

Traditional Rites As A Hybrid Accountability Mechanism In Local Financial Supervision: The Relevance Of Bau Lolon In East Flores

Yosef Dionisius Lamawuran ^{1*}, Yasinta Yunrianto Palan Peten ², Veronika Boleng Kelen ³, Elisabeth Date Masan Welin ⁴, Yohana Fransiska Medho ⁵

^{1, 2, 3, 4} Public Administration Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Katolik Widya Mandira, Indonesia

⁵ Government Study Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Katolik Widya Mandira, Indonesia

* Corresponding Author: dlamawuran@gmail.com

Abstract: The weakness of formal accountability mechanisms in local financial governance has led to the persistence of customary-based oversight practices in various local communities, including the Bau Lolon ritual in East Flores. Using an ethnographic qualitative approach, this study employs in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of official documents and customary archives to examine how Bau Lolon functions as a hybrid accountability mechanism. The findings reveal that Bau Lolon functions as both a living law and a traditional integrity pact that binds public officials, contractors, and the community through a cosmic contract believed to carry non-negotiable spiritual consequences. Field findings indicate that this ritual is employed in oaths of office, oversight of development funds, and the resolution of accountability conflicts, thereby providing a moral infrastructure of governance that complements the shortcomings of formal law. This study concludes that Bau Lolon is an instrument of indigenous public administration that affirms the role of customary law in strengthening the integrity of public governance. This study recommends the need for further exploration through mixed-methods approaches and cross-cultural comparative studies to strengthen the empirical basis and expand the global relevance of the concept of ritual-based hybrid accountability.

Keywords : Bau Lolon; Hybrid Accountability; Legal Pluralism; Regional Finance; Indigenous Public Administration.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of public accountability has always occupied a central position in governance studies. In this realm, the concept of *hybrid accountability* has gained particular attention due to its ability to bridge two different sources of legitimacy: formal law and social norms (Benish 2020; Vakkuri et al. 2021; Rajala et al. 2024). Formal mechanisms such as audits, regulations, and legal instruments offer procedural certainty, but are often trapped in administrative dimensions and vulnerable to manipulation (Griffith et al, 2015; Elmaasrawy et al, 2025). Conversely, social and cultural norms rooted in the community present a moral binding force that is difficult to negotiate (Genbezo et al, 2025). The interaction between the two opens up opportunities for a more robust accountability model, not only legally but also socially (Pérez-Durán and Grimmelikhuijsen, 2025).

The need for a *hybrid accountability* framework is increasingly urgent in the context of regional financial management in Indonesia (Macdonald et al, 2024). The regional financial

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system includes various fiscal transfer schemes, development budget allocations, and public spending, which are very large in value and have direct implications for community welfare (Khusaini 2018). Ideally, these financial instruments should be the engine of local development and strengthen citizen participation (Gaol et al, 2024). However, practices in the field often show the opposite: budget misuse, lack of transparency, and weak oversight make accountability problems a recurring phenomenon (Syamsul and Ritonga, 2017).

Various national reports confirm that corruption in regional financial management is systematic. The methods used vary, ranging from budget *mark-ups* and fictitious procurement to embezzlement of public funds (Anandya and Ramdhana, 2024; BPK RI 2024). In the context of East Flores, this dynamic is even more apparent. Local media and public oversight reports reveal irregularities in various sources of regional finances, including development programs, education funds, and social spending (Kabelen 2024; Purab 2024). Patterns of financial statement manipulation, misuse of funds, and fictitious procurement practices show that the problem of accountability is not merely administrative, but also related to structural and cultural factors. This fact confirms one thing: regional financial oversight cannot rely solely on formal instruments, but requires social legitimacy rooted in the collective beliefs of the community.

The weaknesses of these formal mechanisms have been a focus of governance literature. Four main limitations are often identified: (1) an administrative orientation that disregards ethical dimensions, (2) limited local bureaucratic capacity, (3) community participation hampered by hierarchical power relations, and (4) legal sanctions that fail to deter (Grossi and Argento, 2022). Within the framework of *legal pluralism*, these conditions open up space for customary law as a *living law* that can serve as an additional control mechanism (Tamanaha, 2017; Tan, 2022).

East Flores offers an interesting example through the Bau Lolon customary ritual. This customary oath ritual is believed to be not only socially and morally binding, but also spiritually: violation of the oath is considered to trigger cosmic consequences in the form of illness, accidents, and even death (Boro, 2012; Tokan et al. 2025). This kind of collective belief gives Bau Lolon a binding force that is difficult to negotiate, even surpassing formal legal sanctions, which can often be negotiated. Thus, Bau Lolon can be seen as a *hybrid accountability* instrument that fills the void left by formal mechanisms.

Global literature shows that public accountability does not only depend on formal mechanisms, but is also strengthened by informal mechanisms. A study in Vietnam found that informal accountability mechanisms have a greater influence on responsive policy outcomes than formal mechanisms (Vu and Deffains 2013). On the other hand, research in the UK shows that the space between formal and informal mechanisms often becomes a point of accountability loss when not managed properly (Marnet, 2014). However, this literature is still limited to general social mechanisms and has not touched on ritual-based customary institutions.

In East Africa, empirical studies have begun to show that customary rituals can function alongside formal mechanisms. In Tanzania, for example, the ritual of *breaking a pot* is practiced alongside local government financial audits as a form of accountability, although the focus remains on general accountability rather than public fiscal governance (Kelsall 2003). Meanwhile, the Gadaa system of the Oromo people in Ethiopia is effective in resolving conflicts through traditional rituals, but it has not been linked to public financial oversight (Oljira, 2023).

In Indonesia, the integration of local values into public governance is also beginning to be studied. A study from (Hapsari et al, 2020) shows how the role of traditional leaders (*Mosalaki*) together with village officials can strengthen the accountability of BUMDes, despite constraints in human resource capacity in financial management. Meanwhile, a study from

(Ruhlessin, 2019) emphasizes that the local wisdom of *Pela* in Maluku functions as a public ethics paradigm that can support pluralistic community governance. However, studies that systematically highlight specific traditional rituals as a *hybrid accountability* mechanism in regional financial oversight are still very limited.

Unlike previous studies, this research offers a novel perspective by framing the *Bau Lolon* ritual not merely as a cultural expression, but as an institutional mechanism integrated into local fiscal governance. With this focus, the study contributes on two levels simultaneously: first, it enriches the body of literature on indigenous public administration by demonstrating that local cosmologies retain operational power in shaping contemporary bureaucratic behavior; second, it expands the discourse on living law by affirming that customary practices can function as effective instruments in public financial oversight. Thus, this research opens a new conceptual space that shifts traditional rituals from mere cultural expressions to accountability mechanisms possessing social, moral, and institutional legitimacy.

