

Juridical Review of the Rejection of the Marriage of Isbat Convert Women from *Towani Tolotang* at the Sidrap Religious Court

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32332/nizham.v13i02.11719>

Received: 22-10-2025

Revised: 05-11-2025

Accepted: 25-11-2025

Abstract

This study examines the rejection of Marriage Isbat for converts from the Towani Tolotang community in Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Sidrap) in the context of the relationship between customary law, Islam, and state law. Through a normative-empirical approach, this study combines regulatory studies, Islamic law, and field data in the form of interviews with judges and affected communities. The results of the study show that the rejection of Marriage Isbat is based on incompleteness of documents, incompatibility with the pillars of marriage according to Sharia, and the status of customary marriage that has not been legally administered. The Towani Tolotang case illustrates the challenge of harmonizing the implementation of customary law, Islamic law principles, and state regulations. The Sidrap Religious Court rejected the application not because it ignored customs, but for the sake of legal certainty and the validity of sharia. The harmonization of customary and state law is an important step in ensuring legal protection for women converts and strengthening the sustainability of local cultural values in the national legal system.

Keywords: Marriage Isbat, Religious Courts, Towani Tolotang.



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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji penolakan permohonan Isbat Nikah bagi mualaf dari komunitas Towani Tolotang di Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang (Sidrap) dalam konteks hubungan antara hukum adat, hukum Islam, dan hukum negara. Melalui pendekatan normatif-empiris, penelitian ini memadukan kajian peraturan perundang-undangan, hukum Islam, serta data lapangan berupa wawancara dengan hakim dan masyarakat yang terdampak. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penolakan Isbat Nikah didasarkan pada ketidaklengkapan dokumen, ketidaksesuaian dengan rukun nikah menurut syariat, serta status pernikahan adat yang belum tercatat secara hukum. Kasus Towani Tolotang menggambarkan tantangan dalam mengharmonisasikan pelaksanaan hukum adat, prinsip-prinsip hukum Islam, dan regulasi negara. Pengadilan Agama Sidrap menolak permohonan tersebut bukan karena mengabaikan adat, tetapi demi kepastian hukum dan keabsahan syariat. Harmonisasi antara hukum adat dan hukum negara merupakan langkah penting untuk menjamin perlindungan hukum bagi perempuan mualaf sekaligus memperkuat keberlanjutan nilai-nilai budaya lokal dalam sistem hukum nasional.

Kata Kunci: Isbat Nikah, Pengadilan Agama, Towani Tolotang

Introduction

Unofficial marriage is an interesting social and legal phenomenon to study, especially in the context of Islamic law and the religious justice system in Indonesia. Although an unofficial marriage is religiously recognized, this practice often does not receive state legal recognition because it is not officially recorded in the Civil Registry or the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). This poses significant challenges, especially for women who previously had a long marital status and then became converts and unofficially married. The rejection of Marriage Isbat by the Religious Court in these cases adds complexity in the recognition and legal protection for women in relation to.¹

Official data from the Central Statistics Agency, together with the Director General of Islamic Guidance of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, as of January 2024, shows that more than 1.5 million marriages are formally recorded every year.² However, exact data related to serial marriages is still difficult to obtain, even though it is known that the number is relatively large. A survey by the Non-Governmental Organization for the Empowerment of

¹ R Rezy et al., "Analisis Hukum Isbath Nikah Di Mahkamah Syarâ€™t M Iyah Kota Langsa," Meukuta Alam: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa, 2019.

² Barzah Latupono, "Penyelesaian Perkawinan Yang Tidak Memenuhi Syarat Perkawinan Melalui Isbath Nikah," Jurnal Hukum & Pembangunan 49, no. 4 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.21143/jhp.vol49.no4.2351>.

Women Heads of Families in 2012 found that about 25% of people use unofficial marriage or traditional marriage, a figure that is estimated to be constantly changing and requires more in-depth field studies to get an accurate picture of this practice.

Unrecorded marital status has serious legal repercussions, especially for women and children who lose legal protection for their rights that they should have. The Marriage Isbat application is a solution taken to legalize marriage legally in the state and provide legal protection.³ However, practice in the field shows that many *Marriage Isbat* applications are rejected by Religious Courts due to a lack of documents or supporting evidence, such as divorce certificates, marriage witnesses, or official marriage certificates. These rejections create new legal issues, particularly regarding the legal status of children born from unregistered marriages and the women's rights to inheritance and marital property (*harta bersama*). For instance, when a marriage cannot be legally verified, the child's civil status becomes uncertain, preventing the issuance of a birth certificate listing both parents' names. Likewise, women may lose access to legal protection in cases of divorce or domestic violence, as their marital relationship is not formally recognized by the state. This situation not only exposes weaknesses in the *Marriage Isbat* mechanism but also reflects broader systemic challenges in ensuring equality and access to justice within Indonesia's family law framework.

