

## THE TRADITION OF WONI: Models of Adaptation of Manggarai Catholics in Encounters with Muslims

Fransiska Widyawati  
Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, Nusa Tenggara  
Timur, Indonesia  
E-mail: [fwidyawati10@gmail.com](mailto:fwidyawati10@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This article explores the adaptation and modification of the tradition of *woni* in Manggarai culture, Flores, in encounters with Muslims. Before the Manggarai people met the Muslim community, the tradition of *woni* was used to honor clans that had certain *ceki*. *Ceki* can be compared to the concept of totems in classical anthropological studies, namely animals or plants that are considered sacred by a particular community and become symbols and identities of a clan. Due to its sacred nature, the animal or plant is treated as taboo. In encounters with Muslims, Manggarai Catholics practiced the tradition of *woni* by providing halal food. This is also done to maintain inter-religious harmony. However, along with the growing awareness of the concept of halal, accompanied by a movement to purify the teachings of Islam and the rise of identity politics, the question of food provided by non-Muslims becomes increasingly sensitive and even crucial. This factor encourages Catholics to adopt variations in practicing the tradition of *woni*. Employing an ethnographic approach, this study found seven models of adaptation to the tradition of *woni* practiced by Manggarai Catholics today. The more rigid the Muslim community practices the concept of halal, the higher the adaptation of the Manggarai Catholics to conform to the Muslim standards. Conversely, the easier the practice of Muslims regarding halal food, the model of adaptation by the Manggarai Catholics may become lesser.

**Keywords:** Tradition of *Woni*; Muslim-Christian relation; Manggarai Catholics; local tradition.

**Article history:** Received: 11 May 2020; Revised: 23 July 2020; Accepted: 14 August 2020; Available online: 01 September 2020.

### How to cite this article:

Widyawati, Fransiska. "The Tradition of *Woni*: Models of Adaptation of Manggarai Catholics in Encounters with Muslims". *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-agama* 10, no. 2 (2020): 249–270.  
<https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v10i2.1455>

## Introduction

This article discusses the adaptation and modification of *woni* tradition in Manggarai culture, Flores, in encounters with Muslims. *Woni* is a tradition of providing special meals for those who cannot eat a common meal provided in a traditional ritual, a family banquet, or a feast. Before the Manggarai people encountered the Muslim community, the tradition of *woni* was used to honor clans that had certain *ceki*. *Ceki* can be compared to the concept of *totems* in classical studies such as that of Tylor,<sup>1</sup> Frazer,<sup>2</sup> Kroeber,<sup>3</sup> and Freud.<sup>4</sup> In their study, *totems* were explained as animals or plants, or other objects that were considered sacred by a particular community. *Totems* have also become symbols and identities of certain clans or groups.<sup>5</sup> Due to its sacred nature, such as animals or plants or objects must be respected. For example, by treating them as a *taboo* to not be eaten by the clans. Violations of *taboo* are believed to have fatal effects on the individuals or the clans.

In manggarai tradition, every clan have their *ceki* or *totems*. In customary prayer, the *ceki* is usually juxtaposed with *wura*. Both *ceki* and *wura* can be interpreted as a sacred spirit or as something of a divine nature. Because of its nature, it was especially respected. The *ceki* of a certain clan can be in the form of animals or plants. The prohibition on eating *ceki* is called *ireng*. The Manggarai people believed that whoever ate the *ceki* would cause the anger of ancestors over the person and even to the entire clan. This punishment and anger are called *itang agu nangki*.

Since there is a belief not to eat the sacred food (*ceki* or *totems*), the tradition of *woni* is practiced when they invited a clan to follow traditional rituals or family events or parties of other clans. The host of the ritual should provide another menu for the guests if their main menu is considered as *taboo* or *ceki* by the guests. With this tradition, the differences of *ceki* among the clans do not become a barrier for

---

<sup>1</sup> E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture, Researches Into the Development of Mythology, Religion, Art and Custom* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1871).

<sup>2</sup> J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London, New York, Melbourne: Canongate, 1890).

<sup>3</sup> Alfred L. Kroeber, *Totem and Taboo: An Ethnologic Psychoanalysis* (California: University of Berkeley, 1920).

<sup>4</sup> J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*.

<sup>5</sup> Gillian Cowlishaw, "Culture and the absurd: the means and meanings of Aboriginal identity in the time of cultural revivalism," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 18, no. 2 (2012): 397-417.

the people to visit each other, especially in an invitation of rituals. Thus, the host or organizer of the ritual practices a tradition of respect for other beliefs and traditions. In short, they do not exclude each other from their rituals. Differences in food will not hinder togetherness and brotherhood. This local wisdom is a form of respect for different symbols, identities, and beliefs.<sup>6</sup> By providing food that suits each other's *ceki*, they established a relationship of familiarity and intimacy during the meals.

Nevertheless, *woni* does not always have to be associated with *ceki*. *Woni* also has a more general meaning. It can be a special food menu deliberately prepared to honor those who cannot eat certain foods because of the type of *taboo* or abstinence (*ireng* in their local language) for personal reasons, including because of health problems. Providing *woni* is part of the tradition of appreciating differences by not excluding and harming others. *Woni* is a means to stay together as a family by sharing food and eating together.

When Manggarai people meet Muslims, *woni* tradition is used as an adaptation to the beliefs of Muslims who do not eat foods that are considered haram, especially pork and dogs. Pigs and dogs have a special position in customs and rituals. Pigs are the most commonly used animals for sacrifices in traditional rituals. It is also important animals in the exchange of customary rights and obligations between those who are related to their families. Hence, pigs have many names or terms tailored to their customary interests. It has also become symbols of the culture, beliefs, and identity of the Manggarai people. The presence of pigs and pork in a ceremony has a very significant role in the culture of the Manggarai people. Likewise, dogs are also used in customs as well as a special menu in daily life, rituals, and certain feasts or parties.

