

Communication Ethnography in the Royal Funeral Ritual in the Marapu Community, East Sumba

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Abstract. *The funeral ritual, also known as ‘pa hengingu’, is one of the traditional customs of Sumba that have endured to the present day. This research examines the communication events occurring within the Marapu funeral ritual. This study aims to understand the perspectives and values held by the Marapu community by employing a qualitative approach and communication ethnography methodology. This study focuses on traditional communication in the Marapu’s funeral ritual by examining communication activities, such as communication situations, communication events, and communication actions. This study also tries to understand how a cultural group creates meaning, values, and communication practices through cultural events. Research data was collected through observations and interviews with one primary informant and three additional informants. The primary informant was the Funeral Ritual Guide, while the other three informants included the Chief of the Marapu Community, a male community member, and a female community member. The implications of this research for the Marapu community lie in the realm of documentation and archival record benefits. The research findings reveal that the Marapu community highly values kinship and community cooperation—the funeral ritual results from community cooperation involving not only grieving families but all tribal groups within the Marapu community.*

Keywords: *marapu, communication ethnography, ritual communication, symbolic interaction*

Article Info:

Received 19 Nov 2023, Revised 27 May 2024, Accepted 16 Jun 2024, Available online 30 Jun 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The communication process occurs in a specific cultural context and contains unique belief systems, assumptions, and symbol exchanges (Leonard, Van Scotter, & Pakdil, 2009). Culture is an important element in human life, giving meaning implied from aspects of human existence (Eko & Putranto, 2019). In the implementation of culture, the meaning of communication contains value; culture is a system of symbolic meaning (Laksono, 2021). The outcome of human interactions yields symbols in communication. Individuals assign meaning to words, physical objects, and human behaviors. A symbol embodies an idea with a particular meaning (Olendo, Dewantara, & Efriani, 2022).

The attribution of meaning to words is also referred to as language. Linguistics posits that language is a communication system utilizing symbols (Kuswarno, 2008). These symbols emerge as a result of collective agreement regarding the meaning of a symbol.

Symbols are the product of culture, and culture uses symbols to share information. Ritual communication is unique and sometimes challenging to be understood by individuals outside the community (Tjio, Priyowidodo, & Goenawan, 2023). As one of the communication functions, rituals are the product of collective agreement among the involved parties. Rituals are always accompanied by specific meanings that signify the ongoing communicative

process (Velkova, 2016). During ritual events, individuals utter words or phrases and engage in symbolic behaviors (Mulyana, 2010). The tribal communities express their beliefs and values through performing rituals (Eko, Putranto, & Veronika, 2022).

Indonesia is rich in cultural diversity, customs, and traditions of various ethnic groups (Widiastuti, Mihardja, & Agustini, 2020). The Marapu belief system is the most significant indicator of the Marapu ethnic identity. According to East Sumba Central Statistics Agency data, the Marapu community's belief system is categorized under the "Others" column. As a minority group, the Marapu community strives to preserve their collective identity by safeguarding their cultural traditions, including the funeral ritual called *pa hengingu*.

Rituals constitute groups that exist due to rituals (Umbres, 2022). Rituals performed collectively by a group of individuals confer identity upon that group. As frequently a ritual is practiced, the stronger the group's identity becomes. Ritual is one of the universal human behaviors, and is presented in various social formations, whether religious groups, gang groups, or ordinary small groups (Lang & Kundt, 2023).

Ritual communication consists of two words: communication and ritual. Communication is the process of transformation of thoughts and feelings by the communicator to the communicant, while ritual refers to the habitual behavior of the community that is carried out repeatedly (Rakhmat & Najmuddin, 2022). The ultimate objective of ritual communication is to foster peace within society (Magiman & Nordin, 2021). Rituals enable group members to share commitments and establish emotional bonds, expressing individual dedication to their community (Mulyana, 2010).

Rituals emphasize the power of communication in building and nurturing communities (Costa, 2020). Ritual communication will persist as a fundamental human need for individuals and the larger society, becoming an integral part of the universe (Pogierter, 2021). The communication process within rituals allows participants to share experiences, values, and beliefs.

