


Transforming rituals: Creating cultural harmony among the Dou Mbawa of eastern Indonesia

**Author:**Abdul Wahid¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Faculty of Ushuluddin and Religious Studies, State Islamic University of Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia

Corresponding author:

Abdul Wahid,
dipifanda@yahoo.com

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This study revolves around the configurations of Dou Mbawa [People of Mbawa] in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, eastern Indonesia, mapped onto the three main sociocultural-religious groups of Muslims, Christians and *Parafu* [followers of local beliefs]. It focuses on the *Raju* ritual as a 'text', representing social structures and dynamics of religious tension among the Dou Mbawa, which has been understudied in the existing works of literature. The central position of the *Raju* ritual is highlighted, as it is born from the cosmological worldview and simultaneously practised by all three religious groups annually. Such interwoven ambiguities occurred in the life of the Dou Mbawa, involving ideology, authority and agents or actors (religious elites), generating tension and confrontation that have led to *Raju's* transformation from religious expression to cultural adaptation. Using ethnographic data generated from 2019 to 2020, this study argues that a *Raju* ritual is a political act that merely reflects the ideology of its supporters and shapes their capital bases and communicative actions to respond to social segregations.

Contribution: This article shows how the *Raju* ritual promotes cohesiveness and harmony for a religiously diverse community by creating a shared ethnic identity and exercising it as a cultural adaptation.

Keywords: plurality; tension; transformation; harmony; ethnic identity.

Introduction

Indonesia has a unique method for having different world religions get along with each other. Religious leaders developed a religious philosophy with a great potential for tolerance and dialogue (McDaniel 2014), while religious communities embodied a form of religious universalism in colourful traditions. Previous studies have shown that the harmonisation process in the country might be found in *petite histoire* or small narratives embedded in indigenous practices from minority ethnicities (Ainiyah & Mardani 2019; Alfian 2019; Hutagalung 2016; Jayadi, Danartoto & Kartono 2019; Simona 2022; Syakur & Khoiroh 2021; Wardatun & Wahid 2021). The continuous concern of social science is to explore grassroots agency for peace (Al-Qurtuby 2012; ed. Brauchler 2009; Richmond 2015; Telle 2014) and to relearn the cultural forms of wisdom rooted in the experiences of local communities representing alternative peace-building mechanisms (Alfitri & Hambali 2013; Askandar 2004; Asmara 2018; Bakri 2015; Barron & Maden 2004; Hartoyo 2019).

While nearly 90% of Indonesians are Muslims, most Indonesians maintain a hybridism in religious creeds and practices (Forshee 2006:29). Bima, a region of Sumbawa Island in eastern Indonesia, also has a cultural history of living together in peace and methods to prevent conflicts and attempt reconciliations. Sila (2017, 2021) found that although Islam has become the unifying factor, varied expressions of Islamic practices among Muslims reflect different cultural legacies and sociopolitical contexts. Regardless of their diversity, Bimanese Muslims are able to mediate their differences and foster harmony among them; tension also occurs within Bima society where different beliefs exist. Prager (2010) showed that local beliefs and ritual practices are considered inconsistent with the purity of Islam and increasingly antagonised by Islamic reformers who continuously attempt to eradicate all syncretic forms of pre-Islamic religion.

One of the critical areas of Bima which is vulnerable to conflict, as well as rich with local knowledge to learn, is Mbawa village, located in the west Donggo highlands area of Bima Bay. Enriched by a long period of Christianisation and Islamisation and the struggle towards modernity, and situated by politics of identity, the Dou Mbawa [People of Mbawa] have a particular way of life, enabling them to survive as a community (Wahid 2016). Their struggle to create harmony began in 1966, stimulated by the New Order's religious policy that constrained citizens to have an affiliation to

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one of the official religions (Hefner 2021), reshaping cultural-religious dynamics among the Dou Mbawa. The changing of the religious landscape happened when the Dou Mbawa adopted Christianity and Islam while maintaining an older belief towards ancestors known as *Parafu*. Christianity and Islam have offered a spiritual vision of an afterlife that Dou Mbawa find far more comforting than the one provided in their old beliefs (Just 2001:80). Multiple identities and an ambiguous, pluralistic social order became entrenched among the Dou Mbawa. As a result, tensions between religious groups involving violence occurred in 1969, 1972 and 2000 (interview with Abdul Gani, Village Head, 12 October 2019).

