



Symbolic Interaction of The Indigenous Communities of Manggarai, Indonesia (Study of Penti Cultural Local Wisdom in The Context of Environmental Conservation)

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ABSTRACT

The problem of forest destruction really needs wise efforts of conservation. One of the efforts is to make use of society's local wisdom. This study aims at examining the meaning, and values contained in the Manggarain Penti cultural ceremony in the context of forest conservation. To reach the objectives of this qualitative research, interviews, 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, Penti also has several meanings, namely pillar of spiritual life (gratitude and request), a forum for togetherness, a behavior controller, and a means of self-recovery /repentance. Meanwhile, based on the meaning given, in addition to ecological value, Penti also has religious value and social value. Thus, penti is concerned with eco-socio- theology Manggaraian conception of the existence of nature.

KEYWORDS

Penti
Meaning
Value
Cinservation

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1. Introduction

Forests are one of the resources that have an important position in human life globally, both socio-economically and ecologically. Socio-economically, forest resources have a role in supporting the fulfillment of daily human needs and as development capital, both in terms of forest production 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, the global forest functions as a regulatory process for the water cycle, as a soil retainer, and as a habitat for various plant species that produce oxygen and energy for survival. In line with this, Ellison (2017) explains that forests are recognized as the main regulators of the water, energy and carbon cycle.

The condition of the world's forests, including forests in Indonesia, has been damaged. Forest Watch Indonesia (2015) noted that the rate of forest destruction in Indonesia in the period 2009-2015 increased by 1.5 million ha/year from the total forest area of 95 million hectares or about 50.6% of Indonesia's forest area. Its area consists of Nature Reserve and Nature Conservation Area (HKSA-PA), Protection Forest (HL), and Limited Production Forest (HPT). Forest damage in Indonesia currently occurs in forest areas and outside forest areas with different levels of damage. Damage to forest area amounted to 8,431,969 ha (47%) consisting of protection forest, conservation forest and production forest. In addition, the damage outside the forest area including private forest was 9,629,204 ha (53%) (Environmental and Forestry Statistics: Ministry of Environment and Forestry, 2016). This might continue to increase from year to year and will worsen the condition of forests in Indonesia. Thus, forest damage in Indonesia spreads in various regions with different levels of damage, including in Manggarai Regency,

The causes of forest destruction in Indonesia are categorized into two, namely direct and indirect causes. As stated by Forest Watch Indonesia (FWI) (2015), the causes of forest damage in Indonesia are grouped into two parts, namely direct causes and underlying causes/indirect causes. The direct causes relate to the conversion of natural forests into annual crops, agricultural land, plantations,



industrial development, transmigration programs and infrastructure development. The indirect causes are not directly related to natural disasters such as floods, landslides, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions which are all outside of human intervention. However, the result of human interaction with nature and natural disasters that often occur are the main causes of forest destruction in Indonesia. Consequently, Deforestation will have an impact on the function of forests in Indonesia. Indonesia's forest area is decreasing due to human behavior or human actions in utilizing forests that are not in accordance with proper procedures. Illegal logging, forest burning, and mining excavations greatly affect the condition of the forest area which will indirectly affect the condition of the ecosystem, both biotic and non-biotic. This condition occurs in almost all Indonesian forest areas.

The problem of forest destruction needs a wise conservation and constructive effort or action. This effort is made to maintain the sustainability of the forest which is very necessary for the life of the next generation. One of the efforts in question is through the expression (action), knowledge and values of local community related to sustainable forest management. This is in accordance with the opinion of Ritzer & Goodman (2008), Ritzer & Smart (2012), Iswandono (2015; 2016), and Wirawan, (2014) that all forms and values of indigenous peoples' local wisdom deserve to be preserved for future generations. Local wisdom is generated from the interaction of humans or a group of people with their natural environment. This wisdom must be preserved from generation to generation, such as local wisdom contained in the penti ceremony of the Manggarai community.

