



## The Characteristics of Traditional House as a Cultural Patrimony of Clan in Manggarai Society (Semiotic Analysis)

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**ABSTRACT:** This study explores the characteristics of traditional house as a cultural patrimony of clan in Manggarai society in terms of its forms, functions, and meanings. The study is viewed from the perspective of cultural semiotics. The study is descriptive-qualitative as it aims to describe the characteristics of traditional house as a cultural patrimony of clan in Manggarai society in terms of its forms, functions, and meanings. The results of study show that the characteristics of traditional house as a cultural patrimony of clan in Manggarai society are unique and specific to Manggarai culture in its forms, functions, and meanings. The name of traditional house belonging to Manggarai society is **mbaru gendang** 'drum house' because there stores **gendang** 'drum' which is believed as the image of the ancestors of the **wa'u** as a patrilineal-genealogic clan who owns the house. In terms of its design, the traditional house is of two forms, **mbaru niang** 'cone-shaped house' and **mbaru lopa** 'prism-shaped house'. The traditional house of Manggarai society as the identity marker of the **wa'u** as a patrilineal-genealogic clan functions as the place to live, to conduct meetings, to carry out rituals, to keep cultural heritages, and to store foods. Along with its functions, the traditional house of Manggarai society shares a set of meanings, especially socia and religious meaning.

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### INTRODUCTION

There are many large pluralistic nations in the world and one of those nations is Indonesia which is identified as the fourth largest pluralistic nation in the world. One of the prominent indicators is that the population of Indonesia is composed of the diversity of ethnic groups widely spreading across around 17.504 islands throughout the archipelago of Indonesia (Wasino, 2013). As every ethnic group has its own local culture and language, Indonesia is known as a large multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual nation in the world (Bustan, 2006; Bustan, 2007; Bustan, 2008; Gana et al., 2022). The miniatures of Indonesia as a large plularistic nation can be seen in several provinces, including the province of East Nusa Tenggara as its population is composed of 18 ethnic groups spreading over five big islands, Flores, Sumba, Timor, Alor, Lembata, and over dozen of small islands such as Komodo, Rinca, and Palue. While in view of linguistic perspective as the manifestation of cultural differences, there are about 68 local languages spoken in the province of East Nusa Tenggara (Bustan & Liunokas, 2019; Kemendikbud, 2019). Therefore, it is not surprising that the province of East Nusa Tenggara is defined as a cultural tapestry of Indonesian archipelago (Bustan, 2006; Bustan, 2007; Gana, 2022).

One of ethnic groups in the province of East Nusa Tenggara is Manggarai ethnic group, which is further called Manggarai people, residing in the region of Manggarai which occupies the western part of the island of Flores. Manggarai society are identified as members of Manggarai ethnic group because they share the same culture known as Manggarai culture and, at the same time, they also speak the same language known as Manggarai language that functions as the reflection of Manggarai culture (Bustan, 2006; Bustan, 2007; Bustan et al., 2024). As in other cultures, the function of Manggarai culture as the identity marker of Manggarai

society as members of Manggarai ethnic group can be seen, among other things, in their traditional house as a tangible product of cultural patrimony inherited from their ancestors.

This study explores to the characteristics of traditional house in Manggarai culture as a cultural patrimony of clan in Manggarai society. However, as the traditional house is pervasive that the study focuses on its forms, functions, and meanings considered along with cultural conceptualization ascribed in the cognitive map of Manggarai society as the frame of reference of their experiences in viewing and making sense of the world. The study is conducted for the basic reason that the traditional house of Manggarai society has unique and specific characteristics to Manggarai culture as the parent or hosting culture in which it is embedded. The unique and specific characteristics are reflected in its forms, functions, and meanings which designate the ways the members of Manggarai society view and make sense of the world. Because of having unique and specific features, the traditional house of Manggarai society has attracted domestic and foreign tourists to visit the region of Manggarai region in the last few decades (Bustan, 2006; Bustan, 2007). One of the traditional villages that has been well-known all over the world as an icon of cultural tourist object in the region of Manggarai because of its traditional houses is Wae Rebo that lies in the southern part of the region of Manggarai (Erb, 1999). Therefore, it is necessary for the local government of Manggarai to revitalize the traditional houses in various traditional villages that have been damages through the design of local culture based-development program.

