

THE CONCEPT OF ETHICS: RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MANGGARAI PEOPLE IN THE *OKE DARA TA'A* RITUAL ACCORDING TO EMMANUEL LEVINAS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Manggarai community is increasingly concerned about the erosion of their local wisdom, particularly the awareness of relationships with others, nature, and the Creator. This decline is reflected in the rise of gang fights, tribal conflicts, and natural disasters, leading to a loss of togetherness and responsibility. Despite this, the Manggarai possess valuable wisdom on living together peacefully and fairly, expressed through art, literature, social systems, rituals, and religious ceremonies. This study explores the ethics of responsibility within the Manggarai community, focusing on the Oke Dara Ta'a ritual, and draws on Emmanuel Levinas's philosophical framework. The Oke Dara Ta'a ritual is performed when someone dies unnaturally—through violence, accidents, disasters, or fights—to remove bad luck and protect other family members. The Manggarai believe that Dara Ta'a results from disharmony with others, ancestors, and the Creator. Levinas's philosophy asserts that ethics arise from encountering the "face" of the other, which inherently demands responsibility. His ideas provide a lens to understand the ethical responsibility embodied in the Oke Dara Ta'a ritual. This qualitative study uses interviews with traditional leaders and ritual practitioners, grounded in phenomenological philosophy. The research highlights the significance of Manggarai local wisdom in fostering social and ethical responsibility.

Keywords: Ethics of Responsibility; Manggarai Culture; Oke Dara Ta'a Ritual; Emanuel Levinas; Safety of Life

Abstrak

Keprihatinan yang dihadapi masyarakat Manggarai memudarnya nilai-nilai kearifan lokal. Khususnya kesadaran relasi dengan sesama, alam dan Sang Pencipta, seperti maraknya tawuran, peperangan antara suku dan bencana alam. Kebersamaan dan tanggung jawab semakin hilang. Padahal orang Manggarai memiliki kebijaksanaan-kebijaksanaan bagaimana menata hidup bersama secara adil dan damai yang terungkap dalam bentuk-bentuk kebudayaan seperti: kesenian, kesustraan, sistem sosial, ritus/ritual dan upacara keagamaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menggali etika tanggung jawab masyarakat Manggarai dalam ritual *Oke Dara Ta'a* dalam terang pemikiran Emmanuel Levinas. Ritual *Oke Dara Ta'a* merupakan ritus yang dilakukan orang Manggarai karena meninggal secara tak wajar seperti terbunuh, kecelakaan, bencana alam dan perkelahian. Ritual ini bertujuan mengapus nasib sial, sehingga tidak menimpa anggota keluarga lain. Orang Manggarai meyakini *Dara Ta'a* disebabkan karena relasi yang tidak harmonis dengan sesama, leluhur dan Sang Pencipta. Menurut Levinas, dasar dari etika adalah relasi manusia yang muncul saat manusia berhadapan dengan wajah sesama. Berhadapan dengan wajah, manusia tidak berbuat lain selain bertanggung jawab. Pemikiran Levinas menjadi *frameworks* untuk mengerti konsep etika tanggung jawab ritual *Oke Dara Ta'a*. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui wawancara dengan tokoh-tokoh adat Manggarai dan pelaku ritual *Oke Dara Ta'a* menggunakan filsafat fenomenologis. Relevansi penelitian pada penghargaan kearifan lokal Manggarai.

Kata Kunci: Etika Tanggung Jawab; Budaya Manggarai; Ritual *Oke Dara Ta'a*; Emanuel Levinas; Keselamatan Hidup

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a large nation rich in cultural diversity, which is not only expressed in elite cultures such as music, dance, opera, literature, and exotic crafts (Adon, 2021). It is also expressed in rituals, religious ceremonies, and cultural symbols. These cultural forms regulate how communal life is organized and managed (Jama et al., 2020). However, this cultural wealth can cause conflict if not managed properly, including the loss of local cultural identity, the domination of particular cultures, conflicts between cultures that result in the loss of cultural heritage, division, and inequality (Steni et al., 2024).

