

Harmonizing faith and tradition: the acculturation of customary and Islamic law within the Tengger community of Indonesia

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This research examines the dynamics of the acculturation of Islamic law within the Walagara marriage tradition among the Tengger community in Wonokitri Village, Pasuruan, Indonesia—a practice that reflects the complex interplay between customary obligations and religious observance. The Tengger community is known for steadfastly upholding ancestral traditions amid a landscape of

religious pluralism. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through participatory observation in Wonokitri Village, Pasuruan, Indonesia; document analysis; and in-depth interviews with ten key informants, including traditional leaders, local *ulama*, or Islamic religious scholars, and practitioners of the tradition—all of whom serve as custodians of cultural and religious values. The research findings reveal that the observance of Walagara is an absolute obligation for the entire Tengger community, including those who are Muslim; failure to observe this ritual results in social sanctions such as ostracism and the invalidation of a marriage under customary law, even if it is valid under religious law (*akad*). This serves as evidence that legal pluralism is strongly realized, where customary law holds authority that coexists alongside Islamic law, creating a space where social and religious legitimacy are mutually dependent. Despite the potential for theological friction, the Muslim Tengger community negotiates their religious identity while continuing to preserve their traditions. Interpreting Walagara not as a deviation from faith (*‘aqidah*), but rather as a form of respect for ancestors that has undergone a harmonization of values, this research affirms that customary law and Islamic sharia in Tengger are not in a mutually exclusive relationship, but rather form a legal hybridity through strategies of cultural adaptation. This research enriches the global body of literature on legal pluralism and cultural studies, illustrating how indigenous communities negotiate religious orthodoxy and cultural heritage to construct a harmonious, layered legal identity.

Penelitian ini mengkaji dinamika akulturasi hukum Islam dalam tradisi perkawinan Walagara pada masyarakat Tengger desa Wonokitri, Pasuruan, Indonesia, sebuah praktik yang merefleksikan interaksi kompleks antara kewajiban adat dan ketaatan religius. Masyarakat Tengger dikenal teguh memegang tradisi leluhur di tengah arus pluralitas agama. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif di Desa Wonokitri, Pasuruan, Indonesia, penelitian dokumen, serta wawancara mendalam dengan sepuluh informan kunci yang terdiri dari tokoh adat, ulama setempat, dan pelaku tradisi sebagai pemegang otoritas nilai kultural dan agama. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa pelaksanaan Walagara merupakan kewajiban mutlak bagi seluruh masyarakat Tengger termasuk yang beragama Islam, di mana pengabaian terhadap ritual ini berimplikasi pada sanksi sosial berupa pengucilan dan ketidakabsahan perkawinan secara adat meskipun telah sah secara agama (*akad*). Hal ini menjadi bukti bahwa pluralisme hukum terwujud dengan kuat, di mana hukum adat memiliki otoritas yang berjalan beriringan dengan hukum Islam, menciptakan ruang di mana legitimasi sosial dan religius saling membutuhkan. Terlepas dari potensi gesekan teologis, masyarakat Muslim Tengger menegosiasikan identitas keagamaan mereka dengan tetap melestarikan tradisi. Memaknai Walagara bukan sebagai penyimpangan akidah, melainkan sebagai bentuk penghormatan leluhur yang telah mengalami harmonisasi nilai. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa hukum adat dan syariat Islam di Tengger tidak berada dalam posisi yang saling menegasikan, melainkan membentuk hibriditas hukum melalui strategi adaptasi budaya. Penelitian ini memperkaya referensi secara global tentang pluralisme hukum dan penelitian budaya, mengilustrasikan bagaimana masyarakat adat menegosiasikan ortodoksi keagamaan dan warisan budaya untuk mengkonstruksi identitas hukum berlapis yang harmonis.

Keywords: *cultural identity; customary marriage; Tengger tradition; Tengger community.*

Introduction

The discourse on acculturation between Islamic law and customary practices is no longer merely a historical footnote; rather, it has evolved into a central focus of global socio-legal studies that has garnered significant academic interest (Mabrursyah et al., 2024). Contemporary academic debates have moved beyond chronological questions about when acculturation first occurred, toward a critical analysis of how Islamic law reconstructs traditions within indigenous communities that have embraced Islam in a transformative manner (Bowen, 2018; Lukito, 2007; Ricci, 2019; Jacqueline Binti Karimon et al., 2026; 2026 Mursalin et al., 2023; Syariah Matsyah et al., 2025). This phenomenon reflects the complex dynamics of legal pluralism. For example, within the Minangkabau social structure, scholars have analyzed that Islam's influence on *Adat* (customary law) since the eight century was not a form of domination, but rather a synthesis—*Adat Basandi Syarak*—that strengthened the moral foundation of society (Aziz et al., 2020; Salim, 2015). Similar patterns have been identified among the Mandailing and Rejang communities, as well as the Tolaki ethnic group, where Islamic inheritance and marriage laws have undergone a process of vernacularization (indigenization) within patrilineal and matrilineal structures without undermining existing social cohesion (Anggraeni, 2023; Saniah & Bastomi, 2022).

