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TRANSFORMATION OF THE MEANING OF NJALANG TRADITION: FROM A PERSONAL RITUAL TO A MEDIUM OF PRESERVATION AND CULTURAL TOURISM AMONG THE NASAL CLAN IN BENGKULU

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of the Njalang tradition among the Nasal clan in Kaur Regency, Bengkulu, from a personal spiritual ritual into a collective cultural event. Once limited to individual visits during Eid al-Fitr, Njalang has evolved into a structured mass pilgrimage involving pre-event meetings, communal services, and ceremonial activities on the second day of Shawwal. Using an ethnographic communication approach, the research involved direct participation and observation to interpret the evolving meanings of this tradition. Findings reveal that Njalang now functions not only as a spiritual practice but also as a means of strengthening social ties, preserving cultural identity, and promoting cultural tourism. This transformation illustrates how local traditions adapt to contemporary contexts while retaining core communal values. The study's novelty lies in its focus on the transformation of meaning—an aspect often overlooked in previous research. It highlights how traditional rituals can become dynamic platforms for cultural communication and collective identity. This research contributes to the discourse on cultural resilience and offers insights for future studies on heritage preservation in the social sciences and humanities.

Keywords: *Cultural Transformation, Cultural Tourism, Mass Pilgrimage, Njalang Tradition, Spiritual Medium*

INTRODUCTION

The Njalang tradition, a ritual practice originating from the Nasal clan in Kaur Regency, Bengkulu, has long been an integral part of the local community's spiritual life. Initially functioning as an individual pilgrimage, this tradition was typically carried out on a personal basis and only during specific moments, such as the celebration of Eid al-Fitr. However, in recent decades, this tradition has undergone significant changes, both in its execution and in the meanings it holds. The main issue at the focus of this research is the shift in the meaning of the Njalang tradition from a personal ritual to a complex collective practice with various social and cultural functions. This change not only reflects a transformation in how the tradition is performed but also a fundamental shift in the meaning associated with Njalang by the Nasal clan community. Investigating this transformation is crucial, as it illustrates the ongoing social and

cultural dynamics within the community, offering valuable insights into how local traditions adapt to changing times and evolving societal values.

Previous research has identified that changes in the meaning of cultural traditions often reflect a community's adaptation to social, economic, and political shifts. (Jan-Petter & Gumperz, 2020; Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2020; Pung et al., 2020; Roux et al., 2022). According to Jan-Petter and Gumperz (2020), the transformation of meaning in cultural traditions is a response to external pressures that impact a community's social structure and cultural identity. In this context, the shift in the meaning of the Njalang tradition can be understood as the Nasal community's way of adapting to changes in their social environment while maintaining their core cultural values (Pung et al., 2020). Lauristin and Vihalemm (2020), in their study on intangible cultural heritage, emphasize that understanding the transformation of meaning in traditions is crucial for cultural preservation. They argue that evolving traditions need to be reinterpreted by the community to remain relevant and meaningful. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of Njalang, where changes in the practice and the meanings attached to the tradition reflect the community's effort to keep it relevant amidst social changes (Roux et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, studies on pilgrimage traditions reveal that changes in meaning are often triggered by modernization and globalization. Research by Choe & Mahyuni (2023) for example, found that pilgrimage traditions in Java and Bali have shifted in meaning from purely spiritual activities to also serving as social and economic mediums. These findings are relevant to the transformation occurring in Njalang, where the pilgrimage now also functions as a means to strengthen social bonds and promote cultural heritage as a tourist attraction. Sholehuddin et al., (2021) also examined the changing meaning of pilgrimage traditions in Yogyakarta, finding that modernization and social changes require communities to adapt their traditions to new contexts without losing their essence. This demonstrates that local traditions can serve as dynamic cultural communication mediums, where new meanings continue to evolve in response to changing societal values (Hefner, 2021; Manalu, 2023).

Hakim's (2022) study on the "Ngejalang Tradition in Pekon Penggawa V Tengah, Karya Penggawa District, West Pesisir Regency" provides a more specific perspective on the meaning of the Ngejalang tradition in Lampung Province. Hakim employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to explore the real and symbolic meanings of the Ngejalang procession. The study found that the real meaning of this tradition lies in strengthening family ties, fostering social bonds, and preserving culture, while its symbolic meaning reflects the religious values, ethics, and life principles of the Lampung community (Basyar et al., 2020; Fitria, 2024). This research is relevant as it offers a framework for understanding how the meanings within pilgrimage traditions can evolve and be interpreted by the local community.

