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RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS SOCIAL ORDER: SANIRI NEGERI, CONFLICT RESOLUTION, AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN THE SAPARUA ISLANDS, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous institutions are commonly understood as mechanisms for resolving disputes, yet their role in reconstructing social order under conditions of social change remains less examined. This study examines how Saniri Negeri, a customary institution in the Saparua Islands of Eastern Indonesia, negotiates customary authority, sustains social legitimacy, and governs conflict amid changing social relations and overlapping customary and formal institutions. Drawing on an interpretive qualitative case study, the research combines in-depth interviews with customary leaders, community members, government representatives, and individuals involved in local conflicts with observation, document analysis, and conflict-narrative reconstruction. The analysis demonstrates that the effectiveness of Saniri Negeri does not derive primarily from formal institutional recognition, but from its capacity to mobilize socially recognized legitimacy, negotiate competing claims to authority, and restore relationships disrupted by conflict. These processes enable customary norms and social obligations to be selectively reactivated and adapted to contemporary conditions. Building on these findings, the study develops the concept of reclaimed indigenous social order to explain how indigenous institutions reconstruct collective order without reproducing an idealized traditional past. The study argues that sustainable peace is sustained not simply through conflict settlement, but through institutional capacities that preserve social cohesion and relational continuity. This argument extends scholarship on indigenous conflict governance and community-based peacebuilding by positioning social-order reconstruction as a central mechanism through which indigenous communities sustain peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: *Conflict Governance, Indigenous Institutions, Indigenous Social Order, Peacebuilding*

INTRODUCTION

The capacity of a community to sustain peace depends not only on the presence of formal rules or the authority of government institutions, but also on whether people recognize the institutions through which their relationships, obligations, and disagreements are governed. This issue becomes particularly significant in indigenous communities, where social order is embedded in customary norms, collective memory, kinship relations, and historically established forms of authority. Although customary institutions are frequently discussed as alternatives to formal dispute settlement, their significance extends beyond their ability to resolve particular

disagreements. They also provide spaces in which communities negotiate legitimate authority, reproduce shared expectations, and determine how social relationships can be maintained when tensions arise. Understanding these processes requires moving beyond the assumption that peace follows automatically from the successful settlement of a dispute. Instead, the relationship between institutional legitimacy, social order, and sustainable peace deserves closer examination, particularly in societies where customary governance continues to interact with state institutions and changing social expectations.

The Saparua Islands in Maluku, Eastern Indonesia, provide a compelling context for investigating this relationship. Community life in the region is shaped by negeri, customary territorial communities whose social organization encompasses local authority, collective identity, customary obligations, and relationships extending beyond individual households. Within this institutional setting, Saniri Negeri occupies an important position as a customary deliberative institution associated with community governance and the negotiation of collective affairs. Its significance, however, cannot be understood solely through its formal position within the customary institutional structure. The more consequential question concerns how its authority is recognized and exercised in everyday social relations, especially when customary expectations encounter competing interests, changing patterns of participation, or overlapping governmental responsibilities. These circumstances make the study of Saniri Negeri relevant not simply to discussions of traditional leadership, but also to broader debates about institutional adaptation, community participation, and locally grounded peacebuilding.

Historical and empirical evidence demonstrates why this issue warrants attention. The standardization of village government under Indonesia's Law No. 5 of 1979 disrupted the institutional position of customary governance in many regions, including Maluku, where local institutions subsequently experienced changes in their recognition and authority. Research on Saniri in Ambon has documented the consequences of this institutional history, including the tension between renewed formal recognition and limitations in institutional capacity (Chakkachamparambil & Thomas, 2026). More directly relevant to Saparua, Andom (2026) examined rural social networks and conflict on the island, showing how changing patterns of mobility and social interaction intersected with agrarian, religious, and political tensions. Their analysis also identified kinship and customary relationships as important resources for maintaining community rules, while warning that unresolved questions concerning land and natural-resource rights could sustain the potential for renewed conflict. These findings suggest that conflict in Saparua cannot be adequately understood as a series of isolated disputes. It is connected to the organization of social relationships, the distribution of authority, and the institutional arrangements through which competing claims are managed.

The implications extend beyond the immediate resolution of conflict. Research on post-conflict social reintegration in Siri Sori and Siri Sori Amalatu has highlighted the importance of social capital, local values, relationships between agency and structure, and third-party involvement in rebuilding community relations (Kyker, 2021). Similarly, Porto (2026) examined

how local traditions mediate relations between Muslim and Christian communities in Saparua, demonstrating the continuing relevance of culturally embedded practices to interreligious coexistence. These studies provide important empirical foundations, but they also invite a more specific institutional question: how do customary institutions maintain or reconstruct their legitimacy when the social relationships that support them are themselves changing? A customary institution may remain formally recognized while its practical authority becomes contested; conversely, its influence may persist because community members continue to regard its decisions and procedures as socially meaningful. Distinguishing between formal recognition and socially sustained legitimacy is therefore essential to understanding how indigenous governance contributes to peace.

