

Masculinity, Capital, and Cultural Continuity in the Blater Community of Rural Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores the remo tradition as a ritual communication practice within the blater community of West Madura. While previous studies have largely treated remo as cultural heritage or as a sociological phenomenon, this research employs both functional theory and symbolic interactionism to reveal how the tradition simultaneously maintains social order and produces symbolic meaning. Using a phenomenological approach, data were collected through participant observation and interviews with remo performers in Bangkalan, including senior members who have been involved since the 1970s. Findings show that remo operates as a communicative system in which greetings, seating arrangements, invitations, and the public announcement of contributions function as signs that transform various forms of capital—economic, cultural, social, and symbolic—into visible recognition. Functionally, remo ensures cohesion, reciprocity, and the continuity of group order. Symbolically, it performs honor, masculinity, and solidarity, reaffirming the identity of the blater. The ritual endures not because of economic gain but because of its capacity to convert resources into symbolic prestige and long-term social networks. Despite the pressures of globalization and digital media, remo continues to persist by adapting its form while maintaining its communicative codes. This study contributes to communication and cultural studies by demonstrating how ritualized interaction sustains identity and legitimacy in local communities. It highlights that cultural continuity depends not only on preserving heritage but also on maintaining the communicative architecture through which tradition gains meaning.

Keywords: Remo tradition; Blater community; Ritual communication; Symbolic interactionism; Functional theory; Cultural capital

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Maskulinitas, Modal, dan Kontinuitas Budaya di Komunitas Blater Pedesaan Indonesia

Abstrak

Studi ini mengeksplorasi tradisi remo sebagai praktik komunikasi ritual dalam komunitas blater di Madura Barat. Sementara studi sebelumnya sebagian besar memperlakukan remo sebagai warisan budaya atau sebagai fenomena sosiologis, penelitian ini menggunakan teori fungsional dan interaksionisme simbolik untuk mengungkap bagaimana tradisi tersebut secara bersamaan mempertahankan tatanan sosial dan menghasilkan makna simbolik. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologis, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipan dan wawancara dengan para pelaku remo di Bangkalan, termasuk anggota senior yang telah terlibat sejak tahun

1970-an. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa *remo* beroperasi sebagai sistem komunikatif di mana salam, pengaturan tempat duduk, undangan, dan pengumuman publik tentang kontribusi berfungsi sebagai tanda yang mengubah berbagai bentuk modal—ekonomi, budaya, sosial, dan simbolik—menjadi pengakuan yang terlihat. Secara fungsional, *remo* memastikan kohesi, timbal balik, dan keberlanjutan tatanan kelompok. Secara simbolik, ia menampilkan kehormatan, maskulinitas, dan solidaritas, menegaskan kembali identitas *blater*. Ritual ini bertahan bukan karena keuntungan ekonomi, tetapi karena kemampuannya untuk mengubah sumber daya menjadi prestise simbolis dan jaringan sosial jangka panjang. Terlepas dari tekanan globalisasi dan media digital, *remo* terus bertahan dengan menyesuaikan bentuknya sambil mempertahankan kode komunikatifnya. Studi ini berkontribusi pada studi komunikasi dan budaya dengan menunjukkan bagaimana interaksi ritual mempertahankan identitas dan legitimasi dalam komunitas lokal. Studi ini menyoroti bahwa keberlanjutan budaya tidak hanya bergantung pada pelestarian warisan tetapi juga pada pemeliharaan arsitektur komunikatif di mana tradisi memperoleh makna.

Kata kunci: *Tradisi Remo; Komunitas Blater; Komunikasi ritual; Interaksionisme simbolis; Teori fungsional; Modal budaya*

Introduction

Geographically and socio-culturally, the island of Madura, which is surrounded by the sea and located close to Java Island, has its own uniqueness. The geographical character of the limestone plateau, the dry climate, and the strong sense of solidarity among its people have shaped the Madurese as a community that values pride (*ajhâgân*), honor (*todhus*), and loyalty (*setyâ*). After the construction of the Suramadu Bridge in 2009, Madura became increasingly accessible (Rasaili, 2023). The mobility of people, goods, and information accelerated, creating new spaces for economic and cultural interaction between Madura and Java. Yet, modernization does not always erase local identities. Many aspects of Madurese culture remain deeply rooted—particularly the strong emphasis on honor, masculinity, and solidarity that structure social relations in everyday life.

