

An Analysis of Linguistic Forms, Meanings and Processes of “*Kili Uta Bue*”, A Harvest Thanksgiving Ritual of Ende People, Flores

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
<i>Kili Uta Bue</i> ritual, harvest thanksgiving, linguistic forms, ritual meaning, ritual process.	This study investigates the form, meaning, and process of the <i>Kili Uta Bue</i> harvest thanksgiving ritual, an annual ceremony performed by the Ende community as an expression of gratitude for agricultural abundance and a prayer for future prosperity and fertility of nature. The aim of this research is to describe and analyse the structure, symbolic meanings, and social functions of the ritual in preserving cultural identity and community values. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through in-depth interviews with <i>mosalaki</i> (ritual leaders), ritual participants, and local residents, supported by documentation, recordings, and field notes to ensure data validity. Data were analyzed through transcription, translation, selection, and thematic interpretation. The findings reveal that <i>Kili Uta Bue</i> possesses a unique ritual structure marked by the use of <i>uta bue</i> , a local vegetable symbolizing fertility, simplicity, and ancestral connection. The ritual embodies both spiritual and social meanings, reflecting gratitude to ancestors and fostering solidarity, harmony, and unity among community members. The ritual process involves several stages featuring symbolic objects such as <i>nggebhi</i> , <i>bhoro</i> , <i>kiko</i> , and <i>ae feo</i> , each carrying distinct meanings. In conclusion, <i>Kili Uta Bue</i> functions not only as a thanksgiving ritual but also as a medium for cultural learning and social cohesion, contributing to the preservation of local traditions.

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INTRODUCTION

Culture is a system of symbols, values, and meanings through which people interpret their lives, as Geertz (1973) explains: it is learned, shared, and transmitted socially rather than inherited biologically. Geertz also emphasizes that humans live within “webs of significance” they themselves create, which highlights how cultural meaning continues to develop through social processes. Traditional rituals represent one important cultural expression because they embody collective beliefs and practices that structure social life. According to Ibrahim (1988), rituals consist of a series of actions rooted in religious or magical traditions and shaped by the everyday life of the people. In many Indonesian communities, rituals continue to function as channels for expressing gratitude and preserving indigenous knowledge. However, numerous traditional rituals face the threat of decline due to modernization, limited documentation, and weakening intergenerational transmission. This condition raises a research problem in the Ende Community, particularly regarding the *Kili Uta Bue* ritual, a harvest thanksgiving tradition practiced there.

To address these issues, this study provides a detailed description of the linguistic form, meaning, and implementation process of the *Kili Uta Bue* ritual. This insight is expected to contribute to cultural

preservation by comprehensively documenting the ritual and explaining its symbolic and social functions. This study also examines the *Kili Uta Bue* ritual through linguistic, anthropological, and cultural approaches, enabling a systematic analysis of how language and cultural practices interact in the context of traditional ceremonies.

Previous studies on Indonesian traditional rituals have generally focused on ritual symbolism, tradition, or socio-religious dimensions. However, research examining the linguistic forms, cultural meanings, and procedural stages of local rituals remains limited, particularly in the context of the Lio community in Ende. Dahles (2013) emphasizes that local culture is a crucial asset that must be preserved to strengthen national identity, yet documentation of specific local rituals, such as *Kili Uta Bue*, remains scarce. This gap highlights the need for in-depth research that not only describes the ritual but also interprets its function within the community's cultural system. This study addresses this gap with an integrated analysis that explains how the *Kili Uta Bue* ritual reflects local identity, ecological wisdom, spirituality, and community cohesion.

This study aims to identify and describe the linguistic forms used in the *Kili Uta Bue* ritual, interpret the cultural meanings embedded in its elements, and explain the stages of its implementation. Expected outcomes include structured documentation of the ritual, a clearer understanding of its symbolic and social meanings, and practical contributions to cultural preservation efforts, especially for local communities, researchers, and policymakers interested in protecting cultural heritage.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design as explained by Nazir (2013) that qualitative research aims to understand in depth the phenomena experienced by research subjects, while descriptive research functions to find facts and provide appropriate interpretations related to the objects studied; therefore, this approach was chosen to reveal the form, meaning, and process of implementing the *Kili Uta Bue* Ritual in the cultural context of the Ende community. The researcher serves as the primary instrument for planning, collecting, analyzing, and reporting data, while the research informants include *Mosalaki* as the ritual leader, ritual performers, and local communities selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement and knowledge.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, recording, field notes, and documentation, in accordance with Sugiyono's (2018) opinion that documentation is a complementary instrument in qualitative research to strengthen evidence and data validity. All information was recorded using a notebook, digital camera, and voice recorder (smartphone) during the research process. Interview data using Lio and Indonesian were then transcribed and translated into English before being analyzed.