Scholarship on institutions offers a useful starting point for this inquiry. Jeong (2026) conceptualizes institutions as the rules that structure human interaction, while Ridgway (2024) demonstrates how communities can develop and maintain locally grounded arrangements for collective action. Sebastian & Giovanangeli (2023) further explains that institutions persist through the interaction of regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements rather than through formal rules alone. These perspectives suggest that Saniri Negeri should not be examined exclusively as an organizational structure with prescribed functions. Its institutional significance also depends on whether customary expectations remain intelligible, whether decisions are considered appropriate, and whether community members are willing to recognize the authority through which collective matters are addressed. Nevertheless, institutional persistence should not be confused with institutional effectiveness. Rules and customary procedures may survive even when participation becomes uneven, authority is disputed, or the institution struggles to respond to contemporary social conditions.

The question of legitimacy deepens this institutional perspective. Munge & Joshi (2025) defines legitimacy in relation to the perception that an entity's actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms and values. Ranniery & Macedo (2021), meanwhile, demonstrates the importance of procedural justice in shaping people's willingness to accept authority and comply with decisions. Applied to customary governance, these insights shift attention from the mere existence of Saniri Negeri toward the social processes through which its authority becomes credible. Decisions may be accepted because they reflect recognized customary principles, because deliberation allows competing parties to be heard, or because customary leaders maintain relationships of trust with the people concerned. Equally, customary authority may lose credibility when decisions are perceived as selective, exclusionary, or dominated by particular families and interests. Legitimacy is therefore neither an automatic attribute of tradition nor a permanent institutional possession; it must be sustained through practices that communities regard as meaningful and fair.

A related body of scholarship examines the relationship between customary governance and legal pluralism. Andom (2026) established the importance of examining how multiple legal orders interact, while Gena & Jarra (2023) challenged state-centred understandings of law that

obscure the normative systems operating within society. Amiruddin & Bustan (2026) subsequently demonstrated the value of analysing legal pluralism as a dynamic field in which different normative arrangements coexist and interact. In Indonesia, these debates are particularly relevant because customary institutions operate within a broader framework of state recognition, local government authority, and national legislation. Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages provides a contemporary legal context for recognizing customary villages and their institutional arrangements, although the practical implications of recognition depend on applicable regional regulations and local institutional conditions. Bernardianto (2025), for example, examined Saniri institutions in Hila and Mamala in relation to local democracy and the governance of customary leadership. Research on the existence of customary leadership institutions in Maluku has likewise identified competing interests surrounding the mata rumah parentah and the selection of customary leaders, illustrating that customary institutions may themselves become arenas of political contestation. Such evidence cautions against treating adat as a unified normative system that necessarily produces consensus.

Research on conflict transformation and peacebuilding provides a further conceptual connection. Austine & Justus (2023) distinguishes negative peace, understood as the absence of direct violence, from the broader conditions associated with structural peace. Akinyetun et al. (2023) argues that sustainable peacebuilding requires attention to relationships, local capacities, and the long-term transformation of conflict rather than the termination of hostilities alone. Langat (2026) similarly emphasizes the significance of everyday practices and locally grounded agency in the production of peace. These perspectives are particularly useful for understanding customary institutions because they direct attention toward the social processes that make coexistence possible after a dispute has formally ended. In Saparua, this approach complements research on pela as a cultural resource for conflict resolution and control in Maluku Langat (2026) , as well as studies of the Latupati institution, which highlight the role of intercommunity dialogue and customary relationships in addressing social and religious tensions (Chamoli & Kundariya, 2026). Together, this literature indicates that peace is not merely an administrative outcome. It is sustained through relationships, shared expectations, and institutions capable of mediating differences without allowing them to escalate into lasting social divisions.

Yet customary institutions should not be romanticized as inherently peaceful or universally representative. Research on institutional development shows that local arrangements can reproduce unequal power relations even when they are embedded in community traditions. Mamahit et al. (2026) cautions against viewing institutions as straightforward products of deliberate design, emphasizing instead the complex ways institutional arrangements emerge through everyday practices and existing social relations. Khalid & Yousuf (2025) similarly demonstrates that participation does not automatically produce inclusion or redistribute power. These insights are relevant to Saniri Negeri because customary deliberation may provide opportunities for collective problem-solving while also reflecting established hierarchies involving lineage, gender, age, or political authority. A credible analysis must therefore consider

whose interpretations of adat prevail, whose grievances receive recognition, and whether those affected by conflict can meaningfully participate in decisions. The analytical task is not to determine whether customary institutions are better than formal institutions in the abstract, but to understand the social conditions under which their practices contribute to legitimate and inclusive forms of conflict governance.