At the same time, negative stereotypes about the Madurese as emotional, violent, and resistant to change continue to persist in public discourse (Rozaki, 2009a). Such images, however, often ignore the

complexity of Madurese social structures and the symbolic meanings behind their cultural expressions. One of the most intriguing and enduring traditions that embodies these meanings is the *remo* celebration. *Remo* is more than a dance or performance; it is a social ritual, an arena of honor, and a communicative event where *blater*—a term referring to local strongmen or champions—gather to perform their identity. This ritual persists despite urbanization, migration, and the diffusion of modern communication technologies, indicating its continued significance as a medium of symbolic expression in Madurese life.

Historically, the *blater* community emerged as a distinct social group within Madura's hierarchical society, alongside *kiai* (religious elites) and *priyayi* (bureaucratic elites). The *blater* were often respected for their courage, sense of justice, and ability to maintain social order through informal means. In many villages, they functioned as protectors of the weak, mediators in conflicts, and upholders of communal norms. Their influence extends

beyond local governance—it is moral, performative, and communicative. The *remo* celebration, held usually from evening until dawn, provides the stage where *blater* reaffirm their authority and solidarity through symbolic acts, body language, and ritualized communication.

Scholars such as Rozaki (2004) and De Graaf & Pigeaud (de Graaf et al., 2001) have traced the evolution of the *blater* figure from historical, sociological, and anthropological perspectives. They describe the *blater* as both feared and admired—figures who balance mystical power (*kanuragan*), religious understanding, and local prestige. In contemporary studies, Hefni explores *blater* as moral agents negotiating between religious norms and social realities (Listiana et al., 2024), while Rahman examines the ritual dimension of *remo* as a performance of masculinity and social capital (Rahman & de Mori, 2020). Similarly, other scholars highlight the communicative aspect of *remo* as a space where collective identity and solidarity are reaffirmed (Khoiri et al., 2024). However, most of these works remain descriptive and rarely frame *remo* within the theoretical perspectives of communication or symbolic interaction. This gap opens an opportunity to reinterpret *remo* through the lens of communication theory—particularly using Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of practice.

Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus*, *field*, and *capital* (1986) provide a useful framework to understand the continuity of *remo* as a communicative ritual (Forchtner & Schneickert, 2016). In Bourdieu’s view, social practices are not random acts but structured performances shaped by the *habitus*—the internalized dispositions and

cultural schemas that guide behaviour (Rosyidi et al., 2020). The *field* represents the social space where actors compete for recognition and legitimacy, while *capital* refers to the resources (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) that individuals mobilize to maintain or improve their position. Applied to the *blater* world, *remo* functions as a *field* where *symbolic capital*—honor, respect, and moral recognition—is continuously reproduced through ritualized communication.

Within this framework, the *blater*’s speech, gestures, dress, and ritual actions can be interpreted as communicative signs that construct and reinforce symbolic power. For instance, the way a *blater* greets another, the tone of his voice, and the manner in which he moves during the *remo* are not merely aesthetic or performative choices—they communicate hierarchy, respect, and solidarity. Through these practices, *blater* collectively produce a sense of belonging and social order. Thus, *remo* can be viewed as a form of *symbolic communication* that maintains the moral economy of masculinity and prestige in Madurese society.

Previous studies, such as those published in *Karsa: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture* (Hefni, 2017) and the others, like (Listiana et al., 2024; Rozaki, 2009), explored it within broader cultural frameworks, focusing on moral education and identity preservation. Yet, none of these have analyzed how communication itself—verbal and nonverbal, ritualized and performative—becomes the medium through which symbolic power circulates within *blater* society. Therefore, this study positions itself at the intersection of

communication, culture, and power, aiming to reveal the communicative function of *remo* in constructing social identity.

The communicative dimension of *remo* also resonates with broader theoretical discussions on ritual communication. Communication is not merely a process of transmission but a ritual act that sustains shared beliefs and community (Ohaku et al., 2025). In this sense, *remo* is a form of *ritual communication* where meaning is collectively enacted rather than simply exchanged. It allows participants to experience solidarity, reaffirm social boundaries, and rearticulate cultural values in a performative way. By merging Bourdieu's theory with ritual communication perspectives, this study emphasizes how *remo* operates simultaneously as cultural heritage and as a living communicative system that reflects and reproduces symbolic power in contemporary Madura.

