

## **Local Culture and Environmental Conservation: A Study on the Symbols' Meaning Used in Barong Wae Ceremony in Manggarai, Flores, Indonesia**



**Erna Mena Niman<sup>1</sup>, Yuliana Wahyu<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup>Indonesian Catholic University of Santu Paulus Ruteng

**ABSTRACT:** Forest and water are of benefit for human. However, the forest and water condition in Indonesia is getting worse. Therefore, there should be a wise action to save them. One of the efforts is to see the existence of the local wisdom. This study aims at examining the meaning, and values contained in the Manggarain barong wae cultural ceremony in the context of forest conservation. To reach the objectives in question, interview, observation, and documentation were used to collect data which were subsequently interpreted following symbolic interaction theory. Findings revealed that aside from as a pillar of conservation, barong wae also functioned as a pillar of spiritual life (gratitude and request), a forum for togetherness, a behavior controller, and as a means of self-recovery /repentance. Meanwhile, based on the meaning given, in addition to ecological value, barong wae also has religious and social values. To sum up, barong wae deals with eco-socio- telogy Manggaraian conception toward the existence of nature.

**KEYWORDS:** barong wae; meaning; value; conservation

### **INTRODUCTION**

Forests and water are very important for humans. The existence of forests and water is closely related to socio-economic and ecological aspects. From the socio-economic aspect, forests and the water resources in them have a role in supporting the fulfillment of daily human needs; as development capital both in terms of production of forest products and life support. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2007) explains that "Socio- economically, global forests are very important because many citizens depend on the goods, services, and financial values provided by forests. Ecologically, global forests function as a process of regulating the water cycle, as a soil barrier and as a habitat for various types of plants that produce oxygen and energy for the sustainability of life. In line with this, Ellison (2017) explains that forests are recognized as key regulators in the water, energy and carbon cycles.

Indonesia has experienced significant deforestation. Forest destruction in Indonesia in 2016 occurred in forest areas and outside forest areas. Damage to forest areas amounted to 8,431,969 ha (47%) consisting of protected forests, conservation forests and production forests. In addition, damage outside the forest area amounted to 9,629,204 ha (53%) in the right forest including community forests (Statistics on Environment and Forestry: Ministry of Environment and Forestry, 2016). The rate of deforestation in Indonesia has decreased in recent years. Directorate General of Forestry and Environmental Planning (PKTL): Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF (2019) explains that the deforestation trend in Indonesia is relatively lower and tends to stabilize. Deforestation in 2018-2019 both inside and outside the forest area amounted to 462.4 thousand ha. The highest deforestation area occurred in secondary forest areas, namely 162.8 thousand ha, with a distribution of 55.75 or 90.6 thousand ha inside the forest area and the remaining 72.2 thousand ha or 44.3% outside the forest area. The decrease in deforestation is thought to be the impact of changes in forest governance including changes in forest resource monitoring and supporting the one map policy and legal certainty (Ministry of Environment and Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020). This is expected to continue to decline from year to year and will improve the function of forests in Indonesia.

The causes of forest destruction in Indonesia are categorized into two causes, namely direct and indirect causes. As stated by Forest Watch Indonesia (FWI) (2015), the causes of forest destruction in Indonesia are categorized into two parts: direct causes and underlying causes/indirect causes. Direct causes relate to the conversion of natural forests into annual crops, agricultural land, plantations, industrial development, transmigration programs and infrastructure development. Indirect causes relate to natural disasters such as floods, landslides, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, all of which are beyond human intervention. The result of human interaction with nature and frequent natural disasters are the main causes of forest destruction in Indonesia.

The causes of forest destruction in Indonesia are both direct and indirect results of human activities. Forest Watch Indonesia (FWI) (2015) explains that direct causes are related to the conversion of natural forests into agricultural land, plantations, industrial

## Local Culture and Environmental Conservation: A Study on the Symbols' Meaning Used in Barong Wae Ceremony in Manggarai, Flores, Indonesia

development, transmigration programs and infrastructure development. Meanwhile, indirect causes are related to natural disasters (floods, landslides, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions). The results of human interaction with nature and frequent natural disasters are the main causes of forest destruction in Indonesia. The uncontrolled direct human contact with the natural environment is one of the main causes of the decline in water availability and quality in Indonesia. This is in line with the findings of several previous authors that the decline in water availability and quality is caused by direct human interactions with nature such as garbage disposal, forest conversion (Sulistiyorini, Edwin, and Arung. 2016.; Sasongko, Widyastuti, et al. 2014), coal mining opening, shortage of water resources, and lack of water resources. 2014) coal mining clearing, lack of raw water sources that are suitable for clean water (Fitriyanti, 2016), domestic industrial wastewater discharge, ship ballast water discharge, and domestic solid waste disposal, household wastewater (Mananoma, Tanudjaja, Mulya. 2011; Aswinanta, et al. 2022; Wardani, 2021).

The various forest and water problems described above require solutions and concrete actions related to the importance of preserving forest resources including water. Conservation actions need to consider sustainable, effective and efficient governance and treatment concepts (Aurilia, Santoso, et al. 2021). The importance of having decisive action through radical changes in the way we utilize and manage nature including forests and water is very necessary while considering the effectiveness and efficiency of targeted and appropriate management (Middleton, 2015).