Building on this foundation, this study not only seeks to describe the role of *Bau Lolon* but also to analyze its conditions and operational mechanisms within the public accountability system. Specifically, this study is designed to answer two main questions: (1) under what conditions does the *Bau Lolon* ritual function to complement or even replace formal accountability mechanisms in local financial oversight; and (2) through what social, moral, and institutional mechanisms does the ritual oath in *Bau Lolon* transform into tangible fiscal compliance among public officials and project implementers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of this study is based on three main pillars: Legal Pluralism, Hybrid Accountability, and Indigenous Public Administration. However, these three approaches are not taken for granted but are viewed as arenas of conceptual debate that contain epistemic and operational limitations. Therefore, this study explicitly critiques the foundational assumptions of each theory, assesses their relevance, and positions the study's contribution in addressing the unresolved analytical gaps in the literature.

Legal Pluralism

The concept of legal pluralism introduced by Sally Engle Merry (1988) asserts that law is not singular but consists of various systems of norms operating simultaneously (Engle Merry 1988; Labik Amanquandor 2024). Tamanaha (2017) subsequently developed this idea by emphasizing that legal pluralism constitutes a dynamic network of norms, where interactions among legal systems occur through processes of negotiation, domination, and resistance.

However, in its development, legal pluralism has faced fundamental criticism on two levels. First, epistemic criticism, namely the tendency in the literature to treat all systems of norms as analytically equal without considering the power relations that often keep state law dominant. This risks reducing legal pluralism to a mere description of "normative coexistence" without explaining the hierarchy and effectiveness of each system. Second, an operational critique: the failure of many studies to explain how customary norms actually influence actors' behavior in concrete practice, particularly in highly institutionalized fields such as public financial management.

Thus, although legal pluralism has succeeded in opening space for the recognition of living law, it has not fully answered the key question: through what mechanisms do non-state norms generate compliance?

This study fills this gap by demonstrating that *Bau Lolon* functions not merely as an alternative normative system but operates through social and symbolic mechanisms that

generate regulatory effects on fiscal behavior. In this context, legal pluralism is repositioned from a purely descriptive framework into a starting point for explaining how customary law can function as an accountability mechanism with empirical binding power.

Hybrid Accountability

The theory of hybrid accountability (Benish 2020; Vakkuri et al. 2021) stems from a critique of accountability approaches that are overly focused on formal mechanisms. This theory emphasizes that accountability is the result of an interaction between formal institutions and informal norms, such that legitimacy derives not only from legal rules but also from social acceptance.

However, this approach contains problematic assumptions. First, a rational-institutional bias, in which actors are assumed to respond to administrative incentives and social pressure within the framework of instrumental rationality. This assumption overlooks the possibility that actors' behavior is also influenced by systems of meaning that are not always rational in the modern sense. Second, the reduction of the dimensions of legitimacy, where legitimacy is understood solely within the formal–informal spectrum, without considering that in many societies, legitimacy also stems from belief in transcendent powers. Third, conceptual limitations in explaining non-material compliance that is, compliance not driven by administrative sanctions or social pressure, but by belief in spiritual consequences. Consequently, hybrid accountability theory has not yet adequately explained accountability practices in contexts where actors fear not only the law or social sanctions but also cosmological consequences.

This study expands this framework by proposing the concept of cosmologically embedded hybrid accountability. This concept does not merely add a new variable but shifts the fundamental assumption regarding the source of accountability's legitimacy, demonstrating that in certain contexts, cosmological beliefs can function as a regulatory mechanism that is equivalent or even stronger—than formal and social mechanisms.

Indigenous Public Administration

The indigenous public administration approach (Drechsler 2013; Jumiati and Saputra 2019) emerged as a critique of the dominance of the Western public administration paradigm, which is perceived as insensitive to local contexts. This approach emphasizes that governance practices must be understood through the values, symbols, and cultural logic of local communities.

However, this approach faces serious criticism in contemporary literature. First, a normative-romantic tendency, where local practices are often positioned as a “better alternative” without critical evaluation of their effectiveness. Second, limitations in operationalization, namely a lack of explanation regarding how local values can be translated into concrete and measurable governance mechanisms. Third, the problem of generalization, where local concepts are often highlighted without contextual boundaries, thereby risking claims that cannot be empirically tested.

In this context, the main challenge is not merely acknowledging the existence of local wisdom, but explaining how and under what conditions such practices actually function as institutions that generate compliance.

This study addresses these critiques by demonstrating that *Bau Lolon* is not merely a symbolic expression or cultural value, but operates as a concrete institutional mechanism through the practice of customary oaths that bind actors socially and spiritually. Thus, this study shifts the discourse on indigenous public administration from the normative to the analytical realm by emphasizing the operational and empirical dimensions of local practices.

Integrative Synthesis and Analytical Propositions

Based on the critiques of legal pluralism, hybrid accountability, and indigenous public administration presented in the previous section, this study develops the concept of cosmologically embedded hybrid accountability as an analytical framework to explain how accountability is formed through the interaction of multiple sources of legitimacy. This concept is defined as an accountability mechanism that operates through three intertwined bases of legitimacy, namely: (1) formal legitimacy derived from law and state institutions, (2) social legitimacy stemming from community norms and controls, and (3) cosmological legitimacy rooted in belief systems regarding transcendent powers.

Unlike conventional hybrid accountability, which emphasizes formal–informal relations, this approach explicitly incorporates the cosmological dimension as an autonomous source of legitimacy. Thus, accountability is understood not only as the result of compliance with administrative rules or social pressure, but also as the result of the internalization of beliefs regarding transcendent consequences that transcend rational-institutional logic.

The cosmological dimension referred to in this study encompasses beliefs in ancestors, divine entities (*Ama Lera Wulan*, *Ina Tana Ekan*), and supernatural sanction mechanisms believed to possess the power to oversee human actions. In the context of *Bau Lolon*, customary oaths are not merely symbolic but constitute performative acts believed to be binding due to the potential for spiritual consequences should the commitment be violated.

However, this concept is not universal. Its relevance depends on the degree to which cosmology is internalized within a society. In contexts where belief in spiritual consequences remains strong, cosmological legitimacy can function effectively, even surpassing formal mechanisms. Conversely, in societies experiencing an erosion of belief, this role tends to weaken and is replaced by administrative structures.

