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license**SYMBOL, SACRALITY, AND SOCIALITY: THE SOCIAL  
CONSTRUCTION OF THE MEANING OF WEDDING  
RINGS IN CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM CUSTOMARY  
COMMUNITIES IN MALUKU****Lusanra Jacqueline Tutkey<sup>1\*</sup>, Paulus Koritelu<sup>1</sup>, Fransina  
Matakena<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Universitas Pattimura, Jalan Ir. M. Putuhena, Ambon 97233,  
Indonesia\*Correspondence E-Mail: [lusandratutkey@gmail.com](mailto:lusandratutkey@gmail.com)DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol2iss3pp449-464>**ABSTRACT**

*This article examines the social construction of the meaning of wedding rings within two culturally and religiously distinct customary communities in Maluku: Negeri Amahusu (predominantly Christian) and Negeri Batu Merah (predominantly Muslim). The primary aim is to explore how wedding rings—as marital symbols—are interpreted differently within each community's social, religious, and cultural context. Employing a qualitative approach and grounded in the social construction theory of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, this study draws on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis conducted in both communities. The findings reveal that the wedding ring is not merely a romantic or legal symbol but is regarded as a sacred object embodying religious values, communal morals, and social identity—shaped and transmitted through family practices, religious narratives, and intercultural interactions. The novelty of this study lies in its cross-community reading of a shared symbol, highlighting how marriage symbols serve as intersubjective mediums for transmitting collective values. The study concludes that cultural symbols like wedding rings play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and promoting interfaith understanding in multicultural societies. It recommends strengthening intercultural studies in the social sciences and humanities to deepen insights into symbolic dynamics within pluralistic communities.*

**Keywords:** Customary Community, Religious Symbolism, Social Construction, Social Identity, Wedding Ring

**INTRODUCTION**

In every human community, symbols serve as bridges between the visible world and hidden meanings. One of the most enduring symbols within the institution of marriage is the wedding ring (Meler & Marnin-Distelfeld, 2024; Park, 2021). In many places, this ring is not merely a circular object worn on a finger; it is a marker of bonds, promises, and even social status. However, this symbol is not universally interpreted. In the pluralistic context of Maluku, the meaning of the wedding ring intertwines with the heritage of custom, religion, and broader social relationships (Iye, 2022). This study arises from observations of the diversity of such interpretations, particularly within two customary communities in the city of Ambon: Negeri Amahusu, which is predominantly Christian, and Negeri Batu Merah, which is predominantly Muslim. Although marriages in these two communities are conducted within the frameworks of

their respective customs and religions, the wedding ring remains a nearly inseparable element of the marriage rite. This raises the question: how is the symbolic meaning of the wedding ring formed, interpreted, and passed down in two communities with differing cultural and religious backgrounds? This question is important not only for understanding the symbolic aspects of marriage but also for capturing the broader social and cultural dynamics within a multicultural society.

Previous studies have highlighted the meaning of symbols within the institution of marriage. Anthropologists such as Huda & Muhsin (2022) and Lipska & Zagórska (2021) emphasize the importance of rites of passage, where objects like wedding rings become part of the symbols marking the transition of social status. In more contemporary studies, symbols in marriage are interpreted as representations of the social construction of love, commitment, and legitimacy (Balani, 2023; Friedland et al., 2025; Jung, 2024). The wedding ring, in particular, is seen as a form of the “commodification of love” in modern society (Mäder, 2023; Parkins & Findlay, 2021), as well as a form of symbolic capital that reinforces an individual’s social identity (Carter, 2022; Nur Fadilla et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian context, several studies have examined the symbolism of marriage in customary and religious communities. For instance, studies by Muchimah et al. (2024) and Said et al. (2024) on Muslim marriage practices in Indonesia emphasize the importance of religious values in marriage rites, while Idrus et al. (2023) and Yusuf (2024) explore Bugis-Makassar customary practices that combine local and Islamic values within the marriage structure. Similarly, research by Jingyi & Jiangli (2024) and Lakawa (2024) shows how Christian marriages in Indonesia construct faith narratives through symbols passed down across generations. However, these studies tend to examine marriage through a single dimension—be it custom, religion, or economy—without delving deeper into how the meaning of a single symbol like the wedding ring is socially constructed within communities that coexist in diversity.

