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Volume 14 Number 1 June 2025

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The *Al-Albab* (e-ISSN [2502-8340](#) & p-ISSN [0216-6143](#)) is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal published biannually, in June and December, by Pascasarjana IAIN Pontianak. First launched as a print edition in [December 2012](#), the journal became available online in 2016. It has been a registered member of [CrossRef](#) since then, ensuring that all articles published are assigned a unique Digital Object Identifier (DOI). Recognized for its quality, the journal is indexed in the [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#). It has been accredited as a [Sinta 2](#) publication through a decree by the Minister of Research and Technology/Head of the National Research and Innovation Agency of the Republic of Indonesia ([No. 200/M/KPT/2020](#)).

The *Al-Albab* provides a platform for scholars and researchers to exchange ideas and share original research across a broad range of topics in religious studies, addressing both local and global contexts. The journal is dedicated to advancing scholarship by publishing innovative research that engages with contemporary issues in the field. Scholars from all regions and disciplines with an interest in religious studies and their manifestations in human life are encouraged to contribute to this open-access platform. With a strong emphasis on novelty and relevance, The *Al-Albab* invites submissions that adopt multidisciplinary approaches, covering areas such as Islamic studies, Catholic studies, Christian studies, Hindu studies, Buddhist studies, Jewish studies, local traditions, Chinese religion studies, and other pertinent fields within religious studies.



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VOLUME 14 NUMBER 1 (JUNE 2025)

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MIGRATION, *BALIK-ISLAM*, AND IDENTITY FORMATION OF MUSLIMS IN PALAWAN OF THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, Muslims in Mindanao, Philippines have had a conflict with the government. The religious-based conflict not only caused deaths but also forced people to migrate from Mindanao. One of the targeted places was Palawan Island. It is situated in the southwest of the Philippines – rather far from any other islands in the Philippines. It is then called “The Last Frontier”. This research focuses on studying the reasons for their migration to Palawan, Philippines and keeping their Islamic identities from 1970 to 2001. This research uses a socio-historical and socio-anthropological approaches. Survey methods and structured interviews are utilized to complete the literature study as primary or secondary sources. The theory of migration conflict from Nancie L. Gonzalez is used to analyse the migration in Palawan whereas for the analysis of the identity establishment, the theory of collective identity is utilized. As a result, the migration of the Muslims of Palawan, Philippines in 1970-2001 was a complex and recurrent event. The motive of the migration was the conflict in Mindanao resulting in economic opportunities in Palawan. As for the identity establishment, building the mosque became a symbol and a starting point for the Muslim migrant in Palawan. They had shared meaning in the phenomenon of Balik-Islam and their sense of belonging to Palawan as an Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) via plebiscite–referendum for integration into Muslim Mindanao or not.

Keywords: *Internal Migration; Balik-Islam; Identity Formation.*

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is a Christian-majority country, where 90% of the population embraces the faith. After Christianity, Islam is the second major religion with 10-11% of the population. The arrival of the Spanish conquerors led to the spread of Catholic all over the Philippines and brought about marginalized Islam. Spain that Islam had conquered made the Spanish keen to spread Catholic in the Philippines. Spain conquered Muslims called Moro in the Philippines (Kamlan, 2004). They have been called Bangsamoro, a symbol of the Muslims' struggle in the Philippines. In the country, Bangsamoro consisted of thirteen ethnics – Badjao, Iranun (Ilanun), Jama Mapun, Kalagan, Kalibugan, Maguindanao, Maranao, Molbog (Melebugnon), Palawani, Samal, Sangil, Tausug, and Yakan, which have occupied Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan Island (Kamlan, 2004).

