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The Intersection of Belief, Culture, and Social Life: A Case Study of Indonesian Ritual

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the intersection of traditional beliefs, cultural practices, and social life as manifested in the *Penti* ritual of the Manggarai Indigenous community. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, focusing on various aspects of the ritual and its social significance. The data were analyzed thematically to identify key themes and sub-themes related to sacred and profane values, spirituality and social practices, and the integration of traditional customs with formal religion. The findings reveal that *Penti* functions as a fusion of spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions, where traditional beliefs coexist with Catholicism, and where social solidarity and gender roles evolve within the ritual context. The study suggests that *Penti* reflects a dynamic combination of spiritual beliefs and social practices, maintaining its relevance amidst modern influences. This research contributes to the understanding of how Indigenous rituals adapt and preserve cultural identity while navigating religious syncretism and social change, offering valuable insights for further studies on ritual practices in multicultural societies.

KEYWORDS

intersection, *Penti* ritual, traditional beliefs, cultural practices, social life

Introduction

The Manggarai Indigenous people in Indonesia are one of the communities that still uphold traditional values firmly, both in spiritual and cultural aspects. The manifestations of these values can be seen in the practice of the *Penti* ritual, an annual rite that marks

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the end of the agrarian year and represents a form of gratitude to the ancestors and the forces of nature for the harvest. This ritual is not only a religious event, but also serves as a means to strengthen social solidarity, preserve customs, and transmit cultural values between generations (Darong et al., 2021; Heng & Yeh, 2022; Niman, 2022a). In this ritual, it is clear that the interplay between traditional belief systems, cultural practices, and social life remains dynamic amidst the changing times.

However, social changes due to modernization, urbanization, and global information flows have put significant pressure on the continuity of this tradition (Johannessen, 2015; Suharyanto & Wiflihani, 2024; Tong & Cheung, 2011). As the influence of formal religions and modern values increases, some societies—especially the younger generation—are beginning to experience a disconnection from the traditions of their ancestors. They no longer fully understand the symbolic meaning behind the ceremonies in the Penti ritual. In addition, shifts in social structure, population migration, and economic challenges affect participation and continuity of the implementation of the Penti ritual. This phenomenon raises concerns about the potential erosion of the noble values contained in the Penti tradition and its implications for the cultural identity of the Manggarai people in Indonesia. Therefore, an in-depth study of Penti ritual practices should be conducted, especially for understanding how traditional belief values, cultural customs, and social relations interact dynamically in the practice of the ritual. This research is important not only to document local culture, but also to trace the processes of ongoing social transformation, including how the Manggarai people are adapting and reinterpreting their traditions in the contemporary context.

Research on the Indigenous people of Manggarai has developed in various fields, including anthropology, linguistics, and religious studies. In the realm of anthropology, previous studies have mapped the social life of the Manggarai people, especially the structure of patrilineal kinship and the communal land ownership system arranged through the concept of ulayat (Darong et al., 2022; Lon, 2019, 2020; Lon & Widyawati, 2021; Niman, 2022, 2023). These studies provide a strong understanding of how customary systems become the basis for resource management and social relations. However, their approach emphasizes more on static social structures, not touching on how those structures are alive and dynamic through the symbolic interactions in ceremonies such as Penti that contain layers of spiritual belief and cultural expression. Meanwhile, discussions of the social structure of Manggarai society highlight how genealogical relationships reflect hierarchical social structures centered on family values (Darong et al., 2022; Lon & Widyawati, 2018). Although the studies show the relationship between social systems and cultural practices, they do not explore the aspects of traditional beliefs that are holistically integrated into the ritual practices of the Manggarai people.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of language and culture, many studies have examined the importance of language in maintaining the cultural identity of the Manggarai people. Linguistic studies conducted by Bustan et al. (2021), Darong (2022), Darong et al. (2023), Huan et al. (2024), Menggo et al. (2021), Erfiani et al. (2023), and Sanjaya (2021) have examined the Manggarai language in the context of oral cultural

heritage and symbolism in traditional communication. These studies emphasize that language serves as the primary means of transmitting ancestral values, mythological stories, and traditional expressions in traditional rituals. The studies mainly focus on documenting and preserving language as a form of identity. However, they do not specifically examine how language functions in grand rituals such as Penti to provide a space for negotiating meaning between generations, as well as a tool for social and spiritual cohesion within communities.