M. Ridwan and his colleague conducted related research on ritual communication in 2020. This research examined the communication process within the Abda'u ritual using communication ethnography. The study suggests that ritual communication

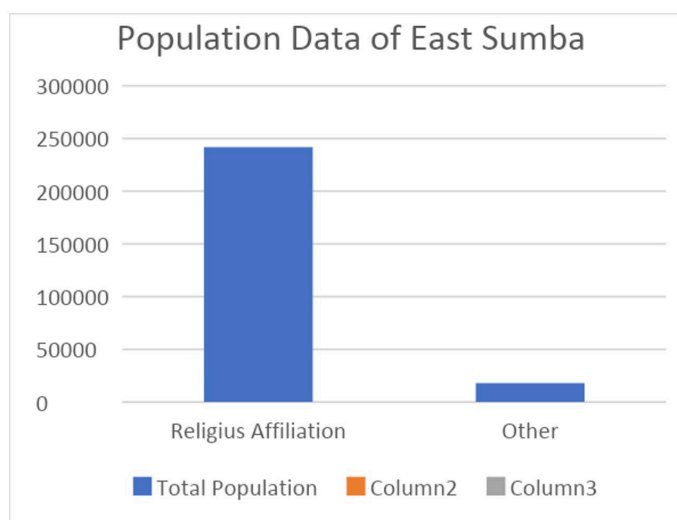


FIGURE 1. Population Data of East Sumba by Religious Affiliation (Source: East Sumba Central Statistics Agency 2021)

institutionalizes the group within the societal social system (Ridwan & Sulaeman, 2020).

Bherta Sri Eko, Hendar Putranto, and Veronika Veronika (2022) conducted previous research on cultural rituals in the context of communication ethnography. This study seeks to make theory-based implications for traditional rituals in ethnic communities by examining gender inequality and the marginalization of women in cultural rites based on the Muted Group Theory.

Sulaeman S. and colleagues conducted another study on ritual communication in 2020. This research focused on the Ukuwala Mahiate ritual of the Mamala community in Ambon. The study elucidates that the reality within rituals is intersubjective (Sulaeman, Rijal, Malawat, & Sere, 2020). The reality in ritual communication is a negotiated outcome disseminated to all community members.

Furthermore, Magiman and Nordin conducted research in 2021 on communication within the Makan Tahun ritual performed by the Kadayan community in Malaysia. The study reveals that rituals rely on various symbolic communication forms (Magiman & Nordin, 2021). These forms of symbolic communication are passed down through generations within the community.

Research on communal feasts in religious celebrations suggests that rituals are associated with friendship bonds and shared responsibilities (Wu, Ju, Lin, & Lyu, 2022). In addition to fostering a sense of togetherness and familial bonds among its members, the execution of rituals contributes to cultural sustainability. Wu and colleagues argue that culture enhances the quality of life for the community and the individuals involved.

The focus of this research is the Marapu community. This community

resides in Rindi Village, Rindi District, East Sumba Regency. The Marapu community practices numerous rituals as part of their cultural identity. One of the cultural rituals still practiced today is the traditional funeral ritual. The Marapu community has a substantial influence on Sumba culture. For Sumbanese, all aspects of human life are related to Marapu (Ngongo & Ngongo, 2021). Start from traditional celebrations, houses of worship, and building pattern procedures to all aspects of life and activities of the Sumbanese (Budianto & Karo, 2021).

The substance is not the most critical aspect of ritual execution. Two benefits derive from performing rituals, both for individuals and their communities. These benefits include providing comfort, predictability recognition, and belonging within a group (Mulyana, 2010). Through various cultural practices (memorialization practices), ritual practices offer a space for grief to be felt as “real” and acknowledged by normative structures (Willer, et al., 2019). It is one of the benefits of the Marapu funeral ritual for grieving families.

Rituals serve as a tool for grieving families to share their experiences as something valid and meaningful (Willer, et al., 2019). As individuals, this is one of the benefits derived from ritual execution. Meanwhile, ritual execution preserves the collective identity of the community. The more frequently rituals are performed, the stronger their cultural identity becomes.

Rituals represent one form of cultural performance. Rituals are patterns of behavior passed down through generations. Rituals are a form of collective communication that homogenizes a group. Rituals strengthen relationships among group members, remind them of their origins, and become a part of the identity that distinguishes one group from another.

To understand the communication

events that occur in funeral rituals; this research rests on the theory of symbolic interaction by Herbert Blumer. This theory relies on the meaning of symbols (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbukan, 2009). The main idea of the theory of symbolic interaction is that the communication process takes place in a face-to-face interpersonal setting, and every communication behavior is a symbol with a particular meaning. Symbols are not only used in verbal communication. Symbols can be tangible physical objects and actions (Ahmadi, 2008).

Symbolic interaction views social reality as humans' creation by exchanging meanings conveyed using symbols (Triwardhani, 2020). Symbolic interaction theory focuses more on meaning than subjective definitions of interactions between individuals in a particular socio-cultural environment (Carter & Fuller, 2015). Symbolic interaction theory is a mixture of two fields of science. The two sciences include sociology and communication. Herbert Blumer views that a study with this theory must be conducted by going directly to the field and understanding the value of each individual (Blumer, 1986). In conducting symbolic interaction theory research, researchers must also have empathy for the subject matter.