Unlike previous studies, this research will delve deeply into the transformation of meaning within the *Njalang* tradition in the Nasal clan, an area that remains underexplored. Most existing research focuses on the spiritual and social aspects of pilgrimage traditions, but few have examined how these changes also reflect a shift in the tradition's function as a complex and

multifaceted medium of cultural communication. The findings from this study will elaborate on the transformation in the meaning of the *Njalang* tradition, from a personal ritual to a collective practice that not only encompasses spiritual and social aspects but also serves as a means of cultural preservation and promotion of cultural tourism. The implementation process of the *Njalang* mass pilgrimage, involving a series of structured activities—from pre-implementation meetings to social services and the main event on the second day of Eid al-Fitr in the month of Shawwal—demonstrates the dynamic cultural adaptation within the Nasal community. This highlights how local traditions can continue to function as relevant and meaningful cultural communication tools amidst ongoing social changes. This research is expected to contribute new insights into the study of cultural tradition transformation in Indonesia and enrich the literature on the preservation and development of local traditions in an ever-changing global context.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs the ethnography of communication approach, a method pioneered by James P. Spradley. As explained by Madden (2022), ethnography is a research method aimed at describing and understanding the culture and communication patterns within a community. This method was chosen for its in-depth and comprehensive techniques, which allow the researcher to observe and interpret cultural phenomena in detail and from the perspective of those who directly experience them. In the context of this study, the ethnography of communication approach is used to explore the transformation of meaning that occurs within the Njalang tradition in the Nasal clan community, Kaur Regency, Bengkulu.

The ethnographic communication approach requires researchers to engage directly with the community being studied over a relatively long period, which can range from several months to several years. In this study, the researcher conducted direct observations of the Njalang mass pilgrimage practices. Direct observation allows the researcher to see behaviors, interactions, and cultural practices in their natural context. Through extended observation, the researcher can note important details that might be missed using other methods. For instance, the nuances of nonverbal communication, the social dynamics that develop during the tradition, and the ways in which the community expresses their cultural values within the context of this mass pilgrimage can all be captured.

In addition to direct observation, the researcher also conducted in-depth and open-ended interviews with various community members. These interviews were designed to gain a deep understanding of the respondents' views, feelings, and interpretations of the Njalang tradition. During the interviews, the researcher used open-ended questions that allowed respondents to speak freely and in detail. This technique is crucial for uncovering the more complex meanings behind each response and for exploring various aspects of the Njalang tradition that might not emerge from direct observation alone.

Along with observation and interviews, the researcher also actively participated in the daily life of the Nasal community to understand their culture and communication from within. Spradley emphasizes the importance of ethnographers not only observing from the outside but also engaging in the life of the community being studied (Sari et al., 2022). In this study, the researcher took part in various activities related to the Njalang pilgrimage, such as pre-implementation meetings, announcements, and other social activities. This participation allowed the researcher to gain a more holistic understanding of how this tradition is practiced and interpreted by the local community.

The choice of the ethnographic communication method is based on the research objective to deeply and comprehensively understand the meanings that evolve within the Njalang tradition. This method allows the researcher to collect rich and complex narrative data, which reflects not only objective facts but also the subjective meanings held by the Nasal community. By becoming part of the community during the research, the researcher can capture the nuances and cultural complexities that might be difficult to grasp through other methods. The results of this approach are expected to provide deep insights into how local traditions like Njalang can adapt and evolve within the context of broader social changes.