In addition, the daily lives of Indonesians are often dominated by ideological and religious language, resulting from the dominance of certain cultures and religions that unconsciously place and treat others as “third parties” (Adon et al., 2025). Furthermore, globalization and technological advances that overlook the local context have led the younger generation to lose their Indonesian identity, including tolerance, a spirit of sacrifice, and a love of peace (Adon, 2022). In Manggarai, for example, many young people are involved in gang fights, suicide, land disputes, and rivalry between tribes (Andari et al., 2023). These social changes contradict the identity of the Manggarai people, who highly value unity and integrity, as these values are deeply ingrained in their ancestral heritage and embodied in Manggarai culture's local wisdom (Steni et al., 2024).

Therefore, this study aims to explore the rich ethics of responsibility among the Manggarai people in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual, a ceremony designed to ward off bad luck associated with unnatural deaths, thereby preventing it from befalling other family members. To explore these rich ethical concepts, this study is informed by Emanuel Levinas' concept of ethics of responsibility. Emanuel Levinas (1906-1995) was a contemporary French philosopher known for his work in ethics and phenomenology (Javier & Piñero, 2022). According to Levinas, responsibility is the basis of ethics and human relations (Sláma, 2017).

In Levinas' phenomenological approach, when a researcher encounters reality, they do not just appear as a reader who understands reality as it is (Muñoz & Delgadillo, 2018). Instead, they discover both the depth and breadth of meaning, the richness of their world, and the reality they observe (Goto et al., 2018). The findings of this study are presented in “frameworks” of language that describe the lived experiences and struggles of the Manggarai people who perform the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual (Riyanto, 2015).

Therefore, in the light of Emanuel Levinas' thought, we find the concept of the Manggarai people's ethical responsibility towards others. In other words, the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual is not merely a local religious ceremony but contains the Manggarai people's ethics of responsibility towards others who have suffered misfortune. Thus, exploring the Manggarai people's ethics of responsibility in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual, in light of Emanuel Levinas' thinking, reveals their concepts of wisdom towards others.

This research is not a form of cultural ethnocentrism, but rather, by discovering the beauty of Manggarai culture, an attitude of appreciation for other cultural riches will be formed (Sriwahyuni et al., 2022). Thus, the image that is built is not exclusive but inclusive (Suprpto et al., 2021). The novelty of this research lies in its exploration of the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual in light of Emanuel Levinas's thought, which led to the discovery of conceptions of ethical responsibility among the Manggarai people towards low human beings who have suffered misfortune, first, the human dimension. The *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual reveals the attitude and responsibility of the Manggarai people towards their fellow human beings who have died unnaturally, so that similar events do not happen to other family members. This ritual also reminds the Manggarai people of their responsibility to maintain happiness and ensure the safety of their fellow human beings (Sriwahyuni et al., 2022).

Second, the social dimension. The implementation of the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual involves the family (*kilo*) and the entire village community (*ata one beo*). This sense of togetherness is evident when someone dies, as the family of the deceased and the entire village community are not allowed to engage in activities outside the home. The aim is to sympathize with those who

are grieving (Semiun, 2021). Third, the religious dimension. The *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual is a means of communication between humans, their ancestors, and *Mori Kraeng* (God). In this ritual, the Manggarai people convey their apologies, regrets, and wishes for peace to their ancestors so that the same death will not befall other family members (Nggoro et al., 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach through interviews and library research (Yaniawati, 2020). The methodology for discussing the themes was grounded in phenomenological philosophy (Canales, 2014). In the phenomenological approach, when a researcher encounters a text or reality, they do not merely appear as a reader who understands the text or reality as it is (Goto, 2008). Instead, they encounter both the richness and depth of meaning in the world of the text or reality (Riyanto, 2018b). The findings of phenomenological research lie in the “frameworks” of languages that describe the real agility of human experience and the concrete struggles of life (Riyanto, 2018a).

This research used two methods: in-depth interviews and library research. Interviews were conducted with Manggarai cultural leaders, including Konstantinus Mon, Ludovikus, Nober Nabar, and Damisnus Joni. The source is a Manggarai cultural leader who understands the purpose of the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual. Interviews were also conducted with families who had performed the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual in 2008, namely Charles Efendi, Regina Mune, and a young Manggarai man, Lukas Trisno. The data collection process involved recording the informants' narratives on a smartphone (HP) and transcribing them into narrative form in accordance with the research flow. The interviews were conducted on June 18-28, 2025, in Manggarai.