The perspective of symbolic interaction theory also conveys how individuals shape and sustain social life through repeated face-to-face interactions (Carter & Fuller, 2015). Symbolic interaction theory also explains that individuals, as actors, can form a social consensus when interacting using symbols and cultural products (Long, 2022). This social consensus ultimately results in a normative social system.

The perspective of symbolic interaction helps us understand the relationship between individuals and the larger society as something dynamic

(Charmaz & Belgrave, 2013). Previous research has found that human interaction can only be understood by sharing symbols or meaningful communication (Khan, Ali, Muhammad, & Shah, 2022).

People interpret each other's actions both in interpersonal interactions and intrapersonal interactions. Symbolic interaction theory mentions three concepts: mind, self, and society (Blumer, 1986). The concept of mind explains that the symbols used in interaction are the fruit of human thought. Individuals in a community give meaning to words (verbal communication) and physical objects and actions (non-verbal communication). The concept of self refers to one's identity that arises and develops along with its interaction in society. The concept of self is defined generally as an individual's beliefs, views, or judgments of their self (Gumilar, 2008). Society refers to social groups formed from interactions between individuals. Two groups in society are particular others (family, friends, acquaintances) and generalized others (society as a whole).

This research focuses on interpreting messages within the Marapu community's funeral ritual. The meaning-making process conducted by the Marapu community in the funeral ritual can reveal their cultural perspectives and values. According to the Marapu community, the funeral ritual held on May 25, 2023, is considered unique. This rarity in the execution of the funeral ritual is due to the substantial cost associated with it.

Numerous animal sacrifices are made during the Marapu funeral ritual. Additionally, grieving families must provide accommodation and sustenance for guests, especially those from different villages. This makes the sacrifice ritual costly for the Marapu community.

Aside from the significant cost involved, the Marapu community also expresses uncertainty about whether this

funeral ritual will be conducted again. It is because many young Marapu generations have abandoned this cultural tradition.

Marapu rituals are laden with culturally meaningful messages, both verbal and non-verbal. Symbols within the Marapu funeral, including woven cloth, animal sacrifices, Tidung Tiu, and gong performances, also known as patambungu, convey these messages.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using the communication ethnography method. Communication ethnography focuses on a communication event’s sociolinguistic and cultural aspects (Kuswarno, 2008). Communication ethnography is a research method that examines language, culture, and communication concurrently. Data collection techniques in communication ethnography research encompass observation and interviews (Creswell, 2014)

Observations were conducted in the Marapu traditional Rindi Village, Rindi District, East Sumba Regency. Interview data were obtained from four sources: two males and two females. Three informants were interviewed directly in the Marapu traditional village, Rindi Village, while one informant was interviewed in the car

on the way to Marapu traditional village, Rindi.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Setting and Scene

The communication events within the funeral ritual (pa hengingu) encompass discourse situations that pertain to time, place, and physical conditions. The burial ritual is held at the Marapu Traditional Village, in Rindi Village, Rindi District, East Sumba Regency.

A ritual animal sacrifice is performed the evening before the day of the burial. The sacrificial animal is a horse, symbolizing the deceased’s ultimate offering to the Creator. This sacrifice symbolizes gratitude to the Creator for the blessings and offspring granted during the deceased’s lifetime. The horse sacrifice culminated with a song or a chant, which serves as the final tribute to the deceased.

As stated by one of the informants, Tamu Rambu Hamu Eti:

“It was his (the deceased’s) final offering, meaning our thanksgiving to the Almighty that he had been blessed abundantly; he had a family, children, or relatives and had been blessed in various ways. So, it expresses gratitude and thanksgiving to the Almighty.” (Personal informant, May 26, 2023).

Table 1. Informant Data

Name	Gender	Age	Status	Description
Tamu Rambu Hamu Eti	Female	65 years	Funeral Ritual Guide	Primary Informant
Umbu Maramba Hau	Male	65 years	Chief of Marapu Community	Informant
Umbu Palangarimu	Male	45 years	Marapu Member/ Ritual Participant	Informant
Hilda Danga Hinda	Female	28 years	Marapu Member/ Ritual Participant	Informant

The funeral ritual begins with the invitees' arrival in the traditional village of Marapu. Each family brings offerings, including woven cloth, horses, and buffaloes.

The next stage involved a procession from the main house to the stone grave. The main house serves as the body storage facility. The procession comprised the Tidung Tiu and the deceased's body. Tidung Tiu means 'the one wearing a hat.' Tidung Tiu is a lord-in-waiting tasked with symbolically accompanying the deceased to the prai Marapu (afterlife).

Tamu Rambu Hamu Eti stated that:

"In plain language, it means 'makanin jara' which means the horse rider who accompanies the spirit of the deceased to their temporary resting place." (Personal informant, May 26, 2023).

