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Where am I Now: Symbols Used in Manggarai Funeral Rite, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

A symbol has a specific meaning and represents the user's conception, way of thinking, and interpretation. This study aimed to analyze the symbolic interactions of the Manggarai ethnic funeral rite. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documents. The results of the analysis showed that the symbols are employed as a spiritual and social tool to aid understanding of the outside world as well as to describe and learn the transcendent secret world, such as the "truth of being". Therefore, the symbols used reflect the interpersonal relations with others, ancestors, and God, called *socio-theological* relations, and profound philosophy of existence, as they are extremely vulnerable and totally reliant on their predecessors and God.

KEYWORDS

funeral rite, interaction, Manggarai, meaning, symbol

Introduction

Local knowledge is increasingly recognized and valued in human existence. The existence in question concerns human behavior and relationships with God, others, and nature. Numerous studies of local knowledge conducted by researchers provide evidence for this. Local community beliefs that are codified as customs, rituals, and norms can sustainably govern their way of life. Local values and culture have a crucial role in determining how people live their lives (Cocks et al., 2018; Mungmachon, 2012; Tahir et al., 2020; Wenzel et al., 2020). Additionally, the local wisdom of local communities and their traditional knowledge are essential to a sustainable way of life and are able to prevent improper

relationships with the environment, God, and other people (Bauto, 2013; Darong et al., 2021) and spur life-sustaining behavior (Sen, 2018).

Other studies have demonstrated the usefulness of a community's traditional knowledge in maintaining and preserving the environment (Aruda & Krutkowski, 2017; Chennells, 2013; Dahliani et al., 2015; Eriksen, 2007). In this respect, people's awareness of the norms, laws, and prohibitions contained in traditional systems and philosophies that govern human interaction with nature is directly related to the way they behave in the natural environment management.

In line with the aforementioned findings, Antoni & Fadillah (2021), Pesurnay (2018), and Setyono & Widodo (2019) emphasized the importance of local wisdom as the cornerstone and source of community ethics in their interactions with the environment. Furthermore, the local wisdom has soft skills and ethical principles that regulate the behavior and obligations of individuals and groups in sustaining the natural environment as confirmed by Bauto (2013), Mungmachon (2012), and Tanui & Chepkuto (2015).

However, it is important to remember that there must be a way or a means to express local values. The means in question undoubtedly have something to do with language. Everything can be expressed in terms of both units and aspects through language. People may be able to understand the local message if they pay attention to the language used. Thus, *how* it is said is part of *what* is said (Boroditsky & Gaby, 2010; Darong & Menggo, 2021; Long & He, 2021; Peeters, 2015). In other words, language and culture are two interrelated concepts. Language is employed within the framework of culture. People can use language effectively when they interact with the users of the language (Brown, 2001; Byram, 1993; Couper et al., 2016; Tin, 2014). In the meantime, a crucial aspect of language is that it is culturally transferable. This characteristic makes it worthwhile to learn. Thus, the cultural context is of considerable importance in the way language is used.

Further, a symbol can be a thing, word, or action that stands for something. It is culturally defined in accordance with the beliefs of the people to whom it belongs. The symbol can be understood through knowledge of the culture of the people who use it; otherwise, it does not have any significance. Such a relationship has three aspects. The first is culture building. In this sense, culture is the use of symbols to represent both spiritual and material qualities, while the symbols themselves are the carriers of culture. The second is culture extension. In this context, the symbol is seen as a tool for engagement. The third is culture reformulation. As a community grows, its culture does indeed change to reflect new developments in life, norms, and conceptions. Language evolves as its users do, and the resulting culture is then reformulated (Dongxiang, 2018). Thus, the relationship between symbols, people, and culture is a key aspect of symbolic interactionism. Symbols play a crucial role in shaping social interactions and meanings, and are an important tool for the construction and transmission of cultural practices and beliefs. In this respect, recent studies have used symbolic interactionism to shed light on the complex and dynamic relationship between symbols, values, identity, and culture, highlighting the ongoing process of negotiation and interpretation among individuals (Cocks et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2020; Tengberg et al., 2012).

The aforementioned research has generally shown that each region has, in essence, its own traditional knowledge. It is upheld as a value that, in turn, develops into

a way of life that guides people's conduct. Local wisdom and nature have a vital inter-action that has helped to save and preserve social and theological relationships. Additionally, the research examined common local rituals, with values, norms, and ethics serving as the key organizing principles. As such, the construct was concerned with the thing-symbol along with its implications resulting from their cultural experiences. Despite the positive results of the studies in question, there is a need to expand the research on the local wisdom to include symbols that have particular ideologies. In other words, there has never been a study on the significance of the symbols used in the cultural practices. In order to establish such a construct in the local culture, it is advantageous to investigate a new construct that takes the symbols into account.