Historically and sociologically, the trajectory of the acculturation of Islamic and customary law is an integral and inseparable variable in the success of Islam's expansion across various regions, including Indonesia (Anwar, 2022). This process is not merely a technical adjustment but a theological reflection of *wasathiyah*, or the spirit of religious moderation and a manifestation of the value of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, or a mercy to the worlds (Burhanudin, 2020). From this perspective, the adaptation of Islamic values to established local traditions and customs demonstrates the flexibility of Islamic law in responding to time and place, enabling Islam to be accepted not as a foreign religion but as a complement to existing cultural values (Fahimah et al., 2024; Ramli et al., 2024).

When Islam began to penetrate the Indonesian archipelago, it encountered well-established cultural and religious systems, particularly Hindu-Buddhist traditions that had deep historical roots spanning centuries (Rohman, 2022). This penetration did not occur in a vacuum but rather through intensive cultural negotiations, beginning in coastal regions

in the tenth century and culminating in its institutionalization through the *pesantren*, or traditional Islamic boarding schools (Zaluchu et al., 2025). The growth of the *pesantren* served not only as a center for the transmission of religious texts but also, analytically, functioned as an agent of cultural transformation. The example of the Giri *pesantren*, founded by Sunan Giri in Gresik, underscores the strategic role of *ulama* in managing the transition from a Hindu-Buddhist society to an Islamic one without significant social upheaval (Mash'ud, 2018).

The interaction between Islam and indigenous customs in the early phase demonstrated a strategic approach to da'wah that avoided direct conflict (Handayani, 2022). Early da'wah practitioners, particularly the Wali Songo, did not view local culture as the antithesis of Islam but rather as an instrument of cultural da'wah (Ricklefs, 2006). The use of wayang and gamelan was not merely an aesthetic accommodation but a sociological strategy to convey the esoteric values of Islam through media familiar to the people. This acculturative approach significantly reduced resistance among indigenous communities and enabled the widespread acceptance of Islam throughout the Indonesian archipelago as part of their new identity (Geertz, 1976).

In the context of legal anthropology, when indigenous communities embraced Islam, a phenomenon of legal reception occurred in which they were required to adhere to the normative principles of Sharia while simultaneously preserving their cultural identity (Nuh, 2023). Consequently, these communities incorporated Islamic law into traditional practices, creating a hybrid legal variant (Hooker, 2008). This blending allows theological teachings and local culture to coexist harmoniously. The most vivid example of this dynamic is manifested in customary marriage, a social institution that possesses a dual dimension of sacredness: sacred in a religious sense and sacred in a customary sense (Bowen, 2003).

Although Islamic law establishes *rukun* (the pillars of a valid marriage) and conditions for the validity of marriage (Ramadhani, 2022), the application and reception of these principles at the local level exhibit significant variation. This variation is not a form of deviation but rather the result of a dialectic between the history of Islamization, the strength of local traditional structures, and the religious interpretations of the local community. These factors give rise to a unique living law in each community (Muhammad,

2023), where Islamic law does not always supersede customary law but often coexists with or complements it in conferring legitimacy upon marriage (Gunawan et al., 2024).

However, the case research of the Tengger community presents a crucial and paradoxical academic problem. The majority of the literature assumes that as Islamic orthodoxy strengthens, local traditions tend to undergo purification or marginalization. Conversely, in Tengger, the Walagara marriage tradition actually retains a coercive power that is equal to or even more dominant than formal religious law. For the Tengger people, an Islamic marriage contract alone is considered incomplete and socially invalid without the observance of Walagara customs (Hefner, 1985). Severe social sanctions—ranging from ostracism to the denial of access to natural resources for violators of Walagara—indicate a tension between authorities; on the one hand, Islam demands absolute adherence to *tanbihid* (monotheistic belief), while on the other, custom demands obedience to ancestors, which could potentially be considered *shirk* (associating partners with God) in formal Islamic theology (Ii, 2024).

Previous studies have extensively examined the dynamics of culture, law, and religion among the Tengger people from various perspectives. The first group of studies tends to focus on descriptions of religious ritual practices, cultural identity crises, and debates regarding the binary polarization between syncretism and doctrinal purity (Proudfoot, 2008; Utomo, 2005; Yulianti, 2024; Triyanto et al., 2025). The second research group highlights sociological dimensions, such as the utilization of social capital, interfaith tolerance, and the community's accommodative strategies for maintaining harmony amidst the encroachment of formal religions (Nurcahyono, 2018; Setiawan, 2023; Sutarto, 2011). Meanwhile, the third research group specifically explores the points of intersection between customary law and religion, such as the negotiation of Islamic law in Walagara marriage rituals (Hasyim et al., 2020), the social transition from endogamy to exogamy (Tohari and Azizah, 2022), the acculturation of customary procedures following the introduction of Hindu values (Hakim et al., 2024), (the resolution of customary inheritance disputes (Al-Mabruri, 2017), and a legal-political analysis of the classical political system of the Tengger community (Damanik et al., 2020).