In this qualitative study, the cosmological dimension is operationalized through empirical indicators, namely: (1) informants’ narratives regarding belief in spiritual sanctions, (2) the practice of traditional oaths as a mechanism for moral binding, (3) symbols and rituals representing human relations with transcendent entities, and (4) actors’ perceptions of the consequences of violations that go beyond administrative and social sanctions. Thus, the abstract cosmological dimension can be systematically analyzed within an ethnographic research framework.

To clarify *Bau Lolon*’s position within this accountability configuration, this study presents a two-axis conceptual model mapping the relationship between institutional forms and sources of legitimacy. This model serves not only as a visualization but also as an analytical tool for understanding how accountability operates in a context where customary norms, state law, and cosmological beliefs interact.

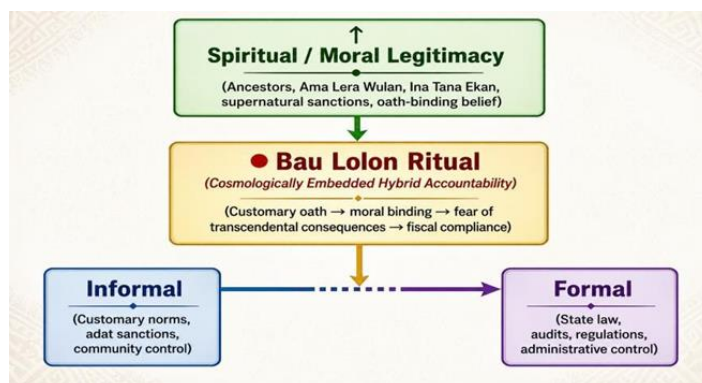


Figure 1. Diagram of Hybrid Accountability in the Bau Lolon Ritual

Figure 1 maps accountability across two primary dimensions. The horizontal axis depicts the institutional spectrum from informal to formal, while the vertical axis depicts sources of legitimacy from legal/administrative to spiritual/moral.

Bau Lolon is positioned at the intersection of informal mechanisms and spiritual/moral legitimacy. This position affirms that its regulatory power does not stem from the state legal system, but from a combination of customary norms and cosmological beliefs internalized within the community. However, its placement within the same analytical framework as formal mechanisms indicates that Bau Lolon does not operate in isolation but interacts with the state's accountability system.

This interaction is dynamic. Under certain conditions, Bau Lolon can strengthen formal mechanisms by adding a moral and spiritual dimension. In other contexts, it can function as a substitute when formal mechanisms are weak or lack credibility. Furthermore, in certain situations, tensions may arise, particularly when the logic of state law conflicts with local belief systems. Thus, this model demonstrates that accountability is not the result of a single system but rather a configuration formed through the interaction of various contextual sources of legitimacy.

Based on this synthesis, this study proposes that: The Bau Lolon ritual functions as a cosmologically embedded hybrid accountability mechanism, in which compliance is shaped through the interaction between formal rules, social norms, and belief in transcendent consequences. In certain contexts, cosmological legitimacy not only reinforces but can supplant or even create tension with formal accountability mechanisms, depending on the degree of internalization of belief and its relationship with state power structures.

This study thus not only expands the framework of hybrid accountability but also challenges its foundational assumptions. The accountability literature has traditionally tended to place administrative rationality and social pressure as the primary sources of compliance. However, findings in the Bau Lolon context indicate that under certain conditions, compliance is actually rooted in belief in transcendent consequences that cannot be fully explained through rational-institutional logic. Therefore, accountability must be understood as a multi-source configuration of legitimacy, where the cosmological dimension can function as an autonomous source of authority in shaping actor behavior.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using a multi-site ethnographic research design to explore the Bau Lolon ritual as a mechanism of social control and its potential in regulation as an anti-corruption strategy within public administration. This approach aims to understand the practices, values, norms, and mechanisms of the Bau Lolon ritual in the social and governmental life of the Lamaholot community. According to Creswell (36), ethnography helps understand patterns of behavior, beliefs, cultural interactions, and language by combining historical methods, observation, and interviews through direct participation. Through ethnography, the Bau Lolon traditional ritual is viewed not merely as a cultural tradition, but also as a living social institution (living law) that functions within local financial governance. Thus, the research focus is not merely on describing the ritual, but on how it is interpreted, performed, and institutionalized as a public oversight mechanism possessing moral and spiritual binding power. This approach also allows the researcher to document interactions among actors, traditional leaders, local officials, law enforcement, and the community, that shape hybrid accountability practices in the context of East Flores. This study employs a multi-site methodology, covering three regions in East Flores Regency: Mainland Flores, Solor

Island, and Adonara. This strategy aims to compare variations in Bau Lolon practices and identify common patterns and differences in their application as a form of social control.

Data collection in this study was designed in a phased and systematic manner to ensure the depth, accuracy, and credibility of the information obtained. The initial phase began with research preparation, which included the purposive selection of locations and informants, the development of interview guidelines, the scheduling of field activities, and the establishment of social access through initial communication with liaisons and key actors in the indigenous community. This phase was crucial for ensuring the openness of informants and the smooth progression of the data collection process within a socially and culturally sensitive context.

The next phase is the implementation of field data collection, conducted simultaneously through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The entire process is systematically documented in the form of field notes, interview recordings, and visual documentation as part of efforts to maintain the transparency and auditability of the research. The collected data is then organized as the basis for the thematic analysis process.

Operationally, data collection was carried out using four main techniques. First, participatory observation, which involved directly attending the Bau Lolon rituals at various research sites, including Mainland Flores, Adonara Island, and Solor Island. The researcher observed at least three rituals held between August and September, each lasting approximately 1–2 hours. Access to the rituals was obtained through consultation with traditional authorities, namely the mehen lewo, ata mua, and ata molan who serve as the guardians of the ritual's legitimacy. In practice, the researcher positioned themselves as a non-participant observer during the core ritual to preserve the authenticity of the practice, but engaged in limited social interactions and post-ritual discussions to capture the symbolic meanings, normative values, and local interpretations attached to the ritual.

Second, in-depth interviews, conducted in a semi-structured manner with various categories of informants, including traditional leaders, government officials, law enforcement officers, academics, and local residents. This technique allows for an in-depth exploration of informants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding the social functions, moral legitimacy, and relevance of Bau Lolon in public oversight practices and anti-corruption policies.

Third, focus group discussions (FGDs), held in each research area to gather collective perspectives and facilitate dialogue among stakeholders. FGDs also serve as a means to identify similarities, differences, and the dynamics of Bau Lolon practices across varying social contexts, while strengthening data validity through cross-confirmation among participants.

Fourth, document analysis, which includes an examination of formal regulations, local financial reports, customary archives, and media coverage related to corruption practices and public governance in East Flores. This study serves as a contextual data source that complements field findings and enables triangulation between social practices and formal institutional frameworks.

