

## Monumental memory and identity formation in the Butonese community through the Oputa Yi Koo Monument

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of the Monument of Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi (Oputa Yi Koo) in shaping collective memory and social identity among the Butonese community in Baubau, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in Maurice Halbwachs' collective memory theory, this study explores how spatial representation, symbolic design, and everyday social practices interact to produce and sustain collective memory. Data were collected through direct observations, visual documentation, and in-depth interviews with local cultural leaders, government officials, and residents. The findings reveal that the monument serves as a socio-symbolic artifact that revives marginalized historical narratives and provides a platform for communal reflection. It becomes a site where the past is reconstructed through present-day needs, reinforcing group identity, while remaining open to reinterpretation and contestation. While many perceive the monument as a source of pride and cultural revival, divergent interpretations of official narratives and community-based memory highlight the collective remembrance's dynamic, negotiated nature. This study argues that monuments are not merely passive heritage objects, but active discursive spaces that mediate identity formation, historical consciousness, and symbolic politics. This research contributes to broader discussions on cultural memory, spatial politics, and heritage making, offering practical insights for inclusive public space design rooted in local historical consciousness.

**Keywords:** collective memory, Oputa Yi Koo, monument, cultural identity, Buton

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Public spaces and monuments have long been viewed as physical and symbolic media that form collective memories. In Maurice Halbwachs' view, collective memory is not only stored in the minds of individuals but is articulated through social spaces where interactions occur. Monuments become a meeting point between history and communal identity, immortalizing figures, events, or values considered necessary by a community group. As historical markers, monuments are not just visual objects but also narratives that continuously negotiate socially. Research conducted by Till (2005) shows that memorial spaces in Berlin allow citizens to form a collective understanding of past traumas such as *the Holocaust*. In this context, public space has become a field of memory communication that is open to interpretation and participation. Monuments are not neutral but are produced in the context of dominant power and ideology. Therefore, the existence of monuments implies an active effort by society to manage and pass on the shared memory.

The importance of monuments as memory representations is also apparent in the Latin American context, where the plazas and statues of revolutionary figures serve as tools to reinforce nationalist narratives. Nora (1989) calls such places *lieux de mémoire*, that is, locations where memory is placed and maintained when the oral tradition is weakened. In this framework, public space is not just a passive container but also a dynamic place of production of cultural identity. In Buenos Aires, the Plaza de Mayo is not only a meeting place, but also a field of struggle for mothers who were victims of enforced disappearance, which makes the space a symbol of the battle for memory and justice. Referring to the research, Jelin (2003) emphasizes that these spaces open up opportunities for counter-memories not represented by the state. This phenomenon shows that public spaces have the potential to become arenas for memory conflicts where various social actors seize historical narratives.

In Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, monuments strategically build a nation's collective memory. For example, constructing the Proclamation Monument and the National Monument in Jakarta shows how the state seeks to consolidate collective memory of independence and nationalism. Pieris (2012) examined how the New Order used monumental architecture to affirm historical narratives following state ideology. Monuments commemorate the past and instill the ruler's desired future orientation. A public space is formed into an "open archive" that conveys political messages through aesthetics and architecture. This indicates that collective memory is not natural but is formed through spatial and symbolic policies.

In the local context, Baubau City in Southeast Sulawesi is also experiencing dynamics in the formation of a memory space through monuments, one of which is the Oputa Yi Koo Monument. This figure is remembered as the Sultan of Buton, who refused to submit to colonialism and fought for justice based on Islamic law. The presence of this monument is not only a form of respect for history but also a contemporary medium for reconstructing Buton's identity in modern urban spaces. As shown by Smith (2006), Collective memory is often mediated through cultural artifacts and urban spaces, which bridge history and contemporary identity (Cudny & Appelblad, 2019). As a multicultural city, Baubau relies on monuments to reinforce local narratives that are sometimes left behind by national history. Research on the role of monuments in small towns is still limited; therefore, Baubau City is important for the study of regional contributions in producing collective memory.

This discourse shows that public spaces and monuments are vital elements in forming a collective memory that is never final. Memories embedded in monuments are selective and often reflect specific political, cultural, or ideological interests (Kabachnik et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding the social meaning of a monument requires an interpretive approach that considers the historical context, actors who formed it, and the social dynamics around it. Halbwachs stated that collective memory is "institutionalized," meaning that it is maintained through rituals, spaces, and public symbols. The Oputa Yi Koo Monument in Baubau is not just an architectural artifact but a symbolic representation of local history rearticulated in a contemporary socio-political context. Within Maurice Halbwachs' collective memory theory, memory does not live in vacuum. However, it is formed in a structured social space and monuments are one of its main instruments. This phenomenon arises from the importance of tracing how

the heroic values of Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi (Oputa Yi Koo) are reinterpreted in public spaces as a symbol of struggle, religiosity, and cultural identity. This monument not only commemorates the past, but also constructs a narrative of the future, who deserves to be remembered, how it is remembered, and for whose purposes. In a multicultural society like Baubau, this memory production process can give rise to symbolic hegemony and identity resistance, making the monument an arena for articulating and contesting constantly negotiated meaning.

This study aims to describe and analyze how the Oputa Yi Koo monument in Baubau is a medium for producing symbolic meaning and social functions within the framework of Maurice Halbwachs' collective memory theory. This study explores how social memory of Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi is articulated through the visual form, location, and narrative attached to the monument. In this context, the monument is not only understood as a material object but also as a social practice involving the construction, preservation, and dissemination of collective memory. This study also examines how community interactions with monuments reflect the process of negotiating local and national cultural identities. Using a qualitative approach, this study aims to uncover how public space strengthens shared memory and impacts the formation of collective community identity.