More specific studies, such as those by Alfons & Titaley (2024) and Latupono et al. (2023) on marriage customs in Maluku, and Gaspersz & Souisa (2023) and Kalay (2024) on the cultural syncretism between Christianity and Islam in Ambon, provide an important foundation for understanding the local context. However, their focus is more on the overall ritual practices rather than on individual symbols within marriage. Meanwhile, symbolic studies in interfaith and customary communities, such as those by Tan et al. (2024), Thaib et al. (2021), and Zuhri et al. (2021) on Chinese-Muslim communities, show that social symbols can have dynamic meanings in multicultural contexts. Nevertheless, there has been little explicit discussion of the wedding ring as a meeting point between religious expression, customary values, and social interaction in local Indonesian communities.

Therefore, the understanding of marriage symbols still leaves relatively unexplored territory: how a seemingly universal symbol like the wedding ring can undergo differentiated meanings depending on its social and cultural context. In a society with a long history of coexistence and interreligious tensions such as Maluku, the interpretation of this symbol

becomes a mirror of deeper social dynamics. This is where this research positions itself—not merely to reread the symbol, but to capture how the symbol operates socially as a medium of sacrality, as well as a construction of identity that is continually negotiated.

By delving into the meaning of the wedding ring in two customary communities with differing religious backgrounds but a historically shared coexistence, this research offers a new reading of the marriage symbol not merely as an object or sign, but as a complex social practice. Here, the wedding ring is not just a cultural artifact but a node in a network of meanings involving theological values, collective memory, and cross-boundary social interactions. This is what makes the symbol not only alive but also flexible and reflective of changing times and values.

The aim of this research is to examine how the symbolic meaning of the wedding ring is socially constructed in two customary communities with different religious and cultural backgrounds in Maluku and to understand how this symbol plays a role in shaping social cohesion, identity, and the transmission of values in a multicultural society. Through this understanding, the social sciences and humanities are expected to broaden their insights into the symbolic dynamics of life in complex and ever-changing societies.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach using a multisite case study method. The choice of this approach is based on the main objective of the study, namely to explore and understand the symbolic meaning of the wedding ring within the framework of social construction embedded in the everyday lives of the communities. Qualitative research is chosen because it allows the researcher to capture the complexity of experiences, beliefs, and values inherent in cultural practices, while also enabling the interpretation of meanings that cannot be reduced to numbers or statistical generalizations (Lim, 2024; Natow, 2020). In this context, the meaning of the wedding ring is not merely measurable data but a social phenomenon that must be read through narratives, practices, and symbolism that are qualitative and contextual in nature.

The research locations were purposively selected, namely Negeri Amahusu and Negeri Batu Merah, two customary communities that are geographically located within the same area of Ambon city, Maluku, but have very different religious and social characteristics. Amahusu is a Protestant Christian community strong in church traditions and the Latupati custom, while Batu Merah is a Muslim community known for its strong Islamic identity and social relations based on extended families (soa) (Afdhal, 2024; Manuputty et al., 2024). The selection of these two communities not only represents religious plurality in Maluku but also enables the study to examine how a shared symbol—the wedding ring—can be interpreted differently depending on its cultural and religious context. Additionally, the historical relationship between these two communities, which have experienced conflict and reconciliation following past social unrest, provides an important backdrop for interpreting the symbol as a form of social dialogue.

