**The Role of *Ye lim* and *Nit ni Wang* in the Construction of Cultural Identity in Contemporary Kei Indigenous Society**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The traditions of Ye lim and Nit ni Wangwithin the Kei Indigenous Community play a pivotal role in the construction of cultural identity by embodying collective memory, social ethics, and cosmological beliefs rooted in indigenous worldviews. These practices are not merely customary norms but constitute symbolic and performative expressions that shape communal life and reinforce a sense of belonging. As dynamic elements of intangible cultural heritage, they function as both regulatory frameworks and cultural markers that sustain intergenerational continuity. In response to contemporary challenges—such as globalization, legal formalization, and ecological transformation—these traditions are undergoing processes of reinterpretation and contextual adaptation. This study explores how Ye lim and Nit ni Wangcontribute to identity formation within the Kei community by employing a qualitative interpretive approach grounded in literature review and analysis of customary practices. The findings reveal that these traditions maintain cultural resilience by adapting symbolically and functionally to changing socio-cultural landscapes. This article contributes to the discourse on cultural identity construction, indigenous knowledge systems, and the significance of traditional practices in contemporary cultural contexts.*)

**Keywords:** *Kei Indigenous Society, cultural identity, Ye Lim, Nit ni Wang, indigenous knowledge.*

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia is a culturally rich nation where local traditions form the backbone of national identity. Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasized that national culture is “the summits of regional cultures,” underlining unity built upon the diversity of local expressions (Dewantara, 2004). In this context, the Kei Indigenous Community of Southeast Maluku offers a compelling case, with a long-standing coexistence of Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam in nearly every village. This pluralistic society is rooted in Adat Evav (Kei customary system), a set of cultural values regulating social interactions and moral obligations. Central to Kei society are the traditions of Ye lim and Nit ni Wang, which function as cultural mechanisms that bind the community. Ye lim is a customary practice of voluntary contribution during major life events such as weddings or funerals, symbolizing solidarity, compassion, and mutual assistance. Nit ni Wang, often associated with religious rituals and ancestral homage, reinforces spiritual connection and collective memory. These practices embody the aesthetic, moral, and cosmological worldview of the Kei people (Rahail, 1993; Dumatubun, 2022).

Culture, according to Koentjaraningrat (2015), encompasses “all human ideas, behaviors, and artifacts that are learned and transmitted socially.” As intangible cultural heritage, these traditions serve both performative and regulatory functions within society. However, globalization has intensified cultural shifts, often diminishing younger generations' connection to ancestral customs (Tobroni, 2012). Cultural expressions like Ye lim face challenges in sustainability, especially as modern lifestyles increasingly prioritize individualism over collective obligation. This research seeks to address the central problem of how the traditions of Ye lim and Nit ni Wangcontribute to the construction and preservation of cultural identity within the contemporary Kei Indigenous Community. Specifically, the study aims to analyze these traditions as vital forms of cultural expression rooted in indigenous values and social practices. Furthermore, it investigates the ways in which these traditions have undergone adaptive transformations in response to external influences such as globalization, religious syncretism, and socio-cultural change. Ultimately, this study explores the extent to which Ye lim and Nit ni Wangcontinue to serve as mechanisms for cultural continuity, identity formation, and the reinforcement of communal solidarity among the Kei people.

