

Epistemology of *Pundhen Telaga Sarangan*: A Study of Sacred Rites as Cultural Identity in Magetan, Indonesia

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Received: 2024-02-20; Accepted: 2024-06-11; Published: 2024-06-30

Abstract: This qualitative research tried to look at the origin of *Pundhen Telaga Serangan* as the epistemology of Islamic studies and the systematic transformation process of local tradition into cultural identity. *Pundhen*, in Javanese philosophy, has sacred meaning and magical power. Indonesians have a unique way of honouring and respecting their history. One of them is by performing rituals. Ancestors carried out the oldest practice for generations, and it became a custom. This paper uses qualitative methods, where the data collection techniques include interviews, documentation, and data qualification. Moreover, the Sarangan community in Magetan Regency is the object of this study because they have experienced cultural transformation. J.G. Frazer and E.B. Taylor's animistic and magic theory become analytical tools in seeing the extent of the meaning of *Pundhen* ontologically and epistemologically. Furthermore, Rudolf Bultmann's hermeneutical approach will serve as a valuable addition to the comprehensive analysis of this research. The results section of this research paper shows that *Pundhen Telaga Sarangan* is a symbol of spirituality. It is a sacred place for the locals to establish interpersonal relationships with God, ancestors, and spirits (the others).

Keywords: Epistemology; *Pundhen*; transformation; culture.

Abstrak: epistemologi studi Islam dan proses transformasi sistematis tradisi lokal menjadi identitas budaya. *Pundhen* dalam filosofi Jawa memiliki makna sakral dan kekuatan magis. Faktanya, masyarakat Indonesia memiliki cara yang unik untuk menghormati dan menghargai sejarah mereka. Salah satunya dengan melakukan ritual. Ritual adalah praktik tertua yang dilakukan oleh nenek moyang kita secara turun temurun dan telah menjadi suatu kebiasaan. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif dimana dalam teknik pengumpulan datanya dilakukan berdasarkan etika kualitatif seperti wawancara, dokumentasi, dan kualifikasi data. Masyarakat Sarangan di Kabupaten Magetan yang menjadi objek penelitian ini dinilai telah mengalami transformasi budaya. J.G. Frazer dan E.B. Taylor menjadi alat analisis dalam melihat sejauh mana makna *Pundhen* baik secara ontologis maupun epistemologis. Selain itu, pendekatan hermeneutika Rudolf Bultmann akan menambah kedalaman analisis penelitian ini secara komprehensif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Pundhen Telaga Sarangan* adalah simbol spiritualitas yang memiliki nilai sakralitas tinggi. Itu adalah tempat suci bagi masyarakat setempat dalam menjalin hubungan interpersonal dengan leluhur dan spirit yang ada di luar dirinya (yang lain).

Kata Kunci: Epistemologi, *Pundhen*, transformasi, budaya.

1. Introduction

Indonesians have varied ways to respect their ancestors' history (Geertz C., 1984). The most obvious method is to implement a series of rituals. It is an activity ancestors perform hereditarily (Post, 2015) and becomes custom. Ritual (custom) activities have been closely attached to the local community and disbursed in all regions in Indonesia and globally. The Sarangan community in Magetan, East Java, has

a unique ritual known as Pundhen Telaga Sarangan. Pundhen, in the Javanese language, means sacred or something considered holy and has unseen strength (Prasetya, 2020). Until now, the Sarangan community has performed this practice heritably.

This research aims to know how the community interprets Pundhen Telaga Sarangan and the transformation of its meaning. The community sees the Pundhen as a folk legend full of mysticism and a more comprehensive set of beliefs. The assimilated Pundhen gives birth to a new interpretation as a medium that connects man with the universe, ancestral spirits, and God. Religious elements (Islam) are now attached to the Pundhen rite, such as *larungan tumpen* and Islamic rituals (*do'a* and *pujas*). The research also examines how the Pundhen rite has become a sacred symbol and religious tourist attraction for followers of specific religions.

In response to this, Basyir (2016), in his research, Indonesian Islamic society, especially in Java, has attracted the attention of anthropologists to research it. The results of the study revealed that the Balinese Islamic community, which originated from the islands of Java and Madura, is identical to the Balinese Islamic community. The Sarangans and Balinese have similarities in sacralising holy places. However, there is a distinction between them in utilising their culture, traditions, and beliefs for the benefit of their lives, as Kunawir suggests.

Meanwhile, the Sarangans see the Pundhen as an object used to fulfil their worldly needs. However, it is about their faith, respect for the land and ancestors, and pride and gratitude that nothing can measure. They feel inner and outer satisfaction when they visit the holy symbol of Pundhen. Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucianists view their houses of worship as sacred rites. Houses of worship are places where religious people can worship, communicate, praise, and build spiritual values with God. For the community, Pundhen is similar to how local religions sanctify forests, trees, rocks, and the universe as living entities with a spirit, life, and spirituality.

