

CRAFTING NEW RITUALS THROUGH INTERRITUALITY: A COMMUNITY CASE FROM MALANG, INDONESIA

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Abstract: This article examines how a citizen group in East Java, Hurip Hurup Handarbeni (H3), designs “new rituals” to care for local springs. We use “new ritual” to mean a community-built ceremony that recombines familiar symbols and steps and turns environmental aims into clear, shared rules of conduct. Building on the idea of interrituality, the blending of elements from different ritual repertoires, we show how H3 joins Javanese processions, multi-faith prayer, and civic/disaster signage to make water care visible and actionable at Sumber Wutah. The study draws on seven months of ethnographic, including participant observation and in-depth interviews. Findings indicate that the ritual script does more than raise awareness: it widens participation (officials, elders, youth, visitors), encodes simple rules through color-wrapped trees and banners (“quiet area,” “soap-free,” extraction etiquette), and supports ongoing site maintenance between events. Conceptually, the case clarifies how performance and interrituality can give grassroots initiatives moral authority without large budgets. Practically, it offers a portable template, clear route, cues, and signs that other communities can adapt to protect small water sources. We conclude that carefully crafted ritual can translate cultural heritage into everyday stewardship and help coordinate behavior at sensitive ecological sites.

Keywords: Water conservation; ritual; culture

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1. INTRODUCTION

Around the world, growing environmental pressures are pushing communities to use cultural practices to address local problems (Crate, 2011). Many studies show how long-standing rituals can support conservation (Fariss et al., 2023). By contrast, scholar has paid relatively limited attention to describe how communities create or crafting new rituals to meet today's needs. This article responds to that gap by examining the Hurip Hurup Handarbeni (H3) community in Mangliawan, East Java, Indonesia, which designs new rituals to protect local springs.

In this study, we observe that the H3 community responds to local challenges by creating new rituals to promote environmental awareness, with particular attention to water preservation. The term new ritual refers to a ritual form composed by combining elements from existing ceremonies, drawing both from practices within the community and from other communities. Following Hornborg (Hornborg, 2017), we describe the practice of composing new rituals by blending multiple ritual repertoires as interrituality.

We use “new ritual” to mean a community-made performance that (a) recombines familiar symbols and sequences, (b) sets new environmental aims, and (c) turns those aims into simple, shared rules of conduct. In H3, this “newness” appears in the blend of Javanese ceremony, multi-faith prayer, and contemporary environmental messages. These performances do more than raise awareness: they build solidarity, invite people from different backgrounds to join, and help set everyday norms for how water sources should be treated.

This study asks how H3’s new ritual practices support community engagement, practical conservation, and local knowledge around spring preservation in Mangliawan. Treating ritual as performance, we pay attention to route design, sensory cues, role assignment, and ritual visuality to see how symbols become clear guidance at the spring site.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rituals within a culture are often seen as highly structured activities, governed by intricate rules and precise procedures. This perception has led many to view rituals as static and resistant to change, serving primarily to reinforce established cultural norms (Brown, 2003). Through their repetition and formalism, rituals appear to safeguard values and transmit them across generations.

However, Eric Hobsbawm challenges this static view. Hobsbawm's account of the *invention of tradition* demonstrates that what is presented as continuity is often assembled, formalized, and redeployed to serve contemporary political, economic, or moral purposes, while retaining the appearance of antiquity and authority (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012). On this reading, tradition functions as a flexible repertoire rather than a fixed inheritance.

In addition, Grimes argues that ritual formation is not the exclusive domain of religious specialists; lay actors have long adapted, combined, and at times, devised ceremonial forms of their own (Grimes, 1992). In urban and peri-urban contexts, neighborhood associations and civic groups routinely stage commemorations, blessings, and place-based observances that attach moral claims to specific sites (Dell'Aglio, 2025). This perspective provides a basis for treating grassroots initiatives, such as the Hurip Hurup Handarbeni (H3) community as legitimate producers of ritual.

