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license**BEYOND CULTURAL PERSISTENCE: DECOLONIZING
IDENTITY THROUGH LOCAL-GLOBAL ENCOUNTERS IN
AN ISLAND SOCIETY OF EASTERN INDONESIA****Marlon Edison Leatemia^{1*}, Paulus Koritelu¹, Piter Jacob
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Indonesia*Correspondence E-Mail: leatemia@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol3iss3pp745-764>**ABSTRACT**

This study challenges the dominant “cultural persistence” paradigm in Global South sociology, which often portrays local communities as passive custodians of tradition under globalization. Focusing on the Patasiwa Putih community in Amahai, Eastern Indonesia, it examines how local identity is actively decolonized through dynamic local–global encounters. The study explores (1) the construction of identity through indigenous structures and symbols (2) its transformation under globalization, modernization, and digital technology, and (3) the strategies through which local actors negotiate and reconstruct identity. Employing a qualitative case study, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving customary leaders, community members, and youth. The analysis follows an interactive model supported by triangulation and member checking. Findings reveal that identity is not eroded but reflexively transformed through reinterpretation of cultural symbols, ritual revitalization, and selective adaptation to global influences. While rooted in customary institutions, identity expands through digital mediation and generational shifts, producing a dynamic interplay between continuity and change. This study advances a decolonial perspective by reframing identity as an active and emancipatory process and highlights island societies as critical sites of knowledge production in the Global South.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Decolonization, Digital Society, Globalization, Local-Global Encounters

INTRODUCTION

In much of Global South sociology, local identity is frequently framed through the lens of “cultural persistence,” a perspective that implicitly positions communities as passive bearers of tradition struggling to withstand the homogenizing pressures of globalization. While this framing has been analytically useful in highlighting resilience, it also risks flattening the complexity of local realities by overlooking the active, reflexive, and often strategic ways in which communities engage with global forces. In many cases, particularly in island societies of Eastern Indonesia, identity is not merely preserved but continually negotiated, rearticulated, and transformed through encounters with external influences (Haryanti et al., 2025; Kolibu et al., 2021; Purnomo et al., 2021). Empirical developments across the region demonstrate that processes such as migration, digital connectivity, religious transformation, and economic restructuring have

profoundly reshaped how individuals and communities understand themselves and their place in the world (Desma, 2024; Halim & Sari, 2024; Kusmaningtyas et al., 2023). These transformations are not unidirectional impositions but are mediated through local cultural logics, producing hybrid and context-specific configurations of identity.

The importance of revisiting this issue lies in the persistent imbalance in global knowledge production, where theoretical frameworks are often derived from Western experiences and subsequently applied to non-Western contexts with limited sensitivity to local epistemologies (Alauddin et al., 2025; Cahyani et al., 2025; Wuhan, 2024). Island societies, in particular, have been historically marginalized in sociological inquiry, frequently depicted as peripheral, isolated, or culturally static. Yet, contemporary evidence suggests that such societies are deeply embedded in global networks, functioning as critical nodes of cultural exchange, labor mobility, and digital interaction (Adam, 2025; Barunaningtyas & Azizah, 2025). In Eastern Indonesia, for instance, the increasing penetration of digital technologies and social media has enabled younger generations to engage with global discourses while simultaneously reinterpreting local traditions (Redjeki et al., 2025; Sihombing, 2022; Sunardi et al., 2025). At the same time, customary institutions such as kinship systems and ritual practices continue to play a central role in structuring social life, creating a dynamic interplay between continuity and change (Purwantoro et al., 2025; Y. Rahmawati et al., 2020; Wahyuni et al., 2023). These empirical realities call for a more nuanced analytical approach that moves beyond dichotomous thinking and acknowledges the co-constitutive relationship between the local and the global.