Ethnographic communication, with its focus on social and cultural interaction, provides an appropriate framework for analyzing the transformation of meaning within the Njalang tradition. Through this method, the researcher can observe how a tradition that was initially personal and intimate has now evolved into a multifunctional collective practice. The dual role of the researcher as both an observer and participant allows for a more authentic and holistic interpretation, reflecting the internal perspectives of the Nasal community regarding the changes in their tradition. The results of this study are expected to enrich the literature on ethnographic communication and contribute new insights to the study of cultural preservation in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tradition of Mass Pilgrimage (Njalang) in the Marga Nasal Community

The tradition of Mass Pilgrimage (Njalang) within the Marga Nasal community is believed to have emerged since the pre-colonial era. Although interviews with primary and key informants did not pinpoint the exact date of its inception, historical evidence suggests that the practice of mass pilgrimage, or njalang, has long been an integral part of the social and religious life of the Marga Nasal people. The tradition of mass pilgrimage existed in a simpler and less structured form compared to what is observed in modern times (Afdhal, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2023). The communal pilgrimage practice evolved as a means for the Marga Nasal community to honor their ancestors, strengthen social bonds within the community, and to preserve and celebrate religious values. The Njalang culture is deeply intertwined with the process of assimilation with the Lampung culture, which has a strong historical influence, particularly given that the Marga Nasal

community originated from the coastal regions of Lampung and settled along the Nasal River (Japarudin, 2021).

According to Kurniawan, 2023, the word "njalang" originates from "jelang," with the prefix "nja" added. In the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language), "jelang" is defined as "to visit" or "to approach." Although the word "njalang" carries a negative connotation among the general public, in the local language, it refers to the act of visiting. The local pronunciation of "ngejelang" eventually transformed into "njalang." To date, there is no comprehensive literature that details the history of Njalang specifically within the context of the Marga Nasal community.

Interviews with traditional leaders and community figures from Marga Nasal reveal that, etymologically, "Ngejalang" is derived from the root word "Jalang" or "Jaring," which connotes "netting" or "catching hopes." In this context, "catching hopes" refers to the act of praying or sending prayers through the pilgrimage process carried out during the Ngejalang ceremony. The Njalang ceremony is a special gathering where the community comes together to foster relationships, share food, and pray together. It reflects how people express gratitude and ask for blessings from God Almighty. This tradition is usually held on Islamic festive days, such as the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (Maulid Nabi) and Eid al-Fitr.

Conceptually, the word "njalang" is similar to "ziarah" (pilgrimage), but the difference lies in its execution. Ziarah is an activity associated with Islamic religious practices where people visit each other or engage in other activities, including visiting graves and praying for the deceased. On the other hand, Njalang is not only a religious activity but also an opportunity for the community to gather, strengthen ties, and share food together (Hakim, 2022; Kurniawan, 2023).

Concept of Communication, Tradition, and Symbolism in the Njalang Tradition

In this study, the communication that occurs within the practice of mass pilgrimage (Njalang) represents a form of transcendental communication that connects the pilgrims with God. This mass pilgrimage activity features a pattern of non-verbal communication, primarily through prayers and *dzikir* (remembrance of God). The essence of the Njalang mass pilgrimage reveals a transcendental communication pattern in which the use of graves as intermediaries facilitates interaction between humans and God, thus creating an essential vertical relationship between the two. Furthermore, the connection between communication and the Njalang culture is clearly manifested through the communicative interactions among community members engaged in this tradition (Polnaya et al., 2023). Communication and culture are interrelated and mutually influential; communication serves as the primary medium for conveying and preserving cultural values, norms, and traditions from one generation to the next. In this way, the communication process enables individuals within a culture to understand and maintain their cultural identity. Conversely, culture also shapes individual communication patterns, including language use, symbols, and social norms prevailing within the community. Therefore, the

interviews indicate that the close relationship between communication and culture plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage and strengthening the identity of a community.

This research adopts the concept of tradition within the cultural and social context, referring to practices, values, and behaviors passed down from generation to generation through processes of socialization and culture. Tradition holds significant meaning in society as it provides identity and connection to the past, culture, and values embraced by the community. In the context of the Njalang pilgrimage culture, this tradition involves customs and rituals performed by the community to honor the deceased as well as to facilitate social gatherings during the month of Syawal. From a communication perspective, the tradition of visiting graves can be interpreted as a form of transcendental communication that allows individuals to interact with God through metaphysical media, such as *dzikir* (remembrance of God), recitation of Quranic verses, and collective prayers on the Second Eid of Syawal.

