Wisdom and Faith: Social Construction of Bima Ethnic Traditions in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

Firdaus Firdaus[1*], Bambang Tri Sasongko Adi[2], Oman Sukmana[3], Vina Salviana[4]

[1,2]*Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Malang, Indonesia*
[3,4]*Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Malang, Indonesia*

Abstract: **This study aims to describe and explore the symbolic and meaningful representation of Islamic law and faith in the cultural values of the Bima ethnic group in West Nusa Tenggara. Utilizing a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach, this research delves into the traditions, practices, and experiences of the Bima people to uncover the ways in which they integrate and represent their Islamic beliefs. Key findings reveal a profound acculturation between Islamic teachings and local wisdom within the Bima community. This blending of culture and religion is evident in various local traditions such as ampa fare, mbolo weki, and rimpu. These practices embody Islamic values including deliberation, frugality, and the importance of modesty. The study highlights how the Bima people have seamlessly woven Islamic principles into their cultural fabric, demonstrating the dynamic interplay between faith and tradition in shaping their community's identity and daily life.**

Keywords: **social construction, symbolic, bima, cultural fabric, religion.**

1. Introduction

A. Background

The Bima ethnic group, residing in the eastern part of Sumbawa Island in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, is a community rich in cultural heritage and deeply rooted in Islamic faith. This intricate blend of tradition and religion presents a unique tapestry of local wisdom interwoven with Islamic values. Understanding how these elements coexist and reinforce each other is essential for appreciating the Bima community's identity and social dynamics.

This study aims to describe and explore the symbolic and meaningful representation of Islamic law and faith within the cultural values of the Bima ethnic group. By employing a qualitative methodology and a phenomenological approach, the research delves into the traditions, practices, and lived experiences of the Bima people. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how religious beliefs are manifested in everyday life and cultural expressions.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to uncover the processes of acculturation between Islamic teachings and local wisdom in Bima. It highlights how the community has integrated Islamic principles into their cultural practices, resulting in a harmonious coexistence that enriches both their religious and cultural identities. Traditions such as ampa fare (a ritual of mutual assistance), mbolo weki (a communal deliberation practice), and rimpu (a traditional attire for women) serve as prime examples of this integration [33]. These traditions not only preserve the cultural heritage of the Bima people but also reflect core Islamic values such as deliberation, frugality, and modesty.

B. Objectives

By examining these traditions, the study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of how Islamic values can be embedded within local cultures. It also aims to provide insights into the social construction of religious and cultural identities in multi-ethnic and religiously diverse societies. This research is particularly relevant in the context of Indonesia, where the interplay between local traditions and Islamic teachings is a pervasive and significant aspect of societal life.

In the following sections, the study review the historical and cultural background of the Bima ethnic group, discuss the theoretical framework of social construction. The findings were presented, highlighting the key areas where Islamic values and local wisdom intersect. Finally, the study concluded with a discussion on the implications of these findings for understanding the dynamic relationship between culture and religion in the Bima community [30], [29].

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology [14], [15], [16], [17], [20], specifically utilizing a phenomenological approach to explore the traditions, practices, and experiences [21] of the Bima ethnic group in representing their Islamic faith. The phenomenological approach is chosen for its focus on understanding the lived experiences and the essence of cultural phenomena from the perspective of those who experience them [19], [7].

The research design is structured to capture the depth and richness of Bima cultural practices and their integration with

*Corresponding author: firdauscanon97@gmail.com

Islamic values. It involves detailed fieldwork in the Bima community, including participant observation and in-depth interviews with community members [22] who are knowledgeable about local traditions and Islamic teachings.

3. Literature Studies

A. Previous Research

[40] conducted a study in 2017 titled "The Face of Islam Nusantara in the Peta Kapanca Tradition in Bima Traditional Marriage." This research utilized a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore the integration of Islamic and Bima cultural practices, specifically within the Peta Kapanca tradition. Their findings highlighted several forms of Islamic acculturation in Bima traditions.