Data analysis includes the selection of relevant data, analysis of linguistic forms that appear in rituals, analysis of meanings that include linguistic-semiotic, symbolic, conceptual, social, religious, political, economic, and cultural meanings, as well as analysis of ritual processes that are arranged based on the stages of preparation to closing. The research was conducted in Saga Village, Detusoko District, Ende Regency, which is the center of the *Kili Uta Bue* tradition and the only location that provides all the necessary data. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources, techniques, and documentation, making the research findings more accurate, consistent, and accountable.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Research findings show that the *Kili Uta Bue* ritual is a traditional practice of the Ende people that plays an important role in sustaining cultural values, social identity, and spiritual relationships with nature and ancestors. Through in-depth observations and interviews with *mosalaki* and ritual practitioners, it was discovered that *Kili Uta Bue* is understood not only as an expression of gratitude for the harvest but also as a means of passing on cultural values that have existed since a time when society experienced limited food resources. *Uta bue*, as the main symbol in the ritual, reflects the community's collective memory of simplicity and resilience and is a symbol of fertility and blessings from nature.

Ritual equipment and symbols such as *nggebhi*, *ae feo*, *bhoro*, *kiko*, and traditional clothing collectively form a meaning system that regulates behavior, social status, and roles in the community. These symbols function as markers of identity as well as a means of spiritual communication between humans and ancestors. The role of women as core ritual implementers indicates that *Kili Uta Bue* supports a particular lineage-based social structure.

Besides that, taboos or pyres play a crucial role in maintaining ritual purity and social order. Prohibitions on certain foods, avoidance of activities that could disrupt sacredness, and restrictions on participants' roles based on lineage demonstrate that these rituals function as mechanisms of social control. The function of the pyre is not limited to maintaining symbolic purity but also to upholding the matrilineal social structure during ritual implementation, an aspect that broadens the theoretical understanding of prohibitions in traditional rituals.

Community views on the *Kili Uta Bue* ritual show that this practice is considered central to the Ende community's spiritual and social identity. This ritual strengthens the sense of togetherness, strengthens relationships between families, and becomes the foundation for implementing the *Nggua* tradition. Community participation in rituals fosters strong social integration and helps ensure that cultural values continue to be passed down from generation to generation. This research confirms that *Kili Uta Bue* is the community glue and functions to maintain the continuity of traditions in a society that continues to develop.

Discussion

This section discusses the research findings in accordance with the research problem formulation, namely, the interpretation of the linguistic form, meaning, and stages of the *Kili Uta Bue* ritual. The discussion is conducted by reviewing the findings in each aspect and connecting them to relevant theories and the cultural context of the Ende community.

Linguistic Forms of Kili Uta Bue Ritual

Research shows that linguistic forms in the *Kili Uta Bue* ritual play a fundamental role in establishing spiritual communication between humans and ancestors. Through direct observation and analysis of *Mosalaki's* speech, it is evident that the words, phrases, and sentences used serve not only linguistic functions but also symbolic and performative functions. Words such as *uta bue*, *pa'a*, *nggebhi*, and *ae feo* carry meanings that go beyond their denotative meanings; each is a cultural sign representing fertility, respect, purity, and spiritual connection.

According to Saussure's semiotic theory, every word functions as a signifier that refers to the signified in the form of the cultural and spiritual values of the Ende people. This research also shows that the relationship between form and meaning is arbitrary and reinforced by social practices and belief systems passed down from generation to generation. Prayers such as "*Embu mamu ka kajo leda bale*" not only convey a pleading meaning but also perform a spiritual act of summoning ancestors to attend and receive offerings. Thus, the linguistic form of this ritual serves as a medium for conveying the social values, spiritual beliefs, and cultural structures of the Ende people.

