

# The Construction of Cultural Identity among Reyog Ponorogo Practitioners, East Java Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the construction of cultural identity among Reyog Ponorogo practitioners in Malang Regency, Indonesia. Drawing on symbolic interactionism and Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology, the study analyzes how cultural identity is produced, interpreted, and reproduced through symbolic practices, lived experiences, and collective meaning-making within the Reyog community. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation involving members of the Reyog Ponorogo Youth Arts Practitioners Community (PPSRP). The findings reveal that cultural identity is not a naturally inherited attribute but a dynamic social process shaped by symbolic interpretation, intersubjective experience, and the internalization of shared values. In this context, Reyog functions as a cultural system that sustains collective identity, social cohesion, and cultural continuity in a migrant social setting. This study contributes to sociology and cultural studies by demonstrating that traditional performing arts serve as significant mechanisms in the construction of cultural identity in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** cultural identity; Reyog Ponorogo; symbolic interactionism; social phenomenology; arts community

## INTRODUCTION

Cultural identity is a social construction formed through symbolic interaction, historical experience, and ongoing social practices in everyday life. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, identity emerges from processes of meaning exchange mediated by symbols, social roles, and reflexive self-awareness in interpersonal interaction (Mead, 1934; Jenkins, 1996). Cultural identity is therefore neither static nor mechanically inherited, but socially constructed and continuously negotiated within specific spatial and temporal contexts. In the era of globalization and modernization, local cultural identities face serious challenges in the form of cultural homogenization and the dominance of global popular culture. Stuart Hall (1992) argues that globalization often generates identity crises, particularly among local communities confronted by dominant global cultural flows. In this context, traditional arts are vulnerable to marginalization while simultaneously holding strategic significance for sustaining local cultural identity.

Beyond their local specificity, traditional performing arts constitute an important arena for understanding broader processes of cultural identity formation in contemporary societies. Across diverse social contexts, traditional arts are increasingly practiced under conditions of social mobility, migration, and cultural globalization, which reshape the ways cultural meanings are produced, negotiated, and maintained. Within this framework, Reyog Ponorogo should not be understood merely as a local cultural expression, but as a living tradition with broader theoretical relevance. As a lived cultural practice, Reyog offers an analytical lens for examining how cultural identity is constructed and reconstructed amid social change.

In migrant and translocal contexts, traditional performing arts often function as social arenas in which practitioners simultaneously negotiate belonging, continuity, and distinction. The reproduction of Reyog Ponorogo practices in Malang Regency demonstrates that tradition does not simply move across geographical spaces but is reinterpreted through interaction with new social environments. Rather than remaining static as heritage artifacts, traditional performances such as Reyog become dynamic practices through which individuals engage with collective memory, establish social relations, and respond to the pressures of modernity and globalization.

Although numerous studies have examined traditional performing arts as cultural heritage, symbolic representation, or tourism commodities, relatively few have focused on how cultural identity is constructed through the intersubjective experiences of practitioners in migrant settings. Existing research tends to emphasize preservation, aesthetic dimensions, or institutional narratives, while the everyday lived experiences through which artists internalize, negotiate, and reproduce cultural meanings remain underexplored. Consequently, the micro-level processes of cultural identity formation among practitioners have received limited scholarly attention.

Addressing this gap, the present study places intersubjective experience at the center of analysis in examining the construction of cultural identity among Reyog Ponorogo practitioners in a migrant context. By integrating symbolic interactionism and Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology, this article shifts analytical focus from Reyog as a static cultural form to Reyog as a social process grounded in lived experience. Cultural identity is therefore understood not as a finalized inheritance but as an ongoing outcome of interaction, shared meaning, and symbolic practice within the artistic community.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using social phenomenology. This approach is chosen to capture the depth of subjective experience and meaning constructed by Reyog practitioners in their everyday lives. Rather than measuring variables, the study focuses on interpreting lived experience within the arts community.

The research design is exploratory and interpretative, positioning the lived experiences of Reyog practitioners as the primary analytical focus. Research participants were selected purposively from active members of the Reyog Ponorogo Youth Arts Practitioners Community (PPSRP) in Malang Regency, based on criteria of sustained participation, length of involvement, and engagement in rehearsal and performance activities.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore subjective experiences, symbolic interpretations, and perceptions of cultural identity. Participant observation was carried out during rehearsals, performances, and community activities. Documentary materials such as photographs, videos, and archival records were used to complement the data.