In his descriptive analysis, Edward Palmer Thompson (2015) argues that we must holistically interpret culture, customs, and traditions. The ancestors and modern people tend to interpret culture, customs, and traditions narrowly, rigidly, and mystically. The Sarangan community follows the same pattern when interpreting Pundhen. The community is a traditional society that is inclusive due to the ritual practices and traditions in the region.

Suyono (2020) and Ventura (2018) reviewed the dynamics of Sarangan Lake, incarnating as a tourism object, and discovered that certain attempts are required to improve competitiveness so that Sarangan Lake can be an economic contributor to surrounding villages and communities. Some attributes are necessarily improved to increase tourist satisfaction. Dewi and Fitriani (2021) showed that the privilege of Sarangan Lake is necessary to disseminate to the public. It does not only reveal its mythology but also other tourism packages, so it provides educational value for visitors. Rini R.S. (2021) divides the rituals of the Sarangans into two points. First, the community generally performs sacred rituals. Second, the Magetan Government provide an agenda as a form of tourism packaging. Hasan, H. N., & Susanto, E. (2021) suggest that culture, customs, and traditions are forms of local value and self-creativity that reflect social reality.

Some gaps distinguish this research from previous existing studies, including [1] Pundhen, a sacred ritual for Balinese Hindus to worship their gods and goddesses, as mentioned by Kunawir in his paper. It is not just the desire of Sarangan residents who seek sensation from the popularity of Telaga Sarangan folklore. It is a belief system that encompasses the entire Balinese Hindu community. [2] This research explicitly explores the epistemology of the Pundhen Telaga Sarangan, how a folk legend is associated with mystical things that have local value, and social creativity that reflects social reality. Suppose the research conducted by the previous researchers focused on mystical aspects, group solidarity or social order; in contrast, this research emphasises the transformation of the meaning of Pundhens and has succeeded in transforming the Sarangan community into an inclusive traditional society. [3] This research also analyses the sacred rite (Pundhen) becoming a religious tourism site with the involvement of religious figures as charismatic leaders. Those figures play an essential role in Pundhen's ritual by mediating and connecting the people with their ancestors and the Almighty.

Two fundamental questions will be answered: [1] How is the cultural transformation of the community towards the sacred rite? [2] What is the (Islamic) epistemology of Pundhen Telaga Sarangan, and how do the locals interpret it? Traditional and modern societies differ in their ontological and epistemological views of local traditions. Comprehending this distinction through local practices is crucial. Additionally, Pundhen has evolved into a sacred symbol and a religious tourist attraction for adherents of specific religions. Therefore, this topic warrants discussion in this research paper.

Nowadays, there needs to be more meaningful hypotheses for cultures that are different from our own. It means that scholars need to explore cross-cultural hypotheses as a fascinating endeavour. We encounter unique perspectives, practices, and social dynamics when studying different cultures. Every culture has its history and values, so cultures are relatives (Cultural relativism) and have historical context. It is important to avoid imposing our cultural norms when analysing other cultures or religions. Meaningful hypotheses emerge from genuine curiosity, open-mindedness, and willingness to learn from cultures beyond our own.

Most religious and cultural studies employ traditional qualitative research methodologies. Qualitative methods are employed in this research to find meaningful descriptive patterns of a particular phenomenon, which involve analysing and interpreting texts, interviews, and observations. Solid and in-depth analysis is required to research the culture and diversity of local communities when studying phenomena in cultures (Anggito, 2018) that are informationally limited.

J.G. Frazer and E.B. Taylor's animistic and magic theory become analytical tools for seeing the extent of the meaning of Pundhen Telaga Sarangan both ontologically and epistemologically. However, this research not only discusses the transformation of the meaning of Pundhen but also discusses Pundhen as a sacred symbol that has become a religious tourism object. So, Rudolf Bultmann's (Johnson, 1974) contribution, which talked about symbols, is also employed to analyse symbols' meaning and Pundhen's essence. Bultmann's hermeneutical approach shows that, epistemologically, humans can believe whatever they choose or adhere to a belief system shared by many objects. This approach is suited to interpreting myths, folklore, and sacred places.

2. Pundhen Telaga Sarangan: Historical Values and Tradition of Local Communities

Each place has its historical values when connected with the past and the present days (Geertz, 2005). One of the places is Sarangan Lake. This place transforms into a community identity, and its existence remains. It is a symbol and attractive object at the centre of religious rituals for local communities. Pundhen originates from the Javanese language, meaning sacred rites, since it has mystical power (Karim, 2022). Sarangan Lake sits near Magetan, East Java's Sarangan Village.