By focusing on these indigenous traditions through the lens of arts and culture, this study contributes to the discourse on intangible cultural heritage and indigenous identity. The research enhances understanding of how aesthetic expressions and ritual practices function as tools for cultural resilience. It also emphasizes the importance of preserving local wisdom systems in the face of global cultural homogenization (Cooley, 2005; Durkheim, 1964). Practically, it informs cultural policy, education, and community initiatives aimed at intergenerational cultural transmission. This paper is structured to provide a comprehensive exploration of the role of Ye lim and Nit ni Wangin the construction of cultural identity within the Kei Indigenous Community. The first section introduces the background of the study, outlines the research problem, objectives, and significance, establishing the contextual and theoretical foundation of the inquiry. The second section presents a review of relevant literature, focusing on the concepts of culture, identity, and indigenous practices, with particular attention to the intersections between local traditions and broader socio-cultural dynamics. The third section elaborates on the qualitative methodological approach employed in the study, including data collection techniques and sources of information. The fourth section offers an in-depth analysis of the findings, highlighting the evolving meanings, symbolic functions, and adaptive practices associated with Ye lim and Nit ni Wangin contemporary Kei society. Finally, the fifth section concludes the paper by synthesizing the key insights and offering recommendations for the preservation and sustainability of these cultural traditions as vital components of indigenous heritage.

This study is anchored in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates concepts from cultural theory, social identity formation, and indigenous knowledge systems. Such a framework is pivotal for analyzing how the Ye lim and Nit ni Wangtraditions contribute to constructing and sustaining cultural identity within the Kei Indigenous community. Émile Durkheim’s seminal work, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1995), underscores the critical role of collective rituals in fostering social solidarity. Durkheim posits that religious and customary practices act as symbolic expressions of collective consciousness, which serve to reinforce social bonds and communal morality. Applying Durkheim’s insights to the Kei context reveals that the Ye lim and Nit ni Wangtraditions are not merely ritualistic performances but fundamental mechanisms that uphold ethical frameworks and group cohesion (Durkheim, 1995). Complementing this, Clifford Geertz (1973) conceptualizes culture as a system of symbols through which communities interpret their social and spiritual realities. Cultural practices like Ye lim function as symbolic narratives encapsulating shared meanings and values, thereby facilitating community members’ understanding of their place within a broader social and cosmological order. Stuart Hall’s (1990) theory of cultural identity as a fluid and historically contingent construct further enriches this perspective. Hall argues that cultural identity is continuously negotiated through discourse and sociohistorical processes. Within this lens, the Ye lim and Nit ni Wangtraditions are dynamic cultural articulations that negotiate continuity and change in the face of modernity and globalization. The conceptualization of intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO (2003) foregrounds the importance of safeguarding customs, languages, and rituals as vital elements of cultural sustainability. The traditions of the Kei community exemplify this living heritage, characterized by their adaptability and transmission across generations. Indigenous knowledge scholars, such as Agrawal (1995) and Battiste (2002), highlight the adaptive and resilient nature of indigenous knowledge systems, which evolve in response to shifting social and ecological contexts. This theoretical stance resonates with the Kei community’s ongoing efforts to preserve their traditions while adapting to contemporary challenges.

Empirical research on indigenous cultural traditions further contextualizes this study. Rahail (1993) offers a comprehensive account of the Kei people’s cultural values, emphasizing the Ye lim tradition as a vital expression of social solidarity and cohesion. Rahail’s findings suggest that Ye lim strengthens kinship ties and serves as an indispensable social institution. Dumatubun (2019) explores the Nit ni Wang tradition, revealing its dual function as a spiritual ritual and a vehicle for promoting interreligious harmony among the diverse religious groups in Kei society. This underscores the capacity of indigenous customs to facilitate peacebuilding and social tolerance in pluralistic contexts. On an international scale, Smith and Akagawa (2009) emphasize the crucial role intangible cultural heritage plays in shaping contemporary cultural identities. Their work advocates for participatory and intergenerational approaches to cultural preservation, which are essential for sustaining local traditions. Studies of Pacific Indigenous communities, such as those by Keesing (1989), illustrate how indigenous cultural practices serve as frameworks for engaging modernity without relinquishing traditional foundations. The resilience of the Ye lim and Nit ni Wangtraditions amidst globalization reflects this dynamic. Henrich and Henrich’s (2007) ethnographic research in Melanesia highlights the importance of voluntary sharing and reciprocal generosity in customary ceremonies as mechanisms for establishing social norms and moral reputation. These insights parallel the Ye lim tradition’s emphasis on altruistic communal participation. At the national level, Tobroni (2012) raises concerns regarding the weakening of cultural transmission across generations, advocating for the integration of culturally based education to reinforce local identities. Similarly, Faruk (2007) conceptualizes culture as a contested arena where local identities are negotiated within broader sociopolitical frameworks.