This study aimed to further the importance of local wisdom in efforts to preserve the local's life, based on the theory of symbolic interaction. The theory in question claims that humans are symbol-producing or symbol-making beings. The German neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1944/1992) proposed the notion that humans are "animal symbolicum". Every object that a person owns has a symbolic significance. These connotations are offered, accepted, and then used as symbols; they do not just exist in themselves. In this context, a symbol is understood as a sign with a common meaning. Therefore, both as an individual and as a society, human behavior is built upon the symbolic meanings of the object.

In connection with this, the researchers seek to elucidate the significance and moral lessons found in one of the indigenous traditions of the Manggarai ethnic in Indonesia, particularly the death rites. This rite is an important cultural and religious practice that involves a series of complex rituals and ceremonies. It typically begins with close family members washing and dressing the body of the deceased. After that, the body is placed in a coffin and taken to the central area of the village, where the community gathers for the wake. The wake may last for several days, during which time friends and relatives come to pay their respects and participate in the mourning rituals, which involve singing, chanting, and the offering of food, drink, and other items to the deceased. Furthermore, on the day of burial, a procession is held and the coffin is carried to the cemetery, accompanied by mourners. The burial itself involves several ritualized acts, including placing rice and other offerings around the grave, burning incense, and sprinkling holy water. After the burial, the family of the deceased performs a series of rituals, including the offering of prayers, the distribution of food to guests, and the burning of offerings. All of these rituals employ symbols that have long been rooted in their culture.

Recent studies have explored different aspects of the Manggarai funeral rite, including its cultural and religious significance and its impact on social relations within the community. A study by Lon & Widyawati (2021a) found that funeral rituals play a crucial role in maintaining the cultural identity of the Manggarai ethnic and strengthening social ties within the community. Another recent study by Jebadu et al. (2021) examined the role of the church in the Manggarai ethnic funeral rituals, highlighting how theological aspects of Roman Catholics influence the ritual in question. Meanwhile, a study by Lon & Widyawati (2021b) explored the impact of COVID-19 on Manggarai ethnic funeral rituals, revealing how changing social and health

conditions are affecting the practice of traditional mourning rituals. To date, the studies in question investigated the relationship between the Manggarai ethnic's funeral rite and the natural environment, displaying how the practice reflects the community's deep spiritual connection to the God, land, and the natural world. In summary, the Manggarai ethnic's funeral rite is a complex and highly symbolic cultural practice that reflects the beliefs and values of the community. Recent studies have clarified various aspects of this practice, accentuating its cultural and religious significance, its impact on social relations, and its connection to the natural environment. Moreover, these studies emphasize the importance of recognizing and preserving the unique cultural heritage of the Manggarai ethnic, including their funeral traditions, for future generations.

The purpose of this study is to explore the use of symbols in the Manggarai funeral rite focusing on meanings and values. While previous studies have described the funeral rite and its cultural significance, little attention has been paid to the use of symbols, their meanings and values. By filling in this research gap, the present study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Manggarai funeral rite and the cultural significance of the symbols within it. In addition, as an effort to maintain the existence and sustainability of the role and function of local culture, this study is very important to provide new perspective to the existing literature of local community in in today's interconnected world.

Local Wisdom and Symbol

Every community has its own unique local wisdom. In principle, local wisdom seeks to uphold a community's sense of cohesiveness, integrity, dignity, and identity (Koentjaraningrat, 1979/2009). Local knowledge is developed and transformed into the abilities and character of a community, which must be put into practice and upheld as a principle, norm, or value. Local wisdom is important in defining human civilization since it influences not only ritual dynamics but also ethics, norms, actions, and behavior. As a result, it functions as a spiritual guide for how to behave and act in daily life (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Richards et al., 2013). In other words, the presence of the unique wisdom of a particular community brings spirituality and intimacy together (Lon & Widyawati, 2018, 2021a; Niman, 2022b).

Local wisdom is also explicit local knowledge that has developed over time and has been passed down from predecessors. The wisdom under discussion has evolved within a local framework that changes and grows with the community, its surroundings, and the larger and more modern setting. The values ingrained in society have not been diminished by the protracted evolutionary process. Local wisdom, as a potential source of energy from society's collective knowledge system, coexists peacefully and actively in the face of ongoing global struggles that destroy and displace it. Therefore, it is important to properly retain and preserve local knowledge. In the field, there have been research studies on local wisdom (Döring & Nerlich, 2022; Gibbs, 2020; Okonski, 2021; Pesurnay, 2018; Sopa, 2018; Tahir et al., 2020; Zhirenov et al., 2016). The studies have confirmed that local wisdoms are social and communicative systems constructing a form of self-organization (autopoesis) of cultural systems. These systems are used in human interactions.

