



Ende Culture in East Nusa Tenggara: Unraveling the Rich Heritage and Traditions of an Enigmatic Region

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ABSTRACT

The Lio inhabit the Ende Regency's eastern to northern regions. There is a village still occupied by the Lio tribe, namely Nggela Village. Located about 72 km from the city center of Ende, the Nggela Village Settlement is included in the traditional village in Wolojita District, Ende Regency, Flores-NTT, which still maintains its culture and customs. The pattern of traditional settlements in the town of Nggela, Ende Regency, is always seen about the place of origin, namely Mount Lepembusu. Cosmological considerations maintain a balance between the two extreme points and their relation to settlements, namely ulu (head) and eko (downstream), and there is a puse (center) as the center of traditional accommodations. Ulu is connected to the sunrise or towards Mount Lepembusu, while eko is towards the sunset or opposite the mountain. As a traditional settlement that still adheres to cultural values maintained today, the center of conventional ceremonial activities is carried out on the Kanga Ria / traditional Mesbah, in the middle of this traditional settlement. The traditional territory of Nggela Village is only inhabited by people with important positions and roles in society or commonly referred to as Mosalaki/traditional stakeholders, with a total of 17 people occupying 15 traditional houses. The behavior of the Nggela village community is strongly influenced by various conventional practices such as Loka Lolo, Joka Ju, and Lobo Keda. This ritual will determine how attitudes, emotions, values, ethics, power, persuasion, and genetics and assess the availability of space in Nggela village.

Keywords: Ende, Lio, Lepembusu

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INTRODUCTION

Ende Regency is a district of Flores Island, East Nusa Tenggara Province, which has a long history and has left physical evidence of the results of its human activities in the past. Ende Regency consists of 21 sub-districts, 23 sub-districts and 255 villages. As a district with a wide area coverage, it has three major ethnic groups. These original tribes in the area are the Lio, ende and Nage tribes. The Lio inhabit the Ende Regency's eastern to northern regions. There is a village still occupied by the Lio tribe, namely Nggela Village.¹ Located about 72 km from the city center of Ende, the Nggela Village Settlement is included in the traditional village in Wolojita District, Ende Regency, Flores-NTT, which still maintains its culture and customs. The classic settlement pattern in a linear form extending from north to south has an outer space formed based on several factors such as ancestral history, cosmology, social structure, and of course, the behavior of indigenous peoples both in

traditional rituals and in people's everyday behavior. The Ende tribe is mostly known for its distinctive dialect, namely the Ja'o dialect. They inhabit the Central area of Ende City and its surroundings Ende Island to the western region, namely Nangapanda District. The third tribe is the Nage or Toto tribe with their Nga'o dialect, who inhabit the west area of Ende Regency, which is on the border with Ngadha Regency.²

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The traditional settlement pattern in some villages at Ende Regency was said to be inspired by ancient myth, where the inhabitant tribes originate. Mount Lepembusu was believed to be the initial point of the ancient civilization.³ Thus, the tip of the Ende-Lio traditional settlement always points to this Mount Lepembusu, whereas the opposite direction is considered the lowest area. This belief

system resembles Balinese cosmology, treating the mountain as the most sacred object.⁴ At the same time, the ocean is the 'underworld', following cosmological considerations that maintain a balance between the two extreme points and their relation to settlements, namely *ulu* (head), *eko* (downstream) and *puse* as the center of the traditional village. Ulu is related to the sunrise or towards Mount Lepembusu, while eko is pointed towards sunset or opposite the mountain.

As a traditional settlement that adheres to cultural values, the inhabitant held conventional ceremonial at the *Kanga Ria* or *Sao Ria*, A customary Mesbah. The location of Sao Ria is in the *Bhisu I* area, namely in the northern part of the traditional settlement. The northern part is the highest plateau since it is in the north, near the hill area, in contrast to the southern region, with a lower level of sacredness. The traditional settlement of Nggela Village is inhabited by people with important positions and roles in society or commonly referred to as *Mosalaki*. These



Figure 1.⁵ Mount Lepembusu, the initial point of the ancient civilization in Ende.

stakeholders are 17 people occupying 15 traditional houses. The Mosalaki have a prerogative right whether to allow migrants to settle in the Nggela traditional settlement, with considerations of kinship and assigning tasks to each of the rituals. The Nggela, in their orthodox settlement community, has a social strata system based on first-inhabitant and level of sacredness. In addition, the power of the Mosalaki includes the right to manage collective land. In this case, their power manifested through the right to inherit by the patrilineal system. The system allows directly a Mosalaki to inherit and the right to permit cultivating a *watas* or plot of arable land.⁶