The case of a female convert in Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Sidrap) is a concrete example of this problem. This woman previously adhered to the Towani Tolotang faith and married and divorced customarily in the presence of the *Uma'* traditional leader. The divorce is considered legal in custom, but is not administratively recognized by the state. After converting to Islam and marrying a series, this woman applied for Marriage Isbat for formal legal recognition, but her application was rejected. This case reflects the difficulty of harmonizing customary law, religion, and state administration.

Marriage Isbat applications are generally submitted for a variety of reasons, including administrative constraints at the Office of Religious Affairs and the practice of polygamy. According to the practice of Religious Court judges, Marriage Isbat applications are divided into several categories, such as marriage under hand without a deed, ignorance of the status of marriage registration, unofficial marriage disputes, and polygamy cases.⁴ The Marriage Isbat process is a legalization effort that serves to provide legal status and protection that couples should have in marriage.

The social and legal impact of rejecting Marriage Isbat is widespread. In addition to losing basic rights such as inheritance, child custody, and social protection, unofficial brides are also vulnerable to economic and social

³ Muhammad Andri, "Implikasi Isbath Nikah Terhadap Status Istri, Anak Dan Harta Dalam Perkawinan Dibawah Tangan," *Jurnal Penegakan Hukum Indonesia* 1, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.51749/jphi.v1i1.11>.

⁴ Andri, "Implikasi Isbath Nikah Terhadap Status Istri, Anak Dan Harta Dalam Perkawinan Dibawah Tangan."

discrimination.⁵ The number of married couples is estimated to reach tens of millions in Indonesia, while their legal protection remains minimal. This poses a serious vulnerability in the midst of efforts to build a just family law. Data from the Ministry of Religion shows that 34.6 million couples in Indonesia do not have marriage books, illustrating the scale and seriousness of legal protection gaps facing families.⁶

This study uses an empirical normative legal research type that combines the study of legal rules and empirical data. Normative research examines laws and regulations and fiqh rules related to marriage law.⁷ Empirical research explored data in the field related to women converts who married in series and the consideration of Religious Court judges in rejecting their Marriage Isbat, thus providing a holistic picture of the problems faced. The research approach follows Peter Mahmud Marzuki's classification, which includes the statutory approach, case approach, and comparative approach. The statutory approach analyzes the relevant regulations of nikah siri and Marriage Isbat. The case approach explores the judge's considerations through a case study of the rejection of Marriage Isbat for female converts. Comparative approach compares national law and Islamic law in order to obtain a thorough and harmonious analysis.⁸

Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with affected women as well as judges and related parties at the Sidrap Religious Court. Observation and document collection were carried out to obtain complete secondary data. Data collection techniques include interviews and case studies that are thematically analyzed to identify key patterns and themes, providing a comprehensive picture of the reasons for rejection as well as their socio-legal impacts. Data analysis is carried out systematically using content analysis techniques to identify themes and patterns of policies and court practices.⁹ The data were analyzed by comparing empirical findings with theory and literature, so as to reveal the main factors of rejection of Marriage Isbat and its implications for serial brides. The results of this analysis are expected to be useful as a basis for recommendations for inclusive and equitable family law policies.¹⁰

With this approach and methodology, this research aims to make a substantive contribution to the development of an Islamic family law system that is responsive and adaptive to the socio-cultural conditions of the community. This research is also expected to strengthen legal protection for serial brides, especially

⁵ Mukhtaruddin Bahrum, "Problematika Marriage Isbat Poligami Sirri," *Al-Adalah: Jurnal Hukum Dan Politik Islam* 4, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.35673/ajmpi.v4i2.434>.

⁶ Editorial Team VOI, *Ministry Of Religion: 34.6 Million Pairs In Indonesia Don't Have Marriage Books* (Jakarta, 2025).

⁷ L.J Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. In *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, in Rake Sarasin, no. Maret (2022).

⁸ Rifa'i Abubakar, *Metodologi Penelitian* (2021).

⁹ Edy Suwandi, "Metodologi Penelitian," in *PT. Scifintech Andrew Wijaya* (2022).

¹⁰ Hasan Syahrizal and M. Syahrani Jailani, "Jenis-Jenis Penelitian Dalam Penelitian Kuantitatif Dan Kualitatif," *Jurnal QOSIM Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial & Humaniora* 1, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.61104/jq.v1i1.49>.

those with conversion status in areas such as Sidrap, and improve the governance of marriage administration for the sake of justice and social welfare.