For Muslim families or invitations to attend, engage, and join traditional ceremonies, rituals, and other celebrations, the tradition of *woni* is practiced. Initially, the understanding of halal in Manggarai communities is only limited to the type of animals, which in this case are pork and dog that is considered haram by Muslims. So, the

---

<sup>6</sup> The study of local wisdom has attracted the attention of experts. Read for example: Mohammad Thoriqul Huda, "Harmoni Sosial dalam Tradisi Sedekah Bumi Masyarakat Desa Pancuran Bojonegoro," *Religio, Jurnal Studi Agama-agama*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2017), 267-297; Jainudin Jainudi, "Mitologi Buyut Cili Kepercayaan dan Habitiasi Transendental Suku Asing Banyuwangi," *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2019), 77-97. [<https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v9i1.1234>]

practice of *woni* for Muslim guests is not to served pork and dog. The substitute menu can be chicken, fish, goat, beef, etc. However, along with the change in understanding and awareness of the term halal in Muslim communities, the practice of *woni* is also gradually changed and undergoes various adaptations and modifications.

Many Muslims are increasingly aware that halal food does not simply refer to the type of food, but also to the whole process of how it is prepared to be served. The food is considered halal as long as if the entire process is not contrary to Islamic law.<sup>7</sup> Thus, even if the Muslims eat chicken or beef as a replacement for pork and dogs, it does not necessarily mean that it is halal. This influenced their perspective on the way *woni* menu is served by Manggarai Catholics. In line with the movement to purify the teachings of Islam in Indonesia and the rise of identity politics, the question of food provided by non-Muslim groups for Muslims is becoming increasingly sensitive and even crucial.<sup>8</sup>

These developments and changes cause the tradition of *woni* being questioned by Muslims, whether *woni* menus served by Manggarai (Catholic) family can be eaten or not. The question gets even broader as Muslims also question themselves, whether they should attend non-Muslim events where pigs and pork are served publicly. On the other hand, the changes in the Islamic practice of Muslims also raises the question for Catholics. Does providing *woni* for Muslim families is good, correct, and not causing friction and conflict between religions? What should Manggarai Catholics do if their Muslim families eat at their homes or attend to their ceremonies?

This study found that these changes and questions have led Manggarai Catholics to adapt to traditional practices of *woni*. There is

---

<sup>7</sup> S.S. Qureshi, M. Jamal, M.S. Qureshi, M. Rauf, B.H. Syed, M. Zulfiqar, and N. Chand, "A review of halal food with special reference to meat and its trade potential," *The Journal of Animan and Plant Sciences*, 22(2 Suppl), (2012) 79-83; Anom Sigit Suryawan, Hisano Shuji and Jongerden Joost, "Negotiating halal: The role of non-religious concerns in shaping halal standards in Indonesia," *Journal of Rural Studies* (2019). [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.09.013>]

<sup>8</sup> Read Noorhadi Hasan, *Public Islam in Indonesia: Piety, Politics, and Identity* (Amsterdam University Press, 2017); Alhassan G. Mumuni, Veen Ann, Luqmani Mushtaq, Quraeshi Zahir A. and Kamarulzaman Yusniza, "Religious identity, community and religious minorities' search efforts for religiously sanctioned food: The case of halal food in non-Muslim majority markets," *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 42, no. 6 (2018): 586-598.

an effort to keep building a harmonious relationship with Muslim families through adaptation and at the same time new negotiations to the *woni* tradition. The Catholics begin to consider the importance of the process in providing, processing, and serving *woni* following Islamic law. This is done by involving Muslim families in the whole process or even by eliminating the “haram” menu at a ritual or ceremony attended by Muslims.

The theory of cultural adaptation shows that adaptation is an attempt by a community to adjust to new changes and circumstances.<sup>9</sup> Adaptation is performed by a smaller group to live in a wider or dominant community. This research shows that although Manggarai Catholics are the dominant group and Muslims are the minority, the adaptation to *woni* is instead done by Manggarai Catholics to adapt themselves, or more precisely, to appreciate the beliefs of other religious communities (Muslims). However, this research will also show that there is a reciprocal adaptation made by Muslims as a minority group towards the majority group, including concerning the practice of *woni*. Despite there are many positive values of the interactions and adaptations of these two parties, however, conflict, suspicion, and hostility may still occur. This is where the dynamics of living together among religious communities are tested.

This research explores how the tradition of *woni* is practiced by Muslims and Catholics, and how they cope with difficulties and challenges. It will also look at the adaptation models used by both parties, as I found new adaptation models to the practice of *woni* today. The different model shows the dynamics of cultural change influenced by external aspects while also illustrates the model of relations and understanding of Catholics and Muslims in Manggarai.

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with ethnography as a method of inquiry. Ethnographic data were obtained through observation of the life of Manggarai people, especially concerning aspects of food, beliefs, and their relationship with others. Apart from observations, the data and information are collected through in-depth interviews. The subjects interviewed were community leaders and indigenous *tu'a*. Through this interview, a

---

<sup>9</sup> Stephen M. Croucher, “Social networking and cultural adaptation: A theoretical model,” *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 4, no. 4 (2011): 259-264; Young Yun Kim, “Cross-Cultural Adaptation: An Integrative Theory,” in R. L. Wiseman (ed.), *International and Intercultural Communication Annual, Vol. 19* (Sage Publications, Inc., 1995).

basic picture of the philosophical tradition of *woni* is obtained. To get information on how *woni* is practiced, interviews were conducted with Manggarai Catholic families who have practiced this tradition in their encounters with Muslims. Here, I found various modifications to the current *woni* tradition and how Manggarai Catholics perceive the practice in relation to interfaith encounters. In addition, some Muslim families in Manggarai were also interviewed to gain their experience and perception of the tradition of *woni*.

The ethnographic data is processed and analyzed by specifically looking at the changes and adaptations made by the Manggarai communities and how it was responded by the Catholics and Muslims. Hence, this research is not only delving into local traditions but also examines the model of inter-religious relations, especially between Catholics and Muslims in Manggarai. The external factors such as identity politics, religious movement, and interfaith relations are also subjected to analysis to see how the national context of these phenomena affected the religious understanding of religious communities in certain regions of Indonesia.

