

Gender Relational Ethics in the *Nyambai* Tradition: A Living *Fiqh al-Munākahāt* Perspective on *Ta'āruf* among the Lampung Indigenous Community

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Abstract

This study examines the *Nyambai* tradition as a form of cultural *ta'āruf* among the *Saibatin* indigenous community of Lampung through the perspective of living *fiqh al-munākahāt*. *Nyambai* is a paired traditional dance performed by *muli* (young women) and *mekhanai* (young men) that serves as a medium for social interaction, the introduction of potential marriage partners, and an essential element of customary ceremonies, particularly *Nayuh* wedding rituals. Beyond its aesthetic function, *Nyambai* embodies social norms and gender ethics that regulate interactions between men and women within the public customary sphere. This qualitative research employs a legal-ethnographic approach, drawing on participant observation, in-depth interviews with customary leaders, performers, and married couples, and documentary analysis of customary texts and *fiqh* literature. The findings indicate that *Nyambai* represents a symbolic and regulated form of *ta'āruf* consistent with key principles of *fiqh al-munākahāt*, including the protection of honor, proper social conduct, and family formation. The study also highlights ongoing negotiations between customary norms and Islamic legal interpretations.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji tradisi *Nyambai* sebagai bentuk budaya *ta'āruf* di kalangan masyarakat adat Saibatin Lampung melalui perspektif hidup fikih munakahat. *Nyambai* adalah tarian tradisional berpasangan yang dilakukan oleh *muli* (wanita muda) dan *mekhanai* (pria muda), yang berfungsi sebagai media interaksi sosial, pengenalan calon pasangan untuk pernikahan, serta elemen penting dalam upacara adat, terutama dalam ritual pernikahan *Nayuh*. Di luar fungsi estetikanya, *Nyambai* mewujudkan norma-norma sosial dan etika gender yang mengatur interaksi antara laki-laki dan perempuan di ranah publik adat. Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan pendekatan hukum-etnografi, mengacu pada pengamatan peserta, wawancara mendalam dengan pemimpin adat, pemain, dan pasangan suami istri, serta analisis dokumenter teks adat dan literatur fikih. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa *Nyambai* mewakili bentuk simbolis yang diatur oleh *ta'āruf*, yang konsisten dengan prinsip-prinsip utama fikih munakahat, termasuk perlindungan kehormatan, perilaku sosial yang tepat, dan pembentukan keluarga. Studi ini juga menyoroti negosiasi yang sedang berlangsung antara norma-norma adat dan interpretasi hukum Islam.

Keywords:

Cultural *ta'āruf*; Living *fiqh*; *Munākahāt*; *Nyambai* tradition; *Saibatin* community

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Introduction

The relationship between Islam and local culture has always been a dynamic field of dialogue within the Indonesian Muslim community (Yusmita, 2018). On the one hand, Islam entails a set of norms derived from religious texts; on the other hand, people live within customary traditions that have long governed social relations (Nur et al., 2025). In daily practice, these two value systems do not always run in diametric opposition; instead, they interact, negotiate, and form distinctive religious patterns (Zulbaidah et al., 2025). This dynamic is evident in Islamic family law (*fiqh al-munākahāt*), particularly in premarital practices that provide a space for the introduction and formation of relationships between men and women (Umam et al., 2024). One cultural practice that represents this dynamic is the *Nyambai* tradition of the Saibatin Lampung indigenous people. *Nyambai* is a traditional dance between *muli* (girl) and *mekhanai* (single), generally performed as part of a series of large traditional ceremonies, especially *Nayuh* (marriage) (Zaki et al., 2025). In the social context of the Saibatin community, *Nyambai* is understood not only as a performing art but also as a space for friendship and customary recognition for young people. Through regular dance movements, traditional clothing full of symbols, accompaniment of traditional music, and accompanying rhymes, *Nyambai* conveys cultural messages about harmony, politeness, and the regularity of social relations (Azzahra et al., 2025).

As a living cultural practice, *Nyambai* plays an important role in shaping patterns of premarital interaction that indigenous peoples consider natural and dignified. This tradition provides a symbolic, controlled meeting space that allows the process of getting to know each other without violating customary norms. In this framework, *Nyambai* is often understood as a form of cultural *ta'āruf*, an introductory process that occurs within the context of values, ethics, and social supervision in indigenous communities. However, this meaning has not received serious attention in the study of Islamic law, especially when faced with the construction of normative *fiqh*, which often views premarital relationships restrictively. In classical *fiqh* discourse, interaction between men and women before the marriage contract is generally strictly restricted to preserve honor (*hifz al-'ird*) and prevent moral transgressions (Said et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the social reality of Muslim societies shows a diversity of forms of premarital interaction that are culturally institutionalized and have their own social control mechanisms. The tension between normative *fiqh* and social practices makes the *fiqh al-munākahāt* living approach relevant, as it views *fiqh* not merely as a product of texts but as a living practice that interacts with society's socio-cultural context (Taman et al., 2025).