This article addresses some gaps in the existing literature. Firstly, the Dou Mbawa and their local wisdom are generally absent from a number of recent researches discussing Bimanese religiosity. Secondly, the aspects of shared religious life are frequently shaped by a particular ritual, such as the *Raju* ritual practised annually by the Dou Mbawa on Sumbawa Island. This religious practice involving Muslims and Christians is also seen as a field of cultural contestation in the region, particularly among Sumbawa's lowland Muslim majority in Bima. Thirdly, this article also gives an account of how changing performances of the *Raju* ritual reflect a changing notion of life towards outsiders. It should be noted that this article is also informed by the writer's former research findings that the *Raju* tradition have been utilised by the local community as an internal communicative tool in the multireligious society such as Mbawa (Wahid 2016). It also amplifies Hutagalung's (2016) note on the dynamic relations of Muslims and Christians of Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, in negotiating their space. The issue discussed in this article supports Telle's (2016) argument on the key role and dynamic power of ritual which she found in the religious pluralism in Lombok.

Therefore, this research is relevant to contribute to existing discussions about tensions and harmony in pluralistic societies. The article aims to answer the main question as to why the *Raju* ritual is now represented more as a cultural show rather than a ritual one. The objective of the article is to argue that the *Raju* ritual role has made this shift because of two compelling reasons: firstly, *Raju* as a cultural practice emerged from the challenges of social and religious plurality faced by the Dou Mbawa and was shaped by the worldview of *mori sama* [living together] in Mbawa society, engaged by their common interest as well as their origin and belief. Secondly, the transformation of the *Raju* ritual to culture reflects the operation of hegemony in the area of knowledge and moral authority. In this context, *Raju* has strengthened identity, internal consolidation and the doctrine of living together for social harmony for the Dou Mbawa.

Literature review

Transformation is defined as a process of change, especially regarding cultural elements. It can be a discovery, diffusion, loss of cultural elements or acculturation (Haviland 1999:445).

The changes in cultural structures are caused by outside influences through interactions, dialogues and intense encounters of ideas and values (Radam 2001:1), as well as the emergence of internal awareness among supporters (Sutrisno 2005:69). In the religiosity aspect, the change is oriented to individual pietism which emphasises ritualism. Piety, in the case of an agrarian society such as Mbawa, can be a symbolic capital that serves as a social control among the community members (Kuntowijoyo 2006:25).

Since the spreading of world religions in Mbawa, much has been changed, particularly in the role of customary authority in the process of ethnic identification of the Dou Mbawa. Christian missionaries and Muslim *da'i* [the Islamic preachers] have also historically played an important role in shaping ethnic identity in Mbawa (Hitchcock 1996). This circumstance has influenced the making of a complex identity within the Dou Mbawa, including how it is practised and negotiated. The arrival of Christianity and Islam among the Dou Mbawa not only stimulated their ethnic consciousness but also contributed to the formation or reformulation of a religious ethnicity, a group whose members practise an ancestor belief and encompass a number of different officially recognised religions (Just 2001). This group manifests many elements of religions that would qualify them as syncretic. Thus, the *Raju* ritual can be seen as an affirmation of communal unity in contrast to the frictions, constraints and competitiveness of social life (Bell 1992:20).

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the works of a few researchers about the Dou Mbawa; Just, (2001) in his ethnographic work *Dou Donggo Justice*, has compellingly studied the Dou Mbawa in-depth in 1981. He identified some aspects of the morality of the community as a basis of harmony among the Dou Mbawa. He argued that this basis is embodied in the set of beliefs towards ancestors and spirits. This article, which is inspired by Just's work, aims to trace out more details on ritual expression as a field where belief is manifested, where Just (2001) gave a very limited portion to deal with. This article is also built from research on Mbawa by Kadri, Suprpto and Wahid (2009) which found that community engagement in Mbawa was enriched by a symbolic form of communication, enabling people to minimise using religious identities in the public sphere. Kadri et al. (2009) and Just (2001), however, neglected *Raju* as a ritual and a core identity among the Dou Mbawa. In addition, this article extends some previous findings concerning *Raju*, seen as a political expression and communication to avoid socioreligious conflicts in a pluralistic society (Wahid et al. 2015).