In 1969, the Muslims formed Moro National Liberation Federation (MNLF) – a military force which waged war on the Philippines government a year after a massacre of the Muslim soldier known as Jabidah Massacre (Kuntowijoyo, 1994, p. 18).¹ Then between 1970 and 1975, there was the first conflict between the Muslims and the Christians in Mindanao (Costello, 1981, p. 171). This took hundreds of lives and made the situation more frightening. Accordingly, the remaining people preferred to save themselves. One of their choices was to migrate from Mindanao to other islands such as Manila, Quiapo, and Palawan. This last island is located southwest of the Philippines, which made it disconnected from other parts of the Philippines and did not join Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).²

Unfortunately, Islamic studies in the Philippines are synonymous with subsequent conflicts. This situation led to overlooking studies other than conflicts. This has drawn Isaac Donoso's attention who wrote about the "missing link" between the Islamic history in the Philippines and Andalusia (Donoso, 2015, pp. 247–273). This hints at the importance of the connection between the migration process and the keeping of Islamic identity. During migration, the identity of migrants will change to adapt and accommodate new life.

Based on the data above, this article focuses on why the Muslims of Mindanao migrated to Palawan and how they kept their Islamic identity in a new place from 1970, the starting point of the migration of Mindanao Muslims to

¹ Jabidah Massacre is the massacre of 28 Muslims by the Philippines forces. This massacre happened in Corregidor Island. This incident happened in March 1968.

² Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is an organization in Philippines that consists of five provinces, which are Basilan (not included Isabela city), Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Maguindanao, and Lanao Del Sur.

Palawan because of the on-going conflict in Mindanao, until 2001, in which the third plebiscite - referendum for the Muslims who lived in the area other than Mindanao to join or not join with Mindanao. This research ended in the year of 2001 as there was a rare event which was: the third plebiscite – a referendum for the Muslims who lived in the area other than Mindanao to join or not join Mindanao – took place. This article aims to explain the argument for the migration of South Philippines Muslims to Palawan and to analyse the dynamics of their Islamic identity establishment in Palawan. Therefore, this article uses a socio-historical approach to explain the migration process to Palawan chronologically and systematically. In addition, the social anthropological approach is also used to see how the collective identity based shared sense – oneness and “we-ness” that was the glue to their actual experience or their shadows reforms the collective identity and their relationship with other Muslims in Palawan (Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2015, p. 175). These approaches complete the historical method of this article – the method which consists of four steps: data collection (heuristic), source test (critic/verification), data analysis (interpretation/*auffassung*), and historical writing (historiography).

Research about Muslims in Palawan can be found in the book *Muslims in the Philippines – a Magnum Opus* about Muslims in the Philippines by Cesar Adib Majul. This book was published by the Philippines University Press in 1973. This book explains the long history of Muslims in the Philippines from the Sultanate of Sulu to the nineteenth century, specifically in Mindanao, rather than Palawan. Also, *The Making of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Southeast Asia: Cases and Resolutions* (2004) by Jamail A. Kamlian was published by the Center for Security and Peace Studies. The chapter is called “Ethnic and Religious Conflict in the Philippines: The Bangsamoro Experience” and chronologically discusses the struggle of Bangsamoro in negotiation with the Republic of the Philippines’ government and what happened in Palawan until 2001. Besides, there are also other works about the Muslims in Palawan. There is a chapter in the book *Migration and Disruptions: Toward a Unifying Theory of Ancient and Contemporary Migrations* (2005, University Press of Florida) edited by Brenda J. Baker and Takeyuki Tsuda. The chapter was written by James F. Eder (American anthropologist) with the title of “Migration and Disruption on Palawan Island, the Philippines: A Comparison of Two Cases”. This chapter deals with two migrations which happened in Palawan in 1930 by the nomads from Luzon and Visayan and in 1970 up to the 1980s by Muslims. The focus of this chapter using an ethnographic approach is the impact of the development and the change that took place in the two migrations, rather than the process of the Muslims migration like in this research. Eder also analysed

the social integration between the Muslims and the non-Muslims there (Eder, 2010b, pp. 407–420) (Eder, 2010a, pp. 317–332) with his anthropological approach. Besides, Eder also wrote an article called “Ethnic Differences, Islamic Consciousness, and Muslim Social Integration in the Philippines” in the *Journal of Minority Affairs* (2010). This article discussed the Muslim ethnics and their differences with other religions in the Philippines in general, their plural characters and identities, the root of the conflict in Mindanao and the ecumenical nature of Palawan, and the social integration of Muslims in Palawan. Lastly, there is one chapter entitled “Palawan in the World of Islam” in the book *Palawan and Its Global Connection* (2014). Oscar Evangelista and James Eder wrote it to test the Muslims population in detail within the scope of global Islam using a historical and ethnographic approach about the Muslims in Puerto Princesa, Palawan. However, the information about the migration and the dynamic of the Palawan Muslims’ identity has not been analysed yet—the theme of this research.