To date, academic studies on *Nyambai* remain relatively limited, focusing primarily on cultural anthropology and the performing arts. Several studies present *Nyambai* as an expression of the Saibatin people's cultural identity, focusing on the aesthetic aspects of dance, the symbolism of movement, and its role in sustaining traditional practices (Herlandani & Puspa, 2025). These studies are important in efforts to preserve local culture but have not addressed the normative dimension of Islam that accompanies the practice of *Nyambai*. Another study views *Nyambai* as part of the Lampung customary marriage system and emphasizes its role in the ceremonial structure, as well as the role of customary institutions in regulating social relations (Herlandani & Puspa, 2025). However, the analysis remains descriptive and has not systematically linked the practice to the Islamic *fiqh* framework. On the other hand, a study examines the relationship between customs and Islam in Lampung, highlighting the principle of harmonization between customary values and sharia (Heri, 2020). Although it provides a macro-level picture of the coexistence of customs and Islam, this kind of study has not specifically examined premarital practices, such as *Nyambai*, as spaces for interaction and *ta'āruf* with direct implications for Islamic family law. Thus, there is still an analytical gap in understanding how *Nyambai* is practiced, interpreted, and legitimized by indigenous Muslim communities within the ethical framework of *fiqh al-munākahāt*.

The existing literature reveals several important gaps that warrant further investigation. First, a few studies explicitly position the *Nyambai* tradition as a space for *ta'aruf* from the perspective of Islamic family law. Second, limited studies using the living *fiqh al-munakahāt* approach to examine *Nyambai* practice, given the negotiations between customary norms and *fiqh* principles. Third, there is a lack of analysis of the ethics of relationships between men and women in *Nyambai* within the daily religious practices of the indigenous people of Lampung (Napsiah et al., 2024b). This research aims to fill these gaps by introducing novelty at conceptual and methodological levels. Conceptually, this study interprets *Nyambai* as a culturally embedded form of *ta'aruf* that operates not in opposition to Islam, but within a contextualized framework of *fiqh al-munakahāt* values shaped by the interaction between Islamic norms and local customary traditions. This study challenges the persistent binary that positions of *adat* and sharia as competing normative systems by arguing that local cultural practices may serve as arenas for articulating and enacting *fiqh* values (Hasan et al., 2023). From a *living fiqh* perspective, Islamic law is understood not solely as a body of normative texts but also as a dynamic social phenomenon that is continuously interpreted, negotiated, and embodied within specific cultural contexts. Methodologically, the study advances the field of *living fiqh* through the application of legal ethnography, which facilitates an examination of Islamic legal norms as they are experienced and practiced in everyday life. By foregrounding community narratives, social interactions, and cultural practices, this approach provides deeper insight into the processes through which *fiqh* is translated into lived realities and local moral orders.

Building on this framework, this study seeks to address the following research question: How does the *Nyambai* tradition function as a space for cultural *ta'aruf* from the perspective of living *fiqh al-munakahāt* among the indigenous people of Lampung? This question is intended to reveal the meaning, function, and ethical limits that govern the practice of *Nyambai*, as well as to examine the dynamics of the relationship between customary norms and normative *fiqh* constructions in the context of pre-marriage. Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic family law, particularly by expanding understanding of the practice of *ta'aruf* through the living *fiqh al-munakahāt* approach. The findings of this study can enrich the discourse on *fiqh's* flexibility in responding to the diversity of social practices of Muslim communities. Practically, this research is significant for indigenous peoples, religious leaders, and policymakers in formulating a more dialogical and contextual approach to local cultural practices, so that traditions such as *Nyambai* can be understood as part of a living religious dynamic rather than merely as objects of rigid normative judgment.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach within a legal-ethnographic framework to understand the *Nyambai* tradition as a cultural *ta'aruf* space among the Saibatin Lampung. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to capture the social practices, symbolic meanings, and ethical norms that live in the *Nyambai* tradition. Primary data were obtained through participatory observation of *Nyambai* in various traditional ceremonies, especially *Nayuh* (marriage), to directly observe the patterns of interaction, symbols, and ethical boundaries that govern the relationship between *muli* and *mekhanai*. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with traditional leaders, *Nyambai* actors, married couples, and local religious leaders to explore subjective meanings, normative legitimacy, and religious views related to the practice. Secondary data were collected through documentation of traditional texts, cultural archives, and classical and contemporary *fiqh* literature relevant to the issues of *munakahāt* and *ta'aruf*.