Many efforts to conserve forests and water have been carried out by local communities in various regions. Some research results have shown that the local wisdom of a community has succeeded in preventing damage to environmental functions, both land, forest and water. Community compliance is reflected in the community's adherence to the advice contained in the community's local wisdom, especially in maintaining balance, managing and caring for the natural environment, complying with prohibitions and various myths that accompany the community's beliefs in its culture, as well as making the ritual location a sacred place, and the community obeys various advice (Andariati, 2019; Siswadi, Taruna. et al. 2011; Yudiatmaja, 2020; Heriyanti, 2021). Li, C & Chen, (2020) found that local wisdom has various ecological, social and cultural frameworks and can shape the development of indigenous waterscapes, and resilient water management in rural areas. These local cultures have strategic roles that are supported by the wisdom values contained in them, have an important role and contribute to sustainable governance strategies (Affandy & Wulandary, 2012., Chazdon et al., 2017; Cocks, Vetter, & Wiersum, 2017; Harvey, 2015; Halim, 2015;). The wisdom of local communities and their traditional knowledge in their culture has the potential to prevent damage to nature and forest ecosystems (Maru, 2020), and trigger sustainability (Sen, 2018).

The values contained in the local wisdom of a community continue to be maintained by the community, because they have value in maintaining and protecting the natural environment (Aruda & Krutkowski, 2017; Dahliani, 2015; Iswandono, Zuhud, Ervival, Hikmat, Kosmaryandi, & Nandi, 2015; Thomas, 2016;). Community culture and behavior in managing the natural environment is closely related to the community's understanding of customary and philosophical provisions that have norms, rules and prohibitions that regulate community behavior in interacting with nature (Haryanto 2012; Ohorella, Suharjito, Ichwandi, 2011; Raho, 2014).

Local wisdom is the foundation and source of community ethics in carrying out their interactions with nature, (Thomas, 2016., Hamzah, Suhartijom and Istomo, 2015). This is because the local wisdom of a region has soft skills and ethical values that regulate behavior and have consequences for individual and group responsibility in managing the natural environment (Bauto, 2013, Elison, 2017, Mungmachon, 2012, Tanui & Chepkuto, 2015).

Various previous studies confirm that local wisdom recognized and upheld by local communities is a value order that is used as a basis for regulating the behavior of the community. The results of these studies show that local wisdom practices have contributed to saving and preserving the natural environment, because there is a significant relationship between local wisdom and environmental preservation.

This research wants to deepen the role of local wisdom in efforts to preserve the natural environment, especially the forest and water environment, based on symbolic interaction theory. The researcher wants to reveal the meaning and values of wisdom contained in one of the local cultures of the Manggarai people, NTT, namely the traditional ritual of barong wae. Apart from being an effort to maintain the existence and sustainability of the role and function of forests, this research is important to form a caring character for nature, and dignity in the process of human interaction with nature and others.

### METHODS

This research uses inductive reasoning and analyzes in detail with the symbolic interaction analysis knife according to Hubert Mead in Ritzer & Smart (2012). The intended analysis knife is the revelation of the meaning of the traditional barong wae ritual with the main concepts of Mind, Self and Society. (1) Mind is the ability to use symbols that have the same social meaning. (2) Self is the ability of individuals to reflect on themselves from the perspective of others. (3) Society is an order of social relations that is deliberately built and constructed by each individual in society. Mead focuses on three concepts and assumptions underlying symbolic interaction, namely: 1) the importance of meaning for human behavior, 2) the importance of the concept of self, 3) the relationship between individuals and society.

## Local Culture and Environmental Conservation: A Study on the Symbols' Meaning Used in Barong Wae Ceremony in Manggarai, Flores, Indonesia

This research is a qualitative study, using an ethnographic approach. The research locus is the Canggo traditional village in East Manggarai Regency. Data were obtained by conducting in-depth interviews and participant observation and documentation. Researchers observed, documented, conducted interviews and interpreted the information obtained. The main data sources were local customary leaders as well as people who have knowledge of and are directly involved in the implementation of the barong wae ritual. A total of 10 resource persons consisting of tu'a golo (customary head of tu'a teno (customary head of customary land) and tu'a gendang (customary head of customary house), tu'a panga (family leader in one sub-clan), heirs to customary rights, Manggarai cultural experts and community leaders who understand adat. Regarding the data collection process, both ethic and emic approaches were considered by the researcher in collecting data. Ethic relates to the views of the researcher that are derived from the researcher's knowledge and experience. Emic is the view of the informant (native) as it is (Haris, 1979).

Furthermore, the data were analyzed using the analysis of Miles and Huberman (1994), namely the data presentation stage, the reduction stage, making temporary conclusions and verification activities. Data validity testing was carried out using data triangulation by repeatedly checking the interview data and observation results in order to verify the results of data analysis.

