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ANTHROPONYMY OF NAMING LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE IN GOVERNANCE SYSTEM OF THE MUNA ETHNIC

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the structure and function of leadership naming within the traditional governance system of the Muna ethnic in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, through the lens of anthroponymy, cultural ethnography. Employing Spradley's ethnographic model and integrating analytical frameworks from Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalism, Geertz's symbolic anthropology, Frawley's theory of meaning, and Alford and Van Langendonck's anthroponymic theory, this research reveals that leadership titles such as Sugi, Sangia, Omputo, Bhonto Balano, Ghoerano, Bobato, Kino, Mieno, Modino, Mintarano Bhitara, Kapita, Kapitalao, Opasi, Tunani, and Firisi are not merely administrative identifiers but constitute a multilayered symbolic system encoding political authority, customary legitimacy, spiritual values, genealogical stratification, and collective identity. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with traditional leaders and office-holders, participant observation, and archival documentation, and analyzed using Atlas.ti to map interconceptual relations. The analysis identifies one overarching cultural theme the hierarchical leadership structure as a representation of the equilibrium between political power, customary authority, and spiritual legitimacy. This study advances the field of anthroponymy by demonstrating that naming systems in traditional governance simultaneously function as referential, structural, contextual, expressive, and conceptual systems of meaning. The findings also contribute to discourse on intangible cultural heritage preservation, offer a linguistic framework for documenting endangered governance vocabularies.

KEYWORDS: Anthroponymy; Leadership Titles; Muna Ethnic Community; Cultural Ethnography; Symbolic Meaning; Traditional Governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The naming of leaders in traditional governance systems constitutes one of the most culturally encoded practices in indigenous societies (Olaopa, 2023; Chotip, 2024; Robbins, 2011). Far from being arbitrary linguistic choices, leadership titles operate as dense symbolic constructs that condense complex social hierarchies, cosmological worldviews, and historical memories into compact linguistic forms (Ehineni, 2025; Udu, 2019; Edward, 2015). Across diverse cultural traditions from the chiefly titles of Polynesian societies to the honorific systems of Sub-Saharan African kingdoms scholars have consistently demonstrated that the act of naming a leader is simultaneously an act of legitimation, social differentiation, and cultural reproduction (Amstron, 2010; Wildavvsky et al, 2018). A title does not simply describe who a person is it prescribes what that person must be, delimits the authority they may exercise, and signals to the broader community the normative expectations attached to that position. In this sense, leadership titles function as what Geertz (1977) would term "thick" cultural symbols linguistic units whose meaning cannot be reduced to their surface denotation but must be read against the full texture of the social and cosmological order in which they operate.

Despite substantial scholarly interest in onomastics and anthroponymy globally, the naming systems of indigenous governance in Eastern Indonesia particularly among Austronesian societies such as the Muna of Southeast Sulawesi remain significantly underexplored in international academic literature (Fox, 2015). The bulk of anthroponymic research has concentrated on personal naming practices in Western and East Asian contexts, with comparative work on indigenous governance title systems in the Indo-Pacific region receiving only peripheral attention (Wu, 2023; Ochi, 2009; Waldispuhl, 2024; Volkel, 2023). This gap is not merely an academic inconvenience it carries practical consequences for communities whose governance vocabularies are transmitted orally and are therefore vulnerable to irreversible erosion as modernization and administrative standardization progressively displace traditional institutions. The Muna case is exemplary of this vulnerability a governance title system of considerable internal complexity and semantic richness exists largely undocumented in the scholarly record, occupying an absence that this study is designed to address (Cumming & Barnes, 2007; Valkonen, 2021; Tuaya, 2024).

The Muna ethnic community, with a population estimated at over 300,000 people, maintains a sophisticated traditional governance system

historically organized around a kingdom structure (Couvreur, 2001; Yanti, 2023; Hasria, 2023). Within this structure, a set of specialized titles including *Sugi*, *Sangia*, *Omputo*, *Bhonto Balano*, *Ghoerano*, *Bobato*, *Kino*, *Mieno*, *Modino*, *Mintarano Bhitara*, *Kapita*, *Kapitalao*, *Opasi*, *Tunani*, and *Firisi* have encoded the community's political organization, social stratification, and moral order for centuries. These titles are not interchangeable each carries distinct semantic content that maps onto specific roles, genealogical affiliations, and normative expectations within the tripartite social stratification of *Kaomu* (nobility), *Walaka* (governing nobility), and *Sara* (common people). Existing anthroponymic research has predominantly focused on personal naming practices in Western or East Asian contexts (Alford, 1988; Sariah, 2011; Sobarna & Afsari, 2020), with comparative work on indigenous Austronesian governance titles remaining sparse. Studies of Muna culture have largely been conducted within the disciplines of history and cultural anthropology without systematic linguistic analysis of the title naming system as a coherent semantic and functional unit. No prior study has applied an integrated anthroponymic and ethnographic framework to the Muna governance title system specifically, nor has any research employed computational coding tools such as Atlas.ti to map the relational networks of meaning between these titles. This gap is critical without systematic documentation, the semantic content of these titles risks irreversible erosion as oral transmission weakens under modernization pressures.

This study addresses three interlocking objectives: (1) to identify and describe the structural organization of Muna leadership titles within the traditional governance hierarchy; (2) to analyze the semantic and symbolic functions of each title in relation to social stratification, authority, and cultural values; and (3) to construct an analytical model of Muna governance title naming as a multi-functional symbolic system. The novelty of this research is threefold. First, it is the first study to apply a systematic anthroponymic analysis to the complete set of Muna governance titles. Second, it integrates five theoretical frameworks Spradley's ethnography, Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalism, Geertz's symbolic anthropology, Frawley's theory of meaning, and Alford and Van Langendonck's anthroponymy into a unified analytical model. Third, it employs Atlas.ti for relational mapping of title semantics, establishing a replicable methodological template for similar studies of endangered governance vocabulary in indigenous Indonesian societies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Anthroponymy and the Social Function of Naming*

Onomastics is a specialized branch of linguistics concerned with the systematic study of proper names, encompassing their origins, evolution, linguistic structures, and socio-cultural functions across diverse languages and societies (Algeo, 2000; Volkel, 2023; Juncal, 2022). As an interdisciplinary field, onomastics intersects with historical linguistics, anthropology, geography, and sociology, thereby enabling scholars to investigate how naming conventions reflect broader cultural, religious, and ideological paradigms embedded within a given community (Kotilainen, 2011; Gordova, 2024). The scope of onomastic inquiry extends beyond mere cataloguing of names, as it seeks to unravel the complex mechanisms through which names acquire meaning, undergo transformation, and serve as markers of collective and individual identity across temporal and spatial dimensions (Butler, 2013; Nicolaisen, 1984).

