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## Islamic Compromise in the Marriage of the Papuan Muslim Marind Tribe

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### ABSTRACT

*This study was prompted by the traditional practice observed among the Marind tribe of Papua, specifically the custom of exchanging dowry during marriages, notably the "Wati Plant." Due to the plant's components inducing unconsciousness, the research aims to comprehend the nature of the Wati Plant and explore the rituals conducted by the Muslim community within the Marind Tribe during marriage traditions. Employing a field research approach with an anthropological-theological perspective, the data collection involved interviews, observations, and documentation, subsequently analyzed using pertinent theories. The findings revealed that the Wati Plant has been part of the Marind tribe's heritage, initially considered a remedy for post-work fatigue by ancestral generations. This tradition persisted across generations. The study also unveiled the coexistence of Islamic and customary elements in Muslim Marind Tribe marriages, forming a harmonious compromise. This integration stems from a deep understanding of Islamic teachings and a commitment to honoring the Marind Tribe's ancestral customs.*

**Keywords:** *Customs, compromise, Islam, Marind tribe, Wati plant.*

Customs and traditions are typically characterized by processions or ceremonies that are performed by certain communities, such as funerals or rites related to marriage or other life events. Indonesia has a strong regard for local customs, even those of the Papuan tribal people (Yamin et al. 2022). Every place has its own set of traditional norms, and marriage is one of them. In marriage ceremonies, it is customary for the prospective husband to give the women a dowry (Abdullah et al. 2023). These include cash, jewelry, prayer utensils, and antique materials (Yatmana 2001). Every dowry in the marital custom has a distinct connotation; for instance, bringing in cakes or fruits signifies that the household's presents are turning into a source of good fortune (A & Islamy 2022). Coconuts, taro, cassava, and bananas, Wati plant (leaves) (piper

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methysticum are examples of dowries given by the Marind Tribe of Papua in Merauke (Amri 2020).

The Marind tribe, comprising both Muslim and non-Muslim members, is one of the indigenous Papuan tribes residing in South Papua. The Muslim community within the Marind tribe has a distinctive marriage tradition, wherein the groom presents a Wati plant as a form of dowry for the bride. It should be noted that the wati plant has significant cultural significance, particularly among the Animha community in Merauke regency (Suroto 2022). Research indicates that the Wati plant, has the potential to serve as an intoxicating beverage. Some studies even detail the presence of compounds in this plant with narcotic properties or resembling alcohol.

Islam and adat (custom) are integral aspects of the Muslim Marind tribe's way of life. While Islam is viewed as guiding positive actions, Marind Muslims find it essential to uphold their customs. This creates a duality, as followers of Islam within the Marind Papua tribe are obliged to adhere to both Islamic teachings and their traditional customs, especially evident in marriage practices involving the Wati Plant ritual, where compromises are made between Islamic principles and traditional customs. Adat (custom) is an ancestral heritage that must be maintained until now as a self-identity (Jubba et al. 2018). Similarly, Islam is a faith that must be maintained to guide individuals towards goodness and the right path (Firdaus & Shalihin, 2021).

Due to the presence of elements deemed haram (prohibited) in Islamic teachings within the Wati plant, this research aims to investigate religious adherence among the Muslim Marind Tribes in Papua. The study delves into the delicate balance between preserving cultural customs and practicing Islam among the Marind Papua tribe. It commences by presenting an overview of the Marind Tribe's identity and explores marriage customs, particularly those associated with the Wati plant. Additionally, the paper examines the acculturation issue, revealing how the Muslims of the Marind tribe either accept or reject new customs, Islamic custom.

The Marind tribe places significant importance on respecting their customs, considering non-compliance punishable. Conversely, Muslims within the Marind tribe view this tradition as conflicting with sharia, given that the Wati plant (wati water) contains alcohol when consumed. Examining the study's objective will shed light on the stance of Islam and adat regarding the marriage customs of the Marind Tribe in Papua.