Data analysis followed phenomenological procedures, including epoché, phenomenological reduction, thematic categorization, and intersubjective interpretation. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, and reflective dialogue with research participants.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of this article is designed to explain the process of cultural identity construction among Reyog Ponorogo practitioners through the integration of symbolic interactionism, social phenomenology, cultural identity theory, and the conception of culture as a system. Cultural identity is conceptualized not as a statically inherited attribute but as a socially produced, subjectively experienced, and intersubjectively constructed process within the life of the arts community.

This study draws on four main theoretical foundations: George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism, Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology, Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity, and Koentjaraningrat's anthropological view of culture. These perspectives are integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of

how meaning, experience, and cultural systems interact in shaping the cultural identity of Reyog Ponorogo practitioners in a migrant context.

### **1. Symbolic interactionism George Herbert Mead**

Views society as the product of social interaction mediated by symbols. Mead argues that meaning does not inherently reside in objects or actions but emerges through social interaction involving interpretation and role-taking. The self is formed through the dynamic relationship between the 'I', representing spontaneity and creativity, and the 'Me', representing the internalization of social norms and expectations. In traditional performing arts such as Reyog Ponorogo, role-taking is particularly significant because each performative role embodies specific social expectations and symbolic meanings that practitioners must internalize.

### **Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology**

Social phenomenology, as developed by Alfred Schutz, provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how social reality is experienced and interpreted by individuals in everyday life. Schutz introduces the concept of the lifeworld as the realm of subjective experience that forms the basis of human social action. The lifeworld constitutes the space in which individuals engage in routine activities, interact with others, and construct meanings derived from their lived experiences.

In addition to the lifeworld, Schutz formulates the concept of stock of knowledge, referring to the accumulated experiences, understandings, and forms of knowledge that individuals draw upon to interpret social reality. Within the context of the Reyog community, this stock of knowledge is formed through familial experience, local traditions, training processes, and continuous interaction among practitioners and the wider community.

Social phenomenology emphasizes that social reality is inherently intersubjective, meaning that it is constructed and understood collectively through shared meanings. Consequently, the cultural identity of Reyog practitioners is not merely an individual experience, but the outcome of ongoing processes of social negotiation and validation within the community. This perspective enables the present study to explore how Reyog is lived, felt, and interpreted as an integral component of both personal and collective identity.

### **Stuart Hall conceptualizes**

In contemporary cultural studies, Stuart Hall critiques essentialist perspectives that conceive cultural identity as fixed and homogeneous. Hall conceptualizes cultural identity as a process of becoming—an ongoing process that is continuously negotiated within historical contexts, systems of representation, and relations of power. From this perspective, identity is dynamic, fragmented, and situational rather than stable or permanent.

Hall's perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the identity of Reyog practitioners in migrant settings. Within contexts of social mobility and encounters with other cultures, Reyog cultural identity is not reproduced identically as in its place of origin, but instead undergoes processes of adaptation and reinterpretation. Cultural identity is thus understood as the outcome of an encounter between past traditions and present social realities.

### **Culture as a System: Koentjaraningrat's Perspective**

Koentjaraningrat conceptualizes culture as an integrated system comprising seven universal elements: language, knowledge systems, social organization, livelihood systems, technology and material culture, religious systems, and the arts. Within this framework, the arts function as a primary medium for the reproduction of cultural values, symbols, and collective cultural identity.

From this perspective, Reyog Ponorogo is understood as an integral component of a broader cultural system rather than an isolated artistic expression. Reyog is closely connected to the moral values, social structures, and worldviews of its supporting community. As such, Reyog artistic practices serve both as a vehicle for the transmission of cultural values and as a social space for the formation and reinforcement of collective identity within the community.

By synthesizing symbolic interactionism, social phenomenology, cultural identity theory, and the anthropological conception of culture, this study conceptualizes cultural identity as a layered social construction. This framework enables the analysis of how cultural identity among Reyog Ponorogo practitioners is constructed, experienced, and reproduced through artistic practice and community life.

### **Theoretical Synthesis**

The integration of symbolic interactionism, social phenomenology, cultural identity theory, and the conception of culture as a system enables this study to conceptualize cultural identity as a layered social construction. Symbolic interactionism elucidates the process through which meaning is formed via symbols and social interaction; social phenomenology reveals the subjective and intersubjective experiences of social actors; cultural identity theory situates identity as a dynamic and continuously negotiated process; while the cultural systems perspective underscores the position of Reyog within a broader framework of cultural values.

