

The Integration of Islamic Values and Bimanese Customary Law in the Nineteenth-Century Majelis Syara': Judicial Authority and Social Legitimacy

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Abstrak

Integrasi hukum Islam dan norma adat merupakan karakteristik penting sistem hukum Indonesia, namun kajian praktik peradilannya di Indonesia Timur masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis integrasi nilai Islam dan hukum adat Bima dalam peradilan Majelis Syara', serta menjelaskan peran religiositas dan budaya lokal dalam membentuk legitimasi sosial otoritas peradilan Kesultanan Bima abad ke-19. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan desain sosio-legal dan historis-interpretatif, data dihimpun melalui analisis manuskrip, dokumen arsip kesultanan, kajian literatur, serta wawancara dengan sejarawan lokal, pengamat budaya, dan pengelola lembaga warisan budaya Bima. Analisis dilakukan melalui interpretasi historis-kritis dan triangulasi sumber. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Majelis Syara' berfungsi sebagai institusi peradilan yang mengintegrasikan fikih mazhab Syafi'i dengan nilai adat Bima, khususnya *Maja Labo Dahu* dan *Sara Dana Mbojo*. Integrasi ini tecermin dalam prinsip peradilan, mekanisme pembuktian, penyelesaian sengketa, dan penerapan sanksi yang berorientasi pada keadilan dan harmoni sosial. Legitimasi peradilan Bima abad ke-19 terbentuk melalui interaksi dinamis antara hukum Islam, adat, otoritas ulama, dan kekuasaan kesultanan. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada kajian pluralisme hukum Islam dengan menunjukkan bahwa otoritas hukum lokal dibangun

melalui negosiasi antara teks keagamaan, tradisi lokal, dan struktur politik untuk menghasilkan sistem keadilan yang diterima secara sosial.

Kata kunci: *Hukum Islam, Hukum Adat, Majelis Syara', Kesultanan Bima, Pluralisme Hukum.*

Abstract

The integration of Islamic law and customary norms (*adat*) is a defining characteristic of the Indonesian legal system, yet studies examining how this integration was institutionalized in judicial practices within Eastern Indonesia remain limited. This study aims to analyze the integration of Islamic values and Bima customary law within the *Majelis Syara'* judicial system, and to explicate the role of religiosity and local culture in shaping the social legitimacy of judicial authority in the 19th-century Bima Sultanate. Employing a qualitative method with socio-legal and historical-interpretative designs, data were gathered through the analysis of historical manuscripts, archival documents of the Bima Sultanate, and literature reviews, complemented by interviews with local historians, cultural observers, and heritage-institution representatives. Data analysis was conducted using historical-critical interpretation and source triangulation. The findings reveal that the *Majelis Syara'* functioned as a judicial institution that harmonized Shafi'i jurisprudence (*fiqh*) with Bima customary values, specifically *Maja Labo Dahu* and *Sara Dana Mbojo*. This integration was reflected in judicial principles, evidentiary mechanisms, dispute resolution, and the imposition of sanctions oriented toward justice and the maintenance of social harmony. The legitimacy of the 19th-century Bima judiciary was forged through the interaction between Islamic law, *adat*, clerical authority, and sultanate power. These findings contribute to the discourse on Islamic legal pluralism by demonstrating that legal authority in the case of Bima was constructed not merely through the enforcement of religious norms, but through a process of negotiation between religious texts, local traditions, and political structures that yields a socially accepted system of justice.

Keywords: Islamic law, customary law, Majelis Syara', Bima Sultanate, legal pluralism.

Introduction

Indonesia represents one of the most significant examples of legal pluralism, where state law, Islamic law, and customary law have historically coexisted and interacted as multiple sources of normative authority. In many societies, legal authority is not produced through a single dominant legal system but through continuous negotiation among religious principles, indigenous traditions, and political institutions. The Indonesian archipelago provides an important historical context for examining this phenomenon because Islamic legal traditions were often incorporated into existing cultural structures and systems of governance. Within this pluralistic legal environment, Islamic sultanates

played an important role in developing institutional arrangements where religious norms and local traditions interacted in regulating social order and resolving disputes.

One significant example from Eastern Indonesia is the Sultanate of Bima, an Islamic polity established in the early seventeenth century following the Islamization of Bima under Sultan Abdul Kahir (r. 1620–1640). Throughout its existence until the twentieth century, the Sultanate developed a distinctive governance structure known as *Sara Dana Mbojo*, which integrated political authority, Islamic principles, and Bimanese customary traditions. The historical experience of Bima demonstrates that the adoption of Islam did not eliminate indigenous legal values; rather, Islamic norms were negotiated and incorporated within existing cultural and political frameworks. This process produced a distinctive form of governance in which religious authority, customary values, and political legitimacy became interconnected.