This research is closely linked to the role of symbolic communication in the Njalang pilgrimage culture, which involves pilgrims reading prayers or Quranic verses at the graves as a sign of respect and a hope to receive blessings from the prayers offered for the deceased buried there. The Njalang pilgrimage practice involves the use of religious and cultural symbols that hold deep meaning for the pilgrims, reflecting the spiritual presence and the vertical relationship between humans and God. Pilgrims use these symbols, such as prayers, *dzikir* (remembrance of God), communal food sharing, and sprinkling water on the graves, as a means to communicate with God through symbolic dimensions. Therefore, the Njalang pilgrimage is not only a religious practice but also a cultural form that encompasses symbolic communication, strengthening the spiritual bond between humans and God.

Ritual Communication in the Tradition of Mass Pilgrimage (Njalang)

Rituals represent a form applied in the process and nature of communication. In this context, each ritual can be understood as a manifestation of communicative action(Ridwan et al., 2020). Rituals consistently display symbolic behavior that occurs in various social situations. Here, rituals are seen as a medium used to convey specific messages to the community. When observing rituals as a modality of communication, it is noted that the messages implied within rituals are often hidden and tend to have ambiguous, dual meanings. This phenomenon is often associated with specific symbolism embedded in ritual practices, which generally arise from the cultural context in which the rituals originate.

In the context of ritual communication, the media used to convey messages are inseparable from the messages themselves. The use of symbols in ritual communication aims to represent certain ideas and values related to hospitality, celebration, or religious and communal ceremonies. It is important to note that these symbols are not freely chosen by the community but are determined by related cultural norms. According to Trillò et al., (2022), there are three closely related terminologies in ritual communication: communication, communion, and commonality. The concept of communication enacted in rituals is often closely linked to the

celebratory or worship activities of a community. As in a celebration, rituals are generally performed collectively by community members involved. This study highlights the religious ritual of the Njalang pilgrimage, which involves processes and actions of communication through the use of symbols, such as bringing food, water for sprinkling on graves, and lighting firecrackers. This celebration is carried out each year during the month of Syawal in the form of the communal Njalang pilgrimage practiced by the Marga Nasal community.

Process and Actions in the Tradition of Mass Pilgrimage (Njalang)

In the research conducted and through the information gathering from primary and key informants, the researcher obtained data on the process and preparation for the Mass Pilgrimage (Njalang) tradition among the Marga Nasal community in Maje and Nasal Districts. The process involves several stages before the event, which takes place on the Second Eid of Idul Fitri, in accordance with the cultural sequence of the pilgrimage within the Marga Nasal community as follows:

Pre-Implementation

This stage occurs one week before the mass pilgrimage (Njalang) tradition, coinciding with the preparatory meeting for the Sengkure Festival or other annual activities held on Idul Fitri. The meeting is conducted in the evening, starting at 8:00 PM or after the Tarawih prayers, and is attended by traditional leaders, community figures, and village government representatives.



Figure 1 Njalang Preparation Meeting
Source: Research Documentation 2024

The announcement process takes place after the meeting conducted by traditional leaders, community figures, and village government representatives. The outcomes of this meeting are then communicated to the community through the mosque's speaker or announced after the Maghrib prayer at the village mosque. The announcement provides information regarding the date of the event and preparations for conducting social activities at the village's public cemetery.

The social service activity is a crucial part of the process, where the entire community participates in cleaning the area of the public cemetery where the event will take place. All community elements, from youth to village government officials and community leaders,

contribute to the preparation and execution of the Njalang activity. This activity starts at 7:00 AM and continues until completion, involving tasks such as cleaning the cemetery area and setting up the Tarub (tent) to ensure comfort during the Njalang event on the day of implementation.



Figure 2 The Social Service Activity at the Public Cemetery (TPU)
Source: Research Documentation 2024

Implementation of the Mass Pilgrimage Tradition (Njalang)

he Mass Pilgrimage Tradition of Njalang is typically held on the second day of the month of Syawal. However, preparations for the Njalang activities begin during the last ten days of Ramadan. During this preparatory phase, the public cemetery is cleaned by village residents under the coordination of the village government. Those who are unable to participate directly in these activities are usually involved in the preparation stage, with the entire village contributing to the preparations. The peak of the Njalang process occurs on the second day of Syawal, starting at 8:00 AM and continuing until completion.