Discussion

Marriage and Divorce of the Towani Tolotang Custom in the Indonesian Legal System

The traditional marriage of the Towani Tolotang community is a wedding ceremony rich in rituals and unique cultural values to the Tolotang people in Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Sidrap), South Sulawesi. The procession is divided into several stages, beginning with the pre-marriage phase, which includes,¹¹ *mabbaja laleng* (Investigation of the Origin of Female Candidates), *madduta/lettu* (Invitation), *mappetu ada* (Family Counseling), *mappaenre paddopo addeng* (Official Ties with the Symbol of Handing Over *Sokko' and Pallise'* to the Women's Party), *massarapo* (build additional buildings for guests and receptions), *tangke* (The bride-to-be stays and takes care of herself at home), to *Mappenre Dui/Pattere Pese* (handing over shopping money and food to women).¹²

The wedding procession was carried out in the presence of *Uwatta*, a ritual leader who is a direct descendant of the founder of Towani Tolotang, affirming the depth of ancestral values and their relationship with the belief in *Devata SenmaE* (God Almighty) that this community embraces. All guests sit cross-legged together on the floor of a Bugis-style stilt house as a symbol of togetherness and equality in the Tolotang community.¹³ This procession is also considered an ancestral heritage that is still preserved and is a potential tourist in the area. The divorce process in Towani Tolotang traditional marriages is usually carried out customarily in the presence of traditional leaders called *Unma* and *Uwatta*. If one of the parties wants to divorce, at the beginning, there will be mediation by *Unma* to try to find a solution and reconcile the two parties.¹⁴ If there is no way out, *Unma* will report to *Uwatta*, who then declares that both parties are officially divorced customarily. *Uwatta's* decision is final and must be obeyed by both parties, and if violated, there will be customary sanctions.

Towani Tolotang customary divorce is not always officially registered in court, because the community believes and is afraid of violating the customary ruling. However, administratively, Towani Tolotang's marriage and divorce certificate is recorded at the Sidrap Regency Civil Registry Office. This mediation process involves deliberative efforts between the divorced parties and traditional leaders, prioritizing reconciliation, and if a consensus is not reached, the divorce

¹¹ Herman Lawelai, "Local Government Protection of 'Towani Tolotang' Minority Group in South Sulawesi," *Journal of Governance and Local Politics* 2, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.47650/jglp.v2i1.34>.

¹² Muh Ardiansyah, "Kebudayaan Towani Tolotang Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang," *Tebar Science: Jurnal Kajian Sosial Dan Budaya*, ahead of print, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.36653/kebudayaan>.

¹³ Tini Suryaningsi et al., "Massempek Folk Games In The Tolotang Community, Indonesia," *Trames* 27, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2023.2.04>.

¹⁴ Suryaningsi et al., "Massempek Folk Games In The Tolotang Community, Indonesia."

will be imposed customarily. This reflects the value of kinship and respect for local customary law in the divorce settlement of the Towani Tolotang community.¹⁵

Administratively, the marriage and divorce certificates of the Towani Tolotang community are registered at the Civil Registry Office of Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Sidrap). Although their marriage and divorce process took place following hereditary customs led by traditional leaders such as *Uwma* and *Uwatta*, the recording of state administration remained an important part. By registering marriage and divorce events at the civil registry office, the legal status of their marriage and divorce gets official recognition from the government, which has important implications regarding identity documents, inheritance rights, and legal protection for both parties.¹⁶

This record combines customs and state law, thus strengthening the legal position of individuals in modern society while respecting the traditional values of Towani Tolotang.¹⁷ It also allows the provision of official documents such as divorce certificates and marriage books issued by the government, so that the people of Towani Tolotang can access administrative and state services more easily and legally. In addition, this process serves as an important bridge between customary law and national law to ensure that citizens' civil rights are comprehensively protected. Thus, the registration of divorces and customary marriages is not only customary recognition, but also part of the population administration system managed by the Population and Civil Registration Office of Sidrap Regency.

Marriage and divorce of the Towani Tolotang tradition are an inseparable part of the socio-cultural system of the Towani Tolotang community in Sidrap Regency, South Sulawesi. This community is known to maintain ancestral values and traditions colored by distinctive customary procedures, especially in the practice of marriage and divorce. The position and application of Towani Tolotang customary law in the context of Indonesia's national legal system shows the dynamics of legal pluralism that accommodates cultural diversity while ensuring formal legal protection.¹⁸

Historically, the Towani Tolotang community has had a customary law system that regulates various aspects of life, including marriage and divorce. This system is led by traditional leaders called *Uwatta* and *Uwma*, who are the holders of the highest power in the application of customary rules and the implementation

¹⁵ Muhammad Najmuddin, "Aktivitas Komunikasi Dalam Ritual Keagamaan Studi Etnografi Komunikasi Komunitas Tolotang," *Al-Mishbab* 15, no. 2 (2020).