Informants in this study were selected purposively and through snowball sampling, considering their direct involvement in marriage practices and the symbolic interpretation of the wedding ring. A total of 18 informants were interviewed in-depth, consisting of nine people from Negeri Amahusu and nine from Negeri Batu Merah. They included married couples from the older generation (over 50 years), the middle generation (30–50 years), and the younger generation (20–30 years); customary leaders; religious leaders (pastors and imams); and community figures considered to have authority in understanding cultural changes in marriage. The selection across generations and social positions aimed to capture the dynamics of changing meanings of the wedding ring over time, as well as interpretive differences between generations and between authoritative figures and lay community members (Lambert & Lambert, 2021; Naeem et al., 2024).

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were used to explore subjective experiences, views, and narratives about the wedding ring within their marriage practices and social lives. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach to remain flexible in following the informants' conversational directions while staying aligned with the research focus. Participant observation was conducted by attending customary events, weddings, and relevant social interactions in both communities. This technique was important to understand how the wedding ring symbol appears performatively in social events, not only in discourse but also in action. Documentation was conducted by collecting wedding photos, customary documents, church or mosque records, and social media materials related to the use and representation of the wedding ring. These three techniques complemented and enriched the data collected, as recommended by Edwards & Holland (2020) in data source triangulation.

Triangulation in this study was carried out by combining data from various sources and collection techniques. First, source triangulation involved comparing information from informants with different backgrounds (age, gender, social status, and customary or religious positions). Second, method triangulation was conducted by examining the consistency between the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Third, time triangulation was performed by repeating interviews at different times to check for consistency in perspectives. Data validity was also strengthened through member checking, that is, by reconfirming with informants the researcher's interpretation of their narratives. These techniques were implemented to maintain data integrity and ensure that the findings truly reflect the social reality as understood by the cultural actors themselves (Natow, 2020).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Construction of Knowledge about Wedding Rings**

The meaning of wedding rings in customary societies in Maluku, particularly in Negeri Amahusu and Negeri Batu Merah, is not something that arises naturally or universally. It is

formed, inherited, and processed within a complex social context through interactions between individuals and institutions. Within the framework of social construction theory as proposed by Berger & Luckmann (1966), social knowledge — such as the meaning attached to wedding rings — is built through three main processes: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. In this context, the wedding ring is part of the stock of knowledge introduced early on by the family, legitimized by religious and customary institutions, and ultimately personally accepted by the individual as something meaningful and valuable.

In Negeri Amahusu, where the majority of residents are Protestant Christians, knowledge about wedding rings is primarily passed down through family practices. From an early age, children see their parents wearing wedding rings, hear stories about how the ring serves as a symbol of marital vows, and witness the wedding blessing ceremonies in the church. In an interview, one informant, N.L., mentioned that since childhood she was always told that the ring is not just a symbol of love but also proof of a promise to God that must not be broken. The ring is understood as a bond that transcends human relationships and carries theological significance as a symbol of fidelity that can only be broken by death. These experiences, although simple, become the initial space for the internalization of a strong symbolic meaning attached to the ring.

Meanwhile, in Negeri Batu Merah, where the majority are Muslims, the meaning of the wedding ring is also shaped within the community's internal pathways, but through different mechanisms. Knowledge about the ring is not entirely built through formal religious institutions, as in Islam there is no theological obligation to wear rings in marriage. However, local tradition plays an important role. Through the *soa* structure (clan groups) and family councils, the narrative of the ring as a symbol of seriousness and honor in marriage is passed down orally. One informant, R.M., explained that although his father did not wear a ring for religious reasons, his mother still wore hers as a reminder of their shared commitment. The ring is understood as a kind of moral shield, protecting the wearer from temptation or interference from outsiders.

In both communities, these internal processes interact with external factors that have become increasingly influential with the rise of media, urbanization, and education. Representations of wedding rings in soap operas, advertisements, and social media, for instance, reinforce the image of the ring as a universal symbol of modern love. Glamorous celebrity weddings, featuring diamond ring exchanges, have become a new symbolic reference for the younger generation. However, as observed in the field, the community does not simply accept this meaning wholesale. They reinterpret it in accordance with their religious and local cultural values.

