

Diterima: [Mei 10, 2026]

Direvisi: [Mei 30, 2026]

Diterbitkan: [Juni 29, 2026]

Article type: [Research Article] | Subject area: [Cultural Communication] | Running title: [Ngunjung Cultural Communication & Cohesion]

NGUNJUNG CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AS A SOCIAL-POLITICAL PRACTICE: TRADITION, RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY, AND COMMUNITY COHESION IN INDRAMAYU

Indah Muina Hermawati¹, Dhini Ardianti²

¹Communication Science Study Program / Universitas Pasundan / indahmhermawati00@gmail.com

²Communication Science Study Program / Universitas Pasundan / dhini.ardianti@unpas.ac.id

*Corresponding author: dhini.ardianti@unpas.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Culture and communication are closely intertwined. Traditions handed down through generations must be safeguarded to ensure they are not lost to the passage of time. This study examines the communication situation, events, and actions within the Ngunjung culture. The research was conducted in Bongas District, Indramayu Regency, West Java, with a focus on the traditional Ngunjung ceremony. The study employed an ethnographic approach to communication, using qualitative methodology. Data collection methods included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The analysis was qualitative and inductive, emphasising the meaning behind generalisations. Triangulation techniques were utilised to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings. The findings revealed that the communication situation in Ngunjung culture is both sacred and celebratory. It is sacred because the traditional ceremonies are deeply rooted in Islamic beliefs, incorporating religious activities. Simultaneously, it is celebratory as the Bongas community also arranges traditional entertainment, such as skits, alongside pilgrimages. The communication events in Ngunjung culture are based on the historical narratives of Karmi's great-grandmother and Warji's great-grandfather, who were descendants of Sunan Gunung Jati. These figures were instrumental in imparting religious knowledge and were regarded as the oldest and most respected individuals in the Bongas region. Communication within Ngunjung culture encompasses both verbal and non-verbal forms. Verbal communication is evident in activities such as the tahlil akbar and tahlil during the Ngunjung ceremonies. Non-verbal communication is observed in the presence of tumpeng during the traditional ceremony.

Keywords: Communication, Ngunjung Culture, Ethnography, Cultural Heritage, Indramayu West Java

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23969/paradigmapolistaat.v9i2.47837>

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RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

[Analyzes Ngunjung ritual via ethnography of communication framework.]

I. INTRODUCTION

Ngunjung is a traditional ceremony observed by the people of West Java, particularly in Indramayu, Cirebon, and the surrounding regions. Also referred to as Munjung, the term originates from the word "datang," which signifies visiting the graves of ancestors or parents as an expression of gratitude. Etymologically, Ngunjung translates to "welcoming new shoots with respect." This tradition is typically conducted in September, coinciding with the planting season, or during the months of Syuro and Mulud. It is held following the rice harvest and is accompanied by various regional art forms, such as wayang kulit (shadow puppetry) and

dramatic performances. The primary objectives of this ceremony are to preserve cultural heritage and promote the safety and well-being of the community.

Participants traditionally bring tumpeng rice and other regional dishes to the event, which is held at the graves of ancestors and religious figures. A notable aspect of the Ngunjung ceremony in the Bongas community is its suitability for ethnographic research. This involves examining the events, contexts, and communicative practices within the cultural framework. The ethnography of communication, a concept introduced by Dell Hymes in 1962, explores the role of language in the communicative behaviour of societies with diverse cultural backgrounds. It provides valuable insights into how language is utilised in cultural traditions and practices.

Cultural communication within a multicultural society, such as in Bongas District, presents a compelling area of study. The Ngunjung culture embodies significant cultural values that enable the residents of Bongas District in Indramayu Regency to coexist harmoniously, despite their diverse cultural backgrounds. This research will concentrate on "Ngunjung Cultural Communication in Bongas District, Indramayu Regency, West Java."

Culture and communication are deeply interconnected. Intercultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall famously stated, "Culture is communication" and "Communication is culture." These two concepts are inseparable, much like two sides of the same coin. Culture influences communication behaviours, while communication serves to define, sustain, develop, and transmit culture. In the field of cultural studies, language is recognised as a fundamental element. It is considered as significant as other cultural components, such as knowledge, livelihoods, customs, arts, and systems of life equipment.

Culture refers to the understanding of the perspectives of a complex nation or an interconnected community. It encompasses knowledge, beliefs, morals, laws, arts, customs, norms, and traditions shared among its members. These perspectives are often preserved in rural areas where the cultural heritage of ancestors is highly valued. A more comprehensive definition of culture is provided by Lawless (Saifuddin, 2006: 87). He defines culture as patterns of behaviour and beliefs, conveyed through symbols, which are learned, rational, integrated, shared, and adaptable. The existence and evolution of culture are dependent on human social interaction.

Culture is transmitted across generations, preserved and maintained to ensure it does not diminish over time. Every individual inherits cultural beliefs from the past, and our surroundings are enriched with cultural elements passed down from previous generations (Abdullayev Shafahat, 2020). As social beings, human interaction is essential, and communication plays a pivotal role in facilitating this. Culture is intrinsically linked to local wisdom, which forms an integral part of a community's social culture and language. Local wisdom is frequently conveyed orally from one generation to the next. A notable example is the Ngunjung ceremony, a distinctive and significant tradition. During this event, members of the community gather at a grave, bringing tumpeng (a cone-shaped rice dish) accompanied by various foods such as roast chicken and fruits. The community unites to offer prayers for their ancestors, often inviting religious figures to lead the prayers, including tahlil prayers for their late great-grandparents. Following the prayers, the tumpeng, fruits, and other offerings are distributed among the committee and, frequently, to those in need who are present at the event. The Ngunjung ceremony fosters significant communication and interaction within the community. Communication, in essence, is the process of transmitting ideas, aspirations, and messages through specific symbols and meanings. It is initiated by the communicator and directed towards the recipient. However, miscommunication can occur, often due to cultural differences that lead to misinterpretation. To minimise misunderstandings, communicators must ensure their messages

are clear and effectively delivered. Equally, recipients play a vital role in achieving effective communication by accurately interpreting the conveyed message.