Within the broader framework of onomastics, anthroponymy constitutes a distinct and particularly significant subfield dedicated to the scholarly examination of personal names including given names, surnames, nicknames, and patronymics as linguistic and sociocultural artifacts (Finch, 2008; Lawson, 2016; Watzlawik et al., 2012). Anthroponomics research investigates the etymological roots, morphological patterns, and pragmatic functions of personal names, elucidating how such designations operate as instruments of social differentiation, familial continuity, and cultural transmission (Monti, 2017; Hysenaj, 2024). Furthermore, anthroponymy provides critical insights into processes of cultural contact, migration, and identity negotiation, as personal naming practices frequently encode historical narratives of power, ethnicity, and belonging that are otherwise inaccessible through conventional historical documentation.

Anthroponymy the study of personal and collective names has established that naming is never a culturally neutral act (Algeo, 2000; Sabet, 2020; Illimbekkyzy, 2024; MacLochlainn, 2025). Alford (1988) argues that naming systems reflect and reinforce underlying social structures, operating as indices of kinship, status, and ideology. Van Langendonck (2007) extends this by demonstrating that proper names carry both referential and predicative functions they identify a referent while simultaneously attributing culturally salient

characteristics to that referent. In the context of governance titles, this dual function becomes particularly consequential, as titles simultaneously identify position holders and assert the normative qualities expected of them (Colebatch, 2014; Apreda, 2005; Learmonth, 2023). Scholarship on naming in indigenous Southeast Asian societies including Perdana et al.'s (2016) analysis of Simalungun Batak clan names and Mutunda's (2016) examination of Luvale personal naming consistently demonstrates that naming systems encode genealogical, cosmological, and political information in layered form. Alès (2013) further shows, in the Yanomami case, that indigenous naming resists external imposition even while adapting to contact pressures, underscoring the resilience and identity-anchoring function of traditional names.

2.2 *Structural Functional Analysis of Governance Systems*

Structural functional analysis, as systematically developed through the foundational theoretical contributions of Radcliffe-Brown (1952), constitutes one of the most enduringly influential analytical frameworks within the social sciences for examining how the constituent elements of a governance system are organized, interrelated, and collectively oriented toward the maintenance of social order and institutional stability. Rooted in the foundational premise that every social institution, practice, and symbolic form performs a specific and identifiable function within the broader social organism, structural functionalism approaches governance systems not as arbitrary configurations of power but as purposively structured arrangements in which each positional element including titles, roles, and hierarchical relationships contributes to the reproduction of social equilibrium, the resolution of collective coordination problems, and the legitimation of authority in ways that are recognizable and meaningful to the community governed by such arrangements (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Within this analytical framework, the internal architecture of a governance system is understood to reflect not merely the historical contingencies of its formation but the deep functional imperatives of social life itself, insofar as the persistence of any structural configuration across time is taken as *prima facie* evidence of its functional indispensability to the social whole (Amin, 2007; Kjaer, 2010). Applied to indigenous governance systems such as that of the Muna kingdom, structural functional analysis provides an analytically powerful point of entry for mapping the hierarchical organization of governance

titles, delineating the specific administrative, legislative, judicial, and military functions assigned to each titular position, and elucidating the systemic interdependencies through which the various components of the governance apparatus are integrated into a coherent and self-sustaining institutional order.

Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) structural-functional theory posits that each element of a social system including naming conventions serves a function in maintaining social integration and equilibrium. Within this framework, no cultural practice exists in isolation rather, every symbolic and linguistic form is understood as contributing to the reproduction of the social structure as a coherent, self-sustaining whole. Applied to the study of governance title systems, structural-functionalism directs analytical attention away from the surface meaning of individual titles and toward the systemic relationships between titles asking not merely what a given title means in isolation, but how its existence, its boundaries, and its interaction with adjacent titles serve to sustain the broader social architecture in which it is embedded (Araujo, 2025; Tierney, 2004). This theoretical orientation is particularly productive for the analysis of indigenous governance systems in which the differentiation of roles is not administratively imposed from without but organically generated from within the community's own normative order (Alcantara, 2014; Hornidge et al, 2015).

Applied to the Muna governance title system, Radcliffe-Brown's framework illuminates how the precise differentiation of titles across the tripartite stratification of *Kaomu*, *Walaka*, and *Sara* maintains and actively reproduces the Muna social order through the repeated enactment of linguistic practice. Each time a *Ghoerano* is addressed by his title in a deliberative assembly, or a *Kino* exercises territorial authority in his designated domain, the title functions not merely as a label but as a performative utterance that re-enacts and reinforces the social division of authority on which the entire governance structure rests. The title system, in this reading, does not passively reflect a pre-existing hierarchy it actively constitutes that hierarchy in every ceremonial, judicial, and administrative act of address. This constitutive dimension of naming aligns with what later scholars drawing speech act theory would describe as the illocutionary force of institutional language the capacity of certain utterances to bring about the social realities they appear merely to describe (Svetlova, 2016; Schauer, 2021).

While structural functionalism, as articulated through Radcliffe-Brown's theoretical framework, offers a compelling analytical lens for examining how naming systems contribute to the maintenance of social equilibrium and institutional stability, its explanatory capacity remains fundamentally constrained when confronted with the deeper symbolic and experiential dimensions that animate the Muna title system from within. The structural-functional approach excels in mapping the relational architecture of governance titles delineating how each title occupies a designated position within a hierarchical order and performs specific integrative functions that sustain the coherence of the broader social structure yet it remains analytically ill-equipped to account for the lived cultural experience through which community members interpret, internalize, and invest such titles with profound moral and cosmological significance. A title of the magnitude of *Sugi* or *Sangia* cannot be adequately theorized as a mere positional marker within a governance matrix; it simultaneously carries a dense constellation of spiritual, ethical, and cosmological associations that are irreducible to functional description alone, and whose meaning is actively constructed, contested, and reproduced through the interpretive practices of the community that recognizes its authority (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952).

