

Islamic Cultural Expressions in Traditional Marriage Ceremonies of the Luwu Community, South Sulawesi

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the cultural expressions and acculturation processes between local traditions and Islamic values in the traditional marriage ceremonies of the Luwu community in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. It seeks to identify how religious and cultural elements coexist and influence the construction of social identity and communal harmony within an Islamic cultural framework.

Method: The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach using ethnographic and anthropological methods. Data were collected through direct observation, interviews with community elders and religious figures, and documentation of marriage rituals. The analysis focused on identifying symbolic meanings, cultural continuity, and the integration of Islamic principles into local wedding practices.

Findings: The study reveals that the Luwu community maintains strong cultural traditions while integrating Islamic moral and ritual values into every stage of the wedding ceremony. The acculturation process manifests in symbolic gestures, prayers, attire, and communal cooperation, reflecting both adherence to Islamic teachings and respect for ancestral customs. These practices represent a harmonious blend that reinforces collective identity, social cohesion, and moral values in daily life.

Significance: The findings contribute to the broader discourse on cultural hybridity and the localization of Islam in Indonesia. They demonstrate how traditional ceremonies serve as living art forms that embody both religious devotion and aesthetic expression, offering valuable insights for cultural preservation and intercultural dialogue in contemporary Muslim societies.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a multicultural nation, is known for its rich tapestry of ethnic, linguistic, and religious traditions that coexist within a shared national identity. The diversity of cultural expressions across the archipelago reveals the dynamic interplay between indigenous customs and external influences, particularly Islam, which has shaped local practices for centuries (Nursanty & Wulandari, 2023). In many regions, Islamic teachings have been absorbed into pre-existing cultural frameworks, resulting in unique forms of religious and social expression (Jong et al., 2023). This cultural encounter has produced what anthropologists term syncretism, a blending of belief systems and practices that reflect both continuity and transformation (Shaw, 2018; Tahara et al., 2023). The island of Sulawesi, with its diverse ethnic composition, stands as one of the most significant sites for observing such processes. Understanding how Islam and local culture interact in the Luwu community provides insight into the broader narrative of Indonesia's cultural hybridity.

Marriage rituals in Indonesia represent one of the most vivid forms of cultural performance, encapsulating the fusion of art, belief, and identity. Traditional wedding

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ceremonies are not only social events but also symbolic enactments of communal values, ethical norms, and aesthetic ideals (Borisova, 2021; Carter & Duncan, 2017). In the Luwu community of South Sulawesi, the wedding ceremony functions as both a sacred religious act and a cultural manifestation rooted in ancestral heritage. The ritual process, encompassing prayer recitations, symbolic offerings, and artistic expressions, illustrates how Islamic spirituality is intertwined with indigenous customs. This blending of local and Islamic elements demonstrates a continuous negotiation between adherence to faith and the preservation of tradition. Therefore, studying Luwu's wedding rituals offers an opportunity to understand how religion becomes localized through artistic and performative expressions of culture (Schrauwers, 2019).

The concept of Islamic acculturation has long been discussed in Indonesian cultural studies, often emphasizing Islam's adaptability and inclusivity toward local wisdom (*kearifan lokal*). Islam in the Indonesian context does not necessarily replace local traditions but rather transforms them through reinterpretation and contextualization (Alimi, 2018; Fauzan, 2025). This adaptive nature allows Islamic teachings to coexist harmoniously with local values such as cooperation, mutual respect, and social unity (*gotong royong*). Such integration is particularly evident in rituals that mark life's major transitions, where social and spiritual dimensions converge (Janusz & Walkiewicz, 2018; Syed, 2017). Within this framework, marriage ceremonies can be seen as performative arenas where religion and culture reinforce one another. The Luwu community's ability to maintain this balance reveals the resilience of its cultural identity amidst modernization and globalization.