Local wisdom is increasingly recognized and considered important in relation to natural environmental management behavior. This is evidenced by the many studies or research on local wisdom that have been carried out by researchers both abroad and domestically. Environmental conservation is realized through local community beliefs in the form of customs, rituals and norms that regulate community behavior in natural resource management. The local culture has a strategic role that is supported by the local values contained in it, (Chazdon et al., 2017; Cocks, Vetter, & Wiersum, 2017; Harvey, 2015; Halim, 2015; Iani and Geneletti, 2014; Liliweri, 2014.; Rukeh, 2017). Local community policies and traditional knowledge have an important role and contribute to sustainable governance strategies (Affandy & Wulandary, 2012) and have the potential to prevent damage to nature and forest ecosystems (Maru, 2017) and trigger sustainability (Sen, 2018).

The results of previous studies show that the values contained in the local wisdom of a community are very useful in efforts to maintain and protect the natural environment (Aruda & Krutkowski, 2017; Chennells, 2013; Dahliani, 2015; Iswandono, Zuhud, Ervival, Himat, Kosmaryandi, & Nandi, 2015; Thondlana & Vedeld, 2012; Thomas, 2016; Sudarmin, 2013). This is supported by the results of other studies which found that people's behavior in managing the natural environment is closely related to people's understanding of customary provisions and philosophies that contain norms, rules and prohibitions that regulate people's behavior with nature (Haryanto 2012; Negi, 2010; Ohorella, Suharjito, Ichwandi, 2011; Raho, 2014).

In line with the above findings, Thomas (2016), Pujiastuti & Sudarmin (2013), Hamzah, Suhartijom and Istomo (2015) and Wibowo and Dewi (2012) emphasized that local wisdom is the foundation and source of community ethics in carrying out their interactions with nature. This is confirmed by Bauto (2013), Elison (2017), Koentjroningrat (2010) Mungmachon (2012); Tanui & Chepkuto (2015) that the local wisdom of an area has soft skills and ethical values that regulate behavior and have individual and group responsibilities in managing the natural environment.

In general, the previous studies above have confirmed that each region essentially has a local wisdom that is upheld as a value that becomes a way of life in regulating the behavior of its people. The results of these studies show that there is a significant relationship between local wisdom and environmental conservation, and local wisdom practices have contributed to saving and preserving the natural environment.

Therefore, based on the theory of symbolic interaction, this study wants to deepen the role of local wisdom in efforts to preserve the natural environment, especially the forest environment. According to the theory of symbolic interaction, people are symbol-producing or symbol-making beings. This



idea is similar to that of the German neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer, who claimed that people are "animal symbolicum. Every item in a person's life has a symbolic meaning. These connotations do not appear on their own; rather, they are proposed, accepted, and then employed as symbols. Here, a symbol is understood as a mark containing a shared meaning. Therefore, the symbolic meanings of the item serve as the foundation for human conduct, both as individuals and as groups.

Related to this, the researcher wants to reveal the meaning and values of wisdom contained in one of the local cultures of the Manggarai people, Indonesia, namely the Penti culture. In addition, as an effort to maintain the existence and sustainability of the role and function of the forest, this research is very important to do to form a noble, character, and dignified character in the process of human interaction with nature and others.

2. Method

The presence of researchers in this qualitative research is very necessary. The researcher observes, analyze documents, conducts interviews, and interprets the information obtained according to the research focus. The data in this study consisted of primary data and secondary data. Primary data is data obtained directly from the indigenous people of Manggarai. Secondary data relates to existing data and are obtained from institutions, documents, and literatures related to the penti culture. The main sources in this study were traditional leaders consisting of tu'a golo (customary head), tu'a teno (ruler of customary land) and tu'a gendang (customary head of traditional house), tu'a panga (family leader in one sub-clan), heirs of customary rights, Manggarai cultural experts and community leaders who understand the penti culture. Regarding the data collection process, researchers considered etic and emic approaches in collecting data. Etic is from the knowledge and experience of the researcher. Meanwhile, emic is the view of the informant (native) as it is (Haris, 1979).