## **Research Method**

This study is qualitative, deriving from the observation of individuals' behavior, as stated by Moleong (2005). Employing an empirical approach and adopting a case study method, as described by Arikunto (2010), the research gathers data from both Muslim and non-Muslim communities within the Marind tribe, along with insights from indigenous cultural figures of the Marind Tribe.

## **Papuan Marind Tribe Potrait of Life**

Merauke Regency, situated in South Papua, encompasses the "Kota Rusa" or Customary territory "Animha." The diverse tribal communities within this region include the Marind Tribe, Asmat Tribe, Muyu Tribe, and others. The local populace practices various religions, such as Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. While South Papua is commonly associated with Indigenous Papuans (OAP- Orang Asli Papua) as the native inhabitants, a substantial transmigrant community is also present, spanning across 20 districts within Merauke Regency.

The Indigenous Papua people (OAP) are dispersed across the region, constituting 70% of the total population in Merauke Regency. The majority, particularly the Marind tribe, steadfastly maintain their customs as a defining aspect of their Papuan identity. In the era of modernization and globalization, some have integrated with immigrant communities, intermarried with other tribes, and embraced new cultures. The introduction of new customs by immigrants is generally accepted, seen as a positive learning experience through cultural differences. Nevertheless,

indigenous Papuans in Merauke Regency, especially the Marind tribe, continue to hold their customs in high regard, considering it a tribute to their ancestors.

The Marind tribe holds deep reverence for their ancestors, considering the deceased as the inaugural figure in human existence. However, with the arrival of Christian missionaries in 1910, a substantial majority has embraced Christianity. This shift has transformed the Marind tribe's belief system from a focus on the supernatural to adopting religion as a defining aspect of their identity (Amri 2020).

To fulfill their daily necessities, they engage in activities like cultivating fields, fishing along the coast or river, farming sago, and hunting wild animals such as pigs and deer. The Marind Tribe's identity is discernible through their last names, known as Marga, a cultural manifestation passed down through generations. These clans are believed to symbolize prayers, events, aspirations, ideals, and the life history of individuals (Kafaabillah, 2018). The Marind tribe comprises seven clans, each with distinct meanings: Basik-basik (Pig), Gebze (Coconut), Ndiken (Bird), Balagaize (Crocodile), Samkakai (Kangaroo or Stock), Kaize (Cassowary), and Mahuze (Dog). The significance of each clan is associated with animal and plant names.



### **"Wati Plant" as the Ancestral History of the Papuan Marind Tribe**

Preserving historical heritage is crucial for indigenous peoples, especially in the context of traditional rituals vital for their survival. Typically, historical relics are categorized into two types: living monuments, serving as symbols or worship infrastructure, and dead monuments, which are not utilized for worship purposes (Lambert 2014). Events conducted in the past were linked to objects that now serve as preserved relics. For the Marind tribe, the Wati plant is such an object, revered and respected as a symbol of historical significance, with its origins traced back to ancestral history. These insights are drawn from interviews with cultural figures in Merauke:

The wati plant has existed since our ancestors, since then until now we Marind tribe people must be able to care for and maintain this plant" (Y. M. Mahuze, n.d.)

This demonstrates that the Marind tribe has a longstanding belief in the existence of the Wati plant. They perceive the Wati plant as an entity deserving care and preservation, serving as a



tribute to their tribal ancestors. As elucidated by Doob (1985), belief constitutes a truth acknowledged by society, evolving from processes like faith, thought, or observation. Belief involves two essential components: the people as adherents and the subject, which includes symbols, objects, art, customs, etc. Considering the Marind tribe's belief in the Wati plant as a symbol of their ancestors, it reflects a historical connection rooted in past events.



