

Religion, Tradition and Transcendental Communication of Coastal Communities: Formulation of Religion and Culture in the Nadran Ritual

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Abstract

One of the traditions of coastal community is *nadran* which is also known as *larung laut* or *sedekah laut*. This ritual uses to express gratitude to God Almighty on seafood and a prayer for asking prosperity and safety by fishermen. This ritual is begun by a puppet show, the slaughter head of male buffalo, then floated into the sea along with other substances. Coastal communities believe the buffalo head float procession is as sacred and holy that must require meeting the circumstances before and during the ritual. Otherwise, a supernatural consequence will occur. Even though the symbols use in the ritual do not imply the Islamic concept, the transcendental meaning of the symbol in a ritual philosophy interpret as the power of God. However, in the Islamic concept, it does not require the symbol to express it. Thus, based on the theological, those symbols contradict with the Islamic concept. Despite, it is understood that the ritual is a cultural reflection only and fluidity or flexibility of culture and religion. Therefore, there is also a mystical dimension and local belief in this tradition. The *Nadran* ritual shows an acculturation between local tradition and religion is harmony. The symbols used in this tradition are pre-Islamic heritages that are inherited from generation to generation. However, the meanings of such symbols refer to the transcendental meanings based on the theology and Islamic concept that express the culture. This article is a result of field research using the ethnographic method with the descriptive qualitative design based on anthropological perspective. The structural-functional approach is employed for analyzing the data. Library research, participant observation, and in-depth interview are used to collect the data.

Keywords: Religion, Tradition, Transcendental, Culture, Ritual

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1. Introduction

In the community, there are many traditions conducted frequently. Those traditions have many perspectives from multiple dimension such as culture, social, and spiritual. It also conducts by coastal community whereby the ritual has been inherited from generation to generation. One of the traditions is *Nadran* which is also known as *pesta laut* or *arang laut*.

Nadran is a colossal tradition which involves many people in the enforcement from preparation, puppet shows until *larung laut* as the core event. The core event usually attended by government agencies and community forums in the area. *Nadran* tradition executes not only at one point but also at some points. The local government institution plan to discourse *Nadran* as tourism potential because of its uniqueness. It will give the positive impact on the economy if it is managed efficiently and with massive marketing. The enforcement of *Nadran* cannot be ascertained every year or every harvest season, but it depends on the financial condition of the community.

2. Coastal Community Karawang Portrait

This study was conducted in *Sukajaya* village, *Cilamaya Kulon* District, *Karawang* Regency, West Java, Indonesia. It covers an area of 507 m and has the population of 5776. *Sukajaya* means "like to victory", *suka* is like or happy, and *jaya* means success or victory. Based on the Government Regulation No 72/2005, the formation of a village can merge of several villages, expand the existing villages or establish a new village.

By considering the number of population, area, and potential, thus, it was formed *Desa Sukakarta* as the main village and *Desa Sukajaya* as a proliferation of that village. The purpose is to facilitate services and community prosperity. The following is *Sukajaya* village boundaries:

East	: <i>Sukakarta</i>
South	: <i>Pasirukem</i>
West	: <i>Pasirjaya</i>
North	: <i>Laut Jawa</i>

Although *Sukajaya* village is a formation of a new village, the traditions that have been rooted in society remain

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held by the villagers firmly. The proliferation of the village does not disregard the root of traditions that has been believed hereditary as a wisdom of culture and believe.

3. Communication Dimension

According to Fiske [1], communication is one of human activity that is recognized by everyone; however, few people can define it satisfactorily. In communication studies, the definition of communication is divided into two theories. First, the theory that defines communication as a message transmission which focuses on how senders and recipients send and receive the messages. They also concern with the efficiency and accuracy. Consequently, the communication influence behavior and the way of thinking of the people. If the respond is not the same with the expectation, so it needs to see the various stages in the communication process to identify where the communication failure occurred. This group is known as the process theory group.

Second, the theory that sees communication as production and significance exchange. They focus on the role of a message in the human interaction to produce a meaning in our culture. This group uses the terms of significance which does not assume misunderstanding as a communication failure. This group sees misunderstanding occur because of different cultures between senders and receivers. Hence, the communication is the study of text and culture. The main method of this definition is semiotics.

The process theory tends to relate with the social sciences, especially psychology and sociology. It focuses on the communication process. While semiotics theory tends to associate with linguistic, subjects of art and represents a tendency to concentrate on the work of communication.