### RESULTS

#### Barong wae

Barong wae is a traditional ritual that must be performed every year. Lexically, barong means to inform and invite, while wae means water. Barong wae is interpreted as informing and inviting water. Based on the belief of the Manggarai people, the target that is informed and invited is the water guardian spirit, because they believe that the spring has a spirit that guards the spring. The guardian spirit of the spring is a spirit that resides around the spring area and merges with all objects and living things around the spring, such as rocks, wood, fish, eels and others. The myth says that wood, stone and all animals around the spring, as well as those in the water in the spring area have spirits whose job is to guard the water. The spirits guarding the spring should be honored by providing information and inviting them to attend traditional ceremonies in the traditional house such as penti (harvest thanksgiving party) or congko lokap (cleaning party for the traditional house and village).

This ritual is performed at a special spring, which has been marked and passed down by ancestors from generation to generation. This special place is a special natural site for the implementation of the barong wae ritual. The water that flows from the barong wae water source can be used by the community for daily needs and agriculture. This ritual has several purposes, namely 1) an expression of gratitude and thanks to the community for the custom towards water. The local community believes that there is a guardian spirit in the water, so that the expression of gratitude and thanks is conveyed to the spirit that guards the water, which has guarded the water for the survival of the surrounding community. 2) contains hope. The community hopes that the spirits in the spring will continue to guard the water so that in the coming years the water will continue to flow to meet the needs of the surrounding community, not recede and not disappear in the dry season, and provide freshness and coolness and health for the surrounding community.

#### Stages of barong wae

##### 1. Planning stage

At this stage, all traditional leaders (tua golo, tua gendang and tua teno) and representatives of sub-clans (tua kilo) have a meeting (bantang) in the traditional house (mbaru gendang) to agree on several things such as: the time to clean the barong wae ritual location, the time to perform the barong wae, the preparation of equipment, the preparation of objects, and the preparation of a spokesperson (tukang tudak). The cleaning of the barong wae ritual site is carried out one week before the peak ceremony of the traditional barong wae ritual, and involves all communities in the customary area.

##### 2. The peak stage of the barong wae ritual

At the peak stage of the barong wae implementation, there are several stages, namely the coordination stage which is carried out at the drum house as a gathering point as well as a star point leaving for the ritual site. At this stage tu'a golo, tu'a gendang and tu'a teno give directions to all the people who will be present at the location of the traditional barong wae ritual ceremony regarding things that can or cannot be said and done. In addition, directions are also given to be polite and courteous as well as silent during the traditional ritual.

After the direction is given, all those gathered in the traditional house (mbaru gendang) go together to the ritual location in a safe and polite atmosphere. The following are the core stages of the ritual carried out at the barong wae ritual location. First: teing cepa. The object used in this stage is siri pinang which is interpreted as an opening greeting and offering. Second: kepok ruha. The object used is a chicken egg. Similar to teing cepa, kepok ruha is also interpreted as a drink and offering. Third: tudak manuk. At this stage it is interpreted as the peak stage of barong wae by using chicken as an offering material.

#### Symbols used in the implementation of the traditional barong wae ritual

##### 1. Symbol of tools. The tools used in the implementation of the traditional barong wae ritual are machetes and knives and gongs.

The machete is used for cleaning the location of the barong wae ritual and is used to slaughter chickens at the peak ceremony.

## Local Culture and Environmental Conservation: A Study on the Symbols' Meaning Used in Barong Wae Ceremony in Manggarai, Flores, Indonesia

While the gong is used as a musical instrument that is sounded on the way back from the barong wae ritual location to the traditional house (mbaru gendang).

2. Symbolic objects. Some of the objects used for the culmination ceremony of the traditional barong wae ritual are siri areca nut, eggs, roosters.
3. Symbolic clothing. The clothes used during the traditional ceremony of the barong wae ritual are the typical Manggarai songket sarong, dester (broom), neat and clean clothes, may be white clothes and kebaya for women.
4. Symbolic verses in the tudak manuk barong wae ritual language.

### There are several poems or expressions used such as:

- a. Mboas wae woang, kembus wae teku. This poem refers to water and is interpreted in the context of water preservation, which contains the hope that the water will continue to flow, not recede or dry in the dry season because of the actions of the community who always take care of the water environment.
- b. Temek wa mbau eta. This poem refers to coolness and is interpreted in the context of forest and water conservation. That the forest will be lush and the water will continue to flow and provide freshness.
- c. Wua raci weri, lebo kala pong. This poetic expression refers to betel and areca nut and is interpreted as a hope for abundant harvests to occur because water remains.
- d. Paeng agu pong. The reference of this poem is to domesticated animals and plants. The meaning is that pets and plant businesses in the garden continue to grow because there is water.

The poems in the barong wae ritual clearly indicate that the poems or traditional expressions used in the barong wae ritual refer to the context of the cosmos of the Manggarai indigenous people and are interpreted as preservation efforts, hopes, and commitments to maintain the sustainability and conservation of the water environment. These efforts have an impact on the coolness and fertility of plants, animals and crops. In the context of barong wae, everything is meaningful and related to the existence and care for the sustainability of the water environment such as forests, water, plantations and crops.

### Prohibitions as well as rules in the traditional ritual of barong wae

1. Do not take objects and do not cut down any trees or plants around the spring area.
2. Not to hunt any animals both around the spring and in the water in the area around the spring
3. Not tying animals around the spring area
4. Not to utter disrespectful words around the spring
4. Not to commit immoral acts or any acts that violate the norms around the spring.