Data analysis was carried out inductively, combining thematic and interpretive analyses. Field data were first categorized into central themes, including the role of *Nyambai* as an introductory space, the ethics of premarital interaction, and the relationship between customary norms and *fiqh* principles. Furthermore, the empirical findings are analyzed using the perspective of living *fiqh al-munākahāt* to trace how *fiqh* values are practiced, negotiated, and recontextualized in the *Nyambai* tradition. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, including comparisons between observations, interviews, and documentation, as well as confirmation of findings to key informants (Wijaya, 2019). With this approach, the research is expected to present a comprehensive understanding of *Nyambai* as both a living cultural practice and an expression of Islamic ethics among the indigenous people of Lampung.

The *Nyambai* Tradition as an Institutionalized Cultural *Ta'āruf* Space

The *Nyambai* tradition is understood by the indigenous people of Saibatin Lampung not merely as an artistic performance or a component of customary ceremonies, but also as an important social institution that regulates the early interaction between *muli* (young women) and *mekhanai* (young men) within culturally accepted boundaries (Manende-Nim, 2011). Through this tradition, the community provides a legitimate, socially supervised space for introductions and interactions among unmarried youths while maintaining collective moral responsibility (Mubarrak et al., 2025). *Nyambai* functions not only as a cultural expression but also as a medium for transmitting ethical values related to gender relations, politeness, mutual respect, and family honor from one generation to another (Daryanti et al., 2019). The practice is deeply institutionalized within the Saibatin customary structure and is supported by clear rules, symbolic expressions, and communal supervision that guide acceptable behavior (Ningrum, 2017). Consequently, *Nyambai* reflects the integration of cultural norms and social ethics in preserving harmonious and dignified relationships within the community.

Nyambai is carried out through a series of traditional ceremonies, especially at important moments such as *begawi*, or traditional wedding events (Ningrum, 2017). The implementation of this tradition involves broad community participation and is carefully coordinated by traditional leaders, respected elders, and village figures who possess moral and symbolic authority within the Saibatin social structure (Narawati & Supriatna, n.d.). Their presence ensures that every stage of the activity is conducted in accordance with customary norms and collective ethical values. This confirms that *Nyambai* is not a space for unrestricted social interaction or promiscuity, but rather a culturally regulated social arena grounded in politeness, proper conduct, and the preservation of family honor (Sar'an et al., 2024). Every interaction within *Nyambai* is governed by strict customary regulations, including bodily movements, seating arrangements, interaction duration, and acceptable verbal and non-verbal expressions (Narawati & Supriatna, n.d.).

In practice, the process of *ta'āruf* in *Nyambai* occurs symbolically through cultural media such as dance movements, traditional poems, and culturally codified aesthetic expressions. The interaction between *Muli* and *Mekhanai* is not carried out directly through intense personal conversations but rather is mediated by cultural symbols and representations. This pattern creates deliberate social distancing, which serves as a mechanism to protect individual honor while maintaining the dignity of the extended family. Thus, *Nyambai* presents a model of *ta'āruf* that is not individualistic but collective, grounded in community social supervision (Tashya & Mardhotillah, 2025). Field findings show that *Nyambai perpetrators*—both *muli* and *mekhanai*—and supportive communities interpret their involvement as part of a

social process fraught with moral consequences. A Saibatin traditional leader interviewed explained:

"Nyambai is not just entertainment. There are rules, there are limits. Muli and Mekhanai can see and get to know each other, but they cannot go beyond mere manners. If you violate, it is not only tarnishing yourself, but also the family name." (Tashya & Mardhotillah, 2025)

The statement shows that *Nyambai* is positioned as an effective instrument of social control in maintaining the ethics of gender relations. Customary boundaries that regulate physical distance, the duration of engagement, and body expression help prevent the emergence of private or exploitative relationships. From the perspective of living *fiqh al-munākahāt*, this practice reflects indigenous peoples' efforts to translate the values of politeness, honor, and moral responsibility into premarital relationships. Furthermore, this study found that *Nyambai* also functions as a social education space, especially for the younger generation (Yuniardi et al., 2025). Through participation in *Nyambai*, *mulu*, and *mekhanai*, people learn to understand the boundaries of appropriate opposite-sex relationships as defined by customs and religion. These values are not taught textually or normatively, but rather internalized through direct experience and repeated cultural practices. A young woman (*mulu*) who was involved in *Nyambai* revealed:

"We were taught since childhood that Nyambai has rules. It is not as free as dating is now. So we know how to behave, how to take care of ourselves, and not to interact with the opposite sex" (Endang, 2025)

This finding suggests that *Nyambai* serves as an important cultural mechanism through which gender-relational ethics are cultivated, transmitted, and socially reproduced. The relationship between *mulu* and *mekhanai* is not understood as an autonomous romantic relationship detached from social obligations; rather, it is situated within a communal moral order in which families and community members actively monitor, guide, and assess interpersonal conduct. Such a configuration reflects a relational understanding of premarital interactions, in which individual agency is exercised within the ethical boundaries established by customary norms and collective social expectations. From the perspective of *living fiqh al-munākahāt*, this arrangement demonstrates how local cultural practices can serve as effective social institutions for regulating gender relations while remaining aligned with broader religious and moral values.