Local knowledge can be preserved by incorporating it into learning activities (Darong & Menggo, 2021; Darong et al., 2021). The learning process must be authentic, contextualized, and consider social wisdom in addition to theories and concepts (conceptual approach). They also emphasized the importance of incorporating local cultural values into the learning environment in order to develop character. Learning about and reintroducing local knowledge is an important step in establishing the foundation of one's own cultural values. It also serves as a means of fostering national identity and a means of identifying harmful foreign cultural influences. A strategic role for the development of a country's character and identity that can be played in the educational process is the promotion of the values found in the local wisdom of a particular indigenous community.

Furthermore, it is impossible to separate language, culture, and communication. When someone discusses culture, they inevitably discuss language and communication as well. In general, culture can be observed; artifacts and man-made products are all tangible examples of culture, while the human mind is the example of the intangible culture. Obviously, a tool is needed to communicate thoughts and coordinate the completion of quality work. In this regard, language is the required tool. Therefore, the language of a nation plays a crucial part in its civilization. Local knowledge becomes valuable when culture, language, and communication are all distinct and relevant to the particular group (Duranti, 1997).

Symbols can be words, actions, and objects. They are used to convey meaning in communication. The symbols in question are used in a way that reflects people culture. A symbol may have a specific meaning and reflect the user's conception, way of thinking, and interpretation. Its meaning is primarily according to the communicational goals of the speaker. Since a symbol is a language, it is unquestionably considered as a means of communication through which its meaning can be understood (Darong et al., 2022; Hashash et al., 2018; Hendro, 2020; Loza, 2022; Setiawan et al., 2021). According to this idea, culture and symbol—which is truly a language—cannot be separated. The meanings of the things, words, or actions that are employed in diverse cultural contexts reflect something and are interpreted within the cultural framework of the community to which they belong. When this is not the case, meanings change and possibly even misunderstandings happen (Green, 1996; Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). As a result, the meaning of symbols is influenced by the cultural background of the user.

Arguing along this line, symbolic interactionism has been used to analyze the role of symbols and meanings in the construction and transmission of cultural practices and beliefs. According to this perspective, culture is not a fixed entity but rather an ongoing process of negotiation and interpretation among individuals. A study by Niman (2022a) used symbolic interactionism to examine how natural spatial and social aspects are constructed and reproduced in the context of ethnic rituals. The author argues that ethnic rituals serve as a space for the negotiation and construction of cultural identities, where individuals use symbols and meanings to assert their cultural heritage and negotiate their relationship to the nature. The author also notes that ethnic rituals can facilitate intercultural communication and understanding, as individuals from different cultural backgrounds come together to celebrate their diversity.

Another study of Niman (2022b) used symbolic interactionism to analyze how cultural values are transmitted from parents to children. The author argues that parents use symbols and meanings to convey cultural values to their children and that the meaning of cultural values can be shaped by the social context in which they are transmitted. The author also argues that cultural values can change over time as individuals reinterpret and negotiate the meaning of symbols and practices in response to changing social and cultural contexts. The values can serve as a site of cultural resistance and negotiation. Thus, symbolic interactionism provides a valuable perspective for analyzing the role of symbols and meanings in the construction and transmission of cultural practices and beliefs. By emphasizing the ongoing process of negotiation and interpretation among individuals, symbolic interactionism highlights the dynamic and contested nature of culture, and the important role of symbols and meanings in shaping cultural identities and practices.

The Manggarai ethnic much like any other ethnic groups, has their own language. It features unique forms, norms, and linguistic components in the linguistic subfields of semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology, among others. A study by Mangga (2020), who analyzed the Manggarai language, found that the language features unique grammatical structures, particularly in the areas of morphological constructions. In this respect, Mangga (2020) explored the morphology of the Manggarai language, identifying distinctive phonemes and morphemes that are characteristic of the language. These studies highlight the importance of recognizing the linguistic diversity and richness of the Manggarai ethnic and the need for language preservation efforts to safeguard this unique linguistic heritage. Nevertheless, the Manggarai language is fascinating to study semiotically. In this respect, Manggarai ethnic uses a wide range of symbols to convey meaning. Every word, whether spoken or written, and every concept implied by the symbols has significance. This reveals the reality that learning a language involves combining agreed-upon meaning units, smaller meaningful units, into larger portions through its socio-construction (Briones, 2016; Eggins, 1994; Halliday, 1985; Hasan, 2014). Additionally, symbols are the best way to understand the meaning of some languages. Therefore, language, particularly the Manggarai language, is essentially a set of symbols in this context.