Communication, as described by Ansawir and Basyirudin Ustman, is not merely the exchange of information and messages. It is also an activity through which individuals and groups share data, facts, and ideas. For communication to be effective, the communicator must ensure that the information is conveyed clearly and is easy to understand. This requires establishing a well-structured communication pattern. (Ansawir and Basyirudin Ustman, 2002). When engaging with others, individuals have varying goals, needs, and methods of socialising or understanding one another. Addressing these differences is essential to fostering positive interactions and ensuring mutual success. As social beings, humans cannot exist in isolation or fulfil all their needs independently. Therefore, forming and maintaining social relationships is vital, as it enables individuals to support and assist one another in meeting their diverse needs.

Humans are inherently social beings, created to connect and interact with one another from the moment of birth. Communication is a fundamental necessity for every individual, as it facilitates interaction and prevents isolation. Koentjaraningrat (2005: 72) defines culture as "the entire system of ideas, feelings, actions, and works produced by humans in community life, which are learned and made their own." The traditional culture of "Ngunjung" serves as an example. This custom did not emerge spontaneously but rather evolved through a process of learning, followed by actions and works created by individuals within their community. The "Ngunjung" tradition has endured to the present day due to deliberate efforts to preserve cultural interaction. This is achieved by communicating its significance while upholding its inherent values, norms, and objectives. To be communicative is to possess the ability to connect with others in a manner that is clear and comprehensible. It emphasises the function and rules of language, which serve to guide speech. Communicative ability is characterised by its dynamic, contextual, and relative nature (Krasen, 1988).

This paper is based on fieldwork conducted in several villages within Bongas District, Indramayu Regency. It examines a community that continues to adhere to cultural traditions passed down through generations. The research was focused on Bongas District due to the community's strong commitment to preserving their long-standing cultural practices. This is particularly evident in their ancestral worship rituals, such as the Ngunjung ceremony, which is performed in accordance with the teachings of their predecessors. The residents of Bongas District maintain a profound connection to their cultural heritage. They regard ceremonies as a vital aspect of their daily lives. While they have embraced Islam in their everyday practices, they continue to uphold the distinctiveness of their traditional customs to this day.

The Bongas community demonstrates their belief in God through traditional practices, including ceremonies and prayer rituals. They engage in syncretism, which involves blending elements of religion without compromising the fundamental principles of each (Mulder, 1999: 3). In Bongas, Islamic teachings are integrated with deeply rooted traditions, resulting in distinctive beliefs that are reflected in their ceremonies. These traditional ceremonies are communal activities that unite individuals to achieve collective objectives. They also act as a medium for imparting essential life values and fostering social cohesion. Goldschmidt notes that traditional ceremonies are intrinsically linked to a community's customs. They serve to validate beliefs and convey them to the wider community (Goldschmidt in Ramdam, 2001: 2). The Bongas community demonstrates a profound commitment to their religion. They remain devoted to their faith while preserving enduring traditions, such as the Ngunjung ceremony.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative approach, employing an ethnographic method grounded in the philosophy of postpositivism. It investigates natural conditions (naturalistic), with the researcher serving as the primary instrument. Data collection is conducted through a combination of techniques (triangulation), and the analysis is both inductive and qualitative, prioritising the interpretation of meaning over generalisation. The study emphasises the normality of the phenomena under examination, as outlined by Duranti (1997). Additionally, it incorporates the perspectives of Spradley (1997) and Strauss & Corbin (1990) to delve into the local wisdom values inherent in the ngunjung culture. The research centres on traditional rituals and the ethnographic values embedded within the ngunjung culture. Data is obtained through observation, in-depth interviews regarding ngunjung cultural practices, and field notes documenting traditional phenomena observed during the study.

The interpretive paradigm forms the foundation of this research. Rahardjo (2018) describes this paradigm as one that perceives social reality as holistic and interconnected, complex and dynamic, rich in meaning, with relationships that are reciprocal rather than causal. This paradigm regards humans as conscious beings who act with intention. Through their intellect, humans can create and understand concepts, placing them in a distinct position compared to other living beings. According to the interpretive paradigm, human actions are deliberate and arise from thought, interpretation, and meaning. Every action or outcome is rooted in what an individual thinks, feels, and interprets. The primary aim of this paradigm is to uncover hidden meanings to gain a deeper understanding of societal life and behaviour. Surface appearances may not always reflect the underlying reality, and the interpretive paradigm enables researchers to delve beyond what is immediately visible.

In this study, the interpretive paradigm is employed to examine the meaning of the ngunjung custom. This is achieved by exploring the experiences and perspectives of individuals who are knowledgeable about the ngunjung ritual.

The individuals who contributed information for this study acted as representatives of the community. They possessed a thorough understanding of the cultural atmosphere, were aligned with the community's values, and served as spokespersons. In essence, they were resource persons with knowledge and data relevant to the case or research subject. This study included seven participants: members of the Indramayu community, the Village Head, the caretaker (Kuncen) of the Tomb, representatives of the committee, cultural figures, religious figures, academics (students and lecturers). The primary informant was an individual directly involved in the ngunjung culture. This group comprised individuals with various roles, such as members of the ngunjung event committee, the Kuncen, religious figures, and the Village Head. Expert informants were categorised into two groups: (1) practitioners: a cultural figure from Indramayu who had a deep understanding of the significance of each event during the ngunjung cultural ceremony; (2) academics: researchers originating from Bongas District, Indramayu Regency, the location where this study was conducted. Additionally, supporting informants included individuals who observed the traditional ngunjung ceremony and participated in its processions.

