The Lonto Leok tradition as a means of conflict resolution among the Manggarai people in Pong La'o

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Abstract

This study examines the philosophical and sociocultural functions of the *Lonto Leok* tradition a form of customary deliberation used for conflict resolution among the indigenous community of Pong La'o Village, Ruteng District, Manggarai Regency. This tradition embodies local wisdom, passed down through generations to maintain communal harmony amidst social diversity. Employing a qualitative method with a cultural anthropology approach, the research explores the symbolic significance of the circular seating arrangement within the *Mbaru Gendang* (traditional house), presided over by the *Tua Gendang* (customary leader). The findings indicate that *Lonto Leok* represents principles of egalitarianism and social cohesion, effectively dissolving hierarchies based on status or age. Fundamentally, this customary forum serves as an effective channel for expressing aspirations, facilitating the resolution of social, economic, and even formal legal disputes through consensus. The success of this tradition is rooted in the life philosophy of *teu ca ambo, muku ca puu*, which binds the Manggarai people to move forward together in unity of thought, heart, and spirit—to preserve the social integration of the village.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji fungsi filosofis dan sosiokultural tradisi Lonto Leok sebagai forum musyawarah adat dalam resolusi konflik pada masyarakat adat Desa Pong La'o, Kecamatan Ruteng, Kabupaten Manggarai. Tradisi ini merupakan perwujudan kearifan lokal yang hidup secara turun-temurun untuk menjaga keharmonisan komunal di tengah kemajemukan sosial. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan antropologi budaya, penelitian ini menelisik makna simbolis dari formasi duduk melingkar di dalam Mbaru Gendang (rumah adat) yang dipimpin oleh Tua Gendang. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Lonto Leok merepresentasikan prinsip kesetaraan posisi (egalitarian) dan keterikatan sosial yang meleburkan hierarki jabatan maupun usia. Secara fundamental, forum adat ini menjadi media penyalur aspirasi yang efektif dalam menyelesaikan perselisihan sosial, ekonomi, hingga hukum formal melalui mufakat. Keberhasilan tradisi ini didasarkan pada falsafah hidup teu ca ambo, muku ca puu, yang mengikat masyarakat Manggarai untuk senantiasa berjalan bersama, seia sekata, sehati, dan sejiwa dalam mempertahankan integrasi sosial desa. dengan panjang maksimal 150 kata.

Keywords

Lonto Leok, Local Wisdom, Cultural Anthropology

1. Introduction

The Indonesian archipelago is a vast region, home to a diverse array of local wisdoms rooted in a pluralistic society encompassing various ethnic groups, nationalities, races, religions, languages, cultures, and customs (Koentjaraningrat, 1990). In the course of human interaction, differences in opinions and ideas frequently arise . As a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation, Indonesia possesses a wealth of local cultural heritage that breathes life into every region. These local cultures, spread across the archipelago, constitute an extraordinary asset for the sustainability of Indonesian civilization (Latif, 2025).

Local wisdom refers to positive values practiced by a community in their daily lives, aimed at protecting and managing the environment in a sustainable manner (Law No. 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management) (Ningrum, 2023). Fundamentally, local wisdom is an integral component of culture, playing a significant role within the traditions and cultural landscape of the archipelago. Indonesia's cultural system comprising diverse ethnic groups exhibits a wide variety of traditional ceremonies that remain deeply embedded in the lives of the communities that uphold them (Brata, 2016).

Culture represents the very fabric of human life; it encompasses the full complexity of human existence, including art, law, and customs acquired by individuals as members of a society (Endraswara, 2005). According to Koentjaraningrat, culture is the entire system of ideas, actions, and creations produced by humans within a societal context, acquired through a process of learning (Saebani, 2023). At its core, culture functions as a process of transmission, whereby cultural values are passed down to new generations. Furthermore, culture serves to bind individuals within a community together. Consequently, safeguarding the continuity of these cultures and preventing their disappearance is an essential imperative (Tumanggor et al., 2017). One form of local wisdom that persists to this day among the Manggarai people specifically the indigenous community in Pong La'o Village, Ruteng District, Manggarai Regency is the *Lonto Leok* tradition. *Lonto Leok* is a deliberative forum held at the *Gendang* (traditional house) level, facilitated by traditional elders, community leaders, and local residents, with the aim of resolving disputes among community members in a fair and wise manner (Sahertian & Rustan Effendi, 2022). This tradition is a practice upheld by the indigenous community through generations, encompassing customs, beliefs, habits, and ancestral teachings; it remains an inseparable element passed down from one generation to the next (Sili et al., 2024).