Furthermore, the endurance of *remo* in the digital era raises important questions about cultural resilience and adaptation. Despite modernization and the influence of media, *remo* continues to be practiced and even mediated through social platforms. Video recordings of *remo* performances circulate on YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok, attracting audiences who reinterpret its meaning in the context of modern identity and nostalgia. This shows that *remo* is not a static tradition but a dynamic communicative practice capable of evolving across media and generations. For the *blater* community, such circulation also reinforces symbolic capital—extending their recognition beyond local boundaries.

This research therefore seeks to fill several gaps. First, it aims to explain *remo*

not only as a cultural performance but as a *communicative ritual* that embodies the exchange of symbolic capital. Second, it contributes to the study of local communication by situating traditional rituals within theoretical frameworks of power and practice. Third, it highlights the importance of local wisdom (*kearifan lokal*) as a communicative resource for identity maintenance in Indonesia's multicultural society. By doing so, this study enriches the discourse on how traditional communication patterns coexist and interact with modern communication systems.

From a communication perspective, the *remo* celebration can be analyzed through a dual-theoretical lens combining functional theory and symbolic interactionism. Functionally, *remo* serves to maintain social stability, strengthen solidarity, and reproduce collective identity within the *blater* community. It fulfills communicative and cultural functions that ensure the continuity of local values amidst modernization. These functions align with the classical functionalist perspective that views culture as a mechanism for maintaining social equilibrium and cohesion.

However, to understand how meaning is produced and negotiated within the *remo* celebration, symbolic interaction theory provides a deeper interpretive framework. Following George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer (Aksan et al., 2009; Blumer, 2018), social reality is constructed through symbolic interaction—where gestures, language, and performances become vehicles for shared understanding. In *remo*,

interactions among blater—their speech, posture, gestures, and ritual actions—constitute a communicative process through which identity and prestige are continuously defined and redefined. This perspective allows the analysis to move beyond structural functions toward the dynamic process of meaning-making that sustains blater identity.

By combining these two approaches, this study situates remo as both a functional communication ritual and a symbolic interactional field. This theoretical integration offers a more comprehensive understanding of how communication in remo simultaneously fulfills social functions and constructs symbolic meanings. Thus, the research contributes not only to the study of local culture but also to the theoretical discourse in communication science that bridges structural and interpretive paradigms.

Methods

This research focuses its attention not on the occurring symptoms or emerging phenomena, but the focus of attention is precisely on what goes beyond the outer appearance, which is also hidden in the minds and thoughts of the doers or actors in the cultural communication (Aksan et al., 2009; Blumer, 2018, 2018). This study employs a phenomenological approach which aims not only to describe the visible phenomena but also to reveal the hidden meanings, intentions, and lived experiences of the actors involved in remo. Phenomenology, as developed from Husserl to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2017),

provides the philosophical foundation for uncovering how remo participants interpret their actions and social reality. In line with Neuman (2013), this method emphasizes the subjective world of actors, moving beyond external symptoms toward the symbolic dimensions of behavior (Neuman, 2013).

In practice, this research was conducted in Bangkalan district, where remo remains an enduring tradition. The primary informants consisted of remo performers (*lengge'*) who have actively participated in performances from 1972 to the present, as well as a community leader who has played a central role in sustaining the practice. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and direct documentation of behavior during remo performances. To strengthen the phenomenological inquiry, visual and photographic documentation of remo events across different years and time periods was also used. These images serve as historical traces that allow comparison of symbols, signs, and performances over time.

Methodologically, the phenomenological approach in this study is complemented by the perspective of symbolic interaction theory. As Mead and Blumer emphasize, meaning arises through interaction, and symbols are central in structuring that meaning. Thus, remo is not only analyzed for its social function but also as a communicative arena in which actors employ and negotiate signs, gestures, and ritual symbols to construct identity and solidarity. This integration allows the study to compare and interpret remo both as a functional

ritual sustaining group cohesion and as a symbolic performance through which social reality is continuously reproduced. (Ritzer, 2012; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2017).