Hovland et al, [2] stated that communication is the process by which an individual (the communicator) transmits stimuli (usually verbal) to modify the behavior of other individuals (the audience). This definition is almost similar to the description made by communication scholars who specialize in human communication. Accordingly, the communication is a transaction and a symbolic process that requires people to manage surroundings with: (1) Building relationship among human beings; (2) exchanging information; (3) reinforcing the attitudes and behavior of others (4) changing people attitudes and behaviors.

Lasswell as cited in Effendy [3], defines communication is an interaction process between communicator and communicant through a media which gives certain effects. Based on that definition, communication consists of 5 elements which are:

1. Who: Communicator roles in the deliver the message to the communicant.
2. Says What: The message said by the communicator to the communicant.
3. In Which Channel: The medium use by the communicator to send the information to the communicant.
4. With What Effect: The effect of the message send by the communicator to the communicant.

Thus, communication is as process delivering the message to sender from receiver through a channel which usually has interruption (noise). In this definition, communication should be intentional that lead to alteration. Likewise, based on the definition and communication elements, the communication can be seen from dimension such as [3]:

1. Communication is a process. If communication is seen as a process, the communication refers to a dynamic activity. Subsequently, the elements that support the communication active and dynamic (Berlo cited in Effendy [3]). In the interpersonal communication context, the process shows delivering the message from one person to another, whereas in the mass communication context, the process begins with gathering information, transform the information and spread the news from publishers or television stations to the public.
2. Communication is a symbol. Almost all human statements are intended for their interests or for others benefit which is expressed in symbolic form. In this case, the communication influences by the symbols which are the result of human creation in the interaction that shows the high quality of human culture in communication.
3. Communication is an action. Thus, the actions in the communication can be through spoken, written and silent. Therefore, the action uses for communication with other people which requires feedback from the receiver to the sender. However, the communication scholars identify that the communication is not only action and interaction, but also require transaction that there is an interplay between the actors of communication which gives a great mutual influence. Hence, the communication actors should be cooperative so that it can meet a point to share the meaning, interest and social networking.
4. System communication. The system defines as an activity whereby all elements interact with each other in producing the outcome (Semprivivo cited in Effendy [3]). The system requires comprehensive, interdependent, sequential, controlling, self-balanced, changing, adaptive and purposeful characteristics. The system requires being controlled so that all the communication elements can create dynamic stability. The relationship between one element with another element will produce a feedback loop.
5. Communication is multidimensional. Based on dimensional perspective, there are two levels of communication which are content dimension and relationship dimension which are united during the communication. The content dimension expresses the words, languages, and information which transmit in the message. While the relationship dimension, it indicates by the interaction in the communication. In relationship dimension, it consists of five elements that interact with each other as a multidimensional relationship. In this case, one element is related to the

four elements which is shown in the figure below (Cuyuno cited in Effendy [3]).

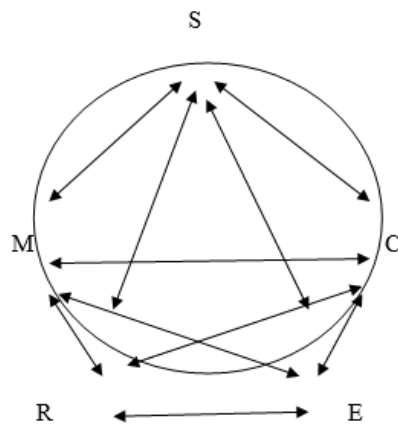


Fig 1: Dimensional Communication Process

One of the communication dimension that has been embedded in human life is transcendental communication. This dimension more embedded with religion dimension through is interpersonal communication or vertical communication. The vertical communication is the communication between human as a creature and a servant of the God as a creator.

Syam [4] determined the transcendental communication as a form about how to discover the laws of nature and the existence of human communication with the God which is based on love (*mahabbah*) without an ulterior motive.

Based on the definition above, transcendental communication in the coastal community through *Nadran* shows love to the creator. Even though the symbols used are not represented the symbols in Islamic Theology concept, the meaning of those symbols presented love to the creator. Additionally, Prof. Nina determines the transcendental communication characteristics such as phenomenal, individualized, implicit, holistic, spontaneous, reflection scene which describes as radical insight reflection and reduction of phenomena.