Regarding data analysis, the researcher used inductive reasoning and analyzed it in detail with a symbolic interaction analysis theory according to Hubert Mead in Ritzer & Smart (2012). The theory in question is the disclosure of the meaning of the penti culture with the concepts of Mind, Self, and Society. In its implementation, the stages (Miles & Huberman, 1994) namely the data presentation stage, the reduction stage, making temporary conclusions, and verification activities were adopted by the researcher. Furthermore, the data triangulation process is carried out by comparing the data from observations (observations) with data from interviews and documentation. Researchers checked the data repeatedly from the beginning of the study until the research was completed. This effort is very relevant to the penti culture which has many terms and symbols that contain certain meanings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The meanings contained in the penti culture are obtained from the results of their symbolic interactions with the concepts of mind, self and society as summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1. Matrix of Significance Analysis (George Mead's Symbolic Interaction Perspective)

Code	Mind	Self		Society	Meaning
		I	Me		
DMS	Penti is a customary obligation	As a traditional leader, I personally have a sense of responsibility to carry out penti every year	There is a hope to to carry out Penti every year continually as the message of the ancestors; an obligation to be grateful for the harvest and all our lives in the past year and welcome new life in the coming planting season. This is done as a form of our	Traditional leader (Tua Golo)	Penti as a pillar of spiritual life (gratitude and supplication)



			responsibility to the the ancestors, to nature and to the Creator. If penti is not done every year, we are afraid of being blamed by our ancestors, nature and the Creator		
SVS	Penti is a customary obligation	Penti is a moral customary obligation	Penti a culture must be maintained. It can teach people to behave positively towards nature and others as well as the creatures. If you don't follow it, you will have an arbitrary attitude towards others and nature and will get ridicule from the surrounding community.	Traditional leader (Tu'a gendang)	Penti as controller of ethic, conduct and manner
LDJ	Penti is a customary obligation	Penti is a moral customary obligation	Penti as a culture must be maintained, because it can teach people to reflect on all their behavior and then be able to improve themselves well in the future.	Traditional leader (Tu'a Panga)	Penti as a means of self-recovery
PTN	Penti is a hope in the future	Personally I feel that penti is not only a thanksgiving ceremony but also a hope for protection in the year to come	Penti must be carried out every year. It is an ancestral heritage to our survival in the days to come, both in the form of nature that continues to give us fertility and rain, corps, health, safety and the success of our life especially the education of our children and grandchildren. All that is achieved when the universe is pleased. If we don't have gratitude through penti then we don't respect our ancestral heritage and get sanctions from nature and from our ancestors.	Culture leader	Penti as a pillar of spiritual life (gratitude and supplication)
SKT	Penti is a part of our life	There is an expectation that it is always carried out to foster brotherhood among citizens	Oral rules in culture are important to be preserved. They are quite effective in shaping positive people's behavior in respecting others as a social community.	Inheritance of customary rights (easy character)	Penti is a means of togetherness



FDS	The location of penti is a medium of communication with nature	As a traditional leader, I only try to carry out what has been ordered by my ancestors, such as maintaining the existence of penti ritual location and maintaining the beliefs that exist in the penti.	. Ritual places in penti are the ancestral heritage that must be preserved, and should not be moved, because it is believed that these places decided to establish our communication with the natural environment. If this place is not guarded then we are afraid of getting the wrath of nature and from our ancestors	Culture leader (tua gendang)	Penti as a pillar of nature conservation /preservation
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The data in Table 3.1 is a form of the meaning of the Manggarai indigenous people towards the important culture they do. In general, the meaning given is inseparable from their view of themselves, others, nature and the creator. This view is a unified whole as a result of their symbolic interaction in carrying out each stage of penti. In addition to meaning, each data rite in the implementation stage of the penti culture has its own value (Table 3. 2). These values are noble values that set the pattern the relationship and interaction of the Manggarai community with others, nature and the creator.

