

The Acculturation Crisis and Religious Commodification in the Customary Conflict of Rencong Telang Kerinci

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Abstract:

This article is intended to analyze the role and position of religion in the Rencong Telang customary conflict in Kerinci Regency, Jambi, which has given rise to the dualism of customary institutions. There are two points of concern that will be highlighted in this article. First, religion and customs are facing an acculturation crisis. Second, efforts to commodify religion in winning the contestation. This study uses qualitative data obtained through interviews, observations, and document studies and then analyzed descriptively. The results showed that the Rencong Telang customary conflict took place when the role and position of religion weakened in the social order so that when adat was in conflict, religion was unable to build reconciliation. This condition threatens the acculturation of religion and customs of Rencong Telang, which has been created for a long time and is reflected in the philosophy of "adat bersendi syara', syara' bersendi kitabullah." Furthermore, religion in a vacuum is also vulnerable to being used as a commodity to seize influence and win conflicts by one or both parties.

Keywords: *Acculturation Crisis, Commodification of Religion, Customary Conflict, Rencong Telang*

INTRODUCTION

Acculturation, even though it is considered an accommodative social process, does not mean that it has solved all social problems related to religious and cultural relations. There is still a threat of a crisis or failure of acculturation that will lead to social disintegration. Geertz reminded us that religion not only creates harmony but also triggers division so that amid the Javanese community, who mostly embrace Islam while maintaining their Javanese identity, social conflicts still lurk in their daily lives (Geertz, 1976). This is the initial theoretical basis that can be put forward to examine the Rencong Telang customary conflict in Kerinci Regency, Jambi, which occurred several years ago and has not ended until this article was written (at the end of 2021). People who claim that their adat is based on *syara'* (Islam) are experiencing traditional dualism: two versions of traditional institutions with their respective everyday holders, and the indigenous people are

divided because of it. Meanwhile, religion has distorted meaning and is even commodified in the vortex of the conflict.

Several studies portray social conflicts with the background of religious and cultural relations in Indonesia. Humaedi's study on the Lampung conflict in 2012, for example, shows that two cultures that have been acculturating for a long time, namely the Lampung culture and Balinuraga, are still faced with conflicts that have a moderately severe impact, even though the trigger is only a trivial problem. It spreads to ethnic and religious issues. This incident is also considered a failure of the acculturation (Humaedi, 2014). The indigenous people of Datuk Sinaro Putih in Bungo Regency, Jambi, have also experienced conflicts with the dualism of customary leadership. However, the dualism here is between the village head—who is positioned by the local regulation as one of the adat stakeholders—and the head of the adat institution, thus giving rise to two leaderships in the village (Ridwan, 2018).

Meanwhile, the customary conflict of Rencong Telang has been raised explicitly by Mahli Zainuddin and Ahmad-Norma Permata. However, their study only looked at one side. Mahli and Ahmad explained that the Rencong Telang traditional institution, which had been on hiatus for a long time and was often plagued with conflict, 2017 succeeded in revitalizing so that new management, new customary holders, and new community spirit were formed. He also called this event a “kebangkitan adat” (customary revival). Mahli and Ahmad mentioned the significant contribution of religion in this event (Zainuddin & Permata, 2021). The incident, referred to as the “customary revival,” triggered a more significant conflict and has not been resolved until now. For that reason, it is essential to put forward this article.

These studies show that there have been many studies on social conflicts with the background of religious and cultural relations. However, these studies have not paid much attention to the role of religion when social conflicts occur in community settings that have experienced religious and cultural acculturation since long ago. This research will try to fill that space by highlighting two things about the *Rencong Telang* customary conflict. First is the crisis of Islamic and cultural acculturation. Second is the commodification of religion in customary conflicts. This article is expected to contribute in the form of enriching perspectives on the acculturation of religion and culture in Indonesia. It is not only highlighted as a historical romantic approach. Still, it must also be projected to build a reminder of the threat of acculturation crisis and social conflict.

This study uses qualitative data obtained through interviews, observations, and document studies. The use of qualitative data with the consideration that this study is to explore the meaning and give an interpretation of an event. From this point of view, qualitative analysis is considered a more relevant (Raco, 2010; Sugiyono, 2013). This study uses an acculturation approach and social conflict to understand the customary disputes, then the religious meaning reduction and religious commodification approach to understanding the position of religion in competition.