This theoretical framework provides the analytical foundation for understanding how the cultural identity of Reyog Ponorogo practitioners in Malang Regency is constructed, interpreted, and reproduced through artistic practices and communal social life.

## **DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH OF RESULTS**

This section presents the main findings of the study concerning the construction of cultural identity among Reyog Ponorogo practitioners within the Reyog Ponorogo Youth Arts Practitioners Community (PPSRP) in Malang Regency. The findings indicate that the cultural identity of Reyog practitioners is not formed instantaneously nor transmitted mechanically, but rather emerges through layered and continuous social processes that are internalized through artistic practice and communal life.

### **Reyog Symbols as Structures of Cultural Identity Meaning**

The findings show that symbols within the Reyog performing art—such as Singo Barong, Warok, Jathil, Bujang Ganong, gamelan accompaniment, and pre-performance rituals—function as primary structures of meaning in the formation of cultural identity. These symbols are understood by Reyog practitioners not merely as aesthetic components of performance, but as representations of moral and cultural values that must be embodied and internalized.

The Warok figure is interpreted as a symbol of resilience, authority, and moral responsibility. Jathil is understood as representing courage, youthful energy, and disciplined aesthetic movement, while Bujang Ganong is interpreted as a symbol of cleverness, flexibility, and the capacity to confront social critique through expressive performance. These meanings cultivate an awareness that participation in Reyog constitutes an expression of cultural selfhood that binds individuals to the collective values of the community.

### **Subjective Experience and the Lifeworld of Reyog Practitioners**

The findings further reveal that the subjective experiences of Reyog practitioners within their lifeworld constitute a fundamental foundation for the construction of cultural identity. Most practitioners come from family or social environments that introduced them to Reyog from an early age. Experiential learning through routine rehearsals, direct involvement in performances, and intensive interaction with fellow community members reinforces the understanding that Reyog is an inseparable part of their lives.

The lifeworld of Reyog practitioners is characterized by the rhythm of rehearsals, the coordination of movement and music, and shared emotional experiences that strengthen a sense of belonging to the community. Through these experiences, Reyog is not merely experienced as an artistic activity, but as a social space that shapes practitioners' value orientations and life attitudes.

### **Intersubjectivity and the Formation of Collective Identity**

The cultural identity of Reyog practitioners is constructed through processes of intersubjectivity, namely shared understandings of meaning developed collectively within the community. Repeated interactions during

rehearsals, informal discussions, and collective performances enable ongoing social validation of symbolic meanings and performative roles. Through this process, the identity of being a “Reyog practitioner” functions as a social category that distinguishes community members from external groups.

This collective identity strengthens internal solidarity and fosters a sense of pride in the Reyog tradition. Such collective consciousness becomes the basis for a shared commitment to maintaining the continuity of Reyog, particularly within migrant contexts where this tradition functions as an important marker of cultural identity.

### **Cultural Values as Community Habitus**

The findings also demonstrate that Reyog cultural values become internalized as a community habitus. The value of discipline (*rapi*) is reflected in regular and orderly rehearsal practices and performance presentation; resilience (*tangguh*) is manifested in the physical and mental endurance required during intensive training processes; while communal solidarity (*guyub*) is expressed through cooperation, mutual support, and respect among community members.

These values are not transmitted through formal instruction, but are acquired through repeated practice, exemplary behavior modeled by senior members, and collective experience. Consequently, Reyog cultural identity does not remain confined to the performance sphere, but extends to shaping everyday behavioral patterns and life orientations of its practitioners.

The findings of this study reinforce the view that cultural identity is a social construction shaped through symbolic interaction and phenomenological experience. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the meaning of Reyog emerges through repeated processes of role-taking and symbolic interpretation performed by practitioners. Reyog symbols function as media of meaning communication that connect individuals to their community and provide a shared framework for understanding cultural values.

Alfred Schutz’s social phenomenology helps explain how the subjective experiences of Reyog practitioners become sedimented within the lifeworld and form a shared stock of knowledge. Through collectively lived experiences, practitioners develop common understandings of values, ethics, and the purposes of artistic practice. This process demonstrates that cultural identity does not rely solely on origins or heritage, but is grounded in experiences that are lived, shared, and continuously interpreted together.

