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The Meaning of Manggarai Traditional Marriage from the Perspective of Martin Buber's "I You" Relationship

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the meaning of Manggarai traditional marriage from the perspective of Martin Buber's "I You" relationship. Manggarai traditional marriage is not merely the union of two individuals but also serves as a space for the formation of kinship, social, and spiritual relationships involving families and the community. This study employs a qualitative approach using literature review and philosophical analysis of texts on Manggarai traditional marriage and the thought of Martin Buber. The results indicate that the forms and stages of traditional Manggarai marriage embody the values of commitment, respect, mutual agreement, care, and responsibility. These values align with the "I You" relationship, which positions each individual as a dignified subject within a dialogical and reciprocal relationship. However, the relational meaning of marriage can shift if the *belis* is understood as a transaction or if the decision to marry is dominated by the family. Therefore, traditional Manggarai marriage must be understood as an authentic encounter that upholds dignity, equality, love, and shared responsibility in family life.

Keywords: Dialogical Philosophy; "I You" Relationship; Manggarai Traditional Marriage; Martin Buber; Responsibility.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are, by nature, creatures who love and are loved. Out of this need, marriage has emerged as a legitimate social institution for realizing love between men and women (Lon & Widyawati, 2021). Marriage is an important part of human life and is recognized across various religions, cultures, nations, and social groups. Marriage arises from a spiritual bond between a man and a woman who are committed to living together long-term and building a family life (Sugar et al., 2026; Azami et al. 2026). Thus, marriage not only unites two individuals but also serves as the foundation for the formation of a family.

In addition to being a spiritual bond, marriage is also a ceremony intended to formalize the loving relationship between a man and a woman, both religiously and legally (Fadilah, 2021). This formalization is generally carried out through religious rituals and witnessed by the community. Marriage is a sacred event that marks the union of two individuals in building a legitimate family life. In essence, marriage is part of the human need to love and be loved, to build intimacy, to live life together, and to continue the family line (Lon Servatius, 2020). Therefore, marriage and the formation of a family are fundamental elements of human life across the globe.

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In Catholic teaching, marriage is understood as a union of love that forms a family as a single unit consisting of a father, a mother, and children (Raharso, 2008; Nurlatu & Bilo, 2026). A relationship built on love serves as the foundation of family life, reflects the life of the Church, and serves as a sign of humanity's relationship with Christ. The Catholic Church views marriage as a commitment between a man and a woman to build a family referred to as the domestic church and to be part of carrying out God's mission in the world. Catholic marriage is characterized as sacred, monogamous, and indissoluble. Although this teaching has faced various criticisms throughout history, the values of unity and indissolubility remain the primary characteristics and strengths of Catholic marriage (Sugar et al., 2026; Prasandi et al, 2026).

Marriage can also be understood as a calling to live together, accepting each other's strengths and weaknesses in order to achieve happiness. Family happiness is reflected in a harmonious life, characterized by minimal conflict and disappointment, as well as a sense of fulfillment in shared life. This harmony encompasses balance in the physical, mental, emotional, social, and personal development aspects of each family member (Derung & Alexander, 2020; Pramoni et al. 2025). However, a harmonious married life that is capable of fulfilling the mission of the Kingdom of God is not always easy to achieve. Domestic conflicts, incompatibility, infidelity, and divorce still occur frequently and are even on the rise. These conditions indicate that building a harmonious family is a real challenge for couples in married life (Sugar et al., 2026; Al-Maududi et al.2026).

In Manggarai society, marriage generally takes place in two stages: a traditional ceremony and a church wedding. Traditional marriage is conducted in accordance with the provisions and requirements of customary law, while a church wedding is solemnized through the reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony. For the Manggarai people, traditional marriage is a significant event involving the families of the *anak wina*, *anak rona,* and *ase kae pa'ang olo ngaung musi* within a single village (Mahri et al., 2022). The Manggarai people also believe in the presence of *ceki* the spirits of the ancestors from the families of the *anak rona* and *anak wina* who are spiritually regarded as witnesses to the marriage. The traditional marriage marks the beginning of a legitimate life together between a man and a woman as husband and wife. In addition to being a form of recognition of a loving relationship, a traditional Manggarai marriage also marks the end of single life. This is reflected in the expression *leso ho cemol lonto reba agu lonto molas,* which affirms that the bride and groom have left their youth behind and entered married life (Gonsaga, 2025).