The reviewed literature collectively demonstrates that the Ye lim and Nit ni Wangtraditions are integral to the Kei community’s cultural fabric. These practices are not static relics but dynamic expressions that reinforce social values, cultural identity, and community resilience. They exemplify the dual processes of preserving ancestral knowledge and adapting to contemporary realities, including the pressures of globalization, religious pluralism, and social transformation.

1. **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research design integrating literature review, field observation, and semi-structured interviews to provide a holistic understanding of the Ye lim and Nit ni Wangtraditions within the Kei Indigenous community. The primary data collection techniques include:

**Literature Review**

A systematic literature review was conducted to gather theoretical frameworks and prior research related to culture, social identity, customary law, and indigenous knowledge systems. This involved examining academic journals, books, reports, and other credible sources to contextualize the study and support data triangulation (Bowen, 2009; Creswell, 2013).

**Field Observation**

Participant and non-participant observations were carried out in selected villages of the Kei Islands, where the Ye lim and Nit ni Wangtraditions are actively practiced. Observations focused on documenting ritual practices, community interactions, and the enactment of local customs in their natural settings. Field notes and audiovisual recordings were used to capture the dynamics of these traditions, providing rich qualitative data to complement the literature review. This approach aligns with established qualitative methods for capturing cultural phenomena in situ (Patton, 2015).

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including traditional leaders, elders, community members, and cultural experts. The interviews aimed to explore participants’ perspectives on the meanings, functions, and transformations of the Ye lim and Nit ni Wangtraditions amid contemporary challenges such as globalization and religious pluralism. This flexible interviewing technique allows respondents to elaborate on their experiences while enabling the researcher to probe specific themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Data from all sources were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving coding, categorizing, and interpreting patterns and themes relevant to the research questions. Triangulation of data from literature, observations, and interviews was employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

Ethical approval was obtained prior to fieldwork. Informants provided informed consent, and their anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. Respect for cultural sensitivities and protocols was maintained throughout the research process. By combining these qualitative methods, the study offers a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of how the Ye lim and Nit ni Wangtraditions function as living cultural expressions that sustain identity and social cohesion within the Kei community.)

**III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Cultural traditions serve as dynamic repositories of values that are continuously transmitted, reinterpreted, and enacted in response to ongoing social change. Such traditions not only preserve historical legacies but also actively contribute to the formation of individual and collective identities within a society. In the context of the Kei Indigenous community, these cultural practices play a critical role in shaping contemporary social cohesion and cultural self-understanding.

Among these, the Ye lim tradition stands out as a pivotal customary practice that embodies voluntary communal contributions made without coercion or expectation of reciprocity. Despite the profound pressures exerted by globalization and modernization, Ye lim demonstrates remarkable resilience, reflecting Anthony Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration, which emphasizes the persistence of social structures through the duality of agency and structure.

The perpetuation of Ye lim is crucial not only for local social cohesion but also as a component of Indonesia’s broader cultural mosaic. Culture, as a core element of communal identity, offers a binding force that mitigates the tendencies toward individualism prevalent in modern society. Unlike individualistic paradigms, the Ye lim tradition fosters a collective ethos characterized by mutual assistance, solidarity, and tolerance, manifesting through spontaneous acts of support during significant life events such as weddings, house building, and religious pilgrimages.

Etymologically, the term Ye lim derives from the Kei words yead (“our feet”) and limad (“our hands”), collectively phrased as yead limad tutu—the "tips of our hands and feet." This metaphor captures the dual movement of seeking opportunities (feet) and providing aid (hands), symbolizing the community’s deep-rooted philosophy of reciprocal care and social responsibility, especially during moments of hardship or life transitions (Rahawarin, 2016).