Although these studies provide a highly comprehensive foundation regarding the phenomenon of cultural compromise in Tengger, the majority of existing findings still

focus on the outward manifestations of social practices, shifts in traditions, institutional governance, and mere descriptions of rituals. In response to the research gap left by the above literature, this research aims to address the lack of in-depth analysis regarding how Tengger Muslims internally construct legal reasoning when facing the dilemma of dual loyalty between adherence to Sharia and ancestral traditions.

The novelty and specific contribution of this research lie in the conceptualization of an unwritten constitution that is actively maintained by the community to navigate normative conflicts. By integrating John Griffiths' (1986) theoretical framework of Legal Pluralism with Eugen Ehrlich's (1936) concept of Living Law, and supported by empirical evidence from field research in Wonokitri Village, Pasuruan, Indonesia. This research offers new insights that religious compromise in Tengger is not a form of passive syncretism. Rather, this research uncovers community agency, particularly through the central role of traditional leaders in mediating religious rituals—a process that integrates two competing legal systems into a single social space without triggering open conflict, a theoretical finding that has been overlooked in the existing literature. Therefore, this research aims to unravel the dynamics of this acculturation by dissecting the negotiation strategies between the historical values of traditional customs and the normativity of Islam (Abdullah, 2021).

To analyze this phenomenon, the research employs the Legal Pluralism theory from the perspective of John Griffiths and Sally Engle Merry, which views law not as a singular entity of the state or religion, but as a domain of diverse, competing, and interacting rules within a semi-autonomous social sphere. This theory will be combined with the concept of cultural acculturation to explain the process of reciprocal adaptation in which Islam becomes grounded in the world and *adat* becomes spiritualized, thereby producing a model of harmonization that protects cultural heritage while accommodating modern religious identities (Merry, 2006).

More specifically, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the adaptation of Islamic law in minority contexts within strong non-Islamic cultural enclaves such as Tengger. Most research on the dialectic between Islam and local customs in Java tends to focus on the Mataram or Coastal regions, where Islam is a hegemonic force that shapes local customs (cultural Islamization). In contrast, the Tengger context presents an anomaly in

which Islam is actually in an asymmetrical position and must make substantial compromises with the traditional social structure—dominated by Hindu-Tengger cosmology—to achieve social acceptability. There has been little research examining how adherence to Walagara rituals is utilized by Muslim communities not merely as a cultural practice, but as a strategy of “identity politics” and self-defense to avoid social exclusion. Therefore, this research is urgently needed to fill this gap by offering a new perspective on minority *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence, within the practice of legal anthropology, a field that remains largely unexplored.

Method

This research is qualitative research employing an explanatory case study approach aimed at deeply exploring the dynamics of cultural acculturation and Islamic law within the Tengger community’s marriage customs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Field data collection was conducted in the settlement areas of the Tengger indigenous community, which are scattered across the buffer zone villages of Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park, with the primary locus in Wonokitri Village, Tosari Subdistrict, Pasuruan Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia.

Primary and secondary data were collected simultaneously through field observations of marriage rituals, reviews of literature, and in-depth interviews. Informants were selected using purposive sampling to identify those possessing cultural or religious authority, as well as direct experience relevant to the research topic (Flick, 2022; Hennink et al., 2020).

To ensure the efficiency of the manuscript’s presentation, the characteristics of the ten key informants are comprehensively described based on three clusters of their social capacities. The first cluster, comprising holders of customary and social authority, is represented by Aa, a *Dukun Pandita* who explains the Tengger cosmological philosophy and the marriage rites (Pasrah Temanten, Temu Temanten, and Walagara), supported by Dd, a Village Elder, in mapping the continuity of traditions across generations, and Cc, a Village Official, who provides an objective overview of institutional transformations in Wonokitri Village. The second group, Islamic religious authorities, was represented by Ee and Ff, local religious figures (*ulama/kyai*), who provided a normative *fiqh munakahat*

analysis of local traditions and the theological formulation of da'wah within a non-Muslim enclave. Meanwhile, the third group comprises tradition bearers and residents—namely Bb, Gg, and Hh, Tengger Muslim spouses—who describe an emic (insider) perspective on marriage rituals as well as strategies for administrative negotiations with the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA); reinforced by the testimony of Ii, an ordinary resident, regarding the binding power of communal social sanctions, and Jj, a representative of the bride's family, who explains the social function of wedding gifts in fostering harmony among residents.

The credibility and reliability of the data in this research were ensured through the application of source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and sufficient references to verify the validity of information from the diverse perspectives of different informants (Denzin, 2017). The data analysis process applied the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which was operationalized into three specific, circular stages.