Results and Discussion

Situating Remo in Previous Studies

The *remo* tradition has long been recognized as one of the most distinctive cultural performances within the world of *blater* in Madura. Yet, prior scholarship has typically treated *remo* either as cultural heritage or as a sociological phenomenon, often stopping short of examining it as a communicative system. Historically oriented research, such as De Graaf and Pigeaud (2001) and Rozaki (2004, 2009), traced the genealogy of *blater* as figures who combine physical strength, supernatural skill, and social prestige. Another cluster of studies approached *remo* through a socio-legal and moral lens, analyzing how informal authority, order, and moral discourse shape village governance (Rahman, 2020). A third stream emphasized *remo* as cultural identity and moral education, highlighting its role in value transmission and identity preservation (Hefni, 2015; Syarif, 2022). Only a limited number of works have focused on the performative and communicative dimensions of *remo*, and even fewer have explained how symbolic meaning and social order are reproduced through micro-interactive acts.

This study therefore departs from purely descriptive accounts by interpreting *remo* through two theoretical frameworks: **functional theory** and **symbolic interactionism**. These perspectives together reveal how *remo* simultaneously fulfills its

social function—maintaining cohesion, hierarchy, and stability—and operates as a **symbolic field** in which meaning, identity, and recognition are co-constructed through communication. The study thus positions *remo* not merely as a preserved heritage but as a living, dialogic form of ritual communication.

Comparative analysis of ritual symbols requires theoretical grounding in semiotic and functional frameworks. Scholars such as Victor Turner (1967), Clifford Geertz (1973), and Catherine Bell (1992) emphasize that symbols derive meaning through their embeddedness in ritual action (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2017). In Southeast Asian ritual traditions, the triadic relation between **symbol–function–meaning** is crucial for understanding how cultural performances sustain social order. Applying Turner’s concept of *social drama* and Geertz’s *deep play* reveals that *remo*, like many regional rituals, transforms material exchanges into symbolic communication that stabilizes hierarchy and identity. This theoretical grounding strengthens the Symbol–Function–Meaning Matrix by showing that each sign is not only descriptive but operates within a culturally encoded semiotic system.

Remo as Gathering and Communicative Field

In West Madura, particularly in Bangkalan and Sampang, *remo* has long served as a site of gathering for *blater* champions from across Madura and even from Java. Informants consistently describe the event as both a celebration and an obligation. One senior participant, Mr. T (29 June 2019, 16.00 WIB), summarized its purpose in three points: to maintain

cohesion among *blater*, to expand networks of friendship, and to ensure the continuity of ancestral tradition.

Observation of several *remo* events reveals that beyond its festive appearance, *remo* functions as a **communication system** with highly structured symbols and interactions. The order of seating, the calling of names by the *caller*, the giving of contributions (*mowang/bhuwuhan*), the gestures of respect, and even the design of invitations are all coded acts that communicate social meaning. From a **functional** viewpoint, these patterns preserve social order and minimize conflict. From a **symbolic-interactionist** viewpoint, each act is an index of status and solidarity—a shared sign system that both produces and displays identity.

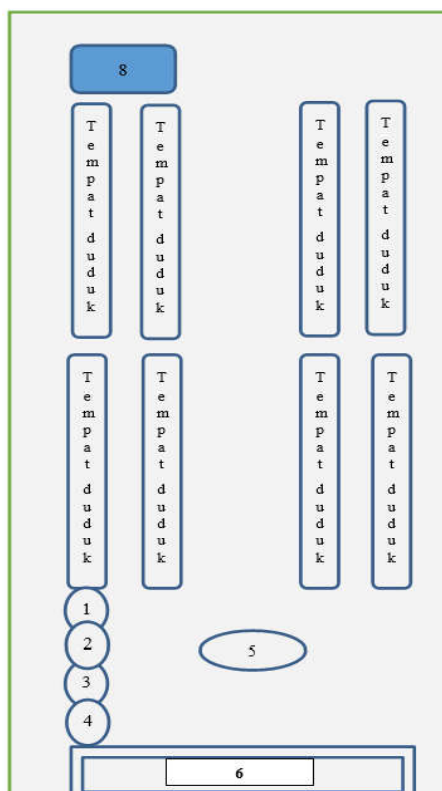


Figure 1 Blater invited guests enter the Remo arena in procession (Documentary Researcher, 2019)