The collective identity formed within the PPSRP community reflects Mead’s concept of the self, in which identity emerges through an ongoing dialogue between individual spontaneity (I) and the internalization of social expectations (Me). Recognition from fellow community members, trainers, and audiences acts as significant others that shape the formation of self-identity among Reyog practitioners. Consequently, the identity of being a Reyog practitioner is the outcome of a reflective and relational social process.

In migrant contexts, these findings align with Stuart Hall’s conception of identity as a process of becoming. The cultural identity of Reyog practitioners is not reproduced in a static manner as in the place of origin, but instead undergoes processes of adaptation and adjustment to local social realities. Reyog thus functions as a social arena in which tradition and modernity are dynamically negotiated.

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that Reyog Ponorogo operates not merely as a medium of aesthetic expression, but as an active social mechanism in the formation, maintenance, and reproduction of cultural identity. Within community practice, Reyog becomes a space for value learning, the strengthening of social solidarity, and the development of collective cultural consciousness.

The implications of this study encompass both theoretical and practical dimensions. Theoretically, this research contributes to the sociology of culture by demonstrating the importance of integrating symbolic interactionism and social phenomenology in understanding the formation of cultural identity. The findings affirm that cultural identity cannot be adequately understood as a mere symbolic inheritance, but rather as a social process that is lived, interpreted, and constructed intersubjectively through ongoing social interaction.

This study also enriches the field of traditional performing arts studies by centering the experiences of practitioners as social actors. Accordingly, the study of the arts does not remain confined to descriptions of form and aesthetic function, but extends into the realm of lived experience and meaning that actively shapes the identity of cultural actors.

Practically, the findings hold important implications for cultural preservation efforts. The sustainability of Reyog Ponorogo does not depend solely on the transmission of performance forms, but also on the successful transmission of cultural values and meanings to younger generations. Arts communities, educational institutions, and cultural policymakers need to facilitate spaces of praxis that allow symbolic interaction and collective experience to unfold continuously.

Furthermore, this study highlights the strategic role of arts communities in migrant settings in maintaining cultural identity. Support for communities such as the Reyog Ponorogo Youth Arts Practitioners Community (PPSRP) can serve as an effective strategy for preserving cultural diversity while simultaneously strengthening social cohesion within increasingly plural societies.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the cultural identity of Reyog Ponorogo practitioners in Malang Regency is a dynamic and layered social construction. Cultural identity does not emerge as an automatically inherited attribute, but is formed through symbolic interaction, subjective experience within the lifeworld, and collective meaning-making processes that occur continuously within the arts community. Cultural identity is therefore understood as a social process that is constantly negotiated and reproduced through artistic practice and everyday social relations.

The findings demonstrate that Reyog symbols—such as the roles of Warok, Jathil, Bujang Ganong, Singo Barong, gamelan accompaniment, and pre-performance rituals—function as primary media for the construction of meaning and identity. Through role-taking and repeated interaction, these symbols are internalized by practitioners as representations of moral values, ethics, and cultural responsibility. This process underscores the relevance of symbolic interactionism in explaining how cultural identity is constructed through exchanges of meaning and social recognition.

From the perspective of Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology, the subjective experiences of Reyog practitioners within their lifeworld constitute the foundational basis for cultural identity formation. Experiences of rehearsal, performance, and communal life give rise to a shared stock of knowledge that enables intersubjective understanding. The identity of being a Reyog practitioner is thus not merely an individual possession, but is reinforced through collective validation and recognition within the PPSRP community.

In migrant contexts, Reyog Ponorogo functions as a cultural mechanism that stabilizes and sustains cultural identity amid social change. The cultural identity of Reyog practitioners reflects the process of becoming, as articulated by Stuart Hall, in which tradition is not reproduced statically but is adapted and reinterpreted in accordance with local social realities without relinquishing its core meanings.

Overall, this study affirms that Reyog Ponorogo operates not only as a traditional performing art, but also as an active social and cultural arena in the formation of identity, solidarity, and cultural sustainability. The integration of symbolic interactionism, social phenomenology, and cultural identity studies provides a theoretical contribution to the sociology of culture and performance studies, while also opening avenues for future research on the role of traditional arts communities in shaping cultural identity in contemporary society.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Research on "The Construction Of Cultural Identity Among Reyog Ponorogo Practitioners, East Java Indonesia has received recommendations from the local education office and is supported by the University of Empat Lima Surabaya and and University of Muhammadiyah Malang.

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