It is precisely this analytical lacuna that necessitates the theoretical supplementation of structural-functional analysis with Geertz's (1977) interpretive approach to cultural symbols and Frawley's (1992) multi-dimensional theory of linguistic meaning, thereby producing an integrated analytical framework of considerably greater explanatory depth and hermeneutic sensitivity. Geertz's interpretive paradigm, which conceives of culture as an ensemble of publicly shared symbols through which human beings impose meaning upon their social experience, enables the present study to excavate the layers of moral philosophy, spiritual cosmology, and collective identity that are encoded within Muna governance titles and rendered accessible only through thick, context-sensitive interpretation. Frawley's complementary theoretical contribution further enriches this framework by demonstrating that culturally saturated linguistic forms such as the apex titles of the Muna system operate simultaneously across referential, normative, and conceptual dimensions, such that their full semantic content can only be apprehended through an analytical approach capable of holding structural function and symbolic meaning in productive, mutually illuminating tension.

2.3 Symbolic Meaning and Cultural Interpretation

Geertz's (1977) theoretical conceptualization of culture as an organized system of symbols through which human beings confer meaning upon social action provides the indispensable interpretive foundation upon which the analytical architecture of the present study is constructed. Central to Geertz's paradigm is the methodological imperative of "thick description" a mode of cultural analysis that attends not merely to the surface-level observable dimensions of symbolic forms, but to the dense, overlapping, and contextually embedded layers of meaning that such forms accumulate through their sustained deployment within specific social and historical contexts. Applied to the domain of leadership titles within the Muna governance system, this interpretive framework reveals that titles such as *Sugi* and *Sangia* function as paradigmatic instances of "thick" cultural symbols linguistic units of exceptional semantic density that simultaneously condense genealogical legitimacy, moral authority, administrative function, and spiritual cosmology into a single, socially recognized term. The capacity of such titles to bear this extraordinary weight of accumulated meaning is not incidental but constitutive: it is precisely the multi-layered symbolic richness of Muna governance titles that endows them with their distinctive cultural power and renders them irreducible to any single analytical register.

Complementing Geertz's interpretive paradigm, Frawley's (1992) comprehensive framework of linguistic meaning which systematically identifies five analytically distinct yet interrelated dimensions of meaning, namely the referential, logical, contextual, cultural, and conceptual furnishes the present study with a rigorous and methodologically precise instrument for decomposing the semantic layers of Muna governance titles in a systematic and theoretically accountable manner. The referential dimension accounts for the title's capacity to designate a specific position within the governance hierarchy; the logical dimension illuminates the inferential and propositional relationships that the title activates within discourse; the contextual dimension captures the pragmatic variations in meaning that emerge across different situational and interactional environments; the cultural dimension encodes the historically sedimented values, norms, and cosmological beliefs that the title carries as a marker of collective identity; and the conceptual dimension reveals the cognitive schemas and mental representations through which the title is processed, internalized, and reproduced by competent

community members. Together, these five dimensions constitute an analytical grid of considerable theoretical power, enabling the present study to map the full semantic profile of Muna governance titles with a degree of precision and comprehensiveness that no single-dimensional approach could achieve.

The theoretical integration of Geertz's interpretive symbolism and Frawley's multi-dimensional linguistics addresses a significant and consequential gap in the existing scholarly literature, wherein prior investigations have tended to examine either the social functions of naming practices or the symbolic dimensions of governance structures in relative isolation from one another, thereby producing analyses that are, by necessity, partial and incomplete. The Muna case compellingly demonstrates that such disciplinary compartmentalization is analytically untenable when confronted with a title system of the complexity and cultural depth under examination here the meaning of a Muna governance title cannot be adequately captured through structural-functional analysis alone, nor through purely symbolic or purely linguistic approaches considered independently. Rather, it is the productive intersection of structural function, symbolic content, contextual deployment, and cosmological reference that generates the full and irreducible semantic profile of a governance title a profile whose apprehension demands precisely the kind of theoretically integrated, methodologically pluralistic analytical framework that the present study seeks to develop and rigorously apply (Geertz, 1977; Frawley, 1992).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Spradley's ethnographic model, which proceeds through sequential stages of domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme discovery (Garrido, 2017; McCurdy et al, 2004). This model is particularly suited to the investigation of indigenous knowledge systems because it foregrounds the insider's conceptual categories (emic perspective) while allowing systematic comparative analysis. Fieldwork was conducted in Muna Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. Data were collected through three complementary methods. First, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 key informants selected through purposive sampling: traditional leaders, current and former holders of traditional titles, and senior community

members recognized as authoritative knowledge-holders on Muna custom governance. Interviews were conducted in the Muna language and Indonesian, recorded with informant consent, and transcribed verbatim. Second, participant observation was carried out across multiple traditional ceremonies, governance deliberations, and community meetings to observe the performative deployment of titles in situ. Third, archival and documentary research was conducted to cross-reference oral testimony with historical manuscripts, local government records, and prior ethnographic documentation of the Muna kingdom.