Methods

Research design, approach and setting

This study uses a qualitative design (Creswell et al. 2007), focusing on the meaning and interpretation of the *Raju* practice. The ethnographic study (Spradley & McCurdy 1984) used participant observations and in-depth interviews with

selected informants (Johnson 2021), taking place in Mbawa where the practices of *Raju* take place. This study, with the subject Dou Mbawa living in a mountainous area, was carried out in the context of revisiting to re-examine the trend in community relations after more than a decade of this interfaith community being absent from the study. The material object of this study is a ritual called *Raju*, a form of relations between the involved actors and the Dou Mbawa's life and artefacts.

Data collection and analysis

The data that later became narratives and descriptions related to the *Raju* ritual were obtained from two-year observations of this annual ritual and interviews with key informants. They include traditional leaders, community elders, Muslim and Christian elites involved in the 'discourse battle' in Mbawa and the religious authorities in Bima, such as the chairman of Indonesian Ulama Council of Bima and officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Bima Regency.

Data analysis used cultural studies and cultural interpretation, namely discourse analysis based on hermeneutics and semiotics (two practices of interpreting text and signs). To uncover the relationship and meaning behind the texts, signs and language (including oral history), the application of discourse analysis to language phenomena in the communication of the local community, such as rhyming, chanting, praying, humouring, grumbling, debating and preaching, is based on two reasons stated by Brewer (2000:74): firstly, language is a form of social interaction that implies a shared knowledge which cannot be separated from social settings, and secondly, language and the social environment are closely related, so it is possible to reconstruct a social world from the fragments of language.

Results and discussion

The discussion of this article begins with brief information on the Dou Mbawa as an ethnicity, followed by a discussion of how the triangular competition among Muslim, Christian and Parafu adherents happens but simultaneously creates local ways of assimilation and resistance. This triangular competition situates the *Raju* as a salient cultural mechanism to maintain a strong bond of community, despite the differences they have. The procession of the *Raju* ritual is discussed to show how it is transformed as a cultural adaptation. The transformation of the ritual from a religious expression to its function as cultural adaptation is presented to uncover the main findings of this article, highlighting the contestation of moral hegemony and local needs for harmony. The article is concluded by highlighting a dynamic interplay of harmony and disharmony in the *Raju* ritual both as a ritual expression and a cultural strategy.

Dou Mbawa: Ethnicity and triangle of competition

The Dou Mbawa are one of the ethnic groups in Bima, a region in the easternmost part of Sumbawa Island, a former

Sultanate of Bima. The Dou Mbawa are also called Dou Donggo [people of Donggo] (Just 2001) because of their settlement in the highland Donggo district, west of Bima bay. Hitchcock (1996) pointed out that the differentiation in Bimanese society comprises three elements: locality (highlanders *vis-à-vis* lowlanders), ethnicity (Bugis-Makassar vs. Bimanese or Chinese vs. Melayu) and religion (Islam vs. other religions, especially Christianity). These three aspects have influenced the Dou Mbawa in many ways. Landscape and climate significantly make the Dou Mbawa possess a way of life different from the lowlanders. Their experiences in power relations with the Bima Sultanate also play a role in determining their position towards other Bimanese (Dou Mbojo). The other factor that differentiates the Dou Mbawa from the Bimanese is their reluctance to receive Islam and their massive conversion to Christianity. Therefore, the Dou Mbawa were often seen as rebels against the authority of the sultan's government. For that resistance, they were discriminated against by the Bima sultanate for years (Hitchcock 1996:66).