MUSLIMS IN PALAWAN

Under President Ramon Magsaysay, the Philippines was in favour of such national programs as National Authority for Reforestation and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA), Land Settlement and Development Corporation (LASEDECO), and Economic Development Corporation (EDCOR) (Gross, 2007, p. 180). These policies caused significant migration to Bangsamoro (Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan) (Gross, 2007, p. 109). For example, the population of the Christians in Mindanao slowly exceeded Bangsamoro - it can be seen in the following table.

Table 1.
Estimated Population of Muslims and Non-Muslims in Mindanao 1960-1980

Year	Muslim Population		Non-Muslim Population	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
1960	1.321.060	23	4.364.967	77
1970	1.669.708	21	6.294.224	79
1975	1.798.911	20	7.348.084	80
1980	2.504.332	23	8.400.911	77

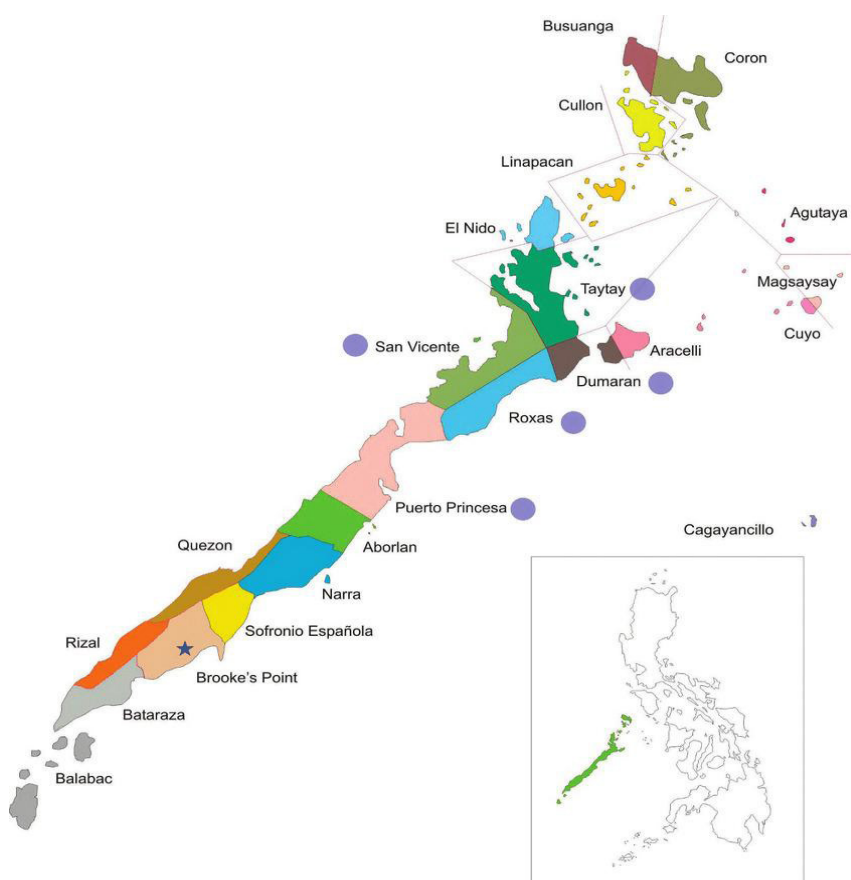
Source: *National Economic and Development Authority of Philippines*, 1980a

To respond to these policies, Bangsamoro formed Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) in 1968 led by Datu Udtog Matalam. The Bangsamoro

demanding that Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan be released from the control of the Philippines Government. Lately, the word “Muslim” was replaced with “Mindanao” allowing non-Muslims to join the movement (Gross, 2007).