Through this combination of data collection stages and techniques, this research aims to generate rich, in-depth, and contextual data, thereby comprehensively representing the Bau Lolon practice as a social control mechanism within a hybrid accountability configuration between customary systems and formal governance. This research was conducted over approximately one year, encompassing the preparation phase, field data collection, analysis, and writing. The research locations were purposively selected in areas that still actively perform the Bau Lolon ritual and maintain traditional institutional structures. Specifically, the research was conducted in nine villages spread across three regions, with a detailed map shown in the figure below:

Table 1. Detailed Mapping of Research Locations

| NO | ISLAND | DISTRICT (KECAMATAN) | VILLAGE (DESA) |
|----|--|----------------------|----------------|
| 1 |  FLORES DARATAN | Demongpagong | Lewokluok |
| | | Lewolema | Riang Kotek |
| | | Tanjung Bunga | Aran Sina |
| 2 |  PULAU ADONARA | Withama | Sandosí |
| | | Ile Bolong | Lamahelan |
| | | Adonara Barat | Bukti Seburí |
| 3 |  PULAU SOLOR | Solor Selatan | Bubu Atagamu |
| | | Solor Barat | Ritaebang |
| | | Solor Timur | Lamakera |

The selection of these locations was based on the consideration that these villages represent the Lamaholot indigenous community, which still actively practices Bau Lolon and is closely tied to the dynamics of local government governance.

Informants for this study were selected using purposive sampling based on relevance, social role, and depth of knowledge regarding the Bau Lolon ritual and public financial management. Details of the research informants can be seen in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Research Informants

| INFORMANT CATEGORY | SUB-CATEGORY / TYPE OF INFORMANT | DESCRIPTION / ROLE AND RELEVANCE IN THE RESEARCH | NUMBER OF INFORMANTS | TOTAL |
|---|--|--|----------------------|-----------|
|  KEY INFORMANTS | 1 Traditional Elders (Mehen Lewo, Belen Lewo, Mua Molang) | Explain the values, norms, and sanction mechanisms in the Bau Lolon Ritual as a form of culturally based social control. | 3 people | 6 people |
| | 2 Customary Institution Leaders | Oversee the implementation of customary values in daily life and play a role in mediating customary law. | 2 people | |
| | 3 Local Historians/ Cultural Experts | Provide historical and academic perspectives on Lamaholot culture and social change dynamics. | 1 person | |
|  GOVERNMENT & LAW ENFORCEMENT INFORMANTS | 4 Regional Government Officials (Regent, Vice Regent, Head of Agencies, Sub-district Head, Village Head) | Responsible for implementing public policies, including anti-corruption policies at the regional level. | 5 people | 10 people |
| | 5 Regional Inspectorate | Supervise and evaluate regional financial management systems and identify potential corruption risks. | 3 people | |
| | 6 Prosecutor's Office & Police | Enforce the law in corruption cases and assess the effectiveness of the existing legal mechanisms. | 2 people | |
|  ACADEMICS & ACTIVISTS | 7 Academics (Law, Anthropology, Public Administration) | Analyze the effectiveness of integrating formal law with culturally based social control mechanisms. | 2 people | 4 people |
| | 8 Local Anti-Corruption NGOs/CSOs | Provide practical perspectives and advocacy experiences in culturally based anti-corruption efforts. | 2 people | |
|  COMMUNITY INFORMANTS | 9 Community Leaders | Have influence in maintaining and transmitting customary values in daily social life. | 2 people | 5 people |
| | 10 Village Officials | Understand village administration practices and the challenges of implementing anti-corruption policies. | 2 people | |
| | 11 General Community (Youth & Women Groups) | Provide perspectives on the effectiveness of cultural values in preventing corruption in everyday life. | 3 people | |
| TOTAL NUMBER OF INFORMANTS | | | 25 PEOPLE | |

This study employs a qualitative approach with an ethnographic strategy. The ethnographic approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand social practices and cultural symbolism from the perspective of the community being studied (Creswell 2018). Through ethnography, the traditional Bau Lolon ritual is not merely viewed as a cultural tradition but also as a living social institution (living law) that functions within local financial governance. Thus, the research focus is not merely on describing the rituals, but on how these rituals are interpreted, performed, and institutionalized as a mechanism of public oversight possessing moral and spiritual binding power. This approach also allows the researcher to document interactions among actors, traditional leaders, local officials, law enforcement personnel, and the community, that shape hybrid accountability practices within the context of East Flores.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with traditional leaders, village officials, local government officials, law enforcement officers, and civil society members involved in the management and oversight of public finances. Participatory observation was carried out by directly attending the Bau Lolon ritual as well as other relevant traditional forums related to public accountability. Meanwhile, the document review included formal regulations, financial reports, traditional archives, and media reports documenting budget misuse in East Flores.

Research data sources consist of primary data (interview results and field observations) and secondary data (official documents, traditional records, and academic literature). Informants were selected using a purposive technique, based on their involvement in local financial management and their position within the local socio-cultural structure.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis within the ethnographic tradition. The analysis began with the transcription of interviews and field notes, followed by a coding process to identify initial categories, such as weaknesses in formal accountability, social legitimacy of customary practices, and the role of Bau Lolon in curbing corrupt practices. These categories were then linked into overarching themes interpreted through a hybrid theoretical framework of accountability, legal pluralism, and indigenous public administration.

The validity and credibility of the data in this study were ensured through the systematic application of source and method triangulation. Triangulation was positioned not merely as a verification procedure, but as an analytical strategy to ensure the consistency, depth, and reliability of the findings. Operationally, the triangulation mechanism was carried out through several steps.

First, source triangulation, which involves comparing information obtained from various categories of informants, such as traditional leaders, government officials, law enforcement officers, and local residents to identify similarities and differences in perspective. Second, methodological triangulation, which involves testing the consistency of data across in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. Third, cross-validation is conducted between empirical data and documentary evidence, such as formal regulations, financial reports, and traditional archives to ensure that the resulting interpretations do not rely solely on informants' subjective narratives. Additionally, the triangulation process involves identifying cases that do not align (negative cases) as part of efforts to strengthen interpretive validity. Through this mechanism, every finding in the research is constructed based on the convergence of various sources and methods, thereby enhancing the degree of trustworthiness and analytical robustness against potential bias.

The researcher's position is participatory-reflective. The researcher does not merely act as an observer but is also engaged within the social context where the ritual takes place. This engagement enables a more contextual and authentic understanding of the Bau Lolon practice, while also fostering critical reflection on the interpretive process.

