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NEDUTA/NEBOLAI AS A MEDIUM OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE KAILI TRIBE'S PREMARITAL TRADITION

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ABSTRAK

Tradisi Neduta/Nebolai merupakan ritual lamaran pranikah masyarakat Kaili yang melibatkan keluarga, tetua adat, tokoh agama, dan simbol-simbol budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis Neduta/Nebolai sebagai ruang pendidikan Islam berbasis keluarga dan komunitas serta menelusuri kesinambungan dan perubahan hubungan adat dengan Islam. Penelitian menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif dengan perspektif historis. Data bersumber dari observasi, wawancara dengan informan komunitas yang disebutkan dalam catatan penelitian, dokumentasi, serta sumber tertulis mengenai adat perkawinan Kaili. Analisis dilakukan melalui reduksi data, kategorisasi tematik, interpretasi historis terbatas pada kesinambungan dan perubahan, analisis nilai pendidikan Islam, dan triangulasi antarsumber. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan enam nilai budaya utama: penghormatan terhadap perempuan dan keluarga, musyawarah, kesantunan komunikasi, simbolisme budaya, kesadaran terhadap struktur sosial historis, dan negosiasi antara adat dan agama. Secara edukatif, nilai-nilai tersebut ditransmisikan melalui keteladanan orang tua dan tetua, partisipasi calon pengantin, komunikasi simbolik, musyawarah keluarga, serta praktik keagamaan seperti pembacaan Al-Qur'an dan Barzanji. Namun, tidak semua unsur adat dapat dinilai secara otomatis selaras dengan Islam. Praktik penentuan hari baik melalui kutika dan penjelasan Nokolontigi yang berkaitan dengan roh jahat, keselamatan, rezeki, dan umur panjang memerlukan pembedaan antara fungsi budaya dan klaim teologis. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kontribusi utama Neduta/Nebolai terletak pada fungsinya sebagai mekanisme pendidikan Islam berbasis komunitas yang menghubungkan keluarga, adat, dan pembelajaran pranikah, dengan syarat unsur-unsur budaya dianalisis secara kritis berdasarkan prinsip Islam.

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Keywords:	ABSTRACT
Islamic education; local wisdom; Neduta/Nebolai; premarital education; Kaili tribe	Neduta/Nebolai is a premarital proposal ritual among the Kaili people that involves families, customary elders, religious figures, and culturally meaningful symbols. This study examines Neduta/Nebolai as a family- and community-based setting for Islamic education and traces continuity and change in the relationship between local custom and Islam. The study employs a qualitative descriptive design with a historical perspective. Data are drawn from observation, interviews with community informants identified in the field material, documentation, and written sources on Kaili marriage customs. Analysis combines data reduction, thematic categorization, historical interpretation limited to patterns of continuity and change, Islamic educational analysis, and triangulation across sources. The findings identify six major cultural values: respect for women and families, deliberation, polite communication, cultural symbolism, awareness of historical social stratification, and negotiation between custom and religion. Educationally, these values are transmitted through parental and elder modeling, participation by prospective spouses, symbolic communication, family deliberation, and religious practices such as Qur'anic recitation and Barzanji. The study also shows that Islamic compatibility should not be asserted for the tradition as a whole without qualification. The use of kutika to identify auspicious times and explanations of Nokolontigi involving evil spirits, safety, fortune, and longevity require a distinction between cultural function and theological claims. The main contribution of the study is therefore to conceptualize Neduta/Nebolai as a community-based mechanism of Islamic education that links family interaction, customary practice, and premarital learning while subjecting culturally inherited elements to critical Islamic evaluation.

A. INTRODUCTION

Local traditions are not only markers of collective identity; they can also operate as social environments in which values are learned through participation, observation, language, ritual, and intergenerational interaction. Recent studies in Indonesia show that local wisdom can support character formation when it is connected to family and community participation, culturally meaningful communication, and contextual learning (Arif et al., 2023; Akhmar et al., 2023; Baderiah & Munawir, 2024; MR et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2024; Ramadani & Fitrisia, 2023; Sakti et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024; Arizona et al., 2025; Permana & Widodo, 2025). In Islamic education, this perspective broadens the location of learning beyond schools, madrasahs, and pesantren by recognizing the educational role of families and social practices. Premarital education is particularly relevant because it prepares prospective spouses to understand responsibilities, relationships, and the ethical foundations of family life (Kamarusdiana et al., 2022; Haidir & Hizbullah, 2025; Handayani et al., 2026).