In Marapu belief, the body of Tidung Tiu serves as the temporary resting place for the deceased. It is believed that the deceased's soul enters the body of Tidung Tiu. Therefore, Tidung Tiu was treated the same way as the deceased during the mourning period. It includes providing Tidung Tiu with food and drink according to the deceased's preferences and customs.

As stated by Hilda Danga Hinda:

"The Raja's spirit is inside, so his feet should not touch the ground. Ideally, he should ride a horse, but he was carried since the horse did not want to move. Behind him, there is the one walking, his companion. The chicken being carried is for the journey." (Personal informant, May 26, 2023).

During the procession to the stone grave, Tidung Tiu wore special attire, head adornments, and a crown, carrying a gold bag. Tidung Tiu, dressed in special attire and head adornments, signifies that

the deceased leaves a positive impression as a newcomer to the next life. The exact meaning applies to the bag of gold worn by Tidung Tiu.

Tamu Rambu Hamu Eti stated that:

"Yes, it is ornamentation; as I mentioned earlier, we are newcomers; usually, when we travel, we must wear gold or whatever we have that is best. Furthermore, in the end, it is not given to them but returned to the owner. The horse ridden by Tidung Tiu is adorned with a crown and Sumba cloth. It signifies that the horse is an ancestral heritage preserved until today. Moreover, in the next ritual event, the same horse or a descendant of the same horse will be used." (Personal informant, May 26, 2023).

Tamu Rambu Hamu Eti added:

"Yes, it is adorned; I mean, it is a sign because, during their lifetime, it was a heritage from their ancestors. When there is another event later on, the same horses will be used again." (Personal informant, May 26, 2023).

The body of the deceased was positioned in a seated fetal position. This position signifies that in this position, the deceased came into the world, and thus, in the same position, one returns. The body of the deceased was covered with Sumba woven cloth. There were 40 pieces of woven cloth covering the deceased's body. These woven cloths were gifts from visiting guests and family members.

The number of cloths wrapped in the deceased's body should not exceed 50 pieces. The quantity of clothes was limited to prevent the body from becoming too heavy. The reason was that the body would be carried from the main house to the stone grave during the funeral ritual. The wrapping of the deceased's body with cloth signifies that, like a new bride covering her face, the deceased, as a



FIGURE 2. One of the Guest Delegations with a Horse as an Offering
(Source: Author Documentation)

newcomer who will eventually join their ancestors in the afterlife, also has their face covered.

Tamu Rambu Hamu Eti stated that:

“When someone dies, they are considered newcomers. In our Sumba culture, ‘mamuha’ means the one who leads. For example, at a wedding, we have aristocratic families. The bride can walk ahead of the groom; she does not see his face first.” (Personal informant, May 26, 2023).

Upon arrival at the stone grave, Tidung Tiu climbed up the grave using a ladder while the deceased’s body was placed inside. After the procession, another animal sacrifice was performed. Stones were used for the grave because they are believed to be more durable and long-lasting. Thus, they can continue to be

seen and remembered by the deceased’s descendants.

Tamu Rambu Hamu Eti added:

“So that people can know, stone never decays with time, so people can know, ‘Oh, this is my ancestor.’ The descendants will know. Even if it is not written, they will know in their hearts.” (Personal informant, May 26, 2023).

The funeral ritual (*pa hengingu*) concluded with an animal sacrifice as a symbol of gratitude for the successful execution of the burial ritual. A family’s first visitation ritual was held the day after the funeral ritual. This ritual involves a procession of Tidung Tiu to the stone grave. Tidung Tiu, adorned with headgear, rides a horse like in the funeral ritual. Upon arrival at the stone grave, Tidung Tiu sat in front of the



FIGURE 3. Sacrifice of a Buffalo in the Funeral Ritual
(Source: Author Documentation)

deceased's stone grave, surrounded by the deceased's entire family. All attending family members expressed their grief. The visitation ritual concluded with a return procession of Tidung Tiu from the stone grave to the main house.

Purpose of the Funeral Ritual

The Sumba culture we know today results from the manifestation of Marapu beliefs (Djawa, 2014). Implementing the Marapu funeral ritual (*pa hengingu*) aims to preserve the Marapu community's existence and conserve the Sumba culture.

As stated by Tamu Rambu Hamu Eti:

“It is not merely to showcase someone's social prestige. That is an external perspective. However, the essence is that we conduct all these ritual events directed towards the Creator. Because we, the Sumbanese, must offer sacrifices to the Creator. The purpose is for the Creator, not for the ancestors or anyone else. Ancestors are just intermediaries between us, humans, and God.” (Personal informant, May 26, 2023).

