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Kambangsa at the Intersection of Culture and Politics: A Multimodal Semiotic Analysis of Meranaw Political Tarpaulins

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ABSTRACT

Political campaign materials do more than identify candidates; they construct political identities through culturally meaningful signs. This study examines how Kambangsa, a Meranaw cultural value associated with family lineage and relational identity, is constructed and communicated in the political tarpaulins of Meranaw local politicians. Using a qualitative, interpretive research design, the study analyzes ten campaign tarpaulins from the May 2019 elections in Lanao del Sur. Guided by Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotics of visual communication, complemented by Barthes' semiotic concepts and Peirce's classification of signs, the analysis explores the interaction of linguistic, visual, chromatic, symbolic, and representational resources. Findings reveal four interconnected processes through which Kambangsa is constructed: transforming the candidate's identity from individual to relational, visualizing genealogy as political capital, condensing lineage into a prominent surname, and integrating family identity with political legitimacy and public identity. Furthermore, the findings revealed that P portraits, kinship expressions, family names, typography, and spatial arrangements collectively position candidates within culturally recognizable networks of belonging. Significantly, the surname emerges as a condensed semiotic resource through which lineage becomes visible without extensive genealogical representation. The study demonstrates that political tarpaulins function not merely as campaign advertisements but as multimodal texts that recontextualize cultural values within electoral communication. By examining Kambangsa at the intersection of culture and politics, this research contributes to understanding how lineage shapes the semiotic construction of political identity in Meranaw society.

KEYWORDS

Meranaw culture; political advertising; political tarpaulins; multimodal semiotics

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1. Introduction

In Meranaw language, there is a famous proverb that goes by as "So bayanek sa lupa a badn miphapayapat. Na o makathimo-timo na makatimbang ko palao." The proverb may be loosely rendered as the idea that scattered particles of earth, when gathered together, can form a mountain. Within the cultural context of the Meranaw, the image foregrounds the strength that can emerge from numbers, connection, and collective belonging. Such a worldview provides an important point of entry into the study of Kambangsa, particularly when family and lineage become visible in public political communication. The Meranaw, commonly referred to in some literature as Maranao or Meranao, are a major ethnolinguistic group in Mindanao whose cultural life is closely associated with the Lake Lanao region. The original manuscript emphasizes the importance of close family ties and the role of bangsa or lineage in Meranaw social organization. Pantao's (2018) study of the language of bangsa in Meranaw ceremonial discourse further demonstrates that lineage is not merely a genealogical category; it participates in the construction of identity, values, social relationships, and ideology.

Within this cultural setting, Kambangsa may be understood as a relational orientation in which lineage, family affiliation, solidarity, social standing, and the obligations associated with belonging become meaningful resources in social interaction. The original study identifies values associated with Kambangsa, including close family ties, unity, mutual assistance, lineage, strengthening relationships, addition to the family, preservation of family identity, and reverence for elders. These meanings become particularly significant during elections because political competition occurs within communities where personal identity may be read together with family and clan identity. Political tarpaulins provide a particularly productive site for examining this phenomenon. They are

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public, highly visible, multimodal texts in which photographs, names, titles, colors, numbers, slogans, party or organizational logos, and spatial arrangements are deliberately combined. Rather than functioning merely as containers of information, these materials can operate as signs through which candidates present themselves, establish associations with influential families, invoke social relationships, and construct an image of political legitimacy.

Previous studies have established the cultural and communicative importance of Meranaw tarpaulins. Maruhom (2015), for example, examined Maranao streamers and tarpaulins as cultural and communicative practices and showed their continuing relevance in the preservation and expression of Maranao traditions. Ibrahim (2021) subsequently examined the visual grammar of tarpaulins in Marawi City and demonstrated how photographs and texts can represent contemporary Meranaw values. Her study identified Kambangsa as one of the five value concepts within Kambilangatao and showed that tarpaulin representations can communicate ideals concerning family heritage, achievement, confidence, religiosity, honor, and leadership. These studies, however, leave a more specific analytical space for the present research. Maruhom's work approaches tarpaulins primarily as cultural communication, while Ibrahim's (2021) study examines the broader visual grammar of Kambilangatao. Neither study, as framed in those works, concentrates specifically on how Kambangsa is semiotically mobilized as a political advertising strategy in the campaign tarpaulins of Meranaw local politicians. Likewise, Pantao's (2018) work examines bangsa ideology through Meranaw kakawing or wedding speeches rather than through multimodal electoral texts. The research gap, therefore, lies at the intersection of three areas: the semiotic organization of political tarpaulins, the cultural meaning of Kambangsa, and the strategic presentation of lineage and relational identity during local elections.

The present study addresses this gap by revisiting a corpus of campaign tarpaulins used by local politicians in Lanao del Sur during the May 2019 election. It does not attempt to measure whether a tarpaulin caused a particular electoral result. Instead, it examines how meaning is produced through the interaction of linguistic and visual resources and how these resources construct Kambangsa as a cultural and political signification. The analysis is therefore concerned with what the tarpaulins say, what they show, how the elements are arranged, and what cultural and political meanings become available through those arrangements.

The study is guided by a social-semiotic perspective of visual communication, particularly the work of Kress and van Leeuwen, supplemented by Barthes' distinction between denotation, connotation, and myth and Peirce's classification of signs. These approaches allow the tarpaulins to be read not simply as pictures of candidates but as multimodal texts in which signs work together to construct identity, authority, belonging, and political appeal. This study examines how Kambangsa is constructed and communicated through the political tarpaulins of Meranaw local politicians. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1.What semiotic elements are employed in the political tarpaulins of Meranaw local politicians in terms of linguistic signs; visual signs; colors and symbols; and images, gestures, and other representational elements?

2.How do these semiotic elements construct and communicate the concept of Kambangsa in the political tarpaulins of Meranaw local politicians?

The study is limited to the interpretation and analysis of campaign tarpaulins used by local politicians in Lanao del Sur during the May 2019 election. The original manuscript reports that a large number of tarpaulins were gathered and that ten were selected for analysis because of time limitations. The revised study retains this corpus of ten tarpaulins and the original visual materials.

The study is qualitative and interpretive. Its unit of analysis is the tarpaulin as a multimodal text. It focuses on the signs that can be directly observed in the corpus and on culturally informed interpretations of those signs. It does not claim to represent every Meranaw political campaign, every municipality in Lanao del Sur, or all contemporary understandings of Kambangsa. It also does not establish a causal relationship between the use of Kambangsa-related signs and actual voting behavior or electoral victory.