Importantly, the practice of Ye lim extends beyond kinship obligations, serving as a fundamental mechanism for reinforcing social solidarity and communal responsibility. As articulated by Laksono and Topatimasang (2004), this tradition acts as a vital social institution that nurtures kinship bonds and facilitates cooperation, thereby sustaining and continually reconstructing the cultural identity of the Kei Indigenous society within an evolving sociocultural landscape.

**Challenges and Adaptations in the Contemporary Era**

In the contemporary socio-cultural landscape, marked by increasing individualism and the commodification of social relationships, traditional practices such as Ye lim and Nit ni Wangserve as resilient pillars of collective identity among the Kei indigenous people. These traditions function not merely as cultural remnants but as active forms of social organization that reinforce community cohesion. Drawing upon Durkheim’s (1995) concept of social solidarity, ye lim can be interpreted as a manifestation of organic solidarity, where mutual dependence and shared norms foster collective consciousness and integration within a diverse and evolving society. The endurance of these practices, particularly in urban centers such as Tual City, illustrates their central role in maintaining communal harmony, mutual respect, and socio-cultural cohesion. Extending beyond kinship ties (riin faam), these traditions encompass broader social structures such as entire villages (ohoi nuhu), facilitating ongoing cultural transmission and social communication (Laksono & Topatimasang, 2004).

From a political standpoint, Ye lim and Nit ni Wangare widely recognized within the Kei Islamic community as aligning with ancestral principles and religious norms. This alignment grants these traditions socio-political legitimacy and positions them as a form of moral capital for local leaders. Leaders who embody the value of lar in baba wir in soso—emphasizing hereditary lineage and ancestral responsibility—are often revered, thereby reinforcing leadership rooted in cultural identity (Rahawarin, 2016). Economically, while traditionally viewed as consumptive, ye lim presents opportunities for innovation in the form of cooperative financial models that promote community-based mutual assistance and economic resilience. This potential underscores the adaptive capacities of local wisdom systems in responding to contemporary economic challenges (Nuruddin & Aksa, 2022).

Religiously, the integration of Islamic rituals such as tahlil (recitations of Qur'anic verses) and collective prayers within the framework of Ye lim and Nit ni Wangexemplifies a syncretic process that sustains cultural relevance while reinforcing spiritual legitimacy. These practices continue to be performed with reverence across generations, signifying their enduring role in preserving both cultural and religious values (Eko & Putranto, 2019). The involvement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in revitalizing customary institutions further enhances the sustainability of these traditions. Mohamad Kabalmay, a youth leader from Tual City, emphasized this dynamic by stating:

***“Nowadays, the purpose of NGOs is precisely to strengthen customary institutions, including ye lim and Nit ni Wang”*** (In-Depth Interview, 2025).

This sentiment reflects a growing recognition among the younger generation of the importance of preserving cultural identity through intergenerational transmission. Kabalmay further explained:

***“Ye lim and Nit ni Wangare integral parts of Kei customs and serve as guiding principles for the Kei indigenous community. As a member of the younger generation, I fully support these traditions because they represent our identity, passed down through generations, and they do not contradict the teachings of Islam, which I believe in”*** (In-Depth Interview, 2025).

The Nit ni Wang ritual, in particular, embodies a complex cosmology involving reverence for ancestors and the unseen realm. Offerings such as tobacco, betel leaves, areca nuts, lime, and coins are not arbitrary but are deeply embedded in a culturally inherited cognitive system that reflects ancestral wisdom and spiritual intentionality (Laksono & Topatimasang, 2004). Participants must undergo purification, signifying the ritual’s sanctity and its function as a spiritual rite of passage. Despite its mysticism and mythological elements, Nit ni Wang has undergone institutionalization through religious gatherings like yasin-an and tahlil-an, ensuring its continued practice in an era of secularization and consumerism. The tradition’s significance extends beyond spirituality, representing a communal mechanism for reaffirming cultural identity and seeking divine blessing (Rahawarin, 2016).