Data analysis proceeded through four interlinked stages following Spradley's ethnographic analysis model. Domain analysis identified the semantic boundaries of the title system what categories of people, roles, and social positions the Muna community recognizes as constituting their governance structure. Taxonomic analysis mapped the hierarchical organization of titles within those domains. Componential analysis identified the semantic features (contrast features) that differentiate titles from one another along dimensions including social stratum (*Kaomu*, *Walaka*, *Sara*), administrative function, judicial function, spiritual/moral function, and territorial scope. Cultural theme analysis synthesized the preceding findings into overarching patterns of meaning that characterize the Muna governance philosophy. To support systematic coding and relational mapping, all interview transcripts and field notes were entered into Atlas.ti (version 9). A network analysis was performed to visualize the conceptual relationships between title codes, identifying both the density of inter-title connections and the directional relationships of authority, coordination, and complementarity between positions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *The Structural Organization of Muna Leadership Titles*

The structural organization of Muna leadership titles constitutes a hierarchically stratified and functionally differentiated governance architecture in which each titular position occupies a precisely designated node within a coherent institutional hierarchy, with authority, administrative responsibility, and genealogical eligibility distributed across distinct strata in a manner that reflects the sophisticated political philosophy underpinning the kingdom's institutional design. At the apex of this hierarchical structure resides the sovereign title of *Sugi/Sangial/Omputo*, whose

occupant functions as the supreme symbolic and cosmological anchor of the entire governance system, concentrating within a single titular position the moral, spiritual, and political legitimacy upon which the coherence of the broader institutional order ultimately depends. Descending from this apex, the structural architecture ramifies into a series of functionally specialized titular positions encompassing chief ministerial, legislative, regional administrative, judicial-religious, and military-security domains each performing specific and identifiable governance functions that collectively sustain the operational integrity and normative coherence of the kingdom as a social and political totality. The distribution of titular eligibility across the *Kaomu*, *Walaka*, and *Sara* strata further reveals that the structural organization of Muna leadership titles is simultaneously a map of functional differentiation and a codification of social stratification, wherein the hierarchical arrangement of titles reproduces and legitimates the broader cosmological order through which the Muna community understands the proper constitution of authority, identity, and collective life (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Geertz, 1977).

Domain analysis reveals that the Muna governance title system organizes fifteen distinct titles into a hierarchically ordered, functionally differentiated governance architecture that reflects both the internal logic of Muna political thought and the practical demands of administering a complex kingdom. This architecture operates across five functional domains supreme executive authority, legislative-customary authority, territorial administrative authority, judicial-religious authority, and internal security-military authority. The distribution of titles across these domains is neither arbitrary nor interchangeable rather, their assignment is strictly regulated by the intersection of three determinative axes genealogical stratum, territorial responsibility, and functional specialization. This triaxial regulatory logic means that a title cannot be fully understood by reference to any single dimension alone knowing that a position belongs to the *Kaomu* stratum, for instance, specifies its genealogical eligibility but not its functional scope, while knowing its territorial jurisdiction specifies its administrative reach but not its normative content. It is only when all three axes are read in conjunction that the full semantic and sociological profile of a given title becomes legible. The analytical implication is significant the Muna title system encodes governance knowledge in a compressed, multidimensional form that demands interpretive frameworks capable of operating

simultaneously across structural, symbolic, and contextual registers.

At the apex of this governance architecture stands the triad of supreme authority titles *Sugi* (the paramount chief, denoting primacy of political power), *Sangia* (the sacred sovereign, foregrounding spiritual authority and cosmic legitimacy), and *Omputo* (the title most commonly deployed in formal ceremonial address for the reigning king). That three distinct titles co-occupy the apex of the hierarchy is itself analytically revealing: it suggests that supreme authority in Muna governance is not conceptualized as a singular, undifferentiated power but as a tripartite construct whose dimensions political, spiritual, and ceremonial are recognized as distinct and independently significant. Informant testimony,

most notably from LDIDR, reveals that accession to these positions requires the fulfillment of four conditions: *nokado* (bravery and moral integrity), *nopande* (wisdom and cognitive discernment), *nobarakathi* (spiritual blessing and divine favor), and *nolia* (the capacity to sustain social *harmony* and communal acceptance). These conditions are not merely customary formalities; they constitute a normative theory of legitimate leadership that the community articulates, maintains, and enforces through the naming practice itself. A candidate who fails to embody these qualities may be genealogically eligible for the title but cannot legitimately receive it a distinction that reveals the fundamentally conditional and performative character of Muna governance authority.

Table 1. Domain Relationship

No	Cultural Term (X)	Semantic Relation	General Category (Y)	Domain Meaning
1	Sugi, Sangia, Omputo	is a type of	Supreme Leadership Title in the Kingdom	King / Supreme ruler of the Muna Kingdom
2	Bhonto Balano	is a type of	Government Administration Title	Prime Minister
3	Ghoerano	is a type of	Government Administration Title	Regional leader (Governor)
4	Bobato	is a type of	Government Administration Title	Regional leader (Regent)
5	Kino	is a type of	Government Administration Title	Village head
6	Mino	is a type of	Government Administration Title	Village head
7	Lindono	is a type of	Customary Leadership Title	Senior village elder / traditional leader
8	Mintarano Bhitara	is a type of	Judicial Authority Title	Judicial officer (customary court authority)
9	Modi	is a type of	Religious Council Title	Religious leader
10	Kapita	is a type of	Security Title	Royal guard / protector of the king
11	Kapitalao	is a type of	Security Title	War commander / naval commander
12	Opasi	is a type of	Security Title	Royal guard / law enforcement officer
13	Siriganti	is a type of	Security Title	Keeper of the royal household / palace guard
14	Firisi & Tunani	is a type of	Security Title	Royal soldiers / palace guards