The following years signed tension between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). This signifies that the mentioned-above national integrity approach failed and was replaced with political autonomy or self-governance for Bangsamoro after signing the Tripoli Agreement in 1976 (Gross, 2007, p. 91). The agreement was facilitated by the Late President of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, who served as the Chairman of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). As a result, MNLF took down their demands—from demanding independence from the Philippines to asking for autonomy for the Muslims in Mindanao.

Making the Muslim community the center or periphery was negotiated continuously, without exception with the Muslim community in Palawan. Eder sees Palawan as peripheral in the context of geography and politics (Eder, 2010a, pp. 320–321). Palawan is far from the recent center of the Philippines’ government, Manila. While politically, Palawan is far from Mindanao and not yet included in the area of Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).



Map of Palawan Province

Source: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sabine-Schoppe/publication/232683939/figure/fig1/AS:669003492102148@1536514270425/Map-of-Palawan-showing-the-municipal-boundaries-and-distribution-of-S-leytensis-Blue.ppm>

Historically, Palawan was an important region from the invasion of Spain in Manila and the Malay Sultanates in Sulu. Both of them fought one another to conquer Palawan because of Palawan strategic location despite its island which was far away and periphery (Eder & Evangelista, 2015a, p. 4). For centuries before Spain came, Palawan was one of the regions under the Islamic influence of Borneo and Sulu (Ocampo, 1985, pp. 77–78).

After the independence of the Philippines, Palawan has been a name of an island, ethnic, and also a province in the Philippines. Palawan covers an area of 1,703,075 hectares half of the area of Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan (MIMAROPA) and becomes 5% from the national territory of the Philippines. It is the biggest province and the fifth most oversized island of the Philippines and is a province in the Philippines whose population growth is faster than that of the national population growth of the Philippines (2002 *Philippine Statistical Yearbook*, 24 September 2020). This is going to be explained in the following part.

In the 1970s, there were twenty cities in Palawan's census. Those cities were Aborlan, Agutaya, Araceli, Balabac, Bataraza, Brooke's Point, Busuanga, Cagayancillo, Coron, Cuyo, Dumarán, El Nido (Bacuit), Linapacan, Magsaysay, Narra, Puerto Princesa (Ibukota), Quezon, Roxas, San Vicente, Taytay. However, due to the area reorganization until the 1990s, there were already twenty- four cities in the year of two thousand. Table 2 shows the comparison of the population growth of Palawan and the Philippines.

Table 2: National Composition of the Population of Palawan

	1970-1975	1975-1980	1980-1990	1990-1995	1995-2000
Philippines	2.8%	2.7%	2.4%	2.3%	2.4%
Palawan	4.9%	4.4%	3.6%	3.7%	3.6%

Source: 2002 *Philippine Statistical Yearbook*

The number of Muslims in 1970 and 2000 can be seen in the following municipalities as shown in Table 3. From the 1970 census, it can be said that there were 7.2% Muslims in Palawan whereas from the year 2000, there were 6.9% Muslims in Palawan - there is a 0.3 % decrease.

Table 3:
The Population of Muslim Palawan in Each Municipality in 1970 and 2000.

No	Municipality	1970			2000		
		Total population	Number of Muslims	Muslims Percentage to Population	Total population	Number of Muslims	Muslims Percentage to Population
1	Aborlan	8,410	129	2%	25,488	258	1%
2	Agutaya	4,203	0	-	10,413	63	1%
3	Araceli	4,444	0	-	10,870	12	0.11%
4	Balabac	7,912	5,360	68%	25,231	20,326	81%
5	Bataraza	10,176	4,408	43%	41,414	9,761	24%
6	Brooke's Point	26,961	3,702	14%	48,900	6,159	13%
7	Busuanga	5,905	0	-	16,287	13	0.08%
8	Cayagancillo	3,598	0	-	6,339	26	0.4%
9	Coron	17,852	21	0.11%	32,243	83	0.25%
10	Cuyo	12,534	0	-	18,253	5	0.03%
11	Dumaran	5,158	0	-	16,610	36	0.2%
12	El Nido (Bacuit)	7,358	0	-	27,029	31	0.11%
13	Linapacan	3,107	0	-	9,178	0	-
14	Magsaysay	9,840	0	-	10,883	2	0.01%
15	Narra	19,019	112	1%	56,845	909	2%
16	Puerto Princesa	37,983	278	1%	159,322	2,200	1%
17	Quezon	18,735	3,039	16%	41,669	2,060	5%
18	Roxas	16,341	20	0.12%	47,221	131	0.27%
19	San Vicente	5,179	0	-	21,654	17	0.07%
20	Taytay	11,920	0	-	53,430	80	0.14%
21	Kalayaan	-	-	-	120	0	-
22	Rizal (Marcos)	-	-	-	31,697	4,803	15%
23	Culion	-	-	-	14,229	7	0.04%
24	Sofronio Española	-	-	-	26,789	4,847	18%
Total		236,635	17,069	7.2%	752,114	51,829	6.9%