This research focuses on the traditional Ngunjung cultural ceremony, employing ethnographic communication methods. The researcher aims to explore and analyse this ceremony, which continues to be preserved to the present day. The study investigates the communication processes within the Ngunjung cultural ceremony, including the situations, events, and acts of communication. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings, direct observation has been conducted.

Bongas is a sub-district located in Indramayu Regency, West Java, and shares boundaries with five neighbouring sub-districts, are patrol Sub-district to the north, Kandanghaur and Gabus Wetan Sub-districts to the east, Anjatan Sub-district to the west, Kroya Sub-district to the south. The establishment of Bongas as a sub-district was formalised on 5th May 1981, in accordance with Government Regulation Number 13 of 1981, which outlined its formation within Indramayu Regency. At present, Bongas comprises eight villages: (1) Bongas, (2) Cipaas, (3) Cipedang, (4) Kertajaya, (5) Kertamulya, (6) Margamulya, (7) Plawangan, (8) Sidamulya. The current population of Bongas is recorded as 51,421 residents.

Indramayu Regency is situated in West Java Province, Indonesia, with its administrative capital in Indramayu. Geographically, it is located between 107°52'-108°36' East Longitude and 6°15'-6°40' South Latitude. According to the Indramayu Regency Statistics Office, the regency spans an area of 2,099 km². The boundaries of Indramayu Regency are as follows: to the west, it borders Subang Regency, to the east, it is bordered by the Java Sea and Cirebon Regency, to the south, it shares borders with Sumedang Regency, Majalengka Regency, and Cirebon Regency, to the north, it is bordered by the Java Sea along the northern coastline.

Indramayu Regency boasts the longest coastline in West Java Province, extending 114 km along the northern coast. Additionally, it encompasses three small islands: Gosong Island, Cendikian Island, and Biawak Island. Administratively, the regency is divided into 31 sub-districts. The origin of Indramayu Regency, as narrated in Babad Dermayu, begins with Raden Aria Wiralodra, the first resident of the area. He hailed from Bagelen, a sub-district in Purworejo Regency, Central Java.

Raden Aria Wiralodra undertook three years of meditation at the foot of Mount Sumbing. Following this, he journeyed westward, accompanied by his primary weapon, the cakra undaksana, and his companion, Ki Tinggil. Together, they carried weapons and provisions in search of the Cimanuk River.

One evening, they stopped by a river, believing it to be the Cimanuk. The following morning, an elderly man appeared, reprimanded them, and inquired about their destination. Upon hearing their explanation, the man informed them that they were at the wrong river and needed to proceed northeast. The man, identified as Ki Buyut Sidum, then vanished. Ki Sidum is recognised as a historical figure from Pajajaran, who lived between 1474 and 1513. After several days of travel, they encountered a large river. While Wiralodra hoped it was the Cimanuk, a voice informed him that it was the Cipunegara River. The voice, attributed to Ki Sidum, instructed him to continue eastward and to follow a diamond-eyed deer when he encountered one, as it would lead him to the Cimanuk River. During their journey, they met a woman named Dewi Larawana, who insisted that Wiralodra marry her. Upon his refusal, she attacked him. Wiralodra defended himself using his chakra, causing Dewi Larawana to transform into a deer. He pursued the deer eastward until it disappeared near a large river. Exhausted, Wiralodra fell asleep and dreamt of Ki Sidum, who revealed that this was the Cimanuk Forest, where a settlement would eventually be established. Wiralodra and Ki Tinggil constructed a hut and began cultivating the land near the Cimanuk River. Over time, the settlement grew as more people joined them. Among the settlers was a skilled woman named Nyi Endang Darma Ayu. Wiralodra challenged her to a contest of abilities, and although she was highly skilled, he ultimately defeated her. She then submerged herself in the Cimanuk River and conceded defeat. Before departing, Nyi Endang Darma Ayu requested that the village be named after her, in recognition of her contributions to its development. Initially, the village was named "Darma Ayu" in her honour, but it was later renamed "Indramayu." According to historical research, the

village of Darma Ayu was established on Friday Kliwon, 1 Sura 1448, or 9 Muharam 934 H, which corresponds to 7 October 1527.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Ngunjung traditional ceremony holds significant importance for the Bongas Indramayu community and is a highly anticipated annual event. This tradition primarily involves visiting or making a pilgrimage to graves, accompanied by prayer rituals. These prayers are often recited in Arabic, with specific ceremonial tools utilised to complete the ritual. As part of the tradition, the community gathers to prepare tumpeng rice, chicken bakakak, and an assortment of foods and fruits, which are then brought to the graves. The term "Ngunjung" or "munjung" is derived from the word "kunjung," meaning to visit the graves of ancestors or parents. This practice symbolises a deep respect for their contributions during their lifetimes and serves as an expression of collective gratitude by the community.



Figure 1. Bongas Community at the Ngunjung Event
(Source: Research Result, 2022)

As conveyed by the cultural informant, Nang Sadewo, Ngunjung is a tradition of visiting or making a pilgrimage to honour and commemorate parents or ancestors. This is emphasised by the statement of Tariloh, the caretaker of TPU Bongas cemetery, who remarked, "As the Arabs say, we come to visit, to be present, and to pray at the grave." The primary purpose of ngunjung is to strengthen familial bonds and to pay tribute to the contributions of ancestors. As explained by Ade Sutanto, the chairman of the Ngunjung committee, the central aim of ngunjung is to offer prayers for the deceased. This includes reciting prayers, such as Al-Fatihah, for those who have passed away, so they may attain peace. Furthermore, ngunjung serves as an opportunity for families to unite and collectively pray for their departed loved ones.