Bell sharpens the mechanism by which such legitimacy is secured. She conceptualizes ritualization as a strategic way of marking action as special through stylization, repetition, and framing, thereby authorizing values and coordinating behavior (Bell, 1992). Non-elite actors can, in this view, secure recognition by adopting recognizable forms, repeating them publicly, and embedding cues that guide conduct. Communities do not merely inherit rituals; they actively ritualize practices to address present needs.

Performance oriented approaches further shift attention from belief to enactment. Turner and subsequent performance theorists understand ritual as an event that organizes bodies, space, and time; roles, pacing, and sensory cues cultivate shared meaning and solidarity (Turner, 1980). Turner's model of social drama: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration or schism offers a processual lens for moments when communities mobilize ceremonial forms to repair social and moral order (Turner, 1979).

The concept of interrituality, introduced by Moyaert (2019) and Hornborg (2017), is central to this analysis. Interrituality refers to the process by which elements from different rituals and traditions are combined to create new practices that resonate with contemporary social, cultural, or ecological needs. In this research, interrituality provides a lens to examine how the H3 community blends traditional Javanese symbols, environmental messages, and modern ritual practices to foster greater community awareness and responsibility for water preservation.

Building on these strands, this study employs two working concepts. New ritual refers to community-authored performance that recombines familiar symbols and sequences,

ties them to explicit contemporary aims, and translates those aims into clear rules of conduct. Interrituality denotes the purposeful blending of elements from distinct repertoires (e.g., Javanese cosmology, multi-faith prayer, and civic/disaster iconography) to broaden participation and render instructions legible. Together, invention, performance, and interrituality provide a coherent framework for analyzing how H3 designs and enacts new rituals that link cultural continuity to practical stewardship of local springs.

A complementary point comes from recent work on water itself. Water is not only a resource but a relationship that asks for responsibility. Research on sacred sites and community water governance shows that ceremony help people remember rules, set boundaries of use, and carry duties across time (Diver et al., 2022). New studies on drinking water governance describe how communities can bridge state systems with local norms to keep water safe and accessible (Acharibasam et al., 2024), while work on Indigenous water relations reframes care as a duty to a living presence (Martinez-Cruz et al., 2024). The H3 case fits this evidence by putting respect, restraint, and routine maintenance at the heart of everyday encounters with the spring.

Taken together, this literature shows that ritual is not a fixed inheritance but an active repertoire that communities can assemble for present needs. Invention and ritualization help lay actors give familiar forms a new purpose and public authority, coordinating conduct around shared places and. A performance view explains how sequences, roles, and sensory cues turn values into collective action and help repair social life when tensions arise. Interrituality clarifies how H3 blends Javanese symbols, multi-faith prayer, civic markers, and environmental messages to widen participation and keep instructions clear. Finally, work on water governance grounds these choices in an ethic of responsibility, showing how ceremony and local rules sustain safe and respectful use of springs over time. Guided by these insights, this article uses the working ideas of new ritual and interrituality to read H3's design as a bridge between cultural continuity and everyday stewardship.

3. METHODOLOGY

Our project began as a plan to produce a documentary film on water preservation in the city of Malang. During production, we followed the H3 community, which patiently designed rituals to promote environmental awareness. We observed their activities, conducted interviews, and took part in community events. The filmmaking process was accompanied by ethnographic fieldwork carried out over a period of seven months.

We combined ethnographic methods with the collection of visual materials, which proved highly valuable for examining perceptions and behavior in a study of ritual

performance (Jaimangal-Jones, 2014). Our original goal was to document the community's environmental conservation efforts, particularly around the water sources in Mangliawan District, Malang Regency. However, as the research progressed, our focus expanded to investigate how the H3 community employs newly created rituals to respond meaningfully to environmental challenges.