Sarangan Lake or Sand Lake (Telaga Pasir) comes from local myth or folklore. The brief history shows that the origin of Sarangan Lake was the story of a couple named Kyai and Nyai Pasir. Shortly, both were rolling around on the ground due to eating snake's eggs, and they turned into a dragon and, finally, became a lake. Indeed, the story is illogical (WI et al., 2024). However, it can convince some communities as a believed myth broadly.

Around the lake are tombs of Sarangan's ancestors, such as Syeh Modur, Jogo Lelono, and Nyai Ramping. To respect ancestors buried in the lake, the Sarangan community performs Larung, an offering ritual (DA, Personal Communication, 2024), for their gratitude and blessing of health, age, agriculture, and life. The community provides a series of offerings as a means of adoration. Here, the function of Pundhen is the ritual centre of animal slaughtering as the condition of offerings (goats, sheep, chickens, and alike).

In some areas, Pundhen can be a wreckage of small temples from the Hindu age, a giant banyan tree, an old tomb, hidden springs, or naturally sacred things (SA et al., 2024). Pundhen Telaga Sarangan stands on the edge of Sarangan. It has two leafy, large, and old trees. The Pundhen is simultaneous with the appearance of Sarangan Lake, accompanied by thriving myths. The Pundhen appears to be a sacred site for the village's guardian spirits (A, Personal Communication, 2024).

The community just learned about the *Larung Sesaji* tradition, which is new. This tradition is just a continuation of the inheritance of their ancestors hereditarily. On the other hand, *larungan*, or

offering, is a custom that dates back to the ancient Mataram kingdom, according to the local leaders. The tradition of Larung was first performed by Atmaja or Atmo Wijoyo, one of the soldiers of the Mataram kingdom (IG et al., 2024) and the follower of Diponegoro. Atmaja run away to Tambakrejo Beach and performed tasyakuran (offering), known as *Larung Sesaji* (Koentjaraningrat, 1962) Historically, the *larungan* was the practice of Kejawen (Javanese traditional faith). The community will sail the *tumpeng*, known as *larungan tumpen* (a pyramid of rice and meals) in Sarangan Lake, to request protection and gratitude to God Almighty. Also, it was a commemorative agenda of the Javanese New Year.

Apart from *Larungan*, Pundhen Telaga Sarangan (as shown in Figure 1) is also a spot for the *Satu Suro* celebration (the Javanese New Year). This ritual aligns with the opinion of local public figures, who state that the Sarangan community is still spiritually connected with their ancestors, religious figures, and saints. Consistently, the community still maintains and preserves the cultural inheritance of the Mataram kingdom (UA et al., 2024).



Figure 1. Pundhen Telaga (sand) Sarangan

With the progressive development of information technology and communication (Mol, 2020), which provides various alternative diverse entertainment, the existing tradition of the community is still around. The Sarangan community has proven that modernisation does not affect them (Stage, 2020). Safeguarding the sustainability of Pundhen Telaga Sarangan, the local community maintains and preserves the authenticity of their local tradition.

Local culture and tradition have social functions, such as a medium for establishing solidarity mechanisms and self-expression (of dissatisfaction, disappointment, helplessness, and happiness). According to Malinowski's functionalism, the tradition that becomes public customs and beliefs aims to suffice some societal functions. Those functions are interconnected to maintain the traditional existence (Mol et al., 2020). Furthermore, the conventional function of societal life consists of two elements. Firstly, it is the place to distribute human feelings.

The public turns tradition as a medium to express their feelings. The distribution process of feelings starts internally and involves an individual's mind and taste. It is manifested in the tradition through certain media as an expression of gratitude to God (Lossky, 1952). Pundhen Telaga Sarangan is an intermediary media between society with their ancestors, spirits, and God (IG et al., 2024). Through *Larungan*, *Slametan*, and *Suro'an*, as well as the assistance of spiritual figures, these traditions form an interpersonal relationship (Underhill, 2020) between humans and "others" outside of themselves.

Secondly, it justifies the existing trust. Humans consider God and mystical things supernatural and magnificent powers (MA et al., 2024) that assure their lives. Thus, humans perform certain rituals as a form of seduction to God and mystical things to give them protection or safety. This practice is still rooted in the custom of the Sarangan community. The tradition is manifested in *Larung Sesaji* so that God Almighty protects, saves, and blesses the local community (IM et al., 2024).

3. Interpretation of Local Communities toward Pundhen Telaga Sarangan

The tradition of the Sarangan community is articulated as the richness of local culture (SR et al., 2024), accommodating policies and life wisdom. The method of the community in interpreting culture, customs, and traditions is the affirmation of the Indonesian identity. Pundhen Telaga Sarangan, from the holistic interpretation, consists of God, humans, and the universe across various dimensions – physical, biological, chemical, social, economic, mental, psychological, and linguistic. All these aspects are holistic entities, not separate parts.