**Picture .3.** *Wati Plants of Marind Tribe of Papua Society at Merauke Regency*

The image above reveals that this plant resembles common vegetation, like vegetables and lush fruit trees. Surprisingly, it can thrive in fields or rice fields. As reported by Kompas, the Head of the Rehabilitation division of BNN Papua Province notes that Wati plants harbor addictive substances (Costa 2017), influencing psychoactive effects beyond psychotropics and narcotics, akin to substances found in alcoholic drinks (I Kadek Buana Putra Sedana et al., 2021). Notably, the roots of Wati plants contain narcotic compounds. However, there are advantages to this plant, such as its ability to shield human cells from damage and its vitamin E content (Agusta et al., 1998). Despite research and laboratory findings indicating the impact of consuming Wati plants, the Marind tribe holds this plant in high esteem, valuing its historical significance that is deeply ingrained and irreplaceable.

### **Representation of Customary and Islamic Forms in the Marriages of the Papuan Muslim Marind Tribe**

Within the predominantly Christian indigenous community of the Marind tribe in Merauke, the Muslims of the Marind tribe constitute a minority. Despite their religious differences, they are acknowledged as integral members of the Marind family. Klinken, in his research, notes the amicable relations between these communities.

"The survival of Islam will find appreciation, even in the conditions of a minority. Thus will arise a responsibility to develop a pattern of relations with the majority in a friendly, productive and humane manner. Violence in the name of religion in the last two decades in various parts of Indonesia is not desirable in Papua" (Klinken, 2007).

This statement elucidates the inter-religious dynamics between the minority Muslim and majority Christian communities of the Marind tribe. Despite religious disparities, there is no conflict or violence between the tribes. Instead, the Marind Tribe community in Merauke Regency leverages these differences for equitable development in their communal life. Notably, traditions linked to the Wati Plant, such as those in marriage customs, have undergone modifications due to

the distinct religious practices. Cultural transformations within the Muslim community of the Marind Tribe do not significantly impact the original culture, as the alterations indicate a departure from the fundamental principle of honoring ancestors. Yet, among the indigenous people of the Marind Tribe, these changes are relatively acceptable. Decision-making involves deliberation and approval from traditional figures or leaders of the Marind people. Interestingly, some Marind Tribe Muslims still partake in the marriage process holding a glass of Wati Plants without consuming them. This suggests that the cultural changes made by the Muslim community in the Marind Tribe do not signify a rejection of indigenous culture but rather demonstrate their commitment to Islamic teachings.

As described earlier regarding shifts or alterations in indigenous culture, these changes fall under the purview of cultural science, specifically known as acculturation. According to Amri's research, acculturation signifies the merging of different indigenous influences, giving rise to new customs (Amri et al., 2023). Riedfield suggests that in acculturation, contact between different cultures leads to tension (Arsyad AT, 2019). The studies highlight that the varied customs involve the original practices of the Marind Tribe, which need to coexist with Islamic customs oriented towards goodness. This is particularly evident in the context of marriage customs related to the Wati Plant, where the traditional beliefs of the indigenous Marind Papua Tribe intersect with the practices carried out by the Muslim community of the Marind Tribe in Papua.

A dissertation titled "*The Minangkabau Traditionalists' Response to The Modernist Movement*," addressing cultural acculturation, posits that the convergence of diverse cultures leads to tension, rejection, and even conflict, as asserted by Za'im Rais (1994). This perspective aligns with another dissertation, "*The Impact of Acculturation and Religion on Intergenerational Family Conflict for Second Generation Asian Indian Americans*" by Shah (2006) which indicates that descendants of Indian Americans experience conflict within family dynamics due to cultural disparities. In essence, both dissertations suggest that when two different cultures intersect, it often results in conflict, particularly oriented towards rejection.

Contrary to expectations, this study, focusing on the Wati plant as a dowry tradition in Muslim Marind tribe marriage customs, did not witness any conflict or rejection from the indigenous people of the Marind tribe, who hold the original customary authority. Surprisingly, the convergence of indigenous traditions with those based on Islamic teachings proved to be a highly beneficial combination. According to the Marind tribe, Islam was integrated into their social identity to reinforce their existing cultural foundation. The willingness of the Marind tribe to embrace changes in the tradition of Wati plant (leaves) as a dowry by the Muslim community highlights the importance of tolerance. Consequently, the findings of this study challenge prior assertions suggesting that the meeting of indigenous and new cultures invariably leads to rejection by the original culture.