Firstly, during the Boho Oi Mbaru procession, which involves a steam bath with flowers, the ceremony begins with the recitation of shalawat and prayers, demonstrating the blend of Islamic rituals with traditional practices. Secondly, the Kalondo Wei procession showcases Islamic influences through the accompaniment of hadrah, a form of Islamic art, further emphasizing the cultural integration. Thirdly, the Peta Kapanca procession starts with the recitation of basmallah and Quranic verses, followed by the recitation of Maulid Syaraful Anam, illustrating the deep-rooted presence of Islamic elements in the tradition [40].

Moreover, the study found that the Peta Kapanca rituals are performed by community elders and guests in odd numbers, symbolizing Allah's preference for odd numbers. Additionally, the floral decorations, specifically the arrangement of 99 flowers, represent the Asmaul Husna, the 99 names of Allah, further integrating Islamic symbolism into the cultural practices [40].

The current research differs from Aminullah and Nasaruddin's study primarily in its methodology. While the previous study used a qualitative ethnographic approach, the present study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach. Despite this difference, both studies share a common focus on the acculturation of Islamic values within the local wisdom of the Bima community. This shared focus underscores the significant interplay between religion and culture in shaping the traditions and identities of the Bima people [40].

B. Culture and Religion

1) Understanding Culture

Etymologically, the word "culture" in English originates from the Latin term "colere," which means "to cultivate" or "to work on" something related to nature [41]. In Indonesian, the term "budaya" (with its nominalization "kebudayaan") comes from the Sanskrit word "buddhayah," the plural form of "buddhi," meaning intellect or reason. Another explanation suggests that "budaya" is derived from the compound term "budi daya," which signifies the empowerment of intellect, manifested through creation, work, and initiative. Similarly, the term "culture" (from the German "kultur," Dutch "cultuur," and English "culture") all denote the outcomes or fruits of human civilization. The word "kultur" in Indonesian is fully adopted from the Latin "cultura," a derivative of "colere," which means

efforts to nurture and advance intellect, reason, and spirit.

Associatively, "budaya" or "culture" fundamentally signifies the efforts of human intellect aimed at improving the quality and quantity of human civilization. These efforts manifest in three basic systems. The first is the System of Ideas, which involves the complexity of human ideas, concepts, and thoughts, often referred to as the cultural system or the concept of thinking. The second is the Social System, which encompasses the complexity of interactional and transactional activities, commonly known as the social system or the process of human interaction. The third is the Instrumental System, which includes the complexity of material means to meet human needs, referred to as the instrumental system or material manifestation.

These definitions of culture cover a broad spectrum. To simplify, [9] defined culture as "a sum of artifacts, rights and duties, ideas, beliefs, capabilities, and customs." Further distilled, culture comprises both tangible and intangible components. Tangible cultural components include material culture necessary for human life, such as clothing, tools, food, buildings, paintings, artifacts, and other objects. Intangible cultural components represent non-material culture, including values, beliefs, attitudes, morality, ethics, spirituality, traditions, and customs.

According to [10], culture in every society or ethnic group consists of both major and minor elements that form a cohesive unity. These elements include tools and equipment for human life, livelihoods and economic systems, social systems, language (both oral and written), arts, knowledge systems, and religion (belief systems). These elements can evolve, although some are resistant to change. Cultural elements that change easily include arts, language, and technology, while those resistant to change include religion (belief systems), social systems, and knowledge systems [11].

From this, it can be understood that culture encompasses everything related to the life of a community, including religion, politics, customs, language, tools, clothing, buildings, artworks, and more. To sustain culture, it is passed down by the cultural founders (founding fathers of culture) to subsequent generations, through various media, including mass media and artistic expressions like songs, poems, tools, rituals in traditional ceremonies, and other forms. This transmission ensures the continuity and preservation of cultural heritage across generations.

2) Islam and Culture

Discussing religion and culture reveals their deep interconnection; many views suggest that religion is an integral part of culture. Both religious life and cultural life stem from the same source: the intrinsic potential of human nature that grows and evolves together in the process of forming a human civilization. This perspective implies that religion is an element of culture, and vice versa, a notion widely accepted across various societal layers from past to present.

Referring to Sir Edward Tylor's classic definition of culture, one can conclude that religion is indeed a part of culture [12]. According to Tylor, culture encompasses the complex whole of knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and other

capabilities and habits acquired by individuals as members of society. Religion, with its teachings, morals, rules, and beliefs, fits within this definition as a system of cultural values that influences the collective mindset regarding what is considered valuable in life. These cultural values function as life guidelines, governing human relationships with each other [12]. Thus, religion not only connects individuals with God but also contains values that regulate human interactions.