The local community believes that Pundhen Telaga Sarangan is a spiritually syncretic centre. The mystical aspect of Pundhen becomes internal and external factors in maintaining traditions (UA et al., 2024). The mystical element decorating the myth of Sarangan Lake is a conservative feature of the traditional community, often related to natural phenomena and mystical issues.

Historically, every generation of humans develops and continues the achievement of the previous generation, but it separates from the ancient belief. Tylor divided primitive society. It started with wild civilisation (savage) (Tylor, 1987), followed by the ancient culture of the Middle Ages (agriculture) and the era of commerce, science, and modern industry (Purves, 2021). Humans were always bound to the doctrine of mysticism, animism, and dynamism (AN et al., 2024). Every generation practices its respective methods based on geographic, environmental, social, cultural, and religious conditions where they live.

The Sarangan community believes that the mystical world has existed and was born along with the birth of Javanese society. Moreover, most religions, mysticism, culture, and tradition arise due to the reaction of humans toward natural power. Then, this belief is passed down inherently from one generation to its successors, and it still survives until this time. According to Woodward, the Javanese can accept Islam because the mystical element in Islam is considered relevant to the Javanese's belief systems and philosophy and sacred doctrine in Islam, called gnosis (Woodward M., 2010). The elders said that:

"Pundhen and Sarangan Lake are more valuable than anything else because it is a sacred object, and the community believes it as a home of the ancestors and spirits of Sarangan Lake" (IG, Personal Communication, 2024).

Nature has a soul, such as animals, that must be protected and not exploited arbitrarily. The community believes that nature is just a reflection of the Highest Reality. It offers divinity, unity, and democratic values. Notably, the Sarangan community creates the concept of adoration by performing the *Larangan* and *Suro-an*. It is an offering to their ancestors and the Creator to protect and save them from disasters (AN, Personal Communication, 2024). According to Frazer, it is one of the self-defence mechanisms of the traditional community to survive their life (Frazer, 1922).



Figure 2. A location where the *Larung Sesaji* and other rituals are performed

Figure 2 depicts where the *Larung Sesaji* and other traditional rituals. The setting is a picturesque coastal area with clear blue waters and a sandy beach, surrounded by lush greenery and traditional Javanese architecture. People are gathered near the shore, preparing offerings and engaging in ceremonial activities. Boats adorned with colourful decorations float nearby, ready to carry the

offerings out to sea. The vibrant atmosphere is filled with reverence and community, highlighting the participants' cultural significance and spiritual dedication to these rituals. The Sarangan community considers that there is a Phantom in the Pundhen Telaga Sarangan since unseen spirits drive the world and universe. The implementation place of the *Larung Sesaji* and *Slametan* rituals is in the middle island of Sarangan Lake. The *Larungan* ritual is performed every Friday Pon (on Ruwah or 36 Javanese months) (AN, Personal Communication, 2024).

The Sarangan community wears attributes and performs habits carried out by their predecessors (MA, Personal Communication, 2024). It is necessary to wear an identity symbol during the rite in addition to offerings, prayers, praises, and traditional attire. Also, the slaughter and the burial of the goat's legs used during the ritual is directed to the west (DA, Personal Communication, 2024), so the community must conduct the established rules.

In addition, rituals require the completion of some acts (MA, Personal Communication, 2024). There are ritual appreciations, such as clothing, place, equipment, appreciation direction, and ceremony (Bloch, 2020). The elders are highly concerned about the mandatory rules in the *Larung Sesaji* ritual. It starts with providing facilities and infrastructure and moves up to symbols and primary media, including *tumpang*, five cigarette types, banana, charcoal, and milk. Some symbols allow humans to stand their ground to their will (SI, Personal Communication, 2024). It implies that diligent worship is necessary for ensuring one's safety.

Belief symbols for the Sarangan community are not just ancestry, mysticism, and syncretism; they are objects that connect them to the soul and spirit of the universe. Humans are firmly attached to the environment and surroundings, such as forests, water, air, wind, animals, the supernatural world, and the sky (*Jagad Cilik and Jagad Gedhe*) (Woodward M., 2010). In short, the Javanese consider that the spirits of their ancestors occupy both universes.

4. Cultural Transformation of Sarangan Community Toward Holy Rites

Pundhen, a sacred rite, is no longer understood as a myth but has become a sacred rite of ritual implementation, such as *Larung Sesaji*, *Suro'an*, and *Slametan*. It is interesting how the modern world's social, economic, and developmental aspects are changing the way of thinking of the local community. For example, there is a shift of meaning in understanding Pundhen. In short, the method of community in interpreting Pundhen Telaga Sarangan has changed.

It is necessary to trace the change pattern through a socio-historical approach. The Sarangan community's ancestral origins were the adherents of animism and dynamism, or paganism.

Similarly, the Egyptian and Roman civilisations practised belief systems akin to paganism. During that era, people believed particular objects (trees, rocks, mountains, lakes, rivers, and animals) possessed magical value. According to E.B. Tylor, myths can be considered realistic in specific contexts. Essentially, myths are beliefs or fairy tales (Tylor, 1987) that are difficult to prove rationally. Additionally, the Sarangan community views Pundhen as an entity with mystical powers.

