

# Ritual Communication between Sandro with Young Jockey: A Study on Main Jaran Tradition in Sumbawa

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## Abstract

*Culture and communication are reciprocity. These two elements affect one another. The relationship between culture and communication is important to learn because, through culture, people can learn how to communicate. This study aims at finding the process of ritual communication between sandro and his young jockey in the Main Jaran tradition at the village of Penyaring, Moyo Utara sub-district of Sumbawa Besar regency. This study used a qualitative approach, while the research type applied descriptive and naturalistic research basis. Data were obtained through interview technique and documentation, while subjects were appointed using purposive sampling technique. The data analysis was done by using Miles, Hubberman, and Saldana model. Based on the research result, the ritual communication process of a sandro to his young jockey on the Main Jaran event in Sumbawa plays a significant role in protecting the jockey and his horse. A Sandro is responsible for keeping the trust of the parents of his jockey. Therefore, a Sandro must proceed with all ritual stages during the Main Jaran event because every ritual has different meaning and purpose which support each other for the success of the jockey and his horse. The regeneration process focuses on ritual process in the Main Jaran tradition.*

**Key Words:** *Ritual communication, communication process, tradition, Main Jaran*

## Introduction

Indonesia is a country with thousands of island that lies from Sabang to Merauke with different geography and climate. The differences in climate and geographic have caused a variety of culture, tribe, race, local languages, religion, tradition, and politics with personal interests for each item. The situation has drawn interest for the situation in Indonesia is unique which does not occur in other countries; the situation of which causes Indonesia to become a multicultural nation with particular tradition or local culture in each area.

Culture is the whole symbols, meaning, image, regulation structure, habit, value, the process of information, and the diversion of thought convention pattern, shared thought and

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action among members of a particular social system and group in the community (Aloliliweri, 2011). There is a traditional game in Sumbawa Besar, particularly at the village of Penyarang, located in North Moyo sub-district, which is known as Main Jaran.

The *Main jaran* is a horse racing event with the racing track which is typically oval/ round in shape called “*kerato*” with young boys as the jockey in age ranging between six to twelve years old. During the colonialization, this tradition grew into a grand event of competition followed by neighboring tribes such as the tribe of Mbojo, Sasak, and several other tribes in East Nusa Tenggara.

One particular and interesting aspect in *Main Jaran* besides the horse performance and young jockeys’ racing skill is that every jockey who takes part in *Main Jaran* must have his personal “*Sandro*” which means shaman. Due to the situation, there is a common sight to see that the young jockey has some rituals done with his *Sandro*. Beyond the intense and festivity of the tradition, there are some things that not many people understand about the role of a “*Sandro*” in the attempt of winning the race, protecting the jockey as well as healing his wound using the power that a Shaman has. Besides the remarkable skill of the jockey and the speed of the horse, each *Sandro* who stands beside the track is summoning up his power.

The people of Sumbawa believes that *Sandro* is functioned to protect the horse and its jockey during the race. Ultimately, the *Sandro* also has the power to help his team in winning the race. To ensure the sustainability of the tradition, the jockey and his *Sandro* must believe in each other since the young boy will face many riders on the racing track. For that purpose, all young jockeys are free to ride whichever horse that their team has chosen with a payment of Rp. 50,000 to Rp. 100,000 for each race. The most important thing about winning the race is that the horse price will escalate up to hundreds of millions.

The ritual pattern of communication between the jockey and his *Sandro* is full of meaning and symbol. This study aims at describing the ritual communication process done by *Sandro* in the *Main Jaran* tradition at North Moyo sub-district of Sumbawa Besar regency.

Culture has a close connection to the human way of living. The human learns to think, feel, believe, and make a proper effort with the culture itself. Cultural pattern act as the base for language use, friendship, eating habit, communication practice, social action, economic actions, politic, and technology. Some people speak in Sundanese, eat snake meat, avoid liquor from grapes, bury dead people, talk through the telephone, or launch rockets to the moon. What has made these people able to do the activities is that they were born in, or at least have grown up in a culture that contains particular elements. What these people do, how they do it, are the responses to their cultural functions. Porter & Samover in (Mulyana dan Rahmat, 2006)

Culture is sustainable and exists everywhere; it also relates to the physical form and social environment that affects our lives. Our culture significantly affects us even before we were born until the time we pass away. Even during a funeral procession, people do it according to the prevailing culture of the society where they live. It means that culture and communication are inseparable. Culture does not only determine who do the talk to whom, what the talk is

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about, and how the communication occurs, but also to determine the person to carry the message, what meaning does the message contain, and the particular condition that accompanies the process during the message delivery, and message interpretation. Even, the culture where an individual lives or grown up with greatly influence all behavioral actions of that person. As a consequence, culture has become the foundation for communication. The more vary a culture is, the more vary communication practices are. (Sihabudin, 2011:19-20)

The searching process for a jockey in the *Main Jaran* up to the fee payment for that jockey are some descriptions of the inseparability between culture and communication. Without excellent communication between the horse owner and the jockey, the tradition will not survive as a ritual to the present.

