

MYTH, POWER, AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY: THE PUNDEN RITUALS OF POHBLEMBEM, BADAS, KEDIRI

Arief Sudrajat¹, Eko Wahyuni Rahayu², Pambudi Handoyo³, Nadhirul Wismiyati⁴, Aisha Arifah Shiba⁵

^{1,3}Faculty of Social Sciences and Politics, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Jl. Ketintang No.18, Ketintang, Surabaya, Jawa Timur 60231

²Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Jl. Raya Kampus Unesa, Lidah Wetan, Surabaya, Jawa Timur 60213

⁴Madrasah Aliyah Futuhiyyah Kwagean, Kediri, Kwagean, Krenceng, Kepung, Kediri, Jawa Timur 64293

⁵Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Airlangga, Jl. Mayjen Prof. Dr. Moestopo No. 47, Surabaya, Jawa Timur 60132

E-mail: ariefsudrajat@unesa.ac.id; ekowahyuni@unesa.ac.id; pambudihandoyo@unesa.ac.id; wismiyati-nadhirul@gmail.com; aisha.arifah.shiba.fk-2026@student.unair.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the transformation of ritual and identity at the Pohblembem Punden in Badas Village, Kediri, specifically analyzing it as a contested public sphere rather than a site of static tradition. Utilizing a qualitative ethnographic approach—combining field observations and interviews with historical research—the study moves beyond descriptive accounts to reveal the underlying power relations that dictate cultural reconstruction. The findings demonstrate that the punden serves as an arena of contestation where identity is negotiated between the descendants of Ki Ageng Panatagama, who claim genealogical legitimacy, and rival groups who rely on oral tradition to assert authority. Furthermore, the study identifies a capitalization of the sacred by village officials and religious management, who utilize the punden to secure political legitimacy. This transformation is not a passive absorption into globalization but a strategic negotiation where marginalized actors, leverage their ritual roles to expand their influence within a patriarchal hierarchy. Ultimately, the study reveals that the punden is a dynamic space where the truth of the past is reconstructed to serve contemporary social and political interests.

Keywords: punden; contested public sphere; ritual hybridity; ki ageng panatagama; power relations

MITOS, KEKUASAAN, DAN IDENTITAS KOMUNITAS: RITUAL PUNDEN DARI POHBLEMBEM, BADAS, KEDIRI

ABSTRAK

Studi ini menyelidiki transformasi ritual dan identitas di Punden Pohblembem di Desa Badas, Kediri, khususnya menganalisisnya sebagai ruang publik yang diperebutkan daripada situs tradisi statis. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan etnografi kualitatif—menggabungkan observasi lapangan dan wawancara dengan penelitian sejarah—studi ini melampaui uraian deskriptif untuk mengungkap hubungan kekuasaan yang mendasari rekonstruksi budaya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa punden berfungsi sebagai arena perebutan di mana identitas dinegosiasikan antara keturunan Ki Ageng Panatagama, yang mengklaim legitimasi silsilah, dan kelompok saingan yang mengandalkan tradisi lisan untuk menegaskan otoritas. Lebih lanjut, studi ini mengidentifikasi kapitalisasi hal-hal sakral oleh pejabat desa dan manajemen keagamaan, yang menggunakan punden untuk mengamankan legitimasi politik. Transformasi ini bukanlah penyerapan pasif ke dalam globalisasi tetapi negosiasi strategis di mana aktor-aktor yang terpinggirkan memanfaatkan peran ritual mereka untuk memperluas pengaruh mereka dalam hierarki patriarki. Pada akhirnya, studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa punden adalah ruang dinamis di mana kebenaran masa lalu direkonstruksi untuk melayani kepentingan sosial dan politik kontemporer.

Kata kunci: punden; ruang publik yang diperebutkan; hibriditas ritual; ki ageng panatagama; hubungan kekuasaan

INTRODUCTION

How do communities preserve their unique identities and social cohesion in an increasingly globalized context where cultural homogenization poses a threat to the erosion of local traditions? This pivotal inquiry has gained considerable urgency as societies across the globe confront the intricate dynamics between safeguarding cultural heritage and

responding to the demands of modernization processes.

The discourse surrounding local identity in the context of globalization is primarily focused on three pathways: absorption, rigid preservation, or hybridization. While global influences pose the risk of complete assimilation, communities frequently exhibit agency by selectively integrating external components while upholding their distinct cultural

frameworks. Rather than rendering traditions immutable in idealized representations, effective adaptation achieves a synthesis of innovation and discernible continuity. Identity is not a fixed entity but rather a fluid negotiation that is reconstructed through social practices to address contemporary challenges.