With this methodological design, the study is expected to yield a deep understanding of how the Bau Lolon traditional ritual functions as a hybrid accountability mechanism in local financial oversight, while also contributing to the development of public administration studies grounded in local wisdom.

4. RESULTS

Bau Lolon as a Traditional Oath Ritual and Social Mechanism

Bau Lolon occupies a fundamental position in the cosmology and social life of the Lamaholot people in East Flores. This ritual is not merely understood as a ceremonial tradition, but as an ethical framework that binds individuals and communities through cosmic, social,

and moral legitimacy. Etymologically, “bau” means to pour or spill, while “lolon” means on the surface. Thus, Bau Lolon is interpreted as the act of spilling tuak as both an offering and a binding of an oath within a cosmological space.

Within the Lamaholot cosmological framework, the community believes in the Supreme Being represented by the figures of Ama Lera Wulan and Ina Tana Ekan. Ama Lera Wulan is understood as the cosmic father the ruler of the sun and moon as sources of life (while Ina Tana Ekan is the earth mother who gives birth to, nurtures, and sustains life). This conception affirms that God is both transcendent and immanent: existing above all things, yet present intimately in the daily lives of the community (Arndt 2003; Michael Boro Bebe 2018). In this context, Bau Lolon serves as a sacred medium of communication between humanity and the cosmos.

Every oath in Bau Lolon is understood as a cosmic contract involving humans, the community, and transcendent forces (Bernadus 2024; Boro 2012). This bond is not merely symbolic but is believed to have real consequences if broken. “Bau Lolon is a deeply sacred customary oath because it establishes a contractual bond with the spiritual forces of the Lamaholot tradition. Once someone has poured tuak during the ritual, they are no longer merely making a promise to fellow humans, but to Ama Lera Wulan and Ina Tana Ekan. If that oath is broken, the consequences are not merely social but can take the form of disasters, illness, or even death, mafflicting both the individual and their descendants. For this reason, anyone who has participated in the Bau Lolon would never dare to break their oath.” (Traditional Leader, Flores Mainland).

This binding power stems from the collective belief that breaking the oath will trigger spiritual consequences such as illness, accidents, or even death. This system creates a monitoring mechanism rooted in a sacred fear that is non-negotiable. In the context of governance, this indicates that Bau Lolon functions as a mechanism of accountability grounded in moral and spiritual principles, which in many cases is more effective than formal legal sanctions.

Operationally, Bau Lolon is carried out through structured ritual mechanisms. The main procession involves gradually pouring tuak onto the ground using a neak, accompanied by the recitation of traditional prayers (koda) by the ritual leader. The first pouring is interpreted as an offering to Ama Lera Wulan and Ina Tana Ekan as the highest witnesses, while subsequent pourings signify the binding of human commitments within social relationships. Thus, the oath is not merely spoken but embodied in symbolic actions that connect the human, communal, and cosmic dimensions.

This ritual is always performed using material objects imbued with profound philosophical meaning. The neak a coconut shell that has been cleaned and smoothed serves as the vessel for pouring tuak during the oath-taking procession. Meanwhile, the nawing is a section of old bamboo used to store the tuak before it is employed in the ritual. Tuak itself is understood as a symbol of life; metaphorically, it is equated with a mother’s milk as a source of life and a tribute to the dignity of women. The nawing reflects communal solidarity much like bamboo that grows in clumps and supports one another while the neak represents the wholeness of human life within the cosmic order.

This symbolic dimension is also reflected in the ritual’s procedural rules, which embody the Lamaholot cosmological structure. Bau Lolon is performed exclusively by men, not as a form of female subordination, but as an articulation of cosmic role division: men are positioned as the embodiment of Ama Lera Wulan, while women are interpreted as the embodiment of Ina Tana Ekan. Thus, men bear the responsibility as guardians of the oath, protectors of the family, and pillars of the community’s continuity.

However, not all men possess the authority to perform this ritual. Only individuals with primogeniture rights or genealogical authority within the customary structure are authorized to

perform it. Additionally, there are symbolic rules that underscore the ritual's ethical dimension: individuals who have lost their father pour with their right hand as a symbol of truth and authority, while those who still have a father use their left hand as a form of respect for the head of the family's authority.

In social practice, Bau Lolon serves a wide range of functions, from dispute resolution and conflict reconciliation to the legitimization of positions and the ratification of village development agreements. This flexibility demonstrates that the values upheld remain consistent: honesty, responsibility, and justice as the foundation of communal life. With these characteristics, Bau Lolon functions as a living law that continues to thrive within the community's social practices (Tamanaha 2017).

From a public administration perspective, Bau Lolon can be understood as a traditional integrity pact rooted in cosmology. Unlike formal mechanisms that rely on written law, Bau Lolon is grounded in an absolute collective belief. This combination of social and spiritual sanctions forms a moral infrastructure of governance, presenting a concrete manifestation of hybrid accountability namely, the intertwining of customary norms and the formal legal system in upholding public integrity.

Limitations of Formal Mechanisms in Regional Financial Oversight

Field findings indicate that formal financial oversight mechanisms in East Flores still face fundamental systemic weaknesses. Irregularities are most frequently observed in the management of Village Funds and BOS Funds, with relatively recurring patterns such as fictitious reporting, disbursement of funds not aligned with physical construction progress, and the illegal distribution of funds among village officials. In many cases, resolutions do not proceed to criminal legal proceedings but instead stop at administrative mechanisms such as Claims for Compensation (TGR), particularly for losses of a certain amount. This pattern causes formal law to lose its coercive power, fails to produce a deterrent effect, and instead reinforces the perception that the misuse of public funds is a negotiable risk.

These conditions not only reflect technical weaknesses in the oversight system but also indicate structural problems in law enforcement practices. This is as stated by law enforcement officials who assert that formal law has not yet fully addressed the moral dimension of corrupt behavior, particularly due to room for compromise in on-the-ground implementation: "Bau Lolon is a local wisdom with great potential to support the eradication of corruption in East Flores. Formal laws have actually existed all along, but in practice they often have loopholes. Many cases never reach the courts and are resolved administratively, so the deterrent effect is not truly felt. In such situations, a cultural approach like Bau Lolon can serve as a reinforcing factor, especially since it addresses moral aspects and a sense of fear that positive law cannot reach." (Law enforcement official, East Flores). Additionally, the weaknesses of formal mechanisms are evident in the management of development projects and public spending. Manipulation of reports by contractors and the potential for compromise during the audit process indicate that the relationship between supervisors and implementers is often transactional. This situation indicates that the issues at hand are not merely administrative but also concern the integrity of actors within the system. Consequently, formal law loses its corrective function and tends to be reduced to administrative procedures devoid of moral substance (Oladinrin et al. 2023; Sohail and Cavill 2008).