From an anthropological perspective, wedding rituals serve as a cultural text that encodes values, beliefs, and power relations within a society. Dengah (2017) conceptualizes culture as a system of meaning, in which rituals act as "models of" and "models for" social life. Through the repetition of symbolic gestures, chants, and artful displays, communities express their cosmological understanding of harmony and order. In the Luwu context, these symbols include gestures of respect, dress codes reflecting modesty, and communal acts that mirror Islamic ethics. Each performative element of the ceremony operates not merely as ornamentation but as a communicative act, a language of symbols that conveys moral and social messages (Shen et al., 2024). Examining these semiotic dimensions highlights how the Luwu people express faith through cultural aesthetics and communal interaction.

At the intersection of art and religion, marriage ceremonies embody both aesthetic creativity and moral instruction. The inclusion of visual arts, rhythmic music, and poetic language within ritual practices signifies how beauty and piety intertwine in the Luwu community's worldview. Artistic expressions, such as ceremonial dress and spatial arrangements, serve as cultural markers of identity while reinforcing the sacredness of the occasion (Krishnamurthy, 2016; G. Li, 2024). These elements demonstrate that the Luwu wedding ritual functions as a living art form where devotion is manifested through creative and communal participation. Moreover, such practices provide continuity with the past while adapting to the evolving moral expectations of a modern Islamic society. Hence, the study of these rituals bridges the disciplines of cultural anthropology, religious studies, and art theory.

However, in recent decades, rapid modernization and digital globalization have threatened the continuity of traditional rituals in many Indonesian communities. The rise of standardized Islamic practices and the influence of mass media have altered perceptions of what constitutes “authentic” religious expression (Turner & Nasir, 2013; Zaid et al., 2022). As younger generations adopt more homogenized cultural practices, the localized expressions of Islam risk being marginalized or forgotten. In the Luwu region, this transformation challenges the preservation of symbolic meanings embedded in marriage ceremonies. Yet, despite these pressures, the persistence of ritual practices indicates a conscious effort among community members to maintain cultural distinctiveness within Islamic orthodoxy. Such resilience underscores the importance of documenting and interpreting these practices before they undergo further transformation.

Therefore, this study investigates the cultural expressions and acculturation processes between Islam and local traditions in Luwu’s wedding ceremonies. By employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, it seeks to reveal how Islamic teachings are localized through ritual performance and artistic symbolism. The research not only contributes to understanding Indonesia’s cultural pluralism but also highlights the aesthetic dimensions of religious experience. Furthermore, it provides empirical evidence of how traditional practices continue to shape collective identity and moral consciousness in contemporary Muslim communities. This inquiry situates Luwu’s ritual heritage within the broader discourse on cultural hybridity and religious expression in Southeast Asia. Ultimately, it underscores that the coexistence of Islam and local art forms is not a contradiction but a dynamic source of cultural creativity and social cohesion.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design grounded in ethnographic and anthropological approaches. The qualitative framework was selected to capture the depth and complexity of cultural meanings embedded in the traditional marriage ceremonies of the Luwu community. Ethnography enabled the researcher to interpret rituals as social and artistic performances, while anthropology provided a lens to understand their symbolic and moral dimensions within Islamic cultural contexts (Creswell, 2018). The research focused on documenting lived experiences, cultural symbols, and intersubjective interpretations rather than quantifying behavioral patterns. Through this design, the study sought to reveal how Islamic teachings are localized through ritual practices, collective participation, and aesthetic expression.

Participant

The participants of this research consisted of key cultural and religious figures from the Luwu community in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. They included *adat* leaders, local religious scholars (*ulama*), and senior family members who play active roles in organizing or officiating wedding rituals. Participants were selected purposively based on their cultural competence and firsthand experience with the traditional ceremonies (Miles et al., 2014). In total, ten informants were engaged in in-depth interviews and participatory observations. Their perspectives provided essential insights into the socio-religious

significance and artistic manifestations of Islamic cultural expressions within the community's wedding traditions.