## FRAMEWORK

As traditional house can be explored from different theoretical perspectives, the study is mainly viewed from the perspective of semiotics, a branch of science which is concerned with the study of signs and their codes together with their uses in a society (Piliang, 2005; Piliang, 2011). This comes closest to the conception of Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) that semiotics is a science that explores the relationships between signs and their intended specific meanings. The conception implies that semiotics is concerned with the study of both signs and anything that stands for or represents something else (Bowcher, 2018). In line with this, according to Zoest and Sudjiman (1992), semiotics is concerned with the study of signs and all related things to signs like the functions, the relationship, the sender, and the receiver of the signs which refer to everything that should be given meaning. As meaning is its main concern, semiotics can be used to study the cultural phenomena of a society and, as meaning is a cultural reality, in the perspective of semiotics, meaning is defined as cultural meaning which is equated with symbolic meaning (Geertz, 1973; Bustan, 2024). As different society can define culture differently, in the perspective of semiotics, culture is defined as a system of signs which are interconnected by means of understanding meanings stored in the signs. The interconnection of signs in a culture is based on social convention or social agreement inherited from ancestors. Parallel to this, according to Piliang (2011), as the interconnection of signs, codes, and texts makes up a culture, in this regard, culture is defined as the amalgamation of signs, codes, and texts.

Along with the conception of Saussure, according to Barthes (in Hoed, 2008), two dichotomy concepts of semiotics that should be taken into account are as follows: (1) syntagmatic and paradigmatic relation and (2) denotation and connotation. The concept of syntagm is the basis of analyzing such cultural phenomena as signs (Sobur, 2004). As there is a close relationship between a sign and its object used as referent, Pierce as quoted by in Zoest and Sudjiman (1992) classifies sign into are three main categories, involving icon, index, and symbol. Icon refers to a category of sign in which the relationship between sign and its object as referent is based on similarity in some respect. Icon refers to a category of sign identified on the basis of having perceptible likeness in its form and meaning. Even though icon can be easily perceived, it is complicated to be interpreted because of its implicit meaning. Index is a category of sign in which its meaning is interpreted on the basis of the context of its use. Symbol is a category of sign referring to a certain thing or object. Symbol as a category of sign can have both iconic aspect and indexical aspect in accordance with its use in certain context (Foley, 1997; Sobur, 2004; Bungin, 2007).

Symbol as a category of sign can be classified into material symbols and nonmaterial symbols. The material symbols refer to symbols which are tangible such as houses, foods, and clothes, meanwhile the nonmaterial symbols refer to symbols which are intangible like language, knowledge, and the system of belief. Regardless their physical appearances, the meanings of symbols are known as symbolic meanings which are closely related to culture and, as such, symbolic meanings are equated with cultural meanings which refer to public meanings encoded in shared symbols, not self-contained private understandings. As culture can be defined differently, as aforementioned, culture in this light is referred to as a system of meaningful symbols and the meanings in a culture known as symbolic meanings which are equated with cultural meanings (Geertz, 1973; Bustan, 2024; Bustan, 2025).