### **The People and the Land of Manggarai**

Manggarai is the name of the region, population, and language at once. As a region, it is located in the western part of Flores island, East Nusa Tenggara Province (NTT), and occupies a third of the island. Geopolitically, since Indonesia's independence, Manggarai was a single district. However, the development of regional autonomy makes the district is divided into new districts. In 2003, it was divided into two, namely Manggarai as the main district and West Manggarai as a new district. In 2006, it was again expanded by the government with the establishment of East Manggarai as a new district. Interestingly, despite regionally divided into West and East, the fact that both region still uses Manggarai signifies a strong unity of identity. Thus, the aspect of "Manggarainess" as a philosophical and cultural basis is strongly imagined, enlivened, and lived by the local people.<sup>10</sup> This aspect is important in the discussion of the *woni* tradition.

In terms of culture, Manggarai people still practice various traditions inherited by their ancestors. Ceremonies from the birth to

---

<sup>10</sup> Fransiska Widyawati, *Catholics in Manggarai, Eastern Indonesia* (Geneva: Globethics.net, 29 (2018).

death of a person are still maintained strongly in their tradition. Although the majority of Manggarai people are Catholic, ancestral traditions and traditional beliefs are still very well-practiced, as demonstrated by some anthropological and social studies.<sup>11</sup> This is also because Catholicism is very “friendly” towards local traditions and practices. There is a process of inculturation, which is incorporating ceremonies and religious beliefs of local culture into the characteristics of the Catholic Church. Catholicism is one of the important institutions that strengthens and revives the traditions of the Manggarai people that are not in conflict with the teachings of the Catholic faith. Some traditional ceremonies already have a Catholic face and some Catholic liturgy are celebrated in the distinctive nuances of local culture.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of population and religious adherents, according to the 2010 Population Census, the population of Manggarai Regency is 292,451 inhabitants. While West and East Manggarai both comprise 221,703 and 252,744 inhabitants respectively. Thus, the total population of Manggarai Raya is 766,898 inhabitants.<sup>13</sup> Of these populations, the 9.99% are Muslims, 0.67% are Protestants, 89.07% are Catholics, 0.07% are Hindus, 0% for Khong Hu Cu, and others are 0.07%. Catholicism is the majority in these three districts or Manggarai Raya as well as in Flores Island. For East Nusa Tenggara Province, Muslims are 9.05%, Christians are 34.74%, Catholics are 54.14%, Hindus are 0.11%, Buddhists are 0.01%, 0% for Khong Hu Cu and others are 1.73%.

### **Indigenous Beliefs, Islam and Catholicism in Manggarai**

Before the so-called world religions come to Manggarai, the local people had their traditional religions and beliefs. They believe in the divine power that overshadows human life, creates, preserves, and

---

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Allerton, “Landscape, Power, and Agency in Eastern Indonesia,” in *South Asian Perspectives on Power*, edited by Liana Chua, et. al. (USA and Canada: Routledge, 2009): 81-94; Catherine Allerton. “Static Crosses and Working Spirits: Anty-syncretism and Agricultural Animism in Catholic West Flores,” *Anthropological Forum* Vol. 19 No.3 (2009): 271-287.

<sup>12</sup> Yohanes S. Lon and Fransiska Widyawati, “Adaptasi dan Transformasi Lagu Adat dalam Liturgi Gereja Katolik di Manggarai Flores,” *Jurnal Kawistara* 10, no. 1 (2020): 17-31. [https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.45244]

<sup>13</sup> <http://sp2010.bps.go.id/index.php/site?id=53&wilayah=Nusa-Tenggara-Timur> (accessed 13/2/2018).

nurtures the universe. It present in the highest power mentioned in various names: *Mori* (Creator, Ruler), *Mori Kraéng* (Father the Creator, Ruler), *Déwa Mésé* (The Great God), *Mori Amé Rinding Mané*, *Ine Rinding Wié* (God the Lord Father of the Day, God the Mother of the Night), and *Par Awon Kolep Salén* (The Rising Sun and The Sunset).<sup>14</sup> Besides, they also believe in the power of spirits, ancestral spirits, and masters of nature. Prayers, rituals, and offerings are the way Manggarai people express gratitude, gratefulness, plead, and ask for mercy and forgiveness. In the ritual, the slaughter of sacrificial animals usually occurs. Pigs, buffaloes, chickens, dogs, goats are important animals in various rituals and eating together in special celebrations of Manggarai communities.

Catholicism in Manggarai is relatively new compared to other regions in Flores. It was spread by Dutch missionaries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While in the eastern part of Flores, Catholicism had existed three centuries earlier in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, spread by Portuguese missionaries, and continued by Dutch missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although politically the Dutch did not support the spread of Catholicism because they are Protestants, however, in the Lisbon agreement in East Timor, the Dutch agreed that Flores should remain a Catholic missionary area. So when the Dutch began to control Flores, they allowed and even supported Catholic missionaries to continue the spread of Catholicism in Flores.<sup>15</sup>

The Dutch officially occupied Manggarai in 1907. When the Dutch saw the population in Manggarai and the fertile territory, they urged the Bishop of Batavia to send Catholic missionaries to Manggarai. One of the reasons is to prevent the development of Islam. Thus, the Dutch colonists prepared for the arrival of Catholic missionaries. In 1920, Catholic missionaries from the Congregation of the Divine Word (SVD) officially opened a religious dissemination mission office in Ruteng, Manggarai. They began introducing Catholicism to the locals. With the help of the Dutch government and the support of the local authorities, the Manggarai people converted from traditional religion to Catholicism with relative ease. Moreover,

---

<sup>14</sup> Fransiska Widyawati, "Kritik Paham Allah dalam Tradisi Kristiani dan Dalam Konteks Budaya Manggarai-Flores Barat," in Natar, Asnath (ed.), *Perempuan Kristiani Indonesia Berteologi Feminis dalam Konteks* (Jakarta: BPK. Gunung, Mulia 2017), 225-227.