Historical evidence regarding Bima's legal institutions is preserved in the *Bo' Sangaji Kai* manuscript, the most important royal chronicle of the Bima Sultanate. Covering the period from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, this manuscript documents various aspects of royal administration, legal regulations, judicial procedures, diplomatic relations, and governmental structures. Complementing this source, other royal manuscripts, including *Bo' Kadi*, provide records concerning religious affairs and judicial matters, indicating the existence of institutional arrangements related to Islamic legal authority within the Sultanate. These historical sources demonstrate that judicial practices in Bima were closely associated with the *Majelis Syara'*, an institution that functioned as a space where Islamic legal principles interacted with Bimanese customary values in addressing social and legal issues.

The relationship between Islamic law and customary law has become a central theme in studies of Indonesian legal history. Previous research has shown that Islamic legal traditions in Indonesia have rarely developed independently from local cultures; instead, they have continuously interacted with indigenous norms, social structures, and political institutions. Studies on regions such as Aceh, Minangkabau, and Java demonstrate that sharia and adat often function as interconnected normative systems that contribute to the formation of social order and legal practices. From the perspective of legal pluralism, these interactions illustrate that legal authority emerges through the coexistence, negotiation, and accommodation of multiple normative orders rather than through a single centralized legal system (Griffiths, 1986; Merry, 1988).

Despite extensive scholarship on Islamic law and customary law in Indonesia, existing studies remain geographically concentrated on major Muslim regions such as Aceh, Minangkabau, and Java. Consequently, eastern Indonesian Islamic polities have received comparatively limited attention, resulting in insufficient understanding of how Islamic legal authority developed in different historical and cultural contexts. The Sultanate of Bima provides an important case for expanding discussions of Islamic legal pluralism because it represents an eastern Indonesian Muslim polity where Islamic norms interacted with distinctive indigenous traditions and political structures.

Previous studies on Bima have primarily focused on Islamization, historiography, cultural traditions, and political development (Ilmiawan, 2017; Haris & Zuhdi, 1997; Murtadha & Abubakar, 2018). Although these studies provide valuable historical insights, they have not sufficiently examined the ways in which Islamic legal principles and Bimanese customary values were institutionalized within judicial practices. Similarly, previous studies on the *Majelis Syara'* have mainly emphasized its administrative and governmental functions (Mubin & Kusumawati, 2019; Mutawali, 2019), while its role as a judicial institution where religious authority, customary ethics, and political legitimacy were negotiated remains underexplored.

The interaction between Islamic law and customary values in Bima is reflected in local philosophical principles, including *Adat Labo Hukum Bune si Ntika Nawa Labo Sarumbu* and *Syara' na ka Tenggoku ba Hukum* which deeply inform the broader Bimanese ethics of *Maja Labo Dahu* and *Sara Dana Mbojo* emphasize the close relationship between customary norms and Islamic legal principles (Ahmad, 1992). These principles indicate that Islamic law and customary law did not operate as isolated or opposing systems; rather, they interacted through processes of adaptation, negotiation, and institutionalization. Through the *Majelis Syara'*, these normative frameworks were incorporated into judicial practices involving legal reasoning, dispute resolution, evidentiary procedures, and moral regulation.

This study argues that the *Majelis Syara'* represents an institutionalized form of Islamic legal pluralism in which Islamic jurisprudence and Bimanese customary ethics functioned as interconnected sources of judicial legitimacy. Rather than understanding Islamic law as a fixed legal system applied uniformly across different societies, this study examines how Islamic legal principles were interpreted and embedded within a specific historical and cultural context. The *Majelis Syara'* is therefore understood not merely as

an administrative institution of the Sultanate but as a judicial arena where religious norms, customary values, and political authority interacted in constructing legitimate legal practices.

The novelty of this study lies in its examination of Islamic legal pluralism through the historical experience of an eastern Indonesian Islamic polity that has received limited scholarly attention. While previous studies have generally examined adat and sharia as parallel normative traditions, this research conceptualizes their relationship as a process of institutional synthesis through which legal authority was negotiated, constructed, and socially accepted. By focusing on the Majelis Syara', this study contributes to broader discussions on how Islamic legal traditions adapt within diverse cultural environments and how judicial legitimacy is produced through the interaction between religion, law, and society.

Theoretically, this study contributes to Islamic legal pluralism scholarship by illustrating, through the case of the Bima Sultanate, how legal authority in a historical Muslim society was produced through dynamic interactions among religious principles, indigenous cultural values, and political structures. Legal pluralism provides a framework for examining the coexistence and negotiation of multiple normative orders, while the socio-legal perspective enables this study to explore how judicial authority gained legitimacy through institutional practices, cultural meanings, and social acceptance.