Comprehending a new tradition involves evaluating whether it is discarded, preserved, or replaced. Riedfield's concept posits that the acculturation process results in syncretism, substitution, deculturation, addition, originalization, and rejection (Kurniansyah 2019). Substitution denotes the introduction of a new culture, syncretism signifies the modification of the original culture with a new (foreign) one, deculturation involves the elimination or alteration of culture, addition implies incorporating elements from the original culture, originalization refers to cultural changes impacting people's lives, and finally, rejection pertains to the rejection by indigenous people (Arsyad AT 2019). The subsequent table outlines the acculturation process of the new Islamic culture within the Muslim Marind Tribe, specifically concerning the Wati Plant.

**Table 1.**  
**The Acculturation Process of the Tradition of "Wati Plants" Handover on the Muslim Marriage Customs of the Marind Tribe of Papua**

Form of Culture	Riedfield Acculturation Process	Explanation
Wati Plant Handover Ritual in the Marriage Tradition of the Marind Tribe of Papua Community in Merauke Regency.	Syncretism (Ritual Change)	The alternation of rituals in the practice of consuming wati plants, becomes the elimination of the practice.
	Deculturation (Tradition Removed)	For mixed marriages (specifically for male candidates from the Marind tribe with women from tribes other than the Marind tribe).
	Origination	New traditions due to new cultural doctrines (Islamic teachings) that forbid wati plants for consumption.
	Rejection	There is no rejection from the community before acculturation occurs (in this case the indigenous people of the Marind tribe).

The provided table indicates that the Wati plant dowry and drinking practice in the Muslim marriage customs of the Marind tribe underwent an acculturation process involving the original culture of the Marind tribe and the new Islamic culture. The cultural acculturation within the tradition of Wati plant as a dowry in marriage customs, a fundamental practice for the Marind tribe of Papua, resulted in several changes. First, there was a process of syncretism, involving modifications to insignificant rituals. Second, deculturation led to the loss of certain ritual traditions. Third, origination introduced a new tradition as a set of rules to be followed in becoming a devout individual. Fourth, there was no rejection from the indigenous people of the Marind tribe towards the Muslim community of the Marind tribe, even when they did not perform the ritual of washing with Wati leaves in their marriage customs.

Islam, as a religion practicing *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*, governs all aspects of life, encompassing nature and human activities through its regulations. In accordance with Islam, all human endeavors are categorized as either prohibited (haram) or permissible (halal) (Wan Zahari et al. 2022). Haram signifies actions that are forbidden, while halal denotes permissibility in carrying out certain activities (Nasution & Nasution 2023). Engaging in actions prohibited by Islam results in consequences or rewards, manifesting as sins that must be accounted for (Ali 2016). Hence, the actions undertaken by the Muslim Marind tribe in their customary marriage practices involving the ritual of Wati Plant offerings are evaluated based on whether they align with Islamic principles or not.

In responding to the preceding description, it's essential to understand that Islamic Law utilizes the Legal Istinbath Method known as '*Urf*'. It is a method for deducing legal rulings to regulate customs that may deviate from Sharia (Muda & Rosmawati 2000). Another method employed in Islamic Law for examining customs or traditions is Maslahah Mursalah. The essence of mursalah is utilizing benefits while eliminating harm (Shofiyah & Ghozali 2021). Considering both Istinbath methods, the '*urf*' law and maslahah mursalah, serve as approaches to examining Islamic principles in the context of studying the customary marriage practices of the Muslim Marind tribe.