A ritual communication is a communication function to address human self-identity as an individual, a member of the social community, and as one of the elements of the universe. An individual who performs ritual communication affirms the commitment towards the tradition of family, tribe, nation, ideology, or religion. Some forms of ritual communication are a wedding ceremony, bridal shower, praying (*sholat*, mass, reading the holy book). Similar to that, a Sandro has the power to relate a belief where the power, speed, safety, and victory is by the will of God the All Mighty. In this situation, Sandro's power may relate with God, ancestor, day, month, time, and other tradition-related things, namely *Main Jaran*.

According to Rothenbuhler (1998:28), a ritual is always identic with the habit or routine activities. Rothenbuhler then explained further that, "Ritual is the voluntary performance of appropriately patterned behavior to symbolically effect or participate in the serious life". Meanwhile, Couldry (2005:60) explained that a ritual is a habitual action (from generation to generation), a formal action, and also contains transcendental values. Based on the previous views, it can be said that a ritual relates greatly with a voluntary performance by the society from generation to generation (based on the tradition) which relates to a patterned behavior. The performance aims at symbolizing a particular effect on social life. Further, Rothenbuhler (1998: 29: 33) explained several characteristics of the ritual which includes: the ritual as an action, performance, awareness, and compliance, it has irrationality aspect, a ritual is not a mere recreational tool, it is collective, an expression of social relation, it is subjunctive and not indicative, it shows the effectivity of the existing symbols, condensed symbols, expressive or an aesthetical behavior, customary behavior, regular recurring behavior, and communication without information, sacred.

A ritual is one of the ways in communication. All rituals are communicative. A ritual is always a form of symbolic behavior in social situations. Therefore, a ritual is always an attempt to deliver a particular intention. To realize that ritual has become one of the ways in communication; therefore, the term ritual communication emerged to address the fact. The term ritual communication firstly introduced by James W.Carey (1992:18). He said that "in a ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as sharing, participation, association, fellowship, and the possession of a common faith". Therefore, in a ritual perspective,

communication relates to the action of sharing, participating, collecting or associating friendship, and the belief of similar faith. Carey added that according to the ritual point of view, communication aims at spreading a message in a particular space indirectly, and also it focuses on the maintenance of an existing community in a particular era. Communication is not an act of giving or imparting information, but it is an attempt to present or represent a particular common believes. Yermia, D.M. (2011) "Communication Journal: Komunikasi Ritual Pada Budaya Bertani Atoni Pah Meto di Timor-Nusa Tenggara Timur, volume 1:287-298".

### Research Method

This study used a qualitative approach based on naturalistic orientation to achieve the in-depth ritual communication process between a Sandro and the jockey. Sandro became the subject of the study with very tight criteria to obtain relevant primary data. Data collection was obtained through a direct interview, in-depth and structured interview, and communication. Data analysis was after the condensation to draw a valid conclusion.

### Research Result

A unique fact about *Main Jaran* is that the jockeys are relatively young aged individuals, around 5 to 10 years old, the age of kindergarten and elementary school students. A jockey is equipped with a helmet, racing silk, helmet pad, vest, and whip to compete in the race at his best performance to win.

Having a son who can ride a horse at a very young age makes parents in Sumbawa feel proud, and they feel even prouder if the horse owner chooses their son for the race. Besides that, the jockey can use this opportunity to help his parents in raising their economic status when he receives a bonus after winning the race; the bonus of which can be in the form of cattle (cow or buffalo).

*Sandro* is a special term for a shaman in Sumbawa; they can be recognized because of their particular physical attributes such as traditional cap (known as *kopiah*), wearing a piece fabric around their neck, and wearing a *sarong* or fabric trousers instead. *Sandro* performs a ritual for the horse before the final examination and entering the start box.

The final ritual for the horse is to avoid any negative effect that might occur to the jockey and the horse. A bad *Sandro* would do anything to win the race, including using black magic. The black magic can appear in the form of preventing other horses for starting the race or even to drop other jockeys from their horses. Based on that fact, every jockey needs *Sandro* to protect him during the race; which is the importance of having *Sandro* for this tradition.