These prohibitions have been adhered to by the Manggarai indigenous people in their daily lives as a form of wise cultural behavior. The meaning of the barong wae ritual

The meaning of the barong wae ritual is obtained from various symbols and the results of symbolic interactions they carry out with the concepts of mind, self and society as summarized in the following interview results:

*"Barong wae is a traditional obligation that contains gratitude and hope. As traditional elders, we have a responsibility to our ancestors, nature and the creator to carry out the barong wae ritual every year as an obligation to be grateful for the water that has provided life for us in the past year and hope that in the coming year the water will continue to flow, we are afraid of the wrath of the ancestors and nature if we do not do it".*

Based on these interviews, it shows that the traditional barong wae ritual is an obligation that must be carried out to thank and be grateful to the water guardian spirits, nature and the Creator while hoping that the water will continue to flow to meet the needs of the surrounding community, provide coolness and health.

*"The location of the barong wae in special forests is a medium of communication between the community and nature and becomes a guideline that regulates behavior so that it has become part of people's lives. As traditional elders, they always try to carry out what has been ordered by the ancestors, such as maintaining and maintaining the existence of the barong wae ritual site and maintaining the beliefs contained in it. The barong wae ritual site is an ancestral legacy that must be maintained, and must not be moved, because it is believed that the location is a place to establish our communication with the natural environment. If this place is not maintained, we fear the wrath of nature and our ancestors, so we maintain various customary restrictions.*

The interview data is a form of meaning of the Manggarai indigenous people towards the barong wae traditional ritual that they perform. In general, the meaning given is inseparable from their views on self, others, nature and the creator. This view is an integral unit as a result of their symbolic interaction in carrying out each stage of the barong wae traditional ritual.

In addition to meaning, every rite in the implementation of the barong wae traditional ritual has a value contained therein. These values are noble values that regulate the pattern of relationships and interactions of the Manggarai community with others, nature and the creator relationship and interaction of the Manggarai people with others, nature and the creator.

1. Ritus bantang.

## Local Culture and Environmental Conservation: A Study on the Symbols' Meaning Used in Barong Wae Ceremony in Manggarai, Flores, Indonesia

This rite is one of the planning stages (pre) of the barong wae ritual, which involves traditional and sub-clan tu'a (tu'a kilo), religious leaders and government representatives. Customary behavior or actions carried out in the form of tuak kapu as a welcome and appreciation to the participants who attended. This behavior is interpreted as a welcome and respect for the community and all elements present.

### 2. Ritus barong wae

This rite is the culmination or core of the barong wae ritual. The participants involved are tu'a -tu,a adat and sub clan (tu'a kilo), religious leaders and government representatives and the surrounding community. The behavior shown in the custom is the giving of offerings such as betel nut (teing cepa), eggs (ruha manuk), chicken offerings (tudak manuk). This behavior is interpreted as respect and appreciation to the spirits waiting at the spring.

The data displays the researcher's interpretation and analysis of the values contained in the barong wae traditional ritual based on the meaning given by the community to the behaviors and symbols at each stage of the barong wae. In general, the values contained in the barong wae traditional ritual can be summarized into three main values, namely religious values, social values and nature conservation values.

## DISCUSSION

The Manggarai indigenous people still maintain the traditional ritual of barong wae as a form of respect and appreciation for the cultural heritage of the ancestors. They still preserve this traditional ritual in the midst of an increasingly modern life. This is reflected in the implementation of the barong wae traditional ritual. The barong wae traditional ritual shows a complete, meaningful and dignified relationship with others, nature and the creator, which is an ancestral heritage that is still maintained.

In the series of stages of barong wae as explained in the research results, it illustrates the sincerity of the heart in caring for and preserving the natural environment, especially water through ancestral culture. This sincerity is not merely carrying out ancestral heritage, but the indigenous people carry it out as a calling of the heart in caring for and preserving culture as well as caring for nature. The Manggarai indigenous people realize the dependence of the community on nature, that nature gives meaning to life for the community. This dependence is reflected in several stages of the implementation of the peak of the barong wae traditional ritual such as 1) the act of cleaning the environment around the spring, 2) the time of implementation is carried out in the afternoon or evening which is adjusted to weather conditions, 3) expressions of gratitude and hope that the water will remain, 4) prohibitions and customary rules. These four things are part of how to care for the natural environment, especially the water environment. The Manggarai indigenous people truly live the various meanings of the barong wae ritual in the context of daily life. This is indicated by the community's compliance with various rules and prohibitions around the spring. This condition of dependence is in line with Ratzel's determinism view that nature also determines human behavior in society (Liliwari, 2014).

All stages and use of symbols in the traditional barong wae ritual are carried out using poetic expressions or tudak to the water guardian spirit. In the context of the barong wae ritual, the poem is a verbal symbol used as a means of human communication with the creator and the guardian spirit of the spring, and is often referred to as a means of spiritual communication. This is in accordance with Fox's statement in Foley (1997) that ritual language can be used as verbal communication in spiritual rituals, and customs. The series of stages of the barong wae ritual has a meaning of respect for the guardian spirit of the spring who carries out the duties of the creator and has socio-cultural values and natural environmental values.