Studies on collective memory and monuments in Indonesia have generally focused on western and central regions, such as Yogyakarta, Jakarta, or Surabaya. The eastern region of Indonesia has rich historical and cultural complexity. However, this has not been widely explored scientifically, especially in the relationship between symbolic space and the social memory framework. This research is necessary because it fills the gap in academic literature on producing meaning through monuments in eastern Indonesia, particularly in Baubau City. In addition, the theoretical contribution of this study is to expand the application of Halbwachs' theory to local contexts that have not been widely touched upon and can practically be an input for cultural preservation policies, public space development, and local history education in the region.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Maurice Halbwachs, the French sociologist who coined the concept of collective memory, sharply differentiated between individual and social memory. For Halbwachs, individual memory never stands alone; it is always connected to and shaped by the social framework in which an individual is located. A person's memory of the past can only be reconstructed through language, symbols, and social relations shared within the group. Collective memory is, therefore, an intersubjective process shaped by social groups, such as family, religion, nation, or cultural community. In this context, personal experience is never truly pure but is mediated by broader social structures. This explains why a group of people can remember historical events uniformly even though they do not experience them directly. Halbwachs emphasized that individual memories quickly fade or become inconsistent without social support. This concept later became the primary foundation for studies of historical narratives, war memory, and collective commemoration practices.

One of Halbwachs' significant theoretical contributions is his idea that collective memory is tied to a particular social space. For Halbwachs, space is a physical context and social arena that forms and stores collective memory. For example, historical buildings, monuments, and even urban planning are not only architectural artifacts, but also markers of social memory. Physical space becomes an "external medium, where societies embed, maintain, and renew their collective memory. Therefore, collective memory is reconstructed when social structures, such as war, migration, or urbanization policies, change. Within this framework, urban and public spaces can be read as living archives of collective memory. A study by Foote & Azaryahu (2007) asserts that memories of the past are spatially articulated through "landscapes of memory" full of political meaning and identity. Thus, social space is not a neutral entity but a symbolic field that reflects and shapes collective memory.

Symbols play a vital role in consolidating collective memory because they allow for the representation of recognizable and shared meanings within a social community. According to Halbwachs, symbols such as flags, statues, and national songs are mechanisms for simplifying the complexity of history

into a form that is easily internalized by society. In other words, these symbols function as "memory markers," which bind group members in the shared meaning of a particular event. For example, in the Indonesian context, the Proclamation Monument in Jakarta is a collective symbol of the struggle for independence, which is historical, political, and ideological. According to Nora (1989), such places *lieux de mémoire*, sites where memory is embedded and preserved symbolically. When these symbols are used in public spaces, they act as tools for social education and strengthen the group identity. Therefore, symbols in Halbwachs' theory are not merely visual aesthetics but are effective means of communicating social memory.

Historical narratives are a key tool in constructing collective memory, because they present the past in a form that can be understood, accepted, and inherited. Halbwachs emphasized that social groups choose to remember certain events that support their identity and social continuity. This process is not neutral; it involves selection, editing, and sometimes the distortion of historical facts. History constructed in collective narratives is often legitimized through institutions such as the state, educational institutions, or mass media. In this context, memory is a tool of power that can be used to strengthen domination or challenge-specific hegemonic forces. For example, Assmann (2011) distinguishes between *communicative memory* and *cultural memory*, where the latter is associated with texts, rituals, and institutions that maintain narratives over the long term. Thus, historical narratives are not only instruments of remembrance but also tools for constructing social identities.

Social institutions, such as family, religion, state, and education, play a central role in the formation and preservation of collective memory. According to Halbwachs, institutions provide a social framework that preserves memory across generations. For example, the national history curriculum in schools is a formal medium for instilling collective memory of independence events or national figures. Through its institutions, the state also created monuments, museums, and commemorative days to frame memory. In a contemporary study, Connerton (1989) mentions that institutions also maintain memory through bodily practices, rituals, and social customs that are continuously reproduced. This shows that memory is not only cognitive but also *embodied* and embedded in everyday social actions. Therefore, collective memory is a discursive product and an institutionalized social practice.

While Maurice Halbwachs's conceptualization of collective memory as socially framed and spatially anchored remains foundational, scholars have expanded it by emphasizing the performative, institutional, and contested nature of memory. Assmann (2011) distinguishes between short-term communicative memory, informal memory exchanged in everyday life and long-term cultural memory mediated by institutions, texts, and rituals preserved through public symbols like monuments. These distinctions are crucial for understanding how memory evolves from immediate interaction into formalized, legitimized forms of historical consciousness. In the case of the Oputa Yi Koo Monument, the transformation of oral narratives into state-sponsored symbolism reflects the shift from communicative to cultural memory. The monument thus becomes a vehicle not only for remembrance but also for formalizing identity through spatial and symbolic fixation.

Moreover, the study of collective memory has increasingly focused on "mnemonic practices and the social processes that constitute, contest, and reshape memory. This view recognizes memory as something done, not just something held. Public rituals, political commemorations, debates over statues, and informal storytelling are practices through which memory is continually renegotiated. The inclusion of Nora (1989), *lieux de mémoire*, further contextualizes monuments as symbolic battlegrounds where memory is not passively stored but actively constructed. By positioning the Oputa Yi Koo Monument within this broader theoretical framework, this study bridges the classic memory theory with contemporary debates about agency, performativity, and the politics of remembering, offering a more nuanced analysis of how spatial symbols mediate identity formation in postcolonial Indonesia.