The Meanings of Kili Uta Bue Ritual

This study reveals that the *Kili Uta Bue* rituals contain various meanings: linguistic-semiotic, symbolic, conceptual, social, religious, political, economic, and cultural. From a semiotic perspective, *uta bue* functions as a sign that links its physical form to the meanings of fertility, life, and ancestral blessings. The symbolic meaning of the ritual is evident in the use of *nggebhi*, *bhoro*, *kiko*, and traditional clothing, which together form a system of social and spiritual values.

The conceptual meaning arises from the community's understanding that each stage of the ritual must be carried out according to certain customary rules so that the balance of life is maintained, while the social meaning is seen from the role of the ritual as a medium for social integration, maintaining identity, and maintaining harmony between tribes. The religious meaning reflects a strong belief that ancestors have the power to protect the local community, and that rituals serve as a means of communication and of asking for blessings.

The political and economic meanings indicate that rituals regulate the legitimacy of traditional leadership, the distribution of social roles, and traditional economic structures grounded in togetherness. Therefore, *Kili Uta Bue* not only represents spiritual beliefs but also shapes the social and cultural framework of Ende society as a whole.

The Stages of Kili Uta Bue Ritual

The stages of *Kili Uta Bue*'s implementation show that this ritual is a clearly structured social and spiritual system. Observational data show that each stage from preparation, *pa'a*, tying of *uta bue*, exchange of *are rega*, to distribution of food is shaped by customary rules, collective participation, and strong symbolism. In the preparation stage, the appointment of special participants and the rule that *uta bue* may take place only in their customary areas reflect social boundaries and customary sovereignty. Entering the *pa'a* stage, the community establishes spiritual communication with ancestors by offering food. This stage marks the transition from the mundane to the sacred, while also strengthening the connection between humans and the spirit world. This stage serves as a request for blessings and as a means of perfecting the connection between the material and spiritual dimensions.

Furthermore, the stage of binding *uta bue* on *nggebhi* is a symbolic moment representing family ties, customary unity, and the continuity of tradition. This *uta bue* binding emphasizes that a community is not a separate entity but a kinship network bound by shared norms, history, and identity. Then, the exchange stage became one of the most important aspects in maintaining harmony between tribes, especially the *Wolo* and *Limbu* tribes. This exchange of *are rega* is not only symbolic but also diplomatic, creating a space for peaceful negotiations and strengthening relations between the two tribes.

The ritual continues with the cooking of *are rega* and *uta bue*. This activity is not performed by the entire community, but rather by the *mosalaki*, the traditional authority holders. This role emphasizes that ritual food processing is a sacred act that may be performed only by traditional figures with spiritual legitimacy. After the cooking process is complete, the food is distributed throughout the traditional houses so that the entire community continues to feel the blessing of the ritual and strengthens the sense of togetherness.

Therefore, this entire series of stages strengthens Victor Turner's view of the ritual process as a collective journey from structure to community. In the context of *Kili Uta Bue*, this ritual also displays a broader function: maintaining balance between humans and the environment, upholding customary authority, and maintaining social solidarity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the *Kili Uta Bue* ritual is a cultural practice of the Ende people, characterized by unique language, rich symbolic meaning, and a well-structured ritual process. Analysis of linguistic forms shows that the ritual language used by *mosalaki* and ritual participants serves both as a means of communication and as a performative medium that connects humans with their ancestors. These linguistic expressions act as cultural markers that embody collective values, beliefs, and identities.

The meanings contained in the semiotic, symbolic, conceptual, social, religious, political, economic, and cultural linguistic rituals indicate that *Kili Uta Bue* is a holistic system that regulates social interaction, strengthens traditional leadership, preserves ecological wisdom, and strengthens spiritual connections. The ritual functions as a mechanism for social cohesion, maintaining harmony and ensuring the continuity of customary norms. It also serves as a medium for transmitting cultural knowledge from one generation to the next.

The stages of the ritual, from preparation to its end, present a sequence of procedures that reflect the power of custom and collective participation. Each stage carries deep symbolic significance, reflecting the kinship ties, social structure, and beliefs of the local community. These stages emphasize that the ceremony is not merely a ceremony but also a cultural framework that shapes community identity and social order.

Overall, this study fully documents the language form, meaning, and stages of the *Kili Uta Bue* ceremony. The results of this study support efforts to preserve cultural heritage, especially in the face of the challenges of modernization and the decline in intergenerational knowledge transmission. This study can serve as a reference for researchers, cultural practitioners, and policymakers seeking to protect and revive local traditions in the Ende community.

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