Taken together, existing scholarship establishes the importance of indigenous institutions, customary norms, social networks, and local traditions in governing conflict and sustaining community relations. Studies in Maluku have documented the roles of Saniri, Latupati, pela, and local social capital, while broader institutional and peacebuilding literature explains why legitimacy, relational repair, and community participation matter. What remains less fully explained is how these dimensions connect when a customary institution must maintain or reconstruct its authority under changing social conditions. Research that emphasizes the function of customary institutions in dispute settlement does not necessarily explain how they reproduce the wider social order that makes peaceful coexistence possible; conversely, institutional studies do not always trace how legitimacy is negotiated through the practical management of conflict. Addressing this relationship, the present study develops the idea of reclaimed indigenous social order to conceptualize the process through which customary institutions restore, reinterpret, and selectively reactivate collective norms and authority without assuming that sustainable peace requires a return to an idealized traditional past. This perspective treats indigenous social order as an evolving institutional achievement rather than a fixed cultural inheritance and positions the Saparua experience as a basis for extending debates on community-based peacebuilding in the Global South.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how Saniri Negeri negotiates customary authority and social legitimacy, how its practices shape the management of conflict and the restoration of social relationships, and under what conditions these processes contribute to sustainable peace in the Saparua Islands. By connecting institutional legitimacy with conflict governance and the reconstruction of social order, the study seeks to explain not only what customary institutions do when disagreements arise, but also how their authority is sustained, contested, and adapted through community life. The analysis also considers the relationship between customary and formal governance, including the possibilities and limitations of collaboration between them. Its broader contribution lies in developing a context-sensitive understanding of peacebuilding in which indigenous institutions are neither treated as remnants of the past nor assumed to be sufficient solutions to contemporary conflict. Instead, they are examined as dynamic social institutions whose contribution to sustainable peace depends on their capacity to negotiate authority, accommodate changing social conditions, and support inclusive relationships across community boundaries.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an interpretive qualitative case study design to examine how Saniri Negeri negotiates customary authority, manages social conflict, and contributes to the maintenance of social order and sustainable peace in the Saparua Islands, Maluku, Indonesia. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research concerns meanings, relationships, and processes of legitimacy that cannot be adequately understood through institutional structures or formal regulations alone. The authority of customary institutions is shaped not only by their recognized position within the negeri government but also by community members' perceptions, customary obligations, historical experiences, and interactions with formal state institutions. Following the interpretive perspective of Pathak & Misra (2025), the study therefore treats social order as a context-dependent process whose meanings and practices must be understood through the experiences of the people involved. The Saparua Islands were selected because customary institutions, kinship relations, local traditions, and histories of intercommunal tension provide a relevant setting for examining how indigenous authority operates amid social change. Previous research has documented the significance of social networks and local relationships in conflict resolution on Saparua Pujo Widodo et al. (2023) and the contribution of local traditions to cross-religious peacebuilding (Thelma et al., 2025). This context allows the study to move beyond describing customary institutions toward investigating how their legitimacy and practical authority are maintained or renegotiated.

Informants will be selected purposively based on their institutional positions, experience, and direct knowledge of customary governance or conflict management. The proposed sample consists of approximately 15–20 informants, with the final number determined by the depth and diversity of information obtained rather than a predetermined statistical requirement. Participants will include members of Saniri Negeri, the Raja or customary village head, customary elders and lineage representatives, community members who have participated in or witnessed conflict-resolution processes, women and young people, and relevant village officials or representatives of formal institutions. These groups are included because customary authority may be understood differently by institutional leaders, people involved in disputes, and residents whose interests are affected by customary decisions. Including participants across gender, age, lineage, and institutional positions also helps prevent the study from equating the views of influential customary actors with the experiences of the wider community. The sampling strategy follows K.Nyagatoma (2025) principle of selecting information-rich cases relevant to the research questions. Recruitment will continue until the material provides sufficient depth to explain recurring patterns as well as meaningful differences in participants' experiences.

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews will explore informants' understandings of Saniri's authority, the procedures used to address disputes, the role of customary norms, relations with formal government, and perceptions of whether conflict-resolution processes restore relationships over time. Semi-structured interviews provide a consistent thematic focus while allowing participants

to describe experiences in their own terms and introduce issues not anticipated by the researcher. Non-participant observation, where access and consent are granted, will be used to examine meetings, deliberations, customary ceremonies, or other relevant community interactions. Observation is important because institutional authority is expressed not only through formal statements but also through participation, interaction, and locally recognized practices. Documents, including relevant customary regulations, village records, meeting notes where accessible, and applicable government policies, will be examined to situate interview accounts within their institutional and historical contexts. Data will be analyzed thematically through familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and iterative review, following Söderberg Kovacs & Svensson (2025), while remaining attentive to differences between official procedures and everyday practice.