In the field of religious studies, several studies have highlighted the relationship between Catholicism, which is the dominant religion in Manggarai, and traditional beliefs. In this context, there are efforts to inculcate Christian teachings into local culture through symbolic and spiritual approaches (Haryanto et al., 2021; Lon & Widyawati, 2021). These studies show how formal religious values and local beliefs are not always in conflict, but can blend into the daily life practices of the Manggarai people. Meanwhile, in the context of traditional beliefs, a number of studies have highlighted the practice of animism and belief in ancestors which are the spiritual foundation of the Manggarai people (Niman, 2022b; Raru, 2016). These studies underscore the importance of the relationship between humans, ancestors, and nature; however, few attributes it directly to the social and cultural functions of major ceremonies such as Penti, which combine all these elements comprehensively and collectively. Nevertheless, this study tends to see Indigenous people through the lens of religious institutions and local beliefs rather than from the way the people themselves understand and carry out their beliefs contextually in rituals such as Penti.

Previous studies have not focused on the Penti ritual as a meeting point or intersection space between traditional beliefs, cultural values, and the social life of the Manggarai Indigenous people. Most studies are still partial, separating cultural studies, social studies, and faith studies. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by examining Penti in an interdisciplinary manner, as a space where spiritual meaning, social structure, and cultural values are intertwined and practiced in the real life of society. In this respect, the Penti ritual cannot be understood merely as a static cultural heritage but rather as a social practice that is constantly negotiated, reinterpreted, and even politicized by society. As such, this research seeks to reveal in depth how traditional beliefs, cultural values, and the social structure of the Manggarai people are intertwined in the implementation of the Penti ritual.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the fields of cultural anthropology and the sociology of religion by offering a nuanced understanding of how traditional rituals like Penti serve as dynamic arenas for negotiating identity, belief, and social structure among Indigenous communities facing the pressures of modernization. Unlike previous studies that approach belief systems, culture, or social life in isolation, this research integrates these dimensions through an intersectional and practice-based lens. By conceptualizing Penti not as a static tradition but as a living, adaptive ritual, this study offers a theoretical model for examining ritual as a site of cultural resilience, negotiation, and reinterpretation. This approach may be applied to similar Indigenous contexts globally, providing a framework for analyzing how traditional societies sustain their identity in the face of external transformation.

The findings of this study are significant as they uncover how rituals like Penti function as repositories of collective memory, tools for social cohesion, and mediums of cultural transmission in contemporary settings. The research highlights the role of Penti in mediating intergenerational values, reinforcing communal identity, and integrating spiritual and secular life. These insights are crucial not only for academic scholarship but also for practical efforts in cultural preservation. Local governments, customary institutions, and civil society actors can benefit from this research in designing more participatory and culturally grounded preservation strategies. Moreover, by rearticulating the meaning of Penti in today's context, the study empowers the younger generation of Manggarai to engage more deeply with their heritage, fostering cultural continuity in an increasingly homogenized world. This study emphasizes that Indigenous rituals are not relics of the past, but active, evolving practices that sustain identity, community, and meaning in the present.

Literature Review

The relationship between religion and culture has long been the subject of various studies. Religion is a system of symbols that give meaning to human actions and experiences (Darong et al., 2023; Menggo et al., 2021; Ndiung & Bayu, 2019; Niman, 2022b). In this regard, Lon (2019) emphasized that religion and culture are inseparable because they form each other. While being a system of beliefs, religion is also integrated into daily cultural practices. Consequently, Penti serves as a cultural expression as well as a belief system of the Manggarai people towards nature, their ancestors, and their social life absolutely integrated to culture.

Previous studies in religious anthropology have emphasized the social function of religion in creating social solidarity and order. Religious rituals are as a collective means of strengthening social cohesion (Hanif et al., 2024; Resmini & Saina, 2021; White, 2010). In traditional societies such as Manggarai, the Penti ritual plays a similar role. More than merely a celebration of the end of the agricultural year, this is also a space where the entire community gathers to celebrate, reaffirm traditional values, and renew their relationship with their ancestors and nature. Thus, Penti signifies not only a traditional ritual but also a religious event in a broad and holistic sense (Niman, 2022a).