Participants in the Funeral Ritual

The Marapu community funeral ritual participants include family members and the local community. Before the funeral ritual, a deliberation

was held to decide who would be invited. The guest list comprised those who will directly participate in the funeral ritual. The involvement of guests included a procession into the Marapu village while bringing offerings such as woven cloth or livestock.

Furthermore, this deliberation also addressed the availability of accommodations and food for the overnight guests. Not just the grieving families, but the entire community of Rindi opened their homes to provide lodging.

Umbu Maramba Hau stated that:

“Those who attend are from every tribe within the jurisdiction of this village. They have representatives. Not representatives from each tribe but representatives from different villages. If you have in-laws, they can be invited, but if not, it is okay. During the meeting, they decide whom to invite to participate in the burial because one of the main principles in the meeting is cooperation. If we agree that this tribe can bring two or three livestock for consumption, you count how many that is on the actual day. The total of overnight guest sometimes 100, more than 100. You cannot invite more, as it must align with the outcome of the previous deliberation.” (Personal informant, May 23, 2023).



FIGURE 4. Deliberation Scene Before the Funeral Ritual
(Source: Umbu Palangarimu's Documentation)



FIGURE 5. Stone Grave (Source: Author Documentation)

The Marapu community highly values the collective cultural dimension of “gotong royong” (cooperation), as reflected in the interview excerpt above. In addition to determining the number of guests each tribe can accommodate, these deliberations also establish the number of livestock contributions.

The livestock contributions are intended for the guests’ consumption. As the interview excerpt mentions, each tribe typically prepares two to three livestock, including pigs, chickens, and buffaloes.

Ends.

The purpose of performing the animal sacrifice ritual the night before the funeral ritual was to express gratitude to the Creator. Thanks were given for the blessings and descendants bestowed during one’s lifetime. The animal sacrifice ritual the night before the funeral culminated by a song or a chant. This

chant was performed as a final tribute to the deceased. A group of Marapu priests performed the chant.

In addition to being a final tribute, the chant was performed to guide the deceased on their journey to the prai Marapu (the afterlife). The chant was also intended to bestow blessings from God upon the family left behind.

Tamu Rambu Hamu Eti stated that:

“Yes, that is the last tribute to the deceased; by saying words of apology, directing their path, thanking them for all their services during their lifetime, conveying it to the Almighty so that we receive blessings again; those left behind receive blessings.” (Personal informant, May 26, 2023).

Act Sequence

Messages were conveyed in both verbal and non-verbal forms. Verbal communication takes the form of a song or



FIGURE 6. Horses Prepared for the Procession in the Funeral Ritual (Source: Author Documentation)



FIGURE 7. Funeral Ritual Setting (Source: Author Documentation)

chant before the animal sacrifice ritual on the night before the funeral. Meanwhile, messages during the funeral ritual were conveyed in non-verbal communication forms. Non-verbal messages in the funeral ritual included the offerings brought by the guests and the animal sacrifices. The guests' offerings at the beginning of the funeral ritual contained gratitude for the invitation to participate in the funeral (*pa hengingu*). The first animal sacrifice in the funeral ritual carries messages of gratitude for the presence of the guests and thanks to the Creator for the blessings that allowed the funeral ritual to occur. The final animal sacrifice at the end of the funeral ritual conveys thanks to the Creator for completing the funeral ritual.

Keys.

Verbal messages were conveyed through a song or a chant. The language used was the Sumba language, specifically the Mahu dialect. The chanting was performed formally by a group consisting of twelve Marapu priests, who wore all-black attire.

As stated by Tamu Rambu Hamu Eti:

“Yes, of course, those chosen are the ones who are already familiar with the song lyrics. Because they reciprocate with the Imam, four people who convey verses or songs, a language conveyed to ancestors, both the deceased and ancestors, and conveyed to the Creator.” (Personal informant, May 26, 2023).

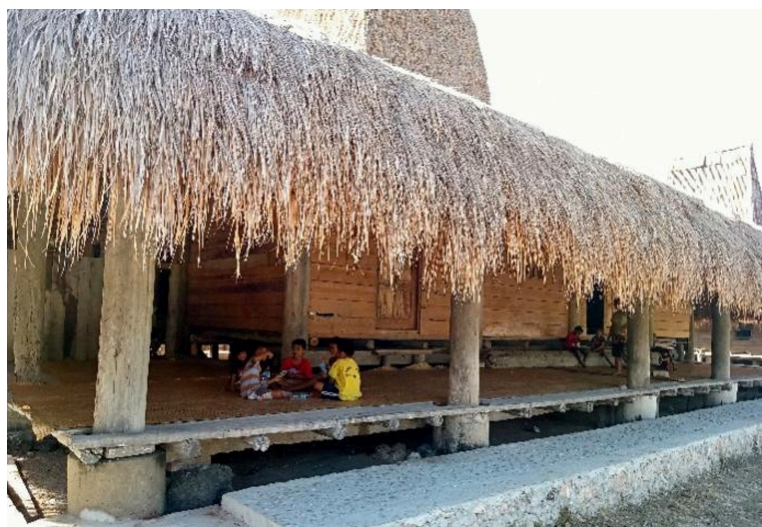


FIGURE 8. Large House, Body Storage Location (Source: Author Documentation)



FIGURE 9. Family Pilgrimage to the Gravesite (Source: Author Documentation)

Instrumentalities.