The Njalang process begins with a welcome speech from the village government, encouraging those present at the cemetery to maintain and continue the Njalang tradition. They urge parents to pass on the tradition to their children, highlighting the many positive aspects embedded in Njalang.

Following the village government's speech, a religious ceremony is conducted. This includes an Islamic ritual consisting of a sermon or religious lecture, followed by the recitation of Surah Yasin, tahlil (prayers for the deceased), tahmid (praise of God), and communal prayers. During the religious lecture, religious leaders typically remind the attendees about preparing for death and the journey one will undertake after passing away. They emphasize that everyone will eventually face death and will be buried in the cemetery like their loved ones.

After the sermon, the religious activities continue with the recitation of Yasin, tahlil, tahmid, and prayers led by local religious figures. The community reads these prayers together for their families. The final part of the Njalang tradition involves enjoying the food that each community member has brought and prepared independently. Participants typically engage in conversations while enjoying their meals. Following the meal, the community members exchange greetings and apologize to one another for the festive season. Once everyone has exchanged

greetings, the Njalang event concludes, and the participants return to their homes in an orderly manner.



Figure 3 The Implementation of the Njalang Tradition)
Source: Research Documentation 2024

Meaning of the Mass Pilgrimage Tradition (Njalang) Over Time for the Community

The research findings reveal that the Mass Pilgrimage Tradition of Njalang is a crucial part of the culture and tradition of the Marga Nasal community in Kaur Regency. The Marga Nasal community views this tradition as an integral part of their identity, with its meaning deriving from two sources as outlined by Hanifah et al., (2023): intention and expression. Consequently, 'meaning' in this context can be interpreted as the significance, thought, idea, information, message, and content. Thus, when someone utters a particular word, the meaning plays a role, allowing one to visualize and understand the significance of that word.

In this study, the meaning of the Njalang tradition can be examined from both historical and contemporary perspectives. This information was gathered through in-depth interviews and field observations, with the historical period defined as from 1980 to 2000, and the current period covering post-reform era from 2000 to the present. During this timeframe, primary and key informants provided information consistent with field facts. The post-reform era has seen shifts in activities and culture due to the emergence of technology and the widespread use of media, which have significantly impacted the Njalang tradition.

Based on field observations and direct interviews conducted by the researcher, insights were obtained regarding the significance of the Mass Pilgrimage Tradition (Njalang) for the Marga Nasal community, both historically and in the present day.

Research findings from the period between 1980 and 2000 reveal that the Mass Pilgrimage Tradition (Njalang) for the Marga Nasal community was deeply rooted in both spiritual and solidarity aspects. The spiritual significance of Njalang during this time was closely tied to religious and spiritual practices. The pilgrimage was focused on honoring ancestors and revered figures, with the belief that visiting graves or sacred places would bring blessings, good fortune, and protection from ancestral spirits. The tradition was characterized by collective and communal rituals led by traditional leaders, who coordinated the event from preparation through to the recitation of prayers. These leaders played a pivotal role in ensuring the spiritual depth of the tradition, guiding the community with advice on the afterlife and encouraging the reinforcement of social bonds. The community's adherence to the leaders' guidance underscored the profound spiritual meaning attached to the tradition as an expression of devotion to deceased family members.

Additionally, the Njalang tradition fostered a strong sense of solidarity among the community. During this period, solidarity was a key aspect of the tradition, with the community gathering to pray, remember the past, and honor the cultural heritage left by their ancestors. Traditional leaders and village officials emphasized the importance of maintaining cultural values, with the tradition evolving from an intimate practice to a structured communal event celebrated on the second day of Eid al-Fitr. Community members actively participated by bringing food from their homes, aiming to pray for their family members and reinforce social connections.

In the period from 2000 to the present, the meaning of the Mass Pilgrimage has expanded to encompass cultural preservation, cultural tourism, and social bonding. The tradition has become an important symbol of cultural identity amidst modernization and social changes. The active involvement of the community, as encouraged by local government, highlights the tradition's role in preserving ancestral culture. Nowadays, the focus has slightly shifted from purely cultural preservation to include aspects of cultural tourism, with the local government and community leaders promoting participation and site maintenance to keep the tradition vibrant. Additionally, the tradition continues to serve as a significant means of social bonding, providing a platform for community members to come together, strengthen relationships, and maintain connections with family and friends during the pilgrimage..