Traditional village rituals, like ceremonies, festivals, and customs with deep roots in local history and belief systems—have become essential tools for communities to express, uphold, and pass down their collective identities to future generations in many regions (Awotona & Teymur, 2024).

These cultural practices are dynamic social processes that actively create relationships, community values, and self-understanding rather than being purely symbolic performances or historical artifacts. Traditions give stability and continuity in the face of societal change, as noted by Hobsbawm, (2012). Particularly, village rituals provide intriguing glimpses into how communities balance tradition and change, fostering environments where collective identities are actively created and rebuilt in addition to being articulated.

According to preliminary field observations, punden is perceived as a social space where social solidarity is strengthened, folklore is passed down, and communal interactions occur in addition to being a sacred site. Oral stories that emerge around the punden, group prayers, and pilgrimage activities demonstrate the site's active social role in the local community.

The importance of these cultural practices goes beyond simple cultural preservation. They serve as critical social resources by strengthening community relationships, facilitating knowledge transmission, and providing frameworks for collective action and issue solving (Baker et al., 2023; Ben-Amos, 2023; McClinchey, 2024). When communities participate in shared ritual activities, they reinforce their common history and values while also adjusting these traditions to meet current difficulties. Because of this dynamic interplay between continuity and creativity, village rituals are particularly fascinating subjects for studying how cultural identity is preserved and recreated across time.

This study is primarily focused on using punden as a tool to improve social integration and community collective identity. This social unity is fostered not only via religious behaviors, but also through folklore and folklore linked to regional chroniclers. Punden, as a medium, connects the historical, cultural, and social components in the life of local communities (Zou, 2023).

In the Javanese cultural landscape, the punden is more than just a physical location for ancestral burial; it is a hallowed sanctuary of origin that serves as a vital public sphere—a conceptual and physical arena where community members negotiate social position, collective memory, and political authority. Traditionally, these locations house the tombs of village founders (*pembabad tanah*), which serve as the cornerstone for communal identity. However, in Pohblembem Badas Village, Kediri, the punden has evolved into a "arena of contestation" in which historical myths are actively used to build social hierarchies, rather than simply preserved. While rites like the *bersih desa* are commonly regarded as emblems of communal harmony, they are increasingly revealing deep-seated contradictions between the preservation of "purity" and the pragmatic demands of a modernizing society.

This study uses a thorough cultural analysis to investigate the diverse role of village rituals in developing communal identity (Cerisola, 2025). This study seeks to contribute to broader scholarly discussions about cultural preservation, community development, and the sustainability of traditional knowledge systems in contemporary societies by investigating the mechanisms through which these traditions contribute to social cohesion, cultural continuity, and collective identity formation (Huys, 2025).

The connection between local cultural traditions and community identity is nuanced and multifaceted. Village rituals do more than just reflect pre-existing identities; they actively contribute to their development and evolution. Communities use these traditions to negotiate internal diversity, create boundaries with external groups, and continually reinterpret their shared past in light of changing circumstances (Bortolotto, 2015; Brooks, 2023; Ruan, 2024).

The research that follows looks at several interconnected aspects of this phenomenon: the historical development and evolution of village rituals, their symbolic structures and cultural meanings, their social functions in contemporary communities, and the challenges and adaptations they face in response to modernizing influences. Through this multifaceted analysis, the study aims to develop a nuanced understanding of how local cultural traditions contribute to the maintenance and strengthening of community identity in a rapidly changing world.

Folklore plays an important function in connecting the sacred place and the social identity of the society. Folklore serves not just as a source of

pleasure and local history, but also as a tool for forming a communal meaning of a cultural place (Huys, 2025). In the context of punden, folklore becomes an interpretive framework that explains why the site continues to be cared for, visited, and interpreted socially across generations.

Unlike previous studies, this study does not stop at the conceptual analysis of punden and folklore, but relates it directly to field findings. By combining theoretical frameworks and empirical data, this study seeks to present a more contextual understanding of the role of punden in the social life of contemporary society.

The study of punden has been more placed in an archaeological or historical framework that emphasizes aspects of its origin and physical form. This approach tends to position punden as an object of the past that is completed, rather than as a cultural space that continues to function in the social life of contemporary society (Jia et Martinez, 2025). As a result, the relational dimension between punden, social practices, and the dynamics of community identity is still relatively under-appreciated in the study of social anthropology.