<sup>15</sup> Karel Steenbrink, *Catholics in Indonesia. 1903-1942: A Documented History*, vol. 2. (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), 7.

the missionaries also established infrastructure such as education, hospitals, irrigation, roads, and housing, all of which made the initially isolated area becomes more open and advanced. This makes Catholicism coloring all aspects of Manggarai people's lives. Up to this day, the Catholic Church has grown into the most respected and influential institution in the lives of Manggarai people. The study of Erb,<sup>16</sup> Webb<sup>17</sup>, and Widyawati<sup>18</sup> shows that Catholicism has become a strong identity within the Manggarai people; being Manggarai is being Catholic.

Historically, Islam has existed before the presence of Catholic missionaries in Manggarai, even in Flores in general. Islam is thought to have been present since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, approximately 3 centuries before the Manggarai people came to know Catholicism. It was originally carried by traders from Sulawesi. When Malacca as a trading center fell to the Portuguese in 1511,<sup>19</sup> many traders from Java and Sumatra switched from Malacca to the east. Hence, Makassar became a new trading center. Many Muslim traders from Java, India, Persia, and Arabia came to trade in this area. This led to the growth of Islam in Sulawesi. Gowa, as one of the major sultanates in Sulawesi, has also adopted Islam since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20,21</sup>

The bustle of trade makes the community of Gowa, as well as Bajo and Bugis looking for locations to get tradable goods once consumers can provide merchandise. They visited the surrounding islands, including the island of Flores. They arrived at the northern

---

<sup>16</sup> Maribeth Erb, "True Catholics: Religion and Identity in Western Flores," in Franck Michael (ed.) Special Issue on Religion and Identity (Sentiments religieux et identités culturelles), *Histoire et Anthropologie Asies* 2 (2003).

<sup>17</sup> R. Webb, "Rural Development and Tradition: The Churches in Bali and Flores," *Centre of Southeast Asian Studies Working Papers*, No. 65, Monash University (1990).

<sup>18</sup> Fransiska Widyawati, "Catholics in Manggarai, Eastern Indonesia."

<sup>19</sup> Syamsuez Salihima, "Peta Politik di Sulawesi Selatan pada Awal Islamisasi," *Jurnal Rihlah*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2015): 33-34. [<https://doi.org/10.24252/rihlah.v2i01.1354>]

<sup>20</sup> Muhamad Murtadho, "Jejak Kerajaan Islam Ende dan Sejarah Keagamaan di Flores," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan*, volume 13 number 1 (2015): 237-264. [<http://dx.doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v13i1.225>]

<sup>21</sup> M. Fachrir Rachman, "Kontroversi Sejarah Kehadiran Islam di Bima, Ulumuna," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 1 (2005): 20-34. [<https://doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v9i1.441>]; Saidin Hamzah, M Ahmad Sewang dan Syamzan Syukur, "Kondisi Dana Mbojo (Bima) Pra Islam dalam Tinjauan Historis," *Diskursus Islam*, Vol. 5 No. 1 (2017): 16-29; Noorduy, "Makassar and the Islamization of Bima," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, volume 143 number 2/3, (1987): 312-342.

coast of Manggarai, not far from the southern coast of Makassar. In this region, they found many commodities that can be bought or exploited such as honey, candles, yellow wood, horses, and sandalwood. So they sent more people and even soldiers to occupy some of the territories. With this power, they could easily obtain slaves, which, according to Antony Reid's<sup>22</sup> account, was one of the most popular and best-selling commodities of the time. This is how Islam enters Manggarai.

The merchants did not intend to spread Islam. Their main goal is to trade. Apart from Gowa Sulawesi, people from the sultanate of Bima also claim to have set their foot in Manggarai since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Bima who conquered the villages in Manggarai asked for tributes in the form of merchandise, food, and slaves. Like Gowa, their main mission is to trade and exploit. There is no mission to spread Islam. Even in 1784, Sultan Abdul Hamid Syah strictly forbade the Muslims of Bima, Bugis, and Makasar from associating themselves with Manggarai.<sup>23</sup> They were asked to stay away because it was considered to be disruptive to the culture and religion of Manggarai. This seems to be closely related to their traditions and way of life in which they eat pork or animals that are considered haram.

Although Islam came earlier, it did not develop much among the local population. Muslims are migrants. The conversion of Manggarai people to Islam generally occurs because of the very limited marriages. In addition, local Manggarai people also tend to be reluctant to adopt Islam because of their cultural reasons that cannot be separated from rituals and food, namely pork. Adopting Islam for them is the same as abandoning culture and including the tradition of eating pork. As a result, Islam is growing slowly and tends to be a religion of heritage from the descendants of Bima and Sulawesi.

Initially, the Muslim community was also in the vicinity of the coastal area. This corresponds to the character of the ancestors who were sailors. This is in contrast to the Manggarai people who are afraid of seawater because they live in the mountain. Up to the present, Islamic communities from Bima and Gowa are still dominant in coastal areas. Many villages in Manggarai have similar names to

---

<sup>22</sup> Anthony Reid (ed.), *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> W. P. Coolhaas, "Bijdrage tot de Kennis van het Manggaraische Volk (West Flores)," *Tijdschrift van het Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* 59, (1942): 148-177, 328-357.

villages in Sulawesi, such as Labuan Bajo (due to the Bajo tribe), Gorontalo, and Luwuk.

The development of Islam was further cornered by the presence of European missionaries who brought Catholicism to the region. Missionaries established religious dispersal centers and built schools in areas close to the Islamic community. As Steenbrink<sup>24</sup> and Widyawati<sup>25</sup> show, one of the objectives of the missionary through the establishment of mission centers and Catholic schools is to prevent the development of Islam. As result, the majority of Manggarai people who were traditional are converted to Catholicism. Likewise, several Muslims also converted to Catholics.