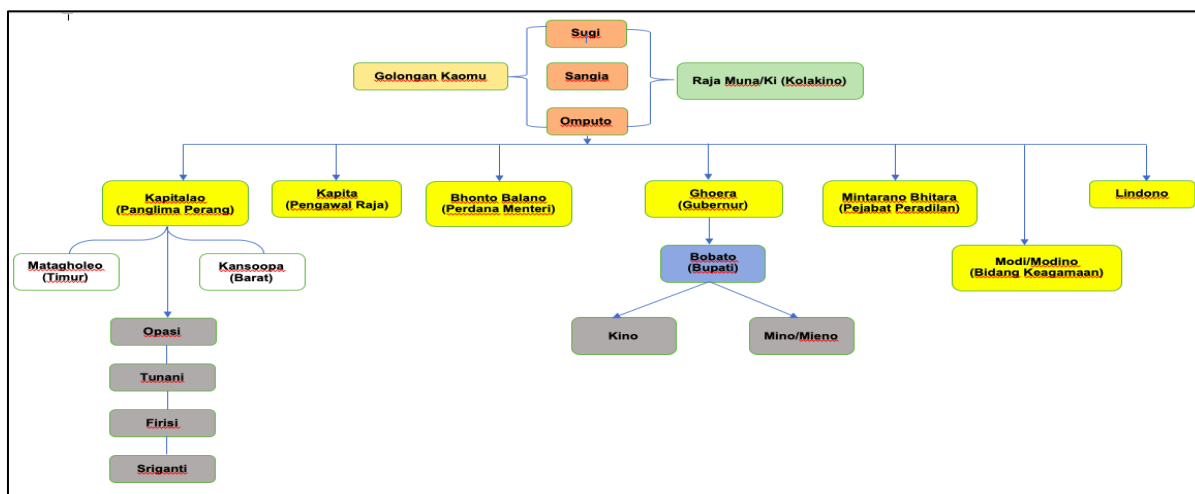
The four condition requirement governing the conferral of the title *Sugi/Sangia/Omputo* reveals a fundamental anthroponymic distinction that sets apex titles within the Muna hierarchical system apart from their subordinate counterparts. Drawing upon Van Langendonck's (2007) theoretical differentiation between the referential and predicative functions of proper names, it becomes evident that titles occupying the highest echelon of the Muna governance structure are overwhelmingly predicative in their orientation, functioning not merely as linguistic markers of pre-existing authority, but as formal predications of a comprehensive constellation of moral, intellectual, spiritual, and social attributes that a prospective title-holder must demonstrably embody prior to legitimate investiture. This predicative primacy fundamentally redefines the ontological status of the title itself: rather than serving as a passive designator attached to an already-constituted authority figure,

the title actively constitutes the very conditions of legitimate leadership, rendering the act of naming inseparable from the act of moral and social evaluation (Makgoba, 2023; Jordan, 2018).

This tripartite functionality whereby the title operates simultaneously as referent, criterion, and social contract positions the apex titles of the Muna system as exceptionally semantically dense units within the broader vocabulary of governance and political anthroponymy. As a referent, the title identifies a specific and irreplaceable position within the structured architecture of Muna political hierarchy; as a criterion, it specifies the qualitative standards that must be satisfied before legitimate occupancy of that position can be publicly recognized; and as a social contract, it constitutes a binding, community-ratified agreement that renders the title-holder perpetually accountable to the normative expectations encoded within the title itself. This multidimensional semantic architecture resonates profoundly with Frawley's (1992) theoretical

contention that culturally saturated linguistic forms operate concurrently across referential, normative, and conceptual dimensions, thereby affirming that the apex titles of the Muna governance system do not

merely reflect the moral philosophy of leadership they actively instantiate, reproduce, and enforce it through the very grammar of their social deployment.



Picture 1. Structure of Muna Ethnic Community.

4.2 Taxonomic Analysis A Stratified Hierarchy of Governance Titles

The taxonomic architecture of the Muna governance title system reveals a hierarchically stratified and functionally differentiated structure in which each titular position occupies a precisely designated node within a coherent organizational tree, with authority, responsibility, and genealogical eligibility distributed across distinct levels in a manner that reflects the sophisticated political philosophy underpinning the kingdom's institutional design. Immediately subordinate to the apex position of the king, the *Bhonto Balano* functions as the kingdom's chief ministerial officer a role that one informant aptly characterized as analogous to that of a prime minister bearing primary responsibility for the coordination and implementation of governance policy across the full territorial and administrative expanse of the kingdom. Crucially, eligibility for the *Bhonto Balano* position is exclusively restricted to members of the *Walaka* stratum, a genealogical prerequisite that is not merely procedural but profoundly ideological, encoding within the very structure of the title system a cosmological conviction that the highest executive functions of governance demand not only demonstrated administrative competence but also the specific moral and spiritual formation that membership in the *Walaka* stratum is culturally understood to confer. This stratum-based eligibility criterion thus operates simultaneously as a structural rule governing succession and as a symbolic statement regarding the nature and sources of

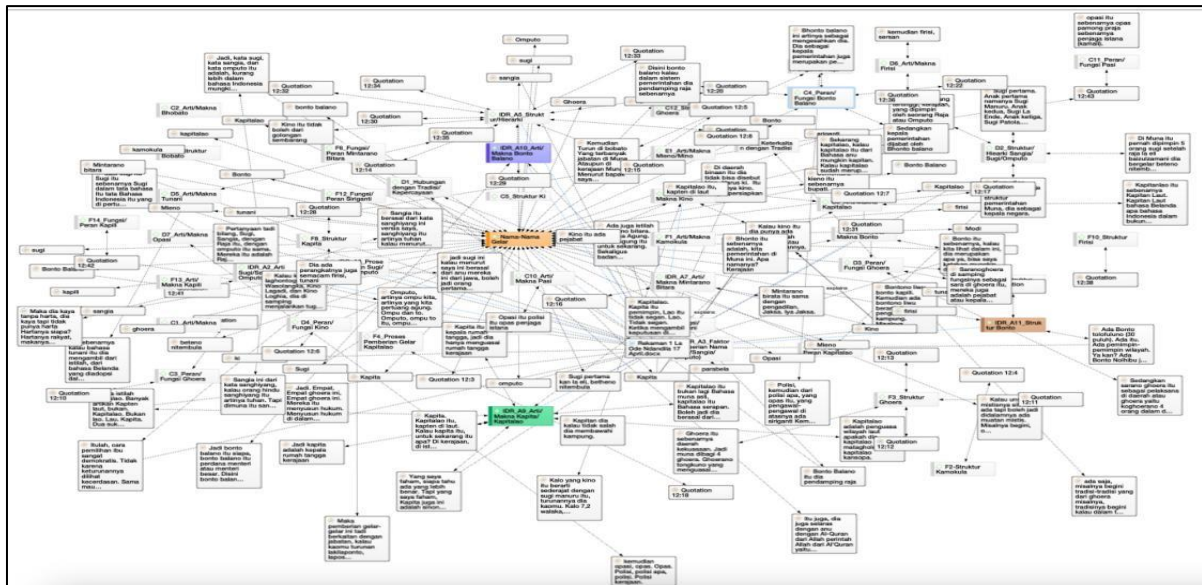
legitimate governance authority within the Muna political order.