¹⁶ Sugiarti, "Interelasi Hindu Dengan Bugis: Menggali Ajaran Sanatana Dharma Dalam Kepercayaan Tolotang," *Maha Widya Bhuvana: Jurnal Pendidikan, Agama Dan Budaya* 3, no. 2 (2021).

¹⁷ Wihdaniah Wihdania and Andi Agustang, "Pernikahan Tolotang Di Kelurahan Amparita Kecamatan Tellu Limpoe Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang," *Phinisi Integration Review* 3, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.26858/pir.v3i2.14426>.

¹⁸ Nur Rezky Asriadi, "Alkulturası Pernikahan Masyarakat Tolotang Benteng Di Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang Dalam Tinjauan Hukum Islam," *Program Studi Hukum Keluarga Islam Fakultas Syariah Dan Ilmu Hukum Islam Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare*, 2022.

of rituals.¹⁹ In marriage, the traditional process is carried out in stages, starting from the proposal, the family agreement, to the wedding ceremony, which is filled with symbols and spiritual meanings. On the contrary, the divorce begins with mediation by *Unwa*, which aims to find a consensus between the two parties. If mediation fails, then the final decision is in the hands of *Uwatta*, who issues a final and customarily binding decision.

According to the 1945 Constitution Article 18B paragraph (2), the state recognizes and respects the existence of customary law and customary law communities as long as they are alive and in accordance with the principles of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. This provision affirms the position of the Towani Tolotang customary law as part of a pluralistic national legal system. Meanwhile, Law No. 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage stipulates that all marriages must be based on the laws of their respective religions and beliefs and must be officially registered. Government Regulation No. 9 of 1975 then complemented by regulating the procedures for registering marriages and divorces, which have formal legal force.

The position of Towani Tolotang customary law in the Indonesian legal system is as a living law that applies specifically to the indigenous community, with socially and morally binding power.²⁰ However, in order to get formal legal recognition and protection from the state, the action must be aligned with state regulations, namely, civil administration registration. This procedure gives customary marriage and divorce dual legitimacy: as customary law and as a positive state law.²¹

This legal pluralism not only reflects the state's recognition of customary law but also demonstrates the necessary synergy between socio-cultural norms and state legal prescriptions. Traditional leaders such as *Uwatta* not only play a role in the implementation of ceremonies and the granting of customary decisions, but also as mediators who maintain peace and social justice in society. The process of resolving problems such as divorce through customary deliberation has proven effective in reducing the potential for prolonged conflicts and minimizing the use of formal legal channels that are sometimes complex.²²

¹⁹ Hasse J, "Dinamika Hubungan Islam Dan Agama Lokal Di Indonesia: Pengalaman Towani Tolotang Di Sulawesi Selatan," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama Dan Sosial Budaya* 1, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v1i2.744>.

²⁰ Hasse J. Hasse J, "Diskriminasi Negara Terhadap Agama Di Indonesia, Studi Atas Persoalan Posisi Hukum Towani Tolotang Pasca Pengakuan Agama Resmi," *Jurnal Kawistara* 1, no. 2 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.3918>.

²¹ Moch. Dienul Fajry Kadir et al., "Pola Hubungan Sosial Dan Eksistensi Masyarakat Hindu Tolotang Di Desa Kalosi Alau, Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang Provinsi Sulawesi Selatan," *Syntax Literate; Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia* 8, no. 5 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.36418/syntax-literate.v8i5.11933>.

²² Mulfi Jumliah Agustin et al., "Socio-Cultural Aspects of the Risk of Diabetes Mellitus in Tolotang Traditional Chairman (UWA) in Sidrap District," *Indonesian Health Journal* 1, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.58344/ihj.v1i2.19>.

The challenge in implementation lies in public awareness of the importance of official recording. There is still a tendency for people to prioritize customary processes and ignore state registration, which has the potential to cause legal problems in the future related to civil status and legal rights.²³ Therefore, socialization and legal education related to the synchronization between customary law and national law are needed so that the public understands the benefits of official administrative recording without reducing the customary values that are firmly held.

In addition, the religious aspect is also part of the identity of the Towani Tolotang community. This community adheres to the beliefs of ancestors who worship *Devata Seuva*, who make the belief system and customary rituals a major part of their social life. This belief affects all aspects of life, including the norms that are adhered to in marriage and divorce. The integration of this belief with aspects of customary law and national law is an important part of maintaining the continuity of cultural identity as well as compliance with the state.²⁴ In practice, the integration between customary, religious, and national law is managed through mutual recognition and adaptation. For instance, marriage ceremonies follow traditional Tolotang customs and spiritual practices, but are also registered under national law in accordance with the Indonesian Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974 to ensure legal validity. Similarly, issues such as inheritance and divorce are resolved through customary deliberations that respect community values, while still aligning with state regulations under the local government oversight. This hybrid system enables the Towani Tolotang to preserve their cultural identity while maintaining compliance with the legal framework of the Indonesian state.

