* remains a marker of heritage, younger generations are increasingly reinterpreting it as a symbol of creativity and resistance to cultural homogenization. Some artisans now craft *Kawali* as decorative art, combining traditional motifs with contemporary designs (Rezki & Putra, 2022; Mahmud & Jannah, 2022). This aligns with Gramsci's (1971) concept of counter-hegemony, in which civil society reshapes inherited meanings to express autonomy. *Kawali's* transformation into cultural art is similar to that of other Southeast Asian symbolic weapons, such as the Malay kris or the Filipino kampilan, which also combine art, ethics, and identity (Nordin & Che, 2020). Ultimately, *Kawali's* symbolic representation serves as a hegemonic mechanism that transmits moral codes through art and ritual, ensuring the continuity of Bugis identity while remaining open to reinterpretation and resistance.

Thus, *Kawali* embodies Gramsci's concept of "organic ideology," where cultural beliefs and moral practices naturally support a hegemonic order. In Gramsci's theory of hegemony, power does not always operate through coercion but rather through a collective consciousness constructed symbolically and culturally (Ashari et al., 2024). *Kawali* is part of this cultural consciousness because it represents values such as *siri'*, *pangaderreng*, and ancestral reverence that the Bugis people have internalized.

### 4.3. *Kawali* as a Means of Communication and Character Building

*Kawali* not only serves as a traditional weapon but also as a symbolic medium of communication in Bugis society (Yusaerah et al., 2024). The traditional and moral values contained in *Kawali* are conveyed through its form, prestige, and use in certain social contexts. Character formation through *Kawali* occurs in a cultural space that combines aesthetics, rituals, and local narratives. *Kawali* is not only an instrument used in sacred moments but also represents everyday life, shaping social attitudes and morality (Dalle & Jundi, 2021). Bugis society

understands that powerful communication transcends verbal boundaries, encompassing symbols that are integrated with individual and community identity.

The use of *Kawali* as a means of character education is also evident in its transmission from generation to generation. A father or grandfather will pass on *Kawali* to his children or grandchildren as part of a generational transition. During this time, strong moral values are communicated: courage, honesty, responsibility, and loyalty to tradition.



**Figure 5. Kawali Inheritance Process in the Bugis Family**

Source: Fieldwork Documentation, 2024

Figure 4 illustrates the symbolism of passing down the *Kawali* from parents to children as a means of communicating values and character legitimacy. This proves that passing down the *Kawali* from father to son is more than just an inheritance; it is also a moral education. As one informant stated, "My father gave me his *Kawali* and said, 'Keep this, not for fighting, but to remember who you are.'" This gesture instills courage, responsibility, and respect in the family's continuity. The inheritance of this ritual becomes a hegemonic process of moral reproduction, in which individuals accept social norms not through coercion but through cultural respect and emotional attachment to ancestral symbols. This demonstrates that *Kawali* has become a living artifact in the Bugis communication tradition.

*Kawali* serves not only as a means of physical protection but also as a means of conveying noble values that shape ethics and social behavior in society. *Kawali's* role as a symbolic communication tool makes it an instrument for holistic, context-based character formation, in keeping with the Bugis philosophy of life. The *Kawali's* forms and motifs create a language that the community can understand. The use of *Kawali* in traditional ceremonies conveys a collective message of honor, courage, and self-respect (*siri'*). This communication is symbolic because it is conveyed not through words but through actions, symbols, and visual attributes integrated with the wearer's body.

Character in Bugis society is formed through the internalization of consistent values within their social environment. *Kawali* serves as a reminder and a reinforcement of personal and collective identity (Astrianie et al., 2023). Someone who wears *Kawali* is considered to understand their social responsibilities and uphold the noble values of society. In this regard, *Kawali* artifacts serve as an effective medium for character education because they convey values symbolically and emotionally.

**Table 3. Communication Functions and Character Education of Kawali**

Symbolic Aspects	Forms of Communication	Transmitted Character Values
Pinning of <i>Kawali</i>	Symbolic, in traditional ceremonies	Responsibility, social maturity
Pamor Bilang and Warangka Warna	Visual and philosophical	Courage, self-respect ( <i>siri'</i> ), steadfastness
Intergenerational inheritance	Social and emotional rituals	Loyalty, responsibility, honor

Source: Results of field data processing

Table 3 shows that *Kawali* serves as a symbolic medium that conveys the character values of the Bugis people. The use of *Kawali* in traditional ceremonies symbolizes responsibility and social maturity, while the pamor blades and the colors of the warangka convey visual-philosophical messages about courage, self-respect (*siri'*), and steadfastness. The intergenerational transmission of *Kawali* not only passes down heirlooms but also instills loyalty, responsibility, and honor as part of the collective identity of the Bugis people.