Furthermore, the Manggarai ethnic has a distinctive culture and take on many different forms during rituals. Different symbols are used in each customary rite. These symbols are used to express their vertical and horizontal relationships (Lon & Widyawati, 2021b; Menggo et al., 2021). The former deals with their relationship with God and their ancestors. The Manggarai people, who are very reliant on God as the highest supreme creator, see their ancestors as their mediators. Horizontal relations, meanwhile, focus on how they manage their interactions with others and the natural environment. As a result, the context of living and cultural experience is extremely closely tied to the existence of a symbol for them. The Manggarai ethnic has also adapted to their surroundings by carefully analyzing the circumstances and creating their own adaptation patterns. The local knowledge that is embodied in their cultural symbols is beneficial to their way of life. This is because all forms of the Manggarai traditional knowledge are performed, taught, and passed on from one generation to the next by considering their behavioral patterns

and way of life. This is consistent with the assertions of Mungmachon (2012), Thondlana et al. (2012), and Vranić et al. (2018) that symbolic meanings, knowledge systems, and values serve as a mirror of a community's way of life.

By and large, the progress reports from the field have largely seen the local culture, along with its wisdom and ideals, in the context of an effort to protect life. In this sense, the studies are directly related to the existence of the local people and their efforts to live a sustainable life. However, studies of local culture focusing on the symbols are few and far between. The inclusion of symbols in the study of the practice of local culture helps to strengthen the locality of a particular community. Thus, this study was conducted in such a way that the researchers was able to examine the philosophy and ideology of the used symbols.

Methodology

Data for this descriptive qualitative approach were organically collected from the emic and etic perspectives of the Manggarai ethnic. In this context, the perspectives of the Manggarai ethnic in describing cultural phenomena are of interest according to emic perspective. Meanwhile, etic perspective examines the Manggarai ethnic from the perspective of outsiders, which, in this study, were the researchers.

In order to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, triangulation was performed (Farmer et al., 2006; Farquhar et al., 2020; Stake, 1995), meaning that three different methods were used to collect the data for this study: observations, interviews, and document analysis. The researchers actively participated as observers and provided a recorder, an anecdotal record, and an observation sheet. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide containing 10 questions related to the main concern of the study. The major informants were three spokespersons and three senior villagers who were more knowledgeable about the Manggarai culture. Three one-on-one interviews were conducted with every respondent, each lasting approximately one hour.

Seven questions were asked during the first and second interviews, and three additional questions were asked during the last session. The interviews were conducted in the Manggarai language to reduce the participants' anxiety and enhance their capacity to comfortably comment on the required information. The interviews were digitally recorded by the researchers using a mobile phone recording app and then transcribed verbatim. Participants received transcriptions to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data. The researchers also conducted a documentation study to learn more about the facts relevant to the study's topic. In this study, the documentation was useful in bolstering and complementing interview and observation data. The documentation in question took the form of a video document (on YouTube[1]) that helped the researchers to gather information about the symbols (Kondo Randang Channel, 2020).

The researchers processed and evaluated the data based on Mey's (1993) semiotics and pragmatics theory of wording. As outlined by Creswell & Poth (2017), this study used the data analysis spiral for the interview, in which the researchers entered with text or video materials and left with an account or a narrative. In this sense, data

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[1] YouTube™ is a trademark of Google Inc., registered in the US and other countries.

analysis involved six stages: managing and organizing the data, reading and observing emergent concepts, characterizing and grouping codes into themes, establishing and assessing interpretations, displaying and visualizing the data, and reporting the results.

The first phase of the researchers' work involved assembling all of the supporting documents, including transcripts of the interviews and other records relevant to the use of symbols, and translating all of the interviews from the Manggarai language into English. In the second phase, the researchers continued to read the transcripts and take notes on new ideas. In the third phase, the researchers used a content analysis technique according to Krippendorff (2004), which refers to the analysis of participants' narratives gathered from the interview transcriptions. To confirm the analysis, a methodological triangulation was used in fourth step to compare particular individual notes and codes. To address the issue of potential coder bias, the researchers individually coded the data and compared the results. The second researcher worked with the first researcher to reach agreement while serving as an objective reviewer of the coding. Second researcher had not participated in the period of data gathering. This action was taken to create an auditable decision trail and increase the reliability of the analysis, and was consistent with the requirements of validity and reliability in quantitative research as recommended by Nowell et al. (2017). Finally, three emerging themes were identified. In the fifth phase, relevant quotes were selected to support the participants' narratives. Examples of the participants' experiences had during the last phase, when this manuscript was created, are provided in the Findings and Discussion section below.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This study examined the significance of the symbols used during the Manggarai ethnic's funeral ritual. The results of the interview are summarized in the table below. The researchers obtained 41 excerpts, nine codes, and three themes.