Another perspective is proposed by Kasim et al. (2017) and Noortyani et al., (2023), who introduced the concept of *communitas* in rituals, confirming that during major rituals, individuals of varying social statuses dissolve into an egalitarian atmosphere, fostering a profound sense of community. In Penti, people from different groups, from elders to children and the Manggarai diaspora, unite in a spirit of celebration and ritual. Thus, Penti facilitates social regeneration and fosters cohesion through shared spiritual experiences that transcend social status. Similarly, in the study of religion and culture in Indonesia, many scholars perceive the religious practices of Indigenous peoples as a form of integration, a synthesis of local beliefs and formal religions. In Manggarai, the belief in ancestral spirits, village guardians, and the universe coexists with Catholic teachings, which are the dominant religion. The people of Manggarai do not necessarily abandon ancestral traditions; rather, they integrate them with the teachings of the church in an adaptive and contextual relationship (Lon, 2020). Penti

serves as a concrete example where the values of local beliefs harmoniously merge with the values of Catholic spirituality, rather than existing in contradiction.

Furthermore, the study of Niman (2023) can also strengthen the reading of Penti's ritual practices. This study indicates that people do not always live by one belief system exclusively, but selectively and creatively combine elements that are considered relevant to the identity and needs of the community. In the context of Penti, this is reflected in the simultaneous use of traditional and Catholic prayers, as well as the involvement of Catholic priests who offer prayers for the community before or after the traditional ritual takes place. These are evidence of a spiritual logic which is flexible, though grounded in cultural roots. Contextual examinations of religion and culture in Flores conducted by Forth (2020), Narung et al. (2019), and Sanjaya and Rahardi (2020) also reveal that individuals in this region tend to possess a very open understanding of religion in relation to local values. They practice religion in theological, social, and cultural terms. Religion is an integral part of the traditional cosmology that is passed down from generation to generation. In Penti, all of these elements converge: the structure of the rites, the ancestral narratives, the sacred symbols, and the collective belief in the sacred cycle of life.

Other research studies on Manggarai rituals provide an important foundation emphasizing that rituals related to forest and environmental preservation are full of symbolic meaning (Haryanto et al., 2021; Niman et al., 2023; Resmini & Saina, 2021). In Penti, sacrificial animals such as buffalo and chickens, through being offerings, also symbolize the forces of nature, sacrifice, and the connection between the human world and the spirits of ancestors. Food that is served and consumed collectively, in addition to providing nourishment, unites the cultural and spiritual identity of the entire community. This concept reinforces the understanding that Manggarai's culture is inseparable from its religious framework. In this regard, Penti, as a cultural performance, exemplifies cultural performativity, a symbolic practice that represents culture simultaneously reproducing it. During the Penti ritual, the traditional identity of the Manggarai people is not only recalled but also reshaped with each celebration. Consequently, this ritual becomes a crucial cultural and religious arena for maintaining and renewing collective memory and social values.

To date, Penti is a deeply rooted cultural practice in Manggarai, serving as a bridge between religion and culture. However, the study of Penti has not been conducted comprehensively with an interdisciplinary approach that views religion and culture as an integrated whole. This represents a significant gap that warrants deeper exploration, considering that Penti embodies spiritual, cultural, and social values that are rich and representative of the value system of the Manggarai indigenous people. By examining the various theories and studies mentioned above, it is evident that the Penti ritual serves as a meeting space between religion and culture in its most vibrant and authentic form. It is not merely an annual rite but a holistic expression of how the Manggarai people understand the world, nurture relationships with their ancestors, maintain social harmony, and affirm their cultural identity. Therefore, it is essential to further investigate how Penti has become the intersection of sacred and profane values, spirituality and social praxis, customs and formal religion, a specific reflection of the pluralistic lives of Indigenous peoples in Indonesia and globally.