The *Lonto Leok* as the act of sitting in a circle for the purpose of discussing, addressing, and resolving problems or conflicts whether they pertain to social, political, economic, legal, or cultural matters. In Manggarai society, issues are typically resolved through traditional customs within the *Lonto Leok* forum. While some conflicts may be addressed through formal legal channels, the *Lonto Leok* forum remains highly active to this day (Japa, 2023).

Philosophically, *Lonto Leok* emphasizes the principle of deliberation (*musyawarah*), prioritizing harmony and tranquility within the community. In this context, the Manggarai people embrace the concepts encapsulated in the phrases *teu ca ambo, neka woleng lako*; *muku ca puu, neka woleng curup*; and *nai ca anggit, tuka ca leleng*. These expressions signify that, as a community, the Manggarai people must move forward together in agreement, in unity of heart, and in oneness of spirit making *Lonto Leok* the central hub of Manggarai social life. Disputing parties are brought to the *Mbaru Gendang* (traditional house), where a *Tu'a Adat* (traditional elder) facilitates a discussion to reach a resolution that satisfies all involved. *Lonto Leok* also represents a cultural heritage that embodies the meanings and classifications of Manggarai traditional groups. The cultural significance and values inherent in *Lonto Leok* reinforce the social life of the Manggarai

people, ensuring it remains consistently harmonious and peaceful (Kristina, 2023).

Literally, *Lonto Leok* means sitting together in a circle to discuss and resolve issues through deliberation and consensus (*musyawarah mufakat*). This long-standing tradition serves as a tangible manifestation of the Manggarai philosophy of life, which upholds the spirit of togetherness, equality, and collective decision-making. In practice, *Lonto Leok* takes the form of participants sitting cross-legged in a circle, typically within a *Mbaru Gendang* (traditional house). This circular formation is no mere coincidence; rather, it carries profound philosophical symbolism. A circle having neither a beginning nor an end represents the principles of perfection, equal standing, and an unbreakable bond. Within this circular space, social hierarchies dissolve; every individual, regardless of their status, age, or background, holds an equal position and the right to be heard (Nikolaus et al., 2025). This reinforces the principle that every person is an essential component of equal value in the building of a community.

2. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative method with a cultural anthropology approach to conduct an in-depth examination of the symbolic meanings and sociocultural functions (Komara, 2014) of the *Lonto Leok* tradition in Pong La'o Village. Data collection was carried out using three primary instruments: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary research. The researcher engaged directly in observing interactions and the circular seating arrangement within the *Mbaru Gendang* (traditional communal house) during deliberations. In-depth interviews conducted in both structured and informal settings involved key informants, including *Tua Gendang* (traditional elders), community leaders, and villagers directly involved in conflict resolution processes. Meanwhile, documentary research involved gathering local historical archives, photographs of rituals, and village monographs to strengthen the validity of the field data.

All collected empirical data were processed and systematically examined using an interactive model of data analysis. The analysis began with data reduction, during which the researcher filtered, categorized, and excluded irrelevant information from interview transcripts and field notes concerning the philosophy of deliberation (Soehartono, 2000). Subsequently, the data were presented through a narrative-descriptive approach to map the relationship between the circular seating arrangement and the Manggarai concept of social equality. To ensure the validity of this anthropological interpretation, the researcher employed source triangulation and peer debriefing to minimize subjective bias before proceeding to the final stage.

The analytical process concluded with the formulation of conclusions and a critical verification of the data to address the research questions (Ikbar, 2012). Initial conclusions remained tentative and subject to revision throughout the ongoing fieldwork. A robust and comprehensive final conclusion was reached by testing the strength of the emerging propositions cross referencing the field data with Koentjaraningrat's cultural theories and the local philosophy of life, *teu ca ambo, muku ca puu*. This step ensures that the research findings provide a comprehensive picture of how *Lonto Leok* has managed to persist as an effective instrument for communal conflict resolution in the modern era.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Lonto Leok Tradition

Tradition refers to customs created and shaped by humans—habits that often carry a supernatural dimension and

encompass cultural values, norms, laws, and related rules. Within a society, a tradition serves as a legacy passed down through generations from one's ancestors. It can be understood as a practice transmitted from one generation to the next, persisting to the present day. Traditions also play a crucial role in shaping culture, often finding expression through the arts of a given society. In their Dictionary of Anthropology, Arriyono and Aminuddin Siregar (1985) explain that tradition pertains to customs or religious practices. Rooted in the lives of indigenous or traditional communities, these traditions are intrinsically linked to the cultural values, laws, and norms that constitute a cultural system, which in turn governs social behavior.