Image caption:

- 1: *Tokang Panggil*
- 2: KT (Blater regional group)
- 3: *Tokang Catet* (Always side by side with the toan roma)
- 4: Seating area for the toan roma (when receiving guests)
- 5: Lengge'
- 6: Front stage (where the gamelan Remo is performed)
- 7: Back stage (where the lengge' performs makeup and clothing)
- 8: Toan roma and receives guests



Figure 2 Seating layout of the Remo arena blaters (Documentary Researcher, 2019)

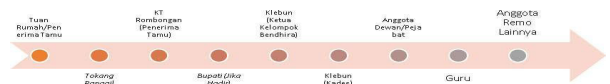


Figure 3 Order of calling participants (Data processed by researchers, 2020)



Figure 4 The giving of contributions (*mowang/bhuwuhan*) (Documentary Researcher, 2019)

Remo and the Performance of Self-Esteem

Among the Madurese, *harga diri* (self-esteem or honor) is a core cultural value;

the proverb *ango' pote tolang atembhang pote mata* (“better to die than to lose honor”) encapsulates this ethos. Participation in *remo* is therefore not only a social practice but also an affirmation of identity and respectability.

Mr. T (28 June 2019, 16.15 WIB) explained in Madurese:

Verbatim (Madurese)

Monterrodaddhiya blatêryakodhunoro'a carabhubhuwan, maksod dha to'oto'otaba sêbiasa êkoca' rêmoh, lamba' rêmoh rêyakabiasaanna sesepuhorêngmadhu rasêêghuna'aghi kaangghuy kompolla orêng blatêr ban kenenganna kaangghuy ajheralagosêpantes, monnoro'rêmohrêya hargadirinaorêng cepetongghelê'.

Segmented gloss

Mon torro daddi yha blater | ya kodhu noro' acara bubhuwan | maksod dha to'oto' ota' | ba sêbiasa e koca' rêmoh | ... | mon noro' rêmoh | rêya harga dirina orang | cepet ongghelê'.

Translation

“To become a blater, one must attend the bubhuwan event, or remo. In the past it connected families; today it gathers blater networks and teaches proper conduct. By joining remo, one’s self-esteem rises quickly.”

In this statement, self-esteem is not an inner feeling but a **socially recognized performance**. Functionally, *remo* distributes esteem within a predictable structure, ensuring reciprocity. Symbolically, esteem is created through interaction—the act of being

named, seen, and acknowledged transforms individual pride into public honor.

Tradition as Collective Continuity

Participants consistently refer to *remo* as a continuation of ancestral legacy. Mr. T (28 June 2019, 16.00 WIB) emphasized:

Verbatim (Madurese)

Rê moh rêyasa êstonamaterro stradisinaorêngmadhuralamba' lê', daddhikitamaterrosapasê laêwarisisesepuhnênê'moyang orêngmadhurarêyalê'.

Translation

“Doing remo continues the old tradition of the Madurese; we are only carrying forward what our ancestors left to us.”

The continuity is materialized through visible communicative symbols—attire, invitations, contributions, and bodily comportment—which collectively index lineage and legitimacy. Functionally, these patterns stabilize social reproduction. Symbolically, they reaffirm historical depth, allowing each performance to invoke ancestral authority.

Capitals in the Remo Field

The endurance of *remo* can be understood through Bourdieu’s notion of capital. Within the *remo* field, **economic**, **cultural**, **social**, and **symbolic** capitals circulate and are constantly converted through communicative practices.

Cultural capital exists in two forms. *Embodied* capital is seen in mastery of etiquette—proper language, demeanor, and

dress—which marks an insider. *Objectified* capital is reflected in invitations, stage arrangements, and the *caller's* notebook that codifies participation. These regulate conduct and communicate belonging.

Social capital manifests in the dense web of obligations and reciprocal visits among members. Attendance, contributions, and verbal acknowledgments sustain these ties. **Symbolic capital**, in turn, is generated when such participation is recognized publicly—when one's name is called, contribution read aloud, and gestures reciprocated.

Economic capital is embedded in the *bhuwuhan* or *mowang* system. Each participant contributes money to

the host, amounts varying according to seniority and capacity: long-term members may accumulate contributions worth IDR 750 million–1 billion, newer members IDR 200–500 million, and single events IDR 500,000–5,000,000. The *caller* records and announces these publicly. Although costly, participants see *mowang* as a communication of responsibility and prestige; it transforms economic expenditure into social recognition.