The Kaili people of Central Sulawesi maintain a sequence of customary practices surrounding marriage. The field material and the written record of Kaili wedding customs identify seven premarital stages: Notate Dala (seeking information), Neduta/Nebolai (marriage proposal), Noovo (determining the time), Nanggeni Balanja (delivering customary marriage provisions), Napasoa (traditional herbal steam bathing), Nogigi (removing selected facial hair), and Nokolontigi (a pre-marital purification ritual) (Hermin et al., 2001). Within this sequence, Neduta/Nebolai occupies a central relational position because the male family formally approaches the woman's family, customary and religious figures are involved, the woman's willingness

is considered, and symbolic objects and formal speech mediate communication between the two families.

Previous writing on Kaili premarital culture has described customary stages and identified moral or counseling values (Hermin et al., 2001; Rosmiati, 2021). Recent studies of other Indonesian marriage traditions likewise show that customary marriage can carry educational, philosophical, relational, and legal meanings that are negotiated between local wisdom and Islamic norms (Jafar et al., 2024; Said et al., 2024). However, describing values contained in a tradition is not the same as demonstrating an educational process. Three questions remain insufficiently addressed. First, who functions as educator and learner within the ritual, and through what mechanisms are values transmitted? Second, how has the tradition negotiated continuity and change as Islam became embedded in Kaili social life? Third, which elements can be interpreted as culturally neutral or educationally constructive, and which require critical theological evaluation rather than a blanket claim of compatibility with Islamic law? These questions are important because scholarship on culturally contextualized education emphasizes not merely the presence of values but the social processes through which they are transmitted and reinterpreted (Akhmar et al., 2023; Ramli et al., 2025).

This study therefore examines Neduta/Nebolai as a community-based setting of Islamic education. It addresses three objectives: (1) to reconstruct the position and historical-cultural meaning of Neduta/Nebolai within the Kaili premarital sequence; (2) to identify the cultural values and the educational process through which Islamic ethical and relational values are transmitted; and (3) to critically analyze the negotiation between custom and Islamic principles, particularly in relation to symbolic objects, *kutika*, and *Nokolontigi*. The novelty of the study lies in conceptualizing Neduta/Nebolai not merely as a premarital customary procedure but as a mechanism for transmitting ethical, relational, and religious values through family deliberation, modeling, participation, symbolic communication, and religious practice. This framing contributes to an understanding of Islamic education as a process that can occur within family and community traditions while remaining open to critical evaluation of inherited cultural elements.

B. METHOD

Research Design and Setting

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design with a historical perspective. The designation is deliberately narrower than a full historical-research design because the available evidence consists primarily of contemporary field material, oral accounts, documentation, and a limited number of written sources rather than a systematic corpus of archival documents subjected to formal source criticism. The historical perspective is therefore used to interpret continuity, change, social stratification, and the accommodation of religious practices within Kaili marriage customs. The study concerns Kaili communities in the Palu Valley and surrounding areas of Central Sulawesi as represented in the available field material.

Data Sources and Participants

Data were drawn from observation, interviews, documentation, and written sources on Kaili customs. The field material names Gazali Lapute, Hasyim Madarayu, Saleh Lahamu, and Samran D. Roja as community informants and also contains a surname-only attribution to “Rodja (2025)” in the discussion of Sambulu. Because the

available field record does not specify the informants' ages, gender, interview duration, interview dates, or the number and dates of observed ceremonies, these characteristics are not reconstructed here. The available record therefore supports identification of the named informants and their substantive roles but not a complete demographic profile. Table 1 makes the evidentiary basis and these limitations explicit.