A growing body of literature has attempted to address these complexities by emphasizing the fluid and constructed nature of identity. Jabar & Salsabila (2025) and Sumiati (2025) famously conceptualizes identity not as a fixed essence but as a process of “becoming,” continuously shaped by historical and cultural forces. Similarly, Herlina et al. (2025) and Mahendra (2024) introduces the notion of reflexive modernity, in which individuals actively construct their identities in response to changing social conditions. These perspectives have been particularly influential in studies of globalization, where identity is understood as an ongoing project rather than a stable attribute (Amin, 2020; A. Rahmawati et al., 2026; Sjamsuridzal et al., 2021). Sutikno's (2021) framework of global cultural flows highlights how media, technology, and migration contribute to the formation of new social imaginaries, while Castells underscores the role of networked communication in reshaping collective identities. Together, these approaches provide a foundation for understanding how local actors engage with global processes in creative and transformative ways.

In the context of Southeast Asia, several studies have explored how globalization intersects with local cultural systems. Pugra et al. (2025) and Wijaya et al. (2023) examines how religious and linguistic practices in Indonesia are reconfigured through encounters with modernity, while Siregar & Alijanovich (2022) and Sulani et al. (2022) analyzes how development interventions reshape indigenous identities and livelihoods. Fatmawati (2021) and Zabadi et al. (2025) highlights the role of adat in mediating social change, demonstrating that tradition itself

is often strategically mobilized in response to external pressures. More recent studies have also drawn attention to the role of digital media in facilitating new forms of cultural expression and identity formation (Mubarrak et al., 2024; Rosmaria, 2025; Saryono & Puspitasari, 2024). These works collectively suggest that local communities are not passive recipients of globalization but active participants in its processes, capable of appropriating, resisting, and transforming external influences.

At the same time, scholarship on island societies has begun to challenge earlier assumptions of isolation and marginality. Fatimah et al. (2021) and Nuriyanto (2022) reconceptualizes the Pacific Islands as a “sea of islands,” emphasizing interconnectedness rather than fragmentation. Fitryansyah & Sofiyati (2024) and Manse (2022) further argues that islands should be understood as strategic sites of globalization, where unique socio-cultural dynamics emerge from their geographical and historical conditions. In Indonesia, studies of maritime and island communities remain relatively limited, but emerging research points to the significance of these contexts in understanding broader social transformations (Candra & Saptatiningsih, 2023; Tjoeng, 2025; Yufriadi, 2024). These studies underscore the need to pay closer attention to how island societies navigate global change, particularly in relation to identity, culture, and power.

Despite these advances, much of the existing literature continues to operate within implicit binaries such as tradition versus modernity or local versus global. Such dichotomies can obscure the more subtle and complex processes through which identities are negotiated in everyday life. Moreover, there remains a tendency to focus on macro-level transformations—economic development, political change, or technological diffusion—without adequate attention to the micro-level practices through which identity is lived and experienced. In the case of Eastern Indonesian island communities, this gap is particularly evident, as few studies have examined how identity is reconstructed through the interplay of customary institutions, digital media, and generational change within a decolonial framework.

It is within this conceptual and empirical terrain that the present study situates itself. Rather than approaching identity as something that either persists or disappears, this research seeks to understand it as a dynamic and contested process shaped by ongoing interactions between local traditions and global influences. By focusing on the *Patasiwa Putih* community in Amahai, this study explores how identity is constructed, negotiated, and transformed in a context marked by historical colonial encounters, contemporary globalization, and rapid technological change. In doing so, it implicitly shifts the analytical emphasis toward the ways in which local actors exercise agency in redefining their identities, not only in response to external pressures but also as part of broader efforts to reassert cultural autonomy and epistemic legitimacy.