Before the Ngunjung ceremony takes place, preparations commence a month in advance. The village government organises a committee to oversee the arrangements. The process is as follows: (1) The village government establishes a committee comprising representatives from each block and determines the date for the ceremony; (2) RT (Role of the Neighbourhood Association) communicates the details of the ceremony, including the day, month, and date, to the caretakers and the community during a weekly meeting held at the security post; (3) The caretaker is responsible for informing the community and making the necessary preparations for the activities or events on the evening prior to the ceremony; (4) At 6 am on the day of the ceremony, members of the community assemble at the TPU. Those residing near the graves walk to the burial sites of their parents or relatives, carrying tumpeng wrapped in tapih or batik cloth, while others may use tablecloths. They bring items such as fruits, beverages, coffee, and mats to sit on while reciting tahlil prayers for the deceased. Upon arrival at the graves, families arrange the tumpeng next to the grave, placing it alongside the obligatory offerings required for the visit. Family members then sit together, awaiting the commencement of the tahlil prayers.



Figure 2. Placing Tumpeng beside the grave
(Source: Research Result, 2022)

Covering the grave with a cloth symbolises tranquillity, akin to the use of an umbrella during prayers. It signifies the universal human desire for peace, achieved through acts of worship that provide solace and accompany individuals after death, whether in the grave or the barzah realm. Once the grave is draped with a tapih cloth, the tahlil prayer commences.



Figure 3. Cover the grave with Tampah
(Source: Research Result, 2022)

When offering prayers at the grave, led by a religious figure invited by the family, the process adheres to a structured sequence, resembling the traditional tahlil prayer. The sequence is as follows: (1) it begins with Bismillah, followed by an introduction to Al-Fatihah, and then the recitation of Al-Fatihah; (2) this is followed by tahlil and takbir, the recitation of Surah Al-Falaq, another round of tahlil and takbir, and the recitation of Surah An-Nas; (3) further recitations include another round of tahlil and takbir, Surah Al-Fatihah, the beginning of Surah Al-Baqarah, Surah Al-Baqarah verse 163, Ayat al-Kursi (Surah Al-Baqarah verse 255), and Surah Al-Baqarah verses 284-286.

Upon completing Surah Al-Baqarah, the recitation proceeds with Surah Hud verse 73, Surah Al-Ahzab verse 33 and verse 56, the Prophet's blessings are recited three times, followed by greetings to the Prophet, Surah Al-Imran verse 173 and Surah Al-Anfal verse 40 are then recited.

The next steps include reciting hauqalah and istighfar three times, reading a hadith on the virtues of tahlil, followed by the recitation of tahlil 160 times, reciting the two sentences of the shahada, the tahlil prayer, solawat tahlil, and a prayer for the goodness of both the inner and outer body. The prayers continue with a prayer for the blessings of the Quran and a wahabah prayer for the companions of Allah's apostles and saints, prayers for the spirits of the inhabitants of the tombs of Mualla, Syubaikah, and Baqi', a prayer asking for the blessings of the Quran, a prayer for the serenity of the grave's occupant, and a prayer seeking intercession from the Quran.

The sequence concludes with an introductory prayer for the grave's occupant, a prayer for the spaciousness of the grave, and a prayer for the deceased, a pilgrimage prayer, a prayer to remember the Quran, and a prayer seeking the pleasure of Allah SWT.



Figure 4. Tahlil prayer at the Grave
(Source: Research Result, 2022)

Following the completion of the tahlil prayer, the subsequent step involves sprinkling seven coloured flowers and pouring the water, which has been blessed during the tahlil, onto the grave. This process begins at the head of the grave, moving from north to south, and then returning to the north. The act of sprinkling the blessed water serves to provide comfort to the deceased or ancestral spirits in the barzah realm. This realm is understood to be the intermediary space between the afterlife and the earthly world.

A theatrical, also referred to as a drama (originating from Javanese), is a form of storytelling designed primarily for performance rather than reading. A written play constitutes a literary work composed of dialogue between characters, structured within a sequence of events. Conversely, unwritten plays are typically derived from well-known stories and generally provide only an outline of the plot and characters. Within Ngunjung Culture, the narratives often centre on the historical aspects of the culture. Furthermore, performers may depict the story of Sangkakala – a malevolent figure who seeks to claim lives or demand sacrifices. This tale is a customary feature of the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony.



Figure 5. Theatrical
(Source: Research Result, 2022)

Communication Situation in Ngunjung Culture

The communication situation in the Ngunjung Culture shows the conditions that occur during the implementation of the Ngunjung traditional ritual. For the Bongas community, Ngunjung has a very important meaning, making this Ngunjung Culture a very sacred ritual. The timing and location of communication activities can vary depending on the circumstances. For the Ngunjung traditional ceremony, while the time and place may differ, it is always conducted during the month of Maulud. This is since many villages have two or more public cemeteries. To avoid scheduling conflicts, the village government organises the Ngunjung ceremony activities accordingly. As stated by the Head of Bongas Village, ceremonies in different blocks are not

conducted on the same day. A time gap is maintained between them as the same committee is responsible for organising the events. This was further confirmed by the caretaker of the Bongas public cemetery.

"Ntas panen sadon, kula kuh ngutunge ning wulan jawa, kien kih wulan Kapit, terus Rayagung, Sura, Bala, setiap tahun ning Mulud, karena wong tani durung panen, nah bokat wis panen ria-riaan, ngunjunge ning wulan Mulud, (Tariloh, 2022)" (After the sadon harvest, I count it in the Javanese month, now it's the kapit month, then rayagung, sura, bala, every year (it is held) in the Mulud month, because the farmers have not harvested, so it is held when the harvest has been done, the visit is in the Mulud month (Tariloh, 2022))"

Prior to the Ngunjung ceremony, the kuncen's hajat is conducted on the evening before the event. This involves offering prayers. Families of the deceased, whose ancestors are interred in the TPU, provide food for the kuncen and his team as a token of appreciation for their prayers and for remaining awake at the gravesite. The act of staying awake throughout the night, referred to as melekan, is undertaken to ensure the completion of the necessary preparations, as described by Tariloh, the kuncen.