Table 1
Theme, Code, and Excerpts

Theme(s)	Code(s)	Sample of the excerpt(s)
Macro	Power	"… What I have done is to communicate and explain the wish, love, and care to our ancestor. We make offerings for the sake of eternal life" (R. D., January 9, 2023, trans. by Hieronimus Canggung Darong [H. C. D.])
		"… as a spokesperson, I have to be careful in maintaining commodity exchanges with the ancestor. Once I made mistake in offering the symbols, I could be the next victim" (F. A., January 11, 2023, trans. by H. C. D.)
	Dominance and inequality	"The symbol used is very adaptable. Although it is different from one village to another, or from one clan to another, the essence is similar. A very prestigious clan might use prestige symbols as they have been ruled for far too long by their ancestors. However, it is still a prayer" (T. G., January 15, 2023, trans. by Hieronimus Canggung Darong [H. C. D.])

Table 1 Continued

Theme(s)	Code(s)	Sample of the excerpt(s)
Meso	Introduction	"We mainly use some forewords. The words are uttered by the spokesperson who leads to the core event. It is just an opening session. We never go directly to the main event. The consideration is about the social relationship, both with the ancestor and the participants attending the event" (G. G., February 11, 2023, trans. by H. C. D.)
	Content/body	"… Everyone who is joining the event should be there. Hopes, prayers, loves are united in the symbol being offered. This is a very essential moment. I am talking to them (ancestors)" (L. W., February 19, 2023, trans. by H. C. D.)
	Closing	"… After offering the symbol, I usually end with a closing statement emphasizing the hopes. In this regard, there is an expectation that the ancestors and God will accept the offerings. There are no tears falling, no life burden, no sorrow and no disaster in the family" (R. D., February 21, 2023, trans. by H. C. D.)
Micro	Semantics	"Overall, I prepared the symbols according to the discourse of the event. In this case, a symbol cannot be used in all traditional rites. This occurs in such a way that the meaning is different according to the setting and the scene. Furthermore, the codes and channels through which the symbol is employed are different as well" (T. G., February 21, 2023, trans. by H. C. D.)
	Syntax	"… In addition to meaning adaptation, I also consider the rules and principles that govern the sentence structure of my language. For example, I should structure my sentence so that meaning of symbols is elegantly offered" (F. A., February 24, 2023, trans. by H. C. D.)
	Stylistic	"… I should pay great attention to the choice and use of words, the style or manner of my utterances (diction), the power of intonation, the distribution of sentence lengths, and the use of certain language registers" (L. W., January 29, 2023, trans. by H. C. D.)
	Rhetorical	"… The art of using language to communicate effectively and persuasively is very important. In this case, I use metaphor and allegory to offer the symbols" (G. G., February 5, 2023, trans. by H. C. D.)

The data above confirm the setting and scene, participants, outcomes, acts and sequences, key instruments, norms, and genre of the Manggarai ethnic funeral ceremony discourse. Such discourse emphasizes the time and place of a speech act, the physical circumstances, as well as formality, power, and seriousness features in terms of setting and scene. Meanwhile, the participants play the roles of speakers and listeners, or more generally of addressers and addressees embracing their ethnicity, social standing, relationships, and duties. Outcomes are about how offers are accepted. Acts and sequences focus on utterances. The words of the spokesperson, as such, were in the form of rhetorical statements, persuasive and full of symbolic meanings. The key is reflected in the sincere ways of the funeral discourse. Instrumentalities refer to the type of language that was primarily used in verbal communication. This

component is strongly tied to the social norm, which in this case was the standard for how the spokesman's sentences should be constructed when presenting symbols. Ultimately, the genre of this ceremony is entirely regarded as a prayer of the family and relatives to the supreme, the almighty God, through the messengers of the ancestors. In order to confirm the interview data, the researchers conducted observations, with the results presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Funeral Ceremony Symbols