Within this framework, *Nyambai* presents a model of gender relations grounded in social responsibility rather than unlimited personal freedom. From the point of view of living *fiqh al-munākahāt*, the practice of *Nyambai* shows that the *fiqh* values of *ta'āruf*, the protection of honor (*ḥifẓ al-'ird*), and the prevention of harm (*dar' al-mafāsīd*) are not always present in a normative-textual form, but can live and operate through contextual customary practices (Napsiah et al., 2024a). *Nyambai* is a concrete example of how the indigenous people of Lampung practice "social *fiqh*" by integrating Islamic values into the local cultural structure without losing their ethical substance. The *Nyambai* tradition cannot be reduced to just a tradition or performing arts, but rather to a social institution that has a regulatory function in shaping the ethics of gender relations (Azzahra et al., 2025). The *Nyambai* tradition offers a safe, dignified, and socially sustainable *ta'āruf* space, as well as proof that, in practice, Islamic law can coexist with and transform local culture. These findings confirm that the understanding of *fiqh al-munākahāt* must be open to cultural practices that embody ethical values aligned with the goals of sharia, especially in maintaining honor, gender justice, and the social resilience of the community.

Ethics of Relationships in *Nyambai* & the Principles of *Fiqh Munākahāt*

From the perspective of living *fiqh al-munākahāt*, the *Nyambai* tradition can be understood as a manifestation of Islamic ethical values that continue to live, develop, and operate within the local cultural space of the indigenous Saibatin Lampung community. Although the tradition is not explicitly articulated through normative *fiqh* terminology or systematically codified in classical Islamic legal texts, *Nyambai* substantively reflects Islamic ethical principles governing interactions between men and women. The values embedded in this tradition include modesty, social responsibility, mutual respect, and the preservation of family honor within premarital relationships. In this regard, *Nyambai* illustrates how the principles of *fiqh al-munākahāt* may be transformed into contextual, adaptive, and socially institutionalized cultural practices that remain relevant to the socio-cultural realities of local Muslim communities (Muttaqin et al., 2026).

One of the principal values strongly embodied in the *Nyambai* tradition is the protection of honor (*hifz al-'ird*), which constitutes an important objective within Islamic family ethics. This principle is reflected in the strict regulation of both physical and symbolic interactions between *muli* and *mekhanai* throughout the *Nyambai* procession. Interactions are not conducted in private or secluded settings but rather in customary public spaces under communal supervision and social observation. Physical distance, bodily gestures, eye contact, and emotional expressions are carefully regulated by established customary norms to prevent excessive intimacy or behavior considered inappropriate within the local moral framework. Such restrictions function not merely as cultural formalities but as preventive social mechanisms aimed at safeguarding individual dignity, preserving family honor, and minimizing the possibility of ethical violations in premarital relationships (Fitriyani et al., 2025).

In the context of *fiqh al-munākahāt*, the protection of honor is a fundamental principle that is closely related to the purpose of the shari'a to protect human beings from moral and social damage (Riski, 2022). *Nyambai*, in this case, presents a space of *ta'āruf* that allows for getting to know each other without opening the door to exploitative or beyond-the-politeness relationships. This shows that the Saibatin indigenous people have an ethical consciousness in harmony with Islamic values, even though it is manifested through cultural mechanisms rather than formal legal rules. In addition to *hifz al-'ird*, the principle of social manners (*ādāb al-mu'āmalah*) is also an important element in *Nyambai* practice. Each participant is required to maintain appropriate attitudes, speech, and intentions during the traditional procession (Auni et al., 2022). These manners apply not only to *muli* and *mekhanai* but also to the families and communities involved, who serve as social observers and evaluators. Thus, the ethics of relationships in *Nyambai* are collective rather than individual and are maintained through social control grounded in customary and religious values. A Saibatin traditional leader who also has a background in religious education explained that *Nyambai* is understood as a social space that has a clear moral orientation:

"Nyambai is not a place to play around. Young people are introduced to manners and to limits. If it is not maintained from the beginning, it can damage good intentions. In our customs, everything has a purpose, not just fun." (Agung, 2025).