Symbol–Function–Meaning Matrix

To illustrate how these capitals operate in communication, the following table synthesizes several key signs observed in *remo* and their dual interpretive dimensions.

Table 1. Symbol–Function–Meaning Matrix in the Remo Ritual

Sign or Symbol	Observed Practice	Functional Dimension	Symbolic Meaning
Name calling by the caller	Publicly announcing each contributor's name	Maintains order, coordinates sequence	Confirms social status and recognition
Seating arrangement	Senior members occupy central seats	Reinforces hierarchy and stability	Indexes rank, seniority, and legitimacy
Invitation design	Distributed using local honorific language	Standardizes coordination and attendance	Conveys collective identity and host prestige
Dress and accessories	Specific headcloth, sarong, and color codes	Establishes decorum and unity	Signifies cultural competence and belonging
Monetary contribution (mowang)	Amount publicly announced by caller	Ensures transparency and reciprocity	Converts wealth into symbolic honor
Representation by PD (proxy)	A delegate gives contribution if absent	Maintains network continuity	Demonstrates reliability and social responsibility
Source (Analyzing Researchers, 2025)			

This matrix makes clear that each sign operates on two levels at once. Functionally, it sustains the rhythm and structure of the ritual; symbolically, it communicates meaning, identity, and hierarchy.

From a public relations perspective, symbolic interaction in *remo* can be understood as a form of identity performance that produces what Goffman (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2017) calls “public face work.” *Blater* participants cultivate a reputation rooted in pride, courage, and mastery—attributes that resemble what anthropologists term magical prowess. These performances function as self-branding practices in which participants display embodied skills (gesture, posture, controlled movement) to communicate honor to both insiders and spectators. As demonstrated in Southeast Asian performance contexts), ritual skill becomes a communicative asset that enhances symbolic capital. In *remo*, pride is not merely an emotion but a communicative act: the moment one’s contribution is read aloud, or one’s gestures imitate ancestral forms of prowess, identity is publicly affirmed. This aligns with PR theory that reputation is constructed through repeated, socially recognized performances of value

Temporal and Visual Documentation

Photographs and archives collected *remo* gatherings to contemporary events reveal continuity and adaptation. The sequence of ritual acts—greetings, contributions, announcements—remains largely unchanged, reflecting functional stability. Yet, visual details evolve:

modern sound systems replace traditional instruments, invitations circulate digitally, and younger members record events for social media. From a functional viewpoint, these changes maintain accessibility and coordination. From a symbolic viewpoint, they expand the field of recognition in figure 5: the audience of honor now extends from the local to the digital sphere.



**Figure 5 Vibes of Ritual Sandur
(Documentary Researcher 2023)**

Integrative Interpretation

The findings affirm that *remo* persists because it serves two intertwined purposes. Functionally, it provides a dependable mechanism for redistributing resources, organizing hierarchy, and sustaining social order. Symbolically, it is a living language of signs through which *blater* articulate and negotiate their identity. When viewed through Bourdieu, *remo* appears as a field where multiple forms of capital are produced and exchanged. Through symbolic interaction, it becomes a communicative process in which gestures, contributions, and speech acts construct shared meaning.

Theoretically, this dual framework shows that rituals like *remo* endure not simply because of their sacredness but because they

continuously translate **social necessity into symbolic expression**. Each ritual element functions as a communicative device that both performs and preserves identity. Methodologically, maintaining verbatim Madurese quotations, accompanied by segmented gloss, upholds authenticity while making the data accessible to wider audiences. Phenomenologically, the integration of visual documentation reinforces that *remo* is not merely narrated but lived and embodied.

Practically, preserving *remo* requires more than organizing festivals. Policymakers and cultural institutions must safeguard its **communicative architecture**—the roles of the *caller*, the etiquette of contributions, the symbolic exchange that constitutes honor. While modernization (such as digital invitations or live streaming) can broaden participation, the essential communicative codes must remain recognizable to maintain legitimacy and meaning.