4. The Substances and the Procession of Nadran Ritual

The procession of *Nadran* ritual is divided into two section which begins one day before *larung* enforcement and during *larung laut* (*Nadran*) enforcement. The first process is puppet shows and slaughtering the male buffalo whereby the head of the buffalo float to the sea and the meat is giving to the community to be used as an amulet. Male buffalo is the perquisites that must be fulfilled. After the slaughtering of buffalo, the blood of that buffalo is lubricated to a boat of fishermen. The lubrication blood is believed that will bring the prosperity and safety.

The first procession conducted overnight one day before *larung laut*. The substances must be prepared in the stage of puppet during the shows. The actor of the puppets shows is *Budug Batuh*. *Budug Batuh* is believed by the community as a character who will give safety and prevent of misfortune

whenever fishermen go to the sea. In fact, the *Budug Batuh* action has a deep philosophy that teaches people about the norms and values that must be applied in everyday life.

4.1. Puppet Shows

The puppet shows story is about the Gods in the pre-Islamic era. *Budug Batuh* is a character that has a deep philosophy. It contents the humanitarian norms such as honesty, trust, and loyalty that must be practiced in everyday life and avoid from immoral acts such as spreading slander and inciting. The intrigue in this character is emphasized through a longer duration than others story. The action in the puppet shows remains the same because the community is believed that if the action change, it will give bad consequences to the community.

If it refers to history, Saints will use the puppet as one of the tool or media for spreading the Islamic concept. Indeed, in the puppet stories content the Islamic elements. Nevertheless, the puppet culture has been embedded in the society.

The process of the plurality religious in Indonesia can be observed empirically historically. Chronologically, it can be stated that the community in Indonesian archipelago was embraced Hinduism and Buddhism, especially in Java island. It is showed by the existence of the most authentic evidences which are *Prambanan* Temple and *Borobudur* Temple. However, animism and dynamism still growth inside and outside of Java Island (Ali cited in Abdullah [5]).

Likewise, when the deployment of Islam reaches the Indonesian archipelago, the process of gradually changing religious conversion arises. The deployment process was peaceful and in a massive way that was recorded by Marshall Hodgson as an amazing achievement of history and culture [5].

It shows that the formulation and acculturation of culture and religion in Indonesia happen naturally. It is shown from various of ritual in society in the coastal community. The character in the puppet shows represents Gods in the pre-Islamic era. On the other hand, the meaning and devotion of the puppet are based on transcendental concepts that relate to the communication vertically between human and God in the Islamic perspective.

4.2. Nadran Ritual Substances

In the ritual enforcement, there are several provisions that must be fulfilled because if the provision is violated, then there will be a negative impact to the community. One of the provision is substances that are important ritual substances in the ritual. Each community has its substances for a ritual which depends on the community believed.

The puppet shows requires the following substances: seven-colored of flowers, seven-colored of cigarettes which must include *kawung* leaf cigarette, rice cone, chicken, green coconut and on the top of substances consists of stored chicken, *madat*, *rujukan* that consists of various kinds of fruits, seven-colored and seven-formed of cakes, white wine, and cigars. The most important of the offering is *cekbang*

which is a chick that is strangled and fluffy pounded. All of the substances are wrapped by using the white cloth, then it keeps in the miniature ships that will be floated to the sea in the following day. The miniature ships contain the substances is included in the puppet shows that is put on the stage (interview with Wardi, handlers of substances).

If there is something unusual happen, the community believes that the substances are incomplete. For instance, *sinden* (traditional singer in Java & Sunda) trance and puppet crew fainted. Based on their experience, the substances of the ritual did complete because there is no *kawung* cigarette in the substances, as the impact, *sinden* trance and fainted during the puppet shows. However, after the complete substances, *sinden* regain consciousness (interview with Waryono; Head of TPI Pasir Putih). The community believes those phenomena as reprimands by God (refers to Hindu beliefs as sovereign of nature) because of ignoring the substances completeness. Then, it becomes a myth that community believes and embed emotionally and sustainably from generation to generation. Therefore, they are very careful to ensure the completeness of the required substances.

Lappe & Collins as cited in Sobur [6] stated definition of myth in their mythology book (1991) as something that commonly considers as true, but it contradicts with the fact. The definition of fact in this context, it does not approve by the scientific yet, but the point refers to the modern myth definition. Furthermore, Barthes defines myth as a way of cultural thinking, conceptualizing or understanding about something. Barthes stated myth as the set of concepts that is interrelated to each other (Sudibyo cited in Sobur [6]).