MINDANAO MUSLIMS' MIGRATION TO PALAWAN

This section discusses how migration from Mindanao to Palawan (internal migration) took place. There were three categories of Muslims ethnics that can be found in Palawan. The first was the Molbog Tribe the native Palawan ethnic who embraced Islam at the time of Sulu Sultanate. The tribe inhabited Balabac, the southern tip of Palawan Island. Secondly, there were Muslims who had been living in Palawan since the time of the Sulu Sultanate, like the

tribe of Tausug. Third, there were Muslims who migrated in 1970 due to a conflict in Mindanao which consisted of Maranao Tribe and Samal Tribe. From the third group, there were at least two reasons why Muslims chose to stay in Palawan, i.e.: civil conflict that took place in Mindanao and economic reasons. These will be discussed in the following sections.

A. Migration Flow to Palawan

Migration to Palawan took place due to the heated socio-political conflict in Mindanao where the largest Muslim population in Philippines had been living. There was an incident in Mindanao that resulted in a civil conflict in the country. It was Jabidah Massacre on 21 March 1968 which led to the massive migration of the Christians from the northern and center part to the southern one, i.e.: Mindanao. The Jabidah Massacre was the massacre of some Muslim soldiers on Corregidor island which was located in bay mouth of Manila, the place of a secret project “*Operation Merdeka*” (George, 1980, pp. 122–123). This event, then, brought about, for instance, MNLF and MIM to send young soldiers to Sabah, Malaysia for military training by a Malaysian professional, which was also supported by the State Minister of Sabah, Tun Mustapha bin Datu Harun (Gross, 2007, pp. 184–185).

Tun Mustapha’s reason for helping Philippines Muslim was that most of the victim of the massacre was from the Tausug tribe – a native tribe of Tun Mustapha. Another reason why Tun Mustapha accepted to train them was that he wanted to put Sulu into the area of Sabah just like at the time of Sulu Sultanate. Tun Mustapha also helped MNLF with weapons supply to that group as Libya, under the governance of Muammar Qaddafi (Gross, 2007, p. 185). As a result, there was an inevitable civil war between Muslims, non-Muslims, and the government. That not only takes people’s lives, but hundreds of thousands of people should also leave Mindanao to find safety. Costello argues that the implication of the conflict is not only migration, but also the increase of settlement segregation in Mindanao. On most of them chose to migrate out of Mindanao, for instance, to Palawan (Costello, 1985).

Regarding the choice of Palawan, Eder mentioned that at least there were two reasons for migrating to the southwest Philippines regions (Eder, 2015, p. 224). Migration had occurred there in the 1930s due to the interest in industrialization and agriculture while another took place in the 1970s due to a conflict in Mindanao. The second will be discussed in the following paragraph.