Table 2. The value of penti

Rite	Stage	Participants	Culture behaviour	Meaning	Values
<i>Bantang</i>	Pra-Penti	The traditional leader (Tu'a adat, Tu'a panga, Tu's golo, Tu'a gendang), religion institutions, government, and villagers	<i>Tuak kapu</i>	Respecting to the villagers and all the elements that present in the rite	Social
<i>Reke Penti</i>		, The traditional leader (Tu'a adat, Tu'a panga, Tu's golo, Tu'a gendang), religion institutions, government, and villagers	- <i>Tuak kapu</i> - <i>Wajo manuk reke penti (ayam, Tuak manuk, sirih pinang)</i>	- Welcoming for attendees - Respecting the spirits and ancestors	Social dan religious
<i>Barong Lodok</i>	Core	The traditional leader (Tu'a adat, Tu'a panga, Tu's golo, Tu'a gendang), religion institutions, government, and villagers	<i>Wajo mahuk takung naga lodok (telur, ayam, tuak, sirih pinang)</i>	Respecting to the guardian spirit of the homeland	Social religious, ecological
<i>Barong wae</i>		Tu'a adat, Tu'a Suku, tokoh agama, utusan pemerintah, dan warga	<i>Wajo manuk takung naga wae (telur, ayam, tuak, sirih pinang)</i>	Respecting to the guardian spirit of the spring (water source)	Social religious, ecological



<i>Barong Boa</i>		The traditional leader (Tu'a adat, Tu'a panga, Tu's golo, Tu'a gendang), religion institutions, government, and villagers	<i>Wajo manuk kengko wur gu ceki (telur, ayam, tuak, sirih pinang)</i>	Respecting ancestor	Social religious, ecological
<i>Barong Compang</i>		The traditional leader (Tu'a adat, Tu'a panga, Tu's golo, Tu'a gendang), religion institutions, government, and villagers	<i>Wajo manuk takung naga golo (telur, ayam, tuak, sirih pinang)</i>	Respect for the village guardian spirit	Social religious, ecological
<i>Tudak Penti</i>		The traditional leader (Tu'a adat, Tu'a panga, Tu's golo, Tu'a gendang), religion institutions, government, and villagers	- <i>Wisi loce</i> - <i>Wewa/rahi</i> - <i>Tudak (Pemberian sesajen)</i> - <i>Toto dan Wali urat</i>	- Respect for fellow citizens and all elements present - The form of support from all parties - Respect for ancestral spirits - information to participants regarding the legalization of receiving offerings by spirits and spirits	Social religious, ecological
<i>Sanda/dere</i>	Post- Penti	The traditional leader (Tu'a adat, Tu'a panga, Tu's golo, Tu'a gendang), religion institutions, government, and villagers	<i>Sanda/dere lima</i>	Appreciation for nature and philosophical respect for the five sacred locations of the rites	Social religious, ecological
<i>Dangku</i>		The traditional leader (Tu'a adat, Tu'a panga, Tu's golo, Tu'a gendang), religion institutions, government, and villagers	<i>Dere dangku</i>	Collegial appreciation and commitment as fellow citizens who live in togetherness and nature (unity)	social
<i>Cepa</i>		The traditional leader (Tu'a adat, Tu'a panga, Tu's golo, Tu'a gendang), religion institutions, government, and villagers	<i>Wajo manuk/tudak cepa (ayam, tuak, sirih pinang)</i>	A request to spirits to return to their respective places	religious

The data in Table 2 shows the researcher's interpretation and analysis of the values contained in the penti culture based on the meaning given by the community to the behavior and symbols at each



penthi stage. In general, the values contained in the penthi can be summarized into three main values, namely religious values, social values and natural conservation values.