The social strata are determined based on indigenous people and immigrants. In the village, migrants from the north live in the northern part of the settlement. Whereas those from the south live in the south, which has a lower level of sacredness. The zones have existed since ancient times and have been well maintained hitherto. In traditional societies where a dwelling is formed, its arrangement is often based on sacred things because religion and ritual are at the center; thus, the houses or settlements that are constructed can show a significant meaning (Snyder and Catanese, 1984: 18). The Nggela Traditional Settlements are inhabited by people who play an important role in the life of the community who are members of the community structure.⁷

The indigenous people have a *Sa'oria Tenda Bewa* term. It is known as the conventional house as the center of activity. This customary house is the center of power and a reflection of the differences or groupings of its people. Traditionally, Mosalaki has legitimacy or recognition as traditional institutions by traditional communities. The conventional ruling group occupies *Sa'oria Tenda Bewa* and oversees the orthodox community. This customary elite group consists of *Ata Ngga'e* or *Ata Ria* (Influential and highly positioned people). At the same time, the lower class is called *Ana kalo fai walu*, and *Aji ana* (ordinary people).

A settlement in Nggela Village has several parts or elements that form a single unit. Most of them are located within the Dusun Nggela area, and the others are outside this area but are still interconnected. Several other core elements in this customary settlement include 1) Traditional houses, 2) *Sa'o Keda*, a place for deliberations Mosalaki, 3) *Kanga Ria*, a traditional courtyard or a conventional altar, with the graves of the ancestors of the Nggela and Tubumusu people on it. Most of the traditional ceremonies in Nggela are performed on the *Kanga*. And last is 4) *Puse Nua*, the center point of the traditional settlement. This village center of origin is marked with a stone. This stone should not be touched or stepped on because of its sacred value. In certain traditional ceremonies, offerings are presented to it.

THE COMMUNITY'S TRADITIONS AND BEHAVIOUR

The history of the traditional settlement in Nggela Village explains that Mosalaki *Ine Ame* was the first person to set foot in the traditional village in Nggela Village and started building houses for his wife and children. The location of the first conventional house, *Sa'o Labo*, is in the north seen from the central point of the traditional village, which is marked by the presence of the *Puse Nua* stone (the main end of the traditional village). Mosalaki *Ine Ame* then built a house for her two sons. After several years, a ship that supposedly came from Majapahit arrived at Nggela Beach, and a misunderstanding occurred between the group leader from Majapahit, A Jaya, and the daughter of Mosalaki *Ine Ame*. This caused the daughters of Mosalaki *Ine Ame* and A Jaya to marry, settle in the traditional village, and be given a place to build a house.

Mosalaki *Ine Ame*, after seeing A Jaya's skill and intelligence, finally pointed to A Jaya as Mosalaki *Pu'u*, a person in charge of leading and carrying out all the rituals in the traditional village. Hitherto, those who carry out all conventional practices were descendants of A Jaya, yet Mosalaki *Ine Ame*'s role remains as a parent for the community. Hence, Mosalaki *Ine Ame* is the highest leader. Apart from this history, the behavior of the people of Nggela village is heavily influenced by various traditional rituals such as *Loka Lolo*, *Joka Ju* and *Lobo Keda*. This ritual would determine how attitudes, emotions, values, ethics, power, persuasion, and genetics and assess the availability of space in Nggela village.⁸

The first behavior observed was when the *Loka lolo* ritual was carried out. This custom ceremony of harvesting corn was initially performed by throwing fried-pounded young sorghum along the center of the village (*nua one*). The ritual reflected villagers' awareness, obedience and loyalty to traditional rulers (mosalaki) by giving only the garden's produce (*one wati*) for offerings and worship of the ancestors. The *Joka Ju* ritual starts from the traditional settlement to Peng lu Beach and returns to the traditional settlement. In terms of cosmology, when it is associated with this time-honored ritual, it can be seen that the southern part of the settlement



Figure 2.¹⁰ The indigenous people have a Saoria Tenda Bewa, a conventional house as the center of activity.

is a profane zone where all pests and evil spirits are disposed of to the south of the settlement to the beach. The *Lobo Keda* is a traditional ritual as appreciation for the community to the Creator and the ancestors for establishing *Saò Keda* as a conventional house without walls which functions as a place for deliberations for the Mosalaki.⁹ This ritual phase involves the community in Nggela Village and several nearby villages. According to the local history, several towns involved in this ritual have kinship relations with Nggela Village.