In the '*urf*' concept, acceptance is categorized into '*urf sahih*' and '*urf fasid*', as outlined by Roslaili in 2019. '*Urf sahih*' denotes customs aligning with Islamic teachings, whereas '*urf fasid*' refers to customs inconsistent with Islamic principles (Taufiqurrahman, 2018). The application of '*urf*' in the context of the tradition of Wati plant dowry in Muslim Marind tribe marriage customs

demonstrates their adherence to Islamic values and norms. For instance, refraining from the tradition of consuming pigs aligns with Islamic teachings, as pigs are considered inappropriate for Muslim consumption (Tekege & Rahanra 2022). The Muslim Marind tribe perceives the practice of Wati plant (leaves) dowry in their marriage customs as consistent with Islam, emphasizing that the Wati Plants offered are not consumed during the ritual practices.

Looking at this marriage custom from the perspective of *Maslahah Mursalah*, the tradition of offering Wati water in the Muslim marriage customs of the Marind tribe is considered a novel situation not explicitly addressed by Quranic texts or hadith (nas) (Usman 2023). Ash-Shatib, in *al-Muwafaqat fi Usul al-Ahkam*, defines *maslahah mursalah* to be applicable to new cases lacking specific textual guidance (nas) but containing benefits compatible (al-munasib) with shariah (Asy-Syatibi n.d.). Hence, the giving of the Wati plant tradition in the Muslim marriage customs of the Marind tribe represents a new phenomenon in Islam. From a *maslahah* perspective, this tradition can yield outcomes, as Muslims offering Wati water that are then consumed by non-Muslim guests might create a perception that a Muslim is providing and serving food or drinks containing haram (prohibited) elements. Consequently, the drinking Wati water tradition in the marriage customs of the Marind tribe in Merauke Regency falls under *maslahah mulghah*, as it contradicts Islamic law and is categorized as a custom leading to harm due to the presentation of food or drink inconsistent with Islamic principles.

### Islamic and Customary Compromise in Marriage Practices of Muslim Marind Tribe

In the indigenous culture of the Marind tribe, the tradition of handing over Wati water during marriages has been an enduring ritual. Our observations reveal that this practice involves offering drinks to the bride-to-be, which are then consumed by invited guests during the marriage ceremony. However, the study's findings indicate minor changes in the adherence to the traditional Wati leaves as a dowry in their marriage customs. These changes are attributed to individuals who uphold the indigenous customs of the Marind tribe. This illustrates the harmonious integration of Islam and the indigenous customs of the Marind tribe, fostering unity between the two. The process of Islam and indigenous customs (adat) in the Wati plants (leaves) handover tradition within the marriage customs of the Muslim Marind tribe demonstrates synergy and mutual compromise.

There are coexistence and disappearance of the traditional practice of giving Wati leaves in marriage customs. The variance between the two practices stems from intermarriages or unions involving individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, those who continue the tradition may not precisely follow the ancestral Marind tribe practice of Wati leaves as a dowry. In this context, the Wati leaves or Wati water are presented merely as identity symbols for the Marind Tribe people, without being distributed to invited guests for consumption as practiced by the ancestors. Despite some opting to eliminate these traditions, it doesn't imply a lack of respect for the cultural norms of Marind tribe marriage customs; rather, it is influenced by both external factors, such as mixed tribal marriages, and internal factors, including adherence to Islamic teachings in their marriage practices.

**Table 2**  
**The Practice of the Tradition of Passing "Wati Plants" to Marriage Customs of Muslim Marind Tribe of Papua**

Traditionalists	Practice	Types of Changes	The Reason of Changes
A	Does not do	Not handing over and consuming	1. The Bride is Javanese. 2. Understanding about Islam .
B	Do without consuming	Not consuming	1. The Groom and Bride are Marind People. 2. Doctrine of Islamic Teachings.



C	Does not do	Not handing over and consuming	1. The Bride is Sulawesi Tribe. 2. Doctrine of Islamic Teachings.
D	Do without consuming	Not consuming	1. The Groom and Bride are Marind People.. 2. Doctrine of Islamic Teachings.
X	Do without consuming	Not consuming	1. The Groom and Bride are Marind People. 2. Doctrine of Islamic Teachings.
Y	Do without consuming	Not consuming	1. The Groom (Javnesse) wants to marry the bride (Marind People). 2. Doctrine of Islamic Teachings.
Z	Do without consuming	Not consuming	1. The Groom and Bride are Marind People. 2. Doctrine of Islamic Teachings.