Monuments have long been integral to producing meaning in public spaces by acting as collective symbols that embody historical narratives and communal identities. Monuments are not merely physical objects, but social constructions that represent the dominant political, cultural, and memory interests of a particular time. Such research emphasizes that monuments direct how people remember the past and interpret their current identities. In this context, it is essential to ask, who is remembered, how is he/she

remembered, and why? The symbolic representation of a figure, such as Sultan Himayatuddin in Baubau, is an interesting example of understanding the relationship between public artifacts and local identity narratives. This meaning-making process is not neutral because it is always within the framework of ideology, power, and resistance. [Forest and Johnson \(2002\)](#) explained that monuments are "symbolic conflict arenas" between formalized and displaced memories. Therefore, the Oputa Yi Koo Monument study must dismantle the symbolism and dominant narratives attached to it. This opens space for reflection on how the Butonese people in Baubau construct their identities.

In Indonesia, monuments are essential markers of nationalism and collective postcolonial memory. A classic example is the Proclamation Monument in Jakarta, which marks the birth of the Republic and serves as a symbolic space for commemorating important events. [Kusno \(2021\)](#) shows how the architecture and placement of the monument reflects state ideology and the direction of national development. Not only at the national level, but in many small cities and regions, monuments also serve as a medium for representing local history, often marginalized by the central narrative. The Oputa Yi Koo monument offers an alternative narrative about heroism, resistance to colonialism, and the regional identity of Butonese people. This uniqueness must be revealed by combining symbolic analysis with a collective memory. This means that Oputa Yi Koo is not just a historical figure, but a symbol of resistance and cultural pride articulated in modern public spaces.

Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi, known as Oputa Yi Koo, was a central figure in the history of the Buton Sultanate in the 18th century, remembered for his fierce resistance to Dutch colonialism. He served twice as Sultan of Buton (1752–1755 and 1760–1763), but his reign was better known for his abdication from the throne leading to a resistance movement. In the local historiography, Oputa Yi Koo is positioned as a symbol of struggle, courage, and consistency in maintaining sovereignty. His presence is interpreted as a form of resistance against the co-optation of external power, making him an icon of the local decolonial movement. In this study, depicting the figure of Oputa Yi Koo is key to understanding the symbolic context of the monument built in his name. He is not only a representation of history but also an articulation of the spirit of local identity revived through contemporary public spaces.

The construction of the Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi monument can be seen as an effort to legitimize the cultural identity of Buton in the context of modern Indonesia. Local communities often feel marginalized by the national narratives of globalization and modernization. In this case, monuments become tools for reclaiming history and rearticulating cultural identity. Many traditions considered ancient are actually "inventions of tradition", created to respond to contemporary needs. This study explores how Oputa Yi Koo's narrative is reconstructed to fill the space of Buton identity in the national narrative. Empirical studies of local monuments in Indonesia also show how people dynamically interpret and respond to monuments. This context is very relevant to Baubau because the Oputa Yi Koo Monument now stands in the city center as a new landmark that opens space for public interaction. This monument serves as a historical symbol and a gathering place and activity for residents, creating a new identity for the city ([Halbwachs, 1992](#)).

In many local contexts, monuments also serve as tools for reshaping historical narratives that have been reduced by official history. Examples can be seen in local memorializations in Berlin and Athens, which show that monuments can be spaces for articulating identity. These monuments not only celebrate history but also create new dialogue about the identity and collective memory of the local community. [Alderman & Dwyer \(2009\)](#). Thus, monuments serve as meeting points between the past and present, allowing communities to reflect on their experiences and construct more inclusive narratives. In the Baubau context, characterizing Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi as a national hero and local symbol is a political strategy. Significant memory. This represents the resistance of the Butonese people to colonialism and becomes a local representation that can compete with the national historical narrative, often Java-centric. In other words, the Oputa Yi Koo Monument presents an opportunity for Butonese people to reposition themselves in the national narrative through local symbols of resistance. The importance of in-depth studies based on collective memory theory lies in dissecting how these symbols are produced and consumed. This process not only involves acknowledging local history but also sparking

discussions about the identity and values held by the Butonese people in a broader context (Syahadat et al., 2014).

The Oputa Yi Koo Monument in Baubau City contributes to the academic literature on monuments and memory in eastern Indonesia, which is still very limited. Many previous studies have focused on the western regions of Indonesia, while the symbolic and cultural dynamics in the eastern region have been less explored. As revealed by Indonesia's pluralistic identity, recognizing the local narratives that help shape Indonesian identity is required (Kusno, 2021). Through this research, the author shows how the Buton community, through the Oputa Yi Koo monument, not only remembers the past, but also negotiates the position of their identity amidst the discourse of nationalism and modernity. This also confirms that monuments are not only products of the past, but also fields of struggle for meaning that continue in the present (Lukman, 2020).