DISCUSSION

The Religious and Cultural Acculturation Crisis in Rencong Telang

The acculturation crisis referred to here is not a religious versus cultural conflict but a religious vacuum when culture is experiencing conflict. Crisis diction is used here to signify the relationship between religion and culture, which is moving away from the ideal point. The adage “adat with syara', syara' with scriptures” that lives in the Rencong Telang community who all embrace Islam is an ideal that requires religion and culture to strengthen each other in one social order so that when one of them is disturbed, the other elements will react. However, in the Rencong Telang community, whose customs are experiencing internal conflict, religion not only does not respond but becomes an object used for the benefit of certain parties. To explain the crisis, this discussion can be classified into three phases, as shown in the following table:

Table 1.1 The Phases of The Relationship between Islam and the Rencong Telang Custom

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Islam and the <i>Rencong Telang</i> custom have met and built a harmonious relationship, thus giving birth to the adage “ <i>Adat bersendi syara', syara' bersendi Kitabullah</i> ” (custom based on religion [Islam], religion based on The Quran)	The <i>Rencong Telang</i> custom is experiencing internal conflict, but religion (Islam) does not play any role (vacuum)	<i>Rencong Telang</i> customary conflict is getting bigger, so that it not only gives rise to two versions of customary institutions, but positions religion as a commodity to win conflicts by each party.

The first phase is the history of the meeting of Islam and Rencong Telang culture. The federation system in Kerinci, including *Rencong Telang*, existed before Islam's arrival and persisted after Islam Field arrival (Tago, 2009; Zakaria et al., 1989). In subsequent developments, *Depati Rencong Telang* was transformed into a collective-collegial leadership system. The history of Islam in *Rencong Telang* is part of the history of Islam in Kerinci. Before Islam, the people of Kerinci governed their social life according to custom; as their saying goes, “*adat basendi patut, patut basendi kepada yang benar*” (custom is based on propriety, while propriety is based on truth) (Ali et al., 2005). However, another opinion says that before the arrival of Islam, the Hindu-Buddhist religion had developed in the 14th century in Kerinci (Kozok, 2006). Meanwhile, based on solid evidence, Islam is estimated to have entered Kerinci around the 17th century (Tasman, 2015; Zakaria et al., 1989). There is an opinion that Islam had joined Kerinci in the 13th century, even before that. Still, upon critical examination, a stronger argument was in the 17th century with the main character Siak Lengih (Iskandar, 2020). However, in particular, Islamization in the Rencong Telang area was carried out by a number of figures, namely Hangtuao Maligei or Tuanku Nan Bagonjong from Minangkabau, Hangtuao Lubuk Camateh from Muko-Muko, and Hangtuao Palanao Pekak (Tago, 2015).

The entry of religion, both Hindu-Buddhist, and Islam, into the Kerinci area triggers a cultural transformation because one of the characteristics of religion is to bring commands and prohibitions that stimulate social change (Hamali, 2017; Saihu & Sahin, 2020; Syukur et al., 2021). However, Kerinci is already strong enough with its customs that were formed from the beginning, so that various cultural influences that come from outside, for example, Minangkabau or Jambi, must adapt to the Kerinci culture, as reflected in the Kerinci traditional proverb, “*teliti balek ke Jambi, undang balek ke Minangkabau.*” That is, all traditional and cultural influences that came from Jambi and Minangkabau (which at that period were aggressively spreading their influence to Kerinci) had to adapt to Kerinci customs but not be rejected (Ali et al., 2005).

The relationship between Islam and Kerinci customs built through acculturation is expressed in various aspects, including law, artifacts, art, and the daily activities of the people (Kusairi & Siswanto, 2020). Acculturation in the form of artifacts, one of which can be seen in the decorative motifs of the Great Mosque of Pondok Tinggi. This ancient mosque is the pride of the people of Kerinci (Alamsyah, 2001) and is administratively now in the Full River City area (*Kota Sungai Penuh Dalam Angka*, 2021). In the legal aspect, the traditional leaders and the people of Kerinci agreed to make religion the basis of adat, so that the adage known as “*adat bersendi syara’, syara’ bersendi kitabullah*” (customs based on religion, religion based on the book of Allah [Al-Qur’an and Hadith]), is a change from the adage Previously, “*adat basendi patut, patut basendi kepada yang benar*” (Ali et al., 2005).