"Yang pertama hajate kuncen, bengine ngeprakena, nanti dari keluarga ngupaih makanan untuk kita-kita nanti di ikrarkan doa, misalnya esuke di ikrarna di dua kali mangga (Tariloh, 2022)" (The first is the caretaker's wish, in the evening the caretaker's wish is arranged, later the family will provide us with food, then a prayer will be said, for example in the morning it is said, so two mangoes (Tariloh, 2022))

The Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony is carried out with strong customs and Islamic nuances, these activities include tahlil, reciting the Koran and reading the Yasin letter, which is carried out at the kuncen's event, namely the night before the D-day, or when the Ngunjung Ritual takes place, this is a form of gratitude expressed to Allah SWT. and to send prayers to ancestors who have passed away first.

In addition to the primary pilgrimage event, an art exhibition is also held, featuring traditional arts from the Indramayu region. These cultural performances, such as drama, are carefully preserved by local artists. The purpose of this event is to provide entertainment for pilgrims and to enhance the atmosphere of the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony, which is conducted annually. This information was conveyed by Mr Ade, the chairman of the Ngunjung Culture Committee.

"First, it only entertains visitors who come, actually the entertainment is not the main thing, because last year there was no entertainment because of Covid, but because of the togetherness, there was entertainment that was there to entertain and sometimes the stories in the drama performances provide insight when visiting how to do it, where the customs come from like that (Ade Sutanto, 2022)"

The Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony: Communication and Process

The communication process during the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony may evolve over time, but the location remains constant. The schedule for the ceremony is determined by the village government to maintain public order, with time blocks allocated in rotation. The ceremony is conducted during the month of Mulud at the Public Cemetery (TPU) within the

respective village and block in Bongas District. During the ceremony, the kuncen (caretaker) and religious leader serve as the primary communicators, delivering messages to the community and attendees present at the event. The community and audience, who observe the ceremony in person, act as the communicants. Messages are conveyed by religious leaders through activities such as tahlil (religious recitation) and prayers, which are forms of verbal communication as they involve spoken language. Additionally, the rituals performed during the Ngunjung pilgrimage constitute nonverbal communication, as they rely on symbolic actions rather than words.

The message conveyed in this ritual is delivered by a communicator to a recipient through the use of symbols as a medium. The communication approach in the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony is primarily direct, with the communicator employing both verbal and non-verbal symbols to express the message. Insights from interviews indicate that the cultural communication context of the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony is characterised by its sacredness and celebratory nature.

Communication Events in Ngunjung Culture

The Ngunjung traditional ceremony serves as a pilgrimage, reminding us of the inevitability of death. It encourages individuals to remain devoted and to prepare themselves for the afterlife. This understanding is historically supported by an interview with Abdul Wahid, "The Ngunjung tradition is observed only in specific districts. Within Indramayu Regency, not all areas practise Ngunjung. Based on available information, Ngunjung is primarily conducted in the Bongas Blok District, particularly in Sabrang Wetan, Kertajaya Village. The origins of the Ngunjung tradition can be traced back to the ancestors of the late great-grandfather Warji and great-grandfather Karmi. Initially, it was a private family gathering held to honour the deceased, where people would visit to pay their respects. Over time, this practice developed into a tradition and eventually became an annual event, typically held after the harvest season in October. Historical accounts suggest that the first Ngunjung event was organised by the family of great-grandfather Warji and great-grandmother Karmi. Their tomb, recognised as the oldest in the village, continues to be maintained by their family and descendants. It is believed that their lineage may be connected to Waliyullah Sunan Gunung Jati. However, to substantiate this claim, a detailed verification of the family's ancestry would be required. According to family records, their lineage has been traced back to Sunan Gunung Jati Syarif Hidayatullah."

Ngunjung is a traditional ceremony that has been preserved through generations. It originated with the great-grandfather Warji and Buyut Karmi, who initiated the practice of visiting the tomb. Warji, as the eldest individual in the village and a descendant of Sunan Gunung Jati (Syarif Hidayatullah), encouraged others in the community to participate in this tradition. The Ngunjung ceremony serves a dual purpose: it is both a pilgrimage and a means of safeguarding cultural heritage. Following the completion of the Ngunjung ceremony, traditional performances such as wayang (a form of traditional art drama) are conducted. As Sutrisno, an academic, elaborates: "Wayang performances, drama, tarling, and tahlilan are integral to the tradition. The wayang narrative often features Sangkakala, a malevolent character who seeks to claim lives or demand sacrifices. This is a customary element of the Ngunjung tradition."

Likewise, according to Ade Sutanto as the Head of the Ngunjung Committee: "The entertainment that was there to entertain also sometimes provides insight into how Ngunjung is done, its customs, where it comes from." According to Nang Sadewo, as the Core Informant, he said that "Visiting respects and honors parents or ancestors, related to the concept of life in human life, visiting is part of respect or rituals for death or after death because the object is the burial site of ancestors or respected people, the first is how this visiting tradition actually occurs

and becomes a cultural phenomenon in society and we must also see this from various sides, the first is the spiritual power of the spirit of the community's own belief in their history, especially in the closest environment, for example, we must realize that when we are born, it means there are previous people who are intermediaries for us to be born in the world or live this life to be the basis that parents also have parents again, We are born from a pair of parents, namely mother and father, father and mother from a pair of grandfather and grandmother, grandfather and grandmother come from great-grandparents, great-grandparents need a pair of cangga, cangga needs a pair of wareng, udeg-udeg needs a pair of petarangan bodol, petarangan bodol needs a pair of gantung siwur and so on, well this is the concept of how life really is, the flow of paths and provisions of how life actually takes place is through a very long process. This tradition of visiting is included in the ritual activities in the Law on the Advancement of Culture, one of the main ideas of culture is rites and visiting is included in the ritual activities themselves, an activity that is connected with religiosity, a pattern of thinking about spirituality (Nang Sadewo, 2022)"