Figure 1: Research team documenting ritual activities of the H3 community in Mangliawan, Malang

Participant observation was our primary research method. Over seven months (January–July 2024), we participated in and closely observed 4 ritual events and community gatherings. Our observations focused on key elements such as spatial arrangements, sensory experiences (including the use of incense, prayer chants, and symbolic offerings), and embodied practices that reinforced community solidarity and environmental messages. By immersing ourselves in daily interactions and communal activities, we gained insights into the deeper significance and symbolic meanings embedded in these rituals. Participant observation was very useful for noticing the planned details of the ritual. It allowed the researcher to record embodied practices such as gestures, speech, posture, rhythm, and the sequence of actions (Cain & Scrivner, 2022).

We conducted in-depth interviews with 11 community members, consisting of two community members, two founding members who shaped the vision of H3, one ritual coordinator who managed ceremonial proceedings, one woman involved in ritual preparations, and five regular participants. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to

90 minutes. These interviews provided personal narratives, revealing individual motivations, interpretations, and emotional connections to the rituals, thus enriching our understanding of how traditional and contemporary practices are woven together to address pressing environmental issues.

Additionally, we collected and analyzed various audio-visual materials, including photographs and video recordings from past ritual events and community activities. Analysis of these visual archives provided evidence of the evolution of H3's environmental advocacy, highlighting how visual documentation reinforced the community's message and facilitated broader public engagement. Through the triangulation of these methods: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and audio-visual analysis, we demonstrate how rituals serve not only as effective tools for environmental advocacy but also as vital mechanisms for preserving and revitalizing cultural heritage within contemporary contexts.

Because the public life of the ritual depends on being seen, we used a visual ethnography approach to trace how visibility is created and how it travels beyond the event (Malafaia et al., 2025). Filming and still photography functioned as research tools rather than simple records. We mapped vantage points, crowd lines, and sightlines to the spring, and noted the placement of signs, color wraps, offerings, incense, and banners that draw attention and guide movement. We gathered wide shots and close observations to follow gestures, rhythm, smoke, and sound as cues that organize perception. We then used short video clips and photographs in interview elicitation so participants could comment on what they noticed, remembered, and felt.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 *Living Among the Springs*

Nestled on the western edge of Malang Regency, Mangliawan is a village in East Java, Indonesia, blessed with abundant springs that flow from the rocky cracks of the surrounding mountains. This natural wealth has long supported the local community's way of life, providing fresh water not only for farming and household needs but also as a draw for visitors seeking the beauty of clear, flowing streams.



Figure 2: rice paddies that once shaped daily life now stand alongside newly built houses and roads, reflecting how villagers balance farming traditions with rapid urban growth.

Mangliawan Village lies on the eastern fringe of Malang Regency, a landscape once dominated by rice paddies nourished by a network of perennial springs. In recent years, however, many fields have been replaced by housing clusters and small commercial buildings, while infrastructure such as a cellular tower now punctuates the skyline. More buildings not only change the view but also add pressure on the shallow groundwater that feeds the springs H3 wants to protect.

Farmers we spoke with reported declining water discharge during the dry season, a change they attribute to shrinking recharge areas and increased runoff from newly paved surfaces. In this situation, H3 sees its rituals as warnings. They remind people that every new roof or paved road affects the water, and that everyone must work together to protect it.

Despite its blessing of numerous water sources, Mangliawan today faces serious challenges. Pollution and accumulating waste threaten the springs' sustainability, creating deep concern among residents and environmental advocates (Kewuel & Aileen, 2023). The H3 community has taken these issues to heart, watching with worry as climate change and rapid spatial changes in Malang which urbanization and the conversion of green spaces bring added risks. Growing populations and expanding

infrastructure have reduced water catchment areas, raising fears of future water shortages (Mahendra & Pradoto, 2016).

Amid these pressing challenges, H3 members see themselves not only as beneficiaries of Mangliawan's springs but also as custodians, committed to preserving this invaluable resource for generations to come. In H3's view, the ceremonies function as public warnings and as invitations to collective care, an approach that aligns with our earlier framing of new ritual as a performance crafted by the community that links cultural continuity to practical stewardship.

4.2 History of the Hurip Hurup Handarbeni

The community was formed by individuals who loved venturing into local villages and exploring the surrounding natural landscape. They came from diverse professional backgrounds but were united in their joy of traversing footpaths, fields, rice paddies, and forests. Through these shared experiences, they found a simple happiness in discovering nature's beauty, offering them a momentary escape from daily routines.