Islam, in particular, positions itself as a cultural guide within society, offering principles and behavioral directives to ensure adherence to Islamic teachings. Islam views the traditions that arise and evolve within communities as opportunities for religious propagation. Therefore, while religion and culture are distinct elements, they are inseparable. When they work in harmony, they strengthen each other, shaping the unique characteristics of their intersection. Both religion and culture provide insights and perspectives on life in accordance with divine will and human nature. Religion symbolizes obedience to God, while culture encompasses values and symbols that enable humans to navigate life dynamically [3], [2] and [5].

This synergy between religion and culture can be observed in how Islamic values integrate into local traditions, enhancing both spiritual and cultural practices. For instance, local customs that incorporate Islamic principles help reinforce the community's faith while preserving their cultural identity. The fusion of these elements demonstrates the adaptability and resilience of both culture and religion, creating a cohesive and enriched social fabric that guides individuals in their daily lives.

C. Social Construction Theory

According to social construction theory [13], [36], [38], humans are creative actors in their social reality. Human actions are not entirely determined by norms, customs, values, and other social facts. Instead, humans have considerable freedom to act beyond the control of social structures and institutions. Individuals actively and creatively develop themselves by responding to stimuli within their cognitive world. Therefore, the social definition paradigm is more interested in human thoughts about social processes, particularly in symbolic interactionism. This perspective views social reality as meaningful when it is subjectively constructed and understood by individuals, which then solidifies the reality objectively.

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann introduced the social construction theory in 1966 in their work "The Social Construction of Reality" [8], [27] This theory emerged from Berger's question about "what is reality," arising from the dominance of empiricism and rationalism. Through the sociology of knowledge, Berger answered this question with the concepts of "objective reality" and "subjective reality." In objective reality, humans are structurally influenced by their environment, while in subjective reality, humans, as organisms, exhibit tendencies within their social context. Berger views the formation of social reality as a dialectical interaction between individuals and society, involving processes called externalization, objectification, and internalization. This interaction involves society as a subject with ingrained cultural values, knowledge, beliefs, and actions. According to Berger and Luckmann, traditional values, culture, religion, and local wisdom are all socially constructed realities.

In the context of Bima, for example, Islam's values have been integrated into local wisdom through these dialectical processes. Individuals are influenced by deeply rooted religious knowledge (externalization), which then becomes a fundamental standard in Bima society [39]. Religious symbols are identified and agreed upon (objectification) before being internalized and socialized through local customs (internalization). In conclusion, an individual's ideology is formed through a lengthy process of construction involving externalization, objectification, and internalization. Ideology, as a symbolic reality, is obtained through interactions with the environment or society as empirical reality. In interactions, humans create and use symbols, which become objectified and independent from their original creators. For instance, in Bima, facing west (Qibla) for various activities is considered auspicious and blessed, demonstrating how subjective processes become objective in social life.

4. Results

A. History of Bima (Mbojo) and its Belief System

Mbojo is the name representing the Bima ethnic group, which has existed since the 13th century. The name Mbojo (dou mbojo) predates the name Bima itself. Mbojo comes from the word "babuju" or "dana ma babuju," meaning highland, a place where Bima's kings were inaugurated. The name Mbojo has been embedded in local folklore long before the name Bima, inspired by a character in the legend of Sang Bima. The name change from Mbojo to Bima originated from a king of the Mbojo tribe named Sang Bima [31]. According to the ancient manuscript Bo Sangaji Kai (owned by the Bima Kingdom), the Bima region was pioneered by a Javanese traveler and nobleman named Sang Bima. In other words, the name Bima was derived from a king named Sang Bima. He is recognized as the first person to develop the Bima region and taught Hindu teachings to the Bima people during his reign [1].