First, the data condensation stage was carried out by transcribing all interview recordings from ten key informants, organizing field notes, and performing thematic coding. The informants' statements were filtered and classified into specific clusters of categories, such as the sequential details of the Walagara ritual procedures, theological arguments regarding Islamic law, and the mechanisms for enforcing customary social sanctions. Second, the data presentation stage involved abstracting selected information into logical narratives, relationship diagrams, and conceptual matrices to map the interrelationships among legal variables. Third, the stage of drawing and verifying conclusions was carried out inductively by comparing the patterns of relationships found in the field with the theoretical frameworks of Living Law and Legal Pluralism, in order to formulate a final conceptualization of how the unwritten constitution is practiced and maintained by the Tengger Muslim community.

Rituals and traditions of Tengger customary marriage in Wonokitri Village

The existence of the Tengger community in the volcanic landscape on the slopes of Mount Semeru and Mount Bromo represents a unique sociological phenomenon of cultural resilience amid the dynamics of modernity (Triyanto et al., 2025). Genealogically, their existence is closely tied to the narrative of the fifteenth century migration of the Majapahit

Hindu community, which turned the mountainous region into a refuge to preserve their religious values (Hefner, 1985; Tohari and Azizah, 2022). This geographical isolation ultimately allowed them to preserve a distinctive cultural variant, manifested in the name “Tengger,” which carries dual meanings: as “tetenger” (a physical or spiritual marker) and “Tenggering Budi Luhur” (moral nobility). This cultural and spiritual identity is deeply rooted in the cosmology of the ancestral mythology of Roro Anteng and Joko Seger, which continues to underpin their social institutions to this day (Sutarto, 2011). The legend of the sacrifice of their 25th child, Kusuma, into the Bromo crater for the village’s safety has shaped an ethic of sacrifice and a deep-seated sense of spiritual debt within the community. This is confirmed by Dd, an elder of Wonokitri Village:

Respect for ancestors through customary traditions is a legacy passed down through generations. It has been the primary foundation of harmony and peaceful coexistence among the Tengger people from ancient times to the present (Dd, 2024).

Based on this cosmological foundation, the social structure of Tengger society exhibits a pattern of complementary dual authority. On the state level, administrative leadership is held by the Village Head, who promotes the modernization of education and the adaptation of the agrarian economy (cabbage and potato farming) toward the tourism sector. However, on the cultural level, the highest authority is held by the *Dukun Pandita*, or a respected religious and spiritual leader. Modernization does not erode traditional customs; rather, the state, through the village government, intelligently accommodates these traditions. Cc, as a Village Official, emphasizes this integration

Every marriage practice among residents is fully facilitated by the village and traditional customs, provided that its implementation remains in accordance with state regulations—namely, that it is officially registered at the KUA to ensure administrative order (Cc, 2024).

Within this societal landscape, which strictly upholds the tripartite harmony (God, humanity, and the universe), marriage rituals are regarded as a crucial mechanism for integrating the microcosm and the macrocosm (Benda-Beckmann & Turner, 2019). Marriage rituals are not merely cultural performances adorned with Javanese Edelweiss flowers; rather, they function as an unwritten constitution governing the interlegal relationships within the community. The performance of these rituals is an absolute

obligation. This pattern of absolute adherence to such a cultural constitution actually represents a sociological phenomenon commonly found in various indigenous communities across the Indonesian archipelago, where rituals and traditions serve to bind the social order; as seen in the marriage rituals of the Acehnese people (Manan, 2014), the Merari' elopement tradition of the Sasak people (Saladin, 2013), the Javanese *weton* determination system (Zubaidah, 2019), the negotiation of Doro customary sanctions in Minangkabau (Ismail and Dja, 2023), and the sacredness of the communal Tabot celebration in Bengkulu (Sirajuddin, 2012). In Tengger itself, the absolute authority over this ritual is specifically asserted by Aa, the Dukun Pandita:

"This tradition must be carried out as an act of devotion to the ancestors. One's identity as a descendant of the Tengger people is inherent for life; therefore, rejecting traditional rituals is tantamount to severing spiritual bonds, which can trigger communal sanctions" (Cc, 2024).

Procedurally, the Tengger traditional wedding tradition is structured around three crucial stages rich in socio-legal significance. The first stage, *Pasrah Temanten*, is a procession involving the presentation of wedding gifts (such as a bunch of bananas, white sugar, rice, and coconuts) that symbolize hopes for agrarian economic well-being. Sociologically, however, this is a stage of transferring responsibility and establishing communal bonds. Jj, a representative of the bride's family, explained:

This series of Pasrah Temanten customs is mandated by the families and the community. It is a tangible manifestation of the non-negotiable harmony among community members (Jj, 2024).

The second stage, *Temu Temanten*, is a welcoming ritual that uses purifying elements such as rice, free-range chicken eggs, boreh leaves, and incense. This stage marks a transitional period (*liminality*) toward communal adulthood. For the Tengger Muslim minority, participating in this Hindu-Javanese-influenced ritual raises identity challenges. However, they respond with a mature spirit of compromise. Bb, a Tengger Muslim who practices these traditions, offers his emic perspective:

My involvement in traditional rituals is purely a social obligation as a Tengger person, not to associate partners with God. We adhere to tradition to remain recognized as part of the village, without compromising our Islamic faith (Bb, 2024).