Instrument

The primary research instrument in this study was the researcher herself, acting as both an observer and interpreter of cultural phenomena (Moleong, 2019). To support data collection, several auxiliary tools were employed: interview guidelines, a voice recorder, a digital camera for visual documentation, and field notes for contextual observations. The interview guide contained open-ended questions designed to explore participants' understanding of ritual meanings, symbols, and Islamic values embedded in the ceremonies. Observational data were complemented by photographic evidence of ceremonial sequences, artistic elements (e.g., costumes, music, spatial design), and collective interactions. This combination of tools ensured a rich, triangulated understanding of the cultural and religious practices under study.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative techniques following Miles et al. (2014) model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The collected data were first transcribed verbatim and categorized according to thematic codes related to cultural expression, Islamic values, and social symbolism. Each theme was then interpreted using a cultural-semiotic framework to uncover underlying meanings within ritual acts and artistic representations. Triangulation between interview, observation, and documentation strengthened the validity of findings, while reflective interpretation ensured cultural sensitivity and contextual accuracy. The analysis ultimately produced a descriptive model illustrating how Islamic teachings and local traditions merge harmoniously within the Luwu community's wedding ceremonies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Overview of the Marriage Ceremony in Luwu

The traditional marriage ceremony of the Luwu community is a multistage ritual that symbolizes the union not only between two individuals but also between two extended families and their ancestral lineages. Each stage carries distinct cultural and spiritual meanings that reflect both local customs and Islamic values. Observations revealed that these ceremonies are characterized by strong communal participation, reciprocal cooperation (*gotong royong*), and a deep sense of respect for elders. The rituals emphasize family unity, social harmony, and obedience to religious norms, thereby blending adat (customary law) and syariah (Islamic law) in everyday practice.

To provide a clearer structure, the main stages of the Luwu marriage ceremony are summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Stages of Traditional Marriage Ceremony in Luwu and Islamic Influences

Stage	Local Customary Practices	Integrated Islamic Elements	Cultural Significance
1. Mappesek-pesek (Proposal)	Family of the groom visits the bride's family to propose, bringing symbolic gifts such	The proposal begins with basmalah and ends with doa bersama (communal	Symbolizes respect, humility, and the sacred intent of forming a

Stage	Local Customary Practices	Integrated Islamic Elements	Cultural Significance
	as woven cloth and traditional food.	prayer) seeking Allah's blessing.	family under divine guidance.
2. Mappettu Ada (Agreement Meeting)	Families discuss dowry (uang panaik), wedding dates, and ceremonial responsibilities.	The discussion is guided by principles of musyawarah (deliberation) and fairness in accordance with Islamic ethics.	Reinforces values of consensus, justice, and transparency rooted in both adat and Islam.
3. Mappanre Temme (Pre-wedding Rituals)	Purification ceremonies and preparation of the bride, including application of traditional herbs.	Quranic recitations accompany the preparation, symbolizing spiritual and physical purification.	Represents inner and outer readiness to enter sacred marriage life.
4. Akad Nikah (Marriage Contract)	Conducted in the bride's home according to local custom.	Official Islamic marriage contract performed by a qadi or religious leader, with witnesses and recitation of ijab qabul.	Marks the religious validation of marriage; the core Islamic act within the traditional framework.
5. Mappatamma (Wedding Feast)	Large communal celebration with dance, traditional music, and food sharing.	Opening prayers and dzikir sessions precede the event, followed by expressions of gratitude (syukuran).	Blends art, community joy, and devotion; expresses the aesthetic and social dimensions of faith.
6. Mapparola (Post-wedding Visit)	The couple visits relatives and neighbors to express gratitude and seek blessings.	Recitation of doa selamat and expressions of gratitude to Allah for the union.	Strengthens kinship ties, humility, and social solidarity under Islamic ethics.

2. Forms of Cultural and Religious Acculturation

Field observations and interviews revealed three dominant forms of **acculturation** between local culture and Islam in Luwu's wedding ceremonies:

1. Ritual Integration:

Local rituals that once carried animistic or symbolic connotations have been reframed within an Islamic worldview. For example, ancestral blessings once addressed to *roh nenek moyang* are now replaced by collective *doa arwah* invoking Allah's mercy for the deceased. This change demonstrates a process of *Islamization* of custom without erasing traditional meaning.