Before Sang Bima established a kingdom, the Bima region already had its political system called Ncuhi. The local manuscript, Bo (book) Sangaji Kai, reveals that the area was once led by five dominant Ncuhi: Ncuhi Hu'u, Ncuhi Daha, Ncuhi Saneo, Ncuhi Nowa, and Ncuhi Tonda. At that time, the people in these five regions generally practiced animism. However, the influence of animism waned as the government system transitioned from Ncuhi to a kingdom, eventually replaced by Hindu-Buddhist teachings introduced by the first king, Sang Bima. For four centuries, Bima was a Hindu kingdom until the end of the reign of the 27th and last king, Sawo, after which it transitioned to a sultanate system [2].

On July 5, 1640, the government system shifted from a kingdom to a sultanate. This transition not only changed the government system but also saw a shift in the dominant religion from Hinduism to Islam. The introduction of Islam in Bima is believed to have occurred between 1450-1540, according to Zollinger [42], with Sultan Abdul Galir (Abdul Kahir) being the first Bima sultan to embrace Islam. This new faith was brought

by preachers from Makassar. From his appointment as the first sultan in 1620 until his death in 1640, Sultan Abdul Kahir actively spread Islam among his people [2].

Since Rumata Ma Bata Wadu was inaugurated as the first sultan with the title Sultan Abdul Qahir, Islam became the predominant religion of the Bima people, with only a small fraction refusing to accept it. Those who rejected Islam retreated to the mountains, becoming known as "Dou Donggo," a minority group of original Bima people who resisted Islam and settled in the Donggo mountain area west of Bima city. Thus, since the beginning of the Bima Sultanate, almost all Bima inhabitants embraced Islam, with non-Muslim residents comprising less than 0.5%, including Chinese, officials, military personnel, and civil servants stationed in Bima [2] and [1].

From the time of the first Sultan Abdul Qahir to the last Sultan Muhammad Salahuddin, and continuing to the present day, Islam remains the predominant faith among Bima's population, passed down through generations. Despite Christian proselytizing efforts across Indonesia, including Bima, these efforts have been unsuccessful due to the strong Islamic faith of the Bima people, with Christianity limited to newcomers. The people of Bima are known for their strong Islamic devotion, integrating their traditions and culture, such as the Ampa Fare, Mbolo Weki, and Rimpu traditions, with Islamic teachings and guidance [2] and [1].

B. Islam and Bima's Local Wisdom: From Fanaticism to Cultural Acculturation

The relationship between Islam and local culture is an interesting topic. Islam, as a universal religion, is a blessing for all of creation. Its presence on earth blends with local culture, making Islam and local culture in a society inseparable and mutually supportive [3]. This is also true for the local wisdom of Bima's people and the Islamic values that have merged through traditions and culture such as Ampa Fare, Mbolo Weki, and Rimpu [24].

Traditions and culture in Bima, like Ampa Fare, Mbolo Weki, and Rimpu, embody local wisdom that incorporates religious values. For example, the Ampa Fare tradition is believed to contain Islamic meanings and values. Ampa Fare is a thanksgiving ceremony to God for the harvest. It involves storing the harvested rice in a granary called Uma Lengge. Uma Lengge is built facing the Qibla, as the direction is considered auspicious in Islam. Thus, traditions like Ampa Fare represent the blending of Bima's local cultural values with Islamic teachings [32]. The Islamic values in Ampa Fare can be seen not just in the structures or rituals but also in its emphasis on frugality, in line with Allah's command in Surah Al-Isra' verses 26-27.

Similarly, the Mbolo Weki tradition is another example of Bima's local wisdom containing Islamic teachings. Mbolo Weki is a consensus meeting typically held to prepare for significant family events. 'Mbolo' means circular, and 'Weki' means gathering, so Mbolo Weki refers to a consensus meeting attended by family representatives, relatives, and local community members to discuss and decide on important matters [4]. In Islam, such consultations are part of its teachings, as practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, and are mentioned in Surah Ash-Shura verse 38 and Surah Al-Imran verse 159 [5]. Therefore, Mbolo Weki as local wisdom also preserves and integrates Islamic teachings through its practices.

Most people in Bima are devout Muslims, so it is not surprising that their traditions and cultural practices align with Islamic values and teachings. Traditions such as Ampa Fare, which teaches frugality, Mbolo Weki, which emphasizes consensus, and Rimpu, which advocates modesty, all reflect Islamic values. Rimpu is a traditional way of dressing that aligns with Islamic principles. It involves wearing a sarong wrapped around the head, exposing only the face, as a form of modesty [34]. This practice aligns with the Islamic teaching that women should cover their bodies in the presence of non-mahrams. In the village of Simpasai, for example, wearing Sarimpu is a form of obedience to Allah [6].