This shows that Ngunjung is a tradition that must be maintained, as conveyed by the Head of Bongas Village, Kadir, that "The form of the tradition of visiting the origins of the village needs to be maintained, the name of the tradition should not be eliminated, because in this day and age these traditions are starting to become extinct due to the advanced technology of the era, because it is a legacy from our ancestors, before the arrival of Islam, this tradition already existed so we need to maintain and preserve it." Ade Sutanto, a key informant, explained that Ngunjung is a cultural tradition observed in the communities of Indramayu, Majalengka, Cirebon, and surrounding areas. The primary purpose of Ngunjung is to preserve cultural heritage while paying respect to ancestors and parents who have passed away. This involves visiting graves, offering prayers, and bringing offerings such as tumpeng rice and other food to be shared with family members. The tradition is typically carried out following the harvest season. Tariloh, speaking in the local language, described Ngunjung as: "Visiting graves, bringing tumpeng, offering prayers for ancestors and parents, accompanied by entertainment such as plays, evening prayers, and a communal feast the following morning." Abdul Wahid further elaborated that Ngunjung is a significant traditional event in Indramayu Regency, particularly in Bongas District, Kertajaya Village. It is generally held annually. Prior to the Ngunjung tradition, a similar event known as Unjungan often takes place, which is comparable to visiting graves as described by Nahdatul Ulama.

There are differing views on the Ngunjung tradition, particularly among those unfamiliar with it. In 2018, an agreement was reached in the Bongas District. Religious, community, and traditional leaders collaborated to permit the tradition, provided it complied with Islamic principles. This decision was supported by both the government and religious authorities.

The Ngunjung traditional ceremony takes place once a year in the month of Mulud. While the date and time may change, the ceremony itself remains unchanged, as it has been practised since ancient times. The ceremony starts with bringing a tumpeng (a cone-shaped rice dish) to the grave being visited. After that, a religious leader leads a tahlil (a religious offering) ceremony. Once the tahlil is finished, everyone shares a meal either at the gravesite or at home.

The Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony is both sacred and vibrant. It is not solely centred on the pilgrimage (Ngunjung) itself. The ceremony also features artistic performances, such as shadow puppetry and drama, which add a lively and celebratory atmosphere to the event. Through interviews conducted with participants, researchers have gained insights into the various events that form part of the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony. The findings emphasise the significant

role of communication elements within Ngunjung Culture, illustrating how communication is integral to the ceremony.

Communication Acts in the Ngunjung Culture

The final aspect of cultural communication activities is communication acts, which encompass both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. In the Ngunjung culture, these acts include spoken words and nonverbal expressions. For instance, verbal communication is demonstrated when the community gathers to recite prayers on the evening prior to the traditional Ngunjung ceremony. This practice is affirmed by Abdul Wahid, a religious leader in Bongas, Indramayu, who has highlighted its significance.

"The visit was the next day, before that night there was a grand tahlil, which was also attended by the village head, related agencies, and thank God the sub-district head was also present and participated in the joint prayer or grand tahlil, that was the night before the event, then the next day there was also another one when before the disbandment there were people going to the mobile graves to pray, for those of their families who could do the tahlil, for those of their families who could read the Yasin letter, the purpose of the activity was to send prayers."

In addition to the Tahlil Akbar held in the evening, the community engages in verbal communication during prayers by reciting the Yasin letter and the Tahlil in the morning. This takes place following the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremonies, as stated by Ade Sutanto, the Chair of the Committee:

"Early that morning, the residents, the community had been preparing chicken, tumpeng, fruit, drinks, basically everything, and then there was the reading of prayers, Yasin, tahlil, from there the event sometimes included eating together there, after reading the prayers, the tahlil was finished."

The Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony incorporates both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. A notable example of non-verbal communication is the practice of covering the grave with a batik cloth, referred to locally in Indramayu as "tapih." This tradition symbolises offering shade and protection in both this world and the afterlife, as described by Tariloh, the Kuncen (caretaker).

"Artine anggo adem-adem bae, ari ng kene mah umum, wong mati ng dunia kah di payungi sebenere mah ning dunya kih nok menurut pengetahuan besuk mah kita lagi urup kuh luruh adem-adem kanggo besuk balik kuen mah dalil kiase kuh", The batik covering cloth symbolises the act of providing shade. For the Bongas people, shading the deceased signifies the belief that life in this world is transient, and all individuals will eventually pass away. As part of the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony, the community is required to bring tumpeng as an offering. This is done as an expression of gratitude. The term "tumpeng" is derived from the abbreviation "tutug lempeng," which translates to "complete and straight intentions." This interpretation is consistent with the explanation provided by Nang Sadewo, a Cultural Expert, who stated that offerings are a symbolic gesture of gratitude, with "tutug lempeng" representing pure and sincere intentions (Nang Sadewo, 2022).

Overall, the Ngunjung culture is a traditional ritual of visiting graves, offering prayers to honor and glorify parents or ancestors. Ngunjung culture encompasses communication activities that can be studied using communication ethnography. To examine these communication activities, it is necessary to analyze the communication units, including communication situations, communication events, and communication acts. The following is an explanatory discussion:

(1) *Communication Situation*

Communication occurs in various settings, such as ceremonies, outdoor learning, lectures, social gatherings, and formal events. These settings may differ depending on the location, time, and nature of the activities involved. In the context of the Ngunjung Culture, the communication setting is characterised by solemnity, sacredness, and festivity. The Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony is an annual event, consistently held at the same location, although the timing may vary. Traditionally, it takes place during the month of Mulud, coinciding with the conclusion of the rice harvest season, and is always conducted at the cemetery. While the specific date may be adjusted by the village authorities, the location – the cemetery – remains unaltered. The ceremony holds a sacred significance as it is dedicated to honouring ancestors and deceased parents who are remembered for their virtuous deeds. The activities include religious observances such as tahlil, the recitation of Yasin, and communal meals held on the evening prior to and the morning of the event. In addition to its solemn and sacred aspects, the Ngunjung Ceremony is also a vibrant occasion. For the residents of Bongas District, it is akin to a traditional celebration. Alongside the primary event, which is the pilgrimage to the tomb, there are various entertainment activities, including wayang performances, theatrical plays, and a food bazaar. This event not only draws the local community but also attracts visitors from other regions who come to participate and enjoy the festivities.

