

Conference Paper

The Role of Women in the Layout and Interior of *Bale Mengina* Traditional House

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Abstract

This research discusses the role of women in designing the interior of the *Bale Mengina* traditional house on Lombok Island. The analytical method used was non verbal communication to interpret the interior parts of the house. The results revealed that several values of *Bale Mengina* interior design are sourced from the women homeowners, including 1) type and function of the spaces; 2) Space organization; 3) Space-forming elements; and 4) furniture. By exploring the values of local wisdom that still exist in a traditional house, it is expected that the maintenance and preservation of the traditional house concept can be supported. In addition, the concept of traditional house which is still relevant to cultural life today can be applied as a reference in rebuilding the concept of traditional house.

Keywords: traditional house, *bale mengina*, woman, interior design

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Published: 29 July 2020

Publishing services provided by
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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the WCGS Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Women have a great influence and high position in the realm of Architecture and Interior. One of the architectural and interior objects influenced by women is the traditional house. This can be seen from the large amount of literature on traditional houses that places women in the family as a reference in determining the type, location, and arrangement of spaces in the house. The measurement of female body is also employed to specify the size of the rooms, space-forming elements, and furniture.

A house is one of the architectural works resulting from human culture whose physical form and spatial arrangement are influenced by the culture of the owner. The arrangement of house interior reflects the lifestyle, behavior, character, symbols, and social status of the owner. Five basic essences of a house are: 1) it can accommodate the basic activities or daily rituals of its users, 2) the arrangement of the house building, space, and its use are influenced by the structure of the family, 3) women play a role in spatial management, 4) privacy is a basic need, and 5) meeting between people is also considered as a basic need (Rapoport, 1969: 61-69).

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The importance of women's roles in the family system is also reflected in the traditional house layout of the Sasak Tribe called *bale mengina*. Social regulations and local culture indirectly require women to have higher privacy, hence the house must provide a special space for women. Furthermore, the windows, the shape of the roof, and the size of the door are specifically made in order to prevent people other than family members from easily approaching the house. Moreover, the space inside the house such as kitchen which becomes the women's circulation area is specifically made so that it can not be seen directly from the entrance to keep out of sight.

Bale or house is a shelter and a place to protect oneself from hazards such as weather changes or wild animals. A house is also a manifestation of the soul salvation and happiness of its inhabitants (Umar and Sukandi, 1988: 7-8). In addition, a house is also a shelter from the threatening spiritual dangers (Mantra, as cited in Umar and Sukandi, 1988: 7-8). Based on these opinions, *bale* can be interpreted as a place to live that physically has other functions adjusting to the functions and needs of its inhabitants and spiritually is one of the basic human needs to protect themselves. Regional differences, cultural backgrounds, and socio-cultural factors of the local community which then influence its physical expression.

Lombok island has various types of traditional houses, one of which is *Bale Mengina* tradisional house. *Bale Mengina* is also called as the "Women's House" because of the culture of the local community which places women as the main family members who handle and manage everything related to the house. In addition, the rule that only women and children are allowed to sleep in the house is one of the factors in the emergence of this "Women's House" (Siradz, et al, 1995: 75).

In *Bale Mengina*, in addition to the main building, a complementary building is also constructed with a stage system or called *beruga*. *Beruga* is a wall-less building made with a stage system and supported by 6 pillars. The function of *beruga* is a place to socialize, receive guests, gather with family, and hold traditional ceremonies (Umar and Sukandi, 1988: 42). The main building and *beruga* are arranged with a mirror system, where the door of one house and the other door are made facing each other with *beruga* in the middle as a separator. The *bale mengina* and *beruga* cannot be separated because each has a different function, namely as a private and social space.

The main house is built with reference to sunrise and sunset, that is facing east or west. The parents' house is constructed facing to the east as a form of respect so that the sunlight can illuminate the parents' house first. Topographically, the parent's house will be placed in a higher location and the house of the child who has been married will be located in a lower place.



Figure 1: Directional Orientation of the House towards the Sun (Source: Yofangga Rayson, A.M. Ridjal, Noviani Suryasari, 2014).

Although *bale mengina* and *beruga* have undergone several adjustments and maintenance due to development of the times, the main parts of the building are still made to follow the rules that apply to this day. One rule that still applies to now is the spatial arrangement based on female family members (mothers). Accordingly, this research examines the role of women in the interior layout of *bale mengina* and *beruga* reviewed from nonverbal communication elements.