Being the guardian of their ancestors' legacy and customs, the Dou Mbawa are increasingly becoming the largest group of adherents to the traditional faith called *Parafu*. This role is also related to their claim that Ncuhi Donggo, the elder customary leader of the Dou Donggo, was centred in Mbawa – at the present Uma Ncuhi [house of Ncuhi], which is still well preserved as a site of rituals. Hence, the Dou Mbawa are inevitably addressed as *kafir* [unbeliever] by Bimanese Muslims. This configuration plays an important role in the cultural changes of the Dou Mbawa. After a long period of conserving traditions, new challenges frequently come to the Dou Mbawa (Just 2001).

Because they are enabled to prevent external intervention, the Mbawa community is crushed into what Redfield (1965) described as 'part-societies'. They are fragmented and distinguished from one another, experiencing the fact of living together in diversity. Although originating from the same ancestry, they are spread into many religious beliefs. They are embraced by a transfiguration of beliefs, setting them into a syncretic form of religiosity. Just (2001) described the Dou Mbawa, in 1981, as follows: '70 percent Muslim, 30 percent Christian, and 90 percent pagan'. Thirty-nine years later, in 2020, the number of Muslims was 3287 (72%), and the number of Christians were 1300 (28%), from a total population of 4587.

A fragmented community, impacted by changes, has led to communal anxiety among the Dou Mbawa. Because of their fear of the possibility of their cohesive society falling, they attempt to find a cultural way to respond to the change, which is expressed in both disobedience and assimilation, typical pathways for the oppressed (Scott 1990). Marginalised people might be ignored, excluded and neglected, and therefore their livelihoods are vulnerable (Gurung & Kollamair 2005). Dou Mbawa echoes this social vulnerability in their chanting '*hudu nggudu dua wadu nтели*', symbolically

saying that they are similar to a weak flea or a fragile stone fence (Wahid 2019).

Through the spread of Christianity and Islam in Mbawa concurrently taking place with the development of roads, schools and other infrastructures and amenities, there emerged a new challenge or dilemma among the Dou Mbawa. On the one hand, they became more 'civilised' and are no longer thought of as either backward or *kafir*. On the other hand, they are fragmented into religious groups, of which there are three main groups: Christians, Muslims and Parafu.

These three groups have formed their community regardless of the framework of the identity of the Dou Mbawa. Those who leave behind the tradition and identity of the Dou Mbawa from puritan Christians and Muslims have created their boundaries under the auspices of churches or mosques; they are, respectively, led by pastors and ulama. While Muslims label the Dou Mbawa as infidels [*kafir*], the Christian community mocks them as a stubborn and unmodern totemic clan (Interview with Jamaluddin, 05 March 2020).

The development programmes initiated by the government in the early reign of Sultan Salahuddin (1917–1950) (Rachman 2009) have opened windows for the Dou Mbawa to see the outside. When Islam came to Mbawa with the support of the sultan, the Dou Mbawa's character and their strongly held traditional beliefs led them to deny Islamic preaching, although their fellow Dou Donggo in other villages were gradually becoming Islamised. The Dou Mbawa had already been contacted by Christianity in the 1930s when a German Catholic missionary was active in Donggo, and in the 1960s when an American Protestant missionary came to and lived in Mbawa in the 1950s (Just 2001:39). The presence of Christianity was considered a saviour for Dou Mbawa from Muslim exploitation (Hitchcock 1996:64). That is, among other reasons, why Christianity is more accepted, and Islam is rejected.

The third group, the old belief of *Parafu*, has strengthened their old legacy to support their existence. As they are not officially recognised, adherents of *Parafu* formally embrace one official religion – either Christianity or Islam – because of the government policy requiring every resident to hold one of five official religions. This group is centred in Uma Ncuhi, and their leader was a Ncuhi or a descendant. But because the Ncuhi lineage was cut by the process of Islamisation (descendants of Ncuhi converted to Islam), they are now led by a collegial leadership among elders (Interview with Jamaluddin, the guardian of Uma Ncuhi, 05 March 2020). Although the Ncuhi's authority was confined to just religious matters, as in the *padende* case in Lombok (Suprpto 2015), they still influence the community.