Method

This study used a qualitative method with a case study design, which provides an in-depth examination of complex phenomena in real-life settings. In this case, the Penti ritual of the Indigenous Manggarai people is positioned as a specific case representing the intersection of traditional beliefs, local culture, and social life. The case study design facilitates a contextual, detailed, and intensive understanding of the meaning and practice of Penti. This study is exploratory and intrinsic in nature, aiming to deeply examine the cultural, spiritual, and social dynamics of the Penti ritual as interpreted by its practitioners and participants.

To broaden the analytical scope and provide a comparative insight, this study also draws on selected data and literature concerning similar agricultural rituals in other parts of Eastern Nusa Tenggara, particularly Reba in the communities of Bejava. While these rituals are not the primary focus, their comparative inclusion provides for an analysis of both common themes (gratitude to ancestors, agricultural cycles, or spiritual mediation) and contextual differences (religious integration, gender roles, or modernization impacts). This comparative perspective enriches the analysis by situating the Penti ritual within a broader ethnographic landscape of ritual transformation in contemporary Indonesia.

Data collection involved three main techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly during the Penti ritual to capture processes, interactions, symbols, and the surrounding social contexts. The researcher actively engaged in community activities and documented the dynamics that occurred before, during, and after the ritual. The objective was to gain an authentic understanding of how Penti is lived and interpreted by the Manggarai people. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including traditional elders, Catholic religious leaders, Indigenous women, youth, and villagers, thus providing diverse perspectives across gender and generation. Semi-structured interviews enabled the exploration of personal narratives and collective interpretations related to belief, culture, and society. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian and/or Manggarai, depending on the context and preference of the informants.

To support the primary data, documentation techniques were employed, including photographs, videos, Catholic liturgical records, and cultural artifacts from the ritual. These serve as visual and contextual evidence to analyze the structure and symbolism of Penti. In addition, secondary data sources—local government cultural reports, ethnographic archives, and previous ritual studies—were included to establish a broader historical and comparative framework for analysis. As Darong et al. (2023) recommend, the collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved comprehensive reading of all data, open coding to identify key segments across belief, cultural, and social dimensions, and grouping codes into major themes aligned with research objectives. To ensure data validity and credibility, this study used a triangulation strategy, both source and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation compared the perspectives of informants from diverse social roles, while methodological triangulation cross-checked findings from observations, interviews,

and documentation. This process was further strengthened by comparing findings from Penti with secondary data on other rituals, providing a richer and more layered analysis.

Results

Table 1 presents the results of the thematic analysis conducted to understand various aspects of the Penti ritual in Indonesia. The themes that emerged through the analysis, included the meeting between sacred and profane values, spirituality and social practice, the integration of tradition with formal religion, cultural identity through ritual, balancing tradition and modernity, and gendered dimensions in ritual. The table organizes thematic outcomes that illustrate how the Penti ritual serves as a meeting point between these aspects, which not only reflects the religious and cultural dimensions, but also reveals the social dynamics and changes in Manggarai society. Each of the themes, sub-themes, and codes presented below provides insight into how the Manggarai people maintain their traditions while adjusting to the influence of formal religion and modernity.

Table 1
Results of the Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Extract
Sacred and Profane Integration	Ritual Blending with Daily Life	Sacred space in ordinary place; Daily life intertwined with ritual	"During Penti, we turn our daily gathering spaces into sacred grounds. It's where we prepare meals, but also where we honor the spirits" (Participant 1; Trans. by Erna Mena Niman—E. M. N.)
	Dual Purpose of Offerings	Life-sustaining and spiritual offerings	"The buffalo and chicken we sacrifice give us both food for the table and a connection to the ancestors" (Participant 2; Trans. by E. M. N.)
Spirituality and Social Practice	Social Function of Rituals	Community building; Solidarity in ritual	"Penti is not just a spiritual event. It strengthens us as a community, working together to make it happen" (Participant 3; Trans. by E. M. N.)
	Connecting with Ancestors	Ancestral blessing; Ritual as a guide	"The spirits guide us not just in the afterlife but also in how we should live here on earth" (Participant 4; Trans. by E. M. N.)
Tradition and Formal Religion	Catholic Influence on Rituals	Opening prayer by priest; Synchronized rituals	"We open the ritual with a prayer from the priest, but then we continue with our traditional chants and dances" (Participant 5; Trans. by E. M. N.)
	Coexistence of Religious Systems	Traditional beliefs and Catholicism coexist; Blending practices	"We have mass first, but we can't forget our traditions. We see them as connected, not separate" (Participant 6; Trans. by E. M. N.)