**Institutional and Political Support**

The sustainability of these traditions is further reinforced through institutional and political mechanisms. Local political figures who actively participate in Ye lim and Nit ni Wangoften receive public approval, whereas those who neglect these traditions may face criticism or social alienation. For example, during the construction of the Grand Mosque in Tual City, the local government issued a directive mobilizing community-wide ye lim contributions. Structured donations included:

1. Department Heads (Kepala Dinas) : 5 sacks of cement

2. Agency Heads (Kepala Badan) : 5 sacks of cement

3. Division Heads (Kepala Bagian) : 3 sacks of cement

4. Subdivision Heads (Kepala Subbagian) : 2 sacks of cement

5. Civil Servants : 1 sack of cement

In addition, each marga (clan) was required to contribute IDR 200,000 monthly over a five-month period, amounting to IDR 1,000,000 per person. While the levels of contributions varied based on position and financial capacity, perceptions of inequality were largely absent, as even high-ranking officials were expected to contribute through both institutional and familial channels. The inclusivity of the ye lim tradition is particularly noteworthy—contributions were expected from all religious groups, demonstrating the tradition’s role as a unifying cultural force that transcends sectarian boundaries. This inclusive dimension underscores ye lim's significance as an intercommunal practice central to the construction and maintenance of Kei identity in a pluralistic society.

**Future Prospects and Challenges in the Preservation of Cultural Identity**

The enduring relevance of Ye lim and Nit ni Wangin Kei indigenous society reflects their critical role in shaping and sustaining cultural identity amidst contemporary challenges. These traditions are not merely historical remnants; rather, they represent dynamic systems of meaning that reinforce collective identity, social cohesion, and a shared ethical framework within the community. In this context, the continued practice of Ye lim and Nit ni Wangserves as both a cultural expression and a mechanism for intergenerational transmission of values. One of the key determinants of the sustainability of these practices is the reciprocal relationship between cultural traditions and political legitimacy. Political actors who actively participate in or support these traditions often enjoy enhanced credibility and legitimacy among local constituents. These traditions, therefore, function as symbolic capital that strengthens the communal bond between leaders and the populace (Laksono & Topatimasang, 2004). Conversely, political neglect of such customs can lead to social disapproval and perceived disconnection from local identity. Geographically, Tual City and its surrounding regions exhibit varying degrees of cultural preservation based on religious demographics. In areas such as Langgur, where the Catholic community is dominant, cultural traditions are preserved more robustly. This stands in contrast to Protestant-majority areas where reformist interpretations may discourage ritual practices. Meanwhile, within the Muslim community—particularly those aligned with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—support for local customs such as Ye lim and Nit ni Wangremains strong due to NU's inclusive approach toward indigenous culture (Rahawarin, 2016). Such religious pluralism plays a crucial role in the construction and affirmation of cultural identity, facilitating continuity rather than conflict.

The involvement of civil society organizations, particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs), further underscores the relevance of these traditions in the modern era. While NGOs such as El Masrum and Yayasan Nen Mas Il (YNMI) may not explicitly advocate for ye lim and Nit ni Wang, the personal engagement of their members with these traditions illustrates their embeddedness in the local cultural matrix. These organizations, active since 1999, have been instrumental in advocating for indigenous rights, peacebuilding, and grassroots empowerment—objectives that naturally align with the preservation of local wisdom. As articulated by Siti Rentua, the Chairperson of El Masrum:

***"Ye lim and Nit ni Wangare ancestral customs that do not contradict religious principles or the national ideology of Pancasila. On the contrary, they represent an embodiment of those values and should be preserved for future generations"*** (In-Depth Interview, 2025).