2. Symbolic Adaptation:

The use of **traditional symbols**, such as *songkok recca* (embroidered cap) for men and *baju bodo* (traditional blouse) for women, has been preserved but reinterpreted as expressions of modesty and respect, aligning with Islamic ethics of *aurat* (body covering). These adaptations allow aesthetic continuity while reinforcing moral discipline.

3. Communal Values Transformation:

The customary spirit of *gotong royong* and *siri' na pacce* (honor and empathy) has been harmonized with Islamic principles of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *ta'awun* (mutual help). Such transformation reflects the social embodiment of Islamic ethics within indigenous moral frameworks.

Table 2. Dimensions of Acculturation in Luwu Marriage Rituals

Dimension	Local Cultural Practice	Islamic Adaptation	Resulting Hybrid Form
Ritual	Ancestral blessing rituals and offerings	Substituted with doa selamat and dzikir	Religious sanctification replaces animistic symbols
Symbol	Use of local costumes, ornaments, and gestures	Reinterpreted within Islamic modesty norms	Aesthetic continuity with moral refinement
Social Value	Siri' na pacce (honor and empathy)	Ukhuwah (brotherhood)	Reinforced ethical solidarity across faith and culture
Artistic Expression	Traditional dance and music at mappatamma	Preceded by prayer and spiritual reflection	Ritual art transformed into communal gratitude

3. Communal and Artistic Expressions

Ethnographic observation highlighted that the aesthetic dimension of the Luwu wedding ceremony functions as both a cultural performance and a devotional act. Traditional instruments such as *gendrang* (drum) and *kacaping* (lute) accompany the entrance of the bride and groom, while women perform synchronized movements symbolizing blessing and purity. Although these performances have pre-Islamic origins, they are now contextualized as forms of joy (*farah*) and thanksgiving (*syukr*) to Allah. The artistry of costume, color symbolism, and music transforms the ritual into a living art form, where religion is experienced through sound, movement, and visual harmony.

The color schemes, predominantly green and gold, reflect Islamic associations with paradise and divine light, while simultaneously maintaining local aesthetics of prosperity and dignity. The artistic creativity embedded in these performances strengthens cultural identity and intergenerational continuity. Thus, ritual art in Luwu's weddings represents a negotiation between spirituality, beauty, and social belonging.

4. Social Meaning and Identity Construction

The findings also indicate that Luwu's marriage rituals play a significant role in constructing collective identity. The ceremonies operate as *social contracts* reaffirming communal bonds, gender roles, and religious commitments. Through the integration of Islamic ethics and local customs, participants reaffirm their dual identity as both *Bugis-Luwu* and *Muslim Indonesians*. These practices contribute to maintaining social cohesion and transmitting ethical values such as honesty, respect for elders, and mutual support to younger generations.

Elders view the ceremony as a moral lesson on how Islam and culture coexist without conflict, symbolizing the community's capacity to adapt religious universality to local specificity (Azra, 2019). Younger participants, meanwhile, perceive the rituals as both heritage and faith expression, indicating that traditional forms continue to evolve without losing their relevance.

Discussion

The findings of this research demonstrate that the traditional marriage ceremony of the Luwu community represents a dynamic site of cultural and religious negotiation. The blending of *adat* and Islamic practices illustrates what anthropologists describe as *syncretic adaptation*, where local traditions are not erased but reinterpreted within the framework of Islamic theology (Geertz, 1976; Sanjani et al., 2024). This phenomenon reinforces the concept of *Islam Nusantara*, which recognizes that Islamic practice in

Indonesia evolves through interaction with pre-existing cultural systems rather than through opposition to them (Fahmi, 2024). In the Luwu context, ritual forms such as *mappettu ada* and *mappatamma* have been infused with Islamic ethical values, such as sincerity, deliberation, and gratitude, transforming them into expressions of religious devotion. The coexistence of local aesthetics and religious obligations reflects the community's ability to harmonize faith with identity. Such integration also highlights the adaptability of Islam as a cultural force capable of embracing diversity without compromising its spiritual essence (Bakar et al., 2025; Siddique, 2025). Therefore, Luwu's wedding tradition serves as a microcosm of how Islam operates as both a religious and cultural system in plural societies.