One of the main purposes of traditional Manggarai marriage is to produce offspring who will carry on the family line. This objective is expressed in the traditional saying *kudu beka agu buar, wing do ného taé kali ga, rés baling lélé, ras baling racap, ta'i cala wai, borék cala bocél*, which describes the family's hope to have children and ensure the continuity of the family line (Gonsaga, 2025). In Manggarai family life, children are viewed as the primary hope and successors of the family. Therefore, married couples generally hope to have children, especially sons, who are considered essential for the continuity of the family line. In addition, Manggarai customs recognize several forms of marriage, namely *"tungku"* marriages, which include *"tungku cu'u," "tungku canggot,"* and *"tungku salang manga"; "cako"* marriages, consisting of *"cako cama wa'u" and "cako cama anak wina";* as well as *"cangkang," "lili,"* and *"jurak"* marriages (Gonsaga, 2025).

The rituals and values in traditional Manggarai marriage can be examined through Martin Buber's "I You" concept. Buber emphasizes that human existence is understood through a dialogical approach that is, through authentic, reciprocal, and meaningful relationships with others. From the very beginning of their existence, humans have always been part of a network of relationships realized through communication and encounters with others. Human beings are thus understood as existential beings who cannot be separated from interpersonal relationships and their existence in the shared world (Yulianto & Radho, 2024). In his philosophy of dialogue, Buber describes the "I You" relationship as a form of connection that treats the other person as a subject possessing dignity equal to one's own (Dose et al., 2026). This relationship demands appreciation, respect, and ethical treatment of the other person's existence, thereby guiding humans toward the attainment of a deeper meaning of life (Yulianto & Radho, 2024).

Furthermore, Buber understands the dialogical relationship as a call toward a deeper and transformative awareness. Human consciousness is not formed solely on an individual basis but is born through relationships with other persons or realities outside the self. Human existence gains meaning through being with others because the essence of humanity is always realized in relationships and dialogical encounters (Riyanto, 2014). This line of thought is relevant to married life, particularly in the Catholic context. Technological developments, particularly the use of social media, can pose a challenge to the quality of the relationship and communion between husband and wife if not approached wisely. Limitations in deep communication, a decline in personal presence, economic pressures, work demands, and a weakening of trust between spouses also contribute to the emergence of problems in married life (Adinuhgra, 2020).

A number of previous studies have examined traditional Manggarai marriage from various perspectives. Sarong & Gana (2021) show that traditional Manggarai marriage consists of three forms namely, *Cangkang, Tungku,* and *Cako* with belis as a key element, consisting of a sum of money or animals given by the groom's family to the bride's family as a token of appreciation. Kardila et al., (2021) identified five forms of belis horses, water buffalo, goats, pigs, and money and outlined its four functions: religious, social, economic, and educational. Belis is understood as a sign of the man's respect for the woman, her parents, and her extended family. Meanwhile, Sugar, et al., (2026) view Manggarai family ethics as an existential relationship that is not limited to the performance of traditional rituals but is also related to the development of ethics, local cultural anthropology, the dialogue between Western philosophy and local wisdom, and the dynamics of changing social values within Manggarai families in contemporary life. On the other hand, research by Joko et al., (2026) shows that the stages of traditional Manggarai marriage from *tuke para/tuke mbaru, paluk kila, pongo/mbukut, reke kawing, we'e kawing,* the church wedding, and finally *karong lo'ang* embody the values of commitment, respect, mutual agreement, care, and responsibility. These values align with Levinas's philosophy, which places responsibility toward the Other as the foundation of human ethics. From this perspective, marriage is not merely a personal choice between "I" and "you," but rather a calling to be responsible toward one's partner, family, and community.

A number of previous studies have examined Manggarai traditional marriage from the perspectives of marriage forms, the function of belis, family ethics, and values throughout the stages of marriage. However, studies that specifically interpret the meaning of Manggarai traditional marriage through Martin Buber's concept of the "I You" relationship remain limited. Previous studies have tended to focus on anthropological aspects, customary law, and the social function of belis, but have not yet thoroughly examined traditional marriage as a space for dialogical encounter between the bride and groom, their families, the community, and their ancestors. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its interpretation of the rituals and values of traditional Manggarai marriage through the lens of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue, particularly the "I You" relationship as an intersubjective bond characterized by respect, equality, presence, and mutual responsibility. This research is important because the Manggarai traditional marriage is not merely a social ritual but a means of forming family relationships, kinship, and spirituality that can strengthen commitment and responsibility in married life. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of dialogical philosophy, Catholic family ethics, and the preservation of the meaning of the Manggarai traditional marriage amid contemporary social and cultural changes.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research and philosophical analysis (Sugiono, 2012). The research data were sourced from books, scientific journal articles, and literature relevant to traditional Manggarai marriage, as well as the ideas of Martin Buber—specifically, the concepts of the "I You" and "I It" relationships. Data collection was conducted through searching for, reading, and examining written sources that discuss the forms, stages, rituals, and values of traditional Manggarai marriage. The collected data were analyzed using a descriptive-interpretive approach by identifying the social, cultural, and spiritual meanings within Manggarai traditional marriage practices, and then interpreting them based on Martin Buber's concepts of dialogical relationships. This analysis focuses on the values of commitment, respect, mutual agreement, care, equality, and mutual responsibility. Through this method, this study seeks to explain the relevance of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue in understanding the meaning of traditional Manggarai marriage and the challenges it faces in contemporary society.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms and Stages of Traditional Manggarai Marriage