Ritual communication during the funeral was carried out verbally and nonverbally. Verbal communication was conducted using the Sumba language, particularly the Mahu dialect. Nonverbal communication was conveyed through the symbol of physical objects. The physical object used is woven fabric. Every participant in the ritual was encouraged to wear woven fabric. The woven fabric worn by participants did not have to be Sumba's. The use of woven fabric in attire symbolizes unity and kinship.

Norms.

Marapu funeral rituals are an obligation for every member of the community. Animal sacrifices are a necessity. The funeral ritual includes the final sacrifice for the deceased. Funeral rituals require significant financial resources. Therefore, someone who recently passed away does not have to hold a funeral ritual immediately. The family can preserve and store the body until the funds for the funeral ritual are collected.

Several levels of funeral rituals can be adjusted to the economic circumstances of the grieving family. The number of

animals sacrificed determines these levels. The most modest level involves four sacrificial animals: two horses and two buffaloes. The next level is eight sacrificial animals, comprising four horses and four buffaloes. The highest level is sixteen sacrificial animals: eight horses and eight buffaloes.

The maximum number (eight horses and eight buffaloes) of sacrificial animals for the highest level, or as they called it, special level, is based on Marapu's belief in the existence of eight layers of sky.

Tamu Rambu Hamu Eti stated that:

“Yes, because in Sumba tradition, the simple one is two horses and two buffaloes, the next one is four buffaloes and four horses, and the special one, what people call VIP, is eight and eight. It can be less but not more. We believe that there are eight layers of the sky.” (Personal informant, May 26, 2023).

Genre or Type of Communication Event.

Multiforms of communication were performed symbolically. Verbal communication included singing or chanting at the night ritual before burial. The night ritual chant, also called Ludu Bakul, means sacred chant. Ludu Bakul

is performed by a group of Marapu priests.

Umbu Palangarimu added:

“Sumba language. Moreover, the language is difficult because they use poetic language, verses, and poems. They use metaphorical language like verses and poems. For example, a motorbike in Sumba language is literally translated to a horse without control or a sweating horse. There are many metaphorical languages.” (Personal informant, May 1, 2023).

Dialogues that transpired in the night ritual chant or Ludu Bakul are:

“Woo oo woo yalla. Ha oo yalla. Yalla hami. Ho Yalla Yalla ee. Hoo aa oo. Mirri mirri mu nta nahu ka mai ka wanggu. Hu waii, njakka mbada kura panda, wua m u n y a nyakka wai pandarimanya. Nyakka mbana djoru nyaika na djara rara hinna mbata djakka landu djangga hi wundura. Hu waii e, djakka banda murru kallah, djara na djakka banna lulu kallah tau na wuadda rajang hu mu ka. Hu waii e, djakka nda hilli pahamang halla nda ndajalla ngaru nda djakka na pamiara nda limma kadaku widdi, na limma kadalu mbidi hiddu kaada garra wulang ana wuanya. E yalla. Woo oo woo yalla. Ha oo yalla. Yalla hami. Ho yalla yalla ee. Hoo aa oo. Mirri mirri mu tha n a h u n g likka maika wunggu ga. Hu waii, djaka hi dappa pamiara halla, limma nda kadda angu dangu pa hamma nyala ngaru kannda erimu ma

ee. Hoo aa oo. Mirri mirri mu nta nahhuka mai ka wanggu rambu. Hu waii, djakka na pamiara njalla hadda limma na hinna pa hamang nyalla ngaru na unna. Unna k a w a l u mbidi nanda kawula mbidi djillik hu nu rambu. Hu waii, djakka mbada ninyakka na djara lamma, ganna happu djakka mbada ngangu na la tau la mamattu nda unnda rangga ka anna ha wulang anna ranggu. Hu waii, elu mannu mbakka, habbu ndingga kadda lu wotunya wa tiara nambe djurung na djara, radda katta lu pamandunya wan a mborung na pa mbatta ne landu hi djangga wanggu. E yalla. Woo oo woo yalla. Ha oo yalla. Yalla hami. Ho yalla yalla ee. Hoo aa oo. Mirri mirri mu nta nahu ndukka mai ka mundu ga. Ha waii, djakka mbanna u n n u mbanna djullu ya djakka tana mbanna halla na pawukku ma nya tiara napa lu wuanya, mborung na wandanya nangga nduku. Ha waii, djakka mbada ninyakka la limma mappa ngiara nda kada anna ludunda anna na tunnu kaddi unna wuang kadda pahakka ndjo kadda la umma pahakka kikku wundu. E yalla. Woo oo woo yalla. Ha oo yalla. Yalla hami. Ho yalla yalla ee. Hoo aa oo. Mirri mirri mu tha n a h u n g likka maika wunggu ga. Hu waii, djaka hi dappa pamiara halla, limma nda kadda angu dangu pa hamma nyala ngaru kannda erimu ma