Because some family relationships represented visually in the tarpaulins are not explicitly documented in the original corpus, interpretations of kinship are presented cautiously. Where a relationship is explicitly written, such as "son of" or "son-in-law of," it is treated as direct textual evidence. Where a relationship is inferred from a background portrait or a family name, the interpretation is identified as a semiotic reading rather than as a verified biographical fact.

1.1 Theoretical and Analytical Framework

The principal framework of the study is the social-semiotic approach to visual communication associated with Kress and van Leeuwen. This approach treats visual texts as organized systems of meaning rather than as neutral collections of images. The placement, size, salience, framing, color, gaze, posture, and relationship among visual elements can contribute to the social meanings produced by an image. This framework is especially appropriate for political tarpaulins because the candidate's portrait does not operate independently from the candidate's name, family names, titles, campaign number, logos, slogans, colors, and other visual resources. A large portrait may establish salience; a faded portrait in the background may establish association; a bold surname may foreground lineage; and a title such as Sultan may invoke an existing social hierarchy. The meaning of the whole tarpaulin therefore emerges from the interaction of its parts.

Furthermore, Barthes' semiotic distinction between denotation and connotation provides a second layer of interpretation. At the denotative level, a tarpaulin may simply show a candidate, a number, a name, a family portrait, or a campaign slogan. At the connotative level, however, the same elements can suggest authority, prestige, belonging, continuity, respect, or social connection. At the level of myth, repeated associations can naturalize a cultural idea—for example, the idea that a candidate's membership in

a prominent lineage is evidence of political worthiness or legitimacy. Also, Peirce's distinction among icon, index, and symbol is used as a supporting analytical device. Candidate and family portraits are primarily iconic because they visually resemble the persons represented. A written statement identifying someone as a son, son-in-law, Sultan, or member of a particular family can function indexically by pointing to a social or genealogical relationship. Names, numbers, logos, and conventional colors operate symbolically because their meanings depend substantially on socially shared conventions. These categories are not treated as rigid compartments; a single sign can participate in more than one mode of signification.

Moreover, the semiotic readings are situated within the cultural context of Meranaw kinship, lineage, and traditional political organization. The study draws attention to the enduring relevance of bangsa, family ties, traditional titles, and kinship obligations in political organization. Pantao (2018) likewise shows how bangsa functions as an ideological concept in Meranaw ceremonial discourse. The traditional socio-political background is therefore used not as a separate predictive theory but as a cultural-contextual lens for interpreting why lineage, titles, family names, and relational references may carry political meaning. Taken together, the framework follows this analytical sequence: the tarpaulin is treated as a multimodal sign system; its linguistic, visual, color-symbolic, and representational resources are identified; their denotative and connotative meanings are examined; and these meanings are interpreted in relation to Kambangsa and its implications for identity, kinship, authority, legitimacy, and political appeal.

1.2 Results and Discussion

The political tarpaulins examined in this study demonstrate that Meranaw political advertising is a multimodal meaning-making practice in which linguistic and visual resources operate simultaneously. The candidate is not represented through words alone; rather, names, surnames, political titles, kinship references, photographs, typography, colors, ballot numbers, organizational logos, clothing, facial expressions, gaze, posture, and spatial arrangement are orchestrated to construct a recognizable political identity. This observation is consistent with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social-semiotic theory of visual communication, which argues that visual resources, like language, perform representational, interpersonal, and compositional functions. Thus, a political tarpaulin should not be treated simply as a printed advertisement but as a visual text whose individual elements participate in the production of social meaning.

The local relevance of this approach is demonstrated by Ibrahim's (2021) study, Kambilangatao: A Study of the Visual Grammar of Tarpaulins, which specifically examined Meranaw tarpaulins through Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar. Ibrahim (2021) analyzed naming, titles, colors, font size, headings, compliment lines, photographs, angles, physical appearance, clothing, and accessories, demonstrating that these elements collectively represent contemporary Meranaw values. Her findings identified kambangsa, or pride in family lineage, as one of the five values constituting Kambilangatao. This is particularly significant to the present study because the current corpus moves beyond the general representation of Meranaw values and examines how lineage is deployed specifically within electoral political advertising.

Maruhom's (2015) ethnographic study likewise establishes that Maranao tarpaulins and bidangan are culturally embedded communication practices. Her study found that these materials are used to express recognition, support, solidarity, family relationships, and social affiliation. Pantao (2018, 2021) provides further cultural grounding by demonstrating that bangsa or lineage is embedded in Meranaw sociocultural, political, and religious ideology. Her analysis of kakawing speeches shows that marriage is conceptualized not merely as a union between two individuals but as a union involving clans and family lineage. Thus, the prominence of lineage-related signs in political tarpaulins can be interpreted within a broader Meranaw cultural system in which individual identity is relationally constructed.

A. Linguistic Signs

Linguistic signs constitute one of the most prominent resources in the corpus. These include candidate names, surnames, political positions, kinship descriptions, campaign imperatives, ballot numbers, geographical identifiers, political team names, and organizational labels. Their importance becomes particularly evident when considered through Halliday's (1978) systemic-functional perspective, which views language as a social semiotic system capable of simultaneously representing experience, establishing interpersonal relationships, and organizing information. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) extend this logic to visual communication, arguing that linguistic and visual modes can work together to realize similar communicative functions.

In the present corpus, linguistic signs do not merely answer the informational question of 'Who is the candidate?' They also answer questions such as 'Whose family does the candidate belong to?', 'What political position does the candidate seek?', 'What political group supports the candidate?', and 'What relationships should the voter associate with the candidate?' This is particularly visible in the use of surnames. In several tarpaulins, the surname receives greater typographic prominence than the candidate's given name. The surname consequently becomes more than a personal identifier; it becomes a cultural sign of lineage.

This finding closely corresponds with Ibrahim's (2021) observation that textual components of Meranaw tarpaulins—including names, titles, font size, headings, and compliment lines—contribute to cultural meanings. Pantao's (2021) analysis is also relevant because her study found that Meranaw language contains honorifics, royal titles, compliments, repetition, metaphor, and other linguistic resources through which sociocultural and political values are articulated. The political tarpaulins similarly use language not simply to transmit information but to construct social position and relational identity.

B. Visual Signs

Visual signs in the corpus include candidate portraits, additional portraits, size, placement, framing, typography, spatial arrangement, facial orientation, and foreground-background relationships. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) concepts of information value, salience, and framing are particularly useful. Information value concerns the meaning associated with placement; salience concerns the degree to which an element attracts attention; and framing concerns the degree to which elements are visually connected or separated.

Ibrahim (2021) applied visual grammar to Meranaw tarpaulins and examined font size, placement, photographs, angles, physical appearance, clothing, and accessories as meaning-making resources. Imbong (2022), in a Philippine study of political campaign posters from the 2019 senatorial elections, likewise used Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar to show how representational, interactive, and compositional resources construct candidate identities.