- (2) *Communication Event*, is a set of activities that share the same purpose, topic, and involve people who usually speak the same language in a similar setting. In the Ngunjung Culture, communication events can be recognised by their specific components. Based on interviews and data analysis conducted by researchers, it was discovered that communication events in the Ngunjung Culture include certain communication components: **(a) genre or type of communication event**, Communication within the Ngunjung Culture is regarded as solemn and sacred. It revolves around the village elders, who are considered descendants of Sunan Gunung Jati or Syarif Hidayatullah, specifically Buyut Warji and Buyut Karmi. The Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony is an annual event rooted in the customs of the extended families of Buyut Warji and Buyut Karmi, who frequently undertake pilgrimages together. The primary purpose of this ceremony is to honour the contributions of the ancestors by offering prayers.; **(b) topics of communication events**, The Ngunjung Cultural event aims to highlight the significance of the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony. It is not solely about paying tribute to ancestors but also serves as a medium to impart traditional values and local wisdom to the Bongas community. This is achieved, in part, by narrating the origins of Ngunjung through theatrical performances or shadow puppetry. Such storytelling enables the community to understand its historical roots and derive meaningful lessons from the wisdom embedded in these tales.; **(c) purpose and function**, the *Ngunjung* A traditional ceremony is conducted to honour and commemorate the contributions of ancestors during their lifetimes. In addition to offering prayers for the deceased's family, the Ngunjung ceremony is intended

to recognise the significant contributions of Buyut Warji and Buyut Karmi, esteemed religious figures in Bongas. The Ngunjung tradition serves multiple purposes, including the preservation of historical heritage and the promotion of educational values. **(d) setting or background**, this encompasses the location, timing, season, and other physical elements of the context. The Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony is conducted annually during the month of Mulud, coinciding with the harvest season.; **(e) participant**, The Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony is a significant event that involves the entire Bongas community. Additionally, individuals from neighbouring districts and even from outside the city participate in the ceremony. Many attendees visit to pay their respects or undertake pilgrimages to the graves of their parents and relatives located in the Bongas District TPU. This ceremony is inclusive and welcomes individuals of all ages, including the elderly, adults, teenagers, and children. A dedicated committee is responsible for organising the event. Their duties include collecting a portion of the food from the tumpeng brought by the community after prayers, which is then used for the committee's consumption. Religious leaders hold a pivotal role in the ceremony, as they are tasked with leading the tahlil. This is regarded as the most significant and obligatory aspect of the ritual.; **(f) message form**, This study examined the forms of messages within the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony. The findings revealed that the messages in Ngunjung culture are expressed both verbally and non-verbally. Verbal messages were identified during the tahlil akbar (grand prayer) conducted in the evening and the tahlil performed the following day. These prayers are intended to honour and send blessings to deceased ancestors and parents. Non-verbal messages were observed in the rituals performed before and after the prayers. These include: Covering the grave with a tapih and umbrella prior to the prayer. This act symbolises the pursuit of peace and shade in life. Sprinkling blessed water after the prayer. This is done three times, starting from the north (the head of the grave), moving to the south (the feet), and returning to the north. This ritual is intended to provide coolness to the grave. Finally, flowers are sprinkled on the grave as part of the ceremonial tradition.; **(g) message content** The tradition of visiting graves, referred to as Ngunjung, is an opportunity to pay respects to ancestors, parents, and relatives. According to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, visiting graves is considered a sunnah, as it serves as a profound reminder that death may occur at any time and in any place.; **(h) sequence of actions** Ngunjung is traditionally divided into four key stages: First, on the evening prior to the main day, a grand tahlil (religious gathering) is held. This event is attended by village officials, the sub-district head, the caretaker, and religious leaders. The primary purpose of this gathering is to offer prayers. Second, on the morning of the visit, between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m., a tumpeng (rice cone) is brought and placed beside the grave. The grave is then covered with a tapih (batik fabric) or an umbrella, symbolising the provision of coolness and shade in a natural setting. Third, the central part of the Ngunjung ceremony involves the offering of prayers. This includes activities such as tahlil and the recitation of Yasin, led by religious figures. Although prayers are already offered during the tahlil akbar on the previous evening, the community gathers again to pray on the day of Ngunjung. Last, following the prayers, water that has been blessed is poured over the grave to provide coolness to the deceased or parents. Flowers are then placed on the grave. Finally, food is distributed to the poor in attendance, while the committee also ensures food is available for consumption.; **(i) interaction rules** The Bongas community maintains a strong and harmonious relationship with individuals from outside their region or city. This connection is so well-established that it has never resulted in disputes or social jealousy. The

Bongas community is both diverse and highly enthusiastic. They collaborate effectively and place significant value on family ties. For instance, the Ngunjung activity exemplifies their commitment. The Bongas community is deeply familiar with this event and actively engages in it. They are dedicated to upholding the traditions of their ancestors, ensuring that the primary purpose of the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony – pilgrimage – remains unchanged.

(j) **Interpretive norms** are rules that apply and are believed in by a community living in a particular area. The norms contained in the *Ngunjung* Culture are based on the tolerance, beliefs, and traditions practiced by the Bongas people.