Traditional marriage is a significant event in the lives of the Manggarai people. The ceremony involves the families of the *anak wina,* the *anak rona,* and *the ase kae pa'ang olo ngaung musi* within a single village. Additionally, the Manggarai people believe in the presence of ceki—the spirits of ancestors from both families—who are regarded as witnesses to the marriage. Through traditional marriage, a man and a woman are recognized as husband and wife and officially begin their life as a family. This formalization is reflected in the expression *leso ho cemol lonto reba agu lonto molas,* which affirms that the bride and groom have left their single lives behind and begun life as a family (Joko et al., 2026). One of the primary purposes of a traditional Manggarai marriage is to produce offspring as the family's successors. This hope is reflected in the traditional saying *"kudu beka agu buar, wing do ného taé kali ga, rés baling lélé, ras baling racap, ta'i cala wai, borék cala bocél,"* which describes the hope for the continuity of the family line. In Manggarai family life, the presence of children is a vital hope for married couples. Children are viewed as the family's successors and the continuation of the generation, particularly through the male lineage (Gonsaga, 2025). In Manggarai tradition, marriages are categorized into several forms: *tungku, cako, cangkang, lili,* and *jurak.* The *tungku* marriage itself consists of *tungku cu'u, tungku canggot,* and *tungku salang manga,*

while the *cako* marriage is divided into *cako cama wa'u* and *cako cama anak wina.* Each form of marriage has its own rules and significance in Manggarai society (Gonsaga, 2025).

First, a *"tungku"* marriage is a marriage between a man and a woman who are related by kinship or blood. This type of marriage generally occurs between the son of a brother and the daughter of a sister, whether they are full siblings or cousins. It is arranged based on an agreement between the two families—the *"wina"* family and the *"rona"* family. *Tungku* marriage is still practiced because it is seen as a way to strengthen and maintain kinship ties. Through this marriage, the woman's family entrusts their daughter to the man's family, while the man's family accepts her as part of their family. According to Makarinus Weldi, the *"tungku"* marriage also aims to ensure that the family of the *"anak wina"* continues to remember and maintain ties with the family of the *"anak rona"* as the bride's family (Gonsaga, 2025). *Tungku* marriage aims to maintain the continuity of kinship ties between the *"anak rona"* and the *"anak wina"* so that these ties remain preserved and harmonious. Therefore, from a traditional perspective, this form of marriage holds significant importance. However, in today's evolving society, not everyone still practices *tungku* marriage. Changing times have influenced attitudes toward marriage. The choice of a partner is now based more on mutual agreement, shared values, affection, and similarities in educational and economic backgrounds. Families are viewed more as supporters rather than the primary decision-makers in choosing a life partner (Gonsaga, 2025).

Tungku marriage takes several forms, the first of which is *tungku cu'u* (unilateral cross-cousin marriage). This form of marriage occurs between a man and a woman who are related through a single line of descent. In *tungku cu'u,* the family of the brother's side provides the bride, while the receiving family comes from the sister's line. This marriage aims to strengthen family ties, reduce the burden of the *belis* (bride price), and simplify the management of property and inheritance from the bride's side. Therefore, the *tungku cu'u* holds special significance in the kinship system of the Manggarai people (Gonsaga, 2025). Second, a *"tungku canggot"* marriage is a union between the son of the mother's side and the daughter of the mother's cousin. Like other forms of *tungku,* this marriage aims to maintain the kinship relationship between the *anak rona* and the *anak wina* child so that it remains harmonious and sustainable. Third, the *tungku salang manga* marriage is a form of marriage intended to restore a kinship relationship that has begun to fray. The term *tungku* means "connection," *salang* means "path," and manga means "long." This marriage is usually performed when the relationship between the "*anak rona*" and the "*anak wina*" becomes less harmonious due to the absence of a *"tungku"* marriage in the previous generation. Therefore, the *"tungku salang*

manga" or *"anak rona musi"* serves to strengthen kinship ties once again while clarifying the positions and relationships between the *"anak rona"* and the *"anak wina"* (Gonsaga, 2025). Furthermore, this type of marriage is an effort to avoid an improper marriage (*toko toe kop*)—that is, a marriage in which a son from the *anak rona* side marries a daughter from the *anak wina* side.