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the symbolic and cultural meanings attached to the Monument of Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi (Oputa Yi Koo) in Baubau City, Southeast Sulawesi. This approach allows researchers to understand social phenomena deeply by directly interacting with the local context and interpreting complex meanings. Monuments as public artifacts are not treated as neutral objects but as living symbols loaded with layers of historical, political, and collective identity meanings. This is where the cultural semiotic approach becomes relevant because it allows the tracing of signs and visual narratives that shape social meanings. This study focuses on the symbolic interpretation and collective memory of the Buton community through the Oputa Yi Koo Monument, which is positioned as a medium for articulating the values of resistance and pride in local identity. The research location was Baubau City, where the monument is a historical marker and a space for social expression. The research subjects included traditional figures, local government officials, and residents with emotional and historical attachments to Sultan Himayatuddin. Data collection techniques included direct observation of the monument's physical form and strategic position, as well as visual documentation of cultural symbols, such as clothing, statue poses, inscriptions, and accompanying geographical ornaments. In-depth interviews were conducted to assess the narrative of collective memory and perception of identity embedded in the community's historical experience. In addition, data from sultanate archives and academic literature studies were used as secondary references to enrich the understanding of the local historical and political context.

To ensure a credible and inclusive qualitative inquiry, this study employed purposive sampling with theoretical saturation, selecting participants who possessed cultural legitimacy, political involvement, or lived memory related to the figure of Sultan Himayatuddin. A total of 19 informants were interviewed, including five traditional elders, four government officials responsible for cultural heritage and spatial planning, and ten residents, spanning diverse age groups, genders, and socioeconomic status. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to narrate their memories through historical facts and personal and emotional resonance. This approach aligns with best practices in memory studies that prioritize intersubjectivity and social context (Yin Robert, 2018).

To strengthen the validity of the study, data triangulation was carried out using multiple sources: field observation of monument-related practices, visual documentation of spatial aesthetics, archival research from local historiographies, and a comparative review of regional memory politics. Member checking was applied by returning thematic summaries to the informants for verification and clarification. Secondary data from museum exhibits, local oral chronicles, and scholarly publications were used to contextualize and cross-verify the findings. This methodological rigor ensures that the symbolic meanings explored in the Oputa Yi Koo Monument are not merely interpretive constructions of the researcher but are grounded in the memory ecosystem of the Baubau community. Integrating cultural semiotics and grounded narrative analysis allows for a holistic understanding of monumentality as a layered social process.

Conceptually, this research is based on the collective memory theory developed by Maurice Halbwachs (1992), which emphasizes that memory is never solely individual, but is always framed by social structures and spatial symbols. In this context, the Oputa Yi Koo Monument is a symbolic device representing how local communities build and maintain shared identities through materialized historical memories. The analysis was carried out interpretively by examining the relationship between visual texts (monuments), local socio-political structures, and legitimized historical narratives. Thus, monuments are not only seen as physical buildings but also as discursive arenas that produce and reproduce meaning. The results of this study not only contribute to the study of symbolic communication and visual anthropology but also open up space for critical reflection on how the collective identity of local communities continues to be negotiated amidst the dynamics of social change. Therefore, an in-depth and reflective qualitative approach is crucial for capturing the complexity of the visual culture and urban space.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Visual and Architectural Representation of the Oputa Yi Koo Monument

The Oputa Yi Koo Monument in Baubau is a concrete manifestation of the articulation of history and local cultural identity through the visual media. The bronze statue of Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi stands upright with a sword in his right hand and wearing traditional Buton clothing, creating a strong image of courage, steadfastness, and spirituality. Maurice Halbwachs (1992) stated that collective memory does not only live in the mind, but requires “material space support” so that the memory can be maintained and transmitted socially. Visual representations, such as this, have become a collective means of simplifying a history's complexity into signs recognized together by society. This aligns with the view of Nora (1989), who calls places like monuments *lieux de mémoire*, spaces that replace fading oral memory with publicly accessible material symbols. According to Foote and Azaryahu (2007), “landscapes of memory” have the power not only to store but also to reframe historical meaning based on the contemporary needs of society. By being placed in the heart of Baubau City, this monument claims public space as the dominant articulation space of Buton's local history, which has tended to be marginalized in the national narrative. Smith (2006) states that monuments are not just passive artifacts but also part of a heritagization practice intended to create a “negotiable cultural identity”. Forest and Johnson (2002) call monuments “an arena of symbolic conflict” where history is reproduced and contested between power and counter-memory. Therefore, every element of the design and placement of the Oputa Yi Koo Monument contains a social intention and deep politics, making it not just a tribute to past figures but also a symbolic strategy to strengthen Buton's identity in the contemporary Indonesian national cultural map.

Although the monument enjoys broad public acceptance, it is also a site of symbolic contestation. Some indigenous elders and academics have criticized the statue's militaristic depiction of the Sultan Himayatuddin as upright, armed, and commanding, neglecting his role as a spiritual ascetic and guardian of Islamic law. Others have questioned the monument's coastal placement, arguing that it misrepresented his inland-based guerrilla resistance. These critiques reflect what Olick (2013) describes as mnemonic contestation, in which different social groups compete to inscribe their versions of history onto public memory. Far from diminishing the significance of the monument, these conflicting readings demonstrate its vitality as a discursive object that stimulates civic engagement with history.

These tensions reveal that monuments are not static symbols, but rather dynamic platforms where official and vernacular memories collide, as Edensor (2005) notes, public memory is always mediated through lived space and contested meaning, particularly in postcolonial cities undergoing cultural reinvention. In Baubau, the monument becomes an “arena of symbolic struggle” (Forest and Johnson, 2002), where the state's vision of heroism coexists sometimes uneasily with grassroots expressions of spirituality, place-based identity, and anti-colonial pride. Rather than resolving these tensions, this study recognizes them as part of the monument's role in facilitating dialogical memory and pluralistic identity formation in post-authoritarian decentralized Indonesia.