As it puts emphasis on the function of culture as a system of meaningful symbols, one of the kinds of semiotics is cultural semiotics, a branch of semiotics which examines symbols through the lens of culture in which the symbols are embedded (Sobur, 2004). In terms of its products, the symbols of culture can be identified into material and nonmaterial symbols. The material symbols refer to the tangible products of culture that can be touched, while the nonmaterial symbols refer to the intangible products of culture that cannot be touched. Regardless such differences, one of the material symbols of culture is traditional house (Koentjaraningrat, 1992; Koentjaraningrat, 2004). In view of cultural semiotics, the traditional house belonging to a society as members of a social group has unique and specific characteristics to culture as the parent culture in which it is embedded. The unique and specific characteristics

of the traditional house belonging to a society as members of a social group are reflected in such aspects as forms, functions, and meanings which designate the ways they view and make sense of the world. Many facts show that the traditional house belonging to a society is defined not only as a house for them to live, but also as an identity marker for them as a house based-community. In addition, the traditional house is regarded as a sacred place as it serves as a connection between them as human beings and supernatural powers (Erb, 1999; Bustan, 2005; Bustan, 2009).

## METHOD

This is a descriptive study as it aims to describe the characteristics of traditional house in Manggarai culture in terms of its forms, functions, and meanings considered along with the cultural conceptualization ascribed in the cognitive map of Manggarai society as the frame of reference (Muhadjir, 1995). To achieve the intended aim, the study was based on two sources of data, involving primary data and secondary data. Referring to the process of acquiring those two kinds of data, the procedures of research carried out were field research and library research. The field research aimed to collect the primary data regarding the characteristics of traditional house in Manggarai culture in terms of its name, forms, functions, and meanings as the main concerns of study. The field research was carried out in the regency of Manggarai, especially in Ruteng Pu'u village, Wae Rebo village, and Compang Cibal village as the main locations. The three villages were chosen as the main locations for the reason that they are traditional villages in Manggarai regency. The methods of data collection were observation and interview, that is in-depth interview (Bungin, 2007; Sudikan, 2001; Spradley, 1997). The observation was carried out to have data regarding a general view on the physical characteristics of traditional house in Manggarai culture. Based on the data of observation, then we interviewed Manggarai society as the sources of data, especially those living in the three villages as the main locations of the field research. For the purpose of the study, they were represented by 9 key informants selected on the basis of ideal criteria proposed by Sudikan (2001), Spradley (1997), and Bungin (2007) with the most important criterion is that they understand deeply the forms, functions, and meanings of Manggarai traditional house. The techniques of data collection were recording, elicitation, and note-taking. The library research was carried out to collect the secondary data relevant to the problem of the study. The method of data collection was documentary study. The documents used as the sources of data were general references (books) and special references (result of research, articles and papers). All the collected data were then analyzed qualitatively by inductive method as the analysis was started from the data to a local-ideographic theory/concept as it describes the characteristics of traditional house in Manggarai culture with special reference to its forms, functions, and meanings considered along with the cultural conceptualization ascribed in the cognitive map of Manggarai society as the frame of reference.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The result of study shows that the traditional house of Manggarai society is called *mbaru gendang* 'drum house' in Manggarai language. The term *mbaru gendang* is a nominal phrase made up two words as its component parts, involving the word (noun) *mbaru* 'house' as the core word and the word (noun) *gendang* 'drum' as its attribute or modifier. The house is called *mbaru gendang* because there stores the *gendang* 'drum' which is conceptualized in the cognitive map of Manggarai society as the self-image of their ancestors. The traditional house of Manggarai society has unique and specific characteristics to Manggarai culture as the parent or hosting culture in which it is embedded. The unique and specific characteristics are reflected in such aspects as forms, functions, and meanings which designate the ways the members of Manggarai society view and make sense of their world, involving both the factual world and the symbolic world. In accordance with the cultural conceptualization ascribed in the cognitive map of Manggarai people, the *mbaru gendang* is not simply defined as a house that anchors them to a place, divides them into visible groups, and expresses their continuity of relationships over generations. As it is closely tied up with the birth, marriage, and death events, the *mbaru gendang* also functions as a link to connect with the past of Manggarai society in many ways that represent their belief on the existence of their ancestors as supernatural powers. In addition to being a living place for the members of the *wa'u* as a patrilineal-genealogical clan, the traditional house of Manggarai society is the center of their world or axis mundi as it connects the earthly world and the heavenly world.