The four formulas show the occurrence of Islamic negotiations with Kerinci customs, so some customs are entirely accepted because they are by Islamic teachings. Some customs are corrected and adapted to Islam. Some customs are left without having to be updated. Ismail Thaliby, in his dissertation, divides this pattern of relations between Islam and Kerinci customs into three: i) customs that are accepted as they are by syara’ without correction, such as the law of *bangun-pampeh*, which is in line with the principles of *jinayah* (criminal) law in Islam; ii) customs that are changed or abolished by syara’, such as drinking alcohol, gambling, and cockfighting; iii) customs that are not touched by syara’, such as inheritance law (Thaliby, 2000). In their various forms, customs that have gone through a process of interaction with religion often present as two mutually reinforcing elements, even as an inseparable unit (Faisal & Makinuddin, 2019).

The traditional conception of Kerinci has many similarities with the conventional concept of Minangkabau in the context of religious and cultural relations. This is understandable, considering that Kerinci has indeed received much influence from the Minangkabau (Sunliyensar, 2019), not only after the Islamic period but also before it, as evidenced by a letter from King Adityawarman to the ruler of Kerinci in the 14th century which later became known as the “*Kitab Undang-Undang Tanjung Tanah*” and is considered the oldest Malay manuscript in the world (Kozok, 2006). Minangkabau has the adage “*adat basandi syara’, syara’ basandi kitabullah*” and the conception of four types of adat (*adat nan sabana adat, adat istiadat, adat nan diadatkan, and adat nan taradat*) after the Padri conflict that led to The *Sumpah Sati Bukik Marapalam*, a consensus between traditional groups and religious groups (Abidin, 2006; Samad, 2002). This adage and concept of adat are applied in Minangkabau lands and the affected areas, one of which is Kerinci. However, in addition to forming these three patterns of relationship, the relationship between Islam and Minangkabau also produces new traditions that have not existed before, such as the Quranic *kebataman* ceremony (Aziz et al., 2020).

Islamic and cultural relations that have been built for a long time in the Rencong Telang or Kerinci areas, in general, began to face a new phase when several Rencong Telang residents returned from the Sumatra Thawalib Islamic Boarding School, Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, a boarding school founded by Abdul Karim Amrullah and Abdullah Ahmad, two prominent figures. Muslim reformers in Minangkabau (Djamil, 2022). They returned to Rencong Telang with a religious spirit with a reformist and puritan style, so several expressions of acculturation of Islam and Rencong Telang culture were considered not in line with pure Islamic teachings. However, Islam and Rencong Telang customs became more solid after this incident. Religious institutions and leaders have an equal position with traditional institutions and leaders (Tago, 2015).

The second phase is Rencong Telang traditional vacuum. The Dutch government did not have much cultural influence on the Kerinci area because its reign was relatively short, about 40 years, from 1903 to 1942 (Mirdad, 2019). The Dutch had made several reshuffles of the government areas of the *depat* in Kerinci, for example, by dividing Kerinci into a downstream area and a homecoming area (Sunliyensar, 2019), but this did not have much of an impact on the adat order. The threat to acculturation in Rencong Telang occurred in the 1980s, decades after Indonesia became independent from the Netherlands and Japan. Mahli Zainuddin identified that the Rencong Telang customary conflict began to surface in 1986, marked by the dismissal of one of the traditional leaders who was termed “*depat*” and a major reshuffle in the customary internal institutions. After that, public trust was re-established, and expectations for the Rencong Telang traditional institution strengthened again (Tago, 2009). However, the results of the overhaul, considered ideal, turned out to be short-lived. After that, they again faced a moderately severe problem. One of the customary holders is suspected of using the regular money from renting ancestral land without the approval of other everyday stakeholders. This action again resulted in dismissal. After that, the internal problems of familiar institutions continued to roll like a snowball that continued to grow from year to year (Tago, 2009).