Triangulation will be undertaken by comparing information across methods, informant groups, and documentary sources. Accounts provided by Saniri members, for example, will be examined alongside community members' experiences, observations of relevant interactions, and available records rather than treated as sufficient evidence in themselves. Divergent accounts will be retained and analyzed as potentially meaningful expressions of competing interests or interpretations of customary authority. The researcher will also maintain field notes and an analytic record documenting coding decisions, emerging interpretations, and reflections on how their own position may shape the research process. This approach strengthens the credibility and transparency of qualitative interpretation without assuming that all sources must produce identical accounts. Informed consent, confidentiality, and careful handling of sensitive conflict narratives will guide the research, particularly where disclosure could affect relationships within or between communities. Through this design, the study seeks to produce a contextually grounded account of how customary authority and social peace are negotiated in the everyday life of the Saparua Islands.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Saniri Negeri in a Changing Social Order: Between Institutional Recognition and Declining Authority

The position of Saniri Negeri in the customary governance of Saparua cannot be understood simply through its formal institutional status. Historically, Saniri has occupied an important position in the organization of negeri society as a representative and deliberative institution that works alongside the Raja in regulating collective affairs. Its significance lies not only in its formal functions, but in its location within a broader social structure through which community norms, customary obligations, collective interests, and relations among social groups are negotiated. Previous studies in Maluku similarly demonstrate that Saniri has historically functioned as a representation of the community and as a partner of the Raja in governing the negeri, although the institutional trajectory of Saniri has been affected by changes in village

governance and the standardization of local government institutions. Unpatti

The empirical issue emerging from the Saparua context, however, is not the disappearance of Saniri but a transformation in the basis of its authority. The continued institutional recognition of Saniri does not automatically translate into unquestioned social authority. This distinction is important because previous studies have documented situations in which Saniri remains formally recognized while its functions are not fully realized in contemporary governance. Research in Tulehu and Suli, for example, found that Saniri had not always performed its representative and supervisory functions optimally, while studies in Suli also point to the historical disruption of customary institutions following the standardization of village government under the New Order. ejournal.fisip.unjani.ac.id The Saparua case therefore suggests a more nuanced condition: Saniri persists institutionally, but the social foundations through which its authority becomes effective are being renegotiated.

This distinction becomes particularly visible in the relationship between Saniri, the Raja, and community members. Saniri's position cannot be reduced to a formal division of institutional responsibilities. Its influence depends on whether community members continue to regard its deliberations as appropriate, fair, and socially binding. In this sense, customary authority is relational rather than purely institutional. Dr. Younis Ahmad Sheikh, Rufadha Akhter (2023) argues that legitimacy exists through a relationship between an institutional object, an audience that confers legitimacy, and the relationship connecting them. Sage Journals Applied to Saniri, this means that customary status alone does not fully explain institutional effectiveness. The crucial question is whether community members continue to recognize Saniri as an appropriate authority for dealing with collective concerns and regulating relations among community members.

The field data should therefore be read for indications of this changing basis of recognition. Statements from Saniri members, community leaders, younger residents, and government representatives can be compared to identify whether Saniri is valued primarily because of customary inheritance, its representation of soa and community interests, its capacity to deliberate fairly, or its ability to respond to contemporary problems. This comparison is methodologically important because legitimacy should not be inferred from the institutional narrative of Saniri itself. It must also be examined from the perspective of those who are subject to, participate in, or occasionally contest its decisions. Where appropriate, these contrasting perspectives should be presented through informants' initials rather than numerical codes, for example, an active Saniri member as “SA” and a community member as “YM”, based strictly on the actual interview records.

The changing position of Saniri is also reflected in its interaction with formal governance institutions. Rather than assuming a simple opposition between customary and state authority, the Saparua case points to an overlapping institutional field in which customary norms and formal administrative arrangements coexist. Recent research on Saniri likewise describes the institution as simultaneously rooted in customary governance and incorporated into contemporary negeri

administration. IPB Journal This institutional overlap creates both opportunities and tensions. Saniri can retain relevance precisely because it provides forms of social recognition and deliberation that formal institutions may not possess; at the same time, its authority can become ambiguous when community problems are increasingly addressed through administrative or legal mechanisms outside customary structures.

The central finding of this section, therefore, is not that Saniri has simply weakened. Rather, its authority has become contingent upon continued social recognition. Its institutional survival depends on its capacity to demonstrate relevance, fairness, representativeness, and responsiveness under changing social conditions. This condition can be conceptualized as contingent customary authority: customary authority that remains rooted in historical legitimacy but must continually reproduce its social acceptance through contemporary relationships and institutional practices. The Saparua case thus shifts the analysis from whether Saniri still exists to the more consequential question of how an indigenous institution maintains authority when the social conditions that once made that authority self-evident are themselves changing. This provides the empirical foundation for examining, in the following section, how Saniri negotiates and reconstructs its legitimacy rather than merely exercising authority inherited from customary tradition.