Alongside the in-depth interviews, a focused library research on Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of responsibility was conducted, and data was gathered from his works, including *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, *Ethics et Infinity*, *Entere Nous: on Thinking-of-the-Other*, and *Alterity and Transcendence*. In these works, Levinas argues that to understand the Other, we cannot start from ourselves. This approach is influenced by our own standards of truth (Albuquerque, 2014). To truly understand the Other, one must begin with the Other's perspective. The analysis of the research data was carried out in a dialogue between the concept of the Manggarai people's ethical responsibility in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual and Emanuel Levinas' concept of ethical responsibility (Zaluchu, 2020).

The analysis involved consolidating interview themes and selecting relevant data while discarding irrelevant or overlapping information (Indrawan & Jalilah, 2021). Insufficient or unclear data were supplemented using secondary sources (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022). The coded data were then interpreted phenomenologically to describe the Manggarai people's ethics of responsibility. Primary data from Levinas' ethics were enriched with secondary sources and analyzed phenomenologically to formulate the concept of the Manggarai people's ethics in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual (Adon & Rendra, 2022).

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Manggarai Community

The Manggarai are an ethnic group inhabiting the western part of Flores Island. Flores Island is one of many islands scattered across the archipelago that is rich in diversity, both in terms of natural resources and culture. As an ethnic group, the Manggarai people have a distinctive and unique culture. This is also inseparable from Manggarai's natural structure and climate. Geographically, the central part of Manggarai consists of a cluster of mountains and dense forests with a humid tropical climate. The outer part, which borders the sea, has a dry climate (Perdana, 2016).

Such natural structures influence the mindset, character, arts, culture, and local wisdom of the Manggarai people. As stated by Riyanto (2015), the relationship between the local community and the surrounding nature, such as land, water, rivers, forests, mountains, and others, has given rise to profound insights that have produced fascinating wisdom (Riyanto, 2015). It is these challenging natural conditions that have led the Manggarai people to depend on farming for their livelihood. This way of life has ultimately resulted in traditions in agriculture and in everyday culture. This is summarized in the cultural philosophy of “*Gendang oné lingkron péang*”.

The Manggarai people have long recognized the existence of the Creator (*ata jari agu dedek*). They believe that the earth they walk on and the sky above them did not come into being on their own, but were created by someone. The Manggarai people refer to the Supreme Being by various names, such as *Mori*, *Morin*, *Agu Ngaran*, *Mori Kraéng*, *Jari Agu Dedek*, *Ema Eta-Ende Wa*, and *Par Agu Kolep*, reflecting their daily relationships with the Supreme Being (Pandor, 2015b). Of these various names, the most common name for the Supreme Being is *Mori Kraéng*.

The Supreme Being is described as having great power and being involved in human life. The Manggarai people incorporate their belief in *Mori Kraéng* into their entire lives, from birth rituals (*cear cumpe*) to death (*kelas*), *penti* (thanksgiving), and *hese mbaru* (house building). However, the Manggarai people also adhere to the beliefs of dynamism and animism (belief in spirits). They believe that most spirits (gods/ancestors) reside in large trees and springs/swamps. Trees and places like these are considered sacred because they are believed to possess power and offer protection (Ngoro, 2016).

Emanuel Levinas' Concept of Ethical Responsibility

Emanuel Levinas' concept of ethical responsibility stems from the awareness that humans are social beings. Humans cannot live alone; they always live in close proximity to others. They exist in relation to others. In relating to others, humans realize that they are not perfect beings, complete in themselves (Dominggus & Pandor, 2022). They need others in their lives; they are never alone. Humans, as social and relational beings, have a shared way of life. This means that when humans encounter others, they find order and direction in life. What is meant by order and direction? Order and direction are welfare, justice, peace, and happiness for all humans (Adon & Asman, 2022). In other words, when my fellow human beings suffer, that suffering is also my suffering. Because they also deserve to live as well as I do.

Therefore, I have a responsibility for their lives. For this reason, Levinas' thinking is critical and valuable for the creation of a polis that is conscientious and ethical. For Levinas, politics without ethics is cruelty (Levinas, 1978a). Thus, for Levinas, the first philosophy is ethics. Ethics, as the first philosophy, presents concrete everyday life. Everyday life reveals an ethical truth about human life and its relationship with others (Rodríguez, 2021).