Some research on local rituals and sacred sites still clearly separates the sacred and profane dimensions. This separation is less able to explain the social reality at the community level, where religious practices, traditions, social relations, and economic interests often intertwine. In the context of punden, the boundary between the sacred space and the social space is fluid, so its meaning needs to be understood through the experience and practice of daily society (Awotona & Teymur, 2024).

Local identity studies often place identity as something that is established and inherited linearly in a linear manner. This research is based on a different assumption, namely that identity is dynamic and is continuously negotiated through social practices, including rituals, folklore, and communal interactions around punden. Thus, identities are not only reproduced, but also reconstructed according to changing social contexts and the challenges of the times (Chernakova, 2025). Therefore, it is important to look at how communities actively negotiate the use of punden to stay in line with their cultural values and collective identity (Lätzer-Lasar & Williamson, 2024).

This research places folklore as a key element in explaining the sustainability of punden as a cultural space. Folklore is viewed not just as a supporting tale, but also as an important vehicle for establishing social legitimacy, increasing communal integration, and conveying cultural values across generations. By focusing on folklore and field data,

this study aims to address a vacuum in research that connects sacred sites, social rituals, and the strengthening of people's collective identities.

METHOD

The methodological framework of this study is constructed through a qualitative approach employing a descriptive-ethnographic design, aimed at dissecting the complexity of ritual transformation and identity negotiation in Pohblembem, Badas, Kediri. This ethnographic lens is critical because it shifts the emphasis from seeing the punden as a static archeological or physical site to understanding it as a "dynamic social space" where local identity is actively produced, inherited, and challenged through daily social actions (Larsen, 2023). By using this design, the study goes beyond descriptive accounts to examine the "relational dimension" between the sacred site and the community's social behaviors, ultimately positioning the punden as a physical crystallization of the community's collective memory, with the goal of deeply understanding the meaning of punden in the community's social life and its role in strengthening social integration and collective identity (Butler, 2023).

The use of ethnographic principles necessitated extensive researcher involvement, with the *bersih desa* (village cleaning) rites serving as the principal observation point. This intentional scheduling was critical since these celebrations brought together all social strata of the community, creating a visual representation of the "punden ecosystem" in which social roles are performed and power relations are shown. This direct field presence enabled the capture of nuanced folkloric narratives and mythological stories that circulate in the public sphere, which were then interpreted to better understand how traditional values are mobilized as instruments to either consolidate or challenge the existing power hierarchy.

To enhance the findings' legitimacy and rigor, the study combined ethnographic field insights with considerable library research as a type of data triangulation. To create a verifiable historical baseline, the researcher reviewed administrative documents, local history records, and village archives. This integration was particularly crucial for recognizing the friction between "official" history—often supported by genealogy records—and "oral" history, which commonly depends on *tembung jarene* (hearsay) to assert alternate claims of authority. Synchronizing various data sources allowed the study to more objectively map the reconstruction of "truth" inside the village's contested public sphere.

The study focused on punden dispersed across one sub-district, with seven punden locations that now serve as cultural institutions. The research area was chosen based on the fact that punden are still actively used by the community and have folklore that is ingrained in the locals' collective memories.

Data collecting methods included field observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were conducted to personally monitor the physical condition of the punden, the social activities and rituals that occurred, and the interaction of the community surrounding the punden. This insight allows academics to view punden as a live social environment rather than a static entity.

In-depth interviews were done with community leaders, punden keymen, heirs of historical personalities, and local inhabitants actively participating in punden-related activities. The interviews were designed to elicit information about the history of punden, folklore or folklore that arose, the meaning of punden to the community, and the role of punden in social life and local identity.

Folklore data, including oral traditions, were studied as part of the community's collective memory. Data analysis was carried out thematically by grouping data based on primary topics, such as social integration, local identity, and historical narrative contestation. In addition, the field data is evaluated using the theoretical framework of cultural anthropology to acquire a thorough knowledge of the role of punden in people's life

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Multidimensional Functions of Village Rituals in Community Identity Formation

The field data analysis demonstrates that village rituals help to shape community identity through a variety of interrelated ways. These traditional practices are more than just cultural displays; they are dynamic social processes that actively develop and maintain collective identity across all aspects of communal life (Graham, 2008; Hennessy, 2012).

Field findings in this study show that the multidimensional function of village rituals is also reflected in the existence of punden at one sub-districts with spread seven active punden locations. Punden is not only understood as a sacred site, but also as a social space that facilitates the collective interaction of the community (Collins, 2004). Through pilgrimage activities, joint prayers, and commemorations of certain days, punden becomes a medium that brings together various social

groups in one framework of togetherness. In this context, punden functions as a social arena that strengthens community integration through repetitive and meaningful practices. The presence of cross-generational communities in activities in punden creates a continuity of values and strengthens a sense of belonging to the community. Thus, these findings confirm that local sacred rituals and spaces not only reproduce symbolic identities, but also build real social cohesion in people's daily lives.