In this study, cultural tourism has emerged as an important aspect of the Mass Pilgrimage Tradition (Njalang), reflecting the growth of tourism and its impact on local traditions. The Njalang tradition, unique to the Marga Nasal community across several villages, has become an attractive cultural tourism phenomenon. This uniqueness stems from the fact that Njalang is a practice specific to the Marga Nasal and not performed by other communities, thus presenting a distinctive cultural experience for those interested in exploring local heritage and history. The tradition, while deeply personal and intimate, has evolved into a communal and structured event that draws visitors seeking spiritual experiences and insights into the unique cultural practices of the Marga Nasal. This transformation highlights how a traditionally private activity can become a focal point for cultural tourism, offering both spiritual and educational opportunities.

Social significance and social bonding also play a crucial role in the tradition. Research findings, based on in-depth interviews with key informants, reveal that the Njalang tradition serves as a significant occasion for the Marga Nasal community to reunite. During the pilgrimage, community members, whether returning from afar or those residing locally, exchange information, strengthen social networks, and celebrate together within the context of their cultural and religious practices. This tradition is not merely a cultural event but also a vital social gathering that reinforces relationships and networks among the Marga Nasal people. The pilgrimage acts as an essential moment for community members to reconnect, share updates on their lives, and maintain their social structure, enhancing the social cohesion within the Marga Nasal community.

Analysis of the Mass Pilgrimage Tradition (Njalang) Using Symbolic Interactionism Theory

The development of symbolic interactionism in Western social theory is rooted in a general interest in exploring subjective experiences, which emerged partly as a critique of structural functionalism. The term was coined by American sociologist Herbert Blumer, who built upon the theories of his mentor, George Herbert Mead. Blumer argued that common understanding is developed through ordinary daily interactions. His approach to symbolic interactionism provides a profound insight into the dynamics of communication and meaning-making within the context of the Mass Pilgrimage Tradition (Njalang).

By analyzing how individuals interpret religious symbols and interact with one another during the pilgrimage, we gain a clearer understanding of the significance of this tradition in reinforcing religious identity, preserving spiritual culture, and maintaining religious values within the community. Symbolic interactionism offers a strong conceptual framework for examining the complex processes of communication and meaning formation involved in the pilgrimage tradition. This theory not only enhances our understanding of religious practices but also emphasizes the importance of symbols and rituals in sustaining religious and cultural identity in a diverse society.

In the case of Njalang, symbolic interactionism helps us appreciate how the tradition functions as a medium for expressing and negotiating religious and cultural values. It illustrates how rituals and symbols are not merely acts of religious observance but are integral to the social fabric, reinforcing bonds within the community and linking individuals to their cultural heritage. This theoretical perspective sheds light on the intricate ways in which traditions like Njalang contribute to the continuity and vitality of religious and cultural life..

More specifically, Symbolic Interactionism Theory serves as the foundation for the researcher to uncover the meaning of symbolic interactions in the Njalang tradition. Given that Njalang is a communal grave visitation activity conducted by a social community involving social interactions among individuals, the researcher views Symbolic Interactionism Theory as relevant for analyzing the Njalang tradition practiced by the Marga Nasal community in Kaur Regency. This

theory is influenced by the social structure that shapes or triggers specific behaviors, which then gives rise to symbolic processes in social interactions within the community.

The theory emphasizes that each individual must adopt a proactive, reflective, and creative stance by interpreting and expressing behaviors that are unique, complex, and difficult to define. The main points of Symbolic Interactionism Theory involve two crucial aspects: first, that humans in a social context cannot be separated from social interactions, and second, that interactions within society are realized through specific symbols that are dynamic in nature.

The Njalang tradition is a social object continuously performed by a social community. It is possible that the practice of this tradition arises from a shared reality within the community. The presence of a social activity like grave visitation is intertwined with smaller interactions, referred to as collective actions. By applying Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism Theory, we can delve deeper into how complex communication and meaning-making processes occur within the pilgrimage tradition. This theory helps us understand that pilgrimage traditions are not merely religious acts but also integral to how people define, experience, and practice their spirituality through rich symbolic interactions and well-structured rituals. Thus, pilgrimage traditions not only preserve religious and cultural identities but also provide a platform for individuals to collectively experience and reinforce their spiritual meanings within a broader religious community.