The statement reflects a critical awareness that *Nyambai* functions not merely as a cultural performance but as a medium for shaping ethical and responsible gender relations within the community. Interactions between men and women are understood within broader social purposes and collective moral expectations, particularly the possibility of establishing a legitimate, respectful, and socially recognized marriage. Such an orientation closely aligns with the fundamental objectives of *fiqh al-munākahāt*, which emphasize not only the legal validity

of marriage but also the ethical, social, and moral processes that precede and support the formation of a harmonious family relationship.

In the practice of *Nyambai*, *ta'aruf* is understood as an initial social process that enables individuals to recognize the character, attitude, behavior, and family background of a prospective partner in a limited yet meaningful manner. This introduction does not occur through private or highly intensive personal conversations, but rather through observation of manners, politeness, emotional restraint, and interaction patterns displayed within customary communal spaces. Consequently, the assessment of a potential partner is not solely based on individual preferences but also shaped by collective social evaluation, as community members participate in observing, interpreting, and morally assessing the appropriateness of interpersonal conduct.

A local religious leader, who is often asked for his opinion by the community regarding the issue of marriage, expressed his views as follows:

"If we look at it from a religious perspective, Nyambai is similar to ta'aruf, but a traditional version. Young people see each other, get to know each other, but not together. All are open and supervised. This is actually safer than the promiscuity that is now happening a lot." (Rasyid Al Mubarak, 2025)

This statement reinforces the finding that the *Saibatin* indigenous community perceives *Nyambai* as a social mechanism that is substantively compatible with the principles of *fiqh al-munākahāt*. Rather than contradicting Islamic teachings, *Nyambai* is interpreted as a culturally embedded form of *ta'aruf* that emphasizes prudence, transparency, ethical restraint, and collective moral responsibility in premarital interactions. Within the framework of living *fiqh*, this tradition demonstrates that Islamic legal and ethical values are not always articulated through formal legal texts, doctrinal formulations, or religious fatwas, but may also be embodied in local traditions that internalize the substantive objectives of the sharia. Furthermore, the ethics of relationships practiced in *Nyambai* reflect the principles of preventing harm (*dar' al-mafāsīd*) and promoting social benefit (*jalb al-maṣāliḥ*) (Nasution et al., 2026). By regulating interactional spaces, bodily conduct, and communicative expressions, *Nyambai* seeks to minimize moral violations, social conflict, and negative stigma toward women. Consequently, *muli* are not positioned as passive objects but as respected social subjects within the customary social order.

In this context, *Nyambai* also functions as an important social protection mechanism for women within the customary structure of the *Saibatin* indigenous community. The active involvement of family members, customary leaders, and the wider community as supervisors creates a sense of security, social legitimacy, and moral protection for *muli* when interacting with *mekhanai* in public customary spaces. Such collective supervision minimizes the risk of exploitative behavior, social pressure, or interactions that may endanger women's dignity and social standing (Rasidin et al., 2020). This mechanism closely aligns with the spirit of *fiqh al-munākahāt*, which emphasizes protecting vulnerable parties in gender relations, particularly women, while recognizing their agency, dignity, and active participation as social subjects. From the perspective of living *fiqh al-munākahāt*, the *Nyambai* tradition demonstrates that the ethics of gender relations among the *Saibatin* people are constructed through a dynamic synthesis between Islamic ethical principles and local cultural institutions (Amin et al., 2025). Consequently, *Nyambai* presents a contextual model of *ta'aruf* that is not only culturally legitimate but also substantively aligned with the ethical objectives of Islamic family law, particularly justice, honor, protection, and social benefit in male-female relationships.

Negotiation between Customary Norms and Normative *Fiqh*

The *Nyambai* tradition does not stand in complete harmony or in complete contradiction to normative *fiqh*, but rather exists in a dynamic, contextual negotiation space. *Nyambai*, a traditional practice rooted in the Saibatin community of Lampung, involves a symbolic, limited, and supervised interaction between a *muli* (girl) and a *mekhanai* (single) (Daryanti, 2021). Meanwhile, textually normative *fiqh* often emphasizes restricting non-mahram interaction to maintain honor and prevent *khalwat* (Ghani, 2025). The tension between living customary values and normative *fiqh* rules gives rise to bargaining over values, a process typical of *Nyambai* practice. Some informants admit that if the practice of *Nyambai* is read literally through the lens of classical *fiqh*, paired interactions during the dance can be considered problematic. A traditional leader explained:

"If you look at the text, there are indeed those who say that there should be no contact with males and females who are not mahram. However, in our culture, Nyambai already has rules—distance, movement, and even perspective have limits. So stay safe, do not violate the principles of Islam." (Bashri, 2025)