2. Material and Method

The research method employed was a qualitative method. The research activities were in the form of literature study and field observations. Qualitative research is used to understand the phenomena experienced by the research subjects in natural conditions or settings (Sugiyono, 2011: 8). The observed phenomena are behavior, perception, motivation, and actions taken by the research subjects. Data collected in a qualitative research are primary and secondary data. Primary data are data in the form of verbal or words spoken verbally, gestures or behavior of subjects related to the research. Meanwhile, secondary data are the data obtained from documents, photographs, images, and other objects supporting the primary data (Arikunto, 2010: 21-22). The primary data of this research were obtained from the residents of the house and the community around the house and the secondary data were acquired from *bale mengina* building.

A multidisciplinary approach using nonverbal communication analysis theory supported by interior and architectural theory was employed in the data analysis process. The nonverbal communication analysis theory was used to find out the meaning of space and order in the *bale mengina* while the interior design and architectural theory were applied to discover the technical point of view of the building. The nonverbal

communication theory was used with the consideration that a behavior is the context for other behaviors and this must be understood contextually. Nonverbal behavior can be learned through observation and recording which further are analyzed and interpreted (Rapoport, 1982: 87).

Bale mengina, as a place for its users to do their activities, is related to the physical elements shaping it. The physical elements communicate with the users of space in the form of activities. The communication function consists of fixed, semifixed, and nonfixed-feature elements (Rapoport, 1977: 328).

a. Fixed-feature element is a permanent physical element or it can change slowly over a long period of time. The examples of this element include floors, walls, poles, windows and doors, and the roof or ceiling.

b. Semifixed-feature element is an element that can change quickly and easily. This element is able to communicate more than the fixed elements. The examples of semifixed- feature elements are the arrangement and type of furniture, and curtains.

c. Nonfixed-feature element is element related to humans as occupants or users of space, distance of interaction or spatial relationships between individuals, posture and body position, hand movements, facial expressions, relaxation of hands and neck, head nods, eye-contact, and other forms of nonverbal behavior.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Bale Mengina Layout

Interior design is the work of designers related to the interior of a building, where the forms are in accordance with the development of science and technology. Moreover, in the design process, it receives influence from the elements of geography and local culture (Suptandar, 1999: 11). Considerations and approaches in interior works are spatial functions, space-forming elements, lifestyle, physical elements, culture, and behavior of space users (Sachari, 2005: 10). The physical elements are interior and exterior forms and spaces, spatial organization, circulation, hierarchy, definition of space, and space apertures (Ching, 2000).

The main building of *Bale Mengina* consists of 3 types of room with different functions. The room located at the front of the house is called *sesirap*. *Sesirap* is a semi-private room functioning as a place to prepare food ingredients, lay paddies and working tools, as well as to hang clothes. Entering the inside part of the house, there is an inner room called *Bale Dalem*. *Bale Dalem* is a private room functioning as a room to sit, sleep, cook

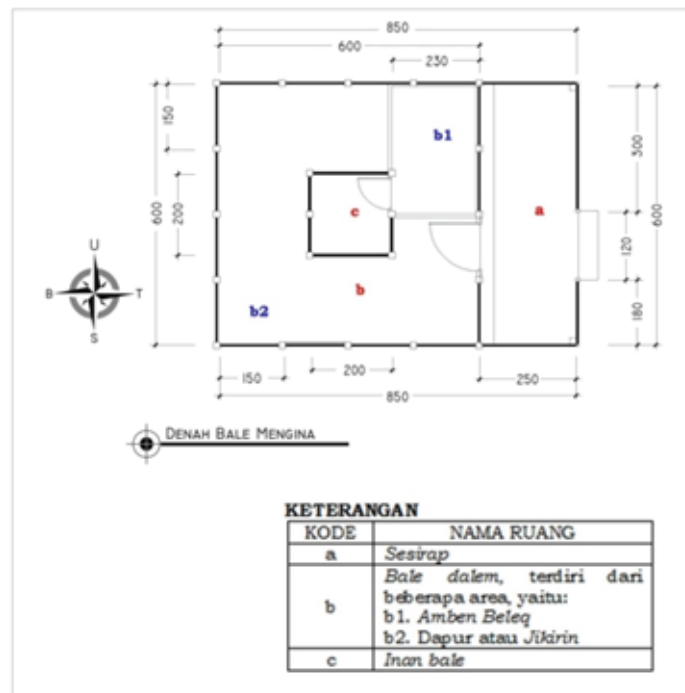


Figure 2: Bale Mengina Blueprint (Source: Draw by the Researcher).

food, as well as to store food, clean water, equipment, and other valuables. The third room which is the main room in *Bale Mengina* is *Inan Bale*. This room is a private room that functions as a place to store rice in *temberasan* (a container) and *inan temberasan*, and to place equipment and offerings.