The presence of visual symbols in this monument underlines the importance of what Halbwachs calls “social frames of memory” (*cadres sociaux de la mémoire*). These symbolic structures enable people to remember familiar cultural and spatial contexts. In this case, the Oputa Yi Koo statue does not stand alone as a historical representation. However, it is framed by a visual language easily recognized by the Butonese people: the sword as a symbol of resistance, traditional clothing as a symbol of continuity of tradition, and firm expression as a symbol of moral steadfastness. This representation shows that memory is not born spontaneously, but is socially constructed through standardized collective visualization. According to Assmann (2011), public symbols such as monuments function within the framework of *cultural memory*, namely, long-term memories embedded through texts, rituals, and cultural artifacts. Therefore, symbolization in monument architecture is essential for commemorating the past and organizing historical narratives and cultural identities in contemporary spaces.

Furthermore, selecting the monument's location in the middle of Baubau's city space shows the process of politicizing memory through the symbolic space's control. According to Kusno (2021), urban space in Indonesia is never neutral, but is constantly produced and reproduced through certain ideologies, both by the state and local communities. In the context of Baubau, the construction of the Oputa Yi Koo Monument in a strategic area can be read as a way for local communities to seize representational space, reviving the Buton identity that has so far been submerged in the Java-centric national historical narrative. This aligns with the views of Forest and Johnson (2002), that monuments are “contested symbolic spaces” by various social actors intending to produce and control public memory. In Halbwachs' logic, this placement is not merely coincidental but rather a form of institutionalizing collective memory by selecting spaces with strategic value to convey local identity and historical messages. Thus, the architecture and location of monuments cannot be separated from their social functions as tools to frame memories and strengthen social cohesion in local communities.

#### **4.2 Collective Narrative of Oputa Yi Koo in Society**

Cultural elites and political leaders have largely shaped the prevailing narrative of Oputa Yi Koo, and political leaders have shaped the prevailing narrative about Oputa Yi Koo. However, everyday citizens also form and maintain memory. For instance, a young online motorcycle driver remarked: “*We don't learn much history in school, but this monument makes me proud to be Butonese.*” Similarly, a street vendor shared: “*I didn't know his story until people came to take pictures here. Now I tell my kids that our city has a hero.*” These voices demonstrate that the monument's meaning extends beyond formal history into lived memory rooted in emotion, pride, and place attachment. Edensor (2005) refers to such informal engagements as “vernacular memory,” where meaning emerges through use, interaction, and personal reflection rather than official discourse.

These community-based interpretations often differ from state-led memorialization but are no less significant. Everyday users' emotional resonance, symbolic appropriation, emotional resonance, and symbolic appropriation transform a monument into a shared social space that fuses leisure, education, and identity. Such interactions fulfill what Connerton (1989), calls “habitual memory,” in which commemorative meaning is inscribed not only through visual representation but also through bodily routines and collective gathering. By including these underrepresented voices, this study resists an overly top-down view of cultural memory and affirms the participatory, plural, and evolving nature of public meaning making. In doing so, it positions the monument as a pedagogical object and a landmark.

The collective narrative of Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi or Oputa Yi Koo grows and develops in the social memory of the Butonese people through oral traditions, traditional rituals, and local celebrations that are continuously reproduced. Most of the interviewed residents described Oputa Yi Koo as a spiritual leader and a symbol of resistance against Dutch colonialism. This memory lives in the family space, traditional communities, and cultural forums that make the story of the Sultan not just history but part of a collective moral identity. This follows Halbwachs' view that “individuals remember in and through their social groups,” because memory is intersubjective and shaped by a particular social framework. In the context of the Butonese people, this social framework is a traditional community that

maintains memory of the Sultan's struggle through hereditary narratives. Assmann (2011) calls this process *communicative memory*, namely a form of memory that is transmitted informally through interactions between group members, and has the function of maintaining social cohesion. Therefore, the narrative of Oputa Yi Koo is not just a historical story but a collective tool for building solidarity, cultural pride, and a shared sense of identity.

The local narrative of Oputa Yi Koo also contains a strong spiritual dimension, showing how Islamic values are internalized in constructing the collective memory of the Butonese people. In several interviews, the sultan is described not only as a political leader but also as a *guardian* or religious figure who consistently upholds the sharia. This dimension enriches historical narrative with ethical and pious nuances, indicating that social memory is factual and normative. According to Connerton (1989), "society remembers through rituals and bodily actions that reproduce collective values." In this case, the narrative of the Sultan is preserved by commemorating his death, which some communities still carry out. The memory of Oputa Yi Koo explains what happened and instills moral guidance on courage, sacrifice, and steadfastness in upholding principles. In Halbwachs' framework, this moral element is a form of social internalization of values considered necessary by the group. Through this mechanism, group identity is maintained and strengthened across the generations.

Community reactions to the Oputa Yi Koo Monument show a complex spectrum of emotions and interpretations, reflecting the dynamic nature of the collective memory tied to the social context. Most Baubau residents appreciated the monument's presence as a form of respect for local history that previously did not have a place in the national narrative. For them, this monument symbolizes that Buton has a heroic legacy that deserves to be elevated alongside other national figures. In interviews, residents expressed pride that "finally, we have a monument that shows who we are." This statement strengthens Halbwachs's argument that the need for group identity always frames collective memory; in this case, the Butonese people reclaim symbolic space to affirm their existence as legitimate historical communities. This is also in line with the concept of "identity anchoring" from Assmann (2011), where public symbols affirm social memory that forms the basis of a community's collective narrative and future orientation. Thus, this monument represents the past and projection of future aspirations articulated through public space.