Building upon this theoretical framework, this study examines how Islamic legal principles and Bimanese customary norms were negotiated and institutionalized within the judicial practices of the Majelis Syara'. It further explores how the interaction between Islamic authority, customary values, and political structures contributed to the legitimacy of judicial institutions in nineteenth-century Bima. Through this analysis, the study seeks to understand how legal authority was constructed through the interaction of religious norms, indigenous traditions, and institutional arrangements within an Islamic sultanate context.

Accordingly, this research aims to analyze the institutionalization of Islamic legal principles and Bimanese customary norms within the judicial practices of the Majelis Syara' and to examine how religious authority, local cultural values, and political structures contributed to the construction of judicial legitimacy in nineteenth-century Bima.

Research Method

1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design using a socio-legal and historical-interpretive approach to examine the interaction between Islamic legal principles and Bimanese customary norms within the judicial practices of the *Majelis Syara'* in the Sultanate of Bima. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of historical, institutional, and socio-cultural meanings underlying the formation of judicial authority and legal legitimacy within a specific Islamic political context.

The socio-legal approach is employed to analyze how Islamic legal principles and customary norms operated within the *Majelis Syara'* as a socially embedded legal institution. Meanwhile, the historical-interpretive approach is utilized to reconstruct the historical development of the *Majelis Syara'* and interpret legal manuscripts, archival records, and historical narratives concerning judicial practices in the Sultanate of Bima.

These two approaches are highly complementary: the historical-interpretive approach provides an understanding of institutional development and historical context, while the socio-legal approach explains how religious norms, customary values, and political structures interacted in shaping judicial authority and social legitimacy.

Guided by the perspective of legal pluralism and socio-legal theory, this study does not view Islamic law and customary law as isolated normative systems but examines how both were negotiated, institutionalized, and transformed into legitimate judicial practices within the historical context of nineteenth-century Bima. In interpreting the empirical findings, this legal-pluralism and socio-legal framework is further complemented by Islamic normative legal theory (encompassing *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *qawā'id fiqhiyyah*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*) and Sally Falk Moore's concept of the Semi-Autonomous Social Field, both of which are applied in the Discussion to explain how judicial legitimacy was constructed.

2. Research Objects and Data Sources

The object of this research is the *Majelis Syara'* of the Sultanate of Bima, with particular attention to its institutional structure, judicial practices, and normative foundations. The study focuses on examining how Islamic legal principles and Bimanese customary values were integrated into the formation of judicial authority and how these interactions contributed to the legitimacy of legal institutions within the Sultanate.

The research was conducted in Bima because the region represents a significant historical case of Islamic legal pluralism in Eastern Indonesia. The Sultanate of Bima developed a distinctive judicial institution through the *Majelis Syara'*, which incorporated Islamic legal principles with indigenous customary traditions. Bima was selected as a historically embedded case because it provides important insights into how religious and customary norms were institutionalized within a single judicial framework. The data sources consist of primary and secondary materials:

Primary Sources: Local legal manuscripts, particularly *Bo' Sangaji Kai*, together with related royal documents and administrative records referenced in the secondary literature, concerning the administration, religious affairs, and judicial practices of the Sultanate of Bima. Primary data also include oral histories obtained through purposive interviews with local historians, cultural observers, and heritage-institution representatives who possess knowledge concerning Bima's legal and cultural traditions.

Secondary Sources: Scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous studies related to Islamic law, customary law, legal pluralism, and the socio-historical development of the Sultanate of Bima. These sources are used to contextualize and interpret the historical findings within broader academic discussions.

3. Research Procedure

The research was conducted through several sequential stages. First, the research problem was identified by examining the relationship between Islamic law, customary norms, and judicial authority within the historical context of the Sultanate of Bima. Second, relevant literature on legal pluralism, Islamic law, customary law, and Bima's historical development was reviewed to establish the theoretical framework.

Third, historical manuscripts, archival documents, and related historical sources were collected and systematically examined to identify evidence concerning the institutional role and judicial practices of the *Majelis Syara'*. Fourth, interviews were conducted with selected informants, including local historians, cultural observers, and heritage-institution representatives, to obtain interpretive perspectives regarding the relationship between Islamic norms and customary values.