Table 1 Continued

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Extract
Cultural Identity through Ritual	Role of Youth in Cultural Continuity	Learning the rituals; Passing down traditions	“The young ones learn the sacred songs and dances from the elders. It’s how we keep our identity alive” (Participant 7; Trans. by E. M. N.)
	Intergenerational Transmission	Elder’s teachings; Rituals as cultural inheritance	“The elders tell us stories while we prepare for Penti. These are the values that we, as youth, must carry forward” (Participant 8; Trans. by E. M. N.)
Balancing Tradition and Modernity	Impact of Modernization on Ritual	Festival; Commodified spirituality	“Some aspects of Penti are performed for tourists now. It’s different, more like a show than a real spiritual act” (Participant 9; Trans. by E. M. N.)
	Youth’s Perception of the Ritual	Selective participation; Changing priorities	“Some young people are losing interest in the sacred aspects. They want the dance and the spectacle, not the prayers and the offerings” (Participant 10; Trans. by E. M. N.)
Gendered Dimensions in Ritual	Gender Roles in Ritual Practices	Men’s roles in sacrifice; Women’s roles in food preparation	“In Penti, men perform the sacrifice, while women prepare the meals Both roles are essential to the success of the ritual” (Participant 11; Trans. by E. M. N.)
	Shifting Gender Roles	Equal participation; Women’s increasing involvement	“There is a growing recognition of women’s contributions. Now, some women lead prayers and have more say in how the ritual is conducted” (Participant 12; Trans. by E. M. N.)

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

This table provides an in-depth overview of how the Penti ritual in the Manggarai community becomes a meeting point between sacred and profane values, as well as spirituality and social practices. This ritual serves not only as a means of worship, but also as a collective moment that strengthens social solidarity. The ritual process that combines daily life with spiritual elements, such as the transformation of ordinary space into a sacred space and the duality of offerings that meet physical and spiritual needs, shows how closely related the worldly life and the spiritual dimension are in the people life. In addition, Penti also described how the Manggarai people managed to integrate formal religion (Catholicism) with their traditional beliefs. The presence of Catholic elements in rituals, such as the mass delivered by Catholic priests, does not replace existing customary practices, but rather enriches the spiritual meaning of the ritual. This shows the synergy between the two belief systems, where they complement each other in creating a balance between personal and community spirituality. It also reflects the adaptation of the Manggarai people to the changing times without having to abandon their cultural and religious roots.

Social change is also reflected in the shift of gender roles in Penti ritual. Although traditional roles still stipulate the division of tasks by gender, where men are more involved in offerings and women in food preparation, there is a tendency to open up more space for women in these rituals. Women are now beginning to engage in roles that were previously dominated by men, such as leading prayers, which reflects the ever-evolving social and cultural dynamics. Thus, Penti is not only a space to preserve traditions, but also a reflection of the social changes and diversity that occur in Manggarai society, creating a form of balance between traditions, formal religion, and social values that continue to transform.

Discussion

Penti is a ritual that reflects the meeting between traditional belief systems, cultural customs, and interrelated social life. Based on the results of thematic analysis, this ritual unites sacred and profane values in a complete unity. In the Penti ritual, the space that is usually used for daily activities is transformed into a sacred domain, which creates a close connection between the mundane and the spiritual. The offerings given, such as animals, not only meet the physical needs of the people, but also serve as a means of establishing communication with the ancestors and the spiritual world. This shows that in the Manggarai culture, the worldly and spiritual lives are not separated, but go hand in hand, which is the essence of the Penti ritual (Darong et al., 2023; Kuczok, 2020; Niman et al., 2023). In addition, the theme of spirituality and social practices is also reflected in this ritual. While representing a spiritual ritual, Penti also serves to strengthen social relations between members of the community. Each individual works together to prepare and carry out the ritual, which reinforces solidarity and togetherness in the community. In this context, these findings support the view expressed by previous research that customary rituals have a social dimension that is very important for Indigenous people (Briando et al., 2023; Heng & Yeh, 2022; Huan et al., 2024; Juwariyah et al., 2023).