The culmination of the marriage's validity lies in the third ritual, known as *Walagara* (or

Wologoro). This stage involves *the banten kayaban* (family bond) and *the recitation of mantras* to invoke the ancestors' blessing. This is where the most crucial interlegal negotiations take place, particularly for exogamous couples. Hh, a native Tengger wife, insists: *"Even though my husband is from outside the community, I require him to participate fully in the traditional procession. If this Walagara ritual is skipped, our marriage could be plagued by misfortune"* (Hh, 2024). In response, her husband, Gg—who comes from outside the community—adopted an accommodating stance: *"I agree to these customary activities because their purpose is purely to honor my wife's family and the village's traditions, not to believe in their transcendental teachings"* (Gg, 2024).

A socio-legal analysis of *Walagara* demonstrates that customary law (*living law*) holds far greater binding power in the social sphere than the state's positive law. Regardless of whether a marriage certificate (KUA) is held or the *akad* is legally valid, a marriage without *Walagara* is considered flawed and triggers coercive social sanctions. This dire consequence is confirmed by Ii, an ordinary resident of Wonokitri: *"The community mandates the observance of Walagara. Disregarding tradition is a violation of communal norms that leads to the sanction of ostracism"* (Ii, 2024). These sanctions are no joke, as they can result in being barred from accessing the communal irrigation system (local *subak*)—an existential punishment that is devastating for a farming community, often forcing the offender to flee the village.

Interestingly, the supremacy of customary law does not conflict with Islamic law. This is thanks to the pragmatism and the principle of *'urf* (accommodation of local customs) applied by local religious scholars. Ee, an Islamic religious leader (Kyai), emphasized: *"Muslim participation in customary rituals is permitted as a local custom, as long as it is purely cultural in nature, does not violate Sharia, and is not polytheistic"* (Ee, 2024). Complementing this, Ff, another religious scholar, affirmed the success of this da'wah compromise: *Community involvement is tolerated as long as the primary foundation—a Sharia-compliant marriage contract—has been validly fulfilled. This is a da'wah approach designed to ensure Islam is accepted without coming into direct conflict with local culture* (Ff, 2024).

The continued existence of the *Walagara* tradition, which remains strong amid the onslaught of modernity, can be analyzed as a form of cultural defense mechanism employed by the Tengger community to preserve their collective identity. From a sociological perspective, this ritual functions as a symbolic boundary distinguishing the Wong Tengger

(insiders) from the Wong Ngare (outsiders/lowlanders). Amid the tide of globalization and intensive interaction with external cultures through tourism, the Tengger community subconsciously reinforces their traditional rituals as a last bastion to prevent the dilution of their identity (Benda-Beckmann & Turner, 2019). The obligation to perform Walagara is not merely blind obedience to the past, but rather an adaptive strategy to maintain social cohesion so that the community is not fragmented by the values of modern individualism that are beginning to enter the village. Therefore, violating tradition is considered a direct threat to the group's integrity, not merely a personal mistake of the bride and groom.

From a cosmological perspective, the persistence of this tradition is rooted in the Tengger people's worldview, which recognizes a causal relationship between human rituals and the balance of nature. They believe that neglecting sacred rituals such as Walagara will disrupt the harmony of the microcosm, potentially provoking the wrath of the ancestors or triggering natural disasters in the macrocosm of Mount Bromo. According to this belief, the village's safety is collective; a single family's failure to observe the ritual can bring misfortune upon the entire village. Therefore, strict social control exercised by neighbors and traditional elders is not an invasion of privacy, but rather an effort to mitigate spiritual disasters for the sake of collective safety. This is what makes Walagara not merely a cultural choice, but an existential mandate that must be fulfilled to maintain harmony between humans, nature, and God.

The interaction of customary, state, and religious law in a plural legal system

This research employs John Griffiths' (1986) theoretical framework of Legal Pluralism to analyze the anatomy of marriage practices among the Tengger community, which operate at the intersection of different legal regimes. Genealogically, the complexity of legal pluralism in Indonesia is deeply rooted in colonial legal policies that enforced racial-based legal segregation: customary law (Adat) for indigenous peoples (Inlanders), Western law for Europeans, and religious law for specific communities (Salim, 2005). This coexistence—which Van Vollenhoven (1987) termed the recognition of “legal circles” (*rechtskringen*)—laid the initial foundation upon which various normative systems operate simultaneously, often in tension, within the same sovereign territory.