However, the public response to the monuments was neither homogeneous nor positive. Several criticisms emerged, especially from academics and specific indigenous communities, who considered that the monument overemphasized the dimension of militaristic heroism and ignored the spiritual aspects and wisdom of the sultan, which were more dominant in local oral traditions. This shows the tension between the "officialized" memory through state symbols and the more fluid and multidimensional community memory. Forest and Johnson (2002) call this condition a "symbolic conflict," where different actors compete to monopolize the interpretation of public symbols. In Halbwachs' framework, this condition can be understood as the result of "memory reconstruction in different social frameworks," meaning that each group tends to reformulate the past based on their values, goals, and identities. Thus, although this monument was designed to unite collective memory, it also created a space for contestation over the meaning of its history. This reflects the nature of social memory as a constantly changing field of negotiation, where symbols are never final but always open to reinterpretation and resistance from social groups who feel their identities are not fully represented.

However, Oputa Yi Koo's collective narrative is neither singular nor free from conflicting meanings. The observations and interviews showed differences in interpretation between the local government's official and residents' narratives, especially those rooted in indigenous communities. The government narrative emphasizes the sultan as a national hero and symbol of national pride. By contrast, indigenous communities emphasize the spiritual side and their courage to reject office for the sake of principle. This difference shows the dynamics of meaning negotiation in collective memory. Forest & Johnson (2002) revealed that "monuments and memory are never neutral; they are the result of negotiations of power and representation." Halbwachs's logic reflects that social memory is influenced by the power structures that regulate it; therefore, it is selective, adaptive, and sometimes excludes alternative memories. Thus, although Oputa Yi Koo's name has been officially immortalized as a monument, the

interpretation of who he was and how he fought remains a fluid realm of social articulation and continues to be fought for in the public space.

### 4.3 Monuments as a Medium for Collective Identity Production

The Oputa Yi Koo Monument not only functions as a historical commemoration tool but also as a medium for articulating the collective identity of the Buton community in the contemporary Indonesian cultural landscape. Its existence in the center of Baubau City marks the claim of space by the local community to affirm its existence in the narrative of the nation's history. This aligns with Maurice Halbwachs' concept that social identity is formed through collective mechanisms that remember the past in a structured way in meaningful social spaces (Halbwachs, 1992). In this case, the monument materializes memory that unites residents into a shared meaning of who they are, where they come from, and what values they uphold. Smith (2006) emphasizes that cultural heritage, such as monuments, is an arena for producing meaning, where identity is displayed and negotiated through visual and symbolic narratives. Thus, this monument acts as a node of identity that binds the younger generation to their cultural roots amid modernization and globalization.

In its social practice, this monument becomes the center of community activities for relaxing the city's outskirts, sports, tourist attractions, and even a selfie space uploaded to social media. All of these demonstrate how these physical artifacts become part of a collective life that is continuously reproduced. According to Connerton (1989), repeating actions and rituals around public symbols is part of the embodied memory process, a memory implanted through the body and social habits. In the context of the Oputa Yi Koo Monument, public activities around it also strengthen the symbolic position of the monument as a tool for creating social identity. Halbwachs said that social groups "embed their memories into physical and symbolic forms so that they can be maintained across generations". Therefore, the production of identity through monuments is not only the result of the meaning attached by their makers, but also the result of the practice of society that continuously interprets, revives, and reshapes symbols in everyday social activities.

The role of monuments in the construction of a collective identity is also seen in how they represent local cultural politics. The Baubau City Government utilizes the Oputa Yi Koo symbol in regional branding elements, such as logos, slogans, and tourism promotions. This practice shows how historical symbols are used as strategic identity capitals. In this context, Halbwachs explained that collective memory can serve the interests of power by organizing historical narratives that follow specific ideological directions. In line with that, Nora (1989) emphasizes that *lieux de mémoire* are places of remembrance and memory management tools that can be used for political and economic purposes. Thus, the Oputa Yi Koo Monument becomes an articulate space reflecting collective memory and a tool for producing an identity actively controlled and directed by various social actors, from the state to local communities. In this framework, Buton identity is not a static entity, but a social construction that is continuously mediated and negotiated through symbols of public space such as monuments.

The role of the Oputa Yi Koo Monument as a collective identity affirmer is increasingly evident in the narratives of local leaders, who actively encourage the community to make it part of their identity construction. One of the informants stated in an interview: "*Oputa Yi Koo is not just history, he is the heart of our culture. This monument helps the younger generation see that we have a figure no less than the one they learn about in national history books.*" This statement emphasizes the importance of symbolic representation as a tool for memory education within the local framework. According to Halbwachs, collective memory develops through social institutions that provide structure and meaning for past events and strengthen identity through symbols and representative figures. In this context, monuments have become a medium of memory and an instrument for inheriting local values that have received little attention in the national narrative.

In addition to traditional figures, government officials emphasized the strategic role of monuments in shaping the region's image. The resource person said: "*The Oputa Yi Koo Monument will be the center of city development based on history and culture. This is not just the aesthetics of the city, but a strategy for forming regional*

*character.*" This statement reflects the government's symbolic use of historical heritage in building a distinctive city identity. This aligns with Smith (2006), thinking that cultural heritage, such as monuments, is utilized in the *heritage branding process*, where local identity is produced and positioned as a strategic element in development. In Halbwachs' framework, this phenomenon can be interpreted as institutionalizing collective memory through positively politicized public spaces and symbols. Buton identity, which was previously oral and stored within the community, is now materialized in a visual form that can be accessed and internalized by the broader public through monuments as memory centers.

Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi, revered as Oputa Yi Koo, must be understood as a regional figure and part of a larger archipelagic resistance against Dutch colonialism in the 18th century. His dual identity distinguished his resistance as a political leader and spiritual reformer. Rather than capitulating on Dutch demands or internal political compromise, he twice abdicated his throne to wage forest-based guerrilla warfare from Buton's mountainous interiors. This tactical relocation was not merely geographical, but symbolic, asserting autonomy from colonial hegemony and the palace-centered power structure. Islamic jurisprudence and the Sufi ethos of moral clarity informed his acts of resistance, positioning him as a "just ruler" figure akin to contemporaries such as Diponegoro in Java or Tuanku Imam Bonjol in Sumatra.

According to Reid (2005), such figures exemplify the hybridization of anti-colonial struggle and Islamic revivalism across the Malay-Indonesian world. Oputa Yi Koo's narrative thus exceeds local heroism and taps into a broader tradition of moral defiance and spiritual leadership. The Dutch archives record his refusals to sign exclusive trade agreements and use Qur'anic law as a framework for governance. His memory, preserved through oral traditions and revived via the monument, functions as a site of local pride and symbolic critique of colonial modernity and centralist historiography. Recognizing these broader dimensions allows for a deeper understanding of why his commemoration resonates so profoundly in Baubau and contributes to the local reinvention of national memory.

The historical context of the establishment of the Oputa Yi Koo Monument played an essential role in strengthening the narrative of the Buton people's collective identity. Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi was the only Sultan of Buton who explicitly rejected Dutch colonial domination, even choosing to abdicate twice to lead armed resistance from the interior of Buton Island in the mid-18th century (1752–1763). In local historiography, courage is seen as a political act and an expression of spiritual and moral steadfastness. Therefore, when the central government officially designated him as a National Hero in 2019, it was considered a long-awaited form of recognition. The monument's establishment in the center of Baubau City after recognition became a symbolic moment that materialized the legitimacy of local history into a solid and monumental visual form. According to Halbwachs, historical events considered necessary by social groups are selected, crystallized, and maintained through symbols that allow collective memory to live in a concrete social space. In this case, the monument becomes an extension of the social memory of the courage and values of justice that Sultan Oputa Yi Koo fought for, as well as a collective representation of the media that the Buton community has as its historical heritage that shapes their identity.

In addition, the construction of the Oputa Yi Koo Monument cannot be separated from the dynamics of post-reform memory politics in Indonesia, where many local communities began to revive historical figures marginalized by the Javanese-centric national narrative. Pieris (2012) noted that many historical narratives were framed centrally during the New Order narratives during the New Order, and only specific figures were promoted as symbols of the nation. Within this framework, the monument's establishment can be read as a form of "seizing symbolic space" by the Butonese people to position their history as an integral part of pluralistic Indonesian identity. Halbwachs states that "group memory is always formed through relationships with other groups and within a larger social framework." Thus, the Oputa Yi Koo Monument commemorates the local past and is a counter-discourse to the dominance of the national historical narrative. It has become a new medium of articulation through which the Butonese people rebuild their collective image in a way that is authentic and rooted in their historical memory.

#### **4.4 Public Response and Interpretation of Monuments**

The Baubau community's response to the Oputa Yi Koo Monument reflects the diversity of the local history and identity interpretations. For most residents, the monument is greeted with pride and high appreciation because it represents the cultural and religious values that have long been part of their ancestral heritage. One resident stated in an interview: *"This monument makes us feel like we have a great figure like other cities. Now our children know who fought the colonialists, not only from Java."* This statement confirms what Halbwachs calls the "social framework of memory," where collective narratives are formed and internalized through symbols that bind group identity (Halbwachs, 1992). For the Buton community, this monument is a concrete representation of cultural heritage that has not been formally accommodated. In Assmann's logic of cultural memory, symbols such as statues and inscriptions act as transgenerational media that allows people to bind themselves to the past and simultaneously imagine a shared future. (Assmann, 2011).

However, the interpretation of this monument also shows a contestation of its meaning. Some groups, especially from the local indigenous community and academics, criticize the visual form of the monument, which is considered too "militaristic" and does not show the spiritual side of Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi, or Oputa Yi Koo, who has been the center of the community's oral narrative. In an interview with an indigenous figure, he expressed his surprise at the location of the monument's construction on the coast, even though the history of the Sultan's struggle is rooted in guerrilla strategies in the forests of the Buton Mountains. *"He was not a warlord at sea; he was a guerrilla in the forest to defend his beliefs and his people. Why was it positioned on the coast?"* He said. This statement reflects the tension between memory formalized through heroic visual forms and dominant militaristic ones, with community memory living in everyday cultural traditions. This aligns with the analysis of Forest and Johnson (2002), which states that "public monuments are an arena of symbolic conflict where official discourse meets counter-memory". In Maurice Halbwachs' framework, this conflict arises because each social group has a different collective memory framework, and the meaning of symbols is never absolute (Halbwachs, 1992). Thus, although the monument is generally accepted as a symbol of pride, it remains an open interpretive space that accommodates various interpretations and criticisms of the local community. Yet at the same time, it potentially marginalizes the history of Butones, as Chalmers says, it erases Indigenous peoples from the landscape (Chalmers, 2019).