Fifth, collected data from manuscripts, archives, interviews, and literature were organized and categorized according to themes related to Islamic legal principles, customary norms, judicial procedures, and sources of legal legitimacy. Sixth, thematic interpretation was conducted by relating empirical findings to the theoretical perspectives

of legal pluralism and socio-legal studies. Finally, the findings were synthesized to explain how judicial authority in nineteenth-century Bima was constructed through the interaction between Islamic law, customary traditions, and political institutions. The overall research procedure is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Procedure

No.	Stage	Description
1	Research Problem Identification	Identifying the research problem concerning the relationship between Islamic law, customary norms, and judicial authority in the Sultanate of Bima.
2	Literature Review	Reviewing relevant literature on legal pluralism, Islamic law, customary law, and Bima's historical development.
3	Source Identification and Collection	Collecting historical manuscripts, archival documents, oral histories, and relevant secondary literature.
4	Historical Document Analysis	Examining manuscripts and archival records related to the <i>Majelis Syara'</i> and judicial practices.
5	Data Collection through Interviews	Conducting purposive interviews with local historians, cultural observers, and heritage-institution representatives.
6	Data Organization and Coding	Categorizing historical and interview data based on themes related to legal norms, judicial practices, and legitimacy.
7	Interpretation and Verification	Interpreting findings through legal pluralism and socio-legal perspectives and conducting source triangulation.
8	Conclusion Development	Synthesizing findings to explain the institutional relationship between Islamic law and customary norms in Bima.

4. Data Collection

Data were collected through three integrated techniques: document analysis, in-depth interviews, and literature review. Document Analysis: Conducted by examining historical manuscripts and archival records related to the governance structure, religious administration, and judicial practices of the *Majelis Syara'*. Particular attention was given to documents that describe the relationship between Islamic legal principles, customary values, and institutional authority.

In-depth Interviews: Conducted with selected informants through purposive sampling. The informants included local historians, cultural observers, and heritage-institution representatives who possess deep historical knowledge and cultural understanding of Bima's legal traditions. Interviews were aimed at obtaining interpretive insights regarding the meaning, function, and social legitimacy of the *Majelis Syara'* within Bimanese society. Literature Review: Conducted to situate the research findings within broader scholarly debates concerning Islamic legal pluralism, customary law, and socio-legal studies.

To ensure rigorous data credibility and internal validity, this study applied source triangulation by constantly cross-checking information obtained from manuscripts, archival records, interview data, and secondary literature. This process enabled cross-validation of historical interpretations and minimized potential subjectivity or recall bias in reconstructing nineteenth-century judicial practices.

A total of five key informants were interviewed and directly cited in this study, selected purposively for their documented expertise in Bimanese history and cultural institutions. Their classification is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Classification of Interview Informants

C ode	Name/I nitial	Categ ory	Role/Expe rtise	Inter view Year
I- 1	Informa nt A	Local historian	Local historian and cultural observer	2024
I- 2	Fahruriz ki	Local historian	Historian of Bima	2024

I- 3	Dewi Ratnasari	Cultu ral institution	Head of the Samparaja Museum	2024
I- 4	Rangga Babuju	Cultu ral observer	Bimanese cultural observer	2024
I- 5	Salahud din Makka'	Local historian	Historian of Bima	2024

Note: informants were selected based on documented expertise in Bimanese judicial history and cultural traditions. The sample did not include a distinctly labeled representative of religious clergy (*ulama*) or customary leader (*tokoh adat*) among the informants directly cited in this article.

5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through an interpretive-critical procedure adapted from the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. The first stage involved data condensation, in which manuscripts, archival documents, and interview transcripts were systematically reviewed, coded, and categorized according to themes relevant to the research questions. The coding process focused on themes such as the integration of Islamic legal principles, customary norms, judicial procedures, institutional structures, and sources of judicial legitimacy.

The second stage involved data display, where categorized information was organized into thematic matrices, chronological narratives, and comparative frameworks. This stage enabled the researchers to identify patterns concerning how Islamic law and Bimanese customary values interacted within the institutional practices of the Majelis Syara'.

The third stage consisted of conclusion drawing and verification. At this stage, empirical findings were interpreted through the perspectives of legal pluralism and socio-legal theory to explain how judicial authority was historically constructed and socially legitimized. Interpretations were continuously verified through comparison among manuscripts, archival sources, interview data, and secondary literature. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied source triangulation and repeated examination of historical documents across manuscripts, archival records, interview data,

and secondary literature. Through this analytical process, the study identified patterns of normative interaction between Islamic law and customary values and demonstrated how judicial legitimacy in nineteenth-century Bima emerged through the institutional synthesis of religious and cultural norms.

Research Finding

The Majelis Syara' as the Institutional Context of Islamic–Customary Judicial Integration

Based on historical sources, the integration of Islamic legal principles and Bimanese customary norms (*adat*) within the nineteenth-century Sultanate of Bima was institutionally implemented through the establishment of the *Majelis Syara'*. The historical records indicate that the *Majelis Syara'* functioned as a formal judicial institution responsible for handling religious and legal affairs within the governmental structure of the Sultanate. Its administrative presence demonstrates that Islamic legal authority in Bima was organized through an official institutional mechanism integrated into state governance.