In the complementary building or *beruga*, there is only 1 open space without walls and this space is public. The function of *beruga* is as a place for male bedroom, a place to receive guests, a family gathering place, a place to play and nurture the children, a place to clean the harvest, and a place to carry out life cycle ceremonies.

Rooms in *bale mengina* and *beruga* are constructed by using space-forming elements taken from the surrounding environment. The elements include (1) the foundation of natural stone which is arranged tightly in several *bale mengina*; (2) the foundation of cement and sand mixture in other *bale mengina*; (3) compacted tile and soil floor; (4) structure of bamboo pieces in *inan bale* dan *beruga*; (5) coconut wood poles; (6) woven bamboo on the *bale mengina* walls; and (7) a roof made from reeds that is supported by *usuk* (long wood) made from bamboo material.

At *Bale Mengina*, no aperture in the form of windows is available and there is only 1 entrance. Light and air enter the house through the gaps of woven bamboo on the house walls. The organization of room is made in a line forming a linear pattern and interconnected directly through the door. The circulation is formed like a straight line from *beruga*, an open area, then goes into *sesirap* and *bale dalem*. Circulation in *bale*

dalem forms a circular pattern surrounding the *inan bale*. The whole area in the *bale dalem* is oriented to the center of the room, namely *inan bale*.



Figure 3: Layout of Furniture and Equipment at *Bale Mengina* (Source: Draw by the Researcher).

The interior elements of the *bale mengina* are divided into furniture, equipment, and accessories. Furniture in the *bale mengina* includes *amben beleg* (large bed), *amben biriq* (small bed), plate holder, *lamin* or storage shelves on the wall (short), and *lamin* (long). Meanwhile, *beruga* only has 1 furniture namely *lamin*. The equipment used at the *bale mengina* includes *ranjat* or hanging racks to put cooked food, stone stoves, *temberasan* and *inan temberasan* or container made of clay, and stepping aids, while there is no equipment in the *beruga*. In addition, neither *bale mengina* nor *beruga* has interior accessories.

3.2. Women in Interior Layout

The role of women in the interior layout of *bale mengina* is discussed in 3 sections in accordance with the nonverbal communication analysis theory. The discussion includes fixed- feature elements, semifixed-feature elements, and nonfixed-feature elements.

3.2.1. Fixed-feature Element

Layout, space-forming elements, and furniture are the parts in the interior of *bale mengina* included in the fixed-feature elements. This is because the parts are arranged integrated with the construction of the house. These fixed-feature elements cannot be moved from the house easily and quickly. Ways to layout and determine locations based on certain rules can communicate meaning, especially in traditional culture (Rapoport, 1982: 88-101). One of the rules used in layout, furniture, and equipment at the *bale mengina* is the position of women as family members.

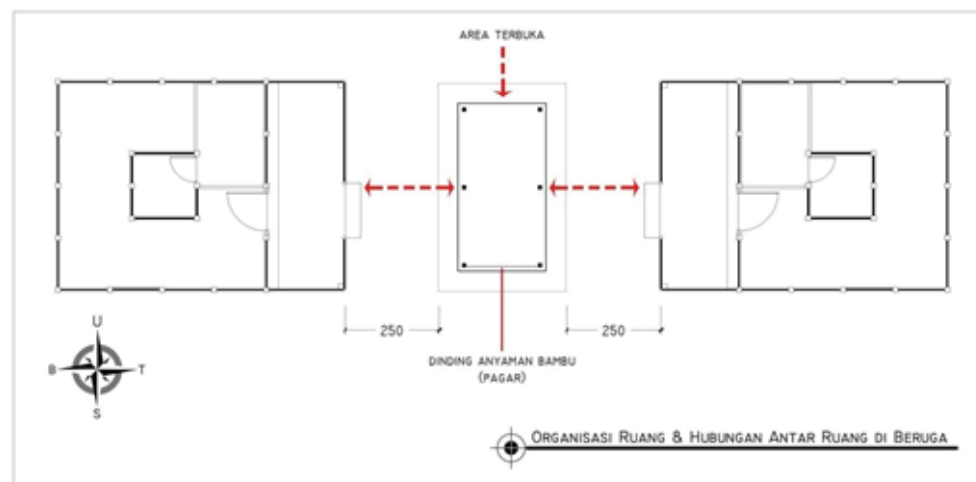


Figure 4: Organizations and Relationships Between Spaces in *Beruga* (Source: Draw by the Researcher)