The symbolic objects and poems used in the traditional barong wae ritual are unique and important elements that deserve special attention, because they contain unique values. All of these symbols are mediators between the Manggarai indigenous people and the water environment. So that the use of symbols is adjusted to the context, purpose and goal. This is in line with Geertz's opinion in Sobur (2006) that patterns of cultural meaning are contained in the form of symbols that are inherited to mediate human communication. Thus, symbols of objects, locations and poems in the barong wae ritual are a medium for human communication with the water environment. This is reinforced by the opinion of Tuner (1969) and Firth, (1973) who assert that symbols as the smallest unit of rituals that still pay attention to and maintain the specific characteristics of behavior in rituals, because each symbol has a unique value instrument. All symbols of actions, objects and poems used in the barong wae ritual have meaning as an effort to protect and preserve nature, as well as being part of the protection of ancestral cultural heritage that has important values related to human relations with nature.

Various symbols of action that lead to offering objects, clothing and poems used at the peak ceremony of the barong wae traditional ritual are part of the way the Manggarai people maintain harmony with nature, especially the water environment. This is in line with Naes in Naes (ZSolnai, 2011) that wisdom can organize life in harmony with nature as a household in a broad sense, living in interconnectedness and dependence on each other with the entire contents of the universe as a household. The dependence of the Manggarai community on nature, especially the water environment, is shown by the attitude of obeying customary rules in protecting the water environment. This compliance creates awareness of the importance of water in supporting human life.

Thus, the use of symbolic objects and poems in the barong wae traditional ritual as a form of offering is a manifestation of the concept of space and the philosophical view of the cosmos of the Manggarai people towards nature, especially the water

## Local Culture and Environmental Conservation: A Study on the Symbols' Meaning Used in Barong Wae Ceremony in Manggarai, Flores, Indonesia

environment. Human communication with nature in the context of the barong wae traditional ritual is embodied in the objects and ritual language used and is a communication tool or medium. This is in line with Rappaport's (1999) theory of rituals as communication symbols and as social actions. These symbols continue to be maintained and have special meaning for the Manggarai people. This is in line with Halim's (2015) opinion that local communities are symbolic societies, where every aspect of life has become cultural meaning and has great potential to be seen and studied, has symbols of culture, and has a different social reality. Furthermore, Thompson, J. L. & Cantrill, J. G. (2013) assert that symbols can reveal something useful in interaction. Thus, the symbols used in the barong wae ritual are mediating media and are part of a culture that is traditional and will remain alive and survive in the local Manggarai community (Lon, 2020; , Niman, 2022).

Referring to the results of observations and interviews, researchers found several important things. First, the traditional ritual of wae barong is interpreted as a relationship of mutual respect and appreciation for fellow creatures as well as a form of effort to restore the natural environment. In relation to nature, this meaning is explained as a chain and efforts to sustain the management, care and preservation of water nature. The traditional ritual of wae barong is a thanksgiving for the water in nature as well as a wish and hope for life in the future. A sustainable chain of nature conservation and management is enshrined in the concept of the actual implementation of the wae barong traditional ritual. This is in line with the findings of Iswandono (2015) and Iswandono (2016) who emphasize that penti is a rejuvenation and seeding and an effort to recover. The chain of utilization and management of nature and the reflection of the existence of the Manggarai indigenous people in relation to their relationship with nature are included in the meaning of the wae barong traditional ritual.

Secondly, the Manggarai indigenous people place a special location as a place to perform barong wae as a sacred place. The concept of space and place in the barong wae ritual is based on a belief that the location is a form and effort to build a harmonious relationship between the community and the universe that must be maintained and preserved. As a protector, maintainer and guardian, the mediator given to the spirit in the water place is an act of worship, respect and honor. Worship reflects that the Manggarai indigenous people believe that there is a supreme being (God). Their closeness to God can be facilitated or mediated by one of the spirits created by God to guard the water. The attitude of respect is reflected in the traditional rites performed at the place where the spirits live, namely the spring, which they believe is a fellow creation of God (the highest being), who is given a special task by Him for the integrity and existence of the universe. Respect is enshrined in the traditional ritual of barong wae. Honoring the water guardian spirits is believed to be able to listen to all the longings of the indigenous people, because they are considered as intermediaries for God, the ruler of life. These three views are closely related to the community's efforts to utilize, care for and manage nature in all forms of interaction that occur.

Third, the barong wae traditional ritual is a means to build interpersonal and group interactions and relations of the Manggarai indigenous people. The interaction in question is a symbolic interaction between the community and its natural environment, namely the water environment and the community with its social environment and the community with the Creator through certain symbols. The symbols used in the barong wae traditional ritual are used as a medium for conveying messages that contain special meanings as a result of the interpretations and thoughts of the Manggarai indigenous people. The symbols in question are in the form of objects, language, actions. This is in line with Mead's view that local wisdom owned by a community contains meaning as a result of symbolic interactions carried out by humans (Ritzer & Goodman, 2008; Ritzer & Smart, 2012); Iswandono 2015; and Wirawan, 2014). Symbolic interactionism is the subject matter in looking at how to understand other people's thoughts, patterns of action through the symbols used (Haryanto 2012; Raho, 2014).