Thus, the present analysis treats each tarpaulin as a composed visual argument. The question is not merely what is shown but why a particular person is larger, why another figure is placed behind the candidate, why a surname is enlarged, why particular colors are used, or why a microphone or formal clothing is included.

C. Colors and Symbols

Color constitutes an important semiotic resource throughout the corpus. Green, yellow, red, orange, black, and white appear repeatedly, often in combinations designed to create strong contrast. The colors help establish salience and organize the viewer's attention. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) caution against treating visual elements as having universal meanings detached from context. Consequently, colors should not automatically be assigned fixed meanings; their meaning emerges from their relationship with typography, photographs, symbols, and cultural context. Baguinat's (2025) Philippine study of festival tarpaulins used Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar to examine how color, imagery, text, vectors, information value, salience, and framing work together to produce meaning. Although Baguinat's study concerned festival rather than political tarpaulins, it demonstrates the usefulness of treating Philippine tarpaulins as multimodal texts rather than as simple graphic materials.

The political tarpaulins also use ballot numbers, political logos, party or team identifiers, and institutional symbols. These function as conventional signs. A ballot number is not inherently political; it becomes meaningful because the electoral system assigns it a particular function. Similarly, a political logo becomes meaningful because viewers recognize it as representing an organization or political alliance.

D. Images, Gestures, and Other Representational Elements

The photographs in the corpus are particularly important because they construct the political persona of the candidate. Most candidates are represented through carefully composed portraits characterized by frontal or near-frontal orientation, smiling or composed facial expressions, formal clothing, and controlled bodily presentation. These choices create meanings of confidence, respectability, accessibility, and readiness for public office.

This finding is directly comparable to Ibrahim's (2021) analysis, which examined photographs through narrative, angle, physical appearance, clothing, and accessories. Ibrahim found that the visual grammar of Meranaw tarpaulins communicates values such as confidence, honor, achievement, religiosity, and leadership.

The photographs can also be understood using Peirce's (1931–1958) distinction among icon, index, and symbol. A candidate's portrait is iconic because it resembles the person represented. A microphone may function indexically because it points to public speaking. A political logo or ballot number functions primarily symbolically because its meaning depends upon socially established conventions.

Figure 1. Aldine Alonto Macarambon campaign tarpaulin.



The first tarpaulin presents AAM as the principal visual participant. His portrait occupies the foreground and is substantially larger and sharper than the second male figure positioned behind him. The compositional hierarchy establishes AAM as the candidate and therefore the primary participant in the political message. In Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) terms, his larger scale and foreground placement contribute to salience. The second figure, although visually faded and subordinate, remains sufficiently prominent to be recognized. The composition consequently creates a two-level identity structure: the candidate as the immediate political subject and the background figure as an associated social reference.

The linguistic composition reinforces this visual hierarchy. The candidate's name, 'A***E A***O M******N,' occupies a substantial portion of the lower-middle section, while 'BOARD MEMBER' identifies the political position and '2nd District, Lanao del Sur' provides geographical and electoral context. The surname M*****n is especially prominent because it is presented in large red lettering. From a Barthesian perspective, the denotative meaning is the candidate's name; its connotative meaning may extend toward lineage, social belonging, and family recognition. The large surname therefore works simultaneously as an identification device and a cultural sign. This is consistent with Ibrahim's (2021) observation that naming and typographic emphasis in Meranaw tarpaulins participate in cultural identity. The most significant feature of Figure 1 is the interaction between portraiture and lineage. The foreground photograph establishes the individual candidate, while the background portrait creates an associative relationship between the candidate and another person. The study does not need to assert an unverified biological relationship; semiotically, what can be established is that the composition invites viewers to read them together. Within Pantao's (2018, 2021) discussion of bangsa, the image can therefore be read as part of a relational logic in which individual identity gains meaning through affiliation with a wider social and familial network.

Figure 2. KDR Campaign Tarpaulin



Figure 2 provides one of the strongest examples of linguistic construction of lineage. Unlike Figure 1, where the relationship must be inferred visually, this tarpaulin explicitly identifies the candidate through kinship expressions, including 'Son of Sultan...' and 'Son-in-Law of...'. The linguistic sign makes genealogy part of the political advertisement itself. The candidate's identity is not presented as independent from other individuals; instead, his political persona is constructed through relationships with persons identified through status and kinship. The tarpaulin thus transforms family information into campaign information. The visual arrangement reinforces the linguistic message. KDR's portrait appears in the foreground, while an older male figure appears behind him. The older figure is visually subordinate but unmistakably present. The visual and linguistic relationships therefore operate together. In Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) terms, the foreground candidate receives greater salience, but the background figure remains an important representational participant. The composition creates a hierarchy of political identity: Khomeiny is the contemporary candidate, while the person behind him supplies relational and status-based context.

Pantao's (2021) study is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that bangsa in Meranaw discourse is connected to family, marriage, social status, and preservation of lineage. Her research shows that marriage is understood as involving clans rather than simply two individuals. In Figure 2, the explicit reference to being a son and son-in-law similarly extends political identity beyond the individual. The present analysis strengthens that observation by showing that the strategy operates through two mutually reinforcing modes—visual association and linguistic genealogy.

Figure 3. OA Campaign Tarpaulin



Figure 3 employs another form of relational portraiture. The candidate, OA, appears prominently in the foreground, while another male figure is placed behind him. The composition establishes a visual relationship between the two men even before the accompanying words are read. The background figure functions as an additional participant in the visual narrative, although the candidate remains the most salient figure. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) concept of salience is useful because the designer manipulates size, sharpness, and position to ensure that O** remains the central political participant.

The linguistic elements identify O** as a candidate for councilor, while additional text associates him with a several families and locality. The tarpaulin therefore combines individual political identity with collective affiliation through a number of family names. The candidate's identity is simultaneously constructed through the self, the family which served as social network, and the political organization. The political message does not present the candidate as an isolated individual competing for office but as a person located within several overlapping family names.

The repeated use of this composition across Figures 1–3 strengthens its analytical significance. Maruhom (2015) found that Maranao tarpaulins function as public expressions of support, recognition, solidarity, and family affiliation. In the political context,

this communicative practice acquires an electoral dimension. Ibrahim (2021) likewise demonstrates that photographs in Meranaw tarpaulins are meaningful cultural resources rather than merely decorative images.