Stages	Symbols	Types	Lexical meaning	Contextual meaning	Meaning Category
Pre	*Wero, pande bo*	Action	To notify	Notifying relatives or villagers of a death	Social and religious meanings
	Haeng nai	Action	To get the soul	Deep condolences of the relatives	Social meaning
	Ela	Thing (animal)	Pig	Offering (prayer of the relatives)	Religious meaning
	Poe woja/ Latung	Action	Corps request	To give the wealth (corps) of the deceased to the family left (not to bring along with)	Social, religious, and cosmological meanings
	Manuk	Thing (animal)	Roaster	Offering for the request of wealth	Social and religious meanings
	Ancem peti	Action	To close the coffin	To say goodbye	Religious and philosophical meanings
	Tokong bakok	Action	To stay over late at night	To comfort the bereaved	Social and religious meanings
	Teru wae cor	Action	To spread the water	Departure and purification; The soul is ready for departure	Religious and cosmological meanings
	Waca lime	Action	To wash hand	To prevent the soul of deceased from following the people who bury the body	Religious and cosmological meanings
During	*Tura wakas*	Action	To put the sugar cane	To ask permission before putting the corps in a hole. Someone might be down there.	Religious and cosmological meanings
	Panggol	Thing	Cross	Religion identity	Religious meaning
	wae	Thing	Water	Purifier	Philosophical meaning
Post	*Reis gu depa lime*	Action	To greet and shake hands	To tell the family that the corps has already been buried	Social and philosophical meanings
	Ceki telu/ Lima or saung ta'a/	Action	Three or five days of grieving period	Prayer for a death memorial (see Figure 2)	Social and religious meanings

Stages	Symbols	Types	Lexical meaning	Contextual meaning	Meaning Category
	Wentar buing lulung loce	Action	To clean the bed	A prayer for a healthy life for the bereaved; an expectation that there will be no more deaths	Religious meaning
	Kelas/ Pedeng bokong	Action	To equip	A prayer. The world of the dead is totally different from the world of the living (to start a new life for both the deceased and the family)	Social, religious, and philosophical meanings
	Kaba/Ela	Thing (animal)	Buffalo/pig	An offering	Social and religious meanings
	Teing hang	Action	To give some food	A prayer for the deceased to protect the family (see Figure 1)	Social, religious, and philosophical meanings

Figure 1
Kelas, Prayer for Start of a New Life for Both the Deceased and the Family

Note. Source: authors.

Figure 2
Ceki Telu, Prayer for a Death Memorial

Note. Source: authors.

Figure 3
Teing Hang, the Offering of a Rooster

Note. Source: authors.

Figure 4
Wada Ruha, the Offering of an Egg

Note. Source: authors.

With respect to the data (see Table 2), the pre, during, and post stages of the Manggarai ethnic's burial ceremony have social, religious, philosophical, and cosmological meanings. The action and object symbols both allude to these meanings. In this sense, the social meaning was an attempt to maintain a sense of kinship and family unity. The religious meaning, on the other hand, is strongly tied to the Manggarai ethnic belief in the human soul, which has existed in the Manggarai culture for far too long. The philosophical meaning contained in these symbols is the view that human life does not stop after death, but continues into another life in another world or realm. Symbols such as water, rice, and other offerings indicate that the journey of the soul after death requires proper and pure preparation for it to go smoothly and peacefully (see Figures 3 and 4). The cosmological values contained in these symbols are the view that humans are part of a larger universe, and that human life does not stand alone but is closely connected to nature and its environment. Symbols such as *po'e woja/latung* [to request the corps], *teru wae cor* [to spread the water], *depa lime* [to greet and shake hands] and *tura wakas* [to put the sugar cane] indicate that human life must always adapt and work together with nature and the environment to achieve progress and success.

Overall, the symbols used in the funeral ceremony of Manggarai ethnic not only have ritualistic values, but also carry deep social, religious, philosophical, and cosmological meanings and values, reflecting the worldview and beliefs related to human life and death.

Discussion

This study examines the use of symbols used in Manggarai ethnic's funeral ceremony. The ceremony is not only about the use of symbols, but also about the practice of social and individual life. This is supported by the idea that a symbol is

actually a personal, social act and knowledge of the users (Carassa & Colombetti, 2015; Dongxiang, 2018; Niman, 2022a). As a result, the use of symbols is strongly linked to the cultural setting in which they are used.

According to the results of the interviews (Table 1), the funeral ceremony employs a variety of symbols, including actions and objects. The Manggarai ethnic interact with their natural surroundings either directly or indirectly through the symbols they use. The meanings of the symbols are closely related to the cosmological perspective and interpretation of the universe. This is consistent with previous research showing that societal symbols and languages are determined by the way people think and believe (Menggo et al., 2021; Sopa, 2018; Tahir et al., 2020).