Table 1. Data sources used in the analysis

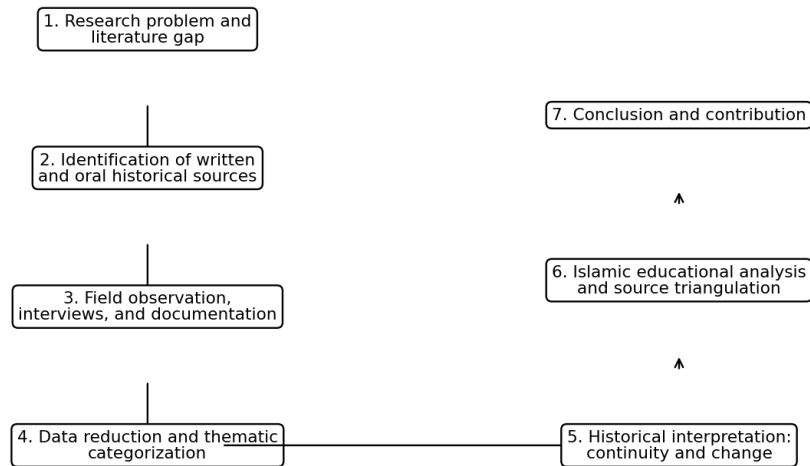
Source	Role in the manuscript	Information contributed / limitation
Gazali Lapute (2025)	Community informant	Oral account of Kaili origins and the meaning and procedure of Neduta/Nebolai. Demographic and interview-duration data are not available in the manuscript.
Hasyim Madarayu (2025)	Community informant	Oral account concerning the origin of the name Kaili and Kaili language distribution. Demographic details are not reported.
Saleh Lahamu (2025)	Community informant	Information on social stratification, marriage custom, and the relationship between custom and Islamic teaching.
Samran D. Roja (2025)	Community informant	Description of seven premarital stages and an informant view regarding the relationship between Neduta/Nebolai and Islam.
“Rodja” (2025)	Surname-only attribution	Statement on Sambulu as a customary binding symbol. The available record does not establish whether this refers to Samran D. Roja or another person.
Hermin et al. (2001)	Written historical-cultural source	Published description of Kaili wedding customs; used to compare continuity of terminology and stages.
Observation and documentation	Field sources	Reported in the original method. The available manuscript does not state observation dates, number of ceremonies, or document-selection criteria.

Data Collection and Analysis

The original study reports observation to understand community practices, interviews to obtain explanations from community members, and documentation to examine supporting materials. For analysis, the material was organized in five stages. First, descriptive data on the sequence and objects of the ritual were separated from interpretive claims. Second, recurring themes were coded into cultural values and Islamic educational values. Third, oral accounts were compared with the written description of Kaili wedding customs to identify continuity and change. Fourth, the educational process was reconstructed by distinguishing educators, learners, content, methods, and plausible educational outcomes. Fifth, claims concerning Islamic compatibility were reassessed using the distinction between socially beneficial custom and beliefs or practices that may require theological qualification. Triangulation was

conducted by comparing interviews, observation/documentation as reported, and written sources rather than relying on one type of evidence.

Figure 1. Analytical flow of the study



C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Historical-Cultural Position of Neduta/Nebolai

The Kaili marriage tradition described in the field material shows both continuity and adaptation. Informants portray customary identity as strongly maintained, while the manuscript also records that ceremonies prior to the spread of Islam and Christianity contained incantations associated with animistic beliefs. In later practice, marriage and death ceremonies were adjusted to the religions of their adherents, and explicitly Islamic practices such as circumcision, Qur'anic completion, and religious recitation became part of community life. This evidence does not demonstrate a complete chronological history of Islamization, but it does show an important pattern: custom was neither simply abolished nor preserved unchanged. Rather, selected forms were retained, meanings were reinterpreted, and religious practices were incorporated.

The distinction between the terms Neduta and Nebolai also reflects historical social organization. In the informants' explanation and the written customary record, Neduta was associated with common people and Nebolai with nobility, although both referred to the same basic act of formally proposing marriage. This terminology should be read as evidence of a historically stratified social order rather than as a justification for present-day inequality. The continuity of the two terms shows how linguistic markers can preserve historical memory even when social boundaries become less rigid.

Stages of Kaili Premarital Tradition

The seven stages reported by Samran D. Roja and the written customary source provide the broader sequence in which Neduta/Nebolai operates. Correct English terminology is important because literal translation can distort the ritual. In particular, Napasoa is not “smoking,” and Nokolontigi is not “divorce before marriage.” Table 2

uses functional translations that are consistent with the descriptions in the field material.