Within the administrative structure of the Sultanate of Bima, the *Majelis Syara'* operated alongside two other central councils, namely the *Majelis Hadat* and the *Majelis Tureli*. Historical documents show that these three institutions performed different but interconnected functions within the governance system of the Sultanate:

- a. **The Majelis Hadat:** Responsible for managing customary affairs and traditional protocols.
- b. **The Majelis Tureli:** Administered general governmental and executive affairs.
- c. **The Majelis Syara':** Exercised judicial authority over religious and legal matters based on Islamic legal principles (Salahuddin, 2017; Mutawali, 2019).

The judicial authority of the *Majelis Syara'* was supported by a religious bureaucracy consisting of specific officials, namely the *Imam*, *Penghulu*, *Khatib Upan*, and *Lebedala*. These officials performed day-to-day judicial, religious, and administrative duties within the Sultanate (Haris & Zuhdi, 1997). Historical records indicate that their responsibilities included interpreting Islamic legal principles, administering religious affairs, and resolving disputes within the community.

The institutional position of the *Majelis Syara'* was directly connected with the political authority of the Sultan. As the highest political authority, the Sultan maintained

responsibility for governing the Sultanate while recognizing the judicial authority exercised by the *Majelis Syara'*. Judicial decisions were therefore implemented within the constitutional framework of the Sultanate and formed part of the broader governmental system (Putra, 2024; Chambert-Loir, 2012).

The institutional foundation of the *Majelis Syara'* was further supported by Bimanese legal traditions preserved in royal manuscripts and customary principles. The *Bo' Sangaji Kai* manuscript documents the relationship between governance, legal regulation, and social order within the Sultanate. Likewise, philosophical principles such as *Adat Labo Hukum* and *Syara' na ka Tenggoku ba Hukum* illustrate the close relationship between customary values and Islamic legal principles within Bimanese society (Chambert-Loir, 2012).

Historical manuscripts, archival records, and interview data further show that Islamic jurisprudence derived from the Qur'an, Hadith, and the Shafi'i school of law constituted the principal normative basis for judicial decision-making. At the same time, customary principles, particularly *Maja Labo Dahu* and *Sara Dana Mbojo*, informed the ethical and social dimensions of judicial practice. Documentary evidence indicates that these normative traditions were reflected throughout judicial proceedings, including legal reasoning, evidentiary assessment, dispute settlement, and the determination of legal sanctions.

Historical evidence further illustrates how this institutional arrangement operated in everyday judicial practice. One local historian and cultural observer who personally witnessed proceedings before the court (locally known as the *Badan Syara' Hukum*) described a specific case as follows:

"I once witnessed the settlement of a case handled by the *Badan Syara' Hukum*. A member of the Sultan's family assaulted a local resident, causing a serious head injury. The victim's family reported the incident to the *Badan Syara' Hukum* seeking justice. The Sultan subsequently instructed one of the judges to require the offender to pay all medical expenses as compensation. At that time, the amount of compensation depended upon the offender's social position within the community." (*Interview with Informant A, Local Historian and Cultural Observer, 2024*).

It should be noted that this testimony reflects institutional continuity into the twentieth century rather than a direct eyewitness account of the nineteenth century itself: the Badan Syara' Hukum described here corresponds to the post-1945 reorganization of

the Sultanate's judicial body (Mutawali, 2019), and is presented as evidence of the enduring judicial pattern rooted in the nineteenth-century Majelis Syara' rather than as a first-hand record of that earlier period.

The interview indicates that criminal cases were processed through the judicial mechanism of the *Badan Syara' Hukum* and that compensation constituted one component of judicial sanctions. The testimony also shows that the determination of compensation considered the offender's social position within Bimanese society. A similar explanation regarding this practice was provided by another informant:

"The compensation imposed for criminal offences depended on the offender's social status. If the offender belonged to the Sultan's family, the compensation was generally higher, whereas different considerations were applied to ordinary members of society." (Interview with Fahrurizki, Historian of Bima, 2024). Both historical documents and interview data consistently indicate that judicial practice in the *Majelis Syara'* incorporated Islamic legal principles together with customary considerations recognized within the social structure of the Sultanate.

The Integration of Islamic and Bimanese Customary Values in Judicial Principles, Norms, and Procedures

The integration of Islamic values and Bimanese customary norms was reflected in the judicial principles, normative foundations, and legal procedures of the *Majelis Syara'*. Historical documents, local manuscripts, and interview data indicate that judicial decision-making combined Islamic legal principles with customary values that had long been practiced within Bimanese society.