Reasons for the Rejection of Marriage Isbat for Converts from Towani Tolotang Sidrap Religious Court

The procedure for submitting a Marriage Isbat at the Sidrap Religious Court generally follows the official mechanism that applies in religious courts throughout Indonesia. The application begins with registering and making a Marriage Isbat application letter at the local court office, which contains complete data of the applicant and the reason for the application.²⁵ Applicants are required to attach supporting documents, such as a certificate from the Office of Religious Affairs stating that the marriage is not recorded, as well as other supporting evidence as needed. After the administration is complete, the application is paid and registered for the trial process. The hearing was held by inviting the applicant, respondent, and related parties, with an examination of evidence and information.

²³ Mashuri et al., "The Influence of Religion and Kinship on the Dwellings of the Towani-Tolotang Community in South Sulawesi, Indonesia," *ISVS E-Journal* 9, no. 2 (2022).

²⁴ Mashuri et al., "The Influence of Religion and Kinship on the Dwellings of the Towani-Tolotang Community in South Sulawesi, Indonesia."

²⁵ Ninda Sari Sri Rejeki and Encep Abdul Rojak, "Implementasi Perma Nomor 1 Tahun 2015 Tentang Pelayanan Terpadu Sidang Keliling Dalam Sidang Marriage Isbat Terpadu Tahun 2021," Bandung Conference Series: Islamic Family Law 2, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.29313/bcsifl.v2i2.2664>.

During the hearing, the judge assessed the fulfillment of the legal conditions for marriage according to positive law and Islamic law. If all the conditions are met and there are no legal obstacles such as polygamy without permission, Marriage Isbat can be granted.²⁶

This procedure also accommodates special cases, such as marriages before 1974 or marriages of doubtful status. If the formal and material requirements are met, the judgment gives legalization of the legally binding marriage. However, in the event of a refusal, the applicant can file an appeal or cassation. This procedure is designed to realize legal certainty and protection of the rights of all parties, especially for women converts who face social and administrative complications in the recognition of their marital status.²⁷ The case of a female convert in Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Sidrap) is a concrete example of this problem. This woman previously adhered to the Towani Tolotang faith and married and divorced customarily in the presence of the *Uwa'* traditional leader. The divorce is considered legal in custom, but is not administratively recognized by the state. After converting to Islam and marrying a series, this woman applied for Marriage Isbat for formal legal recognition, but her application was rejected.

Based on the results of an interview with the judge of the Sidrap Religious Court who handled the Marriage Isbat case, the judge reasoned that administrative requirements and legal requirements for marriage, such as the existence of a guardian, were the main obstacles in submitting a Marriage Isbat. Many cases relate to incompleteness of documents, marriages abroad without clear proof of guardianship, and serial marriages that often do not comply with religious laws and state administrations. The unique case in Sidrap, with the Towani Tolotang custom, makes legal settlement complex. The judge suggested that converts repeat the marriage contract officially at the Office of Religious Affairs instead of applying for Marriage Isbat for serial marriages. Marriage Isbat can be accepted if it meets the requirements of harmony and does not contradict the law, such as the rejection of polygamy. Marriage Isbat without official permission. In the case of a second wife marrying a series, her property rights are often denied if it is proven that she is not in good faith, but the rights of children can still be fought for through the recognition of the child's origin. This interview emphasized the importance of legal certainty and the protection of the rights of women and children in the Marriage Isbat process.²⁸

The judge gave directions to the muamalah woman to complete her first marriage administration at the Population and Civil Registration Office of Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Sidrap). This is suggested because legally, the first marriage is still registered in the office, so the official administration is not

²⁶ Mohammad Syahrul Wardana, "Penanggulangan Nikah Sirri Di Kota Samarinda; Peranan Tokoh Agama Dengan Konsep Sadd Adz-Dzari'ah," *Legitima: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 4, no. 1 (2021).

²⁷ Adriani Adnani and Bonjol Padang, "Akibat-Akibat Hukum Dari Peristiwa Perkawinan Sirri," *Normative Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum* 9, no. 2 November (2021).

²⁸ Nova Noviana (Hakim PA Sidrap), "Hasil Wawancara," 2025, September 27, 2025.

complete or complete. This administrative settlement is important to clarify the legal status of the first marriage, which is the basis for the legality of subsequent marriages. The marriage administration process at the Population and Civil Registration Office includes the official registration of the marriage in order to get a marriage certificate, which is proof of the legality of marital status according to the law. If the previous marriage has not been legally registered, then the next marriage cannot be legally recognized, so it is important to complete the registration for the sake of legal certainty and protection of family rights.