One of the interesting aspects of the Penti ritual is the integration between formal religion and traditional beliefs. Although the ritual begins with more traditional processions, such as offering offerings and prayers performed in the typical Manggarai way, it soon concludes with a Catholic mass led by a priest. This reflects the relation between Catholicism and pre-existing ancestral beliefs, where they complement and enrich each other. These findings are consistent with previous research by DiBianca Fasoli (2020) and Kasim et al. (2017) which have shown that many Indigenous people combine formal religious elements with their cultural customs, creating unique and distinctive religious practices. Furthermore, through connection with ancestors, the Penti ritual shows how the Manggarai people maintain a relationship with their ancestors as part of maintaining social and spiritual balance. This ritual is not only meant to invoke blessings from God, but also as a form of respect for ancestral spirits who are believed to have an important role in their lives. This reinforces the view that in Penti, spirituality is not only personal, but also has a broader social dimension, namely to maintain harmony between the

living and the dead generations (Niman, 2022b). Therefore, this ritual is a means to maintain the cultural and spiritual identity of the Manggarai people, as well as to ensure balance in their lives.

Changes in gender roles are also an important theme observed in the implementation of the Penti ritual. While traditional gender divisions remain visible, where men predominantly lead offerings and symbolic acts, and women focus on food preparation and logistical support, there is a noticeable shift in which women are increasingly involved in broader ritual functions. In recent years, women have participated not only as supporters but also as active agents in leading prayer circles, managing ceremonial structures, and representing families in communal decision-making. Along with a practical shift, these changes indicate a deeper reconfiguration of gender dynamics in ritual space. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (Sharpe, 2024), these transformations can be seen as acts that challenge and redefine normative gender roles through repeated participation in public, symbolic, and spiritual practices. Ritual, in this context, becomes a stage where gender is not only enacted but negotiated. As women assume roles traditionally reserved for men, they perform new scripts of authority, legitimacy, and spiritual leadership. This supports the argument that traditional rituals, while seemingly conservative, can also serve as sites of subtle resistance and redefinition of gender norms (DeLaet & Cramer, 2018; Elmiana, 2019; Koster, 2020; Lee & Eun, 2024; Mohr et al., 2025; Newman et al., 2023; Sarvarzade & Wotipka, 2017).

Moreover, the increased participation of women in Penti suggests an evolving interpretation of spiritual authority where devotion, rather than gender, becomes the basis for inclusion. This shift does not necessarily signal a break from tradition, rather a cultural adaptation that reflects the growing recognition of women's roles in both domestic and public religious life. In this sense, the Penti ritual becomes more than a space for cultural continuity; it also provides a platform for rethinking gender boundaries in response to broader changes in society. These findings enrich the understanding of how gender roles in Indigenous rituals are not fixed, instead constantly reshaped by internal cultural dynamics and external socio-religious influences. Meanwhile, in terms of intergenerational transmission, the Penti ritual serves as a means to transfer cultural and spiritual knowledge from the older generation to the younger generation. This ritual procession is a tribute to ancestors and an opportunity for parents to impart traditional and spiritual values to their children and grandchildren. This is in line with previous research by Jemali et al., (2024) showing that traditional rituals are often used to transmit cultural knowledge and values between generations. While learning to perform rituals, the younger generation in Penti also recognizes the importance of maintaining and preserving traditions as part of their identity.

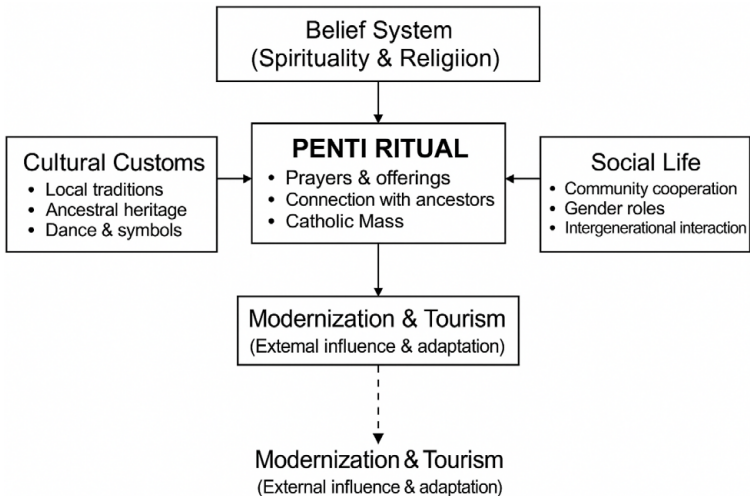
The Penti ritual shows a balance between traditional and formal religion. In this ritual, the Manggarai people retain the traditional elements and accept the Catholic elements introduced by the church. Thus, the Penti ritual is an example of how two belief systems can coexist and enrich each other. Although the ritual has strong roots in traditional beliefs, the presence of Catholic elements in the ritual procession