This limitation is further reinforced by public perceptions that view state law as something that can be negotiated through power or economic resources. In fact, local officials acknowledge that positive law will never be fully effective because there are always loopholes for manipulation.

This indicates a crisis of legitimacy, where formal law is no longer viewed as a moral authority capable of upholding integrity in public governance (Matondang and Putra 2024).

In this context, there is a push from local governments to integrate customary mechanisms into the formal system as a strategy to strengthen accountability. This was conveyed by the Deputy Regent of East Flores, who observed that cultural power possesses a stronger moral force than formal law alone: “The Bau Lolon ritual is directly linked to an oath to the ancestors and the ancestral land, so it holds immense cultural power. The Lamaholot people have a deep-seated fear of the non-negotiable consequences of customary law. For this reason, I see this ritual as having great potential to support anti-corruption policies in the region. The challenge now is how to encourage the establishment of formal regulatory frameworks both at the village and regional levels so that it can be systematically integrated into government governance.” (Deputy Regent of East Flores).

However, this optimism is not entirely without criticism. A more reflective and critical perspective emerges from academics, anti-corruption activists, and the media, who highlight limitations regarding the commitment of actors and the complexity of socio-economic realities. This is as expressed by informants from academic and activist circles:

“Corruption in East Flores is indeed still quite high, and we cannot ignore this. Local wisdom such as Bau Lolon is indeed important and should be recognized in anti-corruption policies through clear regulations. But we must also be honest that there is a major issue regarding the commitment of officials, both at the village and regency levels. They may feel afraid according to custom, but in practice, economic pressures, basic needs, and political interests often take precedence. Under such conditions, not everyone is truly compliant, even if they have participated in the rituals. So we cannot view Bau Lolon as the sole solution, because the social reality is far more complex.” (Academics, anti-corruption activists, and local media).

These findings indicate that formal mechanisms for local financial oversight not only suffer from technical and implementation weaknesses but also face a serious crisis of legitimacy. On the other hand, Bau Lolon offers a form of accountability rooted in moral and spiritual values that holds strong sway within the local cultural context. However, as highlighted by critical perspectives, its effectiveness is not absolute and remains dependent on social and economic conditions, as well as individual integrity.

This phenomenon aligns with findings across various global contexts. In Sub-Saharan Africa, state audit practices often become mere formalities because reports can be manipulated through patronage relationships between officials and auditors (Mabweazara, Muneri, and Ndlovu 2020). In India, formal oversight mechanisms fail to prevent village corruption due to the weak social legitimacy of transparency procedures (Jeong, Shenoy, and Zimmermann 2019). Meanwhile, in Latin America, literature on accountability gaps indicates that formal democracy does not automatically yield effective oversight due to weak bureaucratic capacity and strong patron-client relationships (Hytrek 2002; Levy 2013). This pattern demonstrates that formal instruments tend to be ineffective when not supported by social mechanisms rooted in community beliefs.

Within the framework of legal pluralism, this situation creates space for customary law as a living law to fill the gaps left by state law. Bau Lolon emerges as an institution providing a form of accountability rooted in moral and spiritual values, with non-negotiable authority stemming from local cosmology. However, its effectiveness remains context-dependent.

Therefore, from a hybrid accountability perspective, Bau Lolon is more appropriately positioned as a complementary mechanism that strengthens, rather than replaces, formal law. The integration of state law and customary law is essential so that public financial oversight is

not merely procedural but also possesses social legitimacy and moral force rooted in the community's cosmological values (Benish and Mattei 2020; Vakkuri et al. 2021).

Hybrid Accountability Practices through Bau Lolon

Field findings show that Bau Lolon is not merely a sacred ritual, but functions as a real mechanism of public accountability. In social practice, this ritual is used to bind village officials, contractors, and public officials to carry out their duties honestly. The traditional oath-taking procession is held before the management of development funds, the approval of village programs, and other important decisions. Thus, Bau Lolon works not only in the symbolic realm but also as an institutionalized control instrument in local governance.

The uniqueness of Bau Lolon lies in its ability to fill the void left by formal law. State legal sanctions are often considered negotiable, while the consequences of Bau Lolon are understood to be absolute and cosmic. Law enforcement officials themselves acknowledge that the integration of Bau Lolon has the potential to strengthen regional financial oversight, as spiritual threats instill a more tangible sense of fear in officials and contractors than criminal threats. In this position, Bau Lolon exhibits the main characteristics of hybrid accountability: the intertwining of formal instruments and customary norms that complement each other.

The practice of hybrid accountability through Bau Lolon can be mapped into three main areas. First, public office oaths: village officials or regional heads who swear an oath with Bau Lolon are believed to be more careful in managing public funds, because any deviation is considered a violation of a cosmic contract. Second, supervision of development projects: contractors involved in the ritual are seen as more committed to fulfilling their commitments transparently, reducing the opportunity for mark-ups or fictitious reports. Third, resolution of accountability conflicts: when disputes arise over public funds, Bau Lolon can be used as a mechanism for moral restoration that is more acceptable to the community than formal legal processes, which are considered distant and elitist.

By reading Bau Lolon within the framework of hybrid accountability, it is evident that traditional rituals are not only relevant as cultural heritage, but also as instruments of contemporary governance. The uniqueness of Bau Lolon lies in its combination of cosmological, social, and moral legitimacy, which presents unshakeable authority, even amid the fragility of the state legal system. From a public administration perspective, this practice broadens the horizon of theory by showing that public accountability can be upheld through mechanisms rooted in local cosmology.

5. DISCUSSION

This study shows that Bau Lolon not only stands as a cosmologically rich traditional ritual, but also functions as a concrete mechanism of public accountability. The uniqueness of Bau Lolon is its ability to cross two realms that have often been in conflict: the formal law of the state and the customary norms of the community. In East Flores, where formal mechanisms often fail to have a deterrent effect, this ritual emerges as a moral infrastructure that complements, corrects, and even transcends the limitations of state law. To understand the deeper meaning of this phenomenon, three main theoretical frameworks can be used: legal pluralism, hybrid accountability, and indigenous public administration.

Bau Lolon in Legal Pluralism: From Cosmology to Regulatory Authority

The findings of this study indicate that Bau Lolon is not merely a traditional ritual but an ethical framework that binds individuals through a cosmic contract between humans, the community, and transcendent forces. Belief in spiritual consequences, such as illness,

accidents, and even death—creates a mechanism of compliance rooted in a sacred fear that is non-negotiable. In social practice, this binding power manifests concretely in the legitimization of office, dispute resolution, and the ratification of public decisions.