Constructing Collective Historical Narratives

Village rituals function as powerful vehicles for articulating and transmitting shared historical narratives that provide communities with a sense of temporal continuity and distinctiveness. These ceremonial rituals frequently commemorate key historical events, mythological beginnings, or collective accomplishments that ground communal identity in a specific historical trajectory. According to (Yan, 2025), rituals "convert abstract historical information into lived communal memory" by involving present community members in practices that connect them to their ancestors and shared past.

Field findings show that the ritual function in building a collective historical narrative is also strongly reflected in the folklore that developed around the Ki Ageng Panatagama punden in Pohblembem Hamlet. This figure is understood by the community as a regional historian as well as a religious figure who contributed to the formation of the local social order. Folklore about the origins of the region, spiritual journeys, and exemplary values of Ki Ageng Panatagama is passed down orally from generation to generation and forms the foundation of the community. The folklore not only serves as a record of the past, but also as a social mechanism that connects today's people with their ancestors. Through retelling in the context of pilgrimage and social gatherings in the punden, the community strengthens the sense of historical continuity and legitimacy of local identity. Thus, punden becomes a symbolic place where collective history is not only remembered but also reproduced through social actions.

Ritual reenactments of historical events act as mnemonic devices, preserving indigenous historical perspectives while incorporating elements of pre-colonial and colonial history into local identity narratives. Rituals also connect contemporary practices to pre-colonial social structures and value sys-

tems, ensuring historical continuity despite significant social transformation (Junman, 2025).

These ritual commemorations do not only perpetuate fixed historical narratives, but also provide venues for communities to actively negotiate and renegotiate their relationship to the past. According to Hobsbawm, (2012) concept of "manufactured traditions," many supposedly ancient behaviors have been extensively modified or even newly developed to establish ties with appropriate historical pasts. Heinapuu's (2025) analysis of revitalized harvest ceremonies in Estonian villages demonstrates the dynamic process of historical construction through ritual, which combines pre-Christian agricultural practices with national identity elements developed during the post-Soviet period, resulting in layered historical narratives that address contemporary identity needs.

In social practice, the process of constructing and revising historical narratives is viewed as an attempt to keep local identity relevant, rather than a misrepresentation of the past. Adjustments are made to folklore and rituals surrounding the punden to ensure that inherited values are in harmony with today's societal situation. Thus, folklore serves as a versatile cultural tool for preserving identity (Bawa et al., 2023; Lätzer-Lasar & Williamson, 2024). This method highlights that people's identities are formed not solely on the basis of historical authenticity, but also on the social connotations associated with the narrative. Punden is a symbolic arena where people can confirm their identity through a shared interpretation of history, rather than solely an academic reconstruction.

In Pohblembem society, folk myths about chronicle figures serve as a source of collective identity legitimacy. The events that define Ki Ageng Panatagama's character are viewed as watershed moments that set this community apart from the rest. The narrative creates a framework of common meanings about who they are, where they came from, and the values they maintain in social situations (Liailia Ihsanovna, 2023). This process of folklore inheritance demonstrates how collective memory is constructed not solely via written records, but also through contextual and repetitive oral activities. In this way, Punden serves as a cultural memory center, ensuring the continuity of communal identity in the face of social change.

Field findings show that the negotiation process of past narratives also occurs in the context of punden and local folklore. In the Pohblembem community, there are different versions of stories about the characters who chronicle the region, both related to the origin, historical role, and lineage of the

characters buried in the punden. This difference shows that collective memory is not singular, but is formed through dynamic social processes (Mzembe et al., 2023). The contestation of these narratives does not always lead to open conflict, but becomes a space for symbolic dialogue among community groups. Through informal discussions, retelling, and shared ritual practices, people collectively negotiate the version of history that is deemed most relevant and meaningful. In this context, punden serves as an arena of social legitimacy where various narratives gain cultural recognition.

Spatial Dimensions of Ritual and Identity

Village rituals frequently inscribe community identity into specific physical landscapes, strengthening territorial attachments and spatial boundaries that define the community. Ceremonial processions, site-specific rituals, and symbolic demarcation of sacred spaces create what Bell, (2009); Karadeniz, (2026) terms "memory places"—locations where collective identity is materialized and experienced through embodied ritual practices. These spatial aspects of ritual are particularly significant for communities whose identity is closely tied to specific territories or ecological relationships.