Disobedience is one aspect of the hidden transcripts which is used as a weapon by the weak, representing an indirect critique of power applied by the dominated and the governed towards the dominant group (Scott 1987,

1990, 2010). Religious teaching (*dakwa*), particularly performed by orthodox Muslims, faced this use of resistance. The Dou Mbawa adheres to practices such as the usage of the communal cemetery for Muslims, Christians or *Parafu* all together in one area. This is contrary to common practice in Muslim societies, particularly in Bima, which is more rigidly orthodox (Peacock 1979:65); for the Dou Mbawa, placing a dead body into any ground is not an issue. Haji Saleh, a village elder, resonated with a kind of religious philosophy: 'Sama mpa dana ruma ndi mbali mena kai ta ede' [It is the land of God to which all humans return] (interview with Haji Saleh, 12 October 2019). It frequently happens that Christian children take part in Muslim events, such as contests of *Azan* [calling for praying] and *qasidah rebana* [Arabic music with tambourine]. One informant stated that some Christian parents are often proud of their children's ability to perform *Azan* (interview with Abidin, 12 October 2019).

The other indicator of the disobedience of the Dou Mbawa is the ignoring of spatial segregation based on religious belief. Haji Saleh gave an example:

There are two trees planted by Sehe Boe, an outstanding *ulama* who brought Islam to Mbawa village, to show the place for Muslims and *kafirs* [*non-Muslims*] to settle. The one is *fu'u mengi* [*fragrant tree*] covered the space where Muslims lived, and the other is *fu'u wou* [*stinking tree*] where non-Muslims had to build their houses.

The spatial segregation initiated by early Muslim authorities in their attempt to separate the Dou Mbawa had an opposite effect from what they intended. The *fu'u mengi* has been cut down to allow a church to be built, while the *fu'u wou* overshadows the mosque belonging to Muhammadiyah, the biggest organisation for puritan Muslims.

Assimilation is indicated in the naming system. Names, for Bimanese in general, are not only markers but also prayers (interview with H. Abdurrahim – Head of Indonesian Ulama Council of Bima, 10 October 2019). Names, as expressed identities, are constructed on notions, values and a belief system; therefore, they can be regarded as an ideology (Warren 1983:70). Names, in the context of the Dou Mbawa, are political, that is, mostly concerned with identity. The Dou Mbawa have their own way of giving names. They mostly use Islamic names such as Abdullah, Ahmad, Ismail, Ja'far, and so forth. The use of these typical Islamic names indicates the domination of the Islamic culture of Bima over the Mbawa society. However, using Islamic names does not necessarily mean that they are Muslim. The Christians using Islamic names have certain baptismal names to clarify their Christianity. Names such as (Stephanus) Jamaluddin, (Josep) Ja'far, and (Dominggus) Ibrahim Ta'ali are commonly used among those who converted from Islam to Christianity (interview with Haji Saleh, 12 October 2019, and Jamaluddin, 05 March 2020). This phenomenon indicates the cultural dilemma faced by the Dou Mbawa. On one hand, a part of the Mbawa community has converted to Christianity, in which they have been obliged to perform Christian identity, but on the other hand, they adhere to a communal character

of strictly clinging to the old legacy, so they retain the old Islamic identity. Converting to Christianity while still using Islamic names is also related to the cultural hegemony which the Dou Mbawa deal with, and they constrained people from using Islamic typical names in the public domain, while the Christian names are used in the domestic sphere.

This blurring of identity is a deliberately creative social practice, bridging the gaps within society. It might also benefit the people to camouflage their exterior to prevent them from the outside attacks. This argument refers to the traumatic experiences of the Dou Mbawa, particularly among Parafu and Christian groups, reminding them of the moments when they were attacked by the Muslim groups in 1969, 1972 and 2000 (interview with Jamaluddin, the guardian of Uma Ncuhi, 05 March 2020). When a Javanese Catholic priest arrived to missionise Mbawa in 1960, he was met with a favourable response, particularly given his willingness to bless the traditional memorial feast with a syncretising Catholic gloss (Just 2001:79).