The arrival of Hindu-Buddhism and its incorporation into the Sarangan community's beliefs, rituals, and worship did not diminish the continued practice of these traditions by the community at the Pundhen, which targeted the ancestors and spirits of the lake inhabitants. It indicates that during the Hindu-Buddhist era, the myth of Sarangan Lake was still a prominent aspect of the community's beliefs. However, the advent of Islam in 1082 (Marsham, 2009) led to a shift in perceptions regarding the Pundhen of Sarangan Lake.

It would be a mistake to assume people's belief in the Pundhen of Sarangan Lake has faded. The presence of Islam has spurred the deepening of people's beliefs. The acculturation of Javanese culture (myth and folklore) with Islam gave birth to new practices. For instance, the *larungan* ritual, exclusively addressed to the ancestors, seeks their protection from calamities such as crop failure, illness, and misfortune that may afflict the village. This ritual has transformed as protection is not solely sought from the ancestors but also from the almighty God. The characteristics of these rituals are *similar to Larungan and Slametan*, with several attributions of a vital religious element (Islam). On one hand, religious figures become the third party as an extension of God (KA et al., 2024).

Discussing Islam in Sarangan is a particularly noteworthy phenomenon. Local traditions still dominate, while Islam is just an ornament. Indeed, the community holds religious rituals, but the belief (Islam) could be more robust. An informant claimed that: "Islam (the Muslims) in Sarangan exists but not like Islam in other (Javanese) areas, which are much thicker with various variants such as Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah" (KA, Personal Communication, 2024).

Although Islam and world religions are acknowledged, the social and ideological aspects of the community have undergone significant transformations, influencing how people perceive their local context. So it can be concluded that Islam is only a formality to fulfil administrative demands. Kusnanta continued that most people in Sarangan are Muslims, but they do not practice the teachings of Islam uprightly. On the other hand, when it comes to local traditions, they will be total.

The high rate of social mobility represents a significant aspect of the transformation and interpretation of the Pundhen. Social mobility occurs due to fluctuations in the social structure, which regulates the organisation of social groups. Each subculture will experience a shift. The Sarangan community is changing relatively slowly and remains technologically and mentally underdeveloped. Regarding aesthetics, how people perceive Pundhen is changing directly to how the archipelago's culture is changing due to cultural inclusivity. (Hasan et al., 2021). However, the question remains whether the Pundhen Telaga Sarangan, with its long-standing sacredness, has fully transformed from its traditional form to a new, established symbol, representing the final stage of sub-cultural transformation.

Pundhen is an artefact of the past, an inscription on the cultural transformation process of the Sarangan community. It is a holy place that is sanctified, aesthetic, sacred, and a symbolic link between humans, their ancestors, and the almighty. Basyir (2016), in his research, observes that the objects and places of worship sanctified by the Balinese people are efforts to utilise these objects (in a negative connotation) to fulfil their desires, resulting in a sectarianistic religious attitude. The assumption that people manipulate supernatural forces and spirits (the others) for their benefit needs further examination. Such speculation must be tested for validity, as each community has diverse motives.

The Sarangan community hold ritual ceremonies, dances, offerings, pujas, and sacrifices, symbolising gratitude. The presence of charismatic leaders, such as religious figures and elders, enhances the confidence and spiritual value of the community (Setiyani, 2020). In traditional societies, it is an honour for them to follow the instructions of religious leaders and elders. The elders become a source of guidance in addressing socio-religious issues, particularly those about religious activities such as rites and rituals. Respecting the elders fosters a tolerant mindset (Woodward, 2010) within the community and cultivates a sense of affection and care for one another.

Kusnanta recognises that the Sarangan community, their ancestors, and the spirits (the Others) outside themselves mutually benefit each other. Suppose the community needs safety, blessings, and the welfare of life both physically and mentally. In that case, these non-human entities need them (humans) to worship and ask for protection from them (KA et al., 2024). Pundhen is a sacred rite, similar to how Balinese Hindus worship their gods and goddesses. It is not merely a desire of Sarangan residents to seek sensation from the popularity of Sarangan Lake folklore; instead, it is a belief system that encompasses the entire Balinese Hindu community.

When we examine the detrimental effects of Pundhen's meaning shift, we find that libertarianism's liberal and socialist beliefs and attitudes have supplanted the genuineness of the local tradition. Is it a decline for the local community? The role and contribution of various actors are the cause of cultural transformation in the Sarangan community.

Religious figures have functions and duties to guide the community concerning religious knowledge and practices, practice virtuous behaviour, and conduct *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (combating evil deeds and attitudes and upholding good deeds and attitudes) (Allen, 2023). The speech and behaviour of religious figures are reflections of religious teachings, social exemplary regarding morals, and social ethics. They have strategic measures to create harmony and cause disputes between religious peoples.