Field findings show that punden serves as a marker of cultural space that binds people's identities to the area where they live. The existence of the punden not only marks a specific physical location, but also represents a symbolic boundary that reinforces the attachment of the community to its living space. Through punden, the community interprets the area not just as a geographical space, but as a historical and cultural space (Creola, 2024). In the context of the three sub-districts studied, the punden is an orientation point for social space that strengthens the sense of ownership of the territory. Ritual and social activities centered on the punden create an emotional relationship between the community and the surrounding landscape. These relationships contribute to the formation of a spatial identity that distinguishes local communities from other regions.

The spread of punden in several administrative regions shows that social integration built through sacred spaces is not limited to one small community. The punden located in the seven locations form a symbolic network that connects communities across villages and sub-districts. Although each punden has its own distinctive story and narrator figures, the similarity of values attached to the site reinforces a collective identity on a local scale. This pattern shows that punden functions as a social

binder that transcends geographical and administrative boundaries. Through vivid historical and folklore narratives, people build an awareness of a shared identity rooted in collective memories and similar ritual experiences (Ben-Amos, 2023).

Punden in this study can be understood as a *memory place* that crystallizes the collective memory of the community in a certain space. Through the practice of pilgrimage and folklore storytelling at the punden location, social memories of ancestors and local history are firmly attached to physical space. This process makes the punden a meeting point between past memories and present social practices. The repeated experience of space through rituals and visits to the punden reinforces the internalization of local identity. Thus, punden not only stores memories, but also activates them continuously through the physical presence and social involvement of the community. Indigenous ritual practices often emphasize these spatial connections explicitly. Even in non-indigenous contexts, ritual demarcation of community space plays an important role in identity formation.

Social Stratification and Power Relations in Ritual Contexts

Village rituals simultaneously reflect and change internal social structures and power dynamics within the community. Ritual roles frequently correspond to social positions, with ceremonial leadership typically entrusted to people with established authority or specialized knowledge. According to field research, rituals and social activities around punden do not take place in a perfectly equal social arena, but rather involve hierarchical structures and power dynamics within society.

In the context of the punden in Pohblembam Hamlet, the most central position is occupied by the punden locksmith who has symbolic authority because he is considered to understand the history, ritual procedures, and sacred values inherent in the site. The locksmith has the authority to determine the time of the ritual, the order of the pilgrimage, the form of offerings, and the rules of behavior that must be obeyed by visitors. This authority is not acquired through the formal structure of village government, but through cultural legitimacy and collective recognition of the community.

In addition to the keyman, senior community leaders and family descendants who are regarded to have historical ties to the persons buried in the punden also possess prominent positions in the ritual social order. They are typically involved in discussions about the implementation of cultural

events, the management of pilgrim visits, and the establishment of boundaries for activities that are deemed sacred to punden. In practice, this group has more power than ordinary people because it is perceived to have greater moral authority and historical expertise. These power dynamics sustain social hierarchies by exerting control over cultural knowledge and symbolic legitimacy. Knowledge of punden history, folklore, and ceremonial regulations served as a source of authority, distinguishing particular groups from the broader population. In other words, whoever is thought to have the finest understanding of the history and holiness of punden has a stronger negotiating position in defining the course of local cultural administration.

The transformation of identity and ritual in Badas Village, particularly surrounding the Pohblembem Punden, is far from a harmonious evolution; instead, it serves as a "contestation arena" deeply embedded in power struggles and social hierarchies. This structure of authority is rooted in historical claims of origin, where social standing is often dictated by one's lineage to Ki Ageng Panatagama, also known as RM Moehammad Sholoehi, the recognized pioneer or pembabad tanah of the village. Groups claiming to be direct descendants (dzuriah) utilize the "symbolic capital" of their genealogy to maintain a dominant sociopolitical position and prestige within the community. Conversely, rival narratives emerge from followers of figures like Abdul Jalal, who rely on "tembung jarene" (oral hearsay) to challenge established historical records and claim authority over the public space of the punden.

This social hierarchy is further complicated by the vying of village officials and influential figures for control of ritual administration to secure material gain and political legitimacy. Traditionally, power was maintained through "age-graded ceremonial responsibilities," which positioned elders as the exclusive guardians of sacred knowledge. However, these power relationships are increasingly threatened by competition for influence; this has created "inherited suspicion," forcing powerful elders to enforce rituals to ensure their continued position and power within the local context. Furthermore, some women have begun to reinforce the traditional hierarchies of the ruling class by "strategically using" their symbolic roles in rituals to negotiate greater influence in community affairs, thus challenging long-standing patriarchal norms.