Within the framework of legal pluralism, this finding confirms that *Bau Lolon* is a “living law” as understood by Tamanaha (2017) that is, a law that is alive and operates within the social practices of the community. However, this study goes beyond that approach. While many studies of legal pluralism position customary law as an alternative normative system, these findings demonstrate that *Bau Lolon* possesses direct regulatory capacity over the behavior of public actors, including in local financial governance.

This reinforces Griffiths’ (1986) concept of “law in action,” yet simultaneously expands it: the effectiveness of law is not merely determined by its presence in practice, but by the depth of the internalization of collective values and beliefs (Cope 2023; Galbiati et al. 2021; Griffiths 1986). In the context of *Bau Lolon*, compliance arises from what Durkheim termed the collective conscience a shared system of beliefs possessing moral and sacred binding power (Misztal 2003; Oriane and Eustache 2023).

This dimension is further reinforced by the symbolic structure of rituals, such as the use of neak, nawing, and the articulation of cosmic roles between men and women, indicating that *Bau Lolon* operates as an institutionalized system of meaning. From Geertz’s perspective, this reflects symbolic legitimacy, where the power of law derives from internalized cultural meanings, not merely from formal sanctions (Abolafia, Dodge, and Jackson 2014; Cossu 2021).

This finding is also consistent with contemporary literature emphasizing the importance of cultural and moral dimensions in the effectiveness of law. Recent studies indicate that legal compliance is stronger when supported by normative legitimacy and collective trust, rather than merely the threat of formal sanctions (St. John et al. 2026; Ryan and Bergin 2022). In this context, *Bau Lolon* presents a form of legitimacy that is transcendent and absolute.

The significance of *Bau Lolon* becomes increasingly clear when linked to empirical findings regarding the weakness of formal mechanisms. The dominance of administrative settlements (TGR), the manipulation of reports, and audit compromises indicate that state law is experiencing an erosion of legitimacy. In this situation, *Bau Lolon* functions as an alternative regulatory authority that fills this void through non-negotiable moral and spiritual power.

This phenomenon aligns with the arguments of von Benda-Beckmann and recent developments in the study of legal pluralism, which suggest that in conditions of weak state legitimacy, societies tend to rely on non-state legal systems that possess cultural affinity (Benda-Beckmann and Turner 2018; Mensah 2021). However, this study goes further by demonstrating that *Bau Lolon* is not merely an alternative but, in certain practices, can serve as a more effective authority in regulating behavior.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study also reveal important limitations. Critical perspectives from academics and activists reveal that compliance with *Bau Lolon* can weaken when faced with economic pressures and political interests. This underscores that in the practice of legal pluralism, the effectiveness of law is contextual and influenced by power relations (Merry 1988; Chala and Gemedede 2022).

Thus, the main contribution of these findings is to demonstrate that living laws such as *Bau Lolon* not only survive culturally but can also function as effective regulatory mechanisms, albeit under certain conditions.

Limitations of Formal Mechanisms: A Legitimacy Crisis and the Space for Corruption Negotiation

Research findings indicate that formal mechanisms for local financial oversight in East Flores face serious systemic weaknesses. Practices such as fictitious reporting, discrepancies in budget execution, and the dominance of administrative resolutions through TGR (Taxation and Revenue Settlement) suggest that formal law has not yet been able to produce sufficient deterrent effects. In many cases, irregularities are not prosecuted criminally, thereby reinforcing the perception that violations can be negotiated.

This situation reflects what the literature refers to as an “implementation gap” the discrepancy between formal rules and on-the-ground practices (Buinwi, Buinwi, and Buinwi 2024; Pülzl and Treib 2017). Furthermore, this phenomenon also indicates an “accountability deficit,” where oversight mechanisms exist formally but do not function substantively (Rock 2020).

The transactional relationship between auditors and project implementers indicates that the issues faced are not merely technical but also relate to moral hazard and weak institutional integrity. This aligns with Klitgaard’s (1988) classical model, where corruption arises from a combination of power, discretion, and weak accountability (Kurniawan 2022). Recent studies also confirm that corruption tends to increase in systems that possess formal oversight capacity but lack normative integrity (Khorana, Caram, and Rana 2024; Mungiu-Pippidi 2023).

In a global context, these findings resonate strongly. Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that state audits often become a formality due to the strength of patronage networks (Hopper 2017; Phiri and Guven-Uslu 2019). In India, transparency mechanisms fail due to a lack of social legitimacy (Ghosh and Kumar 2024). Meanwhile, in Latin America, the phenomenon of accountability gaps indicates that formal democracy does not automatically lead to effective oversight due to weak bureaucratic capacity and the dominance of patron-client relationships (Lührmann, Marquardt, and Mechkova 2020).

The similarity of these patterns indicates that the weakness of formal law is not a local phenomenon but rather part of a structural problem in global public governance. Under such conditions, formal law experiences an erosion of legitimacy that is, it remains institutionally intact but loses its moral authority in the eyes of the public.

In the context of East Flores, this erosion is evident in the perception that the law can be negotiated through power or economic resources. Consequently, violations are viewed as manageable risks. In such situations, the need for alternative mechanisms becomes increasingly critical.

Bau Lolon then emerges as a response to this void. With a strong cosmological foundation, this ritual offers a form of accountability that does not rely on formal procedures but on an absolute collective belief. However, as the findings indicate, its effectiveness remains contextual and depends on socio-economic conditions as well as the integrity of the actors involved. Thus, these findings underscore that the weaknesses of formal mechanisms are not merely technical but also reflect a crisis of legitimacy and morality in public governance.

Hybrid Accountability: Integration of Formal–Customary and Cosmological Dimensions

The research findings indicate that Bau Lolon operates tangibly in public accountability practices through oaths of office, project oversight, and the resolution of financial conflicts. In these practices, Bau Lolon does not replace formal mechanisms but reinforces them through moral and spiritual dimensions.

When linked to the weaknesses of formal mechanisms, Bau Lolon functions as an additional layer of accountability that fills gaps in the formal system. The literature on hybrid accountability emphasizes that public accountability is the result of interactions between various logics state, market, and community. However, the findings of this study expand upon

this concept by demonstrating that, in certain contexts, hybridity also encompasses a cosmological dimension as a source of enforcement.

In Bau Lolon, sanctions are not merely administrative or social in nature but are believed to carry transcendent consequences. This creates a stronger moral pressure and narrows the scope for negotiation that often occurs within formal systems. Thus, accountability is no longer merely administrative but becomes a cosmic contract that binds individuals existentially.