The space and area used as a place of activities for women are placed in the innermost part of the house with a high level of privacy. These space and area are in the *bale dalem* consisting of *inan bale*, kitchen area, and bedroom for women. There is only one door to enter the *bale dalem*, thus anyone who gets in can be seen by the owner of the house. Furthermore, the main door is in a semi-private room called *sekenem*. *Sekenem* is a space that can be used by both women and men family members as a place of activity. Since *sekenem* is also used by the women, people who want to enter this room must get permission from the owner of the house. Moreover, *Beruga*, which is a place to sleep and do activities for male family members, is placed outside the house. Women do not have much contribution in determining rules in the *beruga* since they do not perform much activity in this complementary building.

The space-forming elements, namely the walls of the *bale dalem*, are made of non-dense woven bamboo material. This aims to make the light and air still able to enter the room because there are no windows in the *bale dalem* wall. *Bale dalem* is built without a window to maintain the privacy of women while performing activities in it. In

addition, the entrance to the *bale dalem* is lowered so that people who want to enter it must bow their bodies to respect the owner of the house.

Furniture in the *bale dalem* is made with reference to the body measurements of female family members. One example is the height of *lamin* or storage shelves placed between the wall and the roof made to adjust the height of women.

3.2.2. Semifixed-Feature Element

Furniture and equipment that can be classified into semifixed-feature elements are furniture and equipment that are easily moved, replaced or removed without affecting or damaging the construction of the house. The function of these furniture and equipment is basically not integrated with the construction of the house, therefore, if it is removed it will not damage the construction and disrupt the function of the room and other parts of the house.

All furniture and equipment in the *bale dalem* are determined, made, and placed in accordance with the needs and body measurements of women as users of the space. Furniture in the *bale dalem* includes *amben beleq* (large bed), *amben biriq* (small bed), plate rack, and *lamin* (equipment rack placed on the wall). Meanwhile, the equipment in the *bale dalem* is *ranjat* (a hanging rice container made of woven bamboo), stone stoves, *temberasan* and *inan temberasan* (a rice storage container placed in *inan bale*), and wooden foothold used as a tool to climb to the *amben beleq*.



Figure 5: *Ranjat* Equipment in *Bale Mengina* (Source: Documentation of Researcher).

In addition to determining the furniture and equipment placed in the *bale dalem*, the women's role is also as a reference in establishing the size of furniture and the placement of equipment. For example, the height for hanging *ranjat* will be adjusted to the height of women so that it can be easily used by them. Moreover, the height of the foothold is also adapted to the reach of the women's feet.

3.2.3. Nonfixed-feature Elements

The nonfixed-feature elements are elements related to humans as occupants or user settings, shifts in spatial relationships (proxemics), body position and posture (kinesics), hand and shoulder movements, facial expressions, and other forms of nonverbal behavior. The arrangement of nonfixed-feature elements has a strong influence on human communication and interaction as users of space (Rapoport, 1982: 98-101).

Based on observations of the nonfixed-feature elements in the *bale mengina* and *beruga*, it can be seen that women give influence in the interior layout of the *bale mengina*, including:

- The level of space privacy is influenced by women, where the space used by women to do their activities has a high level of privacy, is enclosed, and cannot be entered by anyone who has not received permission from the homeowner.
- Women's activities are centered on the *bale dalem* which has high privacy.
- There is no window and only 1 entrance to the *bale dalem* intended to maintain the women's privacy.
- The territory and circulation area of women are in *bale dalem* while men's territory and circulation area are in *beruga*. *Sekenem* is a transitional space used by both women and men family members.

4. Conclusion

Based on the arrangement of fixed, semifixed, and nonfixed-feature elements in the layout and interior of *bale mengina* and *beruga*, several conclusions can be drawn as follows:

- Space for women is always made with high privacy so that it is placed in the innermost part of the house and closed from the outside areas.
- Space-forming elements such as walls made of woven bamboo without windows are used to maintain the women's privacy when doing activities in the *bale dalem*.
- Furniture and equipment available and used in the *bale dalem* are determined in accordance with the women's needs. The size and placement are also determined by referring to women's body measurements.
- The territory and circulation area of women is in the *bale dalem*.

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