Raju as a religious expression

The *Raju* procession takes three, five or seven days, determined by the forum of village elders. *Raju's* days are usually in October or a week before the rainy season. A couple of days before praying, male practitioners go hunting in the nearby forest, whereas women celebrate it by cleaning their houses and the Uma Ncuhi; they also stop weaving in honour of ritual sanctity. The Uma Ncuhi is a traditional building of the Dou Mbawa which stands under a big tree and boulder and is believed to be their ancestors' dwelling place. While waiting for their men to return, the women hold an initial ritual *raso dana* [village chaste] by offering *sajen* or slaughtered animals at *rafu*, another holy place located in the forested hills or valleys around the village. The forest offers life meaning, a point of connection with ancestors and a sacred space of contemplation (Mukaria 2021). The villagers are not allowed to leave the village during this period. When the men reappear from the forest with hunted animals on their shoulders, they have to wait for a quiet time and pass through the less populated paths, out of respect for their Muslim neighbours who forbid the eating of certain animals, such as pigs, boars, dogs and so forth (observation and interview with Yosef Ome, head of Ncuhi, 05 March 2020). This is also a form of tolerance among neighbours.

After making offerings and praying together, people conduct live 'art' performances, such as dancing *Kalero* and *Toja* (a dance performed by a single man with a traditional costume and waving handkerchiefs and is accompanied by blowing the *sarone* [Bimanes flute]). *Dewa* – literally meaning 'God' – is a ritual healing led by a traditional healer, sitting wrapped in *sarongs* while reciting mantras until they reach a state of trance. The traditional healer of *Dewa*, as elsewhere in Eastern societies (Ali 2009:415), is considered an important person who sets the scene for possibilities and experiences to occur. The dances are mainly performed as gratitude to God. Humans have to prostrate themselves to God through

worship to be closer together with him, as shown in the trance of *Dewa*. To be a good worshiper and united with God, it is compulsory for humans to practice a silent way, such as meditation, as shown in the practice of *Dewa* (interview with Sambe Ama Siti, Mbawa's elder, 05 March 2020).

In addition to prayers and dances as the main activities in *Raju*, the attendees also gather to discuss various issues, from individual to communal levels of problems. When the writer attended the *Raju* in 2019, they discussed the future of Uma Ncuhi, a place where they were sitting at the moment. Katonu Ama Safa, the elder acting as the most recent customary authority, was offended by the misuse of the Uma Ncuhi during the years. For him, the Uma Ncuhi is not a place to sleep, especially not for a spouse, regardless of the reasons. The Uma Ncuhi is a sacred place, symbolising the morality and sanctity of the Dou Mbawa. Also, according to the discussion, the Uma Ncuhi is not the place to earn money or something to be used as a commodity. This discussion has become routine in between the *Raju* activities. For the Dou Mbawa, a meeting bridging them together without any religious boundaries is very challenging to conduct. This is because Muslims and Christians have exclusive events that are not accessible to other parties. In addition, the local farming activities are also an obstacle to unity. Hence, the *Raju* ritual moment is a mechanism to renew togetherness. '*Ake mpa kala ndi kabou ro katenggo kai nuntu ro nggahi*' [It is the only chance to renew and strengthen the talk], said a *Raju* attendant in 2019 (interview with Gegereu Ngiwa, 12 October 2019).

Transformation of the *Raju* ritual: From ritual expression to cultural adaptation

In the past decades, the *Raju* ritual has been carried out with the performing of *Toja* and *Dewa*, which are a blend of dance and ritual gestures. When Islamic *dakwa* penetrated Mbawa, the practice of trance through dance, even *Raju* itself, was considered to be contrary to the principle of Islamic monotheism (interview with Haji Saleh, 12 October 2019). Likewise, such practice was also unrecognised in Christian tradition. For the Dou Mbawa who have been formally Islamised or Christianised, adopting the new teaching is a demand. But it is also difficult to leave their ancestral tradition. Then, carrying out the ancestral traditions while adapting the new teachings is a creative way to escape the cultural dilemma. For example, the *Raju* began to introduce the world religious elements in the mantras chanted in *Kasaro* that are now a blend of old mantras and *do'a* [prayer] in Islamic or Christianity traditions. Similarly, gestures in *Kalero* have adopted the religious elements, especially the Muslim practice of *salat* [daily praying], for its dominant movements mimicked the motions of the praying. Two dancers symbolise the *imam* [priest] and the *makmum* [congregation] in *salat*.