Human beings are never alone. They always live alongside others. Awareness of living with others enables humans to know themselves and their fellow human beings (Ferry, 2023). This means that humans always need other people in their journey through life. With this awareness, humans cannot possibly hurt others. On the contrary, they are responsible for the presence of others before them. Encounters with others require us to respond to their presence rather than judge or make assumptions about them (Riyanto, 2020). Others appear as naked faces, without any context. This means that the other's face does not give me room to form perceptions, conceptions, or definitions of them. The presence of the other's face before me only demands responsibility, so that I appreciate, respect, help, and save them. There is no room for me to harm them (Levinas, 1978b).

Levinas describes the Other as different from me. He explicitly states that the Other is not me; he is different from me. This does not mean to negate the existence of the Other (Levinas, 1969). Here, Levinas only wants to say that the Other remains the Other in its condition, with all its characteristics and innocence. So, when we encounter the Other, we cannot do anything but welcome, accept, and respect it (Berenpas, 2021). If we do the opposite, destroy or

eliminate it, then we will become like someone with insomnia. We are disturbed and imprisoned by *Liyan*. Or, as Levinas says, "We are 'held hostage' by the Other" (Levinas, 1978b). According to Levinas, the face is an ethical value that arises through the presence of another person. Thus, the Face of the Other is a presence that produces ethics (Levinas, 1995).

Ethics of Responsibility

Responsibility is the most fundamental attitude when dealing with The Other. An encounter with The Other demands responsibility. It is in this sense that Levinas says, "I am held hostage by the Other" (Levinas, 1998b). In the presence of The Other, I can do nothing but respond to their presence. That response is an answer to the call of the Other. That answer is always based on an attitude of readiness, like a humble servant who always answers, "Here I am!" (Levinas, 1998a). That is what is called Responsibility.

Responsibility does not arise from the Other's status or profession, such as an aide to the president. It is not in that sense. The responsibility referred to is a response to an ethical call when encountering The Other. Thus, our responsibility towards The Other is a responsibility that has no specific limits. Levinas says that responsibility is never for oneself (The Self), but always in relation to The Other and for The Other. Responsibility is a necessity. We cannot escape it (Levinas, 1998c). Here we open ourselves to the presence of the Other. At that moment, we are interrupted and questioned by the Other, and we must answer. That answer is responsibility.

In Levinas's thought, responsibility towards the Other does not arise from reasoning, past experiences, or the particulars of any given relationship. Instead, responsibility is independent from the specific nature of one's relationship with the Other. Whether mediated through the state, society, religion, ethnicity, or similar affiliation. Such mediated relationships, Levinas argues, are grounded more in expectation or hope than ethics (Susanta, 2018). Responsibility, therefore, is responsibility without prejudice. That is, responsibility is detached from perceptions, concepts, or judgments about the Other. Responsibility must be as naked as the presence of the Face before me. To avoid responsibility, one must not construct a concept of the Other. The Other is not what I perceive or conceptualize. The Other is the Other in its otherness (Berenpas, 2021).

In other words, responsibility towards the Other does not lie at the level of dialogue seeking knowledge, but at the level of ethics. The face, according to Levinas, "is the most fundamental moment or event in an encounter (Sabon, 2018). Among the many approaches and various ways of relating to being, it is the act of the face that is most special [...]. "The face is fundamental. It does not have a systematic character. It is an idea that comes to me through human actions, rather than through knowledge. Thus, "the first language is in the Face, [...] where we are required to respond, and that response is responsibility" (Zhao, 2015).

The Concept of the Oke Dara Ta'a Ritual in Manggarai Culture

The Meaning and Purpose of the Oke Dara Ta'a Ritual in Manggarai Culture

The *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual in Manggarai culture aims to dispel bad luck due to unnatural deaths such as being struck by lightning, natural disasters, murder, drowning in the river, tsunamis, accidents, war, gang fights, and suicide. According to Konstantinus Mon (*Tua Teno Gendang Carep*), the purpose of the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual is to break the chain of unnatural deaths caused by bad luck, because, according to the Manggarai people, natural deaths occur due to illness (Interview Damianus Joni, 2025). The Manggarai people believe that the end of a person's life is determined by the Almighty and that the process of death generally occurs through illness. In Manggarai culture, there is a term known as "*Ai wangkan laku dahau langgor sai nenteng ulu, beti tuka, heo toko, bo kawen beti dahau mbaru sakit cain, teing le menteri, kawe le dokter, wa lampek lima*" (Interview Ludovikus, 2025). This term implies that, fundamentally, a person's death always occurs through physical signs known to humans, such as the process of illness.