In this condition, adat faces its internal conflict without any significant reaction or contribution from religion. This condition contrasts the adage *adat bersendi syara'* (customs based on Islam) developed through acculturation. When unscrupulous customary holders sell their ancestral lands for personal gain, then other everyday holders react, the religious side almost does not respond to the norms, even though in the elaboration of adat, it is said that the true adat for the people of Kerinci is *syara'* (Islam). The vacuum of adat holders and the silence of religious leaders indicate that the acculturation of Islam and Rencong Telang culture is on the verge of a serious crisis.

The third phase is the customary conflict in Rencong Telang. In this phase, everyday conflicts have surfaced. In the second phase, there have been many conflicts, but not many have occurred, so this article is termed the standard vacuum. This third phase of the competition was triggered by internal conflicts that were getting stronger, resulting in frequent dismissals and even the firing of traditional stakeholders. In 2017, several leaders and the village community drew up a new composition of Rencong Telang customary stakeholders, arguing that the old design did not gain legitimacy and public trust anymore. This is what Mahli Zainuddin calls the revival of the Rencong Telang tradition (Zainuddin & Permata, 2021).

The incident, claimed to be the starting point for the revival of adat, shows several irregularities according to the Rencong Telang custom. First, there was the addition of the term “Ujung Kerajaan Pagaruyung” (The Edge of the Pagaruyung Kingdom) behind the

name of Depati Rencong Telang, even though this term had never been known before (Gunardi, 2020; Irw, 2020). Second, this traditional institution built a traditional secretariat whose architecture is similar to the Minangkabau traditional house or the Silinduang Bulan palace in Pagaruyung, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra, with the characteristic of *bagonjong*, even though this kind of architecture has never been adopted in the Rencong Telang traditional area (*Penjelasan Dari Depati Atur Bumi Tentang Keberadaan Depati Rencong Telang Ujung Pagaruyung*, 2020). Third, the management of this conventional institution was confirmed by King Pagaruyung, Sovereign of the King of Alam Minangkabau Pagaruyung Darul Qoror Sultan Muhammad Taufiq Thaib Tuanku Maharajo Sakti (Putra, 2020), even though the four districts in Kerinci do not have a hierarchical relationship with the Pagaruyung Kingdom, and so far none of the departments in Kerinci has been confirmed by the Pagaruyung Kingdom. Fourth, the Rencong Telang Ujung Pagaruyung Kingdom customary institution has a notarial deed so that it is domiciled like a legal entity, even though it should be domiciled as a village community institution that is one unit with the village (Akta Pendirian Perkumpulan Lembaga Adat Ulayat Depati Rencong Telang Ujung Kerajaan Pagaruyung Pulau Sangkar, 2017). Fifth, several customary stakeholders were identified as not meeting the criteria according to the flow and appropriate in the Rencong Telang custom. Still, they were forced to do so under various pretexts. Sixth, the Rencong Telang Customary Institution of Ujung Pagaruyung Kingdom is strongly suspected of having claimed several customary lands of the Rencong Telang community and received compensation from the Batang Merangin Hydroelectric Power Plant (PLTA) construction project undertaken by PT. Bukaka Teknik Utama through its subsidiary PT. Kerinci Merangin Hidro. Several parties suspect that the funds used to build a custom secretariat that operates *Rumah Adat Bagonjong*, the architecture of the Minangkabau traditional, from or are related to the claim to the customary land because the amount is enormous, reaching around 3 billion rupiahs, even though the party concerned stated that the funds came from Corporate Social Responsibility (Zainuddin & Permata, 2021).

Seeing these irregularities, some of the community, including the customary holders who were previously deposed, reacted. Some of them once supported the celebration of the establishment of the Rencong Telang Ujung Pagaruyung traditional institution but later turned around. They build consolidation and support from various parties. Finally, the Depati Empat Alam Kerinci, the most authoritative institution in everyday affairs in Kerinci, does not recognize the Indigenous Institution of the Depati Rencong Telang Ujung Pagaruyung and only acknowledges the traditional institution of Rencong Telang without frills (Irw, 2020). They confirmed the King of Pagaruyung. It turns out that the Pagaruyung Kingdom was also experiencing leadership dualism at that time (Gunardi, 2020). The Pagaruyung Kingdom party on behalf of Raja Alam Pagaruyung who came to the *kenduri sko* Rencong Telang in 2017 was in fact only one version. Meanwhile, another version of the King of Pagaruyung says that the Pagaruyung Kingdom interacts with the Kerinci dept, but Kerinci is not part of the Pagaruyung Kingdom.