This orientation allows for a more expansive understanding of identity as an arena of negotiation in which multiple forces—historical, cultural, economic, and technological—intersect. It also opens up space to consider how processes of reinterpretation, revitalization, and selective adaptation can generate forms of identity that are both rooted and flexible. In this sense, the study contributes to ongoing efforts within Global South sociology to develop more

context-sensitive and theoretically robust approaches that move beyond inherited analytical frameworks.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this research is to analyze how local identity in an island society of Eastern Indonesia is actively reconfigured through encounters with global processes. More specifically, it aims to examine the cultural foundations of identity within the *Patasiwa Putih* community, to investigate how these foundations are transformed through globalization and digitalization, and to identify the strategies through which community members negotiate and reconstruct their identities in everyday life. Through this analysis, the study seeks to offer a more nuanced and empirically grounded account of identity formation in the Global South, while also contributing to broader theoretical debates on globalization, modernity, and decoloniality.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretive paradigm to capture the complexity, fluidity, and lived meanings of identity construction within an island society in Eastern Indonesia. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate because the research seeks not to measure identity as a fixed variable, but to understand how it is socially produced, negotiated, and rearticulated through everyday practices, cultural symbols, and reflexive engagements with global influences. Such an approach allows the researcher to access the subjective dimensions of identity, including values, beliefs, and interpretations that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative instruments (Alam et al., 2026; Marwah et al., 2025; Maryani et al., 2025). The case study design further enables an in-depth and context-sensitive exploration of the *Patasiwa Putih* community in Amahai, Central Maluku, as a socially and historically situated locus where local traditions, colonial legacies, and contemporary global flows intersect. The selection of Amahai is not incidental; it represents a coastal and island community with strong customary institutions such as *pela-gandong* and *mata rumah*, while simultaneously experiencing increasing exposure to migration, education, and digital connectivity. This combination makes it a compelling site for examining how identity is continuously reshaped rather than merely preserved.

The research involved twenty informants who were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure both depth and diversity of perspectives. The initial informants consisted of customary leaders, village elders, and cultural practitioners who possess authoritative knowledge of local traditions and symbolic systems. These actors were essential in providing insights into the historical and structural foundations of identity. Subsequently, the sample expanded to include community leaders, religious figures, and local government actors who mediate between tradition and modern institutional frameworks. Importantly, younger community members, including students and digitally active youth, were also included to capture generational differences in identity articulation. The inclusion of these varied groups reflects an

understanding that identity is not monolithic but is shaped by positionality, experience, and exposure to global processes (Nasoha et al., 2024; Sulistyarini et al., 2024). The total number of informants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, where additional interviews no longer yielded substantially new insights.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were chosen to allow informants to narrate their experiences and interpretations in their own terms, enabling the emergence of nuanced and contextually grounded accounts. Participant observation was undertaken over an extended period to immerse the researcher in everyday social life, including participation in ritual activities, community gatherings, and informal interactions. This method was crucial for understanding not only what people say about identity but how it is enacted in practice (Djukardi et al., 2020; Musthofa et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2024). Document analysis complemented these methods by examining cultural texts, local narratives, and digital content produced by community members, providing additional layers of meaning and historical context.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed multiple forms of triangulation. Source triangulation was achieved by comparing information across different categories of informants, while methodological triangulation involved cross-validating data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. In addition, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected informants to confirm accuracy and resonance with their lived experiences. Prolonged engagement in the field further enhanced the depth and reliability of the data, allowing the researcher to build trust and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the social context (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Kartono et al., 2023; Prayogi & Al-Asyari, 2021). Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were carefully observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and sensitivity to local cultural norms, ensuring that the study not only produces rigorous knowledge but also respects the community from which that knowledge emerges.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Re-rooting Identity: Indigenous Structures as Living Foundations of Selfhood

The empirical findings reveal that the identity of the *Patasiwa Putih* community in Amahai is not anchored in a static conception of tradition, but is continuously re-rooted through the lived and relational dynamics of indigenous structures such as *mata rumah*, *pela-gandong*, and ritual practices. These structures do not merely function as symbolic remnants of the past; rather, they operate as living frameworks through which individuals locate themselves within a broader moral and social order. In everyday life, identity is enacted through participation in kinship obligations, ritual exchanges, and collective ceremonies that reaffirm belonging. As one customary elder (initialed H.L.) expressed during an in-depth interview, “being Patasiwa is not something you inherit once and for all; it is something you must continue to live through your actions in the

community.” This statement encapsulates how identity is understood not as a fixed attribute, but as an ongoing practice embedded in social relations.