In other words, family members can recognize the signs of impending death and mentally prepare for their loved one's departure. Meanwhile, *Dara Ta'a's* death was unprepared and

sudden, shocking her family members, so her death was considered unnatural or bad luck (Interview Charles, 2025). In Manggarai tradition, there is a term called *taung tasuk* ('efforts made by the family to care for the sick') (Interview Regina Mune, 2025). The Oke Dara Ta'a ritual aims to ward off bad luck so that it does not befall other family members (Interview Nober Nabar, 2025). In addition, the body of someone who died due to *Dara Ta'a* was laid out (*loling*) outside the house because it was considered unnatural. In the past, the graves of those who died from bad luck were separated from those who died from illness. Deaths due to illness (*mata nele*) were buried in the public cemetery near the village, while the bodies of *Dara Ta'a* were buried near the church (Interview Konstantinus Mon, 2025).

In some places in Manggarai, deaths caused by *Dara Ta'a* are not accompanied by a *Kenduri* (*kelas*) ceremony (Interview Regina Mune, 2025) to emphasize that the Manggarai people reject this manner of death and do not want it to happen again. *Kenduri* (*kelas*) is a ceremony to send the spirits of the deceased to eternity and ensure they are accepted by the Creator. The primary purpose of the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual is revealed in the following prayer, "*Keti Ta'a hitu ngasang Boto wa nger wa wini ngger sili boto manga itan diang parin tai kudut dopo hau dara ta'a ho'o ai mai eta main toe mangga dara ta'a kilo ho'o boto cunga dunga nala*", meaning that the same death should not happen again to the family (Interview Nober Nabar, 2025).

Factors Causing *Dara Ta'a's* Death

As a community with cosmocentric beliefs (Pandor, 2015a), the Manggarai people believe that *Dara Ta'a's* death occurred within a family due to several factors. The first is hereditary factors. According to Manggarai beliefs, one of the leading causes of *Dara Ta'a* is ancestral inheritance/*bincar ngger one panga agu wela*. The Manggarai people believe that *Dara Ta'a's* death is due to the inheritance of ancestors who experienced it (Interview Nober Nabar, 2025). Therefore, in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual ceremony, all family members from the *Anak Rona* ('mother's family'), *Anak Wina* ('father's family'), *Wa'u* ('descendants'), *Ase-kae/Pa'ang olo ngaung musu* (community members) are required to attend. During the ceremony, all those present are asked whether the fate of *Dara Ta'a* (bad luck) came from them.

The prayer goes, "*Denge le hau nana ai te'e neho muku de hau de lando neho teu mata kat one salang toe baro one bea, cangap le waja, ngoro le oto am one ana krona ko anak wina tei tanda lau*" (Interview Regina Mune, 2025). After this prayer is said, the spirit of the person concerned will give a sign on two pieces of wood tied with *wuas* (rattan). If the names *Rona* or *Wina* are mentioned, the rattan rope will sway to indicate the source of the bad luck. According to Ludovikus (resource person), *Dara Ta'a* is not the will of the universe (*Mori Kraeng*) but rather a legacy from the ancestors, where the bad luck has not been decided/discarded (*podo*) (Interview Ludovikus, 2025) in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual. Hence, it occurs in the next generation.