Figure 4. BD Campaign Tarpaulin



Similarly, Figure 3 contributes to a recurring visual pattern in which political identity is relationally constructed through the simultaneous presentation of more than one person. It represents a major shift from portrait-based lineage to text-based lineage. Instead of relying on a second family-associated portrait, the tarpaulin presents an extensive series of family names: P****n, M***r, A***-M****g, M***m, T***r, M***-M**o, M******o, D*******n, O****n, and B****n. The quantity of names occupies considerable visual space. This is significant because the list is not necessary for basic electoral identification. The candidate could have been advertised through his name and office alone. The decision to display numerous family names therefore constitutes a deliberate semiotic choice. At the denotative level, the names identify familial or lineage affiliations. At the connotative level, their accumulation can communicate breadth of social connection, ancestry, belonging, and collective identity. In effect, the tarpaulin produces a form of visual genealogy. Rather than showing a family tree graphically, it presents genealogy linguistically. This is consistent with Pantao's (2018) finding that bangsa constitutes a central ideological concept in Meranaw culture and that lineage is connected with sociocultural and political values. The typography strengthens this interpretation. The list is placed prominently enough to be read as part of the candidate's identity rather than as supplementary information. Ibrahim (2021) demonstrated that size, style, color, and placement of text in Meranaw tarpaulins contribute directly to meaning. Read through salience and information value, the accumulation of names functions as a semiotic resource of collective identity.

Figure 5. ZM Campaign Tarpaulin



Figure 5 employs a similar lineage-oriented strategy but introduces an important dimension of gender and cultural representation. ZM occupies the central visual position, while a sequence of family names appears as part of the textual design. The visual organization therefore combines the candidate's individual identity with a broader genealogical identity. Her political office—city councilor—is explicitly identified, establishing the modern electoral dimension of the message.

The candidate's vibrant colored hijab is one of the most visually salient representational features. The hijab does not merely function as clothing; it becomes part of the cultural and religious positioning of the candidate. At the level of visual grammar, it contributes to the construction of the represented participant's identity. At the cultural level, it situates the candidate within a recognizable Muslim/Meranaw visual environment. Ibrahim (2021) specifically emphasized clothing and accessories as meaningful resources in Meranaw tarpaulin representation, demonstrating that physical appearance contributes to cultural values and identity. The combination of female portrait, hijab, family names, and political office produces a layered representation. The candidate is simultaneously constructed as a woman, a Muslim/Meranaw cultural subject, a member of a lineage, and a political leader. The tarpaulin demonstrates that political leadership can be visually represented without separating the candidate from her cultural

identity. This reinforces Ibrahim's (2021) finding that contemporary Meranaw identity in tarpaulin discourse can incorporate achievement, confidence, honor, religiosity, and leadership alongside kambangsa.

Figure 6. FM Campaign Tarpaulin.

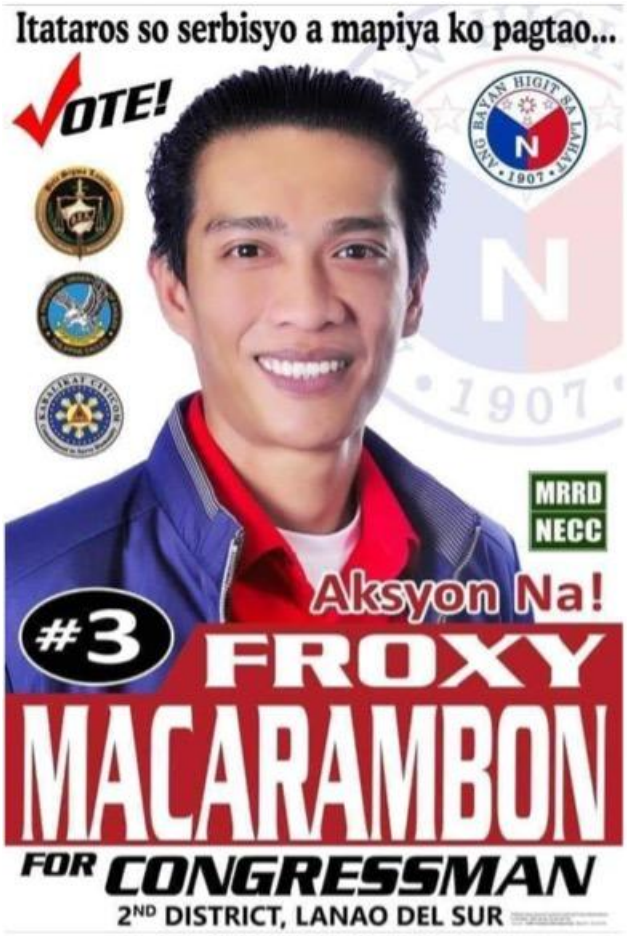


Figure 6 demonstrates a more compressed form of lineage representation. The tarpaulin does not present an extensive list of family names or a prominently displayed second portrait. Instead, the surname 'M******N' is displayed in exceptionally large typography. The surname visually dominates the lower part of the composition and is substantially more salient than the given name 'F***y.' This suggests that the family name itself is being used as a principal identity marker.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) concept of salience is particularly applicable here. Salience is created through size, contrast, position, and typographic emphasis. The designer has made a clear compositional decision: the viewer should notice M******N immediately. The surname therefore becomes more than an administrative identifier. It functions as a culturally loaded sign capable of evoking a wider social network for viewers who recognize its significance.

This strategy demonstrates that Kambangsa does not always need to be represented through numerous relatives. It can be semiotically condensed into one prominent surname. Ibrahim (2021) found that kambangsa constitutes pride in family lineage within the broader visual grammar of Meranaw tarpaulins. The present corpus extends that observation into political advertising: when a family name is sufficiently recognizable, the surname itself can function as a shorthand representation of lineage. The political candidate therefore acquires a relational identity without requiring an explicit genealogical explanation.