One of the most significant contributions of this study is its demonstration that *remo* can only be fully understood when approached through both functionalism and symbolic interactionism. Functional theory, rooted in the works of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, has long explained rituals as mechanisms that maintain cohesion, regulate behavior, and reproduce social order. From this perspective, *remo* is the social “glue” of the blater community: it redistributes resources through *mowang*, affirms rank through seating and name calling, and establishes predictable cycles of reciprocity.

Yet, taken alone, functionalism risks reducing *remo* to a utilitarian mechanism. Symbolic interactionism, inspired by Mead,

Cooley, and later Goffman, emphasizes the micro-processes of meaning-making. From this angle, *remo* is less about structure than about performance—each gesture, greeting, and contribution is a sign that participants interpret in relation to others. To be called by name, to wear the proper attire, to be publicly acknowledged—these are symbolic accomplishments that cannot be reduced to mere function.

By combining the two, the analysis captures both the structural necessity and the symbolic vitality of the ritual. Function explains why *remo* persists as an institution; symbol explains how it remains meaningful for participants. This dual lens can serve as a methodological model for the study of other Southeast Asian rituals, where pragmatic and symbolic dimensions are equally entangled.

Comparing *remo* with other Indonesian and regional traditions reveals both commonalities and unique features. The *slametan* in Javanese society, for example, similarly functions to bind communities through shared meals and prayers, yet it is inclusive and often religiously inflected. *Remo*, in contrast, is exclusive to blater and centered on masculine prestige. Meanwhile, Madurese *rokat tasek* (sea-offering ritual) enacts reciprocity with natural forces, whereas *remo* enacts reciprocity within social hierarchies.

In terms of Southeast Asian parallels, *remo* resembles certain Filipino *barangay* practices or Thai *muay* rituals where displays of strength, generosity, and masculinity are central. However, unlike martial arts or sporting events, *remo* intertwines symbolic exchange with

monetary circulation. This positions it as a hybrid: part performance, part economic redistribution, part ritual communication.

Through this comparison, the distinctiveness of *remo* lies in its integration of economic capital into symbolic display. While other rituals redistribute food, blessings, or sacred objects, *remo* redistributes money as a sign. This makes it an especially potent case for Bourdieu's theory of capital conversion, since the transition from economic to symbolic is literal and publicly staged.

Another important dimension is gender. As observed, *remo* is overwhelmingly a male-centered ritual. Participation, recognition, and honor are all tied to masculine identity. Women appear only in supporting roles—preparing food, organizing hospitality—without occupying the stage of symbolic recognition.

From a functional perspective, this exclusion preserves the ritual's structure as an arena for male solidarity. From a symbolic perspective, masculinity is continuously constructed through the ritual: to give generously, to be recognized publicly, to sit in a position of honor—all these acts reaffirm what it means to be a “man” in blater culture.

This gendered exclusivity also has implications for broader Madurese society. It highlights the cultural value of male honor while simultaneously rendering women invisible in the symbolic order of *remo*. For communication studies, this raises questions about how gendered performances are encoded in ritual and how the absence of women from recognition spaces reinforces broader gender hierarchies.

Globalization and the spread of digital technology present both challenges and opportunities for *remo*. Younger Madurese, exposed to global cultures, might perceive traditional rituals as outdated. Yet, evidence shows that *remo* adapts rather than declines. Invitations are now shared via WhatsApp, contributions may be coordinated through digital banking, and events are recorded or streamed online.

These adaptations suggest that the communicative codes of *remo*—public recognition, symbolic exchange, and capital conversion—are flexible enough to survive technological shifts. Indeed, digital circulation may expand the audience of recognition, as a participant's honor is not only acknowledged locally but also shared in wider networks.

At the same time, digitization may alter the symbolic economy. When honor is broadcast on social media, it risks shifting from collective recognition to individual self-promotion. This tension deserves future research: will *remo* remain a ritual of solidarity, or will it evolve into a form of personal branding in the digital age?

The persistence of *remo* also carries implications for cultural policy and local governance. Too often, cultural preservation is equated with organizing festivals or recording performances. Yet, as this study shows, the essence of *remo* lies not in its spectacle but in its communicative codes: the role of the caller, the etiquette of contributions, the order of seating, the reciprocal announcement of names. Preserving *remo* therefore requires safeguarding this semiotic architecture.