Over time the group saw that the places they loved were under strain. Conversations about climate change and shifts in land use resonated with what they observed on their walks: litter along banks, muddied channels, and fewer areas where water could soak into the ground. They chose to learn more about disaster mitigation and to take practical steps to care for these sites.

From this decision came a new name, Hurip Hurup Handarbeni (H3). The change signaled an intention to align environmental protection with cultural tradition. Members began to weave local wisdom into their activities, designing ceremonies and practices that could speak to both heritage and present ecological needs. Through H3 they hoped to encourage a wider sense of responsibility for water while honoring the cultural forms that shape village life.

The name itself carries that message. In Javanese, *handarbeni* refers to a felt sense of ownership, one that implies duty to nature, culture, and community. It suggests that ownership is not only material but also moral and emotional. *Hurip* means life, and *hurup* evokes brightness, a reminder of the vitality they wish to sustain in the places they protect.

Logo design became part of this effort to communicate clearly. Mr. Orien, one of the founders, adapted the emblem of Indonesia's National Disaster Management Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana, BNPB). Guided by the ideal of *Memayu Hayuning Bawono*—enhancing the beauty of the world—the logo adopts a triangular

form familiar from BNPB, places a *gunungan* from *wayang kulit* to suggest the cosmos, and adds a handshake above the motto *Dulur Tunggal Banyu* ("Water Kin").



Figure 3: Indonesia's National Disaster Management Agency Logo and Hurop Hurup Handarbeni (H3) Logo

This design choice is both symbolic and strategic. By echoing the BNPB emblem, H3 situates its work within a language of public responsibility that is recognized at the state level. The *gunungan* brings local cosmology into view, joining official disaster preparedness with Javanese signs of order and care. Together these elements give the logo a double function: it lends legitimacy when H3 engages officials and it carries cultural meaning within ritual practice at the spring.

4.3 Crafting the New Ritual

An interview with one founding member, Mr. Junaedi, underscored a deliberate decision to safeguard springs near the settlement. That conviction set the community on a path to design a new ritual that would draw attention to local waters and teach appropriate conduct at the site. The process unfolded in four phases that echo our literature on ritualization and performance: observing, deliberating, arranging, and performing.



Figure 4: Members of the H3 community walk in procession across the rice fields toward Sumber Wutah spring. Bright green, yellow, orange, white, and black flags lead the group, drawing the eye and marking the path to water, while women carry offerings behind the flag bearers.

4.3.1 Observing

In early 2023 the group undertook *tilik banyu*, a walk to locate potential sources. They identified a vigorous spring that they later named *Sumber Wutah*, a term that denotes abundance. The spring sits near the meeting of two rivers, locally called a *tempuran*, a place long treated as sacred in Javanese cosmology. Although once used for meditation, the area had become neglected, partly because it lies behind housing and receives little day-to-day attention. Litter was visible along the banks, and paths showed signs of erosion. These observations clarified both the ecological pressures and the pedagogical aims that a new ritual would need to address.

In Javanese, *tilik* means to pay a visit, often used for visiting someone who is ill at home or in the hospital. Such a visit is not only to check a person's condition but also a gesture of care and empathy. The H3 community uses the phrase *Tilik Banyu*, "visiting the water," to show the same attention toward a spring. In practice, *Tilik Banyu* moves volunteers to clean the site: they remove litter, cut back weeds, and tidy the area so the spring does not look abandoned. Working together in the spirit of *gotong royong*, they improve the condition of *Sumber Wutah*.



Figure 5: Volunteers pause in a shaded grove near Sumber Wutah after cleaning the spring. Sitting in a circle, they raise their hands in prayer before a shared lunch arranged on banana leaves.