### Discussion

Referring to the results of study provided above, this section discusses in more depth the characteristics of traditional house in Manggarai culture in terms of its forms, functions, and meanings on the basis of the cultural conceptualization ascribed in the cognitive map of Manggarai society as the frame of reference.

### Forms

In terms of its design and shape, there are two forms of the *mbaru gendang* in Manggarai culture, including *mbaru niang* 'canonic house' and *mbaru lopa* 'prism house'. The main difference between the two forms of the *mbaru gendang* can be seen in their ridges in which the ridge of the *mbaru niang* is canonic and the ridge of the *mbaru lopa* is prism (Lawang, 1999; Bustan, 2005). The *mbaru niang* can be seen the traditional village of Wae Rebo that lies in southern part of the Manggarai region and the *mbaru lopa* can be

seen in the traditional village of Compang Cibai that lies in the western part of the Manggarai region. However, in the last few decades, most of the traditional houses in the region of Manggarai are designed in the forms of the *mbaru niang* in accordance with the design of the *mbaru niang* in the traditional village of Todo. This is one of the controversial issues regarding the revitalization of the *mbaru gendang* in the region of Manggarai because, as mentioned earlier, there are two forms of the *mbaru gendang* in Manggarai culture, including *mbaru niang* 'canonic house' and *mbaru lopa* 'prism house'.

Apart from the natures of differences in their ridges, in general, the *mbaru gendang* consists of three main parts. The first part is known as *ngaung* which refers to the under part of the house as the place for raising animals such as *ela* 'pigs' and *mbe* 'goats'. The second part is *lutur* which refers to the central part of the house that functions as the living place for the members of the *wa'u* as a patrilineal-genealogic clan who own the house. The third part is *lobo* which refers to the upper part of the house that functions as the place for storing foods especially corn (*latung*) and rice (*woja*) as their staple foods as well as the place for keeping their ancestors' heritages. The three parts of the traditional house are connected by *siri bongkok* as the main pole that lies in the center part of the house to connect the under part, the central parts, and the upper part. The *gendang* 'drum' which is conceptualized in the cognitive map of Manggarai society as the self-image of their ancestors is hang on the *siri bongkok* and, as such, the *siri bongkok* is regarded as a sacred pole that connects the under part (*ngaung*), the central part (*lutur*), and the upper part (*lobo*) of the house.

### Functions

It is conceptualized in the cognitive map of Manggarai society that the *mbaru gendang* functions mainly as the identity marker of the *wa'u* as a patrilineal-genealogic clan living in one village. This is because, in the past, the members of the *wa'u* lived in one village known as *beo* in Manggarai language and, therefore, the term *beo* was defined as a unilocal settlement unit of the *wa'u* as a patrilineal genealogic clan. Along with the expansions of the *wa'u* in several villages nowadays because of cross-clan marriages, it is found out several clans living or residing in one village and, as a result, there are several traditional houses in one village as well. The differences between the traditional houses in one village are marked by the name of the *wa'u* who owns the house. The name of the *wa'u* is attached to the word *gendang* as the conversion of the term *mbaru gendang* with the omission or deletion of the word *mbaru*. As seen in Pagal village, there are two traditional houses. The one belongs to the *wa'u* Kina (the Kina clan) and the other belongs to the *wa'u* Kina (the Tasok clan). The traditional house of the Kina clan is called *Gendang Kina* and the traditional house of the Tasok clan is called *Gendang Tasok*. The difference implies that, in addition to functioning as the sense of identity for the *wa'u* as a patrilineal-genealogic clan, the *mbaru gendang* also functions as a symbol of identity distinguishing one clan from other clans. In line with the function of the *mbaru gendang* as the identity marker of the *wa'u* as a patrilineal-genealogic clan who owns the house, the *wa'u* as a patrilineal-genealogic clan is also defined as a house based-community.