Similarly, the Chairman of YNMI affirmed:

***"NGOs that focus on community empowerment and peace education are inherently aligned with the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems, including Ye lim and Nit ni Wang"*** (In-Depth Interview, 2025).

From this perspective, cultural identity in Kei society is not a static inheritance but a lived and negotiated process. The consistent engagement of religious institutions, political figures, and civil society actors in preserving these traditions demonstrates the multiplicity of agents involved in constructing contemporary indigenous identity. Moreover, the political dimension of these practices is evident in the support provided by local governments. For instance, during the construction of the Grand Mosque in Tual City, the mayor mobilized contributions through the ye lim mechanism, standardizing donations based on public office hierarchy. Importantly, these contributions extended across religious groups, highlighting the integrative function of the tradition and reinforcing its central role in collective identity formation.

Despite modernization and the pressures of globalization, Ye lim and Nit ni Wangcontinue to serve as cultural cornerstones in Kei society. Their enduring relevance suggests that the construction of cultural identity is a dynamic process, one that necessitates ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity, community and state, the sacred and the political. The resilience of these practices confirms their centrality in the cultural identity of the Kei people—binding individuals not only to one another but also to their ancestral heritage and shared future.

**Cultural Erosion and the Imperative of Cultural Education**

Despite their continued relevance, ye lim and nit ni wang—as integral expressions of Kei indigenous identity—face significant challenges in the modern era. The forces of globalization, rapid urbanization, and the expansion of market-driven economies have gradually shifted communal orientations toward individualism and consumerism. These transformations have weakened traditional value systems, particularly among the younger generation, who are increasingly disconnected from their ancestral heritage (Bedaux, 1978; Smith, 2010). Cultural change is indeed an inherent aspect of social evolution. However, the current pace and nature of such transformations often outpace the community's ability to adapt while retaining cultural integrity. Demographic transitions, the weakening of kinship-based social structures, and the dominance of mass-mediated values further accelerate this detachment (Sulasman & Gumilar, 2013). In this context, cultural education emerges as a crucial mechanism for resilience—fostering awareness, appreciation, and intergenerational transmission of local wisdom that underpins social identity and cohesion. Educational initiatives—whether formal, non-formal, or community-based—must prioritize the revitalization of indigenous knowledge systems, including ritual practices, customary law, and oral traditions. By integrating Ye lim and Nit ni Wanginto educational and civic discourse, communities can assert their cultural agency and resist the homogenizing effects of modernity.

**Discussion**

The endurance and relevance of traditional practices such as Ye lim and Nit ni Wangamong the Kei indigenous community in contemporary society highlight the vital role of culture in shaping and preserving collective identity. These traditions are not mere symbolic gestures but are deeply embedded in the everyday lives of the Kei people, serving as mechanisms of social solidarity, cultural transmission, and identity construction. From the perspective of Émile Durkheim's theory of social solidarity, Ye lim and Nit ni Wangrepresent manifestations of both mechanical and organic solidarity. Ye Lim, a practice of voluntary communal contribution, aligns with Durkheim's notion of mechanical solidarity, where social cohesion is maintained through shared beliefs, values, and norms. This solidarity is evident in how the Kei people participate in social rituals without coercion, driven by a sense of moral obligation and collective consciousness. Meanwhile, the adaptive elements of these traditions—such as their inclusion in formal political and religious ceremonies—indicate a shift toward organic solidarity, reflecting the division of labor and the interdependence among community members in modern society (Durkheim, 1984).