Within the microcosm of the Tengger indigenous community in Wonokitri Village, the intersection of customary, religious, and state law does not result in unilateral domination but rather produces a unique legal synthesis known as “interlegality” (Benda-Beckmann & Turner, 2019). In contrast to the case of the Mollo community in East Nusa Tenggara, which highlights customary resistance to state institutions, the Tengger community exhibits a far more accommodating pattern of harmonization. Local actors possess the flexibility to navigate their legal choices without having to pit one authority against another; this characteristic of flexibility within a pluralistic legal system is also dynamically observed among communities in Aceh and within the marriage negotiation spaces of Mandailing Natal (Putra et al., 2026; Sumardi et al., 2021). From the perspective of state law, bureaucratic officials in the Tengger region do not act repressively to suppress traditions, but rather simply ensure that state administrative order proceeds in tandem with the local value system—a pattern of non-coercive governance also found in the protection of other customary laws across the archipelago (Sumirat et al., 2026). This integrative approach was emphasized by Cc, a village official in Wonokitri, who stated:

“We definitely permit and facilitate every marriage practice among residents here, as long as it is carried out in accordance with state regulations. No matter how grand the customary ritual may be, the important thing is that it is first officially registered at the KUA or the Civil Registry Office to ensure administrative order.” (Cc, 2024).

Cc’s statement confirms that state institutions require formal legality solely as the foundation of legal certainty. Interestingly, the state, through its village apparatus, consciously grants broad discretion for the conduct of traditional rituals (Cc, 2024). This demonstrates a symbiosis in which administrative compliance is exchanged for cultural autonomy: state authority remains intact under positive law, while the Tengger community’s system of local wisdom remains untouched by state intervention.

Similar flexibility is evident in the theological realm, where Islamic religious authorities do not position themselves in a confrontational manner against local cultural hegemony. The existence of the Walagara ritual is not automatically condemned as a syncretic practice that threatens the purity of faith. Instead, this is bridged through flexible da’wah (proselytizing) compromises using the *‘urf* approach (acceptance of local customs within

Islamic jurisprudence). Ee, a local Islamic religious leader (Kyai), clearly explains the limits of this theological tolerance:

As Muslims, participating in traditional rituals is permitted as long as they are purely cultural in nature and do not violate Islamic law. What is most important to us is that rukun of the marriage contract (the akad) are already valid according to religious law. As long as there is no shirk, we must respect the traditions of our local ancestors (Ee, 2024).

Ee's account reflects a mature sociological-religious reasoning among the village's religious elite. Rather than competing for sole authority over truth, Islam and *Adat* instead share functional roles proportionally (Ee, 2024). Islamic law provides theological-transcendental legitimacy (determining the halal nature of the marital relationship in the eyes of God through the marriage contract), while the Walagara tradition is given full scope to strengthen social cohesion in the immanent realm. This division of roles has proven successful in freeing the Tengger Muslim community from the dilemma of dual loyalty, allowing them to be Muslims who are obedient to Sharia law while simultaneously being an integral part of the Tengger cultural entity.

Demographically, the urgency to maintain this dual legal compromise is strongly driven by Wonokitri's social structure, which is dominated by Tengger Hindus, where the Muslim community constitutes only a small minority (approximately five households). In this homogeneous communal ecosystem rooted in agrarian cohesion, absolute adherence to *adat* is not merely cultural romanticism but a survival mechanism. This attachment is candidly expressed by Hh, a native Tengger Muslim woman:

"Even though my husband is from outside the community, I require him to fully participate in the Walagara traditional ceremony. My husband also agrees because his intention is to show respect, not because he believes in it. If we were to skip this tradition, not only would the community ostracize us, but we also believe our marriage could be plagued by misfortune because we failed to seek permission from our ancestors" (Hh, 2024).

Hh's testimony explicitly demonstrates the binding power of *living law*, which operates effectively through the threat of social sanctions—such as communal ostracism—and the fear of metaphysical sanctions in the form of misfortune.

Ultimately, interactions in Wonokitri represent a unique dialogical construction between the triad of State, Religious, and Customary authorities. Within this landscape, the dialogue

that emerges is not confrontational but rather accommodative and integrative. The State is present through administrative instruments (the Office of Religious Affairs/Civil Registry) that demand formal legality; yet at the same time, the State provides a space for discretionary practice of customary rituals as an expression of local wisdom (Butt, 2019). On the other hand, Religion (Islam) and Custom (Walagara) no longer vie for the authority of truth but rather share functional roles: Religion provides theological (transcendental) legitimacy, Custom provides sociological legitimacy, while the State guarantees legal certainty. This phenomenon in Tengger refutes the assumption that legal pluralism always leads to a conflict of norms; on the contrary, this case demonstrates civic wisdom, in which the community is able to weave these three legal systems into a single, functional social harmony.

Acculturation of customary law and Islamic law in marriage traditions

Fundamentally, acculturation cannot be viewed merely as the meeting of two cultures but rather as a complex dialectical process in which intensive interaction occurs without negating the core identities of the entities involved. Kim (2001) conceptualizes acculturation as a form of secondary enculturation—that is, a cognitive and social mechanism for internalizing new values into the cultural structure of indigenous communities. From this analytical perspective, acculturation is not a form of cultural conquest but rather an adaptation strategy in which foreign influences are assimilated and adjusted to align with local culture (Saniah & Bastomi, 2022). This process requires flexibility on the part of individuals or groups to learn new cultural codes while remaining steadfast in their primordial values. Contemporary research confirms that this mechanism is crucial for preventing cultural dissonance and social marginalization in pluralistic societies.