Second, *cako* marriage. *Cako* marriage (kawing *cako*) is a marriage between the children of first cousins in the patrilineal line or between relatives on the wina side. This marriage aims to strengthen family ties, maintain closeness among family members, rediscover one's lineage, and preserve family wealth so that it does not pass to or be divided among those outside the family. *Cako* marriage consists of *cako cama wa'u* and *cako cama anak wina. Cako cama wa'u takes* place within a single clan, specifically between descendants of brothers. Meanwhile, *cako cama anak wina* is a marriage between the children of the mother's siblings, whether the mother's brothers or sisters. In practice, water buffalo are commonly used as sacrificial animals, giving rise to the traditional expression *"kaba lembor cako."* The entire *cako* marriage ceremony is carried out according to traditional stages, from the betrothal to the escorting of the bride to the groom's family (Gonsaga, 2025).

Third, *"cangkang"* marriage. *"Cangkang"* marriage (*kawing cangkang*) is a marriage between a man and a woman who were not previously related by blood. Through this marriage, new family and kinship ties are formed within a clan (*wa'u*). Thus, a *"cangkang"* marriage is a form of marriage outside the clan that marks the beginning of the formation of relationships as *"anak wina"* and *"anak rona"* (Mahri et al., 2022). In a *"cangkang"* marriage, the groom's family must be well-prepared—mentally, intellectually, and economically—to meet the needs of married life.

Fourth, *lili* marriage. *Lili* marriage (*kawing lili*) is a marriage between a man and a woman who has become a widow due to her husband's death. In Manggarai customary practice, the man who marries the widow is usually related to her late husband, either as a full sibling or a cousin (Adon, 2021). The *lili* marriage aims to ensure the continuity of responsibility for the children in the family, including their care and education. This marriage is also expected to help meet the family's economic needs. In practice, the man does not provide a dowry (*belis*) to the woman's family. However, the relationship must still be formalized through several traditional rituals, namely *tudak paca* and *beo* (Gonsaga, 2025).

Fifth, *jurak* marriage. *Jurak* marriage (*kawing jurak*) is a form of marriage considered to deviate from Manggarai customary norms. This marriage is viewed as improper because it violates the permissible boundaries of kinship relationships under customary law. This

situation is known as *toko toé kop*, meaning a mistake in choosing a partner, or *jurak*, which refers to a consanguineous relationship (incest) (Adon, 2021). In Manggarai custom, a couple who engages in intimate relations and has a child outside the provisions of customary marriage may be subjected to the *"keti le manuk miteng"* ritual. This ritual aims to sever the couple's ties with the extended families of both parties so that they are no longer recognized as part of the kin. This severance of ties is also intended as a form of customary sanction as well as an effort to prevent the practice of *"kawing jurak"* from recurring or being emulated by future generations (Gonsaga, 2025).

The Stages and Significance of the Manggarai Traditional Marriage

As described earlier, the Manggarai traditional marriage involves several stages that the bride and groom must go through. However, changing times and various social conditions have led some couples to no longer follow all the traditional stages, partly because they have already been intimate before marriage. Nevertheless, the stages of the Manggarai traditional marriage remain important to examine in order to understand the process and the meanings embedded within them.

First, *tuke para/tuke mbaru.* Literally, *tuke para/tuke mbaru* means "climbing the stairs of the house." This term relates to the design of traditional Manggarai houses, which were historically raised on stilts. In the context of traditional marriage, *tuke para* signifies the stage when the groom's family formally comes to propose to or ask for the hand of the woman who will become his future wife (Gonsaga, 2025). During the betrothal phase, the two prospective spouses have already gotten to know each other. The groom's family then prepares the dowry, which in Manggarai tradition is called *belis*. This ceremony is attended not only by the families of both parties but also by friends and relatives known as *hae reba* and *hae molas.* Their presence serves to offer advice and ensure that the prospective bride and groom remain committed to their marriage vows. One of the rituals in the betrothal is *"toto molas,"* a ceremony designed to gauge the sincerity of the prospective groom. This ritual also signifies that the bride's family (*anak rona*) does not immediately hand over their daughter or relative until they are certain of the prospective husband's seriousness (Joko et al., 2026).