- (3) *Communication action*, is the last component in cultural communication activities. From the results of the interview, The final part of cultural communication in the Ngunjung traditional ceremony involves both non-verbal and verbal communication.

Non-verbal communication: During the ceremony, items like batik cloth (known locally as *tapih*) are used to cover graves. This symbolises providing coolness and peace; an umbrella is also placed, representing the philosophy that life needs peace and coolness, religious leaders oversee the ceremony to ensure it aligns with its original purpose of pilgrimage, water, which has been prayed over during the *tahlil*, is sprinkled on the grave from north to south and back again. This is followed by sprinkling flowers, Once the ritual is complete, participants return to their homes. **Verbal communication:** On the evening before the ceremony, a grand *tahlil* is held. This is a prayer session to honour and send prayers to ancestors, forefathers, parents, and relatives who have passed away. On the day of the ceremony, people visit graves, recite the *Yasin*, and pray for their loved ones with the same purpose of sending prayers. After the ceremony, traditional art performances, such as shadow puppets or humandramas, are presented by local artists.

Dell Hymes, through the Ethnography of Communication approach, identifies three fundamental areas for understanding cultural communication: communication situations, communication events, and communication acts. The Ngunjung tradition is a ceremonial ritual observed by the community to pay homage to their ancestors. This ritual encompasses various activities, including visits to ancestral graves and the recitation of *tahlil* prayers. Its primary purpose is to honour and express gratitude for the contributions of ancestors to the present generation. This tradition has been preserved and passed down through numerous generations. Following the passing of Buyut Warji and Buyut Karmi, their relatives initiated grave pilgrimages, which have since been referred to as Ngunjung by the community. In addition to these pilgrimages, the Bongas community continues to uphold deeply respected customs. These practices are integral to safeguarding their cultural heritage, ensuring its continuity and preventing its decline over time.

Based on the research results, there are unique communication activities found in Ngunjung Culture. The uniqueness of these communication activities is likened to the influence of the sociocultural aspects of the communication participants. In communication, there are many unique, complex, and distinctive communication events that are carried out repeatedly, this is seen in the implementation of the Ngunjung ritual which is carried out every year with the same steps. The communication activities contained in the Ngunjung culture can be seen from the first component, namely the communication situation. The communication situation found in the Ngunjung culture is sacred but still festive. The Ngunjung culture is a ritual of traditional ceremonies, visiting graves and then sending *tahlil* prayers because anything related to religion and culture is very sacred, this activity is filled with religious activities. Several religious activities. Several religious activities are always carried out during the preparation and

implementation of the Ngunjung traditional ritual, including holding a grand tahlil on the eve of the day and tahlil on the day of Ngunjung.

Then, besides being sacred, the communication situation found in the Ngunjung culture is also festive. For the Bongas community, Ngunjung culture is not only a pilgrimage activity but Ngunjung culture is considered a "People's Festival", this can be seen from the implementation of the second component of communication activities, namely communication events. Ngunjung Culture can use 10 communication components. And the last component in Ngunjung cultural communication activities is communication acts in Ngunjung Culture, namely verbal and nonverbal communication. Verbal communication in the Ngunjung Culture is seen in various activities carried out, one of which is the tahlil akbar and tahlil on the day of the Ngunjung activity, this is done to send prayers.

Then in the entertainment event the actors tell stories about the history of Ngunjung, the goal is for the community to always remember the cultural history left by their ancestors. Then the non-verbal communication activities contained in the Ngunjung Culture are seen during the implementation of the Ngunjung Traditional Ceremony, which is carried out with the presence of tumpeng, and sprinkling prayer water on the grave, not merely sprinkling but the Bongas community believes that the water that is sprinkled will provide coolness in the grave. Through this research on Ngunjung cultural communication, it ultimately provides a picture of the true meaning of Ngunjung Cultural communication activities in Bongas District, Indramayu, West Java.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Ngunjung cultural communication tradition in Bongas, Indramayu, is a unique tradition that reflects the local wisdom of the local community. Often associated with pilgrimage ceremonies to ancestral graves or sacred sites, Ngunjung holds profound significance in the social and spiritual life of the Bongas people. This tradition serves as a means of cultural communication that strengthens relationships between individuals, families, and communities. This visit is not just an ordinary visit, but rather a form of profound communication, involving various cultural, social, and spiritual aspects. Communication in the context of this visit is full of meaning, involving symbols, rituals, and specific verbal-nonverbal communication, including symbolism. Every element of the visit, from the food served, the clothing worn, to the time of the event, has a deep symbolic meaning. For example, tumpeng, the main dish, is often interpreted as a symbol of fertility and prosperity; the Ngunjung ritual involves a series of rituals passed down through generations. These rituals serve to strengthen social bonds and demonstrate respect for noble values. Nonverbal communication such as gestures, eye contact, and seating also play an important role in Ngunjung. For example, the way someone serves food can reflect the level of respect they show for their guests.

Communication ethnography was conducted to explore the cultural communication of ngunjung in Bongas. This study revealed that Ngunjung not only functions as a means of friendship, but also as a medium to maintain social relations, Ngunjung strengthens kinship ties and relationships between neighbors, transmits cultural values such as mutual cooperation, mutual respect, and appreciation of differences inherited through the Ngunjung tradition, and also conveys information/messages/news or even ancestral stories through plays conveyed through Ngunjung activities.

Through this research on cultural communication, Ngunjung shows the importance of face-to-face communication, especially in the digital era, where face-to-face communication is becoming increasingly rare. Ngunjung teaches the importance of interacting directly to build

deeper social relationships, and also teaches respect for the diversity of cultural differences and social backgrounds, which of course strengthens community ties. In the midst of increasingly individualistic society, Ngunjung reminds us of the importance of maintaining harmony within the community and preserving local culture.

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