In support of this claim, the researchers discovered a number of significant aspects of the symbols. First, the symbols are used in such a way that they have the power to convey the message. They served to repair and preserve the relationship between the Manggarai people, their ancestors, and the Supreme God. This religious interpretation is defined as an effort and prayer to maintain the life management, care, love, and affection of the family and relatives towards the corpse that begins to reside in a new space. Manggarai ethnic's cosmological perspective has the potential to use symbols in expressing the feelings in question. There should be offerings (symbols) in order for life to exist. Regardless of the differences among clans, the substance is similar in terms of the goals of what is called a prayer. Therefore, a prayer to the deceased is the main focus of the Manggarai ethnic's funeral service.

Second, when expressing symbols, the spokesperson must adhere to the discourse norm, which requires an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The greetings and honors to the participants "here (living people) and there (ancestors and God)" are addressed in the introduction. The major core of the offering symbols is referred to as the body. In this section, the prayer to God and the ancestors is offered. The conclusion, meanwhile, is a high expectation for the acceptance of the offered symbols. As of now, the introduction, body, and conclusion of the funeral discourse are comparable to those of other genres.

Third, the symbols used were articulated with a strong focus on the local meaning of a discourse, in addition to the macro and micro levels. Such local meaning can be deduced from the semantic, syntactic, stylistic, and rhetorical elements of the spokespeople's statements. The semantic element is concerned with lexical, phrasal, and sentence meaning and the principles that govern the relationship between sentences or words. Thus, the symbols used in the funeral discourse are closely related to meaning as a definition, meaning as an intention, and meaning as a reference. These meanings may also occur in other traditional Manggarai rites. However, the spokesperson of the Manggarai funeral discourse expressed the symbols in context, which in turn conveyed the meanings in question. Meanwhile, the rule governing the spokesperson's utterances in expressing symbols mostly followed the pattern of $S \rightarrow NP\ VP$. The uttered sentence (S) consists of a noun phrase (NP) and a verb phrase (VP) (syntactic element), with a great attention paid to the power of intonations (tones) and sentence length (stylistic element) as well as the use of figurative language (rhetorical aspect).

The Manggarai ethnic's funeral rite is an output of a product, which means that it is not just a discourse. It is important to consider the Manggarai social structures, systems of dominance, power, and how these factors affect the discourse in question. Thus, text, social cognition, language, and social context are all interrelated. As a result, the symbols used pay as much or more attention to language use in relation to social, political, and cultural factors than to "purely" linguistic facts.

Integral to the interview data, symbols used in the funeral discourse is a means to build the Manggarai ethnic interpersonal relationships (Table 2). The symbols hold the relationship between the family and others and their environment, ancestors, and God. In this respect, symbols (things and actions) are employed as a means of communication and have specific meanings. This is consistent with Mead's theory that symbolic interactions between people provide a pearl of meaningful local wisdom (Baker et al., 2018; Iswandono et al., 2016; Niman, 2022b; Zhirenov et al., 2016). Through symbols, symbolic interactions become the subject of how to understand other people's thoughts, and patterns of action (Loza, 2022; Tahir et al., 2020). In addition, the symbol is frequently used to describe and learn the transcendent secret world, such as the "truth of being," through implicit images to shield oneself from the blinding rays of truth, as well as a spiritual tool to help understand the outside world (Firth, 1973/2011; Cassirer, 1944/1992).

Furthermore, the symbols have a societal significance. The use of action symbols, which represent a societal concept for the Manggarai ethnic, makes this meaning very evident. The social platforms that bring people together and foster fraternity and togetherness are employed as symbols. This is consistent with the findings of previous research that each traditional ritual is a way for communities to express their interconnectedness by reading environmental cues and creating local knowledge patterns that are embodied in knowledge or ideas, customary norms, and values in the cultural rituals (Baker et al., 2018; Bauto, 2013; Borchi, 2018; Byram, 1993; Mungmachon, 2012; Suswandari, 2017).

In the Manggarai funeral discourse, the meanings indicated above (social, religious, philosophical, and cosmological meanings) are unified with distinctive principles for each. The principles serve as guidelines for how they should conduct themselves and engage with others, ancestors, environments, and God. This suggests that the funeral rites of the Manggarai ethnic uphold noble principles that are extremely precious to them. The point is supported by the studies performed by Duranti (1997), Koentjaraningrat (1979/2009), Miska et al. (2017), and Niman (2022b) who said that the concepts of things in the community's mind (mentalistic aspect) that they value serve as a guide for action and interaction both now and in the afterlife.

The stages of the funeral ceremony also represent a cosmic unity that is unbroken and holds honorable qualities for the Manggarai ethnic. The patterns and modes of communication as well as the ideals expressed in each stage suggest a symbolic exchange and a profound philosophy of existence as extremely vulnerable human beings who are totally reliant on their predecessors and on God. These principles are upheld and serve as ways of life. This is consistent with previous studies, which

showed that local wisdom has the power of values and norms that the community must uphold as a result of the symbolic interactions (Gibbs, 2020; Saharudin, 2019).