Figure 7. HL Campaign Tarpaulin

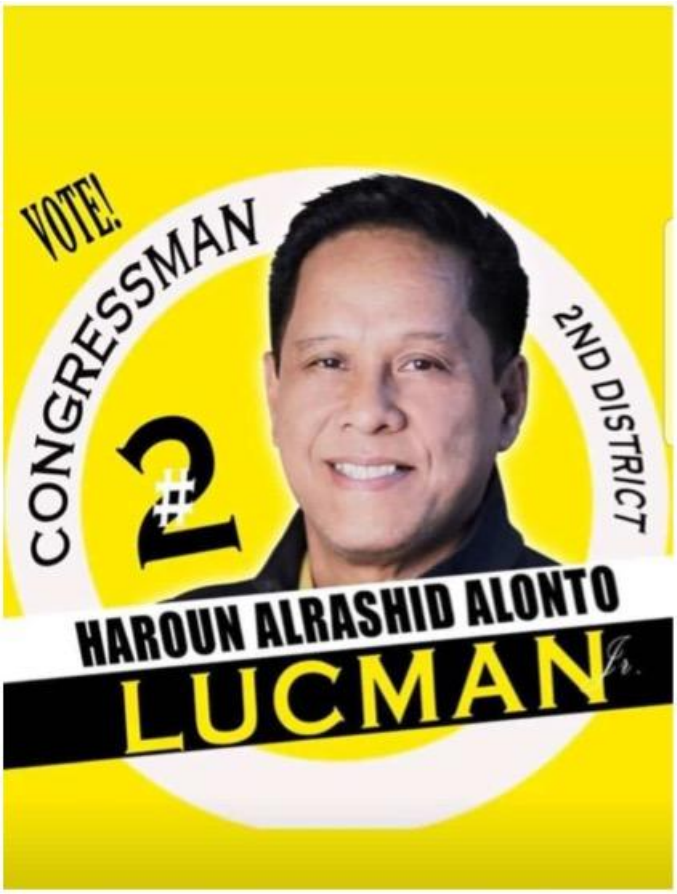


Figure 7 similarly foregrounds the surname 'L****N,' which occupies a highly prominent position beneath the candidate's portrait. The candidate's full name is provided, but the surname is typographically enlarged and visually isolated. This arrangement directs the viewer's attention toward the family name and gives it greater compositional weight than the given name.

From a visual-semiotic perspective, the surname functions as a high-salience linguistic sign. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that compositional emphasis guides viewers toward particular elements considered important by the sign-maker. The enlarged L****N consequently suggests that the family identity has communicative importance beyond mere identification. The design tells the viewer, visually, that the surname is something worth remembering. This becomes particularly meaningful when placed beside Pantao's (2018, 2021) discussion of bangsa. Pantao's research demonstrates that lineage is not merely a genealogical category but a component of Meranaw ideology and identity. Figure 7 provides a political-visual manifestation of this principle. The candidate is presented as an individual seeking congressional office, but his surname simultaneously positions him within a lineage. The family name becomes a compressed cultural sign linking individual political identity to collective ancestry.

Figure 8. AS Campaign Tarpaulin



Figure 8 differs from most of the other tarpaulins because the candidate is shown holding a microphone. This seemingly minor representational choice has important semiotic implications. Most other candidates are presented through static portraits, whereas AS is depicted in the process of speaking. The microphone therefore introduces a narrative element into an otherwise largely conceptual corpus.

Peirce's (1931–1958) concept of the index is particularly useful here. The microphone has a functional relationship with speaking; it points toward the activity of public address. It can consequently operate as an index of public speaking and political participation.

The image constructs the candidate not simply as someone who wants to occupy office but as someone already positioned within a public communicative role. The image also connects with Pantao's (2021) work on Meranaw katharo sa lalag or public speech. Her research demonstrates the cultural significance of rhetoric, honorifics, compliments, political values, and public speaking within Meranaw discourse. The microphone in Figure 8 can therefore be read as a visual sign of public voice. The candidate is represented as someone who speaks to and for the public, demonstrating that political representation can be constructed through an action or object and not merely through facial appearance or naming.

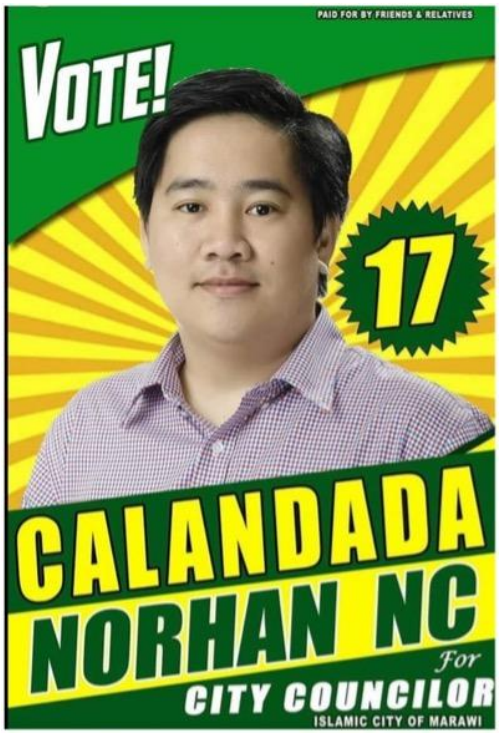


Figure 9. CN Campaign Tarpaulin

Figure 9 presents CN against a dynamic green-and-yellow background characterized by radiating lines. The rays converge around the candidate and create an energetic visual field. The candidate's portrait is positioned centrally, while the large surname occupies the lower portion of the composition. The result is a strong hierarchy in which the candidate's face and name become the principal points of attention.

The radiating lines can be interpreted through Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) concept of vectors and compositional directionality. Although the lines are not narrative vectors involving human action, they guide the viewer's visual movement toward the candidate. They consequently increase salience. The design creates an impression of movement and energy even though the candidate himself is presented in a static portrait.

The most important linguistic feature remains the prominence of 'C*****A N****N NC.' The surname is incorporated into the dominant upper section and is visually differentiated through large typography. The combination of portrait, surname, ballot number, and radiating background produces a strong identity-centered composition. This is consistent with Imbong's (2022) Philippine study of political campaign posters, which found that the relationship among visual elements is crucial in constructing favorable political identities. Figure 9 demonstrates that political persuasion can be built through the orchestration of multiple semiotic decisions rather than through a single slogan.

Figure 10. LF Campaign Tarpaulin.



Figure 10 uses a relatively compact composition in which the candidate's portrait is accompanied by political symbols and a highly prominent surname, 'L****O.' The surname occupies a visually dominant position in the lower portion of the tarpaulin, making it one of the first elements likely to be noticed after the candidate's face.

The design demonstrates again that surname prominence functions as a recurring linguistic strategy. The candidate is identified through her given name and surname, but the typographic treatment gives particular emphasis to the family name. This creates a visual distinction between individual identity and lineage identity. The candidate is therefore not merely L***o F******h; the graphic design invites the viewer to recognize her through the family name L****o.

This strategy supports the broader pattern observed across Figures 6–10. Where Figures 1–5 use additional persons, kinship statements, or multiple family names to make relational identity visible, Figures 6–10 increasingly compress lineage into the surname itself. Ibrahim (2021) provides a relevant precedent because her study identified kambangsa as pride in family lineage and demonstrated that tarpaulins make Meranaw cultural values visible through the interaction of text and image. Figure 10 thus illustrates a minimalist but culturally dense form of Kambangsa: the family name becomes the principal visual carrier of lineage.