In the perspective of Bourdieu, (1991), this condition suggests that symbolic capital can be an effective source of social power in traditional societies. However, power relations around punden are

always dominative and closed for their followers. In some situations, rituals are actually a space that brings together various social groups without highlighting differences in economic status or formal positions. Joint pilgrimage activities, collective prayers, and traditional commemorations allow people from different backgrounds to engage in the same social space. Thus, rituals also have an integrative function that can reduce social distance in daily life.

Tension began to be seen when there was a difference of opinion between the recognized pioneer or pembabad tanah of the village and followers of figures like Abdul Jalal regarding the management of punden. Ritual authority emphasizes the importance of maintaining sacredness and limiting activities others group that are considered out of reinforcing power and influence. In this context, power relations become a negotiation arena between efforts to maintain traditional cultural authority and the demands of contemporary social adaptation. Thus, village rituals not only reflect existing social structures, but also become an arena where hierarchy, cultural legitimacy, and power relations are constantly negotiated. Punden functions both as a space for reproduction of symbolic authority and a space for social interaction that allows the emergence of new forms of participation in society. However, these practices can reinforce existing hierarchies or create alternative social arrangements that challenge everyday power structures.

Ritual activities reveal how rituals are organized, reflecting caste hierarchies in ceremonial roles while simultaneously creating temporary spaces where these distinctions are maintained during collective celebrations (Wilby, 2026). These ceremonial responsibilities redistribute elite prestige and influence, creating a status system based on community service and ritual knowledge (Leong, 2022; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Initiation punden ritual not only mark individual life transitions but establish cohort identities that organize social relationships and responsibilities throughout life.

Contemporary changes in social systems cause problems in how rituals express communal identity. The study reveals a variety of adaptive strategies for addressing these tensions, such as simplifying elaborate ceremonies, relaxing gender restrictions in ritual roles, and developing abbreviated ritual versions to accommodate work schedules and geographic dispersal (Sakakeeny, 2024; Yadav, 2025).

This technique demonstrates the community's collective understanding of protecting the integrity of the punden culture (Munandar, 2024). The tech-

nique emphasizes that society is not only an object of cultural commodification, but an active player who selects how their cultural identity and history are represented. As a result, punden serves as a forum for negotiating economic demands and maintaining local identity.

Theoretical Implications and Practical Applications

This study's findings contribute to our theoretical knowledge of the relationship between cultural practices and community identity in a variety of ways. First, it challenges static notions of tradition by demonstrating that adaptability and innovation are inherent features of cultural continuity rather than dangers to authenticity. Second, it demonstrates the multifunctionality of village rituals, which serve social, economic, spiritual, and identity requirements through integrated practices. Third, it emphasizes the role of local communities in carefully managing global influences, selectively adopting external aspects while preserving distinct cultural frameworks.

These findings have practical consequences for cultural preservation projects, community development strategies, and heritage policies. They argue that effective cultural sustainability efforts should prioritize sustaining the social processes and community capacities that allow for continuing adaptation rather than keeping specific ritual forms. According to Kurin, (2004), the goal should be "protecting the conditions that allow traditions to continue growing," rather than freezing behaviors in idealized versions.

For community development practitioners, the study emphasizes the value of rejuvenated cultural traditions as resources for solving modern difficulties. Village rituals, when regarded as live social instruments rather than museum exhibits, can enable intergenerational communication, improve social networks, regulate environmental interactions, and increase community resilience to external pressures. The success of efforts such as the cultural revitalization project in rural areas indicates how carefully modified traditions may contribute to community well-being while preserving cultural identity.

Punden as a Mechanism of Social Resolution and Community Moral Control

Punden in the lives of local communities not only functions as a ritual area and a symbol of identity, but it also plays a vital role in social resolution

and moral regulation. According to field research, punden is seen as a space with strong symbolic authority, and the ideals associated with it serve as a reference for regulating people's social behavior. Such authority is not formal or legal, but is based on cultural agreements and shared values passed down from generation to generation.

Punden is frequently employed as a moral reference point in everyday social practice when social tensions or minor conflicts between citizens arise, such as family disagreements, land disputes, or infractions of customary rules. Community leaders and punden keymen frequently use folklore and the example of chronicle individuals buried in the punden as a kind of guidance and warning. This technique is thought to be more effective because it is based on shared cultural values rather than formal, coercive consequences.