The rapid development of Islam in Manggarai has only occurred in the last few decades. Many traders, employees, entrepreneurs, and other workers from Java, Bima, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and other regions come to live and work. Some of them choose to live in cities and small towns located in mountainous areas. Through this, the encounters between the Manggarai Catholics and Muslims became quite intense. The kinship, neighborly, and marriage relations between Catholics and Muslims are also increasing. Lon and Widyawati<sup>26</sup> show that these encounters inevitably come into contact with highly sensitive food issues. Food can be a means of brotherhood but also a source of conflict. This research specifically identified the adaptation of Manggarai Catholics to their cultural traditions in the practice of *woni*.

### ***Ireng* and *Haram* in Manggarai Culture and Islam**

Taboo or the prohibition of eating or doing something is very typical in various cultures. In Manggarai, taboo is called *ireng* (prohibition/unallowed), *ceki*/tabu,<sup>27</sup> *ceki mawa*/tabu, or *toé hang*/not

---

<sup>24</sup> Karel Steenbrink, "Dutch Colonial Containment of Islam in Manggarai, West-Flores, in Favour of Catholicism, 1907-1942," *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land-en volkenkunde/Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 169, no. 1 (2013): 104-128.

<sup>25</sup> Fransiska Widyawati, "Kolonialisme, Islamisasi dan Masuknya Agama Katolik di Manggarai," *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Missio*, Vol. 4, No.1. (2003).

<sup>26</sup> Yohanes S. Lon and Fransiska Widyawati, "Food and Local Social Harmony: Pork, Communal Dining, and Muslim-Christian Relations in Flores, Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* Vol. 26, No. 3 (2019): 445-474. [<https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v26i3.9917>]

<sup>27</sup> Maribeth Erb, *The Manggaraians: A Guide to Traditional Lifestyles* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1999): 42.

eating. All of these terms describe things that should not be done or something that should be avoided or should not be consumed by a particular person or group. Concerning food that is forbidden to eat, the tribes in Manggarai know the concept of *ceki*, i.e. certain animals or plants that are considered special to a tribe or clan. Due to its sacred nature, all members of the community are prohibited from eating these animals or plants in their daily life.

If they break the rules then they will get *itang agu nangki* (curse and punishment) from the ancestors. Anger or *itang agu nangki* can happen immediately after someone breaks the rules regarding *ceki*. The form of ancestral anger, for example, is by making the person who eats it experience a direct reaction such as hives, abdominal pain, wounds, vomiting, poisoning, and even death. The punishment can also affect the community for a long time, for example causing crop failure, death of the family, the disharmony of village and household, or natural disasters.

Each clan or tribe has its *ceki*. Usually, there are certain stories about why an animal or plant is considered taboo. For example, because the animals had been a friend of their ancestors, or a helper of their ancestors, or who assisted when their ancestor is sick, or those who pointed the way to a new village, etc. There are also *ceki* because of the promises or oath spoken by ancestors that should not be broken by their descendants. Because there are so many tribes in Manggarai, there are also many *ceki*. What becomes a *ceki* or taboo in one village, is not necessarily a *ceki* or taboo in other villages. If someone is invited or visits a family or village, then he or she will avoid food that is considered taboo by their community.

Besides *ceki*, there is also *toé hang*, which means not to eat or drink certain foods because of special restrictions. This is specifically related to Muslims who do not eat pork, dogs, or other food and beverages. However, there are also *toé hang* for health reasons or do not eat food at certain events, such as not being able to eat *ela réngé/tudak* (pork used for traditional rituals) or meat in traditional sanctions ceremonies (*tala*).<sup>28</sup>

In Islam, the prohibition on consuming certain foods is somewhat different. The reason is not because of the sacredness of objects or animals or plants, but rather precisely because the food contains aspects that are considered dirty and unhealthy. Haram can

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

be due to the substance, the way it is processed, and also how it is obtained. Food that is not processed lawfully becomes haram. For example, the slaughter of animals that is not done by mentioning the Name of God, animals for idolatry, animal meats that are contaminated by prohibited substances, etc.<sup>29</sup>

### **Variation in Practices and Adaptations of the *Woni* Tradition**

In older traditions, *woni* means special meals that are reserved for those who cannot eat a common meal at a shared meal for a certain reason. It can be due to beliefs (taboo or *ceki*), health, or other personal reasons, as previously explained. In more recent traditions, *woni* has been directly associated with Muslims. For example, the Verheijen<sup>30</sup> dictionary defines *woni* literally as “in accordance with the pillars of Islam.” While *ata woni* means “a person who does not eat pork” or a Muslim. Hence, it has become a common understanding today that *woni* refers to food that is not pork or a dog, and *ata woni* refers to Muslims. Sometimes, Manggarai people are also called Muslims as *ata waé*. *Ata* means people and *waé* means water. So, *ata waé* means “water people.” They called Muslims as “water people” about two things: Muslims generally dwell on the beach (coming from the water or sea-water) and Muslims perform ablutions (cleaning themselves with water before praying).

The tradition of *woni* was born from local wisdom to respect those who cannot eat certain foods for certain reasons. In particular, in their encounters with Muslims, the ancestors of the Manggarai people immediately realized that Muslims forbid pork or dogs. In fact, for the Manggarai people, pork has a very important position in their culture and daily life. These two animals that are prohibited by Muslims are important animals for their customs. Pig (*ela* in Manggarai) is a sacrificial animal that is slaughtered in various traditional ceremonies to be offered to their ancestors. Because of the importance of pig in the rituals and customs of the Manggarai people, there are many terms devoted to pigs based on their importance in the ritual.

---

<sup>29</sup> M. Ali, “Konsep Makanan Halal dalam Tinjauan Syariah dan Tanggung Jawab Produk Atas Produsen Industri Halal.” *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*, Vol. 16. No. 1 (2016): 291-306; Yusuf Al-Qardhawi and Mohd Hafiz bin Daud, *Halal dan haram dalam Islam* (Malaysia: PTS Publishing House Sdn. Bhd, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> J. Verheijen, *Kamus Manggarai I: Manggarai-Indonesia* (Kooninklijk Instituute vor taal Land-en Volkenkunde, Esgavenhage-Martinus Nijhoof. 1967): 764.