The analysis demonstrates that the ten tarpaulins employ four major groups of semiotic resources: linguistic, visual, chromatic/symbolic, and representational. What is particularly significant is that these resources do not operate independently. Their meanings emerge from their interaction. A surname by itself may simply identify a person; a surname enlarged in bold type becomes a salient identity marker; a surname accompanied by a second portrait becomes a relational sign; and a surname accompanied by an explicit 'son of' or 'son-in-law of' statement becomes a genealogical political credential. This multimodal interaction corresponds closely with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) position that meaning is produced through the orchestration of multiple semiotic modes. It also parallels Ibrahim's (2021) findings that Meranaw tarpaulins combine language, photographs, typography, colors, clothing, and placement to communicate contemporary cultural values. Baguinat (2025) similarly demonstrated in a Philippine tarpaulin context that meaning emerges from the interaction of text, color, imagery, vectors, salience, information value, and framing.

The findings further resonate with Maruhom's (2015) observation that Maranao tarpaulins function as public media for recognition, support, family solidarity, and social connection. In the present political corpus, these established communicative practices are transferred into an electoral context. The family and social network is no longer represented only to celebrate an achievement or recognize an individual; it becomes part of the public presentation of a political candidate.

Most importantly, Pantao's (2018, 2021) research provides the cultural foundation for interpreting this pattern. Her studies demonstrate that bangsa is deeply embedded in Meranaw sociocultural and political ideology and that lineage is implicated in relationships, family continuity, social status, and political values. The present study therefore finds that the repeated appearance of surnames, family portraits, kinship descriptions, and relational references is not an accidental feature of graphic design. Within the cultural context of the corpus, these elements constitute semiotic resources through which lineage is made publicly visible. Hence, Meranaw local politicians employ a complex multimodal repertoire of linguistic, visual, chromatic, symbolic, and representational signs. Linguistic signs identify candidates while simultaneously foregrounding lineage, kinship, political position, and affiliation. Visual signs establish hierarchy and salience through portraits, size, placement, and framing. Colors and symbols organize attention, establish contrast, and communicate political affiliation and electoral information. Photographs, clothing, gaze, facial expression, posture, and objects such as microphones construct particular images of the candidate as respectable, approachable, culturally grounded, authoritative, and publicly engaged. The most important finding, however, is that lineage itself becomes a semiotic resource. It can be expanded through multiple portraits and family names or compressed into one visually dominant surname.

How do these semiotic elements construct and communicate the concept of Kambangsa in the political tarpaulins of Meranaw local politicians?

The analysis of the ten political tarpaulins reveals that Kambangsa is constructed not through a single semiotic element but through the deliberate interaction of linguistic, visual, typographic, spatial, and representational resources. The tarpaulins do not simply identify candidates as individuals seeking public office. Rather, they repeatedly position the candidate within a wider network of family, lineage, social affiliation, cultural identity, and political belonging. In this sense, the political tarpaulin becomes a multimodal text through which an individual political identity is connected to a collective identity. This finding is consistent with Pantao's (2018) treatment of bangsa or lineage as an important ideological concept in Meranaw discourse. In her study, Pantao demonstrated that sociocultural, religious, and political values converge in the concept of bangsa, which contributes to the transmission of Meranaw identity and ideology.

The present corpus extends this understanding from verbal discourse to political visual discourse. The ten tarpaulins demonstrate that Kambangsa can be communicated visually and materially through portraits, family names, surnames, kinship expressions, typography, clothing, spatial positioning, and the relationship between foreground and background figures. The original corpus likewise identifies lineage, family names, background portraits, and the highlighting of surnames as recurring strategies through which Kambangsa is represented. More importantly, the analysis suggests that Kambangsa operates on a continuum: it may be represented explicitly, through statements of kinship and lists of family names, or implicitly, through the strategic prominence of a recognizable surname or through visual association with another socially significant person.

Four major ways emerge from the corpus.

2. From Individual to Relational Identity

The first and perhaps most fundamental way the tarpaulins communicate Kambangsa is by situating the candidate within relationships rather than presenting the candidate as an isolated political individual. The candidate's identity is constructed through association with family members, prominent persons, ancestors, surnames, and other members of a broader social network. Thus, the semiotic message is not simply "This is the person running for office" but, more significantly, "This person belongs to a particular lineage and social network." This is particularly evident in Figure 1, where the candidate is positioned prominently in the foreground while another male figure appears behind him. The foreground-background arrangement creates a visual relationship between the two represented participants. The candidate receives greater salience because of his size, position, and clarity, while the background figure remains sufficiently visible to establish an association. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain that visual composition produces meaning through information value, salience, and framing.

In the context of Kambangsa, therefore, the background portrait in Figure 1 can be interpreted as more than a decorative addition. It provides a visual cue that the candidate's identity should be understood relationally. Importantly, the semiotic interpretation need not make an unverified claim regarding the precise biological relationship between the two individuals. What can be established from the composition is that the designer deliberately places the two figures within the same visual field. The candidate is consequently presented together with a socially meaningful person rather than completely by himself.

This strategy becomes considerably more explicit in Figure 2. Unlike Figure 1, where the relationship is communicated principally through visual composition, Figure 2 combines image and language to directly articulate kinship. The expressions "Son of Sultan..." and "Son-in-Law of..." explicitly define the candidate through his relationships with other persons. The candidate's political identity is consequently accompanied by a genealogical and relational identity. The language does not merely provide biographical information; it becomes part of the political appeal because it directs the viewer's attention toward the candidate's familial and social connections.

The significance of Figure 2 becomes clearer when viewed alongside Pantao's (2018) conceptualization of bangsa. Her study found that Meranaw ideological meanings associated with bangsa emerge from sociocultural and political relationships and that language serves as a transmitter of identity and ideology. In Figure 2, this ideological function of language is transferred into political advertising. The phrases identifying the candidate as someone's son and son-in-law make relationality part of the candidate's public identity.

Figure 3 reinforces the same process through visual association. Like Figure 1, it gives importance to a background figure, allowing the candidate's identity to be read alongside another socially meaningful person. The repetition of this visual strategy across the corpus is significant because it demonstrates that the use of another person's image is not an isolated design choice. It forms part of a broader semiotic pattern in which political identity is relationally constructed.

This relational construction is culturally significant because Kambangsa, as represented in the corpus, is connected to broader Meranaw values involving close family ties, lineage, unity, strengthening relationships, and reverence for elders. The present study identifies kapangedeg sa poonan or lineage alongside other values associated with Kambangsa. Thus, the political tarpaulin translates a cultural principle into a visual-political message: the individual is meaningful because the individual belongs to a larger relational structure.

3. Genealogy as Political Capital

A second major way through which Kambangsa is communicated is through the visualization of genealogy and the deliberate foregrounding of family names. While Figures 1–3 primarily use portraits and explicit kinship relationships, Figures 4 and 5 make lineage visible through the accumulation and display of family names.