In Amahusu, for example, women in church fellowship groups mention that although they see many references to wedding rings on television, they still teach their children that the true meaning comes from the Bible and the vows made before God. Conversely, in Batu Merah, young men active in mosque youth organizations said they were initially confused between the religious prohibition against men wearing gold and the cultural depiction of ring exchanges in soap operas. However, through religious study groups and family discussions, they ultimately found a

compromise: wearing rings made of silver or other materials is still permissible as long as it does not violate Islamic law.

Direct observations during wedding events in both communities reinforce the understanding that wedding rings hold significant symbolic positions in social practice. In Amahusu, during wedding blessing ceremonies at the Protestant Church of Maluku, the exchange of rings is carried out solemnly before the congregation. The pastor states that the ring is “a sign of love that circles endlessly, like God’s eternal love.” The congregation welcomes the moment with respectful silence, some even shedding tears. This is not merely a ritual but a collective experience that strengthens the symbolic meaning of the ring as a spiritual bond.

In Batu Merah, although rings are not officially exchanged during the Islamic marriage contract (*akad nikah*), observations at the reception show that rings are still given within the family setting. In one wedding, the groom received a silver ring engraved with Arabic calligraphy. He wore it not because of religious demands, but as a form of respect toward customary values and as a moral message to others that he was now a married man. The presence of the ring becomes an important form of non-verbal communication within the community.

This meaning deepens further when linked to the concept of embodied meaning developed by Turner (2023), which posits that cultural objects like rings become extensions of one’s social body. When a ring is worn, it is not only physically present but also carries symbolic meaning that is socially recognized. It becomes a “mark on the body” that speaks in the language of values, norms, and beliefs. On a person’s hand, the ring signals that they have committed, have promised, and have become part of a larger social structure.

The construction of knowledge about wedding rings in these two customary communities cannot be separated from the social, religious, and cultural frameworks in which it exists. The ring is not merely an accessory but a living symbolic artifact whose meaning is continually negotiated and passed down over time. This process shows that even in small, familiar symbols like rings, there is a powerful force in shaping identity, social relations, and collective understanding in a multicultural society like Maluku.

### **Sacred Markers: The Meaning of Rings for Married Couples**

The meaning of wedding rings for married couples in the customary communities of Negeri Amahusu and Batu Merah shows how the same symbol can be understood differently, depending on the underlying religious and cultural frameworks. In Amahusu, where most residents are Protestant Christians, the wedding ring is seen as a representation of a sacred vow before God. Its circular, unbroken shape is understood as a metaphor for the eternal nature of the marital relationship — a bond that should not be broken by anything except death. In an interview, a female informant, M.S., mentioned that the ring on her hand is “a daily reminder that she has sworn not only to her husband but to God.” Such narratives do not stand alone but are part of a collective understanding reinforced through church teachings and family fellowship practices, where couples are often asked to share testimonies about their married life as a form

of mutual learning.

In contrast, for Muslim couples in Batu Merah, within the local Islamic context that coexists with custom, the wedding ring does not have a binding theological basis but still carries strong symbolic meaning. It is seen as a sign of inner connection and a social communication tool indicating someone's marital status in public spaces. A male informant, R.L., explained that although it is not religiously obligatory, he still wears a ring as a sign of respect for his wife and extended family. He added that the ring "helps others know that I already have responsibilities." In a community like Batu Merah, where the soa structure and extended family relations are very strong, marital status is not just a personal matter but also a representation of collective honor. Here, the ring becomes a visual tool that stabilizes an individual's social status amidst dense community interactions.

Field observations during several community events reveal how this meaning appears in daily actions. In Amahusu, during a routine family fellowship gathering, it was seen that elderly couples still wore their wedding rings even though they were old and worn out. They did not replace them, even with new ones, because the historical and spiritual value of the rings was considered irreplaceable. One couple, married for over 35 years, explained that "this ring has prayed with us, cried with us." That statement is evidence that the ring has transformed into an object carrying the emotional and spiritual traces of the couple's life. The ring becomes a memory artifact that stores layers of family life events.