Historical evidence indicates that the judicial system of the *Majelis Syara'* was grounded in Islamic legal principles, including '*adl* (justice), *amanah* (responsibility), *ishlah* (reconciliation), *maslahah* (public welfare), and *al-bayyinah* (evidence). As explained by the Head of the Samparaja Museum, drawing on the museum's historical holdings:

"Syara' judges always ensured that each decision was not only valid according to *fiqh* but also preserved *Maja Labo Dahu* as a value of honor in Bimanese society." (Interview with Dewi Ratnasari, Head of the Samparaja Museum, 2024). The archival evidence and interview indicate that Shafi'i jurisprudence served as the principal legal reference for judicial decision-making while customary values were also considered in

the implementation of judicial authority (Idrus et al., 2022). Interview data further indicate that Bimanese customary principles formed an important component of judicial practice. Values such as *Maja Labo Dahu*, *Sara Dana Mbojo*, and *Nggusu Waru* were consistently referred to by informants as normative considerations in dispute settlement (Anwar Hasnun, 2020; Idrus et al., 2022; Zuriatin et al., 2025). As explained by a Bimanese cultural observer:

"Syara' judges understood that Bimanese people highly value honor and family dignity; therefore, in serious cases, they always considered how custom could restore social relationships after punishment was imposed." (*Interview with Rangga Babuju, Bimanese Cultural Observer, 2024*)

Historical manuscripts also indicate that the integration of Islamic and customary norms was reflected in judicial procedures. The *Bo' Sangaji Kai* manuscript documents legal provisions that combined Islamic legal principles with local customary traditions (Chambert-Loir, 2012). During judicial proceedings, the *doho syara'* served as a formal forum for case examination in which documentary evidence, witness testimony, and customary deliberation were considered together (J, 2023). An informant explained the procedure:

"*Doho syara'* is a sacred dialogical forum that integrates *bayyinah* from sharia with customary oaths as moral reinforcement within society." (*Interview with Fahrurizki, Historian of Bima, 2024*).

Evidence collected from manuscripts and interviews also shows that Islamic legal principles and customary considerations were reflected in sanctioning practices. Judicial sanctions included *baja*, caning, fines (*denda*), and *waru*, which were applied within the judicial procedures of the Sultanate (Anwar Hasnun, 2020). As stated by a local historian: "From early times, the *penghulu* relied on Shafi'i legal texts but interpreted *fiqh* in accordance with the context of *Dana Mbojo* so that it did not conflict with custom and would be accepted by society." (*Interview with Salahuddin Makka', Historian of Bima, 2024*)

Historical evidence indicates this interaction across several specific types of disputes documented in the sources reviewed:

1. **Inheritance cases:** The customary formula of *Sasu'u Salemba* was applied together with Shafi'i legal provisions regarding property distribution (Zuhrah et al., 2021).

2. **Land disputes:** Resolved through the *doho syara'* procedure, which combined written evidence and customary boundary conventions (Malingi, 2016, 2022).
3. **Moral and criminal cases:** Involving sanctions such as *baja*, caning, and *waru*, administered through the authority of the *Majelis Syara'* to restore local social order.

Religiosity and Local Culture as the Basis of Social Legitimacy of the Syara' Judicial System

Historical sources and interview data indicate that religiosity and local cultural values constituted important foundations for the operation of the *Majelis Syara'* in the Sultanate of Bima. Local historical records and secondary literature describe nineteenth-century Bimanese society as strongly committed to Islamic teachings, with *ulama* occupying a respected position and the Shafi'i school serving as the principal reference for religious life (Amrin et al., 2022; Abdullah, 2021). Historical evidence further indicates that Islamic law was understood not only as a religious obligation but also as a normative framework governing social order (Munawar-Rachman, 2010).

The historical records also show that *ulama* occupied an important position in the judicial system of the Sultanate. Religious figures such as **Tuan Guru Ishaq A. Qadir**, who served as a *syara'* judge, exercised religious authority within the judicial institution (A. G. Abdullah, 2004; Makdur, 1979). At the same time, the Sultan formally recognized the judicial authority of the *Majelis Syara'*, thereby establishing an institutional relationship between political authority and religious leadership (Rodatul et al., 2025). Historical accounts also suggest that traditional leaders participated in connecting judicial decisions with prevailing customary norms within *Dana Mbojo*.

Historical documents further indicate that Bimanese customary values formed an integral part of the social environment in which the *Majelis Syara'* operated. Cultural principles such as *maja*, *dahu*, and *Sara Dana Mbojo* were widely recognized as moral values regulating social conduct (Safitri, Sodikin & Fahrudin, 2022). The value of *maja* emphasized personal honor and social responsibility, while *dahu* reflected moral awareness associated with wrongdoing. *Sara Dana Mbojo* functioned as the customary framework regulating social relationships within the Sultanate (Mandyara, 2017; Zuriatin et al., 2025).