Drawing on Clifford Geertz's interpretive anthropology, Ye lim and Nit ni Wangcan be seen as "webs of significance" that the Kei people have spun to make sense of their world. These rituals are thick with meaning, embedded in symbols, and performed through culturally specific acts that define who the Kei are. For example, the act of giving offerings in Nit ni Wang, with its prescribed items and ritual purification, serves not only a spiritual function but also reaffirms ancestral connections and social values. As Geertz (1973) argues, culture is not just a system of inherited conceptions but also a toolkit for navigating social life—precisely what these traditions offer the Kei community. Furthermore, Stuart Hall’s theory of cultural identity provides a useful framework for understanding the dynamic nature of Kei cultural identity in a globalized world. Hall (1996) posits that cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a positioning, constantly formed and reformed through history, culture, and power. In this context, Ye lim and Nit ni Wangserve as cultural anchors that resist homogenization and assert the uniqueness of Kei identity. While modernity introduces elements of individualism and consumerism, these traditions offer a counter-narrative rooted in collectivism, respect for ancestors, and social harmony. Their persistence illustrates Hall’s notion of identity as both a product of shared cultural codes and a site of contestation and negotiation.

The findings of this study resonate with previous research on indigenous traditions and social resilience. For instance, Laksono and Topatimasang (2004) emphasize the importance of traditional institutions in sustaining community cohesion and mutual support systems. Similarly, Rahawarin (2016) highlights the philosophical foundations of Ye Lim as a moral economy grounded in the ethics of reciprocity and voluntarism. These insights support the view that Kei traditions are more than cultural artifacts; they are functional systems of governance, welfare, and identity formation. Moreover, the study reveals that Ye lim and Nit ni Wangare increasingly utilized as political and social capital. Political figures who engage with these traditions often gain legitimacy and popular support, illustrating Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of symbolic power. The integration of these rituals into state-led development projects and religious practices shows how traditional culture can be co-opted into broader governance structures while maintaining its indigenous character.

The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) further underscores the adaptive capacity of Kei traditions. While NGOs such as El Masrum and Yayasan Nen Mas Il may not explicitly campaign for Ye Lim and Nit ni Wang, their implicit support, through advocacy for indigenous rights and education, contributes to the preservation and valorization of these practices. This aligns with findings by Smith (2010) and Sulasman & Gumilar (2013), who argue that cultural education and empowerment are essential strategies for sustaining local identities in the face of globalization. Nonetheless, the study also identifies significant challenges. Cultural erosion, driven by modernization, religious purification movements, and economic rationalism, threatens the vitality of these traditions. This condition, as described by Bedaux (1978), is not unique to Kei but reflects a broader crisis of cultural continuity experienced by many indigenous communities. The weakening of kinship ties, demographic shifts, and the rise of individualism all demand a renewed emphasis on cultural education and intergenerational transmission. In conclusion, Ye lim and Nit ni Wangare not just cultural practices—they are vital expressions of the Kei people’s identity, social cohesion, and resistance to cultural homogenization. They embody the intersection of tradition, spirituality, politics, and modernity. Their continued relevance in contemporary Kei society affirms the view that cultural identity is both historically rooted and dynamically constructed. By applying the theoretical lenses of Durkheim, Geertz, and Hall, we can better appreciate the layered meanings and enduring significance of these traditions in shaping the cultural identity of the Kei indigenous community today.

1. **CONCLUSION**

The preservation and continual practice of Ye lim and Nit ni Wangtraditions illustrate how indigenous cultural systems shape collective identity and character within Kei society. These customs are not merely ritualistic performances but serve as dynamic tools for constructing communal values, guiding moral conduct, and nurturing a sense of belonging. In the context of modern Indonesia, where the tension between tradition and transformation is ever-present, the Kei experience offers a compelling model of cultural continuity. As a society governed by adat (customary law), the Kei people demonstrate a profound commitment to their communal norms. Customary law is not merely a set of prescriptive rules but is deeply embedded in the daily lives of community members, forming what Alting (2010) describes as habitual law—a moral-legal order sustained through repetition, belief, and collective practice. In this worldview, society is conceptualized as an organic whole, where each individual’s identity is constructed through shared values, social roles, and mutual obligations.