In Batu Merah, a different nuance is felt when attending a large family gathering. Among the women and young wives, it was evident that the presence of the ring was more than just a symbol of sacredness. It becomes a visual marker that also functions in social dynamics and status. Some women adjust their ring styles to match current fashion trends but still ensure that its meaning is not purely aesthetic. A female informant, H.N., explained that choosing a ring is not just about beauty but also about "what is appropriate in front of the husband's parents." In other words, the ring becomes part of social identity that must be curated in inter-family interactions, showing a dimension of representation embedded in this marriage symbol.

Analysis of these dynamics shows how the wedding ring symbol works intersubjectively. It does not only hold personal meaning but also becomes a shared symbolic language that is read and recognized by the surrounding environment. As explained by Mensah & Korankye (2025), in post-traditional societies, wedding symbols undergo layered symbolism — that is, layered meanings combining traditional values, individual choices, and evolving spiritual interpretations. The ring is no longer just an object placed on the finger during a ceremony but transforms into an extension of the self, of commitment, and of the relationship continually negotiated between the individual and the community.

In this context, the ring becomes a manifestation of spirituality that is not abstract but attached to the body and everyday actions. It is worn in routines, in prayers, in conflicts, and in celebrations. Its presence is not just a formality but a constant reminder of the vows made and the responsibilities to be carried out. Thus, the wedding ring in both communities is not merely

a universal symbol of love but a complex social medium — full of nuances, contexts, and meanings that are continually renewed.

### **Purity of Intention: The Meaning of the Ring for the Divorced**

The meaning of a wedding ring after divorce is one of the most complex aspects in the dynamics of social symbols. Amid the common narrative that often views the ring merely as a sign of a relationship that has ended, field realities show that the meaning of the ring post-separation does not stop at loss. On the contrary, it often transforms into a symbol of memory, spirituality, or even protection against social stigma. This transformation is personal but heavily influenced by the religious and customary context of the community in which the individual lives.

In Negeri Amahusu, where the majority are Christian, the ring after divorce is not immediately removed or discarded. Through several interviews and observations, it was found that the ring is often preserved as a spiritual artifact. One informant, a 43-year-old woman with the initials L.M., explained that she keeps her wedding ring in a jewelry box placed on the home altar. For L.M., the ring no longer belongs to her husband but is “a sign of a promise to God that cannot simply be erased.” She added that the ring serves as a reminder of the sacred moment when she and her partner stood before the altar and spoke vows witnessed by the congregation and family. During the author’s observation while attending a family worship service at L.M.’s home, it was apparent that religious symbols were very prominent in the domestic space, reinforcing the placement of the ring as part of a spiritual relationship, not just a social one.

Conversely, in Batu Merah, where the majority are Muslim, the meaning of the ring post-divorce is more strategic and social. A 38-year-old male informant, A.S., revealed that after his divorce, he still keeps his wedding ring and occasionally wears it—not as a memory of love, but as a form of protection from sensitive social questions. “If people see me still wearing a ring, they don’t ask much,” he said. In one observation during a family adat gathering, the author noticed several divorced women still wearing rings on their right hand. One of them mentioned that the ring acted as a sort of barrier against outside temptations and also preserved her dignity in a community that still views widowhood ambiguously.

This aligns with Berger & Luckmann’s (1966) theory that social reality is dialectical: shaped by human actions, legitimized by institutions, and modified again through personal experience. In this case, the ring undergoes a “reconstruction of meaning” after divorce—not with a singular meaning, but layered meanings: spiritual, social, and psychological. Overton’s (2023) theory of embodied meaning is also highly relevant, as it shows how material objects (like rings) become extensions of one’s inner experiences and the social body’s memory.