4.3.2 Deliberating

Informal discussions at the community office followed. Members invited academics, local historians, and tradition bearers to test ideas and to place *Sumber Wutah* within a wider cultural frame. During their discussions on the form of the ritual, the H3 community gathered many sources to design a new practice that fits the present. They first needed to set the date for the ceremony at Sumber Wutah. In Javanese tradition, a ceremony day is often chosen by finding a good day in the Javanese calendar. In addition, the H3 members also looked at the international calendar, especially dates related to the environment. They searched for information on the internet using Google. After deliberation, they agreed to hold the ritual on World Environment Day, 5 June. This choice was meant to link tradition with environmental preservation.

In the discussions, H3 also noted Mangliawan's historical status in Javanese records and pointed to the region's position relative to Mount Arjuna, Mount Kawi, and the Bromo Tengger Semeru area. The spring was proposed as a cultural site that could anchor learning about water. These exchanges provided what Bell (1992) calls authorization through practice. They also illustrate the invention of tradition in Hobsbawm's sense (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012), since references to the past were recomposed to serve a present environmental purpose.

Sumber Wutah spring lies near an archaeological site that shows traces of a civilization that existed before the Majapahit kingdom. In several historical records, the old village of Mangliawan is described as a beautiful place with many very clear springs. Among these springs stood rows of settlements and many temples (Galeswangi, 2025). For the H3 community, these records are a valuable source of inspiration for crafting new rituals around Mangliawan.



Figure 6: H3 member pray in front of a split yoni stone and an antefix. A yoni is a pedestal in Hindu temple architecture that symbolizes feminine generative power. The site stands beside the Sumber Wutah spring.

4.3.3 Arranging

The H3 community then converted discussion into a repeatable script. The route begins upstream and slows at marked thresholds where incense and flowers cue reverence. Elders lead prayers in Javanese and Arabic, and moments of silence allow participants to register sounds of water and birds. A system of colors on wrapped trees introduces a hierarchy of water use: white signals a basin for ritual respect, yellow indicates domestic filling with etiquette, and a black and white checkered cloth signifies that the water is available for everyday use, but it must be treated with due respect. Banners display a triangular mark adapted from the national disaster agency alongside the *gunungan* and short directives such as “quiet area,” “free of soap,” and “ritual use only.” Taken together, these elements function as environmental semiotics. They translate affect into instruction and give newcomers clear guidance without the need for constant verbal explanation.

In designing the new ritual at Sumber Wutah, the H3 community paid close attention to the visual elements they would show. They made a *tumpeng*, rice shaped into a cone and colored with butterfly pea flowers extract (*Clitoria ternatea*). The blue *tumpeng* was made to stand out and was arranged with offering flowers and fragrant incense. The *tumpeng* and offerings were placed near the spring as part of the ritual, symbolizing a request for forgiveness from the ancestors for having neglected a precious water source. Javanese people call this blue *tumpeng* as “Tumpeng Kapuranto” (Ababil et al., 2021)



Figure 7: Tumpeng made with butterfly pea flower sits on a leaf-lined tray, surrounded by flower offerings and gentle incense smoke near Sumber Wutah spring

4.3.4 Performing the ritual

After cleaning the site and placing signs, H3 convened a public ceremony. Those present included village officials, elders, a customary council, scholars, youth groups, and visitors from neighboring communities. The village head welcomed the gathering and thanked H3 for restoring the spring as a green and sacred space. A representative of the local water company spoke about the value of community action for clean water. Traditional leaders then recognized *Sumber Wutah* as a place for *patirtan*, that is ritual purification. The sequence that followed layered prayers, flower offerings, and incense. One academic participant crossed himself before and after praying. Such moments illustrate interrituality in practice, since diverse repertoires were held in a single space with shared purpose.



Figure 8: H3 community members offer prayers in traditional Javanese clothing while burning incense at the Sumber Wutah spring.

Members also wrapped nearby trees in agreed colors so everyone could see the hierarchy of water use. The event ended with a shared meal featuring *dawet*, a Javanese drink of soft green jelly made from rice flour and tapioca, flavored and colored with pandan or *suji*, and served in coconut milk with palm-sugar syrup. In many villages, *dawet* is offered when a new well is opened, together with rice and side dishes prepared by local women. Eating together strengthened ties and gave organizers a chance to invite volunteers for future maintenance.