The main thing in *Nadran* is the head of buffalo which must be male buffalo. Based on the community believe, if it is female buffalo, the God (rulers of the sea) will not accept the substances and the head of buffalo because when female buffalo was slaughtered, the substances and head of buffalo were back to the sea (Interview with Waryono; Head of TPI Pasir Putih). This incident is interpreted transcendently by society. Therefore, myths that are related with *Nadran* celebration becoming deeply internal and intrinsic value in perspective religious conception or cultural values that cannot be exchanged.

If traced its history, myth is closely related to the ritual. A myth is part of the ritual that is spoken, the story is performed by the ritual. The ritual is done by religious leaders to avoid danger or bring safety to the community. A ritual is an event that can be related with life necessities such as harvest, fertility, youth initiation into the culture of people and death ceremony. Furthermore, in comprehensive definition, myth is the anonymous story about the origin of the universe and life destination. The community also explains to the children about the world, human behavior, nature, human life aims, the symbols of good and evil, life and death, sins, forgiveness, paradise and the hereafter. Accordingly, myth is a story that gives certain guidelines and direction to a group of people [7].

Myth does not come up from the womb of Islam, but it comes up from a culture and belief in the society. It can be seen through Frederick M. Denny thought which shows the

ritual in Islam unconnected with the myth like in an ancient civilizations and culture religion such as an ancient Israel and Jewish and Christian history.

4.3. Larung Laut Process

One of the main *Nadran* rituals is lubricated the buffalo blood that has been slaughtered to the boat. It is believed as the prayer to the God so that He will give the blessing and safety to the fishermen. The ritual of lubricating the blood on the boat is contradictory with the religious perspective. The purpose if the ritual is to pray to the God, however, the process of the prayer does not meet with Islamic concept. It is because the way they pray is shirk which means that worship of anything other than God. On the other hand, in the coastal community, the symbol and the process use is a tool for them to get closer to the God and reinforce confidence in prayer.

Acculturation and formulation of this tradition are interested in the study due to the interrelation between tradition, belief and religion are harmonies. Even though it has been performed for the last decades, the theological collision in this ancestral heritage has never occurred.

Probably, the *Nadran* ritual is almost the same with totem function in one of the Aboriginal race according to Durkheim [8]. The totem function is an instrument of social solidarity that integrates of the whole Arunta community so that they are united. According to Durkheim, all social system must be integrated; therefore, religion must always exist. Hence, they do not focus on the difference belief characteristics such as *totemism*, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Catholicism. However, the most important thing focus on the integrative functions of all religions for the social systems.

The main process of *Nadran* ritual is *larung laut* whereby the substances and head of buffalo, that has been prepared one day before, are ready to float them to the middle of the sea. The first process before the sailing boat, the religious leaders lead the praying as an opening communication with the God (ruler of the sea). When it is considered sufficient, the boat who bring the main substances at the front line, while other fishermen follow that boat with another boat that brings other substances such as bamboo yellow, *andong* leaves, coconut, and fruits. Floating the head of buffalo begins with the prayer recitation that represents a servant asking for salvation and blessing to the Almighty. While the lubricating blood is a form of pleading for safety and luck.

A.R. Raddiffe- Brown stated in his *Structure and Function in Premier Society* book, particularly in religion and society that there is a strong connection between religion and society arrangement. Thus, to understand religion, we should study and understand the consequences brought by the religion through its activities [9].

5. Religion and tradition in perspective of coastal communities

Studying and understanding of the tradition of a coastal community at Pasir Putih Karawang are interesting because of the uniqueness of its practice and understanding of the community. The rituals performed are not based on the religious concept. However, the meaning of tradition is understood on transcendental that has a significant religious meaning which is focused on the one God.

In the society, each religion has the tradition that has been inherited by the ancestors. As a result, it leads that society to have a behavior to obey the religious ceremony or the traditional ceremony. However, there is also a behavior that only obeys the religious ceremony or just follow the traditional ceremony. It could be mix behavior that obeys all the traditional ceremony and just perform some religious ceremony and vice versa. Lastly, they also performed all the traditional ceremony and the religious ceremony that seems to produce a new tradition and form a new way of ceremony that is not indigenous. Thus, it might cause a justification on the changed of the social behavior is due to adaptation between traditional ceremony and religion. Sometimes, it also causes the tradition and religion are mixed up. As stated by Herbert Spencer, we cannot deny that there is a tradition that is related with belief, especially if it is connected with the worship of ancestral spirits and heroes or charismatic leaders [9].