Based on the in-depth interview result with the *Sandros* namely Haji Ismail Mame (78 years old), Haji Faruq (53 years old), Haji Jenaga (67 years old), Mursali HS (58 years old), there are conclusions to draw from the ritual communication process:

1. The initial process for ritual preparation is during the *Sandro* walks around the horse three times; this ritual is done in a particular time according to the *Sandro* revelation. When the

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*Sandro* does that ritual, the jockey or the horse owner must accompany his horse. This ritual functions to build supernatural protection from *Sandro* of other opponents who are willing to use black magic. The ritual is done around the stable or the inn for those who spend their nights at *kerato* area. During this ritual, everyone must not sit down but instead they must stand up; which illustrates the readiness of all elements of the team to any harmful or strike from their opponents. After the protection ritual, all teams must leave the stable heading the *kerato* area. The prohibition during this moment is that everyone must not go back to the stable or to stop in the way before reaching the *kerato*. Therefore, the team must continue walking to get into the *kerato* according to the time frame from the *Sandro*.

2. During check in to the race track, *Sandro* conducts another ritual with two assistants whose job is to take the horse to the start box and to escort the jockey until he rides the horse inside the start box.
3. The next ritual is getting race costume from the racing officials; the apparel that is called "ban". There are 6 participants in total; therefore, there will be ban 1 to ban 6. All jockeys wear this apparel in turn according to the race schedule. *Sandro* blow out the suits and recite a particular spell to clean the suits from any remaining effects of the previous user and his *Sandro*. Therefore, his jockey will wear a pure and clean suit and full off the *sandro's* magical power.
4. The next ritual is when the *Sandro* wipes the suit on to the horse body part from head to feet. This ritual aims at purifying the horse and combining the same scent or power of the suit with the horse so that it remembers the odor of its jockey who will wear the suit. Inside the start box, the horse will smell any scents it can. Therefore, the team needs to make sure that their horse recognizes its jockey's scent. Otherwise, it will act aggressively and refuse its jockey.
5. The *Sandro* does that to the back lower part of his jockey's head to avoid forgetting his riding and racing techniques. This ritual is to prevent the other *Sandro* to distract the jockey's memory in term of racing skills. This ritual is necessary because other *sandros* can easily distract the opponent jockey memory of basic racing skills.
6. The suit worn by the jockey is the main event of the ritual series; that makes good integration between the jockey and his horse. The next step is the handover of jockey from the *Sandro* to an official who will carry him to the start box. The objective of carrying the jockey is to avoid him from getting tired of walking and protecting him from any supernatural trap that is invisible to common people. Therefore, it is not Upon arrival in the start box, every jockey will directly get onto his horse without stepping on his feet on the ground, which also is an attempt to avoid supernatural traps. The process of getting the jockey onto his horse requires the one who carries him and an official, this is also the attempt to avoid scent mixture possibility and magical power effect from other opponents.

## Discussion

In connection with the communication process that consists of several stages, all subjects are called communicator, the person who carries a praying message for their respective young jockey. In this situation, the communicant is Allah SWT, *Sandro* tries to communicate with God All Mighty asking for protection for their jockeys from any bad influence.

As stated by Faruq during the final ritual, *Sandro* recites a particular prayer before he rubs the racing suit to the horse from head to feet. This ritual is to purify the horse and the racing suit. After that, *Sandro* blows the suit and put it on the jockey towards *kiblat* so that all prayers for the jockey and horse be granted by Allah. Finally, *Sandro* hands over the jockey to the official escort to take him to the start box and keep him safe.

In relation with a symbol, Ismail Mame as the first subject explained that people of Sumbawa keep traditional cap or *songko*, but most time only community leaders or government officers who wear it during traditional ceremonies. Therefore, when *Sandro* wears a *songko*, it is a common sight because it has been one of the physical identity of a *Sandro* within *kerato* or racing arena.

Different from Faruq who no longer wear *songko* and sarong to appear as a common person. Often that black magic is sent to *sandros* during the racing as a result of unfair competition attempt.

There is a finding that proves the degeneration of culture value in term of *Sandro* characteristics who seems to cover up his identity as a *Sandro*. Based on several testimonies from the subjects, being a *Sandro* used to be a prestigious role. Becoming a well-known *Sandro* brought many benefits. The economic value would increase as well as social status. The horse business also experienced the benefit as the price of horses with great *sandro* became higher. On every racing event, the government officials whose horses join the race usually as particular *sandro* to touch their horses and pay them with a big amount of money which is usually greater than the racing prize itself.

As modernism values and developing technology infiltrate Sumbawa, the *Main Jaran* tradition has become more well-known in wider place and society. Consequently, the role of *sandro* is decreasing although it does not mean that they lose their attribute but instead they cover themselves; so that not many people recognize their role as *sandro*.

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