The documentary evidence indicates that judicial decisions of the *Majelis Syara'* were implemented within this specific religious and cultural environment. Islamic legal principles were applied through the judicial institution, while customary values continued to regulate social relations among members of the community. Together, the historical sources indicate that religious authority, political recognition, and customary traditions coexisted within the operation of the *syara'* judicial system in nineteenth-century Bima.

Discussion

Embedded Legitimacy: The Convergence of Sharia, Adat, and State Power

The findings of this study indicate that the legitimacy of the *Majelis Syara'* was not merely an administrative attribution but a socially embedded construct produced through the interaction of religiosity, customary values, and political authority within the Sultanate of Bima. Historical documents and interview data indicate that Islamic legal principles were deeply integrated into nineteenth-century Bimanese society and operationalized alongside local customary values in judicial practice.

Consequently, the authority of the *Majelis Syara'* was reinforced through two parallel dimensions:

1. **Formal Institutional Position:** Its constitutional integration into the Sultanate's state apparatus.
2. **Socio-Cultural Acceptance:** The community's internalization of Islamic law as a moral framework and customary traditions (*adat*) as the baseline regulating social relationships (Mahmutovic & Alsudais, 2025; Sukriono et al., 2025).

These insights indicate that judicial legitimacy derived simultaneously from religious commitment, cultural imperatives, and institutional governance. This mechanism aligns with Islamic normative legal theory, which posits that the legitimacy of Islamic law is constructed through the systemic integration of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (methodology), *qawā'id fihiyyah* (legal maxims), and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (teleological objectives). Within this framework, legal authority is sustained through moral reasoning, ethical interpretation, and public acceptance rather than formal statutory validity alone (Ahmed, 2025).

The empirical evidence shows that the judges of the *Majelis Syara'* did not apply Shafi'i jurisprudence in a purely textual or rigid manner. Instead, Islamic legal reasoning was contextually interpreted within the socio-cultural realities of *Dana Mbojo* by incorporating indigenous principles like *Maja Labo Dahu* and *Sara Dana Mbojo*.

Therefore, Islamic law functioned as a dynamic normative system capable of adapting to local cultural environments while preserving its core sacred foundations (Enkhtaivan et al., 2024; Rozikin et al., 2025).

Tripartite Institutional Dynamics and the Semi-Autonomous Social Field

Whereas the Research Finding section identified three formal councils of the Sultanate the *Majelis Hadat*, *Majelis Tureli*, and the *Majelis Syara'* itself the tripartite dynamic discussed here refers to a different set of three: the complementary *actors* (ulema, Sultan, and traditional leaders) whose roles were each individually documented in the Religiosity and Local Culture subsection of the findings. The findings further reveal that judicial legitimacy was sustained through the interaction of these complementary institutional actors who provided mutually reinforcing forms of authority:

1. **The Ulema (Religious Scholars):** Provided theological legitimacy by interpreting Islamic legal principles.
2. **The Sultan:** Conferred constitutional authority through formal political recognition and executive enforcement power.
3. **The Traditional Leaders (*Tokoh Adat*):** Ensured that judicial decisions remained compatible with local social values (Sistyawan et al., 2026).

From a socio-legal perspective, this interaction supports the argument that legal legitimacy depends on the complex relationship between law, religion, culture, and political authority within society. Furthermore, Sally Falk Moore's concept of the Semi-Autonomous Social Field (SASF) explains that legal effectiveness emerges when formal legal institutions interact with locally generated normative orders that regulate everyday social behavior (Dizon, 2025). The historical experience of the *Majelis Syara'* illustrates this dynamic, as Islamic jurisprudence, customary ethics, and political institutions collectively shaped judicial practice and public compliance.

The role of local cultural values strengthens this interpretation. The historical manuscripts and interview data demonstrate that *Maja Labo Dahu* and *Sara Dana Mbojo* functioned not merely as passive cultural symbols but as active normative principles guiding judicial reasoning and encouraging voluntary compliance with court verdicts. Rather than replacing or diluting Islamic law, these customary principles reinforced its implementation by embedding religious norms within locally recognized concepts of honor, responsibility, and communal harmony.

Consequently, judicial sanctions under the *Majelis Syara'* appear, in at least some cases documented in the interview data, to have been understood not only as legal punishments but also as restorative mechanisms intended to repair social fractures and maintain harmonious relationships within the community. This tentatively suggests that local culture constituted an integral component of judicial legitimacy rather than merely providing the passive background for the application of sharia, though further evidence would be needed to establish how widely this restorative framing was shared.