The traditional institution of Depati Rencong Telang has finally been reinstated. Support from various parties has further strengthened its existence and dismissed the claims of traditional institutions that use the term “Ujung Kerajaan Pagaruyung.” The Depati Empat Alam Kerinci stated that the legitimate customary institution was the Depati Rencong Telang, while the institutions that used frills were illegitimate and ahistorical. However, the traditional institution of the Depati Rencong Telang Ujung Kerajaan Pagaruyung did not want to subside and instead fought back. Finally, two versions of

customary institutions emerged, namely the Depati Rencong Telang Ujung Kingdom of Pagaruyung (from now on referred to as “the new version of the traditional institution”) and the Depati Rencong Telang (from now on referred to as the “old version of the traditional institution”).

Under these conditions, the acculturation of Islam and culture built for a long time in the Rencong Telang area seems threatened because customs and religion no longer go hand in hand and support each other. There are many segments of the whole series of daily conflict events that deserve to be commented on using religious arguments, but this did not happen; for example, regarding the deliberation between the two parties that did not go well, the suggestion to forgive each other for mistakes, mutual wills with the truth and patience, walking on legal rules, and the most crucial thing is about taking other people’s property (in this case in the form of customary land) by illegal means.

These phases show how religion, which was originally something foreign, was then well accepted in the culture of the people, then played an important role and became part of the community structure of Rencong Telang, but then tends to be positioned only in the symbolic area. Finally, when the cultural element experiences a shock, religion, set in the extended area, cannot play much of a role (Piliang & Jaelani, 2019). Religion seems to have lost its substance as a social glue (Shonhaji, 2012). At this point, the acculturation that was once glorified in the adage “*adat bersendi syara’, syara’ bersendi kitabullah*” is being threatened.

The commodification of Religion in Customary Conflict

The new version of the adat institution not only claims to be the legal owner of the Rencong Telang customary land but also receives compensation from the Batang Merangin hydropower project in the number of billions of rupiah. Meanwhile, the funds are used only by certain people. From this motive, the argument was then raised that this new version of the adat institution was indeed worthy of existence and that the old version of the adat institution was indeed worthy of being replaced. As for the position of religion, if in the previous description it was on the brink of an acculturation crisis, now it has been positioned as an object to gain profit by certain parties. In the notarial deed of a new version of traditional institutions, religious terms with various derivations can be found to support or strengthen their existence; for example, it is stated that this institution is based on Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, as well as adat and *syara’* (religion). The purpose and objective section state that this institution aims to preserve, practice, and defend customs and culture based on “*adat bersendi syara’, share bersendi kitabullah.*” Likewise, its membership is not only filled by customary holders (depati) and ninik Mamak but also ulama (religious leaders).

The idioms “*syara’*” and “*ulama*” used in the notarial deed automatically become part of the new version of adat institution’s claim to maintain their existence. By using religious terms, the latest version of the adat institution group wants to strengthen its existence that it is not only fighting for adat but also religion. Likewise, in socialization and daily interactions, the new version of adat institutions often presents activities with religious nuances, such as weekly *yasinan* events or religious *tausiyah* at their adat secretariats; the use of houses of worship as a means of gathering support; or image of the characters as pious people and obedient in practicing religion; while the old version of adat institutions and their feelings is the opposite.