This statement demonstrates that the Saibatin indigenous community tends to interpret *fiqh* contextually rather than literally in responding to local cultural practices such as *Nyambai*. *Fiqh* is not conceived as a rigid, absolute legal framework that automatically rejects tradition, but rather as a horizon of ethical values that guides social conduct within culturally meaningful contexts. In the practice of *Nyambai*, Islamic principles such as the protection of honor (*hifz al-'ird*), social propriety (*ādāb al-mu'āmalah*), and orientation toward the formation of a legitimate family are internalized through customary mechanisms and collective moral supervision (Amin et al., 2025). Accordingly, *fiqh* functions as an ethical foundation that shapes and directs social interaction rather than as a prohibitive force eliminating local tradition. This process of negotiation is further reflected in the collective awareness that *Nyambai* is not merely entertainment or artistic performance, but a culturally regulated form of introduction intended to support serious relational purposes, particularly the possibility of marriage. A religious leader who became an informant stated:

"Nyambai is similar to ta'aruf, but the traditional version. Young people can get to know each other while still being watched. The goal is clear, not a joke. If it is done with customary rules, it is actually safer and in line with Islamic principles." (Arip, 2025).

This quote confirms that society is not merely passive toward religious norms but actively interprets, negotiates, and internalizes the principles of *fiqh* within customary practices. Customary regulations on physical distance, interaction duration, and gestures serve as social control mechanisms that preserve *Nyambai*'s moral and ethical legitimacy within the community. In this context, the relationship between customary law and *fiqh* reflects a dynamic, dialogical process rather than a mere symbolic compromise. The negotiation demonstrates how Islamic legal values are continuously adapted into realistic, lived, and culturally accepted social norms that remain relevant to contemporary communal life. These negotiations can be mapped more systematically through the following table:

Table 1.
Negotiation between the *Nyambai* Customary Norms and *Fiqh Munākahāt*

Practical Aspects	<i>Nyambai</i> Customary Norms	Classical Normative <i>Fiqh</i>	Negotiation Results (Living <i>Fiqh</i>)
Forms of interaction	Symbolic pairing dance in traditional public spaces	Restriction of non-mahram interaction	Symbolic interaction allowed with customary supervision
Space and time	Traditional ceremonies, usually at night	The Potential of Unforeseen Consequences	Public spaces with community social control
Purpose of the relationship Supervision	Introduction and matchmaking Traditional and family leaders present	<i>Ta'āruf</i> towards marriage Prevention of <i>khalwat</i>	Clear orientation on the possibility of marriage Collective surveillance as a substitute for physical prohibition
Key values	Harmony, honor, and traditional aesthetics	<i>Hifz al-'ird</i> and social manners	Integration of the values of honor and benefit in cultural practices

This table shows that *Nyambai* is not a practice outside *fiqh* but rather a way of living *fiqh*, in which customary norms and *fiqh* values mutually affirm one another. *Nyambai*'s success in balancing symbolic freedom and ethical boundaries demonstrates indigenous peoples' capacity to adapt, negotiate, and internalize religious principles in everyday social practice. Furthermore, this negotiation process shows that customs are not rigid static entities. The Saibatin community actively adapted the practice of *Nyambai* to social and religious developments without losing its essence. For example, rules governing physical distance and interaction duration are tightened as awareness of religious norms increases, while the symbolism and aesthetics of dance are retained as an important part of cultural identity. Negotiation can also be seen in the way the community internalizes *fiqh* values through social learning. Young people involved in *Nyambai* learn to maintain ethical and interactional boundaries naturally, not just through formal instruction or prohibitions. A *young Mekhanai* recounted his personal experience:

"We were taught from the beginning that Nyambai has rules. It should not be careless; it must be polite. So we learned to respect the opposite sex and take care of ourselves." (Alimuddin, 2025)

This quote emphasizes that the ethics of relationships in *Nyambai* are not only applied externally through customary supervision but also become internalized by the perpetrators. This shows how the value of *fiqh* can live dynamically, channelled through institutionalised cultural traditions, and shape meaningful social experiences. Overall, this study found that the negotiation between customary norms and normative *fiqh* in *Nyambai* resulted in contextual, ethical, and functional practices. *Nyambai* is tangible proof that *fiqh* can "live" in local cultural practices, adapting to social context while maintaining the basic goal of *fiqh al-munākahāt*: the establishment of a legitimate, dignified, and harmonious family (Nurjanah et al., 2024). This process demonstrates the flexibility of Islamic law in the face of rich and complex social

realities and emphasizes the importance of understanding *fiqh* as an interpretive tradition open to cultural dialogue.