The folklore that developed around the punden reinforced this function by presenting a narrative of the moral consequences of human actions. Stories about the kindness, simplicity, and spiritual fortitude of the narrator are used as examples, while stories about breaking norms are often associated with negative effects that are symbolic. Through this mechanism, society builds an internal and reflective moral control system, in which individuals regulate their behavior based on cultural awareness, rather than external pressures.

Thus, punden functions as an instrument of social control that is culturally based and participatory. This function strengthens social integration because problem solving is carried out collectively and based on shared values. The role of punden as a space for social resolution shows that local cultural sites have a significant latent function in maintaining social harmony and stability.

Punden Network and Cross-Regional Social Integration

Field data shows that the punden spread across seven locations in one sub-districts do not stand separately, but form a symbolic network that is interconnected. This connection can be seen through the similarity of historical narratives, historical figures, and cultural values attached to each punden. The network builds collective identity awareness that goes beyond village and sub-district boundaries, so that punden becomes an important node in cross-regional social integration.

Certain pilgrimage and commemorative activities often involve people from various regions, both as pilgrims, ritual participants, and visitors. This cross-community interaction creates a space for so-

cial encounters that strengthen relations between villages. In this context, the punden functions not only as a local sacred space, but also as a social meeting point that facilitates the exchange of narratives, experiences, and cultural values between regions.

The punden network is also strengthened through interrelated folklore, where chronicle figures in one region are often connected with figures in other regions through historical paths or symbolic genealogical relationships. This narrative interconnectedness builds a shared historical imagination that expands the scope of local identity. Community identity is no longer narrowly understood based on administrative territory, but rather as part of a broader cultural community.

This pattern of cross-regional social integration shows that punden plays a strategic role in building regional social cohesion. Such integration is not formed through formal structures or administrative policies, but rather through ritual experiences, collective memory, and recognition of common cultural values. Thus, the punden network functions as a socio-cultural infrastructure that strengthens community unity on a broader scale.

Negotiation of Sacred Meaning and Contemporary Practices Around Punden

Field findings show that punden is a space that continues to experience the negotiation of meaning between traditional sacredness and contemporary practices of society. The sacredness of punden is maintained through rituals, prayers, and certain customary rules, but at the same time the community also accommodates social changes that affect the way punden is used and interpreted. These negotiations reflect the dynamics of a living culture, not the degradation of sacred values.

The tension between the preservation of "purity" and the urge for "reform" in the rituals of Pohblembem Badas is a major struggle that illustrates the fragility of traditional authority. This conflict is primarily expressed as a generational and structural split. On the one hand, the older specialists and direct descendants (dzuriah) of Ki Ageng Panatagama serve as guardians of "purity," emphasizing rigorous devotion to historical genealogy and the preservation of the punden as a sacred space for ancestral connection. They see the "truth" about the village's origins as a fixed legacy that validates their elevated social standing. However, this claim to purity is contested by "pragmatic" forces within the community, particularly the village officials and younger residents. The "reform" here

is often a matter of survival. This results in the "simplification and abbreviation" of rituals—a transformation that elders may view as a loss of sanctity, while others see it as a necessary adaptation to prevent the tradition from disappearing entirely.

Power relations and hierarchy play a decisive role in determining which version of the ritual prevails. Those in positions of administrative power, such as the *ketakmiran* (management) or village leaders, often exercise "authority over rituals" to align them with modern or political objectives, sometimes bypassing the specialized knowledge of the elders. This creates a hierarchy where political legitimacy can supersede spiritual lineage. For example, the contestation between the historical narrative of Ki Ageng Panatagama and the hearsay (*tembung jarene*) surrounding Abdul Jalal is not just a historical debate but a struggle for "authority over public space". If the reformers or "secondary" claimants gain more social or political traction, they can shift the meaning of the *punden* from a strictly sacred ancestral site to a more generalized "cultural asset".

In this environment, hierarchy is maintained not via consensus, but rather through the ability to "capitalize" on the *punden*'s symbolic significance, with those with the wherewithal to handle the ritual's "economic demands" frequently dictating its shape, regardless of traditional purity. Thus, the "hybrid" ritual that eventually emerges is the outcome of a power-laden compromise between those with the keys to the past and those in control of the present's resources.

In some cases, *punden* is a venue that integrates religious, social, and cultural activity. Ritual activities are often followed by social gatherings, community talks, or cultural tourism-related activities. These rituals demonstrate how society intentionally controls the borders between the sacred and profane in order to keep the *punden* relevant while maintaining its cultural legitimacy.