In addition, the stages of the implementation of the traditional barong wae ritual of the Manggarai indigenous people are a whole cosmic unity and contain noble values. These values are contained in each stage of the barong implementation. The patterns and forms of communication and values contained in the stages of the barong wae traditional ritual reflect a symbolic interaction and a deep philosophy of life as a creature in need of and dependent on nature and others. These values are a wisdom that is obeyed and make it a strength and life guide that is passed down to the next generation. This is in line with previous opinions and research that emphasize that local wisdom has the power of values and norms that must be obeyed in community life as a result of the meaning of symbolic interactions carried out (Negi, 2010; Ohorella, Suharjito, Ichwandi, 2011).

Based on Mead's analysis and the results of observations, the researcher found important values in the traditional barong wae ritual. First, the behavior in the stages of the barong wae ritual is interpreted as an expression of recognition of the existence of spirits who are trusted by God to control nature. Manggarai indigenous people believe that the cosmos is not only inhabited by humans but also by various spirits that have higher authority and capacity than humans. These spirits are believed to be able to protect and safeguard all of nature. This is reflected in the stages of the barong wae ritual which contains philosophical meaning and has religious values that function to bind and acknowledge the existence of spirits and nature that have an influence on human life. This is in line with Thomas, (2016), Pujiastuti & Sudarmin, (2013), Dahliani, (2015) and Hamzah, Suhartijo, & Istomo (2015) that community behavior in managing the natural environment is closely related to customary provisions and philosophies that regulate behavior and organize responsible behavior both individually and in groups.

## Local Culture and Environmental Conservation: A Study on the Symbols' Meaning Used in Barong Wae Ceremony in Manggarai, Flores, Indonesia

Second, apart from being an expression of belief, the barong wae ritual also reflects social values. This value can be seen in the determination of the location of the barong wae implementation. The location of barong wae is used as a social forum that unites the community, and reflects a social concept. The social value is reflected in the social meaning of togetherness and brotherhood shown in the use of various symbols and stages of the barong wae traditional ritual. This is in line with the findings of previous research which explains that each traditional rite is a self-expression in togetherness in accordance with environmental conditions and is accompanied by development through environmental wisdom manifested in knowledge/ideas, customary norms, and values as well as cultural rituals so that it can form various patterns of adaptation.

Third, the barong wae traditional ritual has the value of nature conservation. This value is reflected in the community's efforts to care for and preserve the water environment. The concept of preservation is in line with the philosophy of barong wae which includes behavior, ethics and ways of living in harmony with nature, in the same space or natural cosmos to maintain its balance.

The three values of barong wae are used as guidelines in the daily life of the Manggarai indigenous people, especially in organizing themselves and establishing harmonious interactions with the creator, others and nature. In line with this view, Koentjaraningrat (2010) explains that various concepts about something that exists in the mind (mental) of the community that they consider valuable, valuable and important in life can function as guidelines in behavior and interaction. Thus, the traditional barong wae ritual contains noble values related to their interaction with the Creator as the highest form, with nature and with others. Thus, the concept of nature conservation of the Manggarai people in the barong wae traditional ritual is inseparable from their conception and interpersonal relations with others, nature and the Supreme Being. (Eco-socio theological).

### CONCLUSION

The meaning contained in the barong wae traditional ritual is a relationship or symbolic interaction between humans and nature, humans and others and humans with the highest form. The meaning of the barong wae traditional ritual is the result of interpretation and modification of the minds of the Manggarai indigenous people in carrying out each stage of the barong wae traditional ritual. In addition, the barong wae traditional ritual of the Manggarai people contains religious value, social value and nature conservation value.

The barong wae ritual is no longer just a "way of life" with nature, but has become a "part of life" of the Manggarai traditional community, and therefore must be understood as an entity or cultural system itself that is meaningful and must be actualized in the community's life order. Thus, the barong wae ritual is an expression that signifies the identity of the Manggarai people in interpreting the natural environment including water as an important part of their lives as they interpret their relationship with fellow humans and the creator. The concept of eco-socio-theological is an integral unity in the implementation of the barong wae culture of the Manggarai people.

This research is still limited to the study of Manggarai local culture in the barong wae ritual and is limited to the perspective of symbol meaning. Studies from other perspectives can be conducted such as socio-economic studies, eco-linguistic studies and discourse analysis of every speech and action of the barong wae culture which is very interesting to be studied in future studies.

### REFERENCES

- 1) Affandy, D. & Wulandari, P. (2012). An Exploration local wisdom priority in public budgeting process of local government case study in east java. *International.J.Eco.res.* 2012 v (61-76)
- 2) Andariati, L. 2019. Relevansi Mitos Kali Pemali Dengan Etika Lingkungan Islam. *Jurnal SMaRT Studi Masyarakat, Religi dan Tradisi*, (5)02, 275-289
- 3) Aruda, G. M. & Krutkowski, S. 2017. Arctic governance, indigenous knowledge, science and technology in times of climate change Self- realization, recognition, representativeness. *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, 11(4), 514- 528
- 4) Aswinanta, A., Ramadhani, H., Hendri, Andini, I., Safitri, N.A.N., Efendi, S., Anggraini, S.D. 2022. Analisis Keberlanjutan Sumber Daya Alam dengan Melakukan Pengendalian pada Pencemaran Air. *Jurnal Ilmu Komputer, Ekonomi dan Manajemen (JIKEM)*, (2)1, 1894-1903
- 5) Auriliaa, Santoso, Sungkowo.2021. Analisis Karakteristik dan Kualitas Mata Air di Desa Redin, Kecamatan Gebang, Kabupaten Purworejo. *Jurnal Ilmiah Lingkungan Kebumihan*, (3) 2, 1-12
- 6) Bauto, L. M. (2013). Socio-Cultural Values as Community Local Wisdom Katoba Muna in The Development of Learning Materials. *Historia*, 14(2), 195–218.
- 7) Chazdon, R. L., Brancalion, P. H. S., Lamb, D., Laestadius, L., Calmon, M., & Kumar, C. (2017). policy-driven Knowledge Agenda for Global Forest and Landscape restoration. *Conserv. Lett.* 10, 10, 125–132. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12220>
- 8) Cocks, M., Vetter, S., & Wiersum, K. F. (2017). From universal to local: perspectives on cultural landscape heritage in