Historically, Rimpu became part of the local customs with the advent of Islam in Bima around 1640 AD, brought by two scholars, Dato Ri Bandang and Dato Ri Tiro, sent by the Gowa Sultanate to spread Islam in Bima. At that time, most women in the Bima Sultanate still wore traditional attire that only partially covered their bodies. The scholars introduced a way of dressing in line with Islamic requirements. Since then, Rimpu has been adopted by Bima women, aligning with Islamic dress codes. Today, Rimpu is recognized for its strong moral, social, decency, and religious values [6], [34], [37], and [35].

In conclusion, traditions like Rimpu, Ampa Fare, Mbolo Weki, and other forms of local wisdom in Bima are not merely cultural practices. They are embedded with religious values, highlighting the integration of Islamic teachings into the cultural fabric of Bima's society [25].

5. Discussions

A. Social Constructionism and Bima Tradition

Social constructionism, as articulated by scholars such as Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, offers a framework for understanding how societal norms, values, and knowledge are created and maintained through social processes. This theoretical perspective is useful for analyzing how Bima traditions, such as Ampa Fare, Mbolo Weki, and Rimpu, integrate and represent Islamic beliefs. According to social constructionism, reality is not inherently objective but is constructed through social interactions and shared meanings. This process involves three key steps: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. These steps can be applied to understand how Bima traditions incorporate Islamic principles through communal practices and rituals.

B. Bima Traditions and Islamic Views

The tradition of Ampa Fare, which involves giving thanks for the harvest, reflects Islamic teachings on gratitude and frugality. The practice of storing rice in Uma Lengge, which faces the Qibla, symbolizes the integration of Islamic orientation in daily life. It aligns with Islamic principles of

acknowledging Allah's blessings and being mindful of resource use, as indicated in Surah Al-Isra' (verses 26-27). Similarly, the tradition of Mbolo Weki, which involves community consultation, mirrors the Islamic principle of Shura (consultation). This process of involving community members in decision-making reflects the teachings found in Surah Ash-Shura (verse 38) and Surah Al-Imran (verse 159), emphasizing collective deliberation and consensus in line with Islamic governance and social ethics.

The practice of Rimpu, where women cover their bodies in a manner consistent with Islamic modesty codes, directly aligns with the principles of Hijab in Islam. This tradition, introduced by early Islamic scholars, underscores the importance of modesty and adherence to religious dress codes as prescribed in the Quran and Hadith. These traditions are not merely cultural practices but are embedded with religious values, highlighting the integration of Islamic teachings into the cultural fabric of Bima's society.

C. Philosophy Expert's Perspective

From the perspective of a philosophy expert, particularly one versed in social constructionism like Berger and Luckmann, the Bima traditions can be seen as exemplary cases of how religious beliefs and cultural practices coalesce to form a cohesive social reality [27]. The dynamic interaction between Islamic teachings and local customs results in a unique cultural identity that honors both heritage and religion. The establishment of norms, such as facing the Qibla, community consultation, and modest dressing, are culturally specific and religiously significant, demonstrating how social constructs are formed and perpetuated. Historical and religious figures play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining these practices, ensuring that they are passed down through generations as part of the collective identity.

In conclusion, analyzing Bima traditions through the lens of social constructionism reveals how these practices serve as vessels for Islamic values. This approach underscores the importance of understanding cultural traditions not as static relics but as dynamic, evolving constructs that reflect the ongoing interaction between faith and social life. The Bima traditions illustrate how religious beliefs and cultural practices can merge to create a unified social reality that both preserves cultural heritage and upholds religious principles.

D. Dynamic Relationship Between Culture and Religion in the Bima Community

The Bima community exhibits a profound and dynamic relationship between culture and religion, where Islamic beliefs and local traditions are intricately intertwined, creating a unique cultural identity that both respects and reflects religious values. This relationship is characterized by mutual influence, adaptation, and the creation of a cohesive social reality that integrates both cultural heritage and religious principles.