To clarify these different constructions of meaning, here is a comparison table based on field findings and interviews:

Tabel 1 Comparison of Wedding Ring Meanings Post-Divorce in Negeri Amahusu and Batu MerahMerah

| Aspect                            | Negeri Amahusu (Christian)                                              | Batu Merah (Muslim)                                                    |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Main Meaning Post-Divorce         | Spiritual symbol; memory of sacred vows before God.                     | Social marker; protection from stigma and social control.              |
| Treatment of the Ring             | Kept on home altar or prayer box; not worn.                             | Sometimes still worn on the right hand; kept as private charm.         |
| Emotional Function                | Spiritual reflection and contemplation on past relationship.            | Self-protection, symbol of pure intention, maintaining social dignity. |
| Key Interview Quote               | "This ring no longer belongs to my husband, it's mine and God's" – L.M. | "If I wear a ring, people don't ask if I'm divorced" – A.S.            |
| Influence of Custom and Community | Strong religious values; ring part of church and family rituals.        | Strong social control; ring used to negotiate status.                  |
| Attitude Toward Memories          | Accepted as part of a spiritual journey; not denied.                    | Quietly managed; used to preserve privacy and honor.                   |
| Meaning Transformation            | From marital bond → spiritual bond with God.                            | From symbol of love → symbol of social protection.                     |

Source: Author's Analysis, 2025

Through this data, it is clear that the wedding ring undergoes a journey of meaning that does not stop at the marriage itself. In Amahusu, it transforms into a spiritual icon carrying moral weight and sanctity. Meanwhile, in Batu Merah, the ring becomes a tool of social navigation, a kind of "perception controller" used to protect oneself from community pressures that still uphold strong customary and religious norms.

These overall findings support the argument that material symbols like rings never carry a single meaning. They live in narratives, in bodies, and in collective memory that continually evolve. Symbols function not only as forms of communication but as bridges between individual inner life and social expectations. Therefore, in the post-divorce context, the wedding ring is not merely a residue of a failed relationship but rather becomes a starting point for the transformation of identity, spirituality, and how one frames the past in relation to oneself and the community.

### The Wedding Ring in the Perspective of Religious Leaders in Maluku Customary Communities

In the religious context of Maluku society, particularly in Negeri Amahusu and Batu Merah, the interpretation of the wedding ring cannot be separated from the symbolic authority of religious leaders. They are not only guardians of normative values within the community but also act as spiritual mediators who legitimize the social symbols used in the institution of marriage. The wedding ring, in this sense, is not merely an object but part of a system of value representation that is reinterpreted through religious interpretation and daily faith practices.

In Batu Merah, Islamic discourse regarding wedding rings, especially for men, is quite complex. Based on interviews with a senior imam, H.A., it was explained that wearing gold rings for men is prohibited by sharia, as emphasized in a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be

upon him) stating that “gold and silk are forbidden for the men of my ummah but permitted for their women” (HR. Abu Dawud). However, this prohibition does not nullify the symbolism of the ring in marriage. According to H.A., couples are still encouraged to wear rings made of silver or other metals as symbols of sincerity and bonding. “As long as the intention is not to show off and they maintain simplicity, the ring can serve as a reminder of the covenant between two people who pledged before Allah,” he said in an informal conversation after Friday prayers at the village’s main mosque.

The author’s observations at weddings in Batu Merah reinforce this statement. In one akad (Islamic wedding contract) ceremony, the groom wore a simple silver ring, while the bride wore a gold ring. There was no specific religious ritual involving the ring, but the officiating imam still noted that the marriage was “pledged with witnesses and signs, including the ring as a token of mutual acceptance.”

Meanwhile, in Negeri Amahusu, the theological narrative built is far more symbolic and spiritual. In the Protestant Christian tradition practiced there, the ring is an important part of the marriage blessing liturgy. Based on interviews with Pastor Y.T., it was explained that the ring is an inseparable symbol of the theology of marriage. “The ring not only unites two bodies but also two souls in a sacred bond. It symbolizes God’s love, which is circular without beginning or end,” he said when the author attended a wedding rehearsal at the church. In the observed wedding homily, the pastor even referred to the ring as “the visual sign of the divine promise that humans vow before the congregation and God.”