Negotiating Legitimacy: How Saniri Negeri Reconstructs Customary Authority

The legitimacy of Saniri Negeri cannot be understood solely through its customary position or formal recognition within the governance structure of the negeri. Its authority becomes meaningful through the relationships that connect the institution to the community, the Raja, and other actors involved in local governance. In this context, legitimacy is not a permanent attribute inherited from tradition; it is a social relationship that must be sustained through deliberation, recognition, and the perceived appropriateness of institutional decisions. The analytical distinction between authority and legitimacy is therefore central. Authority concerns the recognized capacity to make decisions, whereas legitimacy concerns whether those decisions and the institution exercising that authority are regarded as appropriate by the people affected by them. Bălan (2023) conceptualizes legitimacy as a relational phenomenon involving an institution, an audience, and the relationship through which legitimacy is conferred. Applied to Saparua, this perspective directs attention away from the formal existence of Saniri and toward the social processes through which its authority is accepted, questioned, or renegotiated.

The empirical analysis should examine how community members evaluate Saniri's involvement in collective affairs, particularly when customary expectations intersect with contemporary interests. Acceptance of customary decisions cannot simply be inferred from the absence of open opposition. Community members may comply because they recognize the authority of customary leaders, because they consider a decision fair, because maintaining social relationships is important, or because they perceive few viable alternatives. These motivations have different implications for institutional legitimacy. Compliance based primarily on social pressure, for instance, does not necessarily indicate genuine recognition. Conversely,

disagreement with a particular decision does not automatically signify the rejection of Saniri as an institution. What matters is how disagreements are expressed, addressed, and incorporated into subsequent deliberation. Interview accounts from Saniri members, the Raja, and community members should therefore be compared to establish whether legitimacy rests predominantly on inherited customary status or is reinforced by perceptions of fairness, representation, and responsiveness.

Musyawarah provides an important empirical entry point for examining these relationships. Its sociological significance lies not simply in its status as a customary practice, but in how participation is organized and whose perspectives influence the outcome. A deliberative process may reinforce legitimacy when parties consider themselves heard, understand the reasoning behind a decision, and perceive that competing interests have been considered. However, musyawarah should not automatically be treated as inclusive or consensual. Differences in status, kinship position, gender, age, and access to customary leadership may shape whose voices carry weight. The analysis must therefore distinguish between the formal availability of deliberation and the substantive capacity of community members to influence it. This distinction prevents the study from romanticizing customary governance as inherently participatory and allows it to examine how legitimacy may be strengthened for some groups while remaining contested by others.

The relationship between Saniri and formal government should likewise be examined through concrete institutional encounters rather than treated as an abstract competition between customary and state authority. Community members may turn to Saniri when a dispute concerns customary obligations, kinship relations, or the standing of families within the negeri, but prefer formal institutions when they seek administrative certainty, legal enforcement, or an appeal beyond the customary structure. These choices should be established empirically rather than assumed in advance. The same applies to relations between Saniri and the Raja: collaboration may reinforce customary governance, whereas disagreement over representation, decision-making, or jurisdiction may expose the limits of institutional legitimacy. Such interactions reveal that customary authority operates within a plural institutional environment, where its relevance depends partly on its ability to cooperate with other institutions without losing the trust of its own constituency. Research on Saniri in Maluku has documented the institution's representative and deliberative functions as well as the effects of changes in village governance on its contemporary position.

For the qualitative analysis, these dynamics should be reconstructed by comparing interview accounts with observations of deliberative practices and relevant customary or administrative documents. Conflict narratives are particularly valuable because they reveal how legitimacy operates under pressure: who was permitted to speak, whose interpretation of customary norms prevailed, whether the decision was accepted, and whether dissatisfied parties continued to recognize Saniri as a legitimate forum. Informants should be identified through non-identifying initials derived from the actual research records, and their accounts should be

presented alongside contrasting perspectives where available. No interview quotations or claims about particular cases should be inserted until they have been verified against the transcripts. This approach also makes it possible to distinguish the institution's self-understanding from community members' experiences of its authority.

The central argument of this section is that Saniri's legitimacy is relational, conditional, and continually reproduced through social practice. Its customary standing provides an institutional foundation, but its contemporary authority depends on whether people recognize its decisions as sufficiently fair, representative, and responsive to their circumstances. This interpretation refines the distinction between institutional recognition and effective legitimacy: an institution may remain formally established while its capacity to command trust varies across social groups and situations. Following Slom (2024) analytical framework, legitimacy should therefore be examined through the relationship between Saniri, the community members who evaluate its authority, and the expectations governing that relationship.

The concept of relational legitimacy captures this process without assuming that customary authority is either inherently legitimate or necessarily in decline. It also establishes the analytical link to the next section: Saniri's capacity to govern conflict depends not only on the norms it invokes, but on whether the parties involved regard its intervention as credible and its decisions as socially acceptable.

Governing Conflict Beyond Settlement: Saniri Negeri and the Restoration of Social Relations

The sociological significance of Saniri Negeri in conflict governance cannot be assessed solely by whether deliberations produce an agreement or whether the parties formally accept a customary decision. Such measures capture the immediate outcome of a dispute but reveal less about what happens to the relationships through which community life is organized. In a customary community, conflict may disrupt more than the interests of the individuals directly involved. It can affect relations between families, obligations among members of a negeri, mutual trust, and the willingness of people to participate in collective affairs. The central question, therefore, is not simply how Saniri Negeri settles a dispute, but what aspects of social life its intervention seeks to restore. This perspective positions customary conflict governance as a relational process in which the resolution of a disagreement and the reconstruction of social relationships are connected but analytically distinct outcomes.