The symbols of the Manggarai ethnic's funeral ceremony are more of the hidden meaning than the concept, although the symbol mediates the artistic image and the concept of hidden meaning (Firth, 1973/2011). They have factual meanings as opposed to artistic images. Additionally, the current study discovered that symbols did not directly represent an object or phenomenon, but rather gave it a misleading impression of a similar object or phenomenon. Symbols do not directly express a thought, but use figurative language such as allegory and metaphor. Each person interprets the symbol according to their own level of understanding and chooses a meaning that best suits their capabilities, since it frequently has a metaphorical meaning.

To this day, the Manggarai ethnic's funeral ceremony still uses symbols as a way to communicate with family members, the environment, ancestors, and God. Therefore, the idea of symbols in the Manggarai culture cannot be isolated from its conceptualization, relationships with other people, and the supreme being (socio-theological relations). The position of the soul of the deceased is believed to be in another realm where the souls of the deceased continue their journey into the afterlife. Based on the meanings and values of the symbols used in the Manggarai ethnic's funeral rite, the position of the soul of the dead body is believed to be in the afterlife. The symbols used in the funeral rite are intended to guide the spirit of the deceased to the afterlife and ensure a smooth transition to the next world. For example, the use of offerings may be intended to comfort and support the soul of the deceased on its journey. Overall, the Manggarai ethnic's funeral rite is intended to honor the deceased and ensure that their spirit is able to find its way to the afterlife, where it can continue to exist in a new form.

However, there is still a belief that the spirit of the deceased remains with the family for a period of time after death. This is known as the "souling" period, and it is believed to last for up to forty days. During this time, the spirit of the deceased is believed to remain close to the family and may even visit them in dreams or visions. Although the deceased person is no longer physically present, their soul continues to exist and live with the family and other loved ones. The soul exists outside of this world, but through the prayers expressed in the symbols provided, the soul interacts psychologically with living human beings. In other words, the dead person is still living together with their family and relatives. After the period of souling, the spirit is believed to move on to the afterlife and no longer stay with the family.

More importantly, since they are based on constant mobility and are connected to any phenomenon, it is significant to note that Manggarai ethnic's symbols do not exist in their symbolic domains. Over time, the symbolic units incorporate additional symbolic elements that indicate the categories of modern Manggarai cultural and cognitive existence. Additionally, the character of the symbol in linguistic communication is shaped by communicative necessity. Manggarai ethnic's symbols are thus born out of necessity. This means that the verbal representation of the universe and the symbolization process are different from the representation of scientific reality. Following cultural developments, units that became a component of the symbolic representation of the human worldview should be viewed as a complicated phenomenon.

Conclusion

It is not enough to study the nature of language symbols solely from a linguistic perspective. When symbols are linked to the cultural context, it is possible to comprehend their nature; it is also possible to discover the essence of a symbol by studying how it interacts with that context. Individual expressions of local wisdom come to characterize and play a vital part in the cultural life of a community. As such, a culture is a form of self-expression and the creator of communal identity.

The Manggarai ethnic use symbols in their traditional funeral rites for several reasons. Symbols serve as a form of communication, representing complex ideas, values, and emotions beyond words. They reinforce cultural identity and heritage, connecting individuals to their roots and ancestors. Symbols hold sacred or ritualistic meanings, facilitating religious or spiritual practices and connecting with divine forces. In funeral rites, symbols foster Manggarai ethnic cohesion, strengthening social bonds and a shared sense of identity. They also serve as teaching tools, transmitting cultural knowledge, history, and wisdom to younger generations.

The Manggarai ethnic are keen to demonstrate their transparency, closeness, humility, respect, duty, and courtesy towards others, their ancestors, and God. Thus, the use of symbols in Manggarai ethnic's funeral ceremony reflects their anthropological, sociological, cosmological, and psychological relational principles, which are called socio-theological relations. Through the use of symbols, these relations make the dead person still alive in this world. However, it is important to note that the specific reasons for using symbols in traditional rites can vary widely across cultures, with their meaning and significance deeply embedded in cultural and historical contexts. Understanding symbols requires studying and engaging with specific cultures.

This study had several limitations. First, the focus of the study was on the funeral ceremony. Since the Manggarai ethnic is rich in symbols, further researchers need to extend the studies to other traditional discourses. Second, there were only six participants in the study. In order to have rich data, it might be more challenging to involve more participants.

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