At such moments, the ring exchange ceremony becomes a solemn part witnessed by the extended family. Even Christian adat elders in the community often add local narratives: that the ring is “a bond of love that cannot be severed by human hands, only by death.” This meaning shows the high integration of marriage symbols with church teachings and the community’s spiritual values.

From these two contexts, we can see how religion plays a role not only as a normative framework but as an active agent of meaning in shaping perceptions and experiences of social symbols. If in Islam there is legal flexibility allowing alternative rings as forms of symbolism, in Christianity, the ring becomes an almost sacramental element—considered part of sacred liturgy. This analysis aligns with Zhang et al.’s (2024) cultural representation theory, which asserts that meaning is not inherent in the object but is constructed through discursive practices supported by institutions, in this case, religion.

Here is a comparison of religious leaders’ perspectives on wedding rings to clarify their differences:

Tabel 2 Comparison of Religious Leaders' Perspectives on Wedding Rings

| Aspect                       | Negeri Amahusu (Christian)                                  | Batu Merah (Muslim)                                                                       |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ruling on Wearing Gold Rings | Permitted for all; no gender-based restrictions.            | Prohibited for men (based on hadith), permitted for women.                                |
| Recommended Ring Materials   | Typically gold, silver, or as per the couple's means.       | Silver, stainless steel, or other non-gold metals.                                        |
| Symbolic Function            | Symbol of sacred vow; integral part of marriage liturgy.    | Symbol of social bond and pure intention; not a religious obligation.                     |
| Role in Wedding Ceremony     | Mandatory in blessing; part of worship structure.           | Not obligatory in akad, but commonly used at receptions.                                  |
| Religious Leader's Narrative | "The ring is a sign of eternal love before God" – Y.T.      | "As long as the intention is good and simple, the ring is a reminder of intention" – H.A. |
| Theological Basis            | Based on liturgical interpretation and Christian symbolism. | Based on fiqh and hadith; normative and functional.                                       |

Source: Author's Analysis, 2025

Thus, we can state that even though wedding rings have similar forms, their meanings are highly contextual and depend on the religious discursive framework in which they operate. The ring does not stand alone but becomes part of a symbolic network interpreted, shaped, and maintained by religious institutions. In this context, the symbol functions not merely as an interpersonal communication tool but as a representational force that shapes the boundaries between the sacred, the social, and the personal.

### Floating Signifier: The Wedding Ring as Symbol, Sacredness, and Sociality

The meaning of the wedding ring in two customary communities in Maluku shows that the ring is not merely a physical object but a social construct formed through intersubjective experiences within differing cultural and religious spaces. The social constructionist approach of Berger and Luckmann (1966) offers a strong lens for interpreting this symbol, particularly through three dialectical moments: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. These three moments work simultaneously in producing meaning around the wedding ring.

The process of externalization is clearly seen in the various symbolic expressions during wedding ceremonies in both communities. In Amahusu, the practice of blessing the rings is delivered through solemn liturgy, framing the ring as a symbol of God's eternal love. In one observation at Ebenhaezer Church, a pastor declared loudly, "This ring is not just metal, but a covenant between you and God." This statement manifests the externalization of spiritual values into a concrete symbol worn daily. Meanwhile, in Batu Merah, externalization appears in the choice of ring material and the intention behind its use. The local imam explained that "as long as it's not excessive and is intended for worship, the ring becomes a reminder," a verbal and practical framing that positions the ring as a religiously valued object within the limits of sharia.