Here are examples of the many names of a pig based on their function in rituals or ceremonies. *Ela céar cumpé* is a pig killed during a baby naming ceremony; *ela mbukut* is a pig that is slaughtered during various rituals of offerings to ancestors; *ela nempung* is a pig used during the ceremony to legalize a marriage; *ela téing tinnu* is a pig used to be slaughtered during the ceremony of feeding a seriously ill or nearly death elderly; *ela haéng nai* is a pig slaughtered in front of the house of someone who has just died as a symbol that the family is with someone who is dying and brings him to death; *ela tekang tana rampi boa* is a pig used for ceremonies before the burial; *ela saung ta'a* is a pig used in a ceremony performed a few days after burial; *ela kélas* is a pig used during the feast ceremony of someone who has passed away; *ela w'éé mbaru* is a pig used when entering a new home; and many other types of pig ceremonies. Thus, pigs are inseparable from the entire cultural life of the Manggarai people.

Besides pigs, dogs are also an important animal in the eating event of Manggarai people. There is also a habit of giving dogs and dog meat from one family to another in certain traditional ceremonies. Therefore, dog meat is considered special and culturally meaningful as well. For them, pork and dogs are no longer just food in a physical sense but have cultural and religious meanings related to the traditional beliefs of the Manggarai people. The meat of these two animals became the most common menu in various Manggarai events. From the economic and practical point of view, the price of pigs and dogs is generally cheaper than the price of cows or buffaloes. Hence, only those who can afford the price can slaughter cows or buffaloes in family events.

For these reasons, it is very common for Muslims in Manggarai to encounter pork, especially for those who have family ties and kinship relationships with Manggarai people. They will certainly attend traditional family rituals where pork is available abundantly. This is where the tradition of *woni* becomes significant. The food provided in the *woni* menu generally depends on the ability and affordability of the host. Chicken meat and eggs are the most common alternative food used for Muslim families. If someone is well-off, they can also provide a lamb. For those who live in urban areas where there is a market that sells beef, they can provide beef. It can also be in the form of fish, toy, tempeh and vegetables.

This study found seven models of *woni* traditional practice. This diversity demonstrated the kind of adaptation that Manggarai Catholics have made to the situation, needs, demands, and even the special reaction of Muslims to other models.

*First*, the traditional model where the whole process of preparing *woni* ingredients, cooking, arranging, and serving is done by the host according to their habits of cooking and serving. Here, there is no intervention from Muslims in the whole process of providing food. The importance is not to cook pork or dog. The process of slaughtering animals (if it is meat) is carried out regularly without a specific Islamic means. When they eat, they eat together. Catholic families will eat their menu (in this case pork or dog) and Muslim one will be treated to a *woni* menu. Both Muslim families and the Catholics trust each other. The Muslims believe that the content of *woni* is following their Islamic values, while the Catholics also have no intention to make Muslims violate their own religious rules. They are bound by a brotherhood and kinship relationship that in principle has no intention of harming each other.

This is a traditional model that was practiced quite dominantly in the past but is starting to shift in the present. In this model, the knowledge of the host (Catholic) is usually very simple, namely that Muslim families do not eat pork or dogs and therefore they should be given food other than that meat. Questions regarding how the food is processed, prepared, and what kind of tools are used in cooking are not yet raised. This is because, in the past, Muslim's understanding regarding the concept of haram and halal was also limited. Thus, this model was accepted as a reasonable and good one. However, along with the growing awareness of the concept of halal, they begin to question or doubt whether the *woni* menu is not contaminated with oil/blood/tools that were previously shared to cook pork and dogs. This new knowledge makes the need for new adaptations of *woni* tradition.

*Second*, the family that organizes the ceremonies provide animals (usually chickens or goats) and invite Muslim relatives to slaughter the animal at the host of the party. This was made primarily as an adaptation to the Muslim's request or wish for the animals to be slaughtered in an Islamic way by saying the prayer "*bismillah*." Likewise, they can ensure that the animal is being killed and not suffocated so that they can eat food with a sense of safety. After

being slaughtered, the party owner's family will cook it separately from other foods containing pork or dogs at the party host.

*Third*, apart from being slaughtered by Muslim families, there is also a new adaptation in which Catholic families invite Muslims to participate in cooking and serving the food at the host party. This adaptation is carried out primarily to ensure that animals that have been slaughtered in an Islamic manner are also cooked with the correct procedure and are free of contamination of meat or equipment that may be mixed by traces of blood or pork oil. With this adaptation model, Muslims are not only being "guests" in the ceremonies, but also part of the family that participates in preparing meals for all the guest. When cooking, they will joke together without thinking about their religious differences.

*Fourth*, in conditions where the house of a Muslim family is not far from the house of the party's owner, they will slaughter the special animals for the *woni* menu in the house of the Muslim families. When the banquet is about to begin, they can bring and serve the meal at the host party. In some traditional ritual events, sometimes, eating events can be done also in Muslim homes, especially if the party owner's house is small and can not accommodate many people while the number of Muslim invitations is relatively many. This model is made especially as an adaptation to ensure food, equipment, procedures, and others are carried out purely in an Islamic manner without being touched by aspects that contain the unlawful. This model is generally preferred by modern Muslim groups who are quite strict and sensitive to halal food.

*Fifth*, if the family does not have the opportunity to provide from their own home, then they can order or buy from a halal stall or restaurant. This only happens in urban areas where there are stalls that are usually owned by Muslims. If the amount is large, they can order catering food which is also made by Muslims. Thus, the entire process of supplying and arranging is no longer carried out by the party host but by Muslims.