Interestingly, these interpretations do not weaken the monument's function but strengthen it as a living discursive space. Public discussions about the monument's meaning, both on social media and cultural forums, show that the monument has triggered collective conversations about the identity, history, and values that need to be inherited. In field observations, youth groups often use this monument physically and symbolically as a meeting point. This shows that, as Connerton (1989) explained, social memory is not only formed from visual symbols, but also from the social practices that accompany them from how people gather, talk, and remember the monumental figures. In this case, the Oputa Yi Koo Monument went beyond its aesthetic and ceremonial functions, becoming an articulate arena where people reflect on what it means to be Butonese in the modern era. As Halbwachs emphasizes, "collective memory is not a repetition of the past, but rather an interpretation of the past shaped by the needs of the present" (Halbwachs, 1992). Therefore, the community's response to and interpretation of this monument shows that memory is an active, negotiative, and continuously reproduced social process.

#### **4.5 Symbolic Dynamics: Monuments between Past and Present**

The Oputa Yi Koo Monument is a symbol that is not static; it has transformed meaning over time, following the social, political, and cultural dynamics of society that articulates it. Initially built as a form of respect for the anti-colonial struggle of Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi, this monument is now interpreted as a symbol of local identity, spirituality, and cultural pride. In Halbwachs' perspective, collective memory is constantly undergoing reconstruction, because "memory is not a copy of the past, but a rereading of the past from the perspective of the present" (Halbwachs, 1992). Therefore, although the monument displays past events, its meaning continues to change, along with the changing social needs

of the Buton community. This transformation is also seen in everyday practices around the monument, where residents use it as a space for cultural expression, reflection, and even digital media, such as a selfie background. Everything shows that This symbol continues to be revived in new social frameworks.

This process of negotiating meaning shows that the symbols in public spaces are never singular or final. Nora (1989) states that lieux de mémoire, such as monuments, such as monuments, are places where “history stops being a narrative, and starts to become an object of struggle for meaning”. In the context of Baubau City, some people interpret the Oputa Yi Koo Monument not only as a historical object, but also as part of a living social space. Its location in the Mara City area, which is on the coast, makes it a favorite place for residents to relax, exercise, and refresh their minds. Residents use this location as a recreation area that blends the natural landscape and historical symbols. “The statue looks majestic, but the atmosphere is also calming. We come here to get some fresh air; sometimes we bring our children too,” said a resident in an interview. This shows that the monument's function has gone beyond the meaning of historical commemoration, transforming it into a social meeting point that builds a sense of emotional connection with the city. In Maurice Halbwachs's framework, this function reflects *the social use of memory*, namely how social groups revive collective memory to meet the needs of contemporary identity and cohesion (Halbwachs, 1992). Therefore, this monument is not only a static artifact but also a symbol that is continuously negotiated and lived in modern society's dynamics of space and time.

In addition, the symbolic dynamics of the Oputa Yi Koo Monument are closely related to the changes in the social and political structure of Baubau. In the post-reform era, when the discourse on decentralization and regional autonomy strengthened, local communities had a broader space to define their identities. The establishment of this monument is a form of symbolic political articulation of efforts to affirm Buton's identity in the national cultural map. In this case, as noted by Kusno (2021), post-reformation public architecture not only reflects local values but also becomes an instrument for contesting the national narrative that was previously too centralized. Thus, the Oputa Yi Koo Monument is not only a meeting point between the past and the present, but also an arena where national and local identity discourses interact and sometimes clash. In Halbwachs' framework, such memories do not live in a space, but are always related to larger social changes. Therefore, the symbolic dynamics of this monument provide clear evidence that cultural identity is always in the process of continuous reform in a complex social space.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the Sultan Himayatuddin Muhammad Saidi (Oputa Yi Koo) Monument plays an essential role in the formation, preservation, and articulation of the collective memory of the Butonese people. As a visual symbol rooted in the history of resistance against colonialism, this monument functions as a historical artifact and social medium that strengthens local identity amidst the currents of modernization and centralized nationalism. From the perspective of Halbwachs, collective memory is not static. However, it is continuously reconstructed within a social framework that allows communities to reinterpret their past according to their present needs. Visual representations, public narratives, and social practices around the monument prove that spaces such as these are discursive arenas where memory and identity are continuously negotiated. The Oputa Yi Koo Monument has become a symbolic space that brings together the heroic past, the present-seeking identity, and the future imagined by the Butonese people.

In addition, the public's reaction to this monument reflects the success and challenges of the institutionalization process of collective memory. This monument is accepted as a form of legitimacy of local history that has long been marginalized but also presents a debate regarding the symbolic dimension that does not fully represent the complexity of the figure of Sultan Himayatuddin. This confirms that social memory is plural, dynamic, and not free from contestation of meaning. This monument is not only a means of commemorating the past but also a tool for organizing social identity in the present and future. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of an interpretive approach based on collective memory

theory in reading monuments, not as passive objects, but as social texts full of historical, political, and cultural meanings.

### **Ethical approval**

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

### **Informed consent statement**

Not Applicable

### **Authors' contributions**

Conceptualization, M.A.A., and F.B.; methodology, M.A.A.; validation, F.B.; formal analysis, F.B.; resources, M.A.A.; writing original draft preparation, M.A.A., and F.B.; writing review and editing, M.A.A., and F.B. All authors have agreed to publish this version.

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The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

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