At the legislative and customary law-making level of the hierarchy, the four *Ghoerano* positions constitute the kingdom's principal deliberative and juridical body, collectively responsible for the formulation, interpretation, and preservation of the customary legal norms that govern social life across the kingdom. As one informant stated with notable directness, "these four *Ghoera* compose the law" a characterization that underscores the extraordinary normative authority vested in this quadripartite body and its foundational role in sustaining the cultural and legal coherence of the Muna polity. Each of the four *Ghoerano* exercises jurisdictional oversight over a designated quadrant of the kingdom, and each is supported by subordinate *Bobato* who serve as village-level governance representatives, thereby ensuring that the legislative and customary authority of the *Ghoerano* is effectively mediated and implemented at the most proximate level of community life. Complementing this legislative architecture, the *Kino* drawn exclusively from the *Kaomu* nobility function as regional administrators within designated territorial units, while the *Mieno* represent the *Sara* (common people) stratum within the governance structure, performing a critical communicative and normative function that bridges the experiential world of the broader community with the formal institutional apparatus of the kingdom's cultural and political authority.

The judicial-religious and military-security domains of the Muna governance taxonomy further

illuminate the remarkable functional comprehensiveness and institutional sophistication of a title system designed to administer not only the political and legislative dimensions of kingdom life but also its spiritual, juridical, and defensive imperatives. Within the judicial-religious domain, the *Mintarano Bhitara* serves as the principal authority responsible for the enforcement of interior customary law, while the *Modino* occupies a theologically and institutionally significant position as the religious official charged with the critical integrative function of reconciling and aligning Islamic jurisprudence with the indigenous customary norms of Muna governance a role whose existence testifies to the historically syncretic character of the kingdom's normative order. The internal security and military domain, by contrast, is organized around the complementary authority of the *Kapita*, who bears

responsibility for palace security and internal administration, and the *Kapitalao*, who commands the kingdom's maritime defense apparatus, with operational implementation delegated to a chain of subordinate officers encompassing the *Opasi* (palace enforcement officers), the *Tunani* (coordination officers, a title whose etymological derivation from the Dutch *luitenant* constitutes compelling anthroponymic evidence of colonial-era contact and linguistic assimilation), and the *Firisi*, who serve as the personal guard and royal escort of the sovereign. Taken collectively, this multi-domain taxonomic structure positions the Muna title system as a governance vocabulary of exceptional functional range and semantic depth, whose full analytical significance can only be apprehended through the kind of integrated anthroponymic and interpretive framework that the present study seeks to provide.



Picture 2. Visualisation from Atlas.ti

4.3 Componential Analysis Semantic Features Differentiating Titles

Componential analysis of the fifteen titles across eight semantic dimensions social stratum eligibility, functional domain, administrative scope, judicial authority, military role, spiritual function, genealogical requirement, and territorial responsibility reveals a highly structured matrix of semantic contrasts. No two titles share an identical feature profile, confirming that each title occupies a unique semantic niche within the system. Three contrasting pairs are analytically instructive. First, *Kapita* and *Kapitalao* share the same stratum requirement (*Kaomu*) and security function, but differ critically in domain: *Kapita* is oriented toward

internal palace security and administrative coordination, while *Kapitalao* exercises external maritime defense across eastern and western naval zones. This contrast demonstrates that the Muna governance system made sophisticated distinctions between internal and external security that are encoded in title semantics. Second, the *Kino-Mieno* contrast reveals a stratification logic in which equivalent administrative functions at the regional level are executed by representatives of different social strata (*Kaomu* and *Sara* respectively), ensuring that all strata have a formal governance role while preserving genealogical hierarchy. Third, the *Mintarano Bhitara-Modino* contrast encodes the complementarity between customary law and Islamic religious authority a historically significant

accommodation that the Muna governance system negotiated as Islam became the dominant religion of the kingdom.

Network visualization analysis conducted through Atlas.ti yields a finding of considerable analytical significance: the highest density of conceptual connections within the Muna governance title system clusters not around the apex position of *Sugi/Sangia/Omputo*, but rather around the *Ghoerano* and *Bhonto Balano* codes, a pattern that reflects the central and operationally indispensable coordinating roles that these two titular positions perform within the day-to-day functional architecture of the kingdom's governance apparatus. The concentration of conceptual linkages around the *Bhonto Balano* is consistent with its established function as the kingdom's chief executive coordinator, responsible for translating the sovereign will into implementable governance policy across the kingdom's administrative subdivisions; while the equally dense network of connections surrounding the *Ghoerano* affirms their collective status as the kingdom's primary legislative and customary law-making body, whose deliberative authority permeates virtually every domain of normative social life within the Muna polity. This empirically derived network topology thus provides robust quantitative corroboration for the qualitative taxonomic analysis presented earlier, confirming that operational governance authority within the Muna system is most intensively concentrated at the chief ministerial and legislative levels of the hierarchy rather than at its ceremonial and symbolic apex.

The comparatively lower conceptual connectivity registered by the *Sugi/Sangia/Omputo* code in the Atlas.ti visualization does not, however, indicate a diminution of the apex title's significance within the broader governance system; rather, it reflects a fundamentally different modality of authority one that is symbolic, cosmological, and sacral rather than operational and administrative in its essential character. This pattern resonates with profound theoretical force with Geertz's (1977) observation that sacred power in many Southeast Asian kingdoms operates through concentration rather than dispersal gathering into a single, luminous symbolic center the moral, spiritual, and cosmological authority upon which the entire edifice of legitimate governance ultimately rests, without necessarily translating that concentrated power into the dense network of operational transactions and administrative relationships that characterize the more functionally active positions subordinate to it. The *Sugi/Sangia/Omputo* thus functions less as an operational manager directing the granular mechanics of governance and more as a symbolic anchor whose very presence at the apex of the hierarchy confers legitimacy, coherence, and cosmological grounding upon the entire title system a finding that compellingly illustrates the analytical indispensability of integrating Geertz's interpretive framework with structural-functional analysis in order to fully apprehend the multidimensional nature of authority as it is constituted, distributed, and experienced within the Muna governance tradition.