Indonesia’s national cultural landscape is marked by its dual structure: the overarching national culture and the plurality of local ethnic cultures. While the national culture aspires toward unity and progressiveness, it must remain grounded in the rich tapestry of local wisdom. Traditions like Ye lim and Nit ni Wangserve as cultural anchors, offering enduring frameworks for ethical behavior, social responsibility, and spiritual meaning. Their continued relevance not only reinforces regional identity but also contributes to the broader discourse on national identity formation. Local cultural systems, when nurtured and empowered, become fertile ground for the regeneration of national culture. They provide the foundational narratives, symbols, and values that sustain cultural resilience. As such, engaging with local traditions is not a nostalgic endeavor but a forward-looking strategy for cultural sustainability. Ultimately, the pursuit of cultural awareness must be guided by biophilia—a deep respect and reverence for the living essence of culture. This stands in contrast to necrophilia, or a static, superficial attachment to the mere remnants of tradition. Through this lens, the vitality of Ye lim and Nit ni Wanglies not in their age but in their ability to evolve, educate, and empower future generations. Their preservation is essential not only for Kei society but also for the enrichment of Indonesia’s cultural pluralism in the face of globalization.

This study offers significant contributions to the understanding of cultural identity construction in indigenous societies, particularly through the lens of ritual and tradition. By examining Ye lim and Nit ni Wangwithin the Kei indigenous community, the study affirms the relevance of classical and contemporary sociocultural theories in explaining how traditions adapt and endure in modern contexts. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings reinforce Durkheim’s notion that ritual practices foster social solidarity and collective consciousness, especially within pluralistic societies navigating modernity. The integration of religious elements into these customs illustrates the evolution of mechanical solidarity into a more complex form of organic solidarity, where shared norms are negotiated across both traditional and religious domains. Through Clifford Geertz’s interpretive anthropology, the study underscores the symbolic and narrative function of ritual in shaping community meaning. The embeddedness of ancestral values and kinship in Ye lim and Nit ni Wangreveals how cultural performances serve as texts that communicate identity, social status, and collective belonging. Further, Stuart Hall’s cultural identity framework supports the argument that Kei traditions are not relics of the past but are continuously (re)constructed through socio-political engagement and generational negotiation. As local youth leaders and NGOs engage in their preservation, these practices become sites of resistance, adaptation, and reaffirmation of Kei indigeneity in the face of globalization. From a practical perspective, the study reveals that the active participation of political institutions, civil society, and religious leaders in sustaining traditional practices is essential for their continued relevance. The case of Ye Lim as a means of community-based contribution to infrastructure (e.g., mosque construction) demonstrates how traditional mechanisms can support modern governance and collective action. Moreover, the cross-religious inclusivity of these traditions underscores their potential as instruments of interfaith solidarity and peacebuilding.

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. First, the research was geographically centered in Tual City and its immediate cultural surroundings. While this region is significant within Kei society, future studies should explore Ye lim and Nit ni Wangpractices in more remote or rural areas to examine potential regional variations and adaptive forms that may differ due to socio-economic or religious factors. Second, the study primarily relied on qualitative data from key informants such as community leaders, religious figures, and NGO representatives. While these voices provide deep insight into cultural meaning and social structures, a more diverse participant base—including women, youth from non-leadership backgrounds, and adherents of non-Islamic faiths—could enrich the analysis and highlight underrepresented perspectives. Third, while the study engaged with classical and interpretive theories, further research could incorporate a postcolonial or decolonial perspective to examine how historical state policies, missionary activities, or global development agendas may have influenced the evolution or suppression of these traditions. This would provide a more critical understanding of cultural persistence amid structural inequality. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be employed to trace the intergenerational transmission of Ye Lim and Nit ni Wang, focusing on the role of digital media, urban migration, and formal education in either eroding or revitalizing these traditions. Finally, future research should consider comparative analysis with other indigenous traditions in Eastern Indonesia—such as those in Aru, Buru, or Papua—to explore commonalities and differences in how ritual practices serve as vehicles for identity construction, resistance, and adaptation in diverse sociopolitical ecologies.

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