As an agricultural ritual, *Raju* has traditionally been among the most common form of religious ritual continuously practised among the Dou Mbawa. For the Dou Mbawa, the *Raju* ritual is not only a religious practice for economic goals

but also functions as a form of communication. The core of many agricultural rituals is the notion of balance or harmony (ed. Salamone 2004:29). The *Raju* ritual also covers interests in maintaining community kinship, as occurs in other places, such as in Klepu, East Java, where ritual functions as a public festival (Salahuddin 2008:49), and in Tana Toraja of South Sulawesi (Pajarianto 2022; Pajarianto, Pribadi & Sari 2022). The *Raju* ritual with its Uma Ncuhi is the occasion or place in which the religious diversities are melded together. Beyond their basic functions as aesthetic and religious traditions, the gradual changes in *Raju* performances indicate a sociocultural adaptation surrounding the *Raju* tradition.

The performances of contextualised arts in ritual have become a mode of interreligious negotiation (Wiebe 2014). Cultural adaptation, as reflected in the *Raju* performances, is evidently a communal consciousness that underlies the new cultural strategy for the Dou Mbawa in response to the onslaught of outsiders, especially from the dominant Muslim cultures. Against the penetration of missionary religions, the Dou Mbawa put up resistance in nonconfronting and nonviolent ways, because they realise that they are 'weak' towards a hegemonic system of the government, world religions and Bimanese lowlanders. Therefore, the choice is to transform their traditions, which cannot be abandoned, by the formation of a less visible ritual. It has become a cultural show as a form of adaptation or response towards the more intense aforementioned triangular competition. This change is not a commodification of art, as has happened in some societies, such as Balinese (Dibia 2010:32), but rather it functions as a space for the negotiation and dialogue between the old and the new values.

The *Raju* ritual is a cultural dialectic field in which a contest between a variety of meanings and interests takes place. It is also a space of negotiation for achieving consensus for a better community life. As a tradition, *Raju* and its performances involving the whole community play a symbolic role that illustrates the power of the local community in preserving cultural heritage, while taking new values from the outside. This conforms with Wolf's description of peasant groups, such as the Dou Mbawa, which often retain a traditional form of religion, while the religious systems of the wider scope are built up and carried outward by the elite (Wolf 1996:103). The creation, inheritance and revitalisation of a culture usually depend on its ability to adapt to a changing environment and adjust itself to new challenges (Chin-keong 1992:1).

The findings of this article thus contribute to amplifying further cultural practices of religious conflict management. However, there are some more questions this article aimed at proposing for future research – especially how this tension and the *Raju* transformation sharpen political identity among the Bimanese, who claim to be the mainstream Muslims in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara.

Conclusion

Out of the previous descriptions emerge the following understandings of the Dou Mbawa and their ritual of *Raju*. Firstly, the mountain people should be understood, as they have complex challenges and a set of creative ways to respond to such challenges by utilising their local wisdom to shape their lives and maintain their communality. Secondly, conflict management among the community does not always refer to structural mechanisms; rather, it can also be achieved through cultural practices. Cultural practices, integrated with other views, potentially become a basis of mutual peaceful relations within the community.

The transformations of the aesthetics and function of traditional practices, such as the *Raju* ritual and its performances, are clearly determined by the sociohistorical context of the community where the traditions are practised. These functions of the tradition encompass imperatives from the religiously sacred to the humanly profaned.

This conforms with the wisdom of addressing the two or more cultural entities that are often opposed to one another. By seeking transformation, the Dou Mbawa prevents their community from being devastated by war with outsiders or factional conflict among themselves. Change and transformation of the tradition in the Mbawa society represent the communal interest in maintaining harmony. Simultaneously, from another perspective, by carrying out this strategy, they also manifest a peaceful resistance against the hegemony of local governmental interventions, as well as the messages of Islamic and Christian missionaries.

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A.W. is the sole author of this research article.

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Disclaimer

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