Table 2. Componential Analysis

No.	Title	Social Status	Social Function	Symbolic Value	Cultural Role	Leadership Traits
1	Sugi, Sangia, Omputo	Supreme king / nobility	Highest leader of the kingdom	Power, sovereignty, sacredness	Protector of the people, enforcer of customs	Charismatic, wise, and authoritative
2	Bhonto Balano	High royal official / Prime Minister	Policy maker and government executor	Wisdom and justice	Advisor to the king	Wise and authoritative
3	Ghoerano	Regional leader / Governor	Supervises regions and enforces law	Balance and order	Regional leader and law guardian	Firm, fair, and responsible
4	Bobato	Middle nobility / Executive official (Regent)	Policy implementer and liaison with the people	Loyalty and service	Administrative and social executor	Disciplined and communicative
5	Kino	Village head	Leader of local community	Responsibility and local wisdom	Regulates village life	Close to the people and deliberative
6	Mino	Village head assistant	Executor of social and customary duties	Mutual cooperation and devotion	Supports social and customary activities	Cooperative and service-oriented
7	Lindono	Customary elder / senior traditional leader	Advisory council and guardian of customs	Wisdom and cultural nobility	Advisor to the king and guardian of tradition	Wise, prudent, and religious
8	Mintarano Bhitara	Judicial officer	Judge and law enforcer	Truth and justice	Executor of customary law	Firm and objective

9	Modi	Religious leader / Clergy	Spiritual guide and ritual leader	Sacredness and morality	Maintains spiritual balance of the kingdom	Religious and exemplary
10	Kapita	Palace security chief	Royal guard and security coordinator	Courage and loyalty	Maintains palace security and order	Alert, loyal, and disciplined
11	Kapitalao	Naval commander / Maritime military leader	Protector of coastal and maritime territories	Strength and vigilance	Defender of maritime sovereignty	Strategic, brave, and resilient
12	Opasi	Palace security personnel	Rule enforcer and order keeper	Order and responsibility	Internal security executor of the kingdom	Obedient and professional
13	Siriganti	Palace servant / Royal regalia keeper	Guardian of royal symbols and household	Loyalty and honor	Maintains ceremonial completeness	Orderly, loyal, and meticulous
14	Firisi and Tunani	Royal soldiers	Security forces and royal protectors	Courage and dedication	Protects the king and palace	Tough and disciplined

The componential analysis table 2 demonstrates that the system of titles in Muna society is hierarchically structured and functionally integrated, where each position reflects a close interrelation between social status, functional role, symbolic value, and cultural responsibility. At the highest level, titles such as *Sugi*, *Sangia*, and *Omputo* represent the highest of authority that is not merely political but also sacred, indicating that leadership is conceptualized as a synthesis of power, customary legitimacy, and moral obligation toward society. At the intermediate level, *Bhonto Balano* and *Ghoerano* illustrate a structured distribution of authority, where executive and normative functions operate in tandem to maintain governance stability and uphold customary law. Meanwhile, titles such as *Bobato*, *Kino*, and *Mino* reflect the localization of leadership, emphasizing service, social proximity, and communal responsibility as essential dimensions of governance at the grassroots level. Furthermore, the table reveals that the Muna leadership system extends beyond administrative functions by incorporating judicial, religious, military, and symbolic dimensions into a cohesive framework. The role of *Mintarano Bhitara* as a judicial authority, *Modi* as a spiritual leader, and *Kapita* and *Kapitalao* as guardians of territorial security highlights a complex yet complementary division of power. Supporting roles such as *Opasi*, *Siriganti*, and *Firisi* and *Tunani* reinforce the internal stability of the kingdom through security enforcement, ceremonial maintenance, and institutional support. This integrated structure reflects a model of collective leadership in which authority is distributed across interconnected roles, ensuring a balance between political power, customary values, and the broader social order within Muna society (Almarsaban, 2023).

4.4 Cultural Themes

4.4.1 The Symbolic Logic of Muna Leadership Naming

The symbolic logic underlying the naming of leadership titles within the Muna governance system operates according to a culturally distinctive semiotic economy in which names are not arbitrary linguistic signs arbitrarily attached to pre-existing positions of authority, but rather semantically loaded symbolic constructs whose phonological form, etymological genealogy, and cosmological associations collectively encode the moral philosophy, spiritual cosmology, and social epistemology through which the Muna community conceptualizes the nature and sources of legitimate governance (Geertz, 1977). Each leadership title within the Muna system functions as what Geertz (1977) would recognize as a "model of" and "model for" social reality simultaneously reflecting the existing hierarchical order of the kingdom while actively prescribing the qualities, obligations, and relational dispositions that legitimate occupancy of any given position demands thereby investing the act of naming itself with a performative and constitutive force that extends well beyond the merely referential function that conventional linguistic analysis might ascribe to proper names (Van Langendonck, 2007). The symbolic logic of Muna leadership naming is further distinguished by its capacity to operate across multiple semantic registers concurrently: a single title may simultaneously invoke genealogical lineage, assert territorial jurisdiction, encode cosmological hierarchy, and stipulate moral criteria for legitimate authority, such that the full meaning of any given title is accessible only to those who possess the culturally competent interpretive framework necessary to navigate its layered symbolic architecture (Frawley, 1992). This multi-register symbolic density renders Muna leadership titles

among the most semantically complex units in the kingdom's governance vocabulary, and it establishes the symbolic logic of their naming as a domain of inquiry that demands precisely the kind of theoretically integrated, interpretively sensitive, and anthroponymically rigorous analytical approach that the present study is designed to provide.