Notably, the role of religious actors is one of the determining factors in the cultural transformation of the Muslim community in Sarangan towards Pundhen Telaga Sarangan. The village elders confirmed that:

"All activities related to tradition, religion, and public interests involve religious figures. Deliberation is an option when social conflict occurs, and they act as a mediator because of their neutral position and non-politics interest" (MO et al., 2024).

The knowledge of religious figures is considered superior, and they have a higher and more respectful position in the social strata. Also, the influence of religious leaders can drive mass in the community. For example, they wrap the "Pundhen Telaga Sarangan" myth into social values. Pundhen, viewed as folklore, is transformed into something sacred and holy with unseen power. For religious figures, Pundhen is a sacred rite with values. Media connects humans with the unseen universe, the sky, and other entities outside humans. The community believes in the concept and manifests it in rituals (Reuter, 2015) for inner satisfaction and channel.

Here, the role of religious leaders proves that their ability to wrap up Pundhen Telaga Sarangan successfully gains support and changes the way of thinking in the local community about Pundhen. Religious values and Islamic elements are included in implementing religious ceremonies (Suyono, 2020), such as prayers and praises). This method can reduce traditional values of the original meaning of Pundhen Telaga Sarangan.

Public perception of Pundhen can shift public changes due to their experiences through interaction between pilgrims, producing essential points, such as the source of individual and group identity. Tradition living in the middle of the community functions as an identity or typical feature of specific community groups. Tradition demonstrates the origins of identity. On the other hand, Sarangan Lake is a source of income for the local community. Some articulate the tradition of *Larungan*, *Slametan*, and *Suro'an* as domestic tourist attractions (YN, Personal Communication, 2024).

The living tradition in Sarangan serves to fulfil security needs. Tradition is part of faith to satisfy the sense of security that arises within someone because each individual needs a safe (spiritual) place (Frazer, 1922). Seeking safety has become an instinct and need of every human.

Thus, the Sarangan community shows the need for security by implementing rituals. The belief evolves from being seen as folklore to something having mystical qualities. Eventually, Sarangan Lake became a local wisdom. It is the identity of the Sarangan community (IA et al., 2024). Religious leaders have a significant role in Pundhen Telaga Sarangan's meaning shift. Local practices intertwine with Islamic values. For instance, in *Slametan*, it is inserted verses of the Koran, preaches, and dhikr (AN, Personal Communication, 2024) led directly by religious leaders.

Meanwhile, the Suro'an tradition results from religious figures' contemplation. In Islamic history, the celebration of *satu Suro'* is only found in the Javanese culture (Central et al.). *Suro'an* is a constructed culture due to assimilation and acculturation between Islam and local values and knowledge. This results in new traditions and practices that have inclusive and exclusive features.

Again, religious figures play important roles in straightening or educating people in the middle of their confusion (Hamidiyanti, 2018). In the shifting process of cultural transformation, Pundhen has a different meaning, mainly in the youth. The meaning transformation of Pundhen also changes ritual meaning and function. Epistemologically, mystical issues are dragged into cultural and religious values, and the traditional values become unoriginal.

5. Islamic Epistemology in the Muslim Culture: Theo-anthropocentrism

The interesting issue of this research is the cultural transformation of the Sarangan community, mainly Moslem. Cultural transformation is their method of seeing local tradition as their cultural identity. Tradition is seen as the ritual practice of syncretism and mysticism (Zamami, 2014) and as the object of the religious activity of Moslem (Marsham, 2009). Due to the economic impact of the ancestors' inherited culture, Sarangan Lake is changing. The escalation of political, economic, and spiritual goals involves the involvement of religious authorities and stakeholders. An informant who owns a lodging business in the lake area said that:

"In terms of the economy in Sarangan over the last ten years, there has been much growth, and many local people have set up food businesses, cafes, shops, and guesthouses here. The government is very supportive of tourism. There are many entertainment attractions, especially during big events. There is a *Larangan Tumpeng* ritual every year. There is also a Suro and even a cultural festival. From an economic standpoint, this is beneficial for us companies" (FA et al., 2024).

Suyono (2020) and Ventu, who also addressed the issue of economic progress in Sarangan Lake, expressed the same opinion. However, both researchers saw the locals' economic stability (Ventura, 2018) due to the attractiveness of Sarangan Lake, which was transformed into a tourist destination. The authors agree with Suyono and Ventura that the community's enthusiasm is more focused on the attractions, entertainment, and facilities provided by the local government. However, at the same time, the authorities are selling the mysticism and mythology of Pundhen telega sarangan as an economic source.