1) Mutual Influence

The interaction between culture and religion in the Bima community is a two-way process where each influences and shapes the other. Islamic teachings were introduced to Bima by influential figures and scholars, and over time, these teachings began to permeate local customs and traditions. Conversely, existing cultural practices provided a framework within which Islamic principles could be expressed and understood. For instance, the tradition of Ampa Fare, which involves thanking Allah for a successful harvest, is a local custom that has been imbued with Islamic values of gratitude and frugality.

2) Adaptation and Integration

Cultural practices in Bima have been adapted to align with Islamic principles, demonstrating the community's ability to integrate religious beliefs into their daily lives seamlessly. The practice of Mbolo Weki, a community consultation tradition, aligns closely with the Islamic concept of Shura (consultation), reflecting a cultural adaptation that emphasizes collective decision-making and consensus, as prescribed in Islamic teachings [25]. Similarly, the tradition of Rimpu, which involves women covering their bodies in accordance with Islamic modesty codes, showcases how local customs can be adapted to reflect religious guidelines, thus maintaining cultural continuity while upholding religious tenets [28].

3) Creation of a Cohesive Social Reality

Through the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, as described by social constructionist theory, the Bima community has created a cohesive social reality where cultural traditions and Islamic beliefs are not seen as separate entities but as mutually reinforcing aspects of daily life. Traditions like facing the Qibla when building Uma Lengge (rice storage structures) and conducting community meetings (Mbolo Weki) according to Islamic principles have become embedded in the cultural fabric of Bima society. These practices are externalized in social rituals, objectified as community norms, and internalized by individuals as part of their personal belief systems [26].

4) Preservation and Evolution

The dynamic relationship between culture and religion in Bima also involves the preservation of cultural heritage while allowing for the evolution of practices in response to religious influences. Historical and religious figures have played a crucial role in shaping and maintaining these practices, ensuring that they are passed down through generations [26]. This process allows for the preservation of cultural identity while also accommodating the religious evolution brought about by Islamic teachings. For example, the introduction of Islamic dress codes by early Muslim scholars has led to the practice of Rimpu, which preserves the cultural significance of traditional attire while adapting it to meet Islamic standards of modesty.

In conclusion, the dynamic relationship between culture and religion in the Bima community highlights a sophisticated interplay where local traditions and Islamic beliefs are deeply interconnected. This relationship is characterized by mutual influence, adaptation, and the creation of a unified social reality that honors both cultural heritage and religious principles. The Bima community's ability to integrate and harmonize these aspects of life exemplifies how cultural and religious dynamics can coexist and reinforce each other, creating a rich and cohesive cultural identity [23].

6. Conclusion

The relationship between culture and religion in the Bima community is a dynamic and intricate interplay where Islamic beliefs and local traditions coalesce to form a unique and cohesive social identity. This relationship is marked by several key characteristics:

1. Mutual Influence: Islamic teachings and local customs mutually shape and influence each other. Traditions like Ampa Fare, Mbolo Weki, and Rimpu exemplify how local practices have been imbued with Islamic values, reflecting a harmonious integration of faith and culture.

2. Adaptation and Integration: The Bima community has adeptly adapted its cultural practices to align with Islamic principles. This adaptation is seen in how local customs such as community consultations (Mbolo Weki) and dress codes (Rimpu) have been modified to reflect Islamic teachings, demonstrating a seamless integration of religious beliefs into daily life.

3. Cohesive Social Reality: Through social constructionist processes, the Bima community has created a social reality where cultural traditions and Islamic beliefs are not seen as separate but as mutually reinforcing. Practices like facing the Qibla in construction and community meetings have become embedded norms that are externalized in social rituals, objectified as community standards, and internalized by individuals.

4. Preservation and Evolution: The Bima community's ability to preserve its cultural heritage while allowing for religious evolution highlights a sophisticated balance. Historical and religious figures have ensured the continuity of cultural identity while accommodating the changes brought by Islamic teachings, leading to a rich cultural tapestry that respects both tradition and religion.

In essence, the dynamic relationship between culture and religion in the Bima community underscores the capacity for cultural practices to adapt to and integrate religious principles, creating a unified and evolving social identity that honors both cultural heritage and religious tenets. This harmonious integration serves as a testament to the community's resilience and adaptability, maintaining cultural continuity while embracing religious evolution.

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