*Sixth*, if the party host is a wealthy family and can afford a cow or buffalo, then the menu of pork or dog will be eliminated at a banquet. Usually, this happens if the party is big and done in a building or camp. Pigs may still be provided but only for Catholic families at home and not at the party venue. When eating together, everyone only eats a menu that is considered halal for all. Thus, in this

context, the *woni* itself has disappeared because everything is the same food. Or, it can also be said that everything is *woni* menu.

*Seventh*, in certain rituals, there is also the consideration of Catholic families to replace pig sacrificial animals with goats. Usually, this is done when the number of families and Muslim invitations that participate in traditional rituals (not just in food events) are very large, and when the custom to replace sacrificial animals is possible. There are several rituals in which the sacrificial animals are more flexible and can be replaced with animals whose meat can be consumed by everyone.

If we look at these seven adaptation models, it is clear that the differences in *woni* concepts and practices are carried out in line with the demands and reactions of Muslim families. The more rigid the Muslim community practices the concept of halal, the higher the adaptation of the Manggarai Catholics to conform to the Muslim standards. Conversely, the easier the practice of Muslims regarding halal food, the model of adaptation by the Manggarai Catholics may become lesser. On the other hand, from the Catholic side, if they cannot meet the expectations of Muslims for halal food, the solution is simply by not inviting Muslims in the meal together. Thus, the conflicts of interest can be avoided early on.

### **Cultural and Religious Adaptation in a Pluralistic Society**

An encounter between two communities that have different cultures and beliefs in a plural society is an inevitability. The differences make one group have to be able to adjust to living in harmony with other groups. According to Gudykunts and Kim,<sup>31</sup> the motivation and ability to adapt are different among groups. However, adaptation is needed to live in harmony. In this study, the encounter between Manggarai people with Muslims makes them adapt their traditions and cultures to a level that allows the relationships and involvement of Muslim families in their lives to be well-established.

In the theory of adaptation, groups of migrants are those who usually have to be able to let go of some of their old habits to adjust to the dominant group in a new place. Cultural adaptation is a process of change made to adapt to new places and circumstances. It is

---

<sup>31</sup> Y. Y. Kim and W. Gudykunst, "Adapting to a New Culture," *Theorizing about intercultural communication* 375400 (2005); William B. Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim, *Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication* (Boston: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1984).

generally done by minority groups to adapt to the majority groups. In this study, what happened was the opposite. Manggarai Catholics, the majority who live in their land, have to adapt their culture and traditions to the new needs and norms of Muslims. At this point, they are hosts that offer harmony.

Interestingly, by adapting the tradition of *woni*, Manggarai people do not lose their cultural peculiarities. Instead, the adaptation takes them to a deeper cultural root, namely the value of appreciation which has been the basis of the tradition from the very beginning. On the other hand, Muslims also do what Gudykunts and Kim called assimilation, namely minimizing the domination of the old culture so that the process of confounding can be better. This happens when Muslims understand the lifestyle of the Manggarai Catholics who cannot be separated from pigs, dogs, or other aspects that are considered haram according to Islamic values. As a way of harmony, what Muslims do is to avoid what can be avoided while not creating conflict and friction and negotiating a model of *woni* tradition that fits their beliefs, so that the encounters of the two cultures can be closely intertwined. This harmony is an important value in different cultural encounters for a pluralistic society.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

The tradition of *woni* is the adaptation of Manggarai Catholics in their encounters with Muslims. This tradition is based on a motivation to involve families, communities, and individuals of different faith in family events and communities. The tradition of *woni* is a local policy and a way for Manggarai people to appreciate differences. In this tradition, people are not “uniformed” and nor do they have to follow dominant cultures or customs. Instead, the people of Manggarai appreciate it beyond their Manggarainess and Catholicism. They realized that there still other customs and traditions that must be respected. *Woni* is also a way to honor small groups and minorities. Through the tradition of *woni*, Manggarai Catholics affirm

---

<sup>32</sup> M. T. Huda, “Harmoni Sosial dalam Tradisi Sedekah Bumi Masyarakat Desa Pancur Bojonegoro,” *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, Vol. 7 No. 2 (2017): 267-296. [<https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v7i2.753>]; Kunawi Basyir, “Membangun Kerukunan Antarumat Beragama berbasis Budaya Lokal Menyama Braya di Denpasar Bali,” *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2016): 186-206. [<https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v6i2.603>]

that eating and food events are not merely a way for human beings to fulfill their biological needs. It is also social, cultural, and religious.

The tradition of *woni* presupposes trust in each other's relations. The Catholic family must be trustworthy to make the food uncontaminated with pigs. Likewise, Muslims must trust the Catholics that there is a positive intention from them to provide the best food. With mutual trust, suspicion and conflict will disappear. Family relationships will be closely intertwined.

The practice of *woni* tradition has changed and shifted according to the new knowledge and awareness of both Muslims and Catholics. Catholics adapt their culture to make the Muslim community part of their life. The ability to adapt for the sake of a harmonious life is an important thing in a pluralistic society.

## References

- Ali, M. "Konsep makanan halal dalam tinjauan syariah dan tanggung jawab produk atas produsen industri halal." *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*, Vol. 16 No. 2 (2016).
- Allerton, Catherine. "Landscape, Power, and Agency in Eastern Indonesia," in *South Asian Perspectives on Power* (edited by Liana Chua, et al), (USA and Canada: Routledge, 2009).
- Allerton, Catherine. "Static Crosses and Working Spirits: Anty-syncretism and Agricultural Animism in Catholic West Flores," *Anthropological Forum* Vol. 19, No. 3 (2009).
- Al-Qardhawi, Yusuf, and Mohd Hafiz bin Daud. *Halal dan haram dalam Islam*. (Malaysia: PTS Publishing House Sdn. Bhd., 2016).
- Basyir, K. "Membangun Kerukunan Antarumat Beragama berbasis Budaya Lokal Menyama Braya di Denpasar Bali." *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (2016): 186-206. [<https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v6i2.603>]
- Coolhaas, W. P. "Bijdrage tot de Kennis van het Manggaraische Volk (West Flores)". *Tijdschrift van het Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* 59 (1942).
- Cowlshaw, Gillian. "Culture and the absurd: the means and meanings of Aboriginal identity in the time of cultural revivalism." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18, no. 2 (2012).
- Croucher, Stephen M. "Social networking and cultural adaptation: A theoretical model." *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 4, no. 4 (2011).