Within the microcosm of Tengger society, marriage culture represents a complex integration of ancestral customary practices and the religious beliefs held by its members. The cultural dominance led by the spiritual authority of the Dukun Pandita indicates that the legitimacy of marriage relies not only on the social consensus of the community but also on the cosmological blessing of the ancestors. An analysis of the selametan ritual in this ceremony reveals its function as a communal social balancing mechanism as well as

a spiritual practice to ward off misfortune. The communal significance and urgency of this ritual are confirmed by Hh, a native Tengger woman who practices the tradition, who explains its essence:

For us, the selamatan ritual is not merely a spectacle or a formal part of the event, but a form of prayer to keep the household free from sengkala (misfortune). The rules and prohibitions set by our ancestors are real, so they must be obeyed to ensure that the peace of the family and the village is maintained (Hh, 2024).

This statement underscores that adherence to rituals is the primary means by which the Tengger community maintains harmony.

Furthermore, these values of compliance and social order are vividly visualized through the stages of the Temu Manten. Symbolic practices—such as the groom stepping on an egg, followed by the bride washing her husband's feet—are not merely empty ceremonial gestures. From a sociological perspective, this procession constitutes a semiotic affirmation of gender structures and leadership hierarchies within the domestic sphere of Tengger families. Analyzing the meaning behind this symbolism, Hh further explains:

The egg-stepping and foot-washing rituals symbolize the division of roles. The husband cracking the egg signifies that he is ready to be a leader who solves problems and provides for the family, while the wife washing his feet symbolizes devotion, loyalty, and her role as a companion who cares for the family (Hh, 2024).

Through this culturally rich practice, the transition of the husband's role as leader and the wife's role as a devoted companion is deeply internalized and preserved from generation to generation to ensure the continuity of their social structure.

For the Tengger community, the construction of the meaning of marriage transcends formal legal boundaries; it is deeply rooted in the pursuit of family harmony and cosmic balance. The view that marriage is a means of uniting two individuals without making religious differences a primary obstacle indicates the dominance of social ethics over theological dogmatism (Woodward, 2011). From a sociological perspective, this attitude reflects the high level of *social capital* possessed by the Tengger community, where family consensus and blessing hold the highest validity, surpassing religious divides. This supremacy of harmony is clearly articulated by Jj, a representative of the family practicing the tradition:

For us, a child wanting to marry someone of a different religion is not an issue worth making a fuss over; what matters most is harmony and the blessing of the extended family. Differences in faith are a personal matter between each individual and God, but maintaining harmony is our responsibility as neighbors (Jj, 2024).

This statement affirms that the sociological orientation of society is directed more toward preventing social friction than debating theological boundaries. The ability of the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority to coexist peacefully is rooted in their collective identity as Wong Tengger, bound by shared customs (Woodward, 2011). These customs serve as an inclusive framework that mitigates the potential for sectarian conflict, allowing pluralism to flourish in the practice of daily life.

Although the Tengger Muslim community is formally subject to Islamic marriage law (*fiqh munakahat*), the integration of traditional ceremonies passed down through generations is strictly maintained. This phenomenon is not merely an aesthetic preservation of culture but a manifestation of the need for dual legitimacy. In legal anthropological analysis, the validity of marriage for Tengger Muslims is not sufficiently established through the *nikah* contract alone (religious and state legitimation); it absolutely requires customary validation through ancestral rituals to be considered socially valid. This demonstrates the operation of a mechanism of *cultural resilience*, in which custom functions as a social safety net that safeguards the community's historical continuity amid shifts in religious affiliation. The preservation of these customs ensures that even as theological identity shifts to Islam, the cultural identity as a community that honors its ancestors remains intact, preventing cultural alienation from their historical roots (Beatty, 2001).

The Walagara tradition in Wonokitri Village has proven to hold a hegemonic position within the social structure of Tengger society. Empirical narratives from the field provide crucial emic insights into how the Muslim minority group negotiates identity amidst the strong hold of traditional customs. This is deeply reflected in the account of Bb, a native Tengger Muslim who practices the tradition:

As native Tengger descendants, Tengger culture—including marriage traditions—is an obligation for us to uphold, regardless of the fact that I am a Muslim. For us, tradition is a form of respect for our ancestors, yet our faith remains in Allah SWT (Bb, 2024).