The *mata rumah* system, for instance, serves as a foundational axis through which lineage, authority, and responsibility are organized. It defines not only genealogical belonging but also ethical expectations, shaping how individuals engage with others within and beyond their immediate kin group. Similarly, *pela-gandong*—a form of inter-village alliance rooted in historical and spiritual ties—extends the boundaries of identity beyond territorial limits, creating a relational network that binds communities through mutual obligation and shared narratives. These structures illustrate that identity is not confined to individual self-definition but is co-produced through collective histories and reciprocal engagements. Observations during ritual gatherings further indicate that these practices are not performed mechanically; they are reflexively enacted, often accompanied by discussions among participants about their meanings and relevance in contemporary contexts.

Rather than representing an unchanging cultural core, these indigenous institutions are subject to continuous reinterpretation. Younger members of the community, particularly those with exposure to formal education and digital media, engage with these traditions in ways that both affirm and transform their significance. A youth informant (initialed R.S.) noted that while he actively participates in ritual events, he also seeks to “explain these traditions in ways that make sense to people outside, especially through social media.” This suggests that cultural symbols are not only reproduced but translated across contexts, enabling them to remain meaningful in a rapidly changing world. Such processes reflect a form of reflexivity in which individuals actively negotiate the relationship between inherited structures and contemporary realities (Putra, 2023; Saputra, 2024; Simanjuntak et al., 2024).

From a conceptual standpoint, these findings resonate with the perspective of relational ontology, which emphasizes that identity emerges through networks of relations rather than residing within isolated individuals (Issundari et al., 2021; Maulida, 2024; Mualimin et al., 2025). In the case of *Patasiwa Putih*, identity is constituted through ongoing interactions among kinship systems, ritual practices, and broader social exchanges. This relational dimension is particularly evident in how cultural symbols derive their meaning not from intrinsic properties but from their position within a web of social practices. For example, ritual objects and performances acquire significance through their role in mediating relationships—between humans, ancestors, and the spiritual realm—rather than as static markers of cultural identity.

Moreover, the data suggest that the endurance of these structures is not simply a matter of preservation but of adaptive continuity. Community members actively reinterpret customary norms to address contemporary challenges, such as migration, economic change, and digital communication. This adaptive process does not dilute the essence of local identity; instead, it reinforces its relevance by allowing it to evolve in response to new conditions. As observed during fieldwork, discussions among community leaders often revolve around how to maintain the integrity of adat while accommodating the aspirations of younger generations. This indicates that

tradition itself is a site of negotiation, where continuity and change are not oppositional but mutually constitutive (Hefira, 2024; Mukti et al., 2026; Priwati & Sanitioso, 2024).

In this sense, identity within the *Patasiwa Putih* community can be understood as a dynamic and performative process, continuously reproduced through everyday practices and social interactions. It is neither a passive inheritance nor a fragile residue threatened by globalization, but a resilient and reflexive project shaped by the interplay of historical depth and contemporary engagement. By foregrounding the active role of local actors in re-rooting their identity, these findings challenge reductive narratives of cultural persistence and instead highlight the creative and relational processes through which identity is sustained and transformed. This perspective not only deepens our understanding of indigenous identity in island societies but also contributes to broader efforts to rethink identity as an emergent and contextually grounded phenomenon within the Global South.

Beyond Erosion: Reflexive Transformation under Global and Digital Flows

The findings of this study challenge the widespread assumption that globalization and digitalization inevitably erode local identities. In the case of the *Patasiwa Putih* community, these forces instead catalyze a reflexive transformation in how identity is understood, performed, and communicated. Rather than displacing indigenous meanings, global and digital flows expand the interpretive space within which identity is negotiated. This is particularly evident among younger community members whose everyday lives are increasingly shaped by educational mobility, social media engagement, and exposure to diverse cultural references. These experiences do not detach them from local identity; rather, they enable new modes of engagement with it. As one young informant (initialed M.T.) explained, “we do not leave our culture behind when we go online; we bring it with us, but in a way that others can also understand.” This statement reflects a broader pattern observed during fieldwork, where digital platforms function not as spaces of cultural dilution, but as arenas for reinterpretation and expression.