During the ceremony, two young women are first presented as stand-in brides, followed by the actual bride-to-be (Gonsaga, 2025). Each young woman is brought before the groom-to-be and asked if she is his future wife. The groom-to-be usually answers "no." The stand-in brides then remain in place until the bride's family presents a sum of money, the amount of which is not specified. After the two stand-in brides have been introduced, the actual bride-to-be is brought forward. If the groom-to-be declares that this woman is his future wife, the

groom's family then presents a sum of Rp500,000 as part of the traditional ceremony. This gift symbolizes the groom's willingness to assume responsibility for the bride (Gonsaga, 2025). Furthermore, this gift serves as a request to the bride's parents to transfer the responsibility for her care and protection to the groom and his family. However, this transfer does not mean that the bride's parents lose all responsibility and rights regarding their child. Thus, this ritual affirms a shared responsibility between the bride's family and the groom's family.

Second, the *"paluk kila"* or ring exchange. *Paluk kila* is a ritual that signifies the sincerity of the love and commitment of the two prospective spouses. In this ceremony, the couple declares their love in front of their extended families and designated representatives of the pa'ang olo ngaung musi. These representatives serve as witnesses and as parties who can provide testimony should marital issues arise in the future. Through this ritual, the couple expresses their willingness to commit to one another and to build a life together. After the *paluk kila* is performed, the couple is permitted to live together as husband and wife even though they have not yet been married in a church ceremony. During the ceremony, a religious leader may also be present to bless the rings used. If the couple is Catholic, for example, the blessing is performed by a Catholic priest. Following the ring-exchange ceremony, a religious wedding may be held as agreed upon by both families (Joko et al., 2026)

Third, the *pongo or mbukut. Pongo* is a traditional stage that signifies that the agreement between the groom's and bride's families has reached a final decision. At this stage, the agreed-upon amount of the *belis* is fixed and cannot be increased or renegotiated. This confirms that the outcome of the traditional agreement has been accepted by both families and serves as the basis for the continuation of the marriage process. During the *pongo* ceremony, a traditional statement is also delivered to both families. This statement affirms that the agreement reached must be upheld and cannot be altered once the decision has been finalized (Joko et al., 2026). The statement is directed at the bride's family to ensure they do not change or increase the amount of the belis that has been mutually agreed upon. In the mbukut ceremony, there is the *ela mbukut*—a pig that is slaughtered as a symbol of the bond between the families of the *anak rona* and the *anak wina*, including the bride and groom. This agreement is legally binding under customary law and serves as the basis for both parties to abide by the decisions that have been made. If either bride or groom violates the customary agreement, they will face sanctions commensurate with the nature of the violation. If the violation is committed by the bride, the "*tala tumpah"* provision applies—that is, the obligation to reimburse all expenses incurred by the groom's family (Gonsaga, 2025).

Fourth, *reke kawing. Reke kawing* is the stage in which the date of the wedding is determined and agreed upon. At this stage, the groom's family sends two or three representatives to meet with the bride's family to discuss the wedding date. The date is set based on an agreement between the two families, with the bride's family having the authority to determine the date. Once the date is agreed upon, both parties prepare for the wedding, including handling various administrative requirements (Joko et al., 2026).

Fifth, *we'e kawing.* In Manggarai culture, the term *"we'e"* generally means to come or return from a place; for example, *"we'e duat"* means returning from the garden. In the context of marriage, *"we'e kawing"* refers to the arrival of the groom's family at the bride's family home to deliver the *belis.* The procession typically travels by wooden bus (*oto ngo paca/wagal*) and is accompanied by songs appropriate for the occasion. The use of these songs and vehicles serves as a signal to the community that the belis delivery procession to the bride's family is underway (Gonsaga, 2025). At this stage, the groom's family has already prepared various necessities for the wedding, both in terms of material goods and financial resources. They bring animals such as cows, buffalo, and horses, as well as the dowry payment in accordance with the agreed-upon terms. The entire process is guided by spokespeople from both families. In this procession, there is the term *"coga seng paca,"* which represents the groom's family's concrete responsibility to cover the various costs and needs associated with the couple's wedding (Regus & Deki, 2012). This determines whether the *"tudak ela"* can be prepared during the *"paca"* or *"wagal"* ceremonies. If the groom's family fulfills the mutually agreed-upon commitments, the *"tudak ela"* can be prepared, and the church wedding will definitely take place. Conversely, if there are still shortfalls, the *"tudak ela"* cannot be prepared, but the church wedding will still proceed.

Sixth, the Church Blessing (*Kawing Gereja*). At this stage, the bride and groom receive the Sacrament of Matrimony during a Holy Mass attended by the families of the bride and groom, relatives, and acquaintances as witnesses. After receiving the sacrament, the couple is declared husband and wife according to the teachings and laws of the Catholic Church. After the Mass, a "*rame kawing"* is held—a celebration to give thanks for the couple's marriage. This event is attended by the extended family, villagers, relatives, and invited guests. The form of the *rame kawing* may change with the times (Joko et al., 2026). In the past, economically well-off Manggarai people (*ata bora*) typically celebrated weddings with a caci performance known as *caci rame kawing.* Today, celebrations tend to take on more modern forms, such as featuring singers or other forms of entertainment. During a *"rame kawing,"* a cow is typically slaughtered in a ritual known as *"japi rame kawing."* This slaughter is both part of the

celebration and a means of inviting the wider community to share in the joy with the families of the bride and groom (Gonsaga, 2025).