Rini's research paper, which deals with the same topic, also comes to a similar conclusion. Telaga Sarangan has its charm independent (Rini R. S., 2014) of the Pundhen mythology. However, in our (the authors') opinion, the Pundhen mythology gave birth to rituals and religious ceremonies and was able to attract tourists. Ultimately, the Pundhen folklore is why the government decided to develop the local economy and learn about the community's local traditions and identity.

The concept of Pundhen is analogous to the perspective of the Balinese Hindu, for example. Temples and places of worship are regarded as sacred spaces that connect them with the *sang hiya widhi*. Sanctified places are regarded as crowns for them, but for others (society or religions), they are considered ordinary. In *The Golden Book*, Frazer (Frazer, 1922) posits that myth, magic, and mystical things are predecessors long before religion came. Before the advent of Islam and Hindu-Buddhism, the concept of Pundhen held a similar significance for the people of Sarangan. It was regarded as a symbol of purity, comparable to the sanctity of mosques, churches, and the tombs of saints or Javanese kings who had lived in the past.

In certain rituals and purifications of Pundhen, the community does not fight and humble themselves or submissive behaviour before the power or entity in question (KA et al., 2024). Instead, they seek to establish peace and foster positive interpersonal relationships. Pundhen serves as an activity of supernaturalism and a form of spiritual fulfilment within the mystical realm. E.B. Tylor (Pals, 2011) and Malinowski (Mol et al. et al., 2022) have mentioned that culture and religion are social activities. Both are expressed as myths and ceremonies with social value, thus enabling all societal elements to participate.

Due to its revered status and mythological associations, Pundhen has emerged as a prominent religious tourist destination. In contrast, the site's sacredness confers economic benefits to the local population. It implies that the local population exploits the site's popularity for their livelihood (Hasan & Susanto, 2021). This phenomenon is also available in other sacred locations, including Ulun Danu Bratan temple in Bali, Istiqlal Jakarta, Sunan Ampel tomb in Surabaya, and Candi Borobudur in Yogyakarta.

Sarangan Lake becomes a popular tourist destination (DA, Personal Communication, 2024). Time has changed, and knowledge and modernisation can reach out and change the concept of the traditional thinking of the community. Sarangan Lake functions as a ritual object and has the economic potential to benefit the local community. Currently, Sarangan has become a tourism reference due to the excellence of the local government in managing Sarangan Lake as a tourist village (EA et al., 2024).

The economic development of rural communities has been largely influenced by modernisation and industrial development. Those aspects can influence and increase their social mobility. Additionally, the bureaucratic system and governmental policies have boosted this issue. According to a famous anthropologist, Thomas Reuter (2015), the influencing factor of economic development in rural communities refers to the context of conservative socio-cultural values. Essentially, it is adapted to integrate with a more efficient economic system.

Moreover, from the perspective of local knowledge, the meaning transformation of Pundhen Telaga Sarangan has become the local identity and wisdom. Meanwhile, from a cultural aspect, it can reduce the authenticity of the local tradition. Then, Pundhen becomes a sacred rite for Muslims. It is an ancestor's inheritance to preserve.

Rudolf Bultmann (Ulfiyati, 2020), through his hermeneutical approach, posits that epistemologically, humans possess the capacity to believe whatever they Believe or to adhere to a belief system shared by a multitude of objects. It also applies to interpreting myths, folklore, and sacred places. Bultmann refers to this concept as existentialization. Existentialisation means the process of making an object (myth, place, or thing) what it is.

Therefore, Bultmann says that the beliefs of religious communities still have an essence. This standard feature of existentialism posits that existence precedes essence (Ulfiyati, 2020). The Sarangan community's interpretation of Pundhen represents a form of "faith" (Keristina et al., 2023) free from external validation. Faith may be defined as an act of self-surrender to bear responsibility obediently and a sense of freedom not influenced inwardly by the world.

People who pilgrimage to Pundhen do not understand the meaning and history but want to see cultural attractions and religious ceremonies (AA, Personal Communication, 2024). Economically, it is a source of income for the interested parties. Conclusively, transforming local tradition into cultural values is just esoteric (Ulfiyati, 2020). Pundhen Telaga Sarangan is still seen as esoteric rather than anthropocentric.

One of the elders claimed:

"... People here believe that this world comprises more than one element. We are not alone in this universe. God has created connected human beings, jinn and other creatures... and Pundhen... is like a centre or portal that connects us (human beings) to the universe and God. The spirits of our ancestors live in this universe, and Pundhen is an object or medium that connects us to them. And, as muslims we know the concepts of *al-insaniyah*, *al-kauniyah* and *al-ilahiyah*" (IG, Personal Communication, 2024).