The second is a person's behavior and attitude in life (*Wintuk agu Pande*). In addition to hereditary factors/bad luck inherited from ancestors, *Dara Ta'a* is caused by the daily behavior of the person concerned, which leads to unnatural death/bad luck. According to Nober Nabar (a respondent), another cause of *Dara Ta'a*, apart from hereditary factors, is a person's actions throughout their life. The Manggarai people have the following advice: "*Neka wedi repi, neka tuke tangkal, neka hembul le, tebur lau, neka ata lai wa, ite lai eta*", which means not to violate Manggarai customs (Interview Nober Nabar, 2025). This means that misfortune/disaster in life occurs because someone violates the norms and ethics of living together, such as "*Eme wina data neka wina ru*" ('cheating on someone's wife') and arrogance/not listening to parental advice (*kembleis/kembelujak*) (Interview Lukas Trisno, 2025). The prayer recited when breaking the curse is, "*Keti ta'a hitu ngasang boto wa nger wa wini ngger sili boto manga itan diang parin tai kudut dopo hau dara ta'a ho'o ai mai eta main toe mangga dara ta'a kilo ho'o boto cunga dunga nala*" (Interview Ludovikus, 2025).

The third is destiny or *Wada*. Although the Manggarai people believe that *Dara Ta'a's* death was the result of personal sin, they also believe in destiny, that each person's life is determined by the Creator (*Mori Kraeng*) through *De'i* ('the determination of fate while still in the womb').

The Manggarai people believe that destiny (*Wada*) occurs during the process of human birth. This belief causes a person to be delayed at birth because “*Toe ca'i olo wada le Mori Kraeng*” (‘God has not yet determined the fate of the person concerned’) (Interview Lukas Trisno, 2025). If a person’s fate—such as dying from a fall or becoming wealthy—is determined at birth, then it will inevitably happen. This fate or destiny cannot be canceled because the Almighty has chosen it. In relation to *Dara Ta'a*, destiny (*Wada*) is a determining factor in a person's death. If the death of *Dara Ta'a* was due to *Wada*, then the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual aims to prevent the same thing from happening again to other family members (Interview Regina Mune, 2025).

The *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual involves several symbolic materials, each carrying a specific cosmological meaning. These include: (1) a black chicken (*manuk miteng*), which symbolizes the dark or unseen world; (2) rattan (*wuas*), believed to be a plant associated with jinn; (3) sugar cane (*teu*), representing the stages or span of human life; (4) pottery (*koli*), symbolizing provisions for the journey; (5) tobacco (*tembakau*), also representing provisions; (6) pandan leaves (*rea*), symbolizing warmth; (7) bananas (*muku*), symbolizing the transience of human life; and (8) a white chicken, which represents rebirth.

The *Oke Dara Ta'a* Ritual Process

The *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual is performed in two places at different times. The first ritual is performed after the burial ceremony, before *Saung Ta'a* (mourning period) at *Pa'ang Beo* (village gate), and the ritual is performed at *Cungga* (the meeting point of two rivers) (Interview Konstantinus Mon, 2025).

a. Ritual performed at the village gate (*Pa'ang Beo*).

In this ceremony, two pieces of wood are placed from one side of the road to the other. Then, *wuas* (rattan) is tied to both pieces of wood. On both sides of the wood, a banana comb (*muku te'e*), sugar cane (*tebu*), tobacco (*tal*), pandan leaves (*saung re'a*), and pottery (*koli*) are placed (Interview Nober Nabar, 2025). Next, the spokesperson (*mu'u curup*) recites the following prayer: “*Denge lahou nana tara tuju mata kemu lime landing tabrak one salang, ngoro le oto ho teti adak hau, boto cuku nunga tai tabrak one salang, neka na'a ngger wa turi ngger musi eme dopo, toe reweng kanang hio peang benda neka cuku nungga kole*” (Interview Regina Mune, 2025). If the rattan rope moves when mentioning the origin of the bad luck, then a black chicken is slaughtered with the following prayer/request: “*Keti tar ropo wua boto mangan itan kole diang, boto kanta kole taing emo dopo haun*” (Interview Charles, 2025).

b. Ritual performed at *Cungga* (‘the confluence of two rivers’)

This ritual is performed in the afternoon and takes place in the same year as the *Dara Ta'a* incident (Interview Lukas Trisno, 2025). In this ritual, all family members of the *Dara Ta'a* victim are required to participate in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* at *Cungga*. At *Cungga*, the family members of the *Dara Ta'a* victim immerse themselves in the river, witnessed by *Anak Rona*, *Wina*, *Wa'u*, and *Pa'ang olo ngaung musi*. Next, the ritual leader recites a prayer, followed by the slaughter of a black chicken (*manuk miteng*). The family of the victim *Dara Ta'a* is not allowed to leave the river until the blood of the slaughtered chicken passes over the heads of the family members (Interview Ludovikus, 2025). The family members take off all their clothes and throw them into the river, to be carried away by the current, as a sign of releasing *Dara Ta'a's* sins/bad luck. After the ceremony, all members of *Dara Ta'a's* family were not allowed to look back until they arrived home, as a sign of letting go and casting away bad luck (Interview Lukas Trisno, 2025).