Ketuju, *karong loang. Karong lo'ang* is the final stage in the Manggarai traditional wedding ceremony and takes place at the groom's family home. During this procession, the bride and groom are escorted to their chamber by their parents or the older women (*ata tu'a ende*). Inside the room, they are given advice and guidance to help them build a harmonious, peaceful, prosperous, and happy married life. In addition to *karong lo'ang,* there is also roi loang, which involves cleaning the room before the couple moves in. This tradition is seen as an effort to create a clean and comfortable living space and as a wish for the couple to be spared from various disturbances and illnesses (Gonsaga, 2025).

Human Dialogical Relationships from Martin Buber's Perspective

Martin Buber (1878 1965) was a Jewish philosopher born in Vienna, Austria, known for his philosophy of dialogue regarding interpersonal relationships. His thinking was influenced by his family background and the religious studies he undertook from a young age. He studied philosophy and art history at several European universities, was active in the Zionist movement, and later delved into the Hasidic tradition, which formed the foundation for the development of his philosophical thought (Yulianto & Radho, 2024). In his work "I and Thou", Martin Buber asserts that the essence of humanity stems from relationships. Human beings are social creatures who, from birth, are always in relationship with others. As "homo socius", humans shape and sustain their existence through encounters and connections with others. Relationships with others form a fundamental part of human existence as individuals (Bertens, 2004). According to Martin Buber, human relationships take two forms: the "I-It" relationship and the "I-Thou" relationship. The "I-It" relationship views the other as an object, whereas the "I-Thou" relationship sees the other as a person with dignity. Buber asserts that authentic and meaningful relationships are realized through the "I-Thou" relationship, because in encounters with fellow human beings, a person discovers the meaning and wholeness of their existence (Hia, 2015).

First, the I-It Relation. Martin Buber explains that the I-It relation is a relationship between a human being and something regarded as an object. In this relation, something is viewed only in terms of its function, usefulness, or value that can be analyzed by human beings (Fransiskus Dose et al., 2026). Buber emphasizes that the I-It relation does not involve the whole of one's personal being, because a person is only partially present when interacting with an object, rather than being present as a complete person (Martin Buber, 1958). Martin Buber explains that the I-It relation occurs when a person regards another person or something outside

themselves as an object that can be used to fulfill personal interests. In this relation, the "other" is not understood as a person possessing freedom and dignity, but merely as a means or instrument. Therefore, the I-It relation is instrumental, as it positions human beings as those who control and utilize the objects around them (Djawa, 2022).

Martin Buber asserts that in the I-It relation, the relationship does not occur through a direct encounter with the other, but rather through images, concepts, or understandings formed in the mind. The object is not present as a person genuinely experienced, but only as something observed, thought about, or utilized by the subject. Thus, the I-It relation is limited to an awareness of the object, rather than an authentic experience of encounter (Buber, 1987). Consequently, in the I-It relation, something outside oneself does not need to be genuinely present, because it can be understood through thought, imagination, or subjective experience. This condition causes the "I" to become self-centered and to treat the other merely as an object of understanding. As a result, the relationship that should be built through dialogue and authentic encounter is neglected (Sugar et al., 2026)

Second, the I-Thou Relation. Human beings are social creatures who have a tendency to build relationships and establish connections with others. In such relationships, human beings seek acceptance and recognition of their uniqueness. Ideal togetherness does not erase personal identity; rather, it respects and affirms the distinctiveness of each individual (Snidjers, 2017). Attitudes such as indifference, hatred, pragmatism, and apathy are inadequate because they deny the existence of others and reduce them to their functions. Martin Buber explains that the I-Thou relation is an interpersonal relationship that occurs through a direct encounter between two equal persons. In this relation, the "Thou" is regarded as a person who possesses dignity, capabilities, and unique characteristics, not as an object to be controlled. Unlike the I-It relation, the I-Thou relation emphasizes appreciation, recognition, and respect for the existence of others (Hia, 2014). According to Martin Buber, the I-Thou relation is rooted in the relationship between the "I" and the "Thou," which is realized through a direct encounter with the other. Unlike the I-It relation, this relationship does not regard the other as an object, but as a subject who possesses value and dignity. The I-Thou relation is dialogical and reciprocal, and it can be realized not only in relationships between human beings, but also in relationships with nature and with God (Hia, 2014).