suggests a synergy between formal religion and ancestral beliefs. This shows that the Manggarai people are able to adapt to religious values without abandoning their existing traditions. Integral to the issue addressed, one of the themes that is also clearly visible in the Penti is the social changes that occur due to modernization and external influences. One of the impacts is the commodification of rituals. The Penti ritual is now often held as a cultural attraction for tourists, which sometimes reduces its spiritual dimension. This is in line with findings of the Briando et al., (2023), Suharyanto and Wiflihani (2024) and Wang and Liu, (2023), which show that more and more traditional rituals are performed to meet the global needs. Therefore, the spiritual essence of these rituals is sometimes reduced. Nevertheless, Penti is still maintained as part of the life of the people of Manggarai, although there are some changes that occur as a result of the need to adapt to the times.

From a contemporary perspective, Penti remains one of the tangible manifestations of Indonesia's and global cultural diversity, combining traditional and formal religious traditions within a single social and spiritual practice. This ritual provides a space for the Manggarai people to show how they maintain traditions while accepting the influence of the religion. The integration of these two belief systems proves that the Manggarai people have the ability to adapt to change without sacrificing their cultural identity that has been passed down from generation to generation. Subsequently, in relation to cultural identity, the Penti ritual serves as a means to reaffirm Manggarai's cultural values that have existed for a long time. In the midst of the currents of globalization and modernization, Penti becomes a place for people to maintain their identity and show that even though they accepted formal religion and were exposed to modernity, they remained faithful to their cultural heritage. This aligns with the view expressed by several researchers who state that traditional rituals often serve as a milestone to maintain cultural continuity and identity of indigenous people (Akhmar et al., 2023; Asante et al., 2017; Habib et al., 2024; Onyejegbu et al., 2023). Thus, the Penti ritual not only functions as a religious ritual, but also as a space to maintain and transmit social and cultural values in the Manggarai community. Through Penti, there is a meeting between traditional belief systems, cultural customs, and social life that are intertwined and form the collective identity of the Manggarai people.

The results of the study show that the Penti ritual reflects the intersection between belief systems, cultural customs, and social life that are closely intertwined. This ritual combines sacred and profane values, where the spiritual and the mundane aspects complement each other through offerings that not only meet physical needs, but also establish a connection with the ancestors and the spiritual world. In addition, Penti strengthens social ties in the community through joint work in preparing and carrying out ceremonies. The study also found the connection between Catholicism and traditional beliefs, as well as changes in gender roles that reflect social dynamics. Despite being influenced by modernization and tourism, Penti still retains its cultural and spiritual meaning, showing how the Indigenous people are able to maintain traditions while adapting to the times. The intersection is highlighted in Figure 1.

Figure 1
The Intersection of Belief, Culture, and Social Life



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

Integral to the issue in question, one of the most visible themes in the current practice of Penti is the social change brought about by modernization and external influences. The increasing exposure to global media, formal education, migration, and economic transformations has led to a gradual shift in how the ritual is perceived and practiced by the community, especially by the younger generation. One of the most prominent impacts is the commodification of the ritual as part of cultural tourism. Penti is now increasingly performed not only for spiritual and communal purposes, but also as a cultural attraction for tourists and outsiders. While this visibility helps promote cultural pride and economic opportunity, it simultaneously risks reducing the spiritual depth and communal intimacy of the ritual, turning it into a performance rather than a lived spiritual practice. This trend is consistent with observations by Briando et al. (2023), Suharyanto and Wiflihani (2024), and Wang and Liu (2023), who note that many traditional rituals across the world are reconfigured under tourism pressures, potentially leading to the loss of their sacred essence.