The moment of objectivation occurs when the symbolic meaning becomes part of the social reality accepted collectively. In this sense, the ring's function or value is no longer questioned but accepted as a given reality—a reality that feels natural because it has been

legitimized by religious institutions, family, and customary law. In many interviews, informants from both communities stated, “Without the ring, it doesn’t feel official,” even though the marriage is legally valid. This shows that the ring has become an object imbued with meaning through long-standing collective norms and practices.

Next, the process of internalization is seen when individuals absorb the meaning of the symbol into their personal identity. In many cases, the ring is not only a sign of a relationship but also of moral identity. A female informant from Amahusu (F.S.) stated that she continues to wear her wedding ring even though her husband has passed away because “it’s part of me, not just a memory.” On the other hand, a man from Batu Merah (R.M.) said that he continues to wear his silver ring so that “people know I was once married with good intentions.” Here, the symbolic meaning enters individual consciousness as part of their self-structure.

Interestingly, the ring in both communities functions as a floating signifier (Lévi-Strauss; adopted by Laclau, 2007), meaning a symbol whose meaning is not fixed but depends on its position within the system of representation. On one hand, it is a religious emblem; on another, a social symbol; and yet on another, an emotional expression. It can be sacred, functional, or sentimental, depending on who is wearing it, when, and in what social context.

Field observations show that the value structures shaping the meaning of the ring involve various actors and institutions. In customary weddings, extended families play a role in selecting the design and timing of the ring’s use. In religious practices, religious leaders set symbolic boundaries for its use. In the modern context, media also reinforces the image of the ring as a symbol of romantic love. Thus, the meaning of the ring is the result of an intersection between locality, spirituality, and modernity, evolving dynamically.

Below is a synthesis table clarifying how Berger & Luckmann’s three dialectical moments operate in the two communities studied:

Tabel 3 Synthesis of the Three Dialectical Moments in the Construction of Wedding Ring  
Meaning

| <b>Dialectical Stage</b> | <b>Negeri Amahusu (Christian)</b>                                              | <b>Batu Merah (Muslim)</b>                                                             |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Externalization          | Ring blessing liturgy, narrative of eternal love in wedding sermons.           | Intent of sincerity during ring giving, use of silver rings in accordance with sharia. |
| Objectivation            | Ring accepted as part of the marriage sacrament.                               | Ring becomes a social sign accepted in custom and religion.                            |
| Internalization          | Ring continues to be worn even after spouse’s death; becomes part of the self. | Ring worn to preserve memory and the identity of marital status.                       |

Source: Author’s Analysis, 2025

From the table above, it can be said that the wedding ring is a symbol operating within a complex field of meanings. It is not universal or fixed but is the product of social construction that continues to undergo adjustment and negotiation. In Berger & Luckmann’s approach, social reality is a human product that then becomes an objective and internal reality within their life

experiences. Thus, the ring not only represents love but also illustrates how local communities frame their reality through symbols. Furthermore, this approach also shows that symbols like the wedding ring can be important media in building social cohesion, connecting individuals with larger social structures—religion, custom, and community. Therefore, the meaning of symbols is not merely an individual discourse but part of the social architecture that shapes the collective identity of society.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study affirms that the meaning of the wedding ring within the Christian customary community in Amahusu and the Muslim community in Batu Merah is not universal but is the result of social construction formed through a dialectical process between individuals and social structures, as explained by Berger and Luckmann. As a marital symbol, the ring undergoes a complex journey of meaning—from a material object to a sacred item, from a sign of love to a manifestation of moral value, and from a status marker to part of a socially constructed identity. These findings show that the meaning of the ring is shaped not only through religious teachings and customary practices but also through family narratives, media influence, and life experiences overlapping between spirituality, emotionality, and sociality. The novelty of this research lies in its cross-community approach, showing how the same symbol is interpreted differently yet functionally in maintaining the social cohesion of each group, and how these social processes open space for dialogical meaning in a multicultural society. Thus, the wedding ring is not merely a personal or ritual emblem but an intersubjective medium that plays a crucial role in transmitting collective values and shaping social ethics within diverse cultural contexts.

## **ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE**

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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