The tradition of ancestral heritage serves as social capital that fosters unity, harmony, and mutual respect within the community, while also acting as a means for self-reflection on mortality. Although there are various ways to remind oneself of death and pay homage to deceased ancestors, the tradition of mass pilgrimage remains a cultural practice worth preserving. The Njalang pilgrimage is a prominent spiritual activity and one of the most practical rituals found. The symbolic meanings enacted by the pilgrims at the cemetery include "Cucu'e aya'e makam," which refers to the ritual cleansing or the pouring of water on the grave, often regarded as a symbol of spiritual purification for the deceased. Water is considered to have cleansing and refreshing qualities, making its use in rituals a way to purify the soul and sanctify the final resting place of the deceased. Additionally, the act of pouring water on the grave can be seen as a gesture of respect, demonstrating that the deceased are not forgotten and continue to be honored. Passed down through generations, the traditions taught by the ancestors of the Marga Nasal emphasize that acts of devotion and self-reflection should be performed collectively on a significant day, specifically the second day of Syawal. These teachings and traditions remain firmly embedded and continue to be practiced today, with one tangible expression being the offering of prayers to the Creator and ancestors, accompanied by wishes for safety and well-being

In this study of the Njalang pilgrimage tradition, the act of bringing food holds deep significance within the framework of Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism theory. This concept highlights the importance of symbolic and social interactions in understanding human behavior. In this context, food is not merely seen as sustenance but as a symbol imbued with rich

social and religious meanings. According to symbolic interactionism, the Nasal community views food as a symbol of life, blessings, and gratitude for divine gifts through the act of bringing food during the communal pilgrimage.

This action reflects the way the Nasal people interpret and appreciate the role of ancestors and ancestral traditions in their lives. Food, in this framework, is perceived as a symbol of respect and gratitude towards ancestors and as a means to maintain and strengthen the connection between the material and spiritual worlds. Field research findings reveal that the food brought consists of staple items commonly prepared for Eid al-Fitr celebrations, such as Bolu cake made from flour, eggs, sugar, and additional ingredients, and Tat cookies made from flour, sugar, pineapple jam, among other dishes prepared by the community. These offerings symbolize sufficiency and express gratitude for the blessings bestowed upon the Nasal community.

The social solidarity and fraternity reflected in this study are also manifested through the act of sharing food. Within the framework of symbolic interactionism, this behavior can be understood as a form of symbolic communication that reinforces social bonds among individuals within the community. Through this practice, the Nasal people affirm and strengthen their identity as members of a group with shared values, traditions, and goals. Moreover, sharing food can be seen as an effort to preserve and develop cultural traditions and identities. Symbolic interactionism suggests that this practice represents a reaffirmation and reinterpretation of cultural symbols within the community. By adhering to the tradition of bringing food during the mass pilgrimage, the Nasal community indirectly reinforces and updates the significance of their traditions in the context of a changing world. Thus, analyzing through the lens of Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism theory reveals that the act of bringing food for mass burial during Eid al-Fitr by the Nasal community in Kaur Regency represents a process of meaning-making and reinterpretation of symbols related to life, religion, social, and cultural aspects, all of which are interconnected and enrich the meaning of the celebration.

In this study, understanding the symbolic meaning or ritual symbols within the mass pilgrimage tradition (Njalang) involves examining the practical significance of how information about observed ritual behaviors is communicated to the local community. It is essential to distinguish between information provided by ordinary informants and professional informants. In this cultural context, local traditional leaders, who are respected and revered, provide information as representatives rather than personal interpreters.

According to symbolic interactionism theory, which refers to rituals, the awareness gained from interpreting symbols in relation to other symbols as a whole impacts one's understanding of cultural symbols. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes social interaction, the debate over definitions, and the roles that individuals take on. Blumer posits that humans form "meanings" in two ways: (1) Meaning is attributed to objects, events, phenomena, etc., and (2) Meaning is the "physical attachment" that humans place on events and objects (Hernandez, 2024). Social action begins with internal impulses involving perception, presentation of meaning, mental repetition, consideration of alternatives, and refinement, which results in meaning for the

communicator. Previous literature suggests that the motivation behind pilgrims participating in the pilgrimage arises from intrinsic spiritual values.