The term "tradition" in its etymological sense refers to inherited customs, habits, or rules established by a society. A social legacy remains relevant today if its elements are actively preserved and maintain a strong connection to contemporary life. In any given region, a tradition consists of customs passed down through generations shaped by the wisdom and teachings inherent within that society which must be sustained into the present. Such traditions not only form part of a region's cultural identity but also embody ancestral values that serve as a guiding framework for life within the community. One of the traditions still upheld by the Manggarai community in Pong La'o Village is *Lonto Leok* a traditional consultative practice that prioritizes togetherness, brotherhood, and mutual agreement as a means to resolve issues arising within the community.

According to Soerjono Soekanto, a tradition is an activity carried out repeatedly and consistently by a group of people (Soekanto, 2017). In other words, it consists of habits practiced continuously by a society and passed down from one generation to the next. Traditions illustrate how members of a society conduct themselves both in their daily lives and in matters pertaining to spiritual or religious aspects. Most fundamentally, this involves the transmission of knowledge or information from one generation to another, whether in written or oral form; without this, a tradition risks extinction. Traditions embraced by a society serve to enrich human life with culture and historical values. Furthermore, traditions foster a harmonious existence though this can only be realized if individuals value, respect, and properly uphold these traditions in accordance with established norms. Traditions emerged alongside the very arrival of humanity on Earth.

Tradition acts as the spirit of a culture, strengthening its overall cultural system. The viability of a tradition is tested by its level of effectiveness and efficiency, and it evolves in tandem with the development of other cultural elements. Traditions may manifest as specific attitudes or actions designed to address challenges; should their effectiveness and efficiency decline, the tradition will inevitably fade and eventually be abandoned by those who once practiced it. In other words, a tradition is a collection of material objects or ideas that have been imbued with specific meaning over time. More broadly, tradition encompasses everything passed down from the past to the present. In a more specific context, a tradition can be understood as a particular social heritage that meets certain criteria and has persisted to the present day.

Lonto Leok is defined as a deliberation held to resolve issues, taking place within a *Mbaru Gendang* (traditional house) where participants sit in a circle (Lon & Widyawati, 2021). From the perspective of Manggarai culture, *Lonto Leok* refers to a gathering attended by community members to discuss various matters affecting their village. The concept and significance of *Lonto Leok* reflect the Manggarai way of life, characterized by harmony and coexistence. This is evidenced by the Manggarai custom of prioritizing collective deliberation when addressing problems or conflicts within a traditional setting. Thus, *Lonto Leok* is understood as a form of deliberation aimed at discussing and resolving issues (Tapung et

al., 2018).

The *Lonto Leok* tradition centers on two main objectives: first, to align the words, thoughts, ideas, and opinions of everyone participating in the deliberation; and second, to coordinate actions for the common good . *Lonto Leok* serves as a method or model for meetings whether for discussing and resolving various issues within a village (*Beo*) or for conducting traditional ceremonies among the Manggarai people. During these sessions, all participants sit in a circular formation, with each individual sharing an equal commitment to participate. The meeting involves a process of discussion aimed at reaching a collective consensus. The circular shape symbolizes a form of democracy, in which the role of every individual is considered significant (Mahur, 2019).

As an activity, *Lonto Leok* involves sitting in a circle to deliberate upon, discuss, and resolve problems or conflicts ranging from social, political, economic, legal, and cultural issues to various other matters. In the political sphere, *Lonto Leok* functions as a communication strategy; as a tradition, it encompasses the seven universal cultural elements identified by Malinowski: language, technology, livelihood systems, social organization, knowledge systems, religion, and the arts (Sulaeman, 2012). In the context of the arts, *Lonto Leok* can be viewed as a form of persuasive art a way of selecting and expressing opinions to ensure a shared understanding. In terms of communication, it serves as a forum or space for meeting and exchanging ideas to formulate policies.

Lonto Leok is a traditional deliberation attended by community elders or customary leaders to discuss or seek solutions to issues arising within the village. All those who take part in this traditional deliberation must sit in a circle. Literally, *Lonto Leok* means "sitting in a circle." It refers to sitting together to discuss and resolve any issues within the village. The *Lonto Leok* concept is inspired by the conical shape of the traditional house; consequently, those inside tend to sit in a circle, mirroring the structure of the dwelling. In practice, *Lonto Leok* refers to a gathering or meeting attended by village residents to deliberate on various matters or problems arising within the village.