According to Martin Buber, the I-Thou relation involves the presence of the whole person in a deep, intimate, and equal relationship. In this relation, the other is not viewed as an object, but as a person who is present with their entire being. The I and the Thou mutually shape one another through dialogical encounter, because each person's existence cannot be

fully understood without the presence of the other. Buber asserts that the I-Thou relation can only be realized through the total involvement of the self, for human beings discover themselves through authentic relationships with others (Sugar et al., 2026) According to Martin Buber, the I-Thou relation is a relationship of profound value that must be nurtured as a gift. It requires a sincere encounter free from domination, prejudice, or the desire to control the other. The I and the Thou are present as equal persons who respect one another and build the meaning of their relationship through shared experience. In an authentic encounter, neither party feels superior, because an understanding of brotherhood emerges from the relationship itself.

The Meaning of Manggarai Customary Marriage in Martin Buber's I Thou Relation

Based on the forms, stages, and values contained in Manggarai customary marriage, it can be argued that Manggarai customary marriage is, in essence, a space for dialogical encounter between the bride and groom, both families, the community, and the ancestors. Marriage is understood not merely as the union of a man and a woman, but also as a process of forming social and spiritual relationships that connect the *anak wina* and *anak rona* within a single network of kinship. The presence of the extended family, the *ase kae pa'ang olo ngaung musi*, and the belief in *ceki* as spiritual witnesses demonstrate that Manggarai customary marriage is both communal and sacred (Gonsaga, 2025). Within Martin Buber's framework of thought, this shared presence affirms that human existence is not formed individually, but through relationships and encounters with others (Yulianto & Radho, 2024).

Manggarai customary marriage has several forms, namely *tungku*, *cako*, *cangkang*, *lili*, and *jurak*. Each of these forms not only reflects the variety of ways in which Manggarai society forms families, but also reveals the strong relational orientation within Manggarai culture (Joko et al., 2026). *Tungku* marriage, for example, is performed between people who have a kinship relationship and aims to strengthen the relationship between the *anak wina* and *anak rona*. *Cako* marriage strengthens family ties and maintains the continuity of the lineage and family property. Meanwhile, *cangkang* marriage forms a new kinship relationship between two families who previously had no blood ties (Mahri et al., 2022). Thus, marriage in Manggarai culture is not merely a personal matter between two individuals, but an event that forms, maintains, and renews social relationships between families.

From Buber's perspective, these practices can be read as manifestations of the "I Thou" relation. Buber distinguishes two basic forms of relation, namely "I It" and "I Thou." The "I It" relation occurs when a person regards the other as an object that can be observed, analyzed, controlled, or utilized. In contrast, the "I Thou" relation is realized when a person encounters the other as a complete subject who possesses dignity, freedom, and uniqueness (Buber, 1987).

The "I Thou" relation is dialogical, direct, reciprocal, and requires the presence of the whole person. In this relation, the "I" does not stand alone as the center of everything, but discovers itself through encounter with the "Thou" (Hia, 2014).

The stages of Manggarai customary marriage clearly demonstrate the principle of the "I Thou" relation. The *tuke para/tuke mbaru* stage is the formal process of courtship, which signifies the seriousness of the man's side as well as respect for the woman's family. At this stage, the man's family does not immediately take the woman as a wife, but comes in accordance with custom to state their intention and seek the approval of the woman's family. The *toto molas* rite affirms that the *anak rona* family has the right to test the seriousness of the prospective groom before entrusting their daughter or sister to him (Gonsaga, 2025). This process shows that the woman and her family are treated as subjects who have the authority to give consent, rather than merely as objects that can be taken or decided upon unilaterally.

The *paluk kila* or ring-exchange stage reveals the personal commitment of both prospective spouses. Through this rite, the couple declares their willingness to embark on a shared life in the presence of the extended family and customary witnesses (Sugar et al., 2026). The presence of the *pa'ang olo ngaung musi* as witnesses affirms that the marriage commitment is not merely a matter between two individuals, but also a responsibility recognized by the community (Joko et al., 2026). Within Buber's framework, the exchange of rings can be understood as a sign of encounter between two subjects who mutually declare their presence and willingness to build a life together. The ring is not merely a material symbol, but a sign of commitment to respect and accept the partner's existence as "Thou."

The *pongo* or *mbukut* stage emphasizes the importance of agreement in Manggarai customary marriage. At this stage, the amount of *belis* that has been agreed upon by both families is fixed and cannot be changed. This agreement is symbolized through the slaughter of *ela mbukut*, a pig that serves as a sign of the binding agreement between the *anak rona* family, the *anak wina* family, and the couple (Sarong & Gana, 2021). This agreement shows that customary marriage is built upon dialogue, deliberation, and recognition of the rights of both parties. In Buber's language, this agreement is a concrete form of reciprocal relation, because neither party unilaterally determines the terms of the marriage without involving the other party (Fransiskus Dose et al., 2026).