The term *al-insaniyah* means referring to 'man', *al-kauniyah* means the 'universe' and *al-ilahiyah* which means 'Allah Almighty' (IG, Personal Communication, 2024). Surah Al-Baqarah verse 30 mentions it where Khalifah means 'leader or *al-insan*' (human), *al-ardh*, which means 'earth/universe', and *rabbun*, 'one God'. This concept is called the-anthropocentric, which etymologically comes from Greek and is divided into three parts: the meaning God, anthropoid meaning man, *eco* or *oikos* meaning ecosystem, and centric meaning centre (Keristina et al., 2023). So the word can be summarised as the-anthropocentric, which means 'centred on God, man, and the universe'. Several researchers claim that Pundhen Telaga Sarangan is anthropocentric. People make pilgrimages to the Pundhen because they see the Pundhen as the centre of man's connection with their ancestors and God.

Do the policies of religious figures and the government ensure the existence of Pundhen Telaga Sarangan in the future? Epistemologically, the transformation and construction of local cultural traditions cause the insensitivity of the community to local traditions. The tradition is not only seen as 'ancestor inheritances that must be maintained and used commercially', but also how it can be a national identity and spiritually inspiring for the community.

The worst thing is that the tradition is gradually forgotten and abandoned. In contrast, liberalism and capitalism are shown by the policy stakeholders in responding to the tradition of Pundhen. Then, does society have to return to its roots (ancestors)? i.e. they behave conservative, traditional, and inclusive. It is lawful, provided that democratic, pluralistic, and humanistic (Arifin, 2017) attitudes are the characteristics of Indonesians.

Referring to the Islamic (theology), Hasan Hanafi offers the concept of theocentric (divinity) to anthropocentric (humanity). *Tauhid* (belief in One God) is not just about believing in God; it covers the correct definition of who Allah is and how humans should behave towards Him and other objects. Theo-anthropocentrism, in this case, is how to strengthen religion and social awareness. *Tauhid* of Muslims is still characterised by theocentric and utopian. Therefore, the paradigm transformation of

Islam from theocentric to the anthropocentric is required. Then, Tauhid does not only discuss God and His derivatives, such as His sayings, revelation, and properties (Saif, 2019).

Through this research, the epistemology of Pundhen Telaga Sarangan is about how we combine spiritual, moral, and social aspects. It is relationships between man and God and between man and the universe (Nugroho, 2016). It is a balance between man with God and among human beings. It is how to combine theocentric and anthropocentric into a unity.

Having strong faith in the Almighty God is the embodiment of Islamic theocentric (Arroisi, 2014), which tries to provide a point of emphasis on understanding God to the Sarangan community while having a noble character is one of the emphases on the image of anthropocentric regarding the concept of collaborative behaviour among human beings in this world.

When interpreting local tradition, one must implement the Jabariah aspect, referred to as Theanthropocentrism, alongside Islamic epistemology. Islamic epistemology philosophically studies Islam's origin, structure, method, validity, and purpose. It examines the extent of human destiny concerning substance, external objects, and reality. Additionally, it encompasses themes of humanity, universality, and divinity (Yazdi, 1992)

Theoretically, Islamic theology (*Ilmu Kalam Asy'ari*) cannot be proven scientifically or philosophically, and this concept needs to be revised. The new concept proposed by Hasan Hanafi about Islamic theology aims to transform classical Islam into not simply empty religious dogma. However, it transforms into an ethical and motivational foundation for human attitudes (Nugroho, 2016). Thus, the ideas of Hasan Hanafi related to theology seek to transform theocentric features of traditional theology into anthropocentric ones. It is from God to man (earth), textual to contextual, theory to action, and destiny to free will.

The Islamic theology (classical) element inserted by religious figures in the tradition of Pundhen is not entirely a reference to the attitudes of Muslims. The disconnected theoretical and practical faith of Muslims can cause a syncretic or double moral attitude that makes society underdeveloped, apathetic, and ignorant. Ultimately, the meaning of transformation and construction should be clear.

6. Conclusions

Magetan's identity is closely tied to Lake Sarangan, which holds social, economic, religious, and cultural values. It remains widely held that Pundhen Telaga Sarangan is esoteric rather than anthropocentric. From the perspective of local knowledge, the meaning transformation of Pundhen Telaga Sarangan has become a key element of local identity and wisdom. However, from a cultural aspect, this transformation can diminish the authenticity of local traditions, reducing Pundhen to a sacred rite for Muslims. It is an ancestral inheritance to preserve.

The epistemology of Pundhen Telaga Sarangan involves uniting spiritual, moral, and social aspects, emphasising relationships not only between humans and God but also between humans and the universe. It seeks a balance between humanity, divinity, and social harmony, combining theocentric and anthropocentric perspectives into a cohesive unity. Hasan Hanafi's theological ideas aim to transform traditional theocentric features into anthropocentric ones, shifting focus from God to man, from textual to contextual, from theory to action, and from destiny to free will.

This research is limited by its focus on the interpretation and transformation of Pundhen Telaga Sarangan within the specific context of Magetan, potentially overlooking broader regional variations and other cultural influences.

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