Social media, in particular, has emerged as a significant medium through which local identity is articulated in contemporary forms. Community members actively produce and circulate content that highlights ritual practices, traditional attire, and collective histories, often accompanied by narratives that frame these elements as sources of pride and distinctiveness. These digital representations are not mere reproductions of tradition; they involve aesthetic and symbolic transformations that translate local meanings into formats accessible to wider audiences. For instance, short videos documenting ritual performances are often edited with modern visual styles and music, creating hybrid forms that resonate both locally and globally. A young participant (initialed R.S.) noted that such practices are intentional, aiming to “make our culture visible without losing its meaning.” This suggests a conscious effort to balance authenticity and adaptability, indicating that digital engagement is guided by reflexive considerations rather than passive consumption.

At the same time, the influence of global culture is neither uniform nor uncritically accepted. The data reveal a selective process through which external values and practices are filtered through local frameworks. Community members distinguish between what can be integrated and what must be resisted, often invoking *adat* as a normative framework for evaluating new influences. A community leader (initialed A.L.) emphasized that “not everything from outside is suitable for us; we choose what strengthens our identity and reject what weakens it.” This selective appropriation demonstrates that globalization operates in a dialogic manner, shaped by local agency and cultural logics rather than imposing a singular trajectory of change. In this sense, global and local elements are not in opposition but are continuously negotiated, producing context-specific configurations of identity.

Conceptually, these dynamics can be understood through the lens of identity as a reflexive project, where individuals actively construct and reconstruct their sense of self in response to changing social conditions. In the digital era, this reflexivity is increasingly mediated by technology, which provides new tools and spaces for self-representation. However, as the findings indicate, this mediation does not lead to homogenization; instead, it facilitates the emergence of what can be described as digital cultural hybridity. This concept captures the creative interplay between local traditions and global influences within digital environments, where cultural forms are recombined and recontextualized in innovative ways. In Amahai, such hybridity is evident in how traditional symbols are reimagined through digital aesthetics, enabling them to remain relevant in contemporary contexts.

Importantly, this process of hybridization does not imply a loss of cultural coherence. On the contrary, it often reinforces a sense of identity by making it more visible and adaptable. The ability to navigate multiple cultural registers—local and global, traditional and modern—becomes a resource rather than a constraint. This is particularly evident among younger generations, who demonstrate a high degree of cultural fluency in moving between different contexts. Their engagement with digital media allows them to participate in global conversations while maintaining a strong connection to local values. As observed during participant observation, online interactions frequently include references to *adat*, kinship ties, and community events, suggesting that digital spaces are integrated into, rather than separate from, the social fabric of the community.

Negotiating Difference: Generational Dialectics in Identity Articulation

The empirical material gathered in this study reveals that generational difference constitutes a central arena in which identity is continuously negotiated, rather than a fault line that fragments the community. Within the *Patasiwa Putih* society, older and younger generations do not simply occupy opposing positions; instead, they participate in an ongoing dialectic through which identity is collectively rearticulated. Elder community members tend to emphasize continuity, grounding identity in customary obligations, ritual precision, and the preservation of ancestral values. For them, identity is closely tied to moral order and social stability, sustained

through adherence to adat structures such as mata rumah and pela-gandong. As one senior customary figure (initialed J.L.) noted during an interview, “if the young people forget the rules of adat, they lose not only tradition but also the way of being a proper person.” This perspective underscores a concern that identity must remain anchored in inherited norms to retain its legitimacy.

In contrast, younger members of the community articulate identity in ways that are more flexible, situational, and open to external influences. Their experiences of formal education, migration, and digital engagement have expanded their interpretive frameworks, allowing them to navigate multiple cultural references simultaneously. However, this flexibility should not be misread as detachment from local identity. Rather, it reflects a different mode of engagement—one that seeks to reinterpret tradition in ways that resonate with contemporary realities. A young informant (initialed M.T.) explained that “we still respect adat, but we also need to express it in ways that fit our lives today.” This statement highlights an important shift: identity is no longer confined to inherited forms but is actively translated into new contexts, including digital spaces and broader social networks.