In Pasir Putih community case, the *Nadran* ritual is understood as a cultural heritage which has been inherited that is an obligation to be conducted. Although there is some a renewal or revitalization in the ritual, it does not change the meaning and essence. The changed made consider insignificant. For instance, Wayang Golek (Puppet show) can lead by anyone to be *dalang* who is the director of the Puppet show. However, the puppet shows story must be *Budug Batuh* story because the community believe that if the story change, it will bring disaster to them.

In fact, the meaning of the tradition is contradicted with religion because belief on power other than God does not follow the religious concept. However, they still believe that the power is referred to the God that they believe in their religion. Although, the ritual practice is based on the heritage in the pre-Islam era. According to the explanation above, *Nadran* ritual is a combination of religion and tradition. The tradition that has existed before the religion exists in society cause the *Nadran* ritual influence the mindset of the community about the concept of one God.

On the other hand, the existence of religion causes some changes in the ritual such as using the prayers in every ritual activity, the involvement of religious leaders when the *larung* ritual is started, and the meaning of the symbols in that ritual. The assimilation between the tradition and religion in *Nadran* is the form of harmony is the coastal community in understanding and interpreting the tradition and religion.

There are factors that support the assimilation process. The first factor is modernization. Media is one of a factor that strengthens the acculturation and assimilation process

occur without collision. Even though there are some cases to insist the *Nadran* ritual to be confiscated due to it is considered unsuitable with the religious concept, it does not influence the existence of *Nadran* among the fishermen significantly. Some of the rituals in the *Nadran* tradition still followed by the community. However, there are some rituals do not perform anymore, even another tradition has been changed due to modernization. Nevertheless, the essence of *Nadran* remain the same. The modernization has changed the meaning of tradition in society. The community understood *Nadran* ritual as sociology and economy activities of the society. They do not consider the ritual only as a mystic ritual. Especially the regional government has the initiative to make the *Nadran* tradition as agenda for local tourism. Because of between the tradition and religion in the society does not cause conflict in the society, they have a good interpretation for both side.

Second, According to Gerts [10] about the classification Javanese people on the religious interpretation is divided into three categories which are *santri*, *abangan*, and *priyayi*. Hence, the Pesisir Karawang community falls into *abangan* category because they perform the Islam in a more syncretic way than the *santri*. They tend to follow the beliefs that come from elements of Hindu, Buddhist, and even animistic traditions. Such religious interpretation facilitates the occurrence of acculturation. It also causes a new meaning to the tradition that they believed. Besides that, the religious symbols are assimilated into the symbols of the old tradition.

Hence, those two factors show that the tradition and religion are transformed into a current situation in Pesisir Karawang. The modernization causes the tradition in Pesisir community interpreted flexibly. The modernization in all aspects of life allows the modification of tradition occurred. Besides that, there is also evolution process, the characters who hold the key ritual are death, but it does not continue by the offspring. Therefore, the modification of the tradition occurred. *Nadran* is one example the community who believe in religion, but they still hold the beliefs that have been inherited without taking over the existence of tradition. Both run harmoniously without the clash of theology.

6. Conclusion

Nadran is a sociological activity and ritual activity in the coastal community. On the other hand, *Nadran* definition is deferent if it relates to theological and sociological perception. According to Prof Nina, the formal sociology paradigm is interconnected with a sociology-phenomenology paradigm which is not seen the human as interdependence society. It views the human as a group individual that has a different perception, attention, and interpretation.

The tradition formulation and religion in the coastal community is interesting because culture and religious belief run in harmony. There is no theology collision, but it complements each other that strengths the community beliefs. The symbols used in ritual is interrelated with the transcendental dimension that there is no connection with the

Islam beliefs, it is even closer to Hinduism belief. For instance, the head of male buffalo, seven-color flowers, burning incense and so forth. Those symbols are interpreted transcendentally as the gratitude of a servant, prayer for the salvation, luck, and safety to the God and the suggestive reinforcement of supernatural.

Although the symbols used is represented the pre-Islamic era, the community believes that the use of the symbols does not violate the Islamic concept. The symbols are a tool for communication with the God. If the ritual perform by the Arunta community is similar with Nadran ritual, hence, *Nadran* ritual is very special because society creates that ritual as a religious consequence.

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