However, the findings of this study also indicate that hybrid accountability is not flawless. There are still actors who commit deviations despite having participated in the rituals. This suggests that the effectiveness of the hybrid system remains dependent on the integrity of the actors and structural conditions. Thus, hybrid accountability in this context is conditional and not deterministic, yet it still makes a significant contribution to strengthening the accountability system.

Indigenous Public Administration: From Local Values to Governance Mechanisms

Within the framework of Indigenous Public Administration (IPA), the findings of this study indicate that local wisdom serves not only as a source of values but also as an operational mechanism in public governance (Suripto, Keban, and Pamungkas 2021). IPA emerged as a critique of the dominance of Western Public Administration (WPA), which is considered insufficiently contextual in developing countries, and emphasizes the importance of a locally-based cultural approach (Jumiati and Saputra 2019). Studies in China indicate that IPA serves as the foundation for public administration reform based on three main pillars: centralization, merit-based systems, and autonomy, which drive development progress across various sectors (Graham and Brigg 2023; Kwon et al. 2006). Other global studies as well as research in Indonesia indicate that IPA is increasingly relevant in examining the role of local wisdom as the foundation of governance, including in the fields of the economy, the environment, government digitalization, development, and ecological governance (Gustafsson et al. 2025; Khlopina Anastasia and Mykola Gnatiuk 2013; Lamawuran et al. 2025; Rahardjanto et al. 2025).

The findings of this study expand on this perspective by demonstrating that Bau Lolon functions as a concrete oversight mechanism that influences the behavior of public actors. In culture-based corruption studies, research indicates that cultural dimensions such as power distance and individualism influence corruption levels, while communal values can serve as a moral foundation for preventing misconduct in Europe and Africa (Oluwakemi Damola 2024; Osiobe et al. 2025).

This study goes a step further by demonstrating that culture not only influences behavior but can also function as a direct enforcement mechanism through rituals that carry tangible consequences. Thus, the primary contribution of this study within the IPA framework is to demonstrate that local wisdom can be part of the moral infrastructure of governance that operates effectively in maintaining public accountability.

Synthesis: Bau Lolon as the Moral Infrastructure of Governance

Overall, this study demonstrates that Bau Lolon functions as a moral infrastructure of governance that operates through the interaction between formal law, social norms, and cosmological beliefs. However, its effectiveness is not universal but depends on structural conditions and the integrity of the actors.

Therefore, Bau Lolon cannot be positioned as a substitute for formal law, but rather as part of a broader accountability ecosystem. The integration of state law and customary mechanisms is crucial for creating governance that is not merely procedural but also possesses strong moral legitimacy.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study reinforces the argument that public administration studies need to make more room for local epistemologies and culturally-based governance practices. Bau Lolon demonstrates that accountability mechanisms do not always have to be based on Western legal-bureaucratic rationality but can also be grounded in the local belief systems that are alive within the community.

Practically, this study demonstrates that local governments can consider customary institutions as strategic partners in strengthening public oversight. The findings reveal that integrating customary mechanisms such as Bau Lolon can enhance the sense of moral responsibility among public officials and contractors, as oversight stems not only from formal institutions but also from social pressure and the community's spiritual beliefs.

More broadly, this study offers the lesson that effective governance does not rely solely on regulations, audits, and administrative procedures, but also requires a moral foundation trusted by the community. In regions where customary ties remain strong, local institutions like Bau Lolon can serve as an additional source of legitimacy to strengthen the integrity of local financial governance.

6. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the Bau Lolon ritual is a customary institution that functions beyond its role as a cultural tradition. In the context of public financial governance in East Flores, this ritual provides absolute moral and spiritual legitimacy, unlike formal mechanisms that often lose their authority because they can be manipulated through power or money. Bau Lolon functions as both *a living law* and *a traditional integrity pact* that binds officials, contractors, and communities through a collective belief in cosmic consequences, making it an effective instrument for upholding integrity in the public sphere.

The main contribution of this research is to show how customary institutions can function as instruments of *hybrid accountability*. By linking Bau Lolon to the frameworks of *legal pluralism*, *hybrid accountability*, and *indigenous public administration*, this study expands the global discourse on public administration by presenting a new epistemology: that cosmological rituals can operate as moral infrastructure in governance. The integration of state law and customary law is not merely a normative compromise, but a substantive strategy to close formal oversight gaps and strengthen public accountability.

The practical implications of this research are clear. At the local level, Bau Lolon can strengthen community trust in village financial management. At the national level, recognition of customary mechanisms within the positive law framework can enrich corruption prevention strategies and enforce more contextual accountability. Globally, Bau Lolon offers an alternative model for countries with weak formal bureaucracies, while also proving that strong *governance* can be based on moral-spiritual foundations that are alive within communities.

This study has limitations because it relies on qualitative ethnographic methods that emphasize depth of interpretation, so the results are contextual and cannot be generalized without adaptation. Further research could strengthen the empirical basis of these findings through mixed methods, including public perception surveys, comparative studies with indigenous accountability practices in other parts of the world, and policy exploration regarding the possibility of institutionalizing indigenous rites into the state legal system.

Overall, this study shows that public accountability can be upheld not only through formal procedures, but also through shared moral and spiritual legitimacy. Bau Lolon proves that public governance with integrity arises when state law and customary law are positioned

not as opponents, but as partners in maintaining the ethics and integrity of government.

Author Contribution

Conceptualization and research design, Y.D.L., Y.N.P.P; data collection, Y.D.L., V.B.K., E.D.M.W., Y.F.M; writing – original draft preparation and editing, Y.D.L., Y.N.P.P; literature management, V.B.K., E.D.M.W.; supervision, Y.D.L.; project administration, Y.D.L. All authors have read and approved the published version of this manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

All data supporting the findings of this study were obtained from in-depth interviews, field observations, and ethnographic documentation conducted in East Flores between May and August 2025. Given that this data contains sensitive personal and cultural information, access to interview transcripts and field notes is restricted to protect the confidentiality of informants and the values of local communities. However, the author can provide data summaries, anonymized interview excerpts, and research instrument guidelines to other researchers upon reasonable request. Data access requests can be submitted to the corresponding author via official institutional email.

Conflict of Interest Declaration

The author would like to disclose that some of the research data was obtained through collaboration with the East Flores District Finance Office, the East Flores Police, and the Larantuka District Attorney's Office. However, these institutions were not involved in the analysis, interpretation, or conclusions of this research. The author guarantees that all analyses were conducted independently to maintain academic objectivity and scientific integrity.

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