Table 2. Stages of the Kaili premarital tradition

Stage	Functional translation	Main function
Notate Dala	Seeking information	Family-based inquiry into the prospective partner and relationship status before a formal proposal.
Neduta/Nebo lai	Marriage proposal / premarital proposal ritual	Formal approach by the man's family, mediated by elders or respected figures, to seek the woman's and family's response.
Noovo	Determining the time	Deliberation on dates and practical timing for wedding-related events.
Nanggeni Balanja	Delivering customary marriage provisions	Delivery of agreed or customary provisions and gifts from the man's side.
Napasoa	Traditional herbal steam bathing	Body care and preparation of the prospective bride using traditional herbal steaming.
Nogigi	Removing selected facial hair	Grooming ritual interpreted as preparation and symbolic transition toward married life.
Nokolontigi	Pre-marital purification ritual	Ritual performed before marriage; some inherited explanations include protection, safety, fortune, and longevity and therefore require critical theological analysis.

The Neduta/Nebolai Proposal Process and Sambulu

Neduta/Nebolai begins after the man's intention has been communicated and a visit to the woman's family is arranged. The delegation is generally led by a customary or religious figure considered capable of using formal and metaphorical speech. The proposal is therefore not presented as a private statement by the prospective groom; it is embedded in a relationship between two families and mediated by people who carry social and moral authority. Gazali Lapute explained that the process is intended to determine whether the woman is available and willing before the proposal proceeds. The woman's family is not represented as having unlimited authority to decide without her; the field material states that her willingness should first be asked. This feature gives the ritual an important ethical dimension related to dignity and consent.

Formal speech is accompanied by Sambulu Pombeka Nganga, a customary set containing betel-related materials and other components. The dialogue uses high or figurative Kaili expressions, including *nikakava kami hi mopeinta ana kami ri sihi*, approximately “we have come to see our child here.” The indirect language reduces confrontation, shows respect, and creates a culturally recognized framework for discussing a sensitive family decision. The field material further explains that the condition of Sambulu can communicate acceptance or rejection: an opened or consumed content signals acceptance, while its return intact signals rejection. Thus, the object functions as a communicative medium rather than merely a decorative artifact.

Table 3. Educational and communicative meanings of Sambulu in Neduta/Nebolai

Element / practice	Meaning reported in the field material	Analytical educational significance
Betel/areca-related components, tobacco, gambier, lime	Customary completeness, respect, and connection with ancestral practice	A material prompt through which elders explain cultural memory and proper conduct.
Taiganja / customary valuable	Associated with opening formal speech and social status	Signals seriousness and responsibility in the inter-family encounter.
Formal metaphorical speech	Polite communication of intention	Models respectful language, restraint, and recognition of the other family's dignity.
Sambulu opened / contents taken	Acceptance of the proposal	Communicates collective agreement without humiliating direct confrontation.
Sambulu returned intact	Rejection of the proposal	Provides a culturally regulated form of refusal that protects social relations.

Cultural Values Transmitted Through Neduta/Nebolai

The descriptive material supports six recurring cultural values. These values are not treated as static essences of Kaili identity; rather, they are social orientations enacted through specific practices. This distinction is important because the educational relevance of a value depends on how it is performed and transmitted. Table 4 links each value to observable features in the ritual and to its educational significance.

Table 4. Cultural values and their social expression in Neduta/Nebolai

Cultural value	Expression in the tradition	Educational significance
Respect for women and families	Proposal proceeds through family consultation and the woman's willingness is considered.	Teaches dignity, consent, family responsibility, and restraint in intimate decision-making.
Deliberation and consensus	Families discuss acceptance, timing, and subsequent stages.	Normalizes dialogue and shared decision-making rather than unilateral action.
Politeness in communication	Formal metaphors and designated spokespersons are used.	Provides direct modeling of respectful speech and conflict-sensitive communication.
Cultural symbolism	Sambulu and associated objects mediate meaning.	Supports intergenerational transmission through material symbols and explanation.
Historical social stratification	Neduta/Nebolai terminology records distinctions between commoners and nobility.	Provides historical knowledge while also inviting critical reflection on changing social equality.

Cultural value	Expression in the tradition	Educational significance
Negotiation between custom and religion	Religious leaders and Islamic recitations coexist with customary forms.	Shows that cultural continuity can involve reinterpretation rather than simple preservation or rejection.