3.2. Discussion

The indigenous people of Manggarai still maintain the culture as a legacy of their ancestors. They still preserve local culture in the midst of an increasingly modern life. This can be clearly seen in the implementation of the Penthi culture. In penthi culture, a complete, meaningful and dignified relationship with others, nature and the creator is an ancestral heritage that is still maintained.

Penthi uses various symbols. The symbols in question are behaviors, expressions and objects as a form of self-expression of the people who carry it out. The symbols used are also related to the concept or mindset and beliefs of the Manggarai people who directly or indirectly interact with the nature in which they live (Darong, Niman, & Jem, 2022; Kelling, 2016; Sardi, Sarwoprasodjo, Lubis, & Suharjito, 2019). In other words, the concept of space in a cosmological perspective about the universe of the Manggarai people is closely related to the meaning of symbols and their interactions with nature in the cultural ceremonies. The meaning is the result of the interpretation of the thoughts of the Manggarai indigenous people towards symbols and cultural interactions in each of the penthi stages. The meaning of each cultural behavior or other symbols used is not sufficiently understood at the lexical level. Contextual meaning really needs to be done to reveal in depth about the penthi and its relationship with efforts to preserve the natural environment.

Referring to the results of observations and interviews (Table 3. 1), the researcher found several important things. First, the penthi culture is an effort to restore and to re-seed. In relation to nature, this meaning is described as a chain and efforts to sustain the management, care and conservation of nature. Penthi is an expression of gratitude for nature as well as a request and hope for the next stage of the planting process. Conservation and sustainable management of nature is embodied in the real concept of its practice. This is in line with the findings of Iswandono (2015) and Iswandono (2016) which emphasize that the penthi is a rejuvenation and self-recovery effort. The chain of utilization and management of nature and the reflection of the existence of the indigenous people of Manggarai related to their relationship with nature are included in the meaning of penthi

Second, the Manggarai indigenous people consider the five places for the implementation of penthi culture as sacred places. The concept of space and place for the penthi rite of the Manggarai people is based on a belief that the five locations are a form and effort to harmonize their lives with the universe that must be preserved and maintained for the sake of survival (Maru, 2022; Raru, 2018). As a protector, preserver, and guardian, mediator given to each spirit in these places is an expression of worship, and respect. Worshiping means that the indigenous people of Manggarai believe that there is a supreme being (God). Their closeness to God can be facilitated or mediated by the spirits that God created to guard this universe. Appreciation is reflected in this traditional ceremonies carried out in places where the spirits live. They are believed to be fellow creatures of God (the highest form) who have been assigned a special task by Him for the integrity and existence of the universe. Besides, respect is enshrined in traditional rites at the graves of the dead. They are humans who already lived in the changed- nature and are believed to be able to listen to all the longings of humans who are still alive. They are considered to be with 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 (Lon, 2016; Raru, 2016)

Third, Penthi is a means to build interaction and interpersonal relations of the Manggarai indigenous people. The interaction in question is a symbolic interaction between the community and its natural



environment and the community with its social environment and the community with the Creator through certain symbols. These symbols are used as a medium in conveying messages and have certain meanings as a result of the interpretation and thoughts of the Manggarai indigenous people. These symbols are objects (animals), language, actions, and songs. All these symbols are used as a medium of communication that has meaning. This is in line with Mead's view that local wisdom possessed by a community contains meaning as a result of symbolic interactions made by humans (Ritzer & Goodman, 2008; Ritzer & Smart, 2012); Iswandono 2015; Sutam, 2016; and Wirawan, 2014). Symbolic interactionism becomes 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 implementing the penti culture of the Manggarai indigenous people (Table 3. 2) are a cosmic unity that is intact and holds noble values for the Manggarai people. These values are contained in each stage of implementation, namely *barong lodok*, *barong wae*, *barong boa*, *barong compang*, and *tudak penti* in traditional houses (*Mbaru gendang*). The patterns and forms of communication as well as the values contained in each stage imply a symbolic interaction and a deep philosophy of life as creatures that are very fragile and fully dependent on nature and others. These values are obeyed and become a guideline for the life of the Manggarai community. This is in line with previous research which confirms that local wisdom has the strength of values and norms that must be obeyed by the community as a result of the meaning of symbolic interactions carried out (Negi, 2010; Ohorella, Suharjito, Ichwandi, 2011). Values in penti become the life force of one generation to the next.