- Erb, Maribeth, "True Catholics: Religion and Identity in Western Flores", in Franck Michael (ed.). *Special Issue on Religion and Identity (Sentiments religieux et identités culturelles)*. Histoire et Anthropologie Asies 2.
- Erb, Maribeth. *The Manggaraians: A Guide to Traditional Lifestyles*. Singapore: Times Editions, 1999.
- Frazer, J.G. *The Golden Bough*. Melbourne: Canongate, 1890.
- Gudykunst, William B., and Young Yun Kim. *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication*. Boston: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1984.
- Hamzah, Saidin, Ahmad Sewang and Syamzan Syukur. "Kondisi Dana Mbojo (Bima) Pra Islam dalam Tinjauan Historis." *Diskursus Islam*, volume 5 number 1 (2017).
- Huda, Mohammad Thoriquil, "Harmoni Sosial dalam Tradisi Sedekah Bumi Masyarakat Desa Pancuran Bojonegори." *Religió, Jurnal Studi Agama-agama*, Vol . 7, No. 2 (2017). [<https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v7i2.753>]
- Jainudin, Jainudin. "Mitologi Buyut Cili Kepercayaan dan Habituasi Transendental Suku Asing Banyuwangi." *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, Volume 9, No 1, (2019). [<https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v9i1.1234>]
- Kim, Y. Y., and W. Gudykunst. "Adapting to a new culture." *Theorizing about intercultural communication* 375400 (2005).
- Kim, Young Yun. "Cross-cultural adaptation: An integrative theory." In R. L. Wiseman (Ed.), *International and Intercultural Communication Annual, Vol. 19*. Sage Publications, Inc. (1995).
- Kroeber, Alfred L. *Totem and Taboo: An Ethnologic Psychoanalysis*. California: University of Berkeley, 1920.
- Lon, Yohanes S., and Fransiska Widyawati. "Adaptasi dan Transformasi Lagu Adat dalam Liturgi Gereja Katolik di Manggarai Flores." *Jurnal Kawistara* Vol. 10, No. 1 (2020). [<https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.45244>]
- Lon, Yohanes S., and Fransiska Widyawati. "Food and Local Social Harmony: Pork, Communal Dining, and Muslim-Christian Relations in Flores, Indonesia." *Studia Islamika* 26, no. 3 (2019). [<https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v26i3.9917>]
- Mumuni, Alhassan G., Ann Veeck, Mushtaq Luqmani, Zahir A. Quraeshi, and Yusniza Kamarulzaman. "Religious Identity, Community, and Religious Minorities' Search Efforts for

- Religiously Sanctioned Food: The Case of Halal Food in Non-Muslim Majority Markets.” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 42, no. 6, (2018).
- Murtadho, Muhamad. “Jejak Kerajaan Islam Enda dan Sejarah Keagamaan di Flores.” *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan*, volume 13 number 1 (2015). [<http://dx.doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v13i1.225>]
- Noorduyn, “Makasar and the Islamization of Bima.” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, volume 143 number 2/3, (1987).
- Noorhaidi, H. *Public Islam in Indonesia: Piety, Politics, and Identity*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017.
- Qureshi, S.S., Jamal, M., Qureshi, M.S., Rauf, M., Syed, B.H., Zulfiqar, M. and Chand, N. “A Review o Halal Food with Special Reference to Meat and its Trade Potential.” *The Journal of Animal Plant Sciences*, 22 (2 Suppl), (2012).
- Rachman, M. Fachrir. “Kontroversi Sejarah Kehadiran Islam di Bima, Ulumuna.” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, volume 9 number 1 (2005). [<https://doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v9i1.441>]
- Reid, A. (ed.). *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983.
- Steenbrink, Karel. *Catholics in Indonesia. 1903-1942: A Documented History*, Volume 2. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007.
- Steenbrink, Karel. “Dutch Colonial Containment of Islam in Manggarai, West-Flores, in Favour of Catholicism, 1907-1942.” *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land-en volkenkunde/Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*, 169, no. 1 (2013).
- Suryawan, Anom Sigit, Shuji Hisano, and Joost Jongerden. “Negotiating Halal: The Role of Non-Religious Concerns in Shaping Halal Standards in Indonesia.” *Journal of Rural Studies* (2019). [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.09.013>]
- Syamsuez, Salihima. “Peta Politik di Sulawesi Selatan pada Awal Islamisasi.” *Jurnal Rihlah*, volume 7 number 1 (2015). [<https://doi.org/10.24252/rihlah.v2i01.1354>]
- Tylor, E. B. *Primitive Culture, Researches Into the Development of Mythology, Religion, Art, and Custom*. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1871.
- Verheijen, J. *Kamus Manggarai I: Manggarai-Indonesia*. Kooninklijk Instituute vor taal Land- en Volkenkunde, Esgavenhage-Martinus Nijhoof. 1967.

- Webb, R. "Rural Development and Tradition: The Churches in Bali and Flores." *Centre of Southeast Asian Studies Working Papers*, No. 65. Melbourne: Monash University, 1990.
- Widyawati, F. "Kolonialisme, Islamisasi dan Masuknya Agama Katolik di Manggarai." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Missio*, 4/1, (2012).
- Widyawati, F. "Kritik Paham Allah dalam Tradisi Kristiani dan dalam Konteks Budaya Manggarai-Flores Barat." In Natar, Asnath (ed.). *Perempuan Kristiani Indonesia Berteologi Feminis dalam Konteks*. Jakarta: BPK. Gunung, Mulia 2017.
- Widyawati, F. *Catholics in Manggarai, Eastern Indonesia*. Geneva: Globethics.net, 2018.