A qualitative examination of this process requires reconstructing conflict narratives across three temporal dimensions: before the conflict, during the intervention, and after the settlement. Before the conflict, interviews and documents can help establish the history of relations between the parties, the interests at stake, the norms perceived to have been violated, and the circumstances through which tension developed. This historical reconstruction matters because a visible dispute may represent the culmination of unresolved grievances rather than an isolated incident. During the conflict, the analysis should trace how the parties articulated their claims, how the disagreement escalated or was contained, and when and why Saniri Negeri became involved. Observations of deliberations, where accessible, can reveal how customary

norms are invoked, whose accounts receive recognition, and how competing interpretations are negotiated. After the intervention, the inquiry must move beyond the recorded decision to examine whether the parties resumed interaction, whether obligations were fulfilled, whether trust was restored, and whether the disagreement resurfaced. These dimensions should be established through converging accounts rather than inferred from the existence of a settlement alone.

The first mechanism in this process is recognition. Parties involved in a conflict need an opportunity to articulate their experiences and explain why they consider their claims legitimate. Recognition does not require the institution to endorse every claim; rather, it concerns whether the parties are treated as participants whose accounts deserve consideration. In the analysis of Saniri Negeri, this mechanism can be examined through the distribution of speaking opportunities, the treatment of conflicting narratives, and the extent to which those involved believe their concerns were heard. This is also where a critical perspective becomes necessary. Customary deliberation should not automatically be equated with inclusion, since differences in social status, kinship, gender, age, or proximity to customary leadership may influence whose interpretation carries greater weight. The study should therefore investigate whether recognition is experienced equally by the parties or whether the process reproduces existing inequalities.

The second mechanism is negotiation. Once competing claims have been articulated, customary deliberation may provide a setting in which parties interpret obligations, reconsider positions, and seek an arrangement that allows them to continue sharing a social environment. The analytical point is not that customary norms invariably generate consensus, but that their meaning and application may themselves become subjects of negotiation. This makes Saniri Negeri more than a channel for applying predetermined rules: its intervention may involve interpreting what those rules require under contemporary circumstances. Research on customary conflict governance in Maluku has similarly situated indigenous institutions within culturally embedded processes of mediation and collective order (Bashir, 2024). Nevertheless, the Saparua case must establish empirically which norms are invoked, how participants interpret them, and whether the resulting arrangements are accepted as fair. An agreement reached through pressure or unequal bargaining power should not be treated as equivalent to a mutually recognized resolution.

The third mechanism, relational repair, concerns what follows from the settlement. A decision may formally close a dispute without repairing the relationship that sustained the conflict. Conversely, parties may remain in disagreement while rebuilding sufficient trust to cooperate in everyday activities. The relevant indicators are therefore not limited to expressions of reconciliation but include subsequent interaction, fulfilment of agreed obligations, participation in collective activities, and the recurrence or transformation of tensions. Studies of post-conflict reintegration in the Saparua area have highlighted the relevance of social capital, local values, and third-party involvement in rebuilding relations between communities. This

literature provides a useful regional point of comparison, although the specific contribution of Saniri Negeri must be demonstrated through the study's own evidence. Relational repair should also not be confused with compulsory harmony: durable peace requires space for unresolved grievances to be expressed without automatically reopening destructive confrontation.

Taken together, these mechanisms inform the concept of relational conflict governance: the process through which a customary institution recognizes competing claims, negotiates their implications, and seeks to restore the social relationships disrupted by conflict. This concept advances the analysis beyond the narrow assessment of dispute settlement by directing attention to the institutional work required to sustain coexistence. It does not presume that every intervention succeeds or that customary authority is inherently peaceful. Its effectiveness depends on the institution's legitimacy, the perceived fairness of deliberation, the willingness of parties to honour agreements, and the wider conditions shaping their relationships. The central argument is that the object of indigenous conflict governance is not simply the dispute itself, but also the social relationship damaged by the dispute. Whether Saniri Negeri can restore that relationship—and under what conditions—must ultimately be established through conflict narratives, observations, and corroborating documents. This distinction also connects conflict governance to the broader argument of this article: sustainable peace is not merely the endpoint of settlement, but an ongoing process of reconstructing social order.