Based on the results of the interview with the lawyer, he explained that the judge of the Religious Court has legal considerations in handling the Marriage Isbat application, including the fulfillment of the legal requirements for marriage according to Islamic law and Indonesian legislation. The main conditions examined are the existence of a marriage guardian, witness, and dowry, with a legal guardian. If the original guardian does not exist or is not qualified, the court may appoint a guardian judge after a special request. The case of female converts with Towani Tolotang traditional marriage that is not registered in the state is usually difficult to declare without official documents and renewal of the marriage contract at the Office of Religious Affairs.²⁹

The judge also emphasized that a Marriage Isbat can only be granted if there are no legal obstacles, such as unlicensed polygamy that violates laws and regulations. Failed Marriage Isbat applications are usually due to incomplete documents, incompatibility with the conditions of the marriage pillar, and problems with the applicant's good faith. An alternative solution that is often given is the recognition of the child's origin to guarantee the rights of the child, especially in the case of the second wife marrying a series. The Marriage Isbat procedure in Sidrap follows general provisions that require complete evidence and legal certainty so that the marriage gets legal recognition and protection of the rights of wives and children in accordance with Islamic family law and state administration.³⁰

Basically, the judge does not reject the application for Marriage Isbat as long as the administrative requirements and the necessary evidence are met. Marriage Isbat is a process of legalizing marriage that has not been officially recorded in the Population and Civil Registration Office, even though, religiously, the marriage has taken place. In the context of the judge's statement that advised the *muallaf* woman to complete her first marriage administration at the Sidrap Regency Population and Civil Registration Office, this is in line with the principle that Marriage Isbat aims to complete and legally legalize the administration of marriage that has not been officially recorded.³¹

²⁹ Saharuddin (Pengacara Pemohon), "Hasil Wawancara," 2025, September 28, 2025.

³⁰ Nova Noviana (Hakim PA Sidrap), "Hasil Wawancara."

³¹ Nova Noviana (Hakim PA Sidrap), "Hasil Wawancara."

Judges tend to direct administrative settlement first so that the legal basis of the first marriage becomes clear, so as not to cause legal problems in subsequent marriages. The Marriage Isbat procedure itself involves applying to the Religious Court by completing documents, such as an application letter, a certificate from the Office of Religious Affairs stating that the marriage has not been registered, and witnesses who can corroborate the existence of the marriage. If all is met, the judge will issue a verdict legalizing the marriage according to state law.³²

Juridical Analysis of the Rejection of the Marriage of Isbat Female Converts from Towani Tolotang at the Sidrap Religious Court

The case of the rejection of Marriage Isbat against a convert from the Towani Tolotang community in Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Sidrap), South Sulawesi, is a highly relevant legal case for studying the relationship between customary law, Islamic law, and state law in the context of the marriage system in Indonesia. This issue not only reflects the clash of legal norms but also shows the complexity of legal identity faced by indigenous peoples when there is a religious conversion and a change in an individual's religious status. In the context of the female convert, the legal question arises whether a customary marriage carried out before changing religion can obtain recognition by Islamic law and the state after she becomes a Muslim.

Indonesia is indeed known as a multicultural country that recognizes the diversity of legal systems. This is affirmed in the constitution through Article 18B paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution, which states that the state recognizes and respects the unity of customary law communities and their traditional rights as long as they are alive and in accordance with the development of society and the principles of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Thus, customary law has a recognized position in the national legal system, although its application must still be in line with positive law and the principle of equality before the law.

In the Indonesian marriage legal system, Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage is the main foundation. Article 2 paragraph (1) of the law emphasizes that the validity of a marriage is determined by its conformity with the religious law or beliefs of each couple. Article 2, paragraph (2) requires that every marriage be recorded according to laws and regulations. The purpose of this recording is to provide certainty and legal protection, as explained by Prof. Satjipto Rahardjo, that the law is not just a written rule, but a means to ensure justice and social order. Without official registration, the legal status of marriage becomes blurred and has the potential to cause vulnerability for women and children.³³

In the case of the Towani Tolotang convert, the marriage was initially carried out according to a traditional procession that is legal according to the

³² Nova Noviana (Hakim PA Sidrap), "Hasil Wawancara."

³³ Ahmad Fauzi, "Marriage Isbat Solusi Bagi Nikah Siri," *Jurnal Sosial Sains* 1, no. 9 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.36418/sosains.v1i9.192>.

Towani Tolotang belief, where the procedure is arranged by the traditional leader or *Uma'*. However, after he converted to Islam, he applied for Marriage Isbat at the Sidrap Religious Court to obtain recognition of Islamic law and state registration. The court rejected the application because the marriage was not initially carried out according to Islamic procedures and did not meet the principles of marriage in Islamic law, such as the absence of a legal guardian according to Sharia.