Referring to Mead's analysis and observations, the researcher found the core values that serve as concepts and guidelines for the Manggarai community. First, each stage is an expression of people's belief in the existence of a supreme being (spirit) that controls this universe. This cosmic space is not only inhabited by humans but also inhabited by spirits who have higher authority and capacity than humans. They are protectors, preservers, guardians of the universe and its creatures. Each stage of the penti culture is a philosophical meaning that has religious values that bind and regulate the existence of a higher being and nature. This is in line with Thomas, (2016), Pujiastuti & Sudarmin, (2013), Dahliani, (2015) and Hamzah, Suhartijo, & Istomo (2015) who say that community behavior in managing the natural environment is closely related to customary provisions and philosophy of life which regulates behavior of the individual and group in managing the natural environment.

Second, apart from being an expression of belief, the penti rites also implies social values. This value is clearly seen in the Manggarai people's philosophy of choosing a place for rites, such as *lodok*, *boa*, *compang*, and *mbaru gendang*. These places indicate a social concept of the indigenous people of Manggarai. The place is a social forum that unites fellow human beings. The meaning of togetherness and brotherhood given to the symbols used and the stages of penti rite also implies the values mentioned above. This is in line with the findings of previous research which says that every traditional rite is self-expression of togetherness by reading environmental conditions and developing adaptation patterns through the development of environmental wisdom embodied in knowledge/ideas, customary norms, and values and culture rituals (Harvey, 2015; Liliweri, 2014; Halim, 2015; Iani and Geneletti, 2014; Uhi, 2016).

Third, penti contains the value of the nature conservation. This value is reflected in the community's efforts to care for and manage nature. These are in line with the real philosophy of penti which is a form of restoration, rejuvenation and re-seeding. This philosophy includes behavior, ethics and ways (ethic, conduct and manner) in carrying out life in a space or cosmos that must be kept in balance (Kelling, 2016; Iswandono, Zuhud, Hikmat & Nandi. 2015; Marfiatun, 2019).



The three values mentioned above (religious values, social values, and nature conservation values) are a unified whole in the penti of Manggraian people. These values are guidelines for them to manage themselves and establish interactions with nature, others, and the creator. This indicates that penti contains noble values that are very valuable for the Manggarai people, especially regarding their interactions with nature and others. This is in line with Koentjaraningrat's (2010) view on cultural values. The concepts of something that is in the mind (mentalistic) of the community which they consider valuable functioned as a guide in behaving and interacting.

To date, the practice of the penti ceremony as a local culture of the Manggarai indigenous people is an interpersonal relationship with others and God (the highest form). So, the concept of preserving the nature of the Manggarai community cannot be separated from their conception and interpersonal relations with each other and the highest form (Eco-socio- theological).

4. Conclusion

The meaning contained in the penti is a symbolic relationship or interaction between humans and nature, humans with others and humans with the highest being. It is a result of interpretation and modification of the minds of the indigenous people of Manggarai. In addition, the Penti culture of the Manggarai community contains religious values, social values and the value of nature conservation which is born from the community's conception of good and right; it regulates behavior patterns with others, nature and the creator. The eco-socio theological concept is a unified whole in the implementation of the penti of the Manggarai community.

This study only examines the local culture of Manggarai in the perspective of symbolic interaction. Studies from other perspectives such as eco-linguistic studies and discourse analysis in the penti are very interesting to be studied in subsequent research studies

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