3.2. *Lonto Leok's* implementation process in solving problems

As a tradition that upholds a space for dialogue, *Lonto Leok* employs a clear decision-making mechanism. There are two forms of this tradition: first, routine deliberations held without the presence of traditional leaders; and second, major deliberations that result in collective decisions, represented by traditional elders. In *Lonto Leok* gatherings involving a large number of participants, the final decision-making process strictly adheres to established procedures (Esem & Henukh, 2026).

Lonto Leok is a form of traditional deliberation still practiced in the Manggarai region, specifically in Pong La'o Village. The term *Lonto Leok* is derived from the words *Lonto*, meaning "to sit," and *Leok*, meaning "in a circle." Essentially, this practice serves as a forum for traditional deliberation, designed to discuss and resolve various issues that may arise. In a social context, *Lonto Leok* functions as a meeting space for the community to engage in discussions, settle disputes, and share experiences. The tradition aims to do more than just restore balance between conflicting parties; fundamentally, the reason the *Lonto Leok* mechanism is still maintained by the Manggarai people today is that it embodies essential life values namely, the spirit of togetherness, equal rights, and fair treatment for all involved.

Lonto Leok serves as a forum for aligning perspectives, where everyone is given the opportunity to deliberate or discuss

matters collectively. Ideally, *Lonto Leok* is considered successful when it manages to harmonize or unify the perceptions and aspirations of diverse participants. All participants are expected to be *nai ca anggit* sharing one heart, one soul and to avoid *woléng curup*, or conflicting opinions (Chen and Charles, 2012). A Manggarai expression that captures this alignment of views is *muku ca puu neka woleng curup* ("bananas growing from the same clump should not hold differing opinions"). The participants are likened to banana plants growing together within a single cluster; this shared growth is manifested through the process of deliberation aimed at reaching a consensus (*mufakat*) (Habur, 2016). As explained by Ardianus Marselus Nggoro, a lecturer at UNIKA and a cultural expert:

> "In terms of terminology, *Lonto Leok* consists of two parts: *Lonto* means 'to sit,' while *Leok* which can also imply a sense of 'engaging' or 'confronting'—suggests a specific, purposeful way of sitting together. In this context, sitting in a circle is a means to address and resolve a problem. Such problem-solving cannot be done by an individual alone; it must be a collective effort, as we require the opinions and input of others" (interview, December 17, 2025).

Based on the interview with Ardianus Marselus Nggoro, it can be concluded that the *Lonto Leok* tradition plays a vital role in aligning opinions through collective discussion, ultimately fostering a consensus to resolve issues. When viewed through the lens of social capital theory, *Lonto Leok* embodies trust, collaboration, shared norms, and social interactions that strengthen community cohesion. These values are reflected in the expression *muku ca puu neka woleng curup*, which emphasizes the importance of togetherness and unity of opinion. Consequently, *Lonto Leok* serves as a means to reach consensus, maintain harmony, and fortify the social bonds within the Manggarai community.

Lonto Leok, as a strategic forum, is expected to unify efforts and facilitate collective action (Mukese, 2012). It does not conclude merely with the reaching of a consensus; rather, that agreement must be manifested through joint action. In the context of conflict resolution or problem-solving, all participants are expected to engage in addressing the issue at hand, with the ultimate goal of achieving well-being and the common good. Participants in *Lonto Leok* are encouraged to be *tuka ca leleng* (of one heart and mind) ensuring that everyone's direction and objectives remain aligned to avoid *woleng lako* (acting independently or going separate ways). A traditional expression captures this sentiment: *teu ca ambo neka woleng lako* ("sugarcane stalks growing from the same clump cannot go their separate ways"). As noted by Blasius Dabura former village head who served as a *Tua Kilo* (clan elder) at the *Rumah Gendang* (traditional ceremonial house) and former head of Pong La'o village:

> The purpose of holding a *Lonto Leok* is to resolve problems. As the Manggarai people say, *do weki doa ita* the more people who gather, the more ideas, insights, and guidance are contributed, allowing the problem to be solved." (Interview, January 20, 2026)

Based on research findings and the interview with Blasius Dabur, *Lonto Leok* serves to harmonize collective steps toward problem-solving through cooperation, the exchange of ideas, and shared responsibility. This aligns with the theory of Social Capital encompassing the beliefs, norms, and collaborative networks that strengthen social solidarity and contribute to the achievement of the common good.