The community's attitude toward visitors from outside the region reflects this negotiation of meaning. On the one hand, welcoming pilgrims and tourists is viewed as an opportunity to share local culture. On the other hand, there are unwritten regulations that govern ethics, behavior, and prohibitions on *punden*-related activities. These restrictions serve as a key method for maintaining the site's purity in the face of increased external contact.

Thus, *punden* can be viewed as an adaptable and reflecting cultural space. Its holiness is preserved not by seclusion, but via an ongoing process

of social negotiation. This strategy enables *Punden* to continue to serve as a center of identity and social integration while meeting the needs of modern society.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate how power dynamics, lineage contestations, and generational shifts influence the transformation of ritual meaning and community identity in the contested public space of the Pohblembem *Punden*. By going beyond a descriptive description of "local wisdom," the findings successfully address this goal by demonstrating that the *punden* is a dynamic arena in which historical truth is weaponized to build social hierarchies. The study reveals that identity in Pohblembem Badas is a constantly reconstructed narrative in which the *dzuriah* (descendants) of Ki Ageng Panatagama use genealogical records to maintain symbolic authority over rival groups that use oral tradition or *tembung jarene* to assert their own legitimacy.

Punden is a cultural place that serves a multifaceted social purpose in the lives of local communities. According to field research, *punden* functions not only as a sacred location and symbol of historical identity, but also as a channel of social integration, bringing together individuals, groups, and communities from other regions. *Punden*, via ritual activities, pilgrimages, and communal encounters, transforms into a site that fosters social cohesiveness and a sense of community.

However, the process of social integration does not take place in a completely harmonious and equal manner. The findings of the study show that the management of meaning, ritual practices, and the legitimacy of *punden* culture is greatly influenced by the social hierarchy and power relations that live in society. Certain groups—such as locksmiths, traditional leaders, village elites, and families who are considered to have a genealogical relationship with the history of *punden*—have greater symbolic authority in determining historical narratives, ritual procedures, and the use of sacred spaces. The authority not only generates social respect, but also gives greater access to the management of the social, cultural, and economic resources that develop around the *punden*.

In this setting, folklore serves not only as a medium for transmitting cultural values, but also as a tool for social legitimacy, strengthening the standing of specific groups within the community structure. Narratives concerning the origins of *punden*, ancestral figures, and village history are formed

and perpetuated through power relations that define who has the right to speak, interpret history, and lead rituals. Thus, folklore is not entirely neutral, but rather serves as a forum for negotiating social meaning and validity on a local level.

Badas Village's metamorphosis of identity and ritual, particularly around the Pohblembem Punden, is far from harmonious; instead, it functions as a "contestation arena" firmly rooted in power struggles and social inequalities. This power structure is based on historical claims of origin, with social position often determined by one's genealogy to Ki Ageng Panatagama, also known as RM Moehammad Sholoehi, the village's recognized pioneer or pembabad tanah. Groups claiming to be direct descendants (dzuriah) use the "symbolic capital" of their ancestry to preserve a dominant sociopolitical position and prestige in the community. Rival narratives emerge from followers of personalities such as Abdul Jalal, who use "tembung jarene" (oral hearsay) to question official historical records and assert authority over the punden's public space.

This social structure is further compounded by village officials and powerful persons who compete for control over ritual management to achieve both material gain and political legitimacy. Traditionally, power is maintained by "age-graded ceremonial tasks," which establish elders as the exclusive guardians of holy knowledge.

The results of the study show that folklore has a central role in reviving the social function of punden. Folklore about regional chroniclers is a source of moral legitimacy, a means of social control, and a medium for cultural-based conflict resolution. In addition, folklore serves as an effective cultural education vehicle in transmitting local values, norms, and knowledge to the younger generation. This process takes place informally but continuously, thus strengthening the internalization of collective identity across generations.

The research additionally revealed that punden constitutes a symbolic network spanning villages and sub-districts, thereby enhancing social integration on a regional level. This network is established through the interconnections of historical narratives, shared pilgrimage practices, and the acknowledgment of collective cultural values. Concurrently, the community is actively engaging in the negotiation of the sacred significance of punden in relation to contemporary practices, which include social activities and cultural tourism, all while preserving the cultural legitimacy intrinsic to the site.

In summary, punden can be conceptualized as a cultural space that exhibits adaptability and re-

silience in the context of social transformations. The sustainability of its functional role is bolstered by the community's capacity to maintain equilibrium between the preservation of traditional values and the responses to the evolving dynamics of contemporary society. By synthesizing theoretical frameworks and empirical data, this study enhances the contextual comprehension of the significance of punden in reinforcing collective identity and fostering social integration within modern society.

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