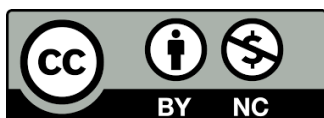
## Local Culture and Environmental Conservation: A Study on the Symbols' Meaning Used in Barong Wae Ceremony in Manggarai, Flores, Indonesia

- South Africa. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 24(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2017.1362573>
- 9) Dahliani. 2015. Local Wisdom Built Environment in Globalization Era. *International Journal of Education and Research*, (3) 6, 1-10
  - 10) Direktorat Jenderal Planologi Kehutanan dan Tata Lingkungan (PKTL): Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan (KLHK (2019). *Statistik Bidang Planologi Kehutanan dan Tata Lingkungan*.
  - 11) Ellison, 2017. Trees, forests and water: Cool insights for a hot. *International Jurnal Global Environmental Change*.43, (51-61)
  - 12) Firth. R . 1973. *Symbols: Public and Private*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York
  - 13) Fitriyanti, Reno. 2016. Pertambangan Batu Bara: Dampak Lingkungan, Sosial dan Ekonomi . *Jurnal Redoks*, (1) 1, 34-40
  - 14) Foley. W. 1997. *Anthropological Linguistics: An Introduction*. Oxford-UK: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd.Fox
  - 15) Forest Watch Indonesia, (FWI) (2015). Nasib Hutan Alam Indonesia.
  - 16) Halim, A. 2015. Cultural Capital to Establish Spirit Nationalism Study of Values Local Dayak Communities Border Region in Sub Jagoi Babang, Bengkayang Regency, West Kalimantan Province. *International Knowledge Sharing Platform*, 5 (20). 9-15
  - 17) Hamzah, Suhartijo, Istomo. 2015. Efektivitas Kelembagaan Lokal dalam pengelolaan Sumber Daya Hutan pada Masyarakat Nagari Simanau Kabupaten Solok. *Risal. Kebijakan. Pertan. Dan Lingkungan*.2 (2), 117-128.
  - 18) Harris, M. 1979. *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture*. New York: Harper
  - 19) Harvey, R. D. 2015. Landscape and Heritage: Trajectories and Consequences. *Landscape Research*. 40(8), 911-924.
  - 20) Haryanto, S. 2012. *Spektrum Teori Sosial dari Klasik Hingga postmodern*. Malang: ArRuzz Media.
  - 21) Heriyanti. K. 2021. Relevansi Mitologi Dalam Meningkatkan Keyakinan Umat Beragama. *Genta Hredaya*, (4)2, 164-172
  - 22) IPCC (International Govermental Pannel on Climate. 2007.
  - 23) Iswandono, E., Zuhud, Ervival. A.M., Hikmat A., Kosmaryandi, Nandi. 2015. Integrating lokal culture into forest conservation: A case study of the Manggarai tribe in Ruteng Mountains. Indonesia. *Scientific Article JMHT*, 21, (2): 55-64. Doi: 10.7226/jtfm. 21.2.55
  - 24) Iswandono, E., Zuhud, Ervival. A.M., Hikmat Ag., Kosmaryandi, Nandi, W, dan Lukas. R.2016. Traditional land practice and forest conservation: Case study of the Manggarai tribe In Ruteng Mountains, Indonesia. *International Journal of Indonesian Society and Culture*.8 (2), 257-266. Doi:10.15294/komunitas.v8i2.4945.
  - 25) Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan Republik Indonesia, 2020
  - 26) Koentjaraningrat. 2010. *Pengantar Ilmu Antropologi*, Jakarta: Rineka Cipta
  - Li. C & Chen. H. 2020. Culture and nature in conserving the indigenous water system in rural China: A case study of the ancient village of Hongcun. *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, (15)2, 44-55
  - 27) Liliweri, A. (n.d.). *Pengantar Studi Kebudayaan*. Bandung: Nusamedia.
  - 28) Lon, Y. S. 2020. “Perkawinan Tungku Cu (Cross-Cousin Marriage) di Manggarai: Antara Adat dan Agama,” *Salam J. Sos. dan Budaya Syar’i*, (7)1, 35–48,
  - 29) Mananoma, Tanudjaja, Mulya. 2011. Upaya Pemenuhan Kebutuhan Air Bersih Di Pulau Terpencil (Studi Kasus Pulau Naen Kabupaten Minahasa Utara). *Pertemuan Ilmiah Tahunan (PIT) XXVII Himpunan Ahli Teknik Hidraulik Indonesia (HATHI), Ambon, Maluku*. ISBN 978-979-17093-5-4
  - 30) Maru, Y., [Gebrekirstos](#), A., Haile, G. 2020. Indigenous ways of environmental protection in Gedeo community, Southern Ethiopia: A socio- ecological perspective. [Cogent Food & Agriculture](#), (6) 22, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311932.2020.1766732>
  - 31) Middleton, A. 2015. Value relevance of firms’ integral environmental performance: Evidence from Russia. *Journal of Accounting and Public Policy*, (34)2, 204–211.
  - 32) Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
  - 33) Mungmachon, R. (2012). Knowledge and Local Wisdom: Community Treasure. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(13), 174–181.
  - 34) Negi C.S. 2010. Traditional Culture and Biodiversity Conservation: Examples from Uttarakhand, Central Himalaya. *Mountain Research and Development*, 30(3):259-265.
  - 35) Niman, 2022. Geographical context and natural environment preservation in local culture (A study on the ritual of Pentu in Manggarai, Flores NTT. *Journal of Natural Resources and Environmental Management (JPSL)*12 (3), 456-465
  - 36) Ohorella, S., Suharjito, D., Ichwandi, I. 2011. Efektifitas Kelembagaan Lokal Dalam Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Hutan pada masyarakat Rumahkay di seram bagian Barat, Maluku. *J. Manaj. Hutan Trop*. (17) 49-55