The existence of *Lonto Leok* provides significant benefits to the community, as this tradition offers a space for resolving issues through deliberation and communication. *Lonto Leok* is rooted in a spirit of brotherhood, kinship, togetherness, and consensus-building. It serves as a platform for the Manggarai people to express their aspirations and grievances

concerning their shared way of life. In social life, differences in opinion and interests are inevitable. Conflicts or problems may arise between individuals, families, or groups; if these issues are not promptly addressed or discussed, social harmony can be disrupted. Therefore, *Lonto Leok* provides an opportunity for the community to discuss problems directly and resolve them collectively.

One of the primary benefits of *Lonto Leok* is its role in synthesizing various ideas, opinions, and perspectives through a process of discussion. Such deliberations involve all parties relevant to the issue at hand. Within the *Lonto Leok* forum, individuals are given the opportunity to voice their opinions openly, allowing diverse viewpoints to be addressed together. This process enables the community to examine problems from multiple angles before reaching a decision. Furthermore, *Lonto Leok* is utilized in various aspects of community life, including the planning of traditional ceremonies and other collective activities. As stated by Mrs. Marselina, a local farmer:

> "Regarding the *Lonto Leok* (traditional deliberation) process here at the *Rumah Gendang* (ceremonial house), it is true that land disputes are the most frequent matters addressed. While we do resolve other issues here such as cases of theft or infidelity land-related conflicts are the most common. For instance, a case was just settled right here in this deliberation space this is where the parties sit, and this is where the discussions take place. The issue involved a dispute over land between a sister and her biological brother. Present for the resolution were the Sub-district Head (*Camat*), village officials, local residents, and we, the traditional elders." "We gather at this *Rumah Gendang* (traditional ceremonial house) to listen to hear one another and provide input regarding the matter at hand" (Interview, December 29, 2025).

Based on the interview above, it can be concluded that the *Lonto Leok* (traditional deliberation) process at the *Rumah Gendang* addresses various issues—not limited to land disputes, which are the most frequent, but also matters such as theft and infidelity. It may also involve unresolved land-related conflicts between siblings (sisters and brothers). Participants in these *Lonto Leok* deliberations include the sub-district head (*Camat*), village officials, community members, and traditional elders, with the *Rumah Gendang* serving as the venue for the discussion.

The continued practice of *Lonto Leok* ensures that any emerging problems can be resolved peacefully. *Lonto Leok* serves as a mechanism for the community to settle conflicts or social issues. Disputes between individuals, families, or groups can be addressed through a forum that brings together all parties deemed relevant to the resolution process. This demonstrates that conflict resolution via *Lonto Leok* prioritizes dialogue and deliberation rather than unilateral decision-making. Those involved in a conflict are not merely brought together to state their grievances; they are also guided toward finding a mutually beneficial solution. As stated by Mr. Blasius Dabura former village head who also serves as a Tua Kilo (clan elder) at the *Rumah Gendang*

> *Lonto Leok* is a traditional method for resolving cases or problems, conducted within the *Rumah Gendang*. The objective is to reach a sound consensus whether in the context of planning or in the context of resolving issues. In Pong La'o Village, for instance, the most frequent problems concern land ownership status and land boundaries. Such issues can escalate significantly when both parties refuse to accept each other's positions (Interview, January 20, 2026)

Based on the interview above, it can be concluded that *Lonto Leok* is a process employed to address problems or disputes with the aim of reaching a sound agreement or consensus. This consensus can apply to two contexts: planning or the resolution of various conflicts. Specifically, this includes disputes over land ownership determining who holds the rightful claim as well as issues regarding land boundaries, such as their location and dimensions. In these situations, a conflict or problem is likely to intensify if both parties are unwilling to accept one another's perspectives.

4. Conclusion

The *Lonto Leok* practice, used to resolve issues or conflicts in Pong La'o Village, operates through a traditional deliberative mechanism involving customary leaders, community members, and the parties directly involved in the dispute or problem. The *Lonto Leok* process begins with the presentation of the issue (*caca*), followed by the offering of responses and input (*cica*), and concludes with decision-making (*congko*) to reach a mutual agreement. This tradition is employed to address various matters, such as land disputes, theft, and conflicts between residents. Throughout the process, all parties are given the opportunity to express their respective views, ensuring that the final decision is the result of a collective consensus. The tradition prioritizes dialogue, deliberation, and peace, with the aim of maintaining and preserving harmony within the community.

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