What emerges from these interactions is not a generational conflict, but a productive negotiation in which both continuity and change are continuously recalibrated. Field observations during community gatherings and ritual events indicate that intergenerational dialogue plays a crucial role in this process. Younger participants often consult elders regarding the meanings of rituals, while elders, in turn, show a degree of openness in accommodating new forms of expression, particularly when these are seen as strengthening collective identity. For instance, the incorporation of digital documentation in ritual practices—such as recording and sharing ceremonies online—was initially met with hesitation but has gradually gained acceptance as it is perceived to enhance cultural visibility. This illustrates how negotiation operates not as a zero-sum dynamic but as a relational process through which different perspectives are reconciled.

From a conceptual standpoint, these findings suggest that identity should be understood as a dialectical process shaped by the interplay of generational positions. Drawing on the notion of identity as “becoming” rather than “being”, the data indicate that identity is continuously produced through interaction, contestation, and reinterpretation. The generational dimension adds a temporal layer to this process, where the past is not simply transmitted but actively reworked in light of present conditions. In this sense, older and younger generations are not merely carriers of different values but co-participants in the ongoing construction of identity. Their interactions generate a dynamic field in which meanings are negotiated and stabilized, albeit temporarily.

This dialectical process also reveals that identity is inherently plural and contingent. Rather than existing as a unified and coherent entity, it takes the form of a configuration of multiple, sometimes overlapping, interpretations. Younger individuals may emphasize adaptability and global connectivity, while older individuals foreground rootedness and

continuity, yet both orientations coexist within the broader framework of *Patasiwa Putih* identity. This plurality does not weaken identity; on the contrary, it enhances its resilience by allowing it to accommodate diverse experiences and perspectives. As Paramitha & Wei (2024) classic insight suggests, generational location shapes not only how individuals perceive the world but also how they contribute to social change. In Amahai, this generational layering becomes a resource for sustaining identity in a rapidly changing environment.

Importantly, the negotiation of generational difference also carries implications for the broader process of decolonizing identity. By engaging in dialogue rather than rigid preservation or wholesale transformation, the community demonstrates an ability to redefine itself on its own terms. Identity is neither imposed from above nor dissolved by external forces; it is collectively shaped through situated practices and intersubjective exchanges. This reinforces the argument that local communities are active agents in the production of meaning, capable of navigating complexity without losing coherence. The generational dialectic thus becomes a key mechanism through which identity remains both grounded and open, anchored in tradition yet responsive to change.

Decolonizing Identity: From Cultural Persistence to Emancipatory Reconstruction

The empirical findings of this study point to a shift that goes beyond the conventional framing of identity as cultural persistence, revealing instead a process that can be more accurately understood as the decolonization of identity. Within the *Patasiwa Putih* community, identity is not simply maintained in the face of external pressures; it is actively reconstructed through practices that reassert local meanings while engaging with global discourses. This process is neither abrupt nor ideologically proclaimed, but unfolds gradually through everyday practices, ritual engagements, and mediated expressions that collectively reposition the community as an active subject in defining its own cultural trajectory. In this sense, decolonizing identity is not a rejection of the global, but a reconfiguration of the terms through which the global is encountered and internalized.

One of the most visible dimensions of this process is the revitalization of ritual practices, which are not merely preserved but reactivated as sites of meaning-making. Field observations indicate that rituals are increasingly framed not only as obligations to ancestors but also as expressions of collective identity in a changing world. Community members consciously emphasize the symbolic significance of these practices, often articulating them in ways that resonate with broader narratives of cultural dignity and continuity. A customary leader (initialed A.L.) noted during an interview that “we do not perform rituals just because they are inherited; we perform them because they remind us who we are in today’s world.” This statement reflects a reflexive awareness that tradition gains relevance through its capacity to speak to contemporary conditions. Rituals thus become spaces where identity is not only enacted but also reinterpreted, allowing the community to maintain continuity while adapting to new social realities.