FIGURE 10. Situation During Chanting (Source: Author Documentation)

dangu wanggu wadda hi dulla. Hu waii, ka tha luru wanggu, hu topu ngu katta lu ndendi manggu n u l l a n g kanna lu lundung pa lundung palla umma lamma mboku la kaheli nama gailar huara.”

The meaning behind the chant is:

“O Great Forefathers of Kings. An unexpected event has occurred. The Great King has left us. In the same way, water comes unexpectedly. In the same way, a shrimp sank, and a horse fell. The high headland has shattered. The King’s death has gathered the royal family and relatives from other regions to conduct deliberation. O Great Forefathers of Kings. The deliberation has resulted in agreements by the royal family, relatives, other clans, and communities here. The agreements consisted of the preparation for the lord-in-waiting and for the invitation list. O Great Forefathers of Kings. The time that had been appointed by many elderly and young has come. Funeral preparations are done. The invitees are here. Let us deliver the body of the Great King to the Great House. A wide hall of eternity.”

The fundamental theory of symbolic interaction is interpretation (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbuken, 2009). Individuals attribute meaning to words (verbal communication), objects, and actions (non-verbal communication). Individuals in the same community attribute meaning to objects, words, and behaviors (mind concept). The first object they attribute meaning to is the shroud. These interactions and attributions provide identities for each individual in that community (self-concept). These individuals eventually become part of a community (society concept). In addition to providing identity to individuals, these interactions and attributions also shape a social society. To this day, the Marapu cultural community can maintain its community as part of Sumba society by preserving traditional cultural practices.

Marapu community funeral rituals encompass aspects of the symbolic interaction theory, including social objects, symbols, language, and perspective (Charon, 1979) in (Ahmadi, 2008). These aspects can be seen in Charon’s symbolic interaction diagram. These four aspects result from human interactions and shape the social reality

Meaning of Messages from the Perspective of Symbolic Interaction.

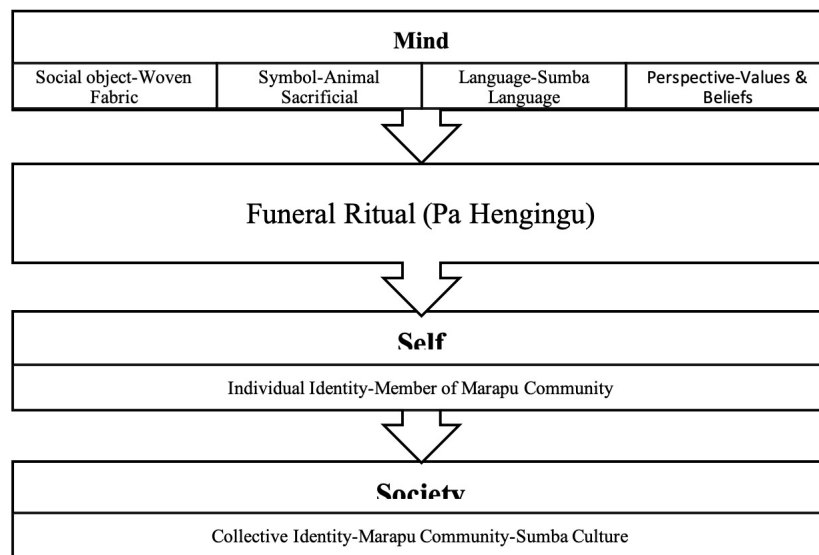


FIGURE 11. Symbolic Interaction Chart of the Funeral Ritual

of society, social life, and individual life (Charon, 1979) in (Ahmadi, 2008).

The social objects aspect of the Marapu funeral ritual sequence is the woven fabric of Sumba. Both grieving families and guests in the Marapu funeral ritual use woven fabric. Using Sumba woven fabric is not mandatory for those outside the Marapu culture, but it is encouraged as a sign of respect. Therefore, third parties attending the Marapu funeral ritual, such as media personnel and researchers, are also advised to wear woven fabric. Woven fabric is not obligatory but signifies unity, as stated by the Marapu adherent informant, Umbu Palangarimu.