It is conceptualized in the cognitive map of Manggarai society that the *mbaru gendang* is not simply defined as a house that anchors them to a place, divides them into visible groups, and expresses their continuity of relationships over generations. As it is closely tied up with the birth, marriage, and death events, the *mbaru gendang* also functions to link with the past of Manggarai society in many ways that also include their system of belief on the existence of their ancestors as supernatural powers. In this light, the *mbaru gendang* serves not only as living place, but also as a center of the world or axis mundi for the *wa'u* who owns the traditional house. As aforementioned, the *siri bongkok* as the main pole of the *mbaru gendang* is regarded as a sacred pole as it connects the earthly world and the heavenly world.

### Meanings

It is conceptualized in the cognitive map of Manggarai society that the *mbaru gendang* has a set of meanings which are closely related to one other in uncovering the ways the members of Manggarai society view and make sense of the world. As reflected in its functions, the prominent meanings of the *mbaru gendang* are social and religious meaning.

#### Social Meaning

The social meaning of the *mbaru gendang* is reflected in such functions as in the following: (1) the identity marker of the *wa'u* as a patrilineal-genealogic clan as the owner of the house defining their existence as a house-based community; (2) the place to live for the members of the *wa'u* as a patrilineal-genealogic clan; (3) the place to hold the meetings for the members of the *wa'u* as a patrilineal-genealogic clan; (4) the place to carry out the social-collective rituals of the *wa'u* such as the rituals which are related to the birth, marriage, and death events of the members of the *wa'u* as a patrilineal-genealogic clan.

#### Religious Meaning

The religious meaning of the *mbaru gendang* is related to the system of belief embraced by Manggarai society regarding the existence of their ancestors as supernatural powers. The manifestation of the religious meaning of the *mbaru gendang* is reflected in the belief of the *gendang* as the representation of their ancestors which is hang on the *siri bongkok* as main pole of the house. This implies meaning that the *mbaru gendang* is a sacred place that serves as a center of the world or an axis mundi for Manggarai society because it is a place of connection between both earthly realm and heavenly realm. It worth noting that, although most of Manggarai society have embraced Christianity nowadays, the belief in the existence of their ancestors as supernatural powers are still be maintained, especially by those living or residing in the rural areas of Manggarai region.



**CONCLUSION**

The traditional house of Manggarai society has unique and specific characteristics to Manggarai culture as the parent culture in which it is embedded. The unique and specific characteristics are reflected in its name, forms, functions, and meanings which designate the ways Manggarai society view and make sense of the world. The name of traditional house Manggarai society is *mbaru gendang* 'drum house' as there stores the *gendang* which is conceptualized in their cognitive map that it represents the self-image of their ancestors. In terms of its design and shape, two forms of the *mbaru gendang* are *mbaru niang* 'canonic house' and *mbaru lopa* 'prism house' in which the difference can be seen in their ridges. In general, the *mbaru gendang* consists of three main parts or levels, that is *the ngaung* as the first part as the place for raising animals, the *lutur* as the second part as the living place for human beings, and the *lobo* as the third part as the place for keeping their ancestors' heritages, in addition to storing corn and rice as their staple foods. In the cultural conceptualization of Manggarai people, the *mbaru gendang* is not simply defined as a place to live as it also shares a set of symbolic meanings, especially social and religious meaning. The meanings of the *mbaru gendang* are interconnected reflecting the ways the members of Manggarai society view and make sense of the world in accordance with the phenomenological realities they experience in the contexts of living together for years and even across generations. Theoretically, the study is beneficial to contribute the significance of semiotics as a branch of science which is concerned with the study of signs, with special reference to the signs of a traditional house as the cultural identity of its people. While practically, as the *mbaru gendang* has unique and specific characteristics that attracts many domestic and foreign tourists, the *mbaru gendang* should be preserved in the face of change as it can increase the socio-economic welfare of Manggarai society sourced from the cultural tourism sector.

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