The rejection is actually in accordance with the provisions of the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) Article 7 paragraph (3), which states that Marriage Isbat can only be submitted for marriages that have been carried out according to Islamic law but have not been recorded. This means that if the marriage contract is carried out outside of Islamic procedures, then the Religious Court does not have the authority to ratify it through isbat. Prof. Azyumardi Azra, in the study of Islamic law in Indonesia, explained that Marriage Isbat is an administrative mechanism, not a judicial process to Islamize customary marriage. The Religious Court is only authorized to legalize marriages that are legal in accordance with the Islamic religion, not to change the legal status of customary marriage to Islamic.³⁴

The jurisdictional aspect is also important. Based on Law Number 3 of 2006 concerning Religious Courts, Article 49 states that the Religious Court is authorized to examine cases of inter-Muslim marriages. Since the woman's marriage was performed when she was not a Muslim, the court could not consider the marriage to be a matter of Islamic law.³⁵ In practice, the Supreme Court strengthened this principle through Supreme Court Regulation Number 1 of 2015 which affirmed that the legalization of marriage (isbat) only applies to Islamic marriages that have not been registered. Therefore, the judge rejected the applicant's application and recommended that he repeat the marriage contract in accordance with the Sharia before the head of the Office of Religious Affairs.

This rejection is often misinterpreted as a form of discrimination against customary beliefs. However, this view needs to be straightened out. As stated by Prof. Jimly Asshiddiqie, the Indonesian legal state is integrative, where various customary, religious, and state law systems interact with each other in a framework of national law harmonization.³⁶ The state does not cancel customary norms, but ensures that their implementation remains within the corridor of legal protection and administrative certainty. In this case, the Towani Tolotang traditional marriage is still recognized socio-culturally in its community, but if it

³⁴ Mansari Mansari et al., "Status Perkawinan Akibat Penolakan Marriage Isbat," *Jurnal Yudisial* 16, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.29123/jy.v16i1.534>.

³⁵ Ahmad Arif Masdar Hilmy and Faby Toriqirrama, "Marriage Isbat Terpadu Perspektif Maqasid Syariah," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 13, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2020.13108>.

³⁶ Rustanti Aulia Fadjartini et al., "Penyelesaian Perkara Marriage Isbat Dan Problematikanya (Studi Analisis Terhadap Penetapan Marriage Isbat Pengadilan Agama Cilegon Tahun 2016)," *Revista CENIC. Ciencias Biológicas* 152, no. 3 (2016).

is to be recognized by the state and the Islamic religion, legal adjustments are needed to meet formal provisions.³⁷

In addition to the issue of religious validity, the aspect of legal protection for women and children is also the main consideration. In the view of Dr. M. Fauzi Ali (2023), the existence of a legal marriage guardian is an essential element in safeguarding women's rights so that the marriage contract is not carried out without their will or without legal guarantees from the family. Therefore, Islamic law places the marriage guardian not only as a formal pillar, but also as a moral and social protector for women. In this context, if the marriage guardian is invalid or not Muslim, then the marriage contract cannot be considered valid according to Islamic law.³⁸

In terms of child protection, Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection mandates the state to ensure the certainty of the legal status of children, including children resulting from marriages that have not been registered. In such cases, even if the Marriage Isbat is rejected, the court can still provide a legal determination regarding the origin of the child as stipulated in Article 55 of the Marriage Law, in order to guarantee the children's civil rights, such as inheritance and legal identity. This is in line with the principle of non-discrimination protection for children affirmed by UNICEF and has become part of Indonesia's national legal policy.³⁹

From a socio-cultural perspective, this phenomenon shows that there is a tension between the preservation of customary values and the fulfillment of religious legal norms after a conversion of beliefs.⁴⁰ Indigenous peoples such as Towani Tolotang have a very sacred marriage system and are closely linked to their religious identity. The state's legal approach should not view customs as an obstacle, but rather as a source of value that can be harmonized. This opinion is in line with the view of Prof. Soepomo, who stated that customary law is a "*mirror of the soul of the Indonesian nation*" which must be maintained as long as it does not conflict with national principles.⁴¹

Therefore, an inclusive and dialogical approach is inevitable. The state needs to strengthen the function of legal counseling for indigenous people who change religions so that they understand the legal consequences of religious conversion, especially in the fields of marriage, inheritance, and civil affairs. Legal

³⁷ Asriadi Zainuddin, "Legalitas Pencatatan Perkawinan Melalui Penetapan Marriage Isbat," *Al-Mujtahid: Journal of Islamic Family Law* 2, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.30984/ajfl.v2i1.1942>.