The severing of *Dara Ta'a's* fate was carried out at *Cungga* (the meeting point of two rivers) because *Cungga* symbolizes marriage (Interview Charles, 2025), scissors symbolize the removal/cutting of bad luck (Interview Regina Mune, 2025), and in accordance with removing bad luck, “*Du leso saler du waes laur*” (‘discarded with the setting of the sun and the flow of the river’) (Interview Nober Nabar, 2025). At night, an initiation/rebirth ceremony is held through the *Te'ing hang* ceremony (feeding the ancestors). In this ceremony, prayers are offered in gratitude and to seek blessings so that the family will be reborn and that no bad luck befalls other family members (Andari et al., 2023).

The Concept of Ethics of Responsibility of the Manggarai People in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* Ritual According to Emmanuel Levinas' Perspective

The Manggarai people have a daily ethic rooted in beliefs passed down from their ancestors about the responsibility to respect others, nature, and the Creator. The Manggarai people believe that the Creator's manifestation in the world is present in parents and *Anak Rona*. For the Manggarai people, *Anak Rona* is the source of life, symbolized by a spring. If the responsibility to respect parents and family is neglected, it will bring dire luck/misfortune. *Dara Ta'a* occurs because the Manggarai people forget this responsibility (Interview Charles, 2025). Emanuel Levinas emphasizes this by saying that the essence of human life is essentially relational, never existing in solitude in this world (Rodríguez, 2021). For Levinas, this relationship is very concrete in the encounter with the Other. The relationship with the Other will only be meaningful if it has substance, and that substance, according to Levinas, is response-responsibility (Sabon, 2018).

Dara Ta'a is not merely a genetic factor but rather bad luck that befalls a person due to disharmonious actions/behavior in daily life. For the Manggarai people, respecting and appreciating others, especially those in difficulty, is an obligation because it is a tradition passed down. For example, if a guest visits, the Manggarai people are obliged to serve them well. The Manggarai people have a saying, "*Toe tombos cokol toe turas tuda*", which means that even if there is no food available, they will try to borrow some from their neighbors (Interview Charles, 2025). The presence of another person in front of me compels me to act and prevents me from remaining silent. It is as if the other person is calling on me to do something for them (Nabilah et al., 2024). Levinas (1969) said, "The face that appears in the image melts into affection so that its dynamism does not only stop at perception but crystallizes into consciousness. This means that the presence of the Face in front of me disturbs my conscience and urges me to help him immediately" (Levinas, 1969).

The ancestors passed down the above wisdom for a reason, because everyone needs others in their lives. In the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual, the presence of Others is significant because the ceremony is not valid if there are no *ase-kae/wau* ('relatives'), *Pa'ang olo ngaung musi* ('villagers'), *Anak Rona*, and *Anak Wina*. Their presence is significant not only as witnesses who offer prayers, but also so that the requests made are accepted by the ancestors and the Creator (Interview Lukas Trisno, 2025). Awareness of fellow human beings in need is essential in Manggarai's communal life, which speaks and invites everyone to engage in dialogue. In Levinas' words, "The face is fundamental. It does not have any systematic character. It is a notion through which man comes to me via a human act different from knowing" (Levinas, 1998c).

By respecting and being responsible to their fellow Manggarai people, they will receive abundant blessings, as seen in the following prayer: "*Mboas wae woang, kembus wae tekus, baca tara boleh loke, uwa gula bok lesu*" (Interview Damianus Joni, 2025) and be spared from disaster, "*Cempak one wejang, bok one lok haeng one pate*" (Interview Regina Mune, 2025). In Levinas' thought, this relationship is not a *do ut des* relationship, where I give to receive, but rather a gift of self. Here, my responsibility to the Other is like that of a donor who gives selflessly, showing from the nobility of the heart (Levinas, 1969). Levinas says, "The ethical obligation that arises with the face must be considered asymmetrical. I give to others without demanding anything in return" (Christian et al., 2020).