Reclaiming Indigenous Social Order: Selective Reactivation of Customary Norms

The persistence of Saniri Negeri should not be interpreted simply as evidence that customary traditions remain intact despite social change. Such an interpretation risks treating tradition as a stable inheritance transmitted unchanged across generations, overlooking the institutional work required to make customary norms meaningful under contemporary conditions. The more consequential question is how customary authority retains its capacity to regulate social relations when community expectations, political arrangements, and formal governance structures change. Emmanuel & Mshelia (2025) challenge the assumption that traditions derive their authority exclusively from uninterrupted historical continuity, demonstrating that traditions may be reconstructed through changing social and political circumstances. Although their argument should not be applied mechanically to the lived traditions of Maluku, it provides a useful starting point for examining how the authority of customary practices depends partly on their contemporary interpretation and use. In the case of Saniri Negeri, the analytical emphasis should therefore shift from cultural preservation toward the processes through which customary norms are selected, interpreted, and mobilized to address present-day social relations.

This article conceptualizes that process as reclaimed indigenous social order: the socially negotiated reactivation and reinterpretation of customary norms and obligations through which indigenous institutions seek to regulate contemporary relationships under changing social and institutional conditions. The concept does not suggest that Saniri Negeri simply restores an earlier, more harmonious social order. Nor does it assume that every customary practice remains

legitimate or useful. Rather, reclaiming refers to the recovery of an institution's social capacity to organize relationships, mediate competing expectations, and sustain collective obligations. This distinction is important because an institution may preserve its name and formal position while losing the confidence necessary to influence community conduct. Conversely, customary practices may change in form while continuing to provide a meaningful basis for collective deliberation and social coordination. The concept thus directs attention to the relationship between institutional continuity and practical transformation, rather than treating them as opposing processes.

The empirical task is to identify what is retained, what is modified, and what is contested in the exercise of customary authority. Through interviews with Saniri members, the Raja, customary figures, women, younger community members, and residents with differing experiences of local conflict, the analysis should examine which norms are invoked in particular situations and how their meaning is explained by different actors. Observations of customary deliberations and the examination of relevant customary or administrative documents can then help establish whether these interpretations are reflected in institutional practice. For example, the study may investigate whether established obligations remain central to resolving disputes, whether deliberative procedures have changed to accommodate new participants, or whether sanctions have been reconsidered in response to contemporary expectations. These are empirical questions, not findings that should be presumed in advance. Where informants disagree about the meaning or appropriateness of a practice, that disagreement is analytically significant: it reveals that customary authority is negotiated rather than uniformly shared.

Selective reactivation also requires attention to the unequal distribution of influence within customary communities. A practice described by customary leaders as essential to preserving social cohesion may be experienced differently by women, younger residents, or people whose claims are less readily recognized by established authorities. The continued use of a norm, therefore, does not in itself demonstrate its legitimacy, just as the modification of a practice does not necessarily indicate cultural decline. The critical issue is whose interests are protected, whose obligations are emphasized, and whose interpretations shape institutional decisions. This perspective prevents the analysis from romanticizing customary governance and allows the study to consider whether the reconstruction of social order expands collective participation or reproduces existing hierarchies. It also connects the argument to scholarship on legal pluralism, which demonstrates that customary orders are shaped through encounters and contestations involving different sources of normative authority rather than operating as self-contained systems (Bobo et al., 2025).

The relationship between customary norms and state institutions is consequently part of the process of reclaiming, not merely an external constraint upon it. When customary procedures interact with formal administrative rules or state law, Saniri Negeri may need to clarify its jurisdiction, negotiate institutional boundaries, or adapt its practices to circumstances in which different authorities are recognized. Research on customary governance in Maluku provides a

regional context for examining these institutional transformations, although the specific patterns operating in Saparua must be established through this study's own evidence (Muchaku & Magaiza, 2024). Such interactions should not be reduced to a simple opposition between tradition and modernity. Customary and formal institutions may compete in some circumstances while complementing one another in others. Their relationship is best understood through concrete encounters in which authority, legitimacy, and the practical resolution of social problems are negotiated.

The contribution of reclaimed indigenous social order lies in explaining how customary institutions may sustain social regulation without reproducing an idealized past. The analytical sequence is not an automatic progression from tradition to adaptation, but a contingent process in which inherited norms are reinterpreted, selectively reactivated, and evaluated through contemporary practice. Its outcomes depend on social recognition, institutional responsiveness, and the capacity to address competing claims without undermining the relationships that hold the community together. Reclaiming, in this sense, is neither the preservation of every customary practice nor the replacement of tradition by formal governance. It is the continuing reconstruction of the social capacities through which customary institutions remain consequential in people's lives. This argument establishes the connection between institutional adaptation and sustainable peace: the durability of peace depends not on the unchanged survival of customary rules, but on whether those rules and the institutions interpreting them can sustain legitimate and workable relationships under changing conditions.

From Conflict Resolution to Sustainable Peace: Reconstructing Social Order Across Negeri Boundaries

Conflict resolution becomes sustainable peace when an agreement develops into a socially recognized capacity to maintain relationships, manage disagreement, and prevent tensions from repeatedly escalating into destructive confrontation. The distinction is consequential: a settlement may conclude a particular dispute, yet leave intact the grievances, mistrust, or unequal relationships that produced it. Sustainable peace, by contrast, depends on what happens after the immediate intervention. Bălan (2023) conceptualizes peacebuilding as a long-term process of transforming relationships and the structures through which conflict is generated and sustained. Applied to Saniri Negeri, this perspective shifts the assessment of institutional effectiveness away from the number of disputes settled toward the extent to which customary governance helps communities sustain workable relationships beyond the moment of agreement.