**Picture. 4.** *The practice of Wati Plants handover on the Muslim marriage customs of Marind people*

The provided table reveals evidence indicating a compromise between Islam and custom in the marriage practices of the Muslim Marind tribe. Firstly, it is evident that the Muslim Marind tribe adheres to the norms of Islamic religious law. This is demonstrated by their limited engagement in the tradition, confining it to the presentation of Wati plants as dowry without consuming them during the marriage ceremony. The decision is rooted in the scientific understanding that Wati plants contain substances deemed harmful (mudharat) and prohibited (haram) for Muslims. Secondly, there is clear evidence that Wati plants continue to play a role in their marriage customs. This dual presence of Islamic doctrine and respect for indigenous identity among the Marind Papuan tribe attests to the compromise between Islam and custom in the marriages of the Muslim Marind Tribe in Merauke Regency.

The study's results lead to the conclusion that the compromise between Islam and customs in the tradition of presenting Wati plants as dowry in the marriages of the Muslim Marind tribe of Papua involves the practice of respecting customs and adhering to Islamic values. Despite Islam being a religion with guidelines for behavior in cultural and belief contexts, it doesn't hinder the Muslim Marind tribe from preserving their indigenous customs.

The Muslim Marind tribe of Papua follows a unique approach in embracing Islamic teachings. Despite Islam being a religion with ethical teachings, delineating between haram and



halal, it doesn't hinder them from observing their customs. The convergence of Islam and custom has resulted in a new perspective for the Muslim Marind tribe in their religious practices. They are obliged to honor their ancestors who shaped their culture and demonstrate reverence for the ancestral customs, while concurrently adhering to the later teachings of Islam.

Observing the compromise between Islam and Adat in the marriages of the Muslim Marind tribe results in the establishment of customary law and religious law. Christian Scouck Hurgronke (1857-1936) suggested that the interplay between customary law and religious law can be understood through Receptie, a theory highlighting the dominance between the two (Burhanudin 2014). Receptie theory posits that customary law tends to dominate its application in society (Rifqi 2021). In a more intricate scenario, Islamic law is expected to prevail over customary law in Receptie (Grewes 1957). Josselin de Jong's Penetration theory asserts that Islamic law exerts a potent influence, introducing changes in indigenous cultures in a tolerant and peaceful manner. According to this theory, despite the transformative impact of Islamic law on indigenous cultures, there is no conflict among communities prioritizing customary law (Pongoliu 2016). Analyzing these theories reveals that the customary marriage practices of the Muslim Marind tribe are rooted in both Islamic and generational customary rules. The synergy between Islamic law and customary law establishes a harmonious relationship in their customary practices.

The evolution of the marriage customs among the Marind Tribe of Papua reflects societal changes driven by shifts in character and social dynamics. This transformation is evident in the evolution of the Wati plant tradition within the Muslim marriage customs of the Marind Papuan Tribe, initially grounded in ancestral beliefs and subsequently adapted with the advent of Islam as their religion. This adaptation reflects a compromise between Islam and the Marind Tribe's original customs. It can be deduced that the practice of using Wati plant as dowry in marriage customs is shaped by the evolving legal consciousness of the community. The shift from the previous customary law to Sharia law indicates a synthesis of these legal frameworks, unveiling a new perspective in the practice of marriage customs for the Muslims of the Marind tribe in Papua.

The study reveals that the Muslim Marind tribe of Papua continues to uphold their customs, although the influence of Islam has led some to abandon certain practices. While the tradition of presenting Wati plant as dowry is still maintained, the consumption of Wati beverage has been discontinued due to its contradiction with Islamic teachings. To the Muslim Marind tribe of Papua, any tradition conflicting with Islamic principles should be relinquished.

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