This incident shows that a new version of traditional institutions is building what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital, namely an acknowledgment or legitimacy that comes from

other capitals, while other capitals can be in the form of social capital, cultural capital, or economic capital (Bourdieu, 1993; Herussaleh & Huda, 2021). In the context of the Rencong Telang customary conflict above, the capital transformed into symbolic capital is social capital in the form of social networks, organizations, and social interactions. Notary Deed and Decree Ministry of Law and Human Rights (Keputusan Menteri Hukum Dan Hak Asasi Manusia Indonesia Tentang Pengesahan Pendirian Badan Hukum Perkumpulan Lembaga Adat Ulayat Depati Rencong Telang Ujung Kerajaan Pagaruyung Pulau Sangkar, 2018) what is owned by the Rencong Telang Ujung Kerajaan Pagaruyung customary institution is social capital that can be transformed into symbolic capital, as well as support from a number of regional figures, including regional heads and members of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD).

Meanwhile, displaying religious and pious images in movement activities means an effort to obtain cultural capital because religion is a religious system (Kontjaraningrat, 2011). By bringing cultural capital, the new version of traditional institutions can easily transform them into symbolic capital in the form of recognition from the community so that their position is more robust and is considered indeed as a traditional institution that carries out the principle of "*adat bersendi syara*." By gaining social legitimacy, the new version of the adat institution will genuinely be considered the rightful owner of the Rencong Telang customary land, then receive compensation from the Batang Merangin hydropower development project. The transformation of social and cultural capital into symbolic capital is clearly illustrated. The symbolic capital is transformed back to economic prosperity, and financial wealth will build more considerable symbolic capital. Therefore, the thesis states that when social relations have turned into economic relations is actual (Hakam et al., 2017).

At this point, religion is treated as a symbolic commodity managed for profit by certain parties. This is possible because religious symbols do have the power to legitimize social and political movements (Hasan, 2014). In many ways, Islam and other religions often transform due to being used as a symbolic commodity (Turner, 2010). Whether we realize it or not, the commodification of Islamic symbols is rising in advertisements for cosmetic and fashion products (Pramudita et al., 2017; Setya et al., 2020; Thadi et al., 2019), tourism promotion (Suleman & Qayum, 2019; Zaenurrosyid & Ulfiana, 2016), management of educational institutions (Hidayah, 2021; Mursidi et al., 2019), electoral politics (J. & Hidayati, 2017; Mutho'in, 2015), etc. This time, the commodification of religion also took place in the struggle for economic resources using adat as an instrument.

In the Rencong Telang customary conflict, religious activities and symbols displayed by one version of the traditional institution are treated like objects that bring profit. Although initially not in the form of material gains, it also bears material benefits in the end. Religion not only does not play a role (or is played) as a mediator in the conflict but is used to win claims amid conflict. The recitation, *yasinan*, and other religious activities held by one version of the adat institution are not solely for religious purposes but to build public trust and gain social legitimacy that can be transformed into economic benefits. This scheme shows that religion which does not play a role in social life is not only prone to distortion but also becomes a commodity.

CONCLUSION

The series of customary conflicts in Rencong Telang, whose reconciliation process was not completed until this article was written, is only one of the social expressions of the adage “*adat bersendi syara’, syara’ bersendi kitabullah*” at different points and phases. This conflict is difficult to reach the end reconciliation because the elements of religion and culture that were once closely intertwined through acculturation no longer play an active and mutually reinforcing role in social life. When one is involved in a conflict, the other element cannot act as a good mediator. This is the starting point for the crisis of acculturation of religion and customs in the Rencong Telang area, Kerinci. Furthermore, religion does not only experience a vacuum. Still, it is treated as a tool for the interests of one party, like a commodity, so that it is not limited to an acculturation crisis but also a problem of religious and cultural meaning. This conflict shows that religion, which does not play a role in social structures and systems, is not only distorted in the sense of its adherents but also has the potential to become a commodity according to the interests of its adherents.

This article is expected to contribute not only theoretically to understanding customary and social conflicts but also practically to understanding the roots of the Rencong Telang conflict so that the reconciliation process can be carried out more quickly without harming any party because so far, the handling of disputes has started chiefly from the point of custom and minimal attention from the point of religion.

However, this article only focuses on the acculturation and commodification of religion during the conflict. It is recommended that further studies be conducted on the context of the Rencong Telang customary conflict, for example, the contestation of capital in conflict; for the context of social conflict in general, it is to examine the extent to which the acculturation (religious and cultural) crisis and the commodification of religion are correlated.

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