Furthermore, research results indicate that *Kawali* is an effective medium for character education through symbols and social practices. In Bugis society, values are not conveyed directly through spoken language but rather through actions and symbols rich in cultural meaning (Juanda & Azis, 2022; Ruwaidah, 2018; Satriadi, 2020). This process strengthens the cultural construction that positions symbols as a means of connecting between generations and maintaining the integrity of customs.



**Figure 6. The Process of Communication of Values and Character Formation through Kawali**

Figure 5 illustrates that *Kawali* serves not only as a physical heirloom but also as a symbol of Bugis identity formation. The inheritance of *Kawali* transmits the values of honor, courage, and responsibility, which are then reinforced through integration into traditional rituals. This process visualizes Gramsci's model of cultural reproduction, in which the ethical systems of *siri'* and *pangaderreng* are maintained through emotional and symbolic communication.

In this context, *Kawali* becomes a medium for symbolizing the values of *siri'* and social legitimacy, which are then internalized in daily behavior. This process ultimately shapes the distinctive character of Bugis individuals, who uphold dignity, honor, and integrity in social life (Ruwaidah, 2018; Satriadi, 2020). Furthermore, the clarification of customary values is

transmitted gradually and symbolically through *Kawali*. This illustrates that character education in Bugis culture is carried out in a performative, symbolic context, not only through oral transmission or formal education. The communication of values through *Kawali* thus acts as a hegemonic practice that stabilizes the moral order in Bugis society. Individuals voluntarily participate in this structure, not as subordinates, but as cultural subjects who internalize shared meanings of virtue and responsibility.

*Kawali*, as an instrument used in ritual practices, is very important to the Bugis people. *Kawali*, which depicts various forms of ornamentation, is intended for sacred purposes and religious ceremonies. Because there is a view that everything is interconnected, this medium of mystical unity is an eternal force, so it is called sacred. In prehistoric times, there was a widespread belief in supernatural powers. In the realm of mythological life, as classified by Peursen, there is no clear separation between humans and the world, between subject and object; humans and the universe interpenetrate, so that human power and divine power are united (Guntur, 2024).

This phenomenon aligns with Gramsci's (1971) notion of "moral and intellectual leadership," wherein ruling ideas become accepted cultural truths through symbols and education. *Kawali*, through its symbolic communication, shapes individual consciousness and social behavior, generating a cultural consensus that underpins the Bugis moral system. In this regard, character formation through *Kawali* exemplifies Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, which naturalizes ethical values through aesthetic and spiritual experiences, reflecting how cultural beliefs and artistic expression combine to maintain a mutually agreed-upon moral order. The sacred perception of *Kawali* transforms aesthetic admiration into social discipline, transforming art into a subtle yet powerful instrument of hegemony.

Thus, it is clear that *Kawali* plays a dual role as both a cultural symbol and a character-building tool. Values such as *siri'* (legal relationship), responsibility, loyalty, and courage are not only preached but also interpreted and practiced through symbolic interactions. Thus, *Kawali* becomes a living symbol of the noble values of the Bugis people, which are continuously passed down from generation to generation in forms that are not only physical, but also cultural and spiritual.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Kawali* functions as a cultural mechanism through which values such as *siri'* (honor), responsibility, and courage are transmitted and internalized. *Kawali* is not only a material artifact but also a communicative medium for moral education and a form of cultural hegemony achieved through mutual consent. Analytically, this study contributes to a broader discussion on how symbolic artifacts sustain moral authority and social cohesion in a non-coercive manner. By combining Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony with Geertz's symbolic anthropology, this study highlights the power of aesthetics and ritual in everyday moral regulation. *Kawali* illustrates that cultural hegemony can be sustained not through political power, but through emotional and aesthetic attachment to collective symbols.

However, this study has several limitations. Its ethnographic scope is limited to the two regencies of Bone and Luwu, thus primarily reflecting local interpretations. Further research could explore comparative perspectives across Bugis or other Southeast Asian communities, examine gendered interpretations of *Kawali*, or use visual and digital ethnography to explore how traditional symbols adapt in a global context. Looking ahead, *Kawali* offers valuable insights for interdisciplinary inquiry connecting anthropology, education, the arts, and cultural policy. As a cultural heritage, it continues to evolve, shaping and being reshaped by the identities of those who preserve it. Beyond its traditional context, *Kawali* can inspire contemporary initiatives in

cultural preservation, creative industries, and moral education, demonstrating that symbolic power remains central to the resilience of Indonesian cultural identity in the modern world.

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## 7. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest regarding this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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