Advancing Legal Pluralism: From Coexistence to Institutionalized Normative Synthesis

The present findings both support and extend previous studies on Islamic legal pluralism in Indonesia. Previous research on Aceh has demonstrated that the legitimacy of Islamic law is closely associated with strong public religiosity and the historical authority of Islamic institutions. Likewise, studies in Minangkabau have shown that the interaction between *adat* and Islamic law contributes to social cohesion and strengthens public acceptance of legal norms (Hariri & Babussalam, 2024). These findings are consistent with the present study in demonstrating that religious commitment and customary traditions jointly reinforce legal legitimacy.

However, the historical experience of the Sultanate of Bima suggests a possible structural distinction, though this comparison should be read with caution: the account of Bima below draws on this study's own primary sources, while the accounts of Aceh and Minangkabau are summarized from prior secondary literature rather than from a comparably in-depth primary investigation.

Table 3. Structural Frameworks of Sharia and *Adat* Integration: Bima vs. Other Regional Models

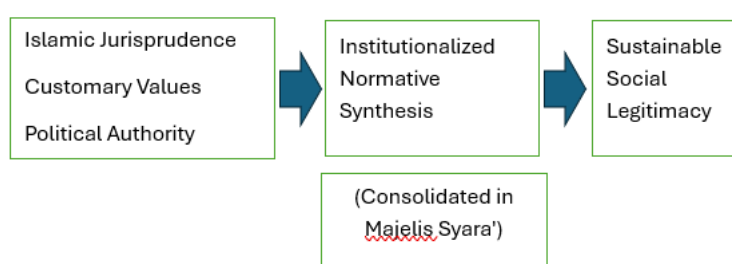
Regional Case Study	Structural Interaction of Sharia and Adat	Institutional Arrangement
Aceh & Minangkabau Models (Previous Studies)	Parallel negotiation, accommodation, or dual-track normative systems.	Managed across separate social or institutional arenas.

Bima Sultanate Model (Present Study)	Deep institutional synthesis and integration.	Consolidated within a single judicial institution (Majelis Syara').
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Note: as stated above, the Bima row draws on this study's primary sources, while the Aceh & Minangkabau row is summarized from secondary literature; the comparison is illustrative rather than a claim of methodologically equivalent evidence.

Judicial authority in Bima was exercised through a singular judicial body in which Islamic jurisprudence, customary ethics, and political authority continuously interacted throughout legal interpretation, dispute resolution, and enforcement. Consequently, these findings contribute to the development of legal pluralism theory. While Griffiths (1986) conceptualizes legal pluralism as the mere coexistence of multiple legal orders within a single social field, and Merry (1988) emphasizes the interaction between formal legal institutions and local normative systems, Bima's history suggests an evolution beyond simple coexistence or normative accommodation.

Accordingly, this study proposes the concept of Institutionalized Normative Synthesis to explain how judicial legitimacy was historically constructed in the Sultanate of Bima.



Unlike previous approaches that primarily conceptualize legal pluralism as the parallel operation of multiple normative systems, the concept proposed in this study explains a process through which Islamic jurisprudence, customary values, and political authority are integrated within *one* judicial body. Through this integration, judicial decisions simultaneously obtained religious validity, cultural acceptance, and constitutional recognition.

The concept of Institutionalized Normative Synthesis extends socio-legal and legal pluralism scholarship by suggesting that hybrid judicial institutions in Muslim societies may derive enduring legitimacy not from maintaining separate normative orders, but from

integrating them into a coherent institutional framework. This conceptual contribution provides an alternative analytical perspective for understanding the historical development of Islamic legal institutions in culturally plural societies.

Conclusion

This study suggests that the nineteenth-century *Majelis Syara'* of the Bima Sultanate functioned as a hybrid judicial institution that integrated Islamic jurisprudence and Bimanese customary values (*adat*) within a unified institutional framework. Rather than operating as parallel or conflicting systems, sharia and *adat* actively interacted throughout legal reasoning, evidentiary procedures, and the determination of judicial sanctions. The enduring social legitimacy of the court was derived from a triadic convergence of deep public religiosity, core customary ethics such as *Maja Labo Dahu*, and the formal constitutional authority of the Sultan. These findings suggest that judicial legitimacy in historical Bima was socially embedded, drawing its strength simultaneously from religious commitment, cultural recognition, and institutional state governance.

Conceptually, this study contributes to Islamic legal pluralism by proposing the model of institutionalized normative synthesis, illustrating how multiple normative orders can transcend mere coexistence and consolidate into a single judicial body. Empirically, this research contributes to broadening the socio-legal literature on Southeast Asia by directing scholarly attention toward Eastern Indonesia, a region historically underrepresented compared to Aceh, Java, and Minangkabau. While this study provides a comprehensive analysis of a single historical case, future research should undertake comparative investigations across other Islamic sultanates to examine how different socio-cultural contexts shaped the mechanisms of institutional legal synthesis.

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