However, it would be reductive to view tourism and modernization only as forces of erosion. The Manggarai community, through their elders and cultural leaders, has shown agency in navigating these changes. Rather than abandoning the ritual, they reinterpret and restructure it to accommodate new realities. For example, some aspects of the ritual are now documented, scheduled more flexibly, or explained using modern language to reach younger audiences and tourists alike. This indicates a process of cultural negotiation in which tradition is not passively eroded, but actively reshaped. At the same time, the integration of Catholic elements into the Penti ritual also reflects this adaptive process, where external influences are not necessarily oppositional but can be harmonized within the existing cultural framework.

Eventually, modernization and tourism function as both challenges and catalysts for transformation. While they pressure the community to conform to broader cultural and economic trends, they also open up new spaces for cultural revitalization, intergenerational dialogue, and strategic identity assertion. Penti, in this light, becomes a dynamic platform through which the Manggarai people reaffirm their heritage in dialogue with the changing world around them. This deeper understanding underscores the ritual's ongoing relevance as a living cultural institution that embodies both resilience and adaptability in the face of modern change.

The novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary and integrative approach to understanding the Penti ritual as a dynamic intersection of belief systems, cultural customs, and social structures within the Manggarai Indigenous community. While previous research has often examined religious, cultural, or social aspects of indigenous life in isolation, this study brings them together holistically within a single ritual practice. By treating Penti not as a static cultural remnant but as a living, adaptive system, the study contributes a conceptual framework that positions rituals as active sites of negotiation where identity, tradition, and social cohesion are continuously shaped. This comprehensive perspective offers a fresh theoretical contribution to the fields of cultural anthropology and sociology of religion, particularly in the context of Indigenous communities navigating modernity. In addition, the study introduces nuanced analyses of contemporary social transformations including gender role shifts, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and the dual impact of modernization and tourism through the lens of ritual practice. The application of relevant theoretical frameworks, such as gender performativity and ritual negotiation, reveals how Indigenous rituals can serve as platforms for both cultural resilience and subtle resistance to normative structures. These insights move beyond documentation, offering critical reflection on how rituals like Penti evolve in response to broader societal changes. Thus, the research not only fills a gap in the literature on Manggarai culture but also provides a model for analyzing similar intersections in other Indigenous settings worldwide.

Ultimately, the findings of this study have significant policy relevance, particularly in the context of cultural preservation, Indigenous rights, and inclusive education. By illustrating how the Penti ritual embodies a rich intersection of belief systems, cultural practices, and social structures, this research highlights the urgent need for policies that protect and promote intangible cultural heritage. Such policies could support community-led initiatives to sustain traditional rituals while navigating modern pressures such as tourism and religious integration. Furthermore, the insights from Penti are deeply relevant to multicultural education frameworks, as they offer a model for understanding and respecting cultural pluralism within formal education systems. Incorporating such local cultural practices into the curriculum can foster intercultural dialogue, empathy, and respect among students from diverse backgrounds. In this way, the study underscores how indigenous rituals not only preserve cultural identity but also contribute to broader societal goals of equity, inclusion, and sustainable cultural development.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the Penti ritual in the Manggarai community combines belief systems, cultural customs, and social life in a complete unit. This ritual illustrates how sacred and profane values, spirituality and sociality, as well as formal customs and religion go hand in hand. Penti not only serves as a means of communication with ancestors and the spiritual world, but also strengthens social solidarity within the community. The connection of Catholicism and customary beliefs as well as changes in gender roles seen in the implementation of Penti are important indicators of the social and cultural dynamics that continue to develop in a community. Although the Penti ritual has been affected by modernization and tourism, it still retains its cultural and spiritual significance.

Despite the findings, the study has shortcomings in terms of data coverage that is limited to one region and focuses on specific rituals. Further research can expand the scope by exploring variations in the implementation of the Penti ritual and comparing them with other traditional rituals in Indonesia. Further research can also delve deeper into the impact of modernization on the implementation of traditional rituals and further look at the role of women in social changes that occur in the context of Penti ritual.

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