The symbolic aspect of the Marapu funeral ritual sequence is livestock. The sacrifice of animals and the total number of livestock have their meanings. The animal sacrifice on the night of May 24, 2023, represents the final sacrifice for the deceased and serves as a symbol of gratitude to the Creator for the blessings of fortune and descendants bestowed upon the deceased during his lifetime. The exact meaning is attributed to the May 25, 2023, animal sacrifice. The initial animal sacrifice in the ritual symbolizes the family's gratitude for the blessings and favors provided by the Creator, enabling them to perform the sacrifices following Marapu customs and traditions. The final animal sacrifice at the end of the ritual also signifies the family's gratitude to the Creator for successfully executing the funeral ritual.

The total number of livestock sacrificed during the animal sacrifices represents the social stratum of the deceased. In Sumba culture, the minimum number of livestock to be sacrificed in the Marapu funeral ritual is four animals: two horses and two buffaloes. The next level is eight animals, comprising four horses and four buffaloes. The highest level, known as "special" in the Marapu community,

is sixteen animals: eight horses and eight buffaloes.

In the funeral ritual on May 25, 2023, eight horses and eight buffaloes were sacrificed (the highest level). The number of livestock sacrificed in the Marapu funeral ritual must not exceed eight horses and eight buffaloes because the Marapu community believes in eight layers of sky.

The language aspect in the Marapu funeral ritual sequence is the Sumba language. Verbal communication during the funeral ritual is conducted in the Sumba language. It is because the Sumba language is the native language of the Marapu community. Non-verbal communication through body language and music is also part of language. The body language displayed by the grieving family includes bowing with hands covering their faces, conveying their sorrow. In addition to body language, non-verbal communication is also performed through music. This activity is called "patambungu," which means hitting the gong. During the mourning period, the gong musical instrument is played. The sound of the gong communicates that someone has passed away (indicating mourning). Where the sound of the gong originates is where the body is located.

The perspective aspect can be understood through social objects, symbols, and language. Perspective aspects that can be seen in the Marapu funeral ritual sequence include:

The use of Sumba woven fabric in the attire of grieving families, guests, and outsiders involved in the Marapu funeral ritual. It signifies that the Marapu community values togetherness and maintains an open attitude.

There is no word for "thank you" in the Sumba language. Every expression of gratitude, whether to the Creator or others, is conveyed through symbols. Symbols include animal sacrifices,

livestock or woven fabric offerings, and betel nuts and leaves. When visiting a Marapu individual's home, guests are offered betel nuts and betel leaves. This offering symbolizes the host's gratitude for the guest's visit.

From the Marapu community's perspective, every good deed will be reciprocated with goodness. The Marapu community believes in both good and bad karma. Every evil deed will be met with an unfortunate event in this world. It means that good and bad deeds have consequences for their lives in this world, not in the afterlife.

CONCLUSION

Through communication ethnography, this research managed to understand the culture of the Marapu community from a communication perspective. This study provides empirical data that shows the complexity of the communication process. The ritual communication of the Marapu funeral ritual involves various types of symbols. Animate objects, inanimate objects, and language are involved in the process. These symbols are open to interpretation. Marapu funeral rituals are attended by members of the Marapu community and participants outside the Marapu community. It provides the potential for misunderstanding in the meaning of the message.

This research also provides new empirical data for symbolic interaction theory. The symbols created give an individual identity. Individuals who have the same meaning of symbols form a group. The symbols used by members of the same group become their collective identity. Thus, the communication process becomes complex due to the diverse meanings of symbols.

Future research can conduct a study that can provide empirical evidence or empirical data describing communication

as a dynamic process. Based on information obtained in the field, the courses of the Marapu funeral ritual had changed. These changes happened along with the development of mindset and social science. However, the changes made remain the core basis of Marapu's values, beliefs, and culture. Even after generations create and use symbols, they are not rigorous. The proposition is that the dynamic pattern of exchanging meaning through symbols in the communication process. This proposition can be tested or proven by using different subjects or objects.

The limitation of this research lies in the study's time constraints. Before the funeral ritual, the Marapu community, especially the informants in this study, would be extremely busy preparing for the funeral ritual. This research managed to capture the informants' time for data collection. For future research with the same research object or subjects, it is recommended to conduct interviews at least two days after the funeral ritual ends to obtain more data.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Special thanks are extended to the Marapu community, which warmly welcomed and assisted the author in the research process. Thanks also to all the informants who gave their time to share their knowledge and experiences. Lastly, thanks to LPPM UMN and the corresponding authors for their detailed and helpful feedback.

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