## Local Culture and Environmental Conservation: A Study on the Symbols' Meaning Used in Barong Wae Ceremony in Manggarai, Flores, Indonesia

- 37) Pujiastuti, S.E. & Sudarmin, 2013. Scientific knowledge based culture and local wisdom in karimunjawa for growing soft skills conservation. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, 6(14), 598-604
- 38) Raho, B. 2014. *Sosiologi*. Maumere: Ledalero
- 39) Rappaport. R. A.1999. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- 40) Ritzer, G. & Godman, D. J. 2008. *Teori sosiologi Modern*. Jakarta: Kencana.
- 41) Ritzer, G.dan .Godman, D.J. 2012. *Teori Sosiologi dari Teori Klasik Sampai Sosial post Modern*. Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana
- 42) Sasongko, E.B., Widyastuti<sup>2</sup>, E., Priyono, R.E. 2014. Kajian Kualitas Air Dan Penggunaan Sumur Gali Oleh Masyarakat Di Sekitar Sungai Kaliyasa Kabupaten Cilacap. *Jurnal Ilmu Lingkungan*, (12)2, 72-82
- 43) Sen, U. K. 2018. Assessing the Social, Ecological and Economic Impact On Conservation Activities Within Human-Modified Landscapes: a Case Study In Jhargram District Of West Bengal, India. *International Journal of Conservation Science*, 9(2), 319-336
- 44) Siswadi, T. T., Purnaweni. H.2011. Kearifan Lokal Dalam Melestarikan Mata Air (Studi Kasus di Desa Purwogondo, Kecamatan Boja, Kabupaten Kendal). *Jurnal Ilmu Lingkungan*, (9)2, 63-68
- 45) Sobur. A., 2006. *Semiotika Komunikasi*, Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya Analisis
- 46) Statistik Lingkungan hidup dan kehutanan: Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan, 2016..
- 47) Sulistyorini, Edwin, dan Arung. 2016. Analisis Kualitas Air Pada Sumber Mata Air Di Kecamatan Karanganyar Dan Kaliorang Kabupaten Kutai Timur. *Jurnal Hutan Tropis (4) 1*, 64-76
- 48) Tanui, J.G., Chepkuto, P. K., 2015. Community Involvement and Perceptions on Local Use and Utilization Practices for Sustainable Forest Management in the Nandi Hills Forests, Kenya. *J. Educ. Pract*, (6),194-201
- 49) Thomas, F. 2016. Educational Value in Pela Tradition (Ethnographic Study Ambonese). International Knowledge Sharing Platform. 6(6), (online). <http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/29436>.
- 50) Thompson, J. L. & Cantrill, J. G. 2013. The Symbolic Transformation of Space. *Environmental Communication*.7 (1) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2012.758650>
- 51) Turner.V. 1969. *The Ritual Process, Structure and Antistructure*: New York: Cornell University Press.
- 52) Wardani RA, Azizah R. 2021. Management of Solid Medical Waste on One of the Covid19 Referral Hospitals in Surabaya, East Java. *Jurnal Universitas Airlangga*, (12)1, 38–44.
- 53) Wirawan, I. B. 2014. *Teori-Teori Sosial Dalam Tiga Paradigma (Fakta Sosial, Definisi Sosial, dan Perilaku Sosial)*. Jakarta: Kencana.
- 54) Yudiatmaja, W. E., Yudithia, S., T., & Suyito. (2020). Social capital of local communities in the water resources management: an insight from Kepulauan Riau. *2nd International Conference on Engineering and Applied Sciences (2nd InCEAS) IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 771(1),
- 55) Zsolnai, L. 2011. Environmental Ethics for business sustainability. *International Journal of Social Economics* Vol.38 No.11. pp 892-899



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.