The *reke kawing* and *we'e kawing* stages further affirm the communal character of Manggarai customary marriage. *Reke kawing* is the stage of determining the wedding date through agreement between both families, while *we'e kawing* is the procession in which the man's family delivers the *belis* to the woman's family. In this procession, the man's family

brings animals and money in accordance with the agreement that has been established. The giving of *belis* is not merely an economic transaction, but an expression of responsibility, respect, and recognition of the woman's family, who has educated and raised the prospective wife (Gonsaga, 2025). Therefore, *belis* should be understood as a relational language that connects two families, not as a means of buying or possessing a woman.

The Church wedding and *karong lo'ang* stages reinforce the sacred and moral dimensions of Manggarai customary marriage. Through the Sacrament of Matrimony, the couple declares their commitment to live together before the Church, family, and community. Subsequently, *karong lo'ang* becomes the moment when the couple receives advice and counsel from their parents and the *ata tu'a ende* as provisions for building a harmonious, peaceful, prosperous, and happy household (Joko et al., 2026). This stage shows that marriage in Manggarai culture and the Catholic Church share a common ground in the appreciation of commitment, sacredness, and responsibility. Marriage does not end with a social celebration, but leads toward the formation of a family life grounded in love and responsibility.

The values of commitment, respect, agreement, care, and responsibility contained in Manggarai customary marriage are in harmony with Martin Buber's "I Thou" relation. Commitment requires the willingness of both spouses to be fully present in their shared life. Respect requires recognition of the dignity of the partner, family, and community. Agreement affirms the importance of dialogue and deliberation, while care and responsibility show that marriage is a calling to serve and safeguard the existence of the other (Joko et al., 2026). Thus, Manggarai customary marriage can be understood as a concrete manifestation of a subject subject relation, rather than a subject object relation.

However, this relational meaning must continue to be preserved so that it does not turn into an "I It" relation. Marriage can lose its dialogical character when one party is treated merely as an object. For example, a woman may be placed in an objectified position if *belis* is understood solely as a price or compensation for her. Likewise, families may lose their dialogical function if the decision regarding marriage is entirely determined without involving the willingness of both prospective spouses. From Buber's perspective, *belis* and various customary rites should be directed toward respect and responsibility, not toward the commodification, domination, or control of women and their families (Bugis, 2025).

Therefore, Manggarai customary marriage becomes authentically meaningful when all of its ritual elements are directed toward the recognition of dignity, equality, and mutual responsibility. *Belis* must be understood as a sign of respect and a reinforcement of kinship ties, not as a means of transaction. The family must serve as a companion and witness to

commitment, not as a party that dominates the life decisions of the couple. Meanwhile, the couple must build their relationship based on presence, honesty, communication, and a willingness to accept one another. Within this framework, Manggarai customary marriage finds its relevance in Buber's dialogical philosophy as a call toward a humane and authentic relationship (Yunus, 2021).

Thus, the primary meaning of Manggarai customary marriage from the perspective of Martin Buber's "I Thou" relation is the formation of an authentic encounter between the couple, families, community, and ancestors. Customary marriage becomes a call to live in relationships that are equal, mutually respectful, and responsible. These values reinforce the understanding that marriage is not merely a social institution or a series of customary rituals, but a space for the actualization of dialogical relations that shape human existence as persons in togetherness. Through marriage, human beings learn to acknowledge the existence of others, accept differences, and build a shared life on the basis of love, respect, and responsibility (Yulianto & Radho, 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Manggarai customary marriage is not merely the union of two individuals, but also a space for the formation of social, familial, and spiritual relationships. The forms and stages of Manggarai customary marriage contain values of commitment, respect, agreement, care, and responsibility that are consistent with Martin Buber's concept of the "I Thou" relation. This relation affirms the importance of recognizing the dignity of every person, dialogue, equality, and mutual responsibility in marital life. However, these values may shift if belis is understood as the price of a woman or if marriage decisions disregard the will of both prospective spouses. Therefore, Manggarai customary marriage needs to be understood and practiced in a manner that upholds human dignity and builds authentic, mutually respectful relationships. This study has limitations because it employs a literature review and philosophical analysis without being supported by empirical data obtained through observation or interviews. In addition, the diversity of Manggarai customary marriage practices across different regions, as well as changes in their meaning between generations, has not been examined in depth. Future research is expected to involve field research in order to enrich understanding of the application of "I Thou" relational values in contemporary Manggarai customary marriage.

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