³⁸ Siti Khatija Hafsari et al., "Tinjauan Hukum Pengesahan Perkawinan Melalui Marriage Isbat," *Private Law* 3, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.29303/prlw.v3i2.2615>.

³⁹ Ahmad Sanusi, "Pelaksanaan Marriage Isbat Di Pengadilan Agama Pandeglang," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 16, no. 1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v16i1.2901>.

⁴⁰ Kairuddin Karim and Muhammad Akbar Fhad Syahril, "Marriage Isbat Dalam Undang-Undang Perkawinan," *Jurnal Litigasi Amsir* 9, no. 2 (2022).

⁴¹ Sudirman Sudirman and Iskandar Iskandar, "Resolusi Marriage Isbat Di Indonesia: Sebuah Pendekatan Masalah," *JIL: Journal of Islamic Law* 1, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v1i1.16>.

assistance by officials of the Office of Religious Affairs, village governments, and local customary institutions can be a solution to avoid similar disputes in the future.⁴² Strengthening legal literacy will also ensure that women converts and their children do not lose their legal rights due to administrative misunderstandings.

In practice, several regions in Indonesia have demonstrated the potential of such inclusive and dialogical approaches. For example, in Sidrap Regency, local religious and customary leaders have collaborated with the Office of Religious Affairs to facilitate legal counseling sessions for Towani Tolotang community members who experience conversion-related marital disputes. This collaboration has helped couples formalize their marriages through *Isbat Nikah* without undermining their cultural rituals.

The rejection of Marriage Isbat by the Sidrap Religious Court in this case actually reflects the implementation of the law that is principled. The panel of judges does not decide on discrimination, but rather based on the authority and applicable legal norms. The decision also offers a concrete solution, namely the official repetition of the marriage contract at the Office of Religious Affairs, so that the marriage obtains legal recognition according to Islamic law and state law. Thus, marital status, wife's rights, and children's rights can be fully protected.⁴³ Philosophically, this case shows how law in Indonesia plays a role as a means of equilibrium, to maintain a balance between cultural plurality and the unification of national law.⁴⁴

In this framework, state law does not function to abolish customs, but to align them with the principles of positive law and social justice. As Prof. Mochtar Kusumaatmadja emphasized, law in Indonesia must be "*responsive to social values*" and not just dogmatic.⁴⁵ Thus, the rejection of Marriage Isbat by female converts from the Towani Tolotang community is not a form of denial of customs, but an affirmation of the importance of legal certainty and conformity between religious, customary, and state norms. This case is a valuable lesson in how Indonesia's legal system seeks to maintain a balance between cultural pluralism and national legal integration, while demonstrating the urgency of legal assistance for indigenous peoples who are undergoing the process of religious conversion so that their rights are fully protected.

⁴² St. Lisdawati Juddah et al., "Analisis Permohonan Marriage Isbat Di Pengadilan Agama Pangkajene," Indonesian Journal of Legality of Law 5, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.35965/ijlf.v5i2.2599>.

⁴³ Rika Nur Laili and Lukman Santoso, "Analisis Penolakan Marriage Isbat Perspektif Studi Hukum Kritis," AL-MANHAJ: Jurnal Hukum Dan Pranata Sosial Islam 3, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.37680/almanhaj.v3i1.566>.

⁴⁴ Pujo Pangestu and Habibi Al Amin, "Nalar Hukum Marriage Isbat Di Pengadilan Agama Kediri," HAKAM: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam Dan Hukum Ekonomi Islam 7, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.33650/jhi.v7i1.6150>.

⁴⁵ Novita Sarwani, "Efektivitas Pelaksanaan Sidang Keliling Dalam Perkara Marriage Isbat," El-Hadhanah : Indonesian Journal Of Family Law And Islamic Law 2, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.22373/hadhanah.v2i2.1808>.

Conclusion

Marriage and divorce in the Towani Tolotang tradition reflect the rich culture as well as show the dynamics of legal pluralism in Indonesia. Traditions led by traditional leaders such as *Unwatta* and *Unnma* not only contain spiritual and social values, but also show the governance of customary law that lives in the community. In practice, each stage of marriage and divorce is carried out in a sacred and symbolic manner, reflecting obedience to the ancestors and belief in *Devata SemwaE*. However, in the context of national law, this custom needs to be harmonized with formal regulations such as Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage and civil registration regulations to have the force of state law. The case of Marriage Isbat's rejection of converts from this community shows the challenge of synchronization between customary law, Islamic law, and national law. The Sidrap Religious Court rejected the isbat not because it ignored customs, but because it maintained the principle of the validity of Islamic law and the certainty of state law. Harmonization between customary and national law is key to protecting the rights of women and children without erasing traditional values. Thus, the Indonesian legal system acts as a bridge that balances the local wisdom of Towani Tolotang and the certainty of modern law fairly and humanely.

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