In this way, the Manggarai people show their difference from the Other as something transcendent. In other words, in the presence of another's face, I can do nothing but respond, "This is me!" (Susanta, 2018). Philosophically, relationships with others become the first and foremost priority. This means I am responsible for others' safety. I am like a host who opens the door to his guests; in principle, guests are kings, without any status categories (McNeilly-Renaudie, 2017). Guests, the Other, now become masters in "my house," and I am a servant who is responsible for providing food that ensures the safety of the Other (Levinas, 1998c).

In addition to having responsibilities towards others, the Manggarai people also have responsibilities in their relationship with the Almighty and their ancestors. This is clearly seen

in the strict observance of traditional ceremonies in Manggarai. The Manggarai people believe that problems in daily life stem from failing to observe customs (Gaut & Tapung, 2021). If the Manggarai people genuinely believe in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual, then the same bad luck will not be repeated, because behind this event lie values of wisdom about how to respect others, nature, and the Creator (Interview Damianus Joni, 2025). Disbelief in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual can cause the misfortune to recur, even if the events are not precisely the same. For example, if the father died because he was killed, the child died because of an accident (Interview Lukas Trisno, 2025). This is revealed in the Manggarai cultural term, "*Bom ata rombo lala, kaling weki rus lombong muku/risk borne by oneself*" (Interview Damianus Joni, 2025).

Other causes of *Dara Ta'a* include natural disasters such as landslides, earthquakes, and lightning strikes, as well as attacks by wild animals. According to Manggarai beliefs, these events occur because the Manggarai people do not respect nature. According to the Manggarai people, nature was created by the Creator to coexist with one another (Dwidiyanti et al., 2018). Natural disasters occur because of human greed and selfishness, causing nature to become angry as humans take what is not theirs (Interview Nober Nabar, 2025). In Manggarai culture, several customary rules must not be violated, such as cutting down large trees in the middle of the forest (Interview Konstantinus Mon, 2025).

The Manggarai people's custom of performing the *takung* ('permission') ritual before doing anything in the garden, so that the natural environment where we live is friendly to us, is now beginning to be abandoned (Dwidiyanti et al., 2018). According to Nober Nabar (2025), natural disasters did occur in the past, but not like today, which cause casualties and occur frequently, such as several villages sinking into a lake. This shows that there is a disharmonious relationship with nature (Interview Nober Nabar, 2025). On the other hand, neglecting customs has led to famine, drought, crop failure, climate change, and strange occurrences such as *Dara Ta'a*, because the Manggarai people today have forgotten *agu mamur*/Manggarai customs (Interview Ludovikus, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Drawing from Emmanuel Levinas's thought, the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual in Manggarai culture embodies the ethical responsibility of the Manggarai people to protect others from misfortune resulting from ancestral inheritance, violations of customary law, and the consequences of one's attitudes and actions in daily life. Although the Manggarai people believe that the Almighty predestines human life, the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual invites them to repent for their behavior and to renew their lives. In particular, it emphasizes the Manggarai people's relationship with and responsibility toward others, nature, and the Creator. Levinas' concepts of ethical responsibility—especially the ethics of the "face," "the Other," and subjectivity—are key to understanding the meaning and values of the local wisdom embodied in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual.

Levinas' concept of ethical responsibility frames the Manggarai people's obligations as seen in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual. This ritual is not just a religious act; it is also an ethical responsibility toward those who are suffering or facing difficulties. Understanding the ritual from Levinas' perspective reminds the Manggarai of their identity as a caring community. His view portrays the ritual as a model for how humans ought to take responsibility for others in times of misfortune. From this perspective, the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual reflects the highest form of awareness of the Manggarai people's responsibility toward others. These values of local wisdom, inherited from their ancestors, are expressed through the ritual. Levinas's thought provides a philosophical foundation for understanding the values contained in the *Oke Dara Ta'a* ritual. Therefore, this study identifies the Manggarai people's concepts of ethical responsibility toward fellow human beings, the environment, and the universe—realities that must be protected, preserved, and respected by every Manggarai person.

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