Blumer, as cited in Dülek (2023) outlines several core ideas of symbolic interactionism relevant to the Mass Pilgrimage Tradition (Njalang). These include the notion that society comprises individuals who interact, with their actions aligning through joint activities in the Mass Pilgrimage, thus forming the social structure of the Marga Nasal community. Interaction encompasses various activities, including pre-pilgrimage preparations (meetings, communal work) and the actual pilgrimage. Actions are interrelated, such as collective prayers, which serve as a medium to reflect on death and seek forgiveness from God for deceased family members as an act of devotion. These practices, repeated by group members, eventually give rise to cultural norms.

The application of Blumer's symbolic interactionism theory in the context of the pilgrimage tradition of the Marga Nasal community in Kaur Regency offers a deep perspective on the dynamics of religious meaning formation and experience. This theory emphasizes the significance of symbols and social interactions in understanding how the pilgrimage tradition not only preserves religious and cultural identity but also serves as a space where individuals in the community can express and modify these meanings.

Firstly, symbolic interactionism asserts that meanings are not inherent in symbols themselves but are assigned by individuals through social interaction. In the context of the Marga Nasal pilgrimage, symbols such as sacred places, rituals, and religious objects become focal points for individuals to interpret and respond to their spirituality. According to Blumer, individuals do not passively accept these symbols; rather, they actively modify and reconstruct meanings based on their experiences and interactions with others in the community.

Secondly, the theory highlights the importance of the interpretive process in shaping social reality. In the context of the pilgrimage, the practice not only upholds religious and cultural identity but also serves as a medium through which individuals continuously interpret and reflect on their beliefs. For instance, through interactions with fellow pilgrims and religious leaders, individuals can expand their understanding of the religious values embedded in the pilgrimage practice and adapt these meanings to their social and spiritual contexts.

Furthermore, symbolic interactionism underscores the importance of social context in meaning formation. It suggests that the context in which interactions occur plays a crucial role in how symbols are understood and how meanings are negotiated. In the case of the Marga Nasal pilgrimage, the communal nature of the ritual, combined with the specific cultural and religious context, shapes how individuals experience and interpret the pilgrimage, thereby reinforcing and evolving their spiritual and cultural identities..

In the Marga Nasal community, where pilgrimage is an integral part of religious and social life, the meanings associated with pilgrimage practices are influenced not only by individual beliefs but also by the prevailing norms, values, and social structures within the society. Symbolic

interactionism allows us to understand how these practices are not only preserved but also evolve in response to the ever-changing social dynamics.

The application of Blumer's symbolic interactionism theory helps us delve deeper into the understanding of religious practices such as pilgrimage, and also explores the complexity of social and spiritual relationships within the Marga Nasal community. This approach enables us to comprehend how meanings in pilgrimage practices are formed, maintained, and interpreted by individuals within their respective contexts. Furthermore, it sheds light on how these practices are integrated into broader religious and cultural identities.

By applying this theory, we gain insight into the ongoing negotiation of meanings in pilgrimage practices, how they adapt to social changes, and how they contribute to the reinforcement and evolution of spiritual and cultural identities within the community. Thus, symbolic interactionism provides a framework for examining the intricate interplay between individual interpretations and collective social experiences in shaping and sustaining religious traditions.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it is evident that the mass pilgrimage tradition of Njalang in Marga Nasal, Kaur Regency, is deeply ingrained with cultural and religious values. This tradition is not merely a ritualistic practice to honor deceased family members but is also a significant aspect of the community's cultural heritage. It involves pre-ceremony activities such as social service at the Public Cemetery (TPU) and promotes social solidarity through communal efforts. The Marga Nasal community imbues this tradition with profound meaning, viewing it as a crucial social reality that must be preserved. Furthermore, the Njalang pilgrimage is recognized as a collective event that fosters unity and preparation among community members during the second day of Idul Fitri in Syawal. It serves multiple roles, including spiritual enrichment, relationship strengthening, cultural preservation, and even cultural tourism. Thus, the study highlights that the Njalang tradition holds substantial relevance in the social, cultural, and spiritual spheres of the Marga Nasal community, evolving continuously as an integral part of their identity and communal life.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing,

without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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