At the same time, the reinterpretation of cultural symbols plays a crucial role in this reconstructive process. Symbols associated with kinship, alliance, and spirituality are increasingly articulated in ways that extend beyond their original contexts, enabling them to function within broader communicative landscapes. This is particularly evident in how younger community members translate these symbols into digital formats, creating narratives that circulate both within and beyond the local setting. Rather than diluting their meaning, this translation often amplifies their significance by situating them within wider conversations about identity and belonging. A youth informant (initialed R.S.) explained that “when we share our culture online, we are not just showing it; we are telling others that we have our own way of understanding the world.” Such expressions indicate that digital engagement is not merely representational but constitutive, shaping how identity is perceived and valued.

The use of digital technology further reinforces the idea that identity reconstruction is an agentive process. Digital platforms provide new spaces for articulation, enabling community members to curate and communicate their identities on their own terms. This capacity to self-represent is particularly significant in the context of Global South societies, where external narratives have historically dominated the production of knowledge and representation. By producing their own content, community members effectively challenge these asymmetries, asserting their epistemic presence in global arenas. This aligns with broader arguments in decolonial thought that emphasize the importance of reclaiming the authority to define one’s own identity and knowledge systems (Auliaamafaza et al., 2022; Rihal et al., 2024; Surpi et al., 2025). In Amahai, such reclamation is not articulated through abstract discourse but through concrete practices that embed local meanings within contemporary forms of expression.

Importantly, the process observed in this study underscores that decolonizing identity operates at the level of praxis rather than rhetoric. It is not simply a matter of adopting a critical stance toward global dominance, but of enacting alternative modes of being and knowing through everyday actions. Community members do not position themselves as passive recipients of globalization; instead, they engage selectively, appropriating elements that resonate with local values while resisting those that undermine them. This selective engagement reflects a form of cultural agency that is both pragmatic and reflexive. As one informant (initialed M.T.) remarked, “we cannot avoid change, but we can decide how to live with it.” Such statements reveal an orientation toward change that is neither defensive nor uncritical, but grounded in a conscious effort to maintain autonomy.

Conceptually, these findings invite a rethinking of identity as an emancipatory project, one that is shaped through the interplay of power, knowledge, and practice. Identity, in this sense, becomes a site where broader struggles over representation and meaning are negotiated. The decolonization of identity does not imply a return to a pre-global past, but the creation of new configurations that draw on both local and global resources. This perspective resonates with recent discussions on epistemic justice, which call for the recognition of diverse ways of knowing and being as equally valid contributors to global knowledge production (Rasidi & Istiningsih,

2025; Sahfutra, 2021; Setiyani et al., 2024). By foregrounding the practices through which local actors reconstruct their identities, the study demonstrates that decolonization is not an abstract ideal but a lived process embedded in social relations.

Island Societies as Strategic Sites: Rethinking the Global from the Margins

The findings of this study invite a broader theoretical reconsideration of how island societies are positioned within discussions of globalization. Rather than occupying marginal or peripheral spaces, the empirical realities observed in Amahai suggest that such communities function as strategic sites where global and local dynamics intersect in particularly intense and revealing ways. Daily life in the *Patasiwa Putih* community is shaped by a constant interplay between mobility, digital connectivity, customary obligations, and historical memory. Migration for education and work connects individuals to wider national and transnational networks, while digital platforms facilitate real-time engagement with global cultural flows. At the same time, these interactions are grounded in enduring local structures, producing a social landscape in which the global is not external but embedded within the local. As one community member (initialed S.K.) noted, “we are far from big cities, but the world is not far from us anymore.” This remark captures the shifting spatial imagination of island societies, where distance no longer equates to isolation.