The overarching cultural theme is the hierarchical structure of leadership as a representation of the equilibrium between political power, customary authority, and spiritual legitimacy. This theme captures the most fundamental insight of the analysis in Muna governance, no single source of authority political, genealogical, or spiritual is sufficient to legitimate leadership on its own. Rather, governance authority emerges from the structured interaction of all three legitimating principles. Each title, and the naming system as a whole, is a symbolic articulation of this equilibrium. Division of power across three social strata (*Kaomu, Walaka, Sara*). The exclusive assignment of titles to specific strata is not merely a social convention; it is a mechanism of institutionalized power-sharing that ensures each major social group has recognized governance roles while preventing any single group from monopolizing authority. This arrangement constitutes what can be described as a proto-constitutionalist governance logic embedded in naming practice. Integration of administrative and

customary authority. The structural pairing of administrative roles (*Bhonto Balano* as executive, *Ghoerano* as legislative) with *adat* legitimacy (*Ghoerano* as law-composers, *Mintarano Bhitara* as customary enforcement) demonstrates that Muna governance was not a purely secular administrative system but a political system in which customary law was constitutive of, rather than supplementary to, governance authority. Symbolism of leadership encoded in titles and positions. Beyond their functional denotation, titles carry substantive moral content. The requirement that a king fulfill *nokado, nopande, nobarakathi, and nolia* before receiving the title *Sugi/Omputo* means that the title itself functions as a moral norm a standard of leadership virtue that the community articulates, maintains, and enforces through the naming practice. This is consistent with Van Langendonck's (2007) predicative function of proper names. Collective and stratified leadership as a governance philosophy. The Muna title system embodies a governance philosophy in which leadership is understood as inherently collective, distributed, and bounded by complementary roles rather than concentrated in a single authority. The horizontal coordination among *Ghoerano*, the vertical delegation from *Bhonto Balano* to *Bobato*, and the functional differentiation between *Kapita* and *Kapitalao* all enact this philosophy in structural form.

Table 3. The Symbolic Logic of Muna Leadership Naming

No	Title	Main Cultural Influence	Symbolic Form	Philosophical Meaning
1	Sugi / Omputo	Customary, spiritual, moral	Sacred leadership	Ideal leader: courageous, intelligent, blessed, and pious
2	Ghoerano	Customary law & tradition	Guardian of customary law	Balance between norms and authority
3	Bobato	Social & community	Public servant	Social closeness and devotion to the community
4	Kino	Genealogical (Kaomu)	Lineage legitimacy	Continuity of power and local responsibility
5	Mieno	Religious & moral (Sara)	Spiritual authority	Guardian of moral and customary values

4.4.2 Theoretical Interpretation Frawley's Five Dimensions of Meaning

Applying Frawley's (1992) five dimensional framework of linguistic meaning to the Muna title system yields a comprehensive and theoretically precise account of how these titles function as multilayered meaning producing units that simultaneously operate across semantic, structural, pragmatic, and ideological registers. At the level of referential meaning, each title identifies a specific governance role and its legitimate occupant, functioning as a proper name in the technical anthroponymic sense a linguistic form anchored to a particular position within a recognized social institution. Yet this referential function, while

analytically foundational, is the least distinctive of the five dimensions; what renders Muna governance titles theoretically significant is the density of meaning that accumulates above and beyond mere reference. At the level of logical-structural meaning, titles define the internal relational logic of the governance hierarchy with considerable precision specifying who reports to whom, who coordinates with whom, who may override whose decisions, and where the jurisdictional boundaries of each role begin and end. The structural meaning of *Bhonto Balano*, for instance, is not exhausted by knowing that its holder is a senior official it encompasses the entire network of downward delegation to *Ghoerano*, upward accountability to the king, and lateral coordination with *Mintarano Bhitara* and *Modino* that

constitutes the operational logic of the Muna executive apparatus. At the level of contextual meaning, titles activate highly specific behavioral scripts in ceremonial, administrative, and judicial settings the act of addressing a *Ghoerano* by his title rather than his personal name in a deliberative assembly does not merely signal status recognition but performatively enacts the relational structure of the governance system, re-instantiating the hierarchy.

The final two dimensions of Frawley's framework cultural meaning and conceptual meaning are where the deepest analytical insights into the Muna title system emerge, and where its significance for the broader field of anthroponymy becomes most apparent. At the level of cultural meaning, titles encode the Muna community's historically sedimented values regarding the proper qualities of leaders, the sacred character of authority, and the negotiated integration of pre-Islamic adat norms with Islamic jurisprudence that has characterized Muna governance since the kingdom's conversion to Islam. A title such as *Modino*, for example, does not merely denote a religious official; it encodes the Muna community's resolution of the potential tension between customary and religious law by institutionalizing a position whose very existence signals that both normative systems are recognized as legitimate and mutually necessary sources of governance authority.

This cultural encoding function is consistent with Geertz's (1977) argument that symbols including linguistic ones do not merely reflect culture but actively constitute the frameworks of meaning through which social actors interpret their world and orient their conduct. At the deepest level, as conceptual meaning, the title system as a whole constitutes a cognitive model of ideal governance a culturally specific but internally coherent map of what legitimate, ordered, and morally grounded leadership looks like from within the Muna worldview. This conceptual model is not merely descriptive of existing arrangements it is normative and aspirational, specifying not only how governance is currently organized but how it ought to be organized if it is to command the community's recognition as genuinely authoritative (Rosenau, 2007; Assche, 2014). Taken together, these five

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dimensions demonstrate that the Muna governance title system is not simply a nomenclatural convention but a sophisticated linguistic instrument through which an entire political philosophy is articulated, transmitted, and reproduced across generations a finding that substantively advances the theoretical scope of anthroponymy beyond its traditional focus on personal names and into the analytically rich territory of indigenous governance epistemology.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the leadership title naming system of the Muna ethnic community constitutes a sophisticated, multilayered symbolic system that simultaneously encodes social structure, governance philosophy, moral norms, and cultural identity. Through the integration of Spradley's ethnographic model, Radcliffe-Brown's structural functionalism, Geertz's symbolic anthropology, Frawley's theory of meaning, and Alford and Van Langendonck's anthroponymic theory, the analysis reveals that Muna governance titles function not merely as administrative labels but as culturally dense symbols that constitute, regulate, and transmit the community's governance order. The overarching cultural theme the hierarchical structure of leadership as a representation of equilibrium between political power, customary authority, and spiritual legitimacy challenges reductive interpretations of indigenous governance as simply traditional or pre-modern. Rather, the Muna governance title system articulates a sophisticated and internally coherent governance philosophy that distributes authority across genealogical strata, functional domains, and legitimating principles in ways that warrant serious comparative attention in the study of pre-colonial political systems in island Southeast Asia.

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