Meanwhile, the residents of the Nggela traditional settlement, on average, have a livelihood as farmers and gardeners. The land for agriculture and gardens is located around the Nggela traditional settlement. Agricultural and green products affect the structure of conventional houses, namely materials for building traditional homes that are taken from garden products, such as reeds for roofs, *ndawa* or bamboo and wooden poles.⁶

PHILOSOPHY OF AN AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

Nggela Village has five types of Ende Lio' sarong (cloth) motifs, resulting from the creativity and daily activities of the village community. Each has the following shape and meaning: 1) Kelimara sarong contains

the meaning of life, love, and affection given by God, the All-Compassionate and Merciful; besides that, it also includes the essence of fertility and beauty; 2) The Pundi, contains the meaning of sincerity, purity of heart and sincerity of love; 3) Elo, contains the meaning of a genuine struggle for love; 4) The *Redu Siku Mbira* sarong contains the meaning of the ups and downs of human life and the struggle to find true love; and last, 5) The *Sarong Luka* contains the meaning of the struggle for human life to get love. The process of making Ende Lio sarongs takes quite a long time to get good and satisfying results; even for weaving, it is still used with traditional equipment or non-machine looms. Sarong weavers always maintain the quality of their sarongs. Therefore, the price is relatively high compared to other types of Sarongs that tourists can find on the market.⁴

The people of Nggela village depend on agricultural yields for their daily necessities. Ranging from traditional medicine, ceremonial customs, household utensils, woven/rigging, and materials for complementary ceremonies, as well as for clothing, food and shelter. The art of utilizing various plants, compositions and processing is carried out traditionally, based on the experience of previous generations, which is carried out continuously. It is an oral tradition passed

on to the next generation without written text or guidelines. The people of Nggela Village take advantage of the fertile soil to grow tubers, coffee, cocoa, fruits and vegetables. In fulfilling their daily needs, the people in Nggela Village cultivate many plants around their houses. The sorghum plant, well known in eastern Indonesia, has a large role in the traditional rituals of the people of Nggela Village. Besides sorghum, there are 20 types of local food plants as a source of carbohydrates and protein.

From the description of the indigenous people of Nggela Village, It can be learned that the history of the formation of the community structure determines how activities or village life run. The concept of the source of origin in Nggela Village not only describes the idea and principle of genealogical descent but can also determine one's position. This can be seen from who is the first, who is prioritized, and who will be the elder to occupy the central and most important roles in the hierarchy of indigenous communities in social life. Its history also states that the ancestors have provided and cleared land for settlements. Followed by developing and regulating social systems in the form of indigenous communities. So that they have power over other residents. Furthermore, this is passed on to their offspring based on the customary rules that apply.¹¹

Another thing is the sorghum plant which has a big role as an important commodity in traditional activities, so it needs to be developed continuously to benefit the community and traditional rituals. This plant is also a local wisdom and can advance conventional villages in the economic field. Determination of residence with the North structure as the center of customary activities and the South is placed for immigrants, able to screen residents and maintain the authenticity of the descendants of the natives in Nggela Village. The origins of the ancestors of the Lio tribe in Nggela Village will also determine how the people in the village live, their activities, who are the traditional leaders, and what the people can do in their daily lives.

In the communication strategy with the people in Nggela Village, one must fully



Figure 3.¹² Since clearing residential land and up to now, mosalaki's services have been very large in maintaining the continuity of people's lives in Nggela Village

understand the role of traditional leaders in their lives. This classic figure, Mosalaki, is a direct descendant of their ancestors. In the spatial planning of Nggela village, since clearing residential land and up to now, mosalaki's services have been very large in maintaining the continuity of people's lives in Nggela Village. Therefore, to maximize the approach with the community and the life of the Nggela traditional village, the communication strategy that can be done is to approach communication with Mosalaki as a formal leader. In exploring the life of the Nggela indigenous people as a migrant community, it is necessary to know in advance the spatial position of community activities, what customs are allowed and what ethics are not allowed in entering the customary space and territory of the Nggela village. This information also deserves to be explored more by interacting directly with Mosalaki.¹³

CONCLUSION

The pattern of traditional settlements in the town of Nggela, Ende Regency, is always seen about the place of origin of the first humans of the Ende Lio tribe, namely Mount Lepembusu and the opposite direction towards the lowest area, namely the ocean. Cosmological considerations maintain a balance

between the two extreme points and their relation to settlements, namely ulu (head) and eko (downstream), and there is a puse (center) as the center of traditional accommodations. Ulu is connected to the sunrise or towards Mount Lepembusu, while eko is towards the sunset or opposite the mountain where the ancestors of the Ende tribe originated. As a traditional settlement that still adheres to cultural values maintained today, the center of conventional ceremonial activities is carried out on the Kanga Ria / traditional Mesbah, which is in the middle of this traditional settlement. The traditional territory of Nggela Village is only inhabited by people with important positions and roles in society or commonly referred to as Mosalaki/traditional stakeholders, with a total of 17 people occupying 15 traditional houses. This Mosalaki decide whether to allow or not migrants to settle in the Nggela traditional settlement. With considerations of kinship and assigning tasks to each of the rituals. The behavior of the Nggela village community is strongly influenced by various conventional practices such as Loka Lolo, Joka Ju, and Lobo Keda. This ritual will determine how attitudes, emotions, values, ethics, power, persuasion, and genetics and assess the availability of space in Nggela village.

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