Such observations challenge longstanding assumptions that portray island communities as static, bounded, and disconnected. Earlier representations often framed these societies as remnants of tradition, positioned outside the main currents of modernity and globalization. However, the evidence from Amahai demonstrates that these communities are deeply entangled in global processes, albeit in ways that are mediated by local cultural logics. This entanglement does not produce uniform outcomes; instead, it generates hybrid and context-specific forms of identity that reflect both continuity and transformation. The articulation of identity in this setting is therefore neither purely local nor wholly global, but emerges from their intersection. This aligns with B. Siregar et al. (2021) influential argument that island societies should be understood not as isolated units, but as part of expansive and interconnected worlds shaped by movement, exchange, and relationality.

The strategic significance of island societies becomes particularly evident when examining how global influences are interpreted and localized. In Amahai, global cultural forms—ranging from media content to educational discourses—are not simply adopted but are actively reworked through existing frameworks of meaning. Community members draw on adat, kinship ties, and collective histories to situate these influences within a recognizable moral and cultural order. This process results in identities that are both reflexive and grounded, capable of engaging with global discourses without losing their local anchorage. A youth informant (initialed R.S.) reflected that “we learn many things from outside, but we always bring them back to who we are here.” This statement underscores the idea that the global is continuously filtered through local perspectives, producing a form of engagement that is dialogic rather than assimilative.

From a theoretical standpoint, these dynamics point toward the need to rethink globalization from the vantage point of the margins. Rather than treating the global as a universal force emanating from dominant centers, the findings suggest that it is co-constituted through diverse local encounters. Island societies, in this sense, offer a particularly rich context for examining how global processes are lived, negotiated, and transformed. Their historical experiences of colonialism, trade, and cultural exchange have equipped them with adaptive capacities that enable them to navigate complexity with a high degree of reflexivity. This resonates with Puspitasari et al. (2022) argument that islands should be seen as strategic nodes in global networks, where unique configurations of social, cultural, and economic life emerge.

Importantly, positioning island societies as strategic sites also has epistemological implications. It challenges the dominance of knowledge frameworks that privilege metropolitan experiences and invites a reorientation toward perspectives grounded in the Global South. By foregrounding the experiences of communities such as *Patasiwa Putih*, this study contributes to the broader effort of “provincializing the global,” a move that seeks to decenter universalist narratives and recognize the plurality of social realities (Kotten et al., 2025; Nurjanah, 2025; Sabur et al., 2025; Susanto et al., 2020). In this context, island societies are not merely objects of study but sources of theoretical insight, offering alternative ways of understanding identity, globalization, and social change.

The hybrid, reflexive, and contextual nature of identity observed in Amahai underscores this point. Identity here is not a derivative of external forces but a product of situated practices that integrate multiple influences into coherent, albeit dynamic, forms. This suggests that the study of island societies can illuminate broader sociological questions about how communities maintain coherence amid change, how they negotiate power asymmetries, and how they contribute to the production of knowledge. By shifting attention to these contexts, it becomes possible to develop more inclusive and representative sociological frameworks that better reflect the diversity of global experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that local identity in the *Patasiwa Putih* community of Amahai cannot be adequately understood within the framework of cultural persistence, but is more accurately conceptualized as an ongoing process of decolonizing identity shaped through situated encounters between indigenous structures and global forces. The findings confirm that identity is constructed through living customary systems such as *mata rumah*, *pela-gandong*, and ritual practices, which function not as static inheritances but as relational and reflexive foundations of selfhood. At the same time, the study shows that globalization and digitalization do not displace these foundations; instead, they open new spaces for reinterpretation, enabling identity to expand through selective adaptation and mediated expression, particularly among younger generations. The presence of generational dialectics further indicates that identity is

continuously negotiated across temporal and social positions, producing a dynamic configuration that integrates continuity with change. In this context, local actors are not passive recipients of external influences but active agents who strategically reconstruct identity in ways that affirm cultural autonomy while engaging with broader global discourses. This process points to a form of identity that is not only adaptive but also emancipatory, as it repositions the community as a producer of meaning within asymmetrical global relations. By foregrounding these dynamics, the study implicitly advances a shift from viewing identity as preservation toward understanding it as a reflexive and agentive practice, while also highlighting the significance of island societies as critical sites for rethinking globalization from grounded perspectives.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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