The Tradition of *Nyambai*, *Ta'aruf*, Gender and Its Relevance to the Study of Living *Fiqh*

The results of this study confirm that *ta'aruf* should not be understood merely as an individual religious practice detached from broader social, cultural, and communal structures. Among the indigenous Saibatin Lampung community, the *Nyambai* tradition demonstrates how the process of mutual acquaintance between men and women can be institutionalized through customary mechanisms that emphasize gender equality, dignity, mutual respect, and ethical interaction without neglecting the essential substance of Islamic teachings (Firdawaty et al., 2024). Through *Nyambai*, premarital interactions become more structured, supervised, transparent, and socially accountable within the community framework. This tradition also creates a dialogical space where religious norms and customary values continuously interact, negotiate, and adapt to one another in practical social life. Consequently, *Nyambai* reflects the concept of living *fiqh*, in which Islamic legal values are not only normative doctrines but are actively embodied, practiced, and internalized in everyday social relations and cultural experiences.

Nyambai is a paired dance between *muli* (girl) and *mekhanai* (single) that takes place within the framework of traditional ceremonies such as *Nayuh* (marriage) or the welcoming of guests of honor. The interaction is not just about dance movements; it is full of symbols, aesthetic values, and moral messages that teach politeness, self-control, and respect. Movement, distance, and the duration of interaction are all regulated by customary rules strictly guarded by traditional leaders and families. With this mechanism, *Nyambai* serves as a medium to ethically, symbolically, and with dignity introduce the character, politeness, and background of prospective spouses, while maintaining the honor of all parties (Azzahra et al., 2025). This tradition clearly places women and men on an equal footing in the *ta'aruf* process, while imposing boundaries that affirm the principles of gender safety and modesty. A Saibatin traditional leader asserted:

"Nyambai is not just entertainment. Young people know each other, but there are rules and limits. All their actions are observed to avoid damaging their honor or that of their families. The main goal is clear, which is to get to know each other before marriage." (Abdurrahman, 2025)

This statement demonstrates that the community perceives *Nyambai* as a legitimate, ethical, and dignified space for *ta'aruf* within the framework of local customary values and Islamic morality. The process is conducted collectively and remains under the supervision of community elders and social norms, ensuring that interactions are guided by strong moral awareness, mutual respect, and social responsibility. In this context, *Nyambai* functions not merely as a cultural ceremony but also as an educational medium for teaching the ethics of gender relations in a natural and socially accepted manner. Rather than emphasizing rigid and formal prohibitions, the tradition encourages self-restraint, courtesy, and respectful communication between men and women. Consequently, both parties can get to know each other in a safe, controlled, and religiously appropriate social environment. In addition, this tradition strengthens awareness regarding the boundaries of interaction. A female informant described her experience:

"In Nyambai, we learn to be polite. You cannot get close carelessly. Everything is done according to the rules, and the purpose of the interaction is clear, which is to get to know each other before marriage." (Indah, 2025)

This experience shows that *Nyambai* is not just entertainment or an art performance, but also a means of social and moral education. Premarital interactions are institutionalized through a precise mechanism to ensure they are safer, ethical, harmonious, and equal for both genders. In the context of living *fiqh*, this practice demonstrates how Islamic law can be brought to life through local culture, not merely as a text or a fatwa, but as a value internalized and embodied in everyday life. Furthermore, this study found a creative negotiation between customary norms and normative *fiqh* (Izzuddin et al., 2024). From the perspective of classical *fiqh*, paired interactions between non-mahram men and women can be considered problematic because they pose a risk of *khalwat* or *ikhtilāf* (Akmal et al., 2024). However, the Saibatin people interpret *fiqh* contextually, taking into account intentions, social goals, community supervision, and binding customary rules (Supriyadi & Ghani, 2025). *Fiqh* is not there to invalidate tradition, but to serve as an ethical boundary that guides practice, ensuring that interactions remain dignified and in harmony with the principles of *ḥifẓ al-'ird* (safeguarding honor) and *ādāb al-mu'āmalah* (social ethics).

In other words, *Nyambai* illustrates how living *fiqh* internalizes Islamic legal and ethical values into local cultural traditions in a dynamic, context-specific manner. Through this process, women and men are encouraged to interact on the basis of equality, mutual respect, moral awareness, and social responsibility within their cultural environment. *Nyambai*, therefore, functions not merely as a ceremonial ritual or form of entertainment but as a meaningful social institution that embodies Islamic principles in everyday communal life. The tradition demonstrates that Islamic law is flexible, adaptive, and capable of remaining relevant to diverse social realities, particularly in shaping ethical gender relations and culturally grounded patterns of interaction. This negotiation process can be mapped in the following table:

Table 2.
Negotiation between *Nyambai Customary Norms, Fiqh Munākahāt*, and Gender Perspectives