Figure 4 is particularly significant because it presents an unusually extensive sequence of family names. The original corpus identifies ten family names in the tarpaulin. Rather than functioning merely as a conventional personal name, this accumulation creates what may be described as a textual genealogy. The names occupy substantial visual space and make the candidate's lineage materially visible within the advertisement.

The semiotic importance of Figure 4 lies in the fact that the candidate's identity is effectively expanded beyond a single name. Each additional family name potentially represents another branch of social affiliation. The list therefore operates through accumulation: more names produce a larger visible network of belonging. This can be interpreted in relation to the Meranaw cultural concept of Kambangsa, in which lineage is not merely a genealogical fact but a culturally meaningful basis for identity and relationship. Pantao (2018) argues that bangsa functions as an important ideological concept within Meranaw discourse, emerging from social, political, and cultural values.

The significance of Figure 4 is further strengthened by the proverb included in the original manuscript's introduction, which conveys the idea that scattered dust can form a mountain when gathered together. Within the researcher's framing, this reflects the importance of numbers and collective strength in Meranaw social understanding. Although the proverb itself should not be treated as empirical proof of electoral behavior, it provides a culturally relevant interpretive lens for understanding why the accumulation of names in Figure 4 is meaningful.

Figure 5 demonstrates a similar strategy but adds another important layer of representation. The tarpaulin presents the candidate together with a sequence of family names while simultaneously identifying her political position. The result is a multimodal combination of personal identity, lineage, gendered representation, cultural identity, and political office. The candidate is not stripped of her cultural identity in order to become a political figure. Instead, the political identity is constructed alongside her cultural and familial identity. The red hijab in Figure 5 is especially significant because it works together with the textual presentation of lineage. At the denotative level, it is an item of clothing. At the connotative level, however, it contributes to the representation of the candidate as situated within a recognizable Muslim and Meranaw cultural context. Ibrahim (2021), in his study of Meranaw tarpaulins, found that clothing, physical appearance, photographs, names, titles, and other visual elements participate in the construction of contemporary Meranaw identity. His study identified kambangsa specifically as pride in family lineage.

Thus, Figure 5 demonstrates that Kambangsa does not operate independently from other dimensions of identity. Lineage interacts with religious and cultural representation. The candidate is simultaneously presented as an individual political actor and as a member of a family and cultural community.

The two figures therefore demonstrate that genealogy itself can become a political semiotic resource. Instead of remaining invisible in the candidate's personal history, lineage is transformed into text, arranged on the tarpaulin, made visually prominent, and consequently made available for public recognition. Kambangsa is therefore communicated by converting familial identity into a publicly readable political identity.

4. Family Name as Visual and Cultural Sign

The third major way through which Kambangsa is communicated is particularly interesting because the strategy becomes more economical. Figures 6, 7, and 8 demonstrate that a politician does not necessarily need to display numerous family names or additional portraits to communicate lineage. Instead, the surname itself can function as a condensed representation of a much larger social identity. This is clearly demonstrated in Figure 6, where "M********N" receives exceptional typographic prominence. The surname is substantially more visually salient than the candidate's given name. The designer therefore establishes a hierarchy between the individual first name and the family name. At the denotative level, Macarambon identifies the candidate's family name. At the connotative level, however, its large-scale presentation invites viewers who recognize the name to associate it with a wider familial and social network.

This is precisely where Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) concept of salience becomes particularly useful. Visual elements become salient through factors such as size, placement, contrast, and prominence. In Figure 6, the enlarged surname is not simply readable; it is deliberately made difficult to overlook. The typography effectively tells the viewer what part of the candidate's identity deserves immediate attention. The family name consequently becomes a semiotic shortcut to lineage.

The same pattern occurs in Figure 7, where "L****N" receives strong visual prominence beneath the candidate's portrait. The full name remains available, but the surname is given particular typographic emphasis. The design therefore directs the viewer beyond the candidate's personal identity toward the family identity embedded in the surname. The corpus specifically identifies Figures 6–8 as using a more minimalist approach: rather than presenting multiple family members or extensive genealogical lists, the advertisements emphasize the candidate's family name.

Figure 8, featuring S******i, completes this pattern. Here again, the reduction of additional family references does not mean that Kambangsa has disappeared. Instead, the surname and overall name presentation become the condensed carrier of lineage. The corpus notes that Figures 6–8 demonstrate an economical strategy in which the family name functions as a condensed sign of a lineage that could otherwise have been represented through multiple portraits or multiple names. This is an important finding because it demonstrates that Kambangsa can operate at different levels of semiotic explicitness. In Figure 4, lineage is made explicit through the accumulation of numerous names. In Figures 6–8, lineage is compressed into one highly recognizable family name. The communicative principle, however, remains similar: the candidate's identity is connected to a larger collective identity.

The surname therefore functions almost metonymically. A single name can stand for a broader family network in the same way that a symbol can represent a more complex concept. This interpretation is consistent with Ibrahim's (2021) finding that kambangsa is represented in Meranaw tarpaulin discourse as pride in family lineage. In the present political corpus, that pride is not simply stated; it is designed into the visual hierarchy of the advertisement.

This also explains why the minimalist design of Figures 6–8 should not be interpreted as culturally empty. On the contrary, minimalism may increase the semiotic concentration of the message. When the designer removes additional portraits and family names, the remaining surname becomes even more important. The message is effectively condensed from "these are the people connected to me" into "this family name itself carries the connection."

Consequently, Figures 6–8 provide one of the strongest demonstrations that Kambangsa can be communicated through semiotic compression. The broader lineage does not need to be visually enumerated if the family name itself is assumed to carry cultural and social recognition.

5. Lineage, Political Legitimacy and Public Identity

The fourth and most comprehensive way through which Kambangsa is communicated is through the integration of family identity with political identity. The tarpaulins do not merely celebrate lineage. They place lineage within an electoral environment in which the candidate is also presented as a public official, aspiring leader, community representative, or political actor. This integration can already be observed in Figures 1–5, where portraits and family references occur alongside political positions, campaign information, and other electoral identifiers. The candidate's family identity is therefore not presented as an isolated cultural feature. It is embedded within the political message. The candidate is effectively represented as both a member of a lineage and a person seeking public authority. This dual construction is particularly evident in Figure 5, where the candidate's political office appears alongside her family names and culturally significant visual representation. The result is a layered identity: she is an individual, a member of a lineage, a woman situated within a particular cultural and religious context, and a political actor. Ibrahim's (2021) study is useful here because it demonstrates that Meranaw tarpaulins construct a contemporary ideal person through several intersecting values, including achievement, confidence, religiosity, honor, leadership, and kambangsa.