From an anthropological and semiotic perspective, the ritual performances observed in Luwu can be read as symbolic communication conveying collective values and cosmological order. Every gesture, dress color, and recited verse operates as a sign that mediates the relationship between the human, social, and divine spheres (Leone, 2010; Leone & Parmentier, 2014). For instance, the use of green and gold in ceremonial clothing symbolizes not only prosperity but also spiritual illumination, while communal *dzikir* expresses social cohesion through shared rhythm and sound. These acts can be understood as forms of religious aesthetics, where art becomes an avenue for experiencing and expressing faith (Austin, 1980). By transforming artistic performance into spiritual practice, the Luwu community demonstrates how beauty (*jamal*) and devotion (*ibadah*) coexist as complementary dimensions of Islamic life. The creative fusion of artistic form and theological meaning challenges the dichotomy between sacred and secular domains in cultural expression. Hence, ritual art in the Luwu marriage ceremony exemplifies what Anjum (2007) calls the "discursive tradition" of Islam—where meaning is continually produced through embodied and historical practice.

Sociologically, the integration of Islamic and local values in the Luwu wedding ceremony also serves as a mechanism of social reproduction and moral education. The community uses the ceremony to transmit norms of respect, modesty, cooperation, and faithfulness to the younger generation (Gede Agung et al., 2024). Through participation in rituals and collective preparations, individuals internalize values of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), strengthening the moral fabric of society. These communal ethics align with the Islamic ideal of *ummah*—a moral community bound by faith and social responsibility (Wang, 2024). The process of organizing and performing the ceremony thus functions as a pedagogical arena where religious knowledge is lived rather than merely taught. By combining familial authority with religious legitimacy, the ritual sustains both the continuity of cultural identity and the stability of social order. This observation supports Páez et al. (2015) classic argument that collective rituals reinforce social solidarity through shared belief and emotional synchronization. Consequently, the Luwu wedding ceremony operates as a cultural institution that sustains social cohesion by embedding faith in daily social practice.

In a broader cultural discourse, the acculturation evident in Luwu's marriage traditions reflects the pluralistic resilience of Indonesian Islam amid globalization. While modernity and mass media promote homogenized religious forms, local communities continue to assert their distinct identity through ritual and art (T. Li & Wu, n.d.; Parker,

2019). The persistence of traditional symbols and the recontextualization of ritual aesthetics show that cultural continuity does not necessarily conflict with modernization. Instead, it indicates an evolving synthesis in which global Islam interacts with local creativity to produce new cultural meanings. This ongoing transformation aligns with Bhabha (2012) concept of the “third space,” where hybrid identities emerge from the negotiation of difference rather than its erasure. Through the Luwu case, it becomes evident that cultural hybridity serves as a productive site for innovation and resilience rather than as a mark of impurity. Thus, the marriage ritual stands not merely as a relic of the past but as a living, adaptive expression of faith, beauty, and identity in contemporary Islamic culture.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the traditional marriage ceremony of the Luwu community reflects a harmonious integration between Islamic faith and local cultural heritage, where ritual, art, and social values coexist in mutual reinforcement. The findings reveal that Islam does not displace indigenous customs but transforms them through reinterpretation, creating a living synthesis between spirituality and tradition. Each stage of the ceremony—from proposal to communal feast—embodies moral teachings, aesthetic expression, and collective identity rooted in both *adat* and *syariah*. This process of acculturation operates through ritual substitution, symbolic adaptation, and social transformation, illustrating how religious devotion can inspire cultural creativity. The Luwu case exemplifies *Islam Nusantara* as a model of pluralistic resilience, showing that faith and culture can evolve together while maintaining authenticity and harmony. Ultimately, these marriage rituals serve as dynamic cultural texts that communicate beauty, ethics, and unity, reaffirming the vitality of Indonesian Islam in shaping identity and fostering intercultural understanding in a globalized world.

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