Viewed through our framework, the H3 script operates as a new ritual authored by a grassroots community. It recombines familiar symbols, secures local authorization through public repetition, and encodes rules that can be remembered and followed. The ceremony functions as redressive action, since it marks conduct as special and coordinates behavior at a sensitive site. It is also an instance of the invention of tradition, because references to the past are assembled to serve present stewardship. In practical terms, the design standardizes clean-ups, establishes zones that are free of soap, clarifies extraction etiquette, and sustains attention to the spring beyond the day of the event.

5. DISCUSSION

This study examined how the Hurip Hurup Handarbeni community designs new ritual forms to care for local springs. Over seven months of fieldwork, combining participant observation, interviews, and visual analysis, we documented how H3 assembles processions, prayers, offerings, and site markers into a repeatable ceremony at Sumber Wutah. The ritual draws on familiar symbols and clear environmental messages, and it is staged in ways that participants from different backgrounds can understand and carry forward.

The findings point to concrete effects on awareness and participation. The ceremony brought together officials, elders, youth, and visitors from nearby communities. It did more than state ideals. It introduced rules that were visible and easy to remember. Colors on wrapped trees signaled a hierarchy of water use. Banners marked quiet areas and zones free of soap. Short messages clarified how to draw water with care. Between events, participants kept paths and signs in good order and corrected inappropriate behavior. In this way, performance helped turn concern into shared routines at the spring.

These results speak to broader debates in cultural and environmental studies. The case makes new ritual a workable concept for analyzing community action, showing how cultural continuity can support practical stewardship. It also gives substance to interrituality by demonstrating how elements from different repertoires can be blended to widen recognition and lower barriers to participation. Finally, it shows that new ritual can be a strategy through which nonelite actors mark conduct as special and coordinate behavior at a sensitive site.

The study meets its objectives by explaining how H3's ritual design enables community engagement, practical conservation, and local knowledge building around spring preservation in Mangliawan. Theoretically, it refines the vocabulary for studying community authored ritual in contemporary settings and clarifies how blended symbolism gains authority through repetition and public uptake. Practically, it offers a template that other small communities can adapt, with simple cues, portable signs, a clear sequence of acts, and regular events that anchor low cost maintenance and peer learning. The approach fits collaboration with local authorities and does not depend on large budgets.

6. CONCLUSION

The H3 case shows how a community can turn ceremony into a practical form of care and local governance, not just a symbol. By blending familiar forms with clear cues at Sumber Wutah, the group translates shared values into simple rules people remember and follow. Volunteers keep paths, markers, and signs in good order between events, which helps the script travel from one gathering to daily use. Because the format is public, repeatable, and low cost, it offers a template other small communities can adapt to protect springs. This reading fits work that frames ritual as nature-based governance (Herrmann-Pillath, 2024) and as collaborative care that returns attention, labor, and authority to those closest to place. It helps explain why H3's design stabilizes everyday conduct and strengthens collective stewardship.

A second point is about how people relate to water. Water is not only a resource but a relationship that asks for responsibility. Studies of sacred sites and community water governance show that ceremony and teaching help people remember rules, set boundaries of use, and carry duties across time (Diver et al., 2022). New work on drinking water governance describes how communities can bridge state systems with local norms to keep water safe and accessible (Acharibasam et al., 2024), while research on Indigenous water relations reframes care as a duty to a living presence (Martinez-Cruz et al., 2024). The H3 case matches this evidence by placing respect, restraint, and routine maintenance at the center of everyday encounters with the spring.

There are limits to what we can claim here. This is one village and one cycle of design and performance. Future work should follow the ritual across seasons, compare similar edge-of-city settings, and pair ethnography with measures of flow, water quality, and rule compliance. Even so, the lesson is clear. Carefully crafted ritual can act as everyday governance at sensitive sites, linking cultural continuity to practical stewardship and widening participation without large budgets. Tracking ecological indicators and institutional uptake will show how durable this approach can be over time.

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