This straightforward statement reflects the subject's sophistication in drawing a cognitive distinction between the realm of communal obligations (sociological) and the realm of *tawhid* (theological). An analysis of this discourse reveals that the Tengger Muslim community consciously compartmentalizes values. They reconstruct and reinterpret ancestral rituals—which, at first glance, carry Hindu-Javanese overtones—not as acts of *shirk*, but purely as an expression of cultural reverence (ethical reverence). This adaptive stance allows a Tengger Muslim to maintain the purity of their creed while simultaneously demonstrating absolute loyalty to the village's unwritten constitution. It is at this point that a space of internal harmony is successfully created to neutralize the potential for destructive doctrinal clashes at the grassroots level.

Furthermore, the informants' explanations confirm that the Walagara ritual serves a strategic function as an instrument of civic legitimation within the Tengger community. As a religion that arrived later in Tengger history, Islam underwent a process of adaptation—or vernacularization—toward already established traditions. For the Muslim minority group, participation in traditional rituals is not merely a choice but a necessity for accumulating social capital. Without going through these traditional ceremonies, their status as full members of the Tengger community could be delegitimized. Therefore, this acculturation serves as a strategy for the social inclusion of Tengger Muslims, who pay the “price” for their social membership by continuing to uphold ancestral traditions. This dynamic demonstrates that Islam in Tengger does not function as a force that deconstructs local culture but rather integrates into it to secure strong cultural acceptance.

Marriage rituals in Tengger provide empirical evidence that Indonesian society has never experienced a discontinuity in the practice of local traditions rooted in customary law. This phenomenon underscores that customary law possesses extraordinary resilience in the face of penetration by global and transnational legal systems. Within the framework of legal pluralism, the continuity of these traditions fosters a spirit of compromise or accommodation on the part of Islamic law toward local customs. The concept of *‘urf* (customary practice) in Islamic jurisprudence serves as a theoretical entry point that allows Sharia to coexist with tradition, provided it does not conflict with the fundamental principle of *tawhid* (Gunawan et al., 2024). This ongoing negotiation between Islamic law and

customary law demonstrates that the process of Islamization in the Indonesian archipelago was not coercive or eliminative, but rather adaptive and integrative. This created a space for dialogue in which religious norms did not supplant local wisdom but rather enriched the existing normative structure.

The system of relations between Islam and Adat in Tengger goes beyond mere coexistence; the two are engaged in a symbiotic relationship in which they depend on one another for survival. On the one hand, the Tengger community works together to preserve the local culture inherited from their ancestors as the basis of a communal identity that distinguishes them from other ethnic groups. On the other hand, Islam achieves cultural penetration by blending into these traditions. Islam requires adat to embed its teachings into the deeply rooted social structures of society, while adat requires Islam to provide spiritual legitimacy within the context of the modern religious Indonesian state. This analysis demonstrates that the integration of law into social structures occurs through a mechanism of mutual borrowing of authority, which prevents social dislocation.

Based on the micro-dynamics in Tengger, an analytical conclusion can be drawn that the characteristics of Islam practiced by the Muslim minority amidst the Hindu Tengger majority exhibit isomorphism (similarity of form) with the practices of the Javanese Muslim majority in other regions. This pattern reflects a variant of *Islam Nusantara* (the Indonesian archipelago Islam) or Javanese syncretic Islam, characterized by a high degree of inclusivity toward local culture (Ramli et al., 2024; Saladin, 2013). The Tengger case is not an isolated anomaly but rather a microcosm of a broader phenomenon in Southeast Asia, where revealed religions are reinterpreted through the lens of local culture. This demonstrates that Islamic identity in Indonesia is fluid and contextual; being a devout Muslim does not require one to shed their Javanese cultural attributes. The similarity of this pattern reinforces the theory that Islam's success in Indonesia lies in its ability to undergo vernacularization—that is, to make itself feel local and familiar to its adherents.

Conclusion

This research ultimately reveals the dynamic negotiations within the Tengger Wonokitri community, where traditional marriage practices create a complex intersection between

customary law, Islamic law, and state administrative regulations. From the perspective of religious and state authorities, compliance with the *rukun*, the pillars of a valid marriage, and civil registration is fulfilled to ensure theological validity and legal certainty. However, empirically, absolute adherence to ancestral rituals such as *Walagara* serves a crucial sociological function for social cohesion and cultural preservation. Through this dual compliance, the Tengger Muslim community practices legal pragmatism and the compartmentalization of values, challenging rigid doctrinal binaries and negotiating a harmonious identity in the space between tradition and faith. Academically, this research makes a significant contribution to the global debate on legal pluralism, demonstrating how cultural agency operates within the overlapping spheres of state, religious, and local customary authority. It illustrates that customary law is neither a static monolith nor exclusive to Islamic law, but rather functions as a complementary arena for continuous adaptation. Although the scope of this research is limited to the specific context of Wonokitri Village and the single domain of marriage rituals, in practical terms, these insights offer valuable guidance for policymakers, traditional leaders, and scholars in navigating social change and bureaucratic accommodation while respecting cultural and religious foundations. Future research can build on this foundation to explore the implications of such negotiations for broader family law issues, such as inheritance, as well as comparative studies with other Muslim communities and indigenous peoples around the world.

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