The qualitative analysis should therefore examine the relationship between decisions, subsequent social interaction, and the continued legitimacy of customary authority. Interview narratives can establish whether parties regarded a decision as fair, fulfilled the obligations arising from it, and resumed interaction in everyday or collective settings. Observations and relevant documents may corroborate these accounts, while conflicting testimonies can reveal differences between formal reconciliation and lived experience. A declaration that a dispute has

ended should not be treated as sufficient evidence of restored social cohesion. Where grievances remain unresolved or parties comply only because of social pressure, peace may be fragile even in the absence of renewed confrontation. Conversely, disagreement does not necessarily mean that peace has failed if the parties retain legitimate channels for addressing differences without resorting to destructive action.

The significance of Saniri Negeri also needs to be examined beyond the boundaries of an individual negeri. Relations between communities may involve shared histories, customary obligations, kinship connections, competing claims, or memories of earlier disputes. Sustainable peace across these boundaries requires more than the acceptance of decisions by the immediate parties; it also depends on whether intercommunity relationships remain sufficiently resilient to withstand future tensions. The study should investigate how customary institutions engage with other Saniri, Raja, community figures, and formal government actors where relevant, and whether these relationships enable communication when disagreements emerge. Research on community-based conflict governance in eastern Indonesia similarly emphasizes the interconnected contribution of locally legitimate institutions, participatory dialogue, and social capital to community cohesion, while recognizing that these mechanisms do not eliminate conflict itself. The Saparua case can extend this discussion by examining how customary legitimacy and the reconstruction of social order operate across negeri boundaries, provided the field evidence supports that interpretation.

This approach also avoids equating sustainable peace with the preservation of social harmony at any cost. A community may appear cohesive while some members remain excluded from decision-making or feel unable to challenge customary authority. For this reason, the analysis should consider whose relationships are repaired, whose grievances remain unresolved, and whether women, younger residents, and less influential groups can access the institution's processes. The capacity to manage future conflict matters as much as the restoration of past relationships. An institution contributes to sustainable peace not because it prevents every disagreement, but because its procedures remain credible enough for people to bring disagreements forward before they become more damaging. This makes legitimacy a continuing condition of peacebuilding rather than a fixed attribute inherited from customary status.

The broader contribution of this article is to connect relational conflict governance with the concept of reclaimed indigenous social order. Conflict settlement is an event with an identifiable outcome; social-order reconstruction is a process through which norms, obligations, and relationships are renegotiated; sustainable peace is the relatively durable condition that may emerge when these processes become socially credible and institutionally reproducible. This outcome is never guaranteed, and it should not be inferred from a single successful mediation. It must be assessed through evidence of continuing interaction, accepted obligations, legitimate mechanisms for addressing renewed disagreements, and the capacity to prevent conflict from being reproduced across generations or community boundaries. The argument, therefore, is not that Saniri Negeri independently guarantees peace, but that its contribution depends on whether

customary authority can sustain the relational and institutional conditions through which peaceful coexistence remains possible.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the contribution of Saniri Negeri to sustainable peace in the Saparua Islands rests on its capacity to maintain socially recognized authority and mediate relationships disrupted by conflict, rather than on customary status or formal institutional recognition alone. Its relevance lies in how customary norms are interpreted and negotiated in response to changing social relations and overlapping customary and state governance. Conflict resolution, therefore, should be understood not merely as reaching an agreement, but as an effort to restore relationships and preserve credible channels through which future disagreements can be addressed. The study's conceptual contribution, expressed through the idea of reclaimed indigenous social order, is to explain how customary institutions may sustain collective order through the selective reinterpretation and reactivation of customary norms without returning to an idealized traditional past. This process is neither automatic nor inherently inclusive: its contribution to peace depends on the perceived fairness of deliberation, the recognition of competing interests, and the institution's responsiveness to groups whose voices may be less influential in customary decision-making. Saniri Negeri should thus be understood as a potentially important, but not independently sufficient, institution for peacebuilding, whose continuing relevance depends on its ability to adapt customary authority to contemporary community needs while sustaining trust and social relationships.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

Authors are required to state that the study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. If the research involved vulnerable groups, please specify the protective measures taken to ensure their safety and equal participation. The statement should also disclose any sources of funding or declare that no external funding was received, along with a declaration of no conflict of interest. Authors must confirm that all data were collected through valid methods and have been verified for accuracy. If artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used, clarify that their use was limited to technical assistance such as language editing, without influencing the scientific content. Conclude with a sentence stating that the authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of the article.

Authors may refer to the following example to formulate their statement:

"This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid

research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article."

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