Neduta/Nebolai as an Educational Process

The strongest educational contribution of Neduta/Nebolai becomes visible when the tradition is analyzed as a process rather than as a list of values. The educators are not formal classroom teachers; they are parents, customary elders, religious figures, and respected family representatives who model appropriate behavior and explain customary meaning. The principal learners are the prospective spouses and younger family members who observe or participate, while the broader community also encounters shared standards of conduct. The content includes respect, consent, deliberation, responsible family relations, courteous communication, faith, and the social meaning of marriage. The methods are modeling, participation, observation, oral explanation, symbolic communication, and religious practice. This pattern is comparable to research showing that local wisdom and Islamic character may be transmitted through modeling, two-way communication, cultural immersion, community participation, and contextual integration rather than through textual instruction alone (Eko & Putranto, 2021; Hastasari et al., 2022; Arif et al., 2023; Sakti et al., 2024; Baderiah & Munawir, 2024; Arizona et al., 2025; Permana & Widodo, 2025).

Table 5. Educational framework of Neduta/Nebolai

Dimensi	Actors / content	Mechanism in the tradition	Evidence-based educational meaning
Educators	Parents, customary elders, religious figures, senior family representatives	Modeling conduct; guiding speech; explaining symbols; leading deliberation or recitation	Authority is exercised through example and mediation rather than formal teaching.
Learners	Prospective bride and groom; younger relatives; observing community members	Participation, observation, listening, response to family deliberation	Learning occurs in a situated social event connected to real family responsibility.
Content	Respect, consent, deliberation, politeness, responsibility, faith, kinship	Formal dialogue, symbolic objects, family decisions, Qur'anic/Barzanji recitation	Ethical and religious values are connected to concrete premarital action.

Dimension	Actors / content	Mechanism in the tradition	Evidence-based educational meaning
Methods	Modeling, oral instruction, participation, ritual practice, symbolic communication	Elders demonstrate language and etiquette; participants enact customary procedures	Combines verbal, behavioral, and symbolic forms of transmission.
Outcomes	Knowledge of custom; expected respectful attitudes and family responsibility	Inferred from repeated participation and social expectations	The manuscript supports intended/interpretive outcomes; it does not measure post-ritual behavioral change.

Religious practices strengthen this educational interpretation. The field material states that Qur'anic recitation and Barzanji are held after agreement as expressions of gratitude to Allah, and that shared faith is treated as important in establishing a household. These practices relocate the social event from a purely customary transaction toward a moral-religious frame. At the same time, an educational interpretation should not assume that ritual participation automatically produces measurable change. The present evidence supports intended and socially reinforced learning—knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral expectations—but does not include pre/post measures or longitudinal observation of marital behavior. The claim is therefore that Neduta/Nebolai provides an educational setting and mechanism, not that its outcomes have been experimentally verified.

Negotiating Custom, Islamic Principles, and Potential Syncretic Elements

The field material repeatedly characterized Neduta/Nebolai as not contradicting Islam. Such a general statement is stronger than the available evidence. A more defensible approach is to evaluate elements individually. Islamic legal thought recognizes the relevance of custom through concepts such as *al-'adah muhakkamah* and *'urf*, but customary practice is not accepted merely because it is inherited; its content must be assessed in relation to explicit religious principles, public benefit, and the avoidance of harm (Zahid, 2022). Recent studies of Indonesian marriage customs likewise show that the relation between *adat* and *sharia* is often negotiated rather than uniformly harmonious (Sormin, 2023; Jafar et al., 2024; Zulkarnain et al., 2024; Busriyanti et al., 2025; Akil et al., 2026).

On this basis, several elements of Neduta/Nebolai can be interpreted as culturally neutral or ethically supportive: family deliberation, the woman's consent, respectful speech, gift exchange within reasonable limits, kinship responsibility, and Qur'anic recitation. Sambulu can also be treated as a cultural symbol when its meaning is social—respect, communication, memory, and agreement rather than a claim that the object has independent sacred or causal power. The distinction between symbol and theological attribution is essential.