Practical Aspects	<i>Nyambai Customary Norms</i>	Classical Normative <i>Fiqh</i>	Gender Implications	Negotiation Results (Living <i>Fiqh</i>)
Forms of interaction	Symbolic pairing in dance in traditional public spaces	Restriction of non-mahram interaction	Maintaining equality and honor for men and women	Symbolic interaction allowed with supervision
Space and time	Traditional ceremonies, usually at night	The potential of <i>khalwat</i> if it is not controlled	Limit the risk of gender bias or harassment, and maintain comfort	Public spaces with community social control
Purpose of the relationship	Introduction and matchmaking	<i>Ta'āruf</i> towards marriage	Provide equal opportunities for men	Clear orientation on the possibility of marriage

			and women to meet potential partners.	
Supervision	Traditional and family leaders present	Prevention of <i>khalwat</i>	Protection of both genders during interaction	Collective surveillance as a substitute for prohibition
Key values	Harmony, honor, and traditional aesthetics	<i>Hifz al-'ird</i> , social manners	Emphasizing equality, decency, and gender ethics	Integration of the values of honor and benefit in cultural practices

The table shows how the *Nyambai* tradition functions as a space for negotiation among customary norms, normative *fiqh* principles, and gender dynamics. Every aspect of practice—from the form of interaction and the space and time of implementation to supervision—can be read as an effort by indigenous peoples to balance social needs, religious norms, and gender ethics. For example, a symbolic form of interaction allows *muli* and *mekhanai* to get to know each other while still maintaining physical and moral boundaries, ensuring the equality and honor of both parties. Spatial and temporal arrangements, such as the implementation of *Nyambai* in traditional ceremonies and in public spaces, minimize the risk of violating *fiqh* norms while creating a safe environment for women and men to interact ethically.

In addition, the table shows that collective supervision by traditional leaders and families not only maintains honor but also ensures that the *ta'aruf* process is conducted transparently, under control, and in harmony with the principles of *fiqh*. A clear purpose of the relationship—an introduction that can lead to marriage—helps to establish a just social and moral orientation for both genders. Key values, such as harmony, politeness, and customary aesthetics, combined with *fiqh* principles such as *hifz al-'ird* and *ādāb al-mu'āmalah*, result in contextual and adaptive living *fiqh* practices. In other words, *Nyambai* not only internalizes religious norms but also builds gender awareness, facilitates safe interactions, and affirms the role of customary law as a mediator between Islamic culture and law.

As a novel contribution, this study not only situates the *Nyambai* practice within the framework of *'urf* or customary law but also articulates it substantively from the perspective of living *fiqh al-munākahāt*, highlighting how the values of Islamic family law operate in practice within the community's socio-cultural realities. In contrast to conventional studies on *'urf*, which are generally normative in nature and primarily concerned with the legal legitimacy of custom within Islamic law, this article demonstrates a dialogical process and dynamic negotiation between *adat* and *fiqh* through social mechanisms such as collective supervision, ethical conduct, and clearly defined relational purposes. Accordingly, the findings affirm that *ta'aruf* practices can remain contextually adaptive without compromising their sharia foundations. More broadly, the *Nyambai* model may serve as both a conceptual framework and a practical reference for other Muslim communities in Indonesia in developing forms of *ta'aruf* that are responsive to local wisdom while maintaining the core principles of Islamic family law, including the protection of honor, ethical interaction, and the orientation toward the formation of a legitimate and harmonious family.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the *Nyambai* tradition among the indigenous people of Saibatin Lampung functions as a cultural *ta'aruf* space, customarily institutionalized and carried out within a controlled framework of social ethics. *Nyambai* is not merely an expression of art and culture, but rather a social practice that regulates the introduction between *muli* and *mekhanai* through symbolic mechanisms, social supervision, and strong norms of politeness. In this context, *Nyambai* allows for premarital interactions without ignoring the principles of honor and social order upheld by indigenous communities. From the perspective of living *fiqh al-munākahāt*, the *Nyambai* tradition reflects the actualization of the fundamental values of Islamic family law, especially the protection of honor (*hiḏz al-'ird*), social manners, and the orientation toward the formation of a legitimate and harmonious family.

Although not identical to the textual construction of normative *fiqh*, *Nyambai*'s practice demonstrates a creative negotiation between customary norms and Islamic values. *Fiqh*, in this case, does not function as a rigid framework of prohibition but rather as an ethical horizon that shapes and limits local cultural practices. Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that subsequent research conduct a comparative study of cultural *ta'aruf* practices among other Muslim indigenous communities in Indonesia to examine patterns of similarity and difference in negotiations between customary practices and *fiqh*. In addition, further research can expand the focus on the changing dynamics of *Nyambai* practice amid modernization and digitalization, including the influence of social media on the meaning and function of traditional *ta'aruf*.

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