Universities and research institutions in Madura can contribute by documenting

these codes in detail, training students in ethnographic methods, and creating archives that preserve both textual and visual data. Local governments can integrate *remo* into cultural tourism programs, but in a way that respects its communicative integrity rather than commodifying it as entertainment. Community leaders, meanwhile, can use *remo* as a platform for fostering solidarity and social trust, while also opening space for younger generations to reinterpret its meaning.

Finally, the findings contribute to communication theory by expanding the study of ritual beyond sacred or religious practices. *Remo* illustrates that secular, even seemingly “profane,” traditions function communicatively to reproduce identity and order. By combining functional and symbolic frameworks, the study shows that rituals endure not only for their utility but because they translate necessity into meaning.

This insight has broad implications. It suggests that communication scholars should treat rituals not as static remnants but as dynamic semiotic systems. Whether in rural Madura, urban youth subcultures, or digital communities, rituals survive when they perform the double work of organizing life and generating meaning.

In sum, extending the discussion underscores that *remo* is best understood as a hybrid institution: it is economic without being reducible to finance, cultural without being reducible to folklore, social without being reducible to friendship, and symbolic without being reducible to spectacle. Its persistence in contemporary Madura demonstrates the resilience of local semiotic systems in the face of global transformation.

For scholars, it provides a model of how communication rituals sustain identity and legitimacy. For policymakers, it is a reminder that safeguarding culture means protecting the signs, codes, and practices that give tradition its living meaning.

A limitation of this research lies in the availability of longitudinal data and visual archives, which restricts a deeper comparative analysis across decades. Future research may employ multimodal ethnography—including video interaction analysis—to explore gesture, gaze, and sequencing in more detail. Comparative studies with other Madurese rituals such as *Sandur* or *Rokat Tasek* could reveal whether similar communicative mechanisms sustain cultural continuity elsewhere.

The ethnographic and phenomenological evidence presented here demonstrates that *remo* is far more than a cultural residue. It is a communicative system that transforms economic exchange into social cohesion and symbolic prestige. Every greeting, call, and contribution serves a dual function: maintaining social structure and expressing collective meaning. In this sense, *remo* exemplifies how local traditions persist by working both **as systems of function** and **as languages of symbol**. Through this dual reading, the study contributes to a richer understanding of how communication rituals reproduce cultural identity and moral order within contemporary Madurese society.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the *remo* tradition is more than an entertainment or an inherited cultural residue. Based on observations and in-depth interviews,

remo operates as a communicative system where interactional practices—greetings, seating orders, invitations, and the public announcement of contributions—transform different forms of capital into visible and legitimate social recognition. The ritual thereby sustains the identity of the blater community within contemporary Madurese society.

Through the dual lens of functional theory and symbolic interactionism, it becomes clear that remo fulfills two interrelated purposes. Functionally, it reproduces social cohesion, ensures reciprocal responsibility, and provides continuity for community order. Symbolically, it enables blater to articulate honor, masculinity, and solidarity in publicly recognizable ways. Each contribution, each gesture, and each call of a name is not only a practical act but also a sign that indexes belonging and status. This shows that remo endures precisely because it operates both as a mechanism of order and as a language of meaning.

The analysis further reveals that different forms of capital—economic, cultural, social, and symbolic—are not separated but constantly converted during the remo. Economic contributions (mowang) become symbolic prestige when announced publicly; cultural knowledge of etiquette transforms into social trust; and symbolic recognition reinforces social networks that can be mobilized beyond the ritual space. Rather than yielding quick material returns, the long-term value of remo lies in this conversion process, which sustains solidarity, hierarchy, and recognition across generations.

The persistence of remo in Bangkalan and Sampang, even amid the pressures of

globalization and digital transformation, underscores the adaptability of local traditions. While the form may change—such as invitations distributed through social media or documentation shared digitally—the communicative codes that constitute its meaning remain intact. This indicates that cultural continuity in Madura is not about resisting change, but about preserving the semiotic architecture through which identity and legitimacy are enacted.

In conclusion, the remo tradition confirms that societies continually develop ritualized forms of interaction to assure both individual and collective existence. In West Madura, this assurance takes the shape of a cultural performance that reproduces capital, enacts identity, and legitimizes solidarity. By highlighting its communicative mechanisms and symbolic dimensions, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural practices not only survive but remain socially powerful in the midst of modern transformations.

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