The same principle can be observed in Figures 6–8, where family names are placed prominently alongside political presentation. The candidate's surname is not presented as a substitute for political identity but as something that strengthens and contextualizes it. The political message becomes multilayered: the candidate is qualified to participate in public life, but the candidate also belongs to a recognizable social and familial network. The relationship between cultural identity and political identity becomes particularly important when the tarpaulins are considered as part of the wider Meranaw communication environment. Maruhom (2015) found that Maranao streamers and tarpaulins constitute a cultural communication practice through which traditions, customs, and ways of life are maintained and communicated. Therefore, political tarpaulins should not be regarded simply as temporary advertisements occupying public spaces. They participate in a broader cultural practice in which identity and social relationships are made visible.

Figures 9 and 10 provide an especially revealing final form of this strategy. In these figures, the family name is visually positioned before or made more prominent than the given name. At the denotative level, this is simply a particular arrangement of a person's name. At the connotative level, however, the arrangement gives family identity greater semiotic weight than individual identity. The importance of Figures 9 and 10 lies in their ability to demonstrate that Kambangsa can be encoded not only through what names are included, but also through how names are ordered and visually presented. The ordering itself becomes meaningful. By foregrounding the family name, the tarpaulin symbolically shifts the center of identity from who I am as an individual toward which family or lineage I represent. The name therefore functions as a cultural sign rather than merely an administrative label.

Taken together, Figures 1–10 demonstrate a movement from individuality toward relationality. Figures 1–3 establish relationships through photographs and explicit kinship language. Figures 4–5 make lineage more explicit through the accumulation of family names and the integration of cultural representation. Figures 6–8 condense lineage into prominent surnames. Figures 9–10 further foreground the family name through naming arrangement. The semiotic strategies differ, but they ultimately converge on the same cultural principle: the political candidate is presented as an individual whose identity is inseparable from the lineage and social network to which the individual belongs. This finding is particularly consistent with Pantao's (2018) observation that bangsa functions as a language of Meranaw ideology and identity. It is also consistent with Ibrahim's (2021) identification of kambangsa as pride in family lineage within the visual grammar of Meranaw tarpaulins. What the present study adds is the demonstration that, within political advertising, that cultural value becomes intertwined with the construction of political identity.

Hence, the four patterns identified above demonstrate that Kambangsa in the political tarpaulins is not communicated through a single sign or isolated design feature. It is produced through the cumulative interaction of signs. Figures 1–3 emphasize relational identity through portraits and kinship language; Figures 4–5 visualize genealogy through family names and cultural representation; Figures 6–8 compress lineage into prominent surnames; and Figures 9–10 foreground family identity through name ordering and typographic emphasis.

6. Conclusion

The progression across the figures is particularly significant. The corpus moves from showing relationships, to naming relationships, to condensing relationships into surnames, and finally to making the family name itself a dominant component of political identity. This progression demonstrates that Kambangsa is flexible as a semiotic resource. It does not require a fixed visual format. It can be expressed through a photograph, a phrase, a list of names, a surname, typography, spatial arrangement, or a combination of these resources.

Furthermore, this multimodality is important because a tarpaulin is fundamentally a multimodal text. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that meaning in visual communication emerges through the organization and interaction of multiple elements, including placement, salience, framing, size, and visual relationships. The present findings demonstrate how these principles operate within a specifically Meranaw cultural context. The political meaning of a tarpaulin cannot therefore be separated from its cultural meanings. A surname, for example, is simultaneously a linguistic sign, a typographic element, a personal identifier, and—within the cultural framework of Kambangsa—a potential marker of lineage.

The findings also reinforce Ibrahim's (2021) argument that Meranaw tarpaulins reveal a contemporary identity shaped by both enduring cultural values and modern forms of representation. His study identifies kambangsa as one of the five values contributing to Kambilangatao, or the ideal of becoming a good person, while also showing that contemporary Meranaw tarpaulins communicate achievement, confidence, religiosity, honor, and leadership. The present corpus demonstrates how one of these values—kambangsa—is specifically mobilized within political advertising. The political tarpaulins therefore demonstrate a form of cultural-political multimodality. Family identity and political identity are not presented as competing categories. Rather, they are layered upon one another. The candidate is simultaneously an individual and a member of a lineage; a political aspirant and a representative of a family; a contemporary public figure and a participant in an enduring cultural system.

Also, the findings establish that the concept of Kambangsa is constructed and communicated in the political tarpaulins through four interconnected semiotic processes: relationalization of the candidate, visualization of genealogy, compression of lineage into the surname, and integration of family identity with political identity. Across Figures 1–10, the candidate is rarely presented as a completely autonomous individual. Instead, political identity is repeatedly embedded within relationships, family names, cultural affiliations, and recognizable lineage.

Figures 1–3 construct Kambangsa primarily through visual and linguistic relationships. Background portraits and explicit expressions such as "Son of Sultan..." and "Son-in-Law of..." position the candidate within a network of socially meaningful relationships. Figures 4–5 make lineage more explicit by visually accumulating family names, transforming genealogy into a highly visible component of the political message. Figures 6–8 demonstrate that extensive genealogical representation is not always necessary because a single prominent surname can function as a condensed sign of an entire lineage. Finally, Figures 9–10 show that even the ordering and visual prominence of names can privilege family identity over individual identity.

Thus, Kambangsa in these political tarpaulins may be understood as a semiotic construction of belonging. It is not merely the recognition of one's ancestry, nor is it simply the display of a family name. Within the corpus, Kambangsa becomes a way of positioning the political candidate within a larger collective identity. The candidate's political self is constructed through the family and social relationships that surround the candidate. In this sense, the tarpaulin transforms lineage from a cultural and genealogical attribute into a publicly visible political resource.

At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that the display of lineage necessarily causes voters to support a particular candidate. The corpus can establish how Kambangsa is represented, foregrounded, and made meaningful, but it cannot by itself establish its actual persuasive effect on voters. What the analysis demonstrates is that the political advertisers deliberately employ semiotic resources that make lineage visible and connect it with political identity. The tarpaulins therefore provide evidence of the symbolic importance and political mobilization of Kambangsa rather than direct evidence of electoral causation.

Ultimately, the ten tarpaulins reveal that Kambangsa functions as a bridge between culture and politics, individual identity and collective identity, and traditional lineage and contemporary political communication. The political candidate is not simply saying, "Vote for me." Through the coordinated use of names, portraits, kinship expressions, typography, clothing, spatial organization, and other visual resources, the candidate is also communicating a culturally situated identity: "I belong to this lineage, I am connected to these people, and my identity is rooted in a larger social and familial community." It is precisely this transformation of lineage into a visible and politically meaningful identity that constitutes the central semiotic construction of Kambangsa in the corpus.

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