Two issues require particular caution. First, Noovo is described as involving the selection of good days or months through *kutika*. If *kutika* functions only as a customary calendar or practical scheduling convention, it may be understood as social organization. If, however, a date is believed to possess independent power to determine

fortune, safety, or marital success, the claim moves from cultural scheduling into a theological domain and cannot be validated simply through custom. Second, Nokolontigi is described as a purification ritual intended, in inherited explanations, to protect the prospective bride from evil spirits and obtain safety, fortune, and long life. The hygienic, aesthetic, social, or symbolic aspects of purification can be distinguished from beliefs that attribute supernatural causality to ritual objects or actions. A contemporary Islamic interpretation therefore requires reinterpretation of these elements in terms of prayer, ethical readiness, cleanliness, and reliance on Allah rather than on autonomous magical efficacy.

This critical differentiation also strengthens the historical argument. The manuscript itself reports that earlier ceremonies included animistic incantations and that later religious adaptation occurred. The evidence suggests a process of selective retention and reinterpretation: social forms such as family gathering, symbolic communication, and ritual sequencing were retained; explicitly Islamic recitations were incorporated; and some older explanatory layers may persist in popular descriptions. Rather than labeling the result either “purely Islamic” or “syncretic” as a whole, the more productive analytical question is which elements were retained, transformed, Islamized, or left theologically ambiguous. This approach treats Islamization as an ongoing process of cultural negotiation.

Contribution to Community-Based Islamic Education

The findings contribute to a growing body of scholarship that understands local knowledge as a resource for contextual education. Cultural transmission research in South Sulawesi shows that knowledge can be passed through oral narratives, ritual, everyday practice, and customary organization (Akhmar et al., 2023). Studies of Islamic and character education similarly emphasize family involvement, community collaboration, modeling, and culturally embedded practice (Arif et al., 2023; Yusuf et al., 2024; Sakti et al., 2024; MR et al., 2024). Internationally published research on Indonesian contexts likewise shows that local culture can strengthen cultural identity, character formation, curricular relevance, and community-grounded learning when it is deliberately connected to educational practice (Ratri et al., 2025; Yani et al., 2025; Arizona et al., 2025; Hasan et al., 2026; Wahyuni et al., 2026). Neduta/Nebolai adds a specifically premarital setting to this discussion. Its educational significance lies not in converting a wedding custom into a classroom curriculum, but in showing how ethical expectations are learned at the moment when two families negotiate a future household.

This study therefore extends the concept of Islamic education from formal institutions toward a continuum that includes family, community, cultural tradition, and premarital interaction. Such extension should remain consistent with Islamic educational aims and should not romanticize every inherited practice. Culturally contextualized Islamic education is strongest when local forms become vehicles for dignity, responsibility, deliberation, and faith while also allowing communities to critically reinterpret elements that conflict with religious principles or contemporary ethical commitments. This balance between preservation and critical reflection is also consistent with broader arguments for culturally responsive and pluralistic Islamic education in Indonesia (Mu'ti, 2023; Ramli et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

Neduta/Nebolai is best understood as a premarital proposal ritual situated within a wider sequence of Kaili marriage customs. Its central practices—family representation, consideration of the woman's willingness, deliberation, formal metaphorical speech, Sambulu symbolism, and subsequent religious recitation—show how a customary event can transmit cultural and Islamic ethical values through participation rather than through formal classroom instruction. The educational process involves parents, customary elders, religious figures, prospective spouses, and observing family members; its methods include modeling, oral guidance, observation, symbolic communication, deliberation, and ritual participation.

The study also refines the relationship between adat and Islam. It does not conclude that every element of the broader premarital tradition is automatically compatible with Islamic teaching. Socially constructive elements such as consent, respect, deliberation, kinship responsibility, and Qur'anic recitation can be interpreted positively, while *kutika* and inherited explanations of *Nokolontigi* require distinction between cultural function and theological claims. This element-by-element analysis is more consistent with the Islamic legal treatment of custom than a blanket affirmation or rejection of the tradition.

The main contribution of this study is the conceptualization of Neduta/Nebolai as a community-based mechanism of premarital Islamic education. It demonstrates how Islamic ethical, relational, and religious values may be transmitted through family interaction and culturally embedded practice. The study is limited by the absence, in the available field record, of complete participant demographics, interview-duration data, precise observation dates, and a wider archival source base. Future research should document these methodological details, compare different Kaili-speaking communities, trace historical changes with archival and oral-history sources, and examine how prospective couples themselves understand and apply the values learned through the ritual.

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