There were a few reasons for the migration to Palawan triggered by the conflict

in Mindanao. First, it was said by one interviewee, Abdul Haq, that his family decided to move from Zamboanga (Mindanao) because of the relentless of the civil war, and finally led him to move to Palawan (Datumanong, 05 August 2021). This decision was taken because in Palawan they had relatives who had been living there. The first time of arriving in Palawan, his family depended on the help of the relatives they lived with. The immigrants in general already had relatives in Palawan. They lived there and their living expenses were borne until they were independent. Their link to relatives and friends promoted their migration and helped them to rebuild their lives in a new place (Pooley & Turnbull, 1998, p. 15). Second, another interviewee, Norfatimah Sunggod, said that some Muslims families from Lanao del Sur and Maranao Tribe (Mindanao) who migrated to Palawan aimed to look for a job and economic chance (Sunggod, 10 August 2021). They migrated to Palawan, whether directly or had transit first to other places, because they considered it more conducive even though most of the people were non-Muslims (Omar, 12 August 2021).

B. The Migrants in Palawan

The Palawan island was a home for the Pa'lawan Tribe who had not known any religion along with Molbog Tribe, the natives from Balabac island, the southern tip of Palawan island (Eder, 2015, p. 226). This last tribe had accepted Islam since the time of the Sulu Sultanate. It was known that the southern tip of Palawan was included in the Sulu Empire. In the time, there were Tausug Tribe, Jama Mapun, and other Muslim tribes from Mindanao and Sulu in Palawan (Eder, 2015, p. 229). Datu Alimuddin governed the south area of Palawan and made it into a commerce area (Warren, 1981, p. 138). Palawan's famous commodity at that time was paddy. It would be exchanged with coconut oil and woven pandanus. The Muslims were centered in the south of Palawan. This was a mix of Muslim migrants who had stayed from generation to generation and the Muslims who had just migrated from the 1970s and after. Then, there was Jama Mapun Tribe who came from Cagayan de Sulu (now it is known as Cagayan de Tawi-tawi). The Muslim tribes in Palawan generally played a role making Palawan a trade route at the time of the Sulu Sultanate (Casiño, 1976). For example, Muslim tribes such as Tausug who came from Sulu island became bureaucrats and merchants in Palawan (Warren, 1981, pp. 137–138).

The people of Palawan consist of Muslims, Christians, and atheists. The Muslims in Palawan consists of the native Palawan people who accepted Islam when Palawan was still part of the Sulu empire, the only one in this category

was Molbog tribe who lives in Balabac island, the southern tip of Palawan Island. Besides, some Muslim migrants came to Palawan from the time of Sulu Sultanate to the middle of the 20th century. They included the tribe of Tausug, Jama Mapun, Maranao, and Pangutaran/Bisaya. Then the last category was the native people of Palawan and the Christians who embraced Islam and were called as *Balik-Islam*. This phenomenon of *Balik-Islam* will be explained later in chapter four.

C. Migration Motives

The migrants went to Palawan using boats that were called *lancha*. Sometimes cruises were cancelled due to the high waves that hit Sulu. Lail (informant, 43 years old) still remembers that her travel took a day and a night from Cagayan de Sulu to Palawan with ₱500 for the ticket for adults and ₱300 for children. Now, it costs at least ₱1500 from Cagayan de Sulu to Palawan, said Lail. The following is the result of interviews with a few informants. Lail and his brother, Hadi (37 years old) were born to a father from Java, Indonesia, and a mother from the Tausug tribe, Mapun island, Cagayan de Sulu Tawi-Tawi Philippines. According to Lail, his father first came at the time of the second world war:

“I have a father from Indonesia. He is Javanese. He has a father (Lail’s grandfather) who was famous, like a village chief in Jakarta. In the second World War, my father was sent by *Jepun* (Japan). Because he was fluent in Arabic, he let people know (teach) and people liked him. At the time, he wanted to marry for the second time, and my mother wanted him also. Father has two wives. I have a mother who is an old ancestor of Tausug, she was called *dayang-dayang* (princess). She has royal blood. If you talk to Haji Zainuddin here, people will know. That is why if you are smart in religion and Arabic, you will have the same respect as my father. My father teaches the Quran in Mapun and Palawan (Sahid, 15 August 2021).”

The migrations that were conducted by Lail’s family is called a return migration.



Lancha Boat

Source: FB Manilla Bulletin Lifestyle

Different from the other informant, Ria (62 years old) now lives in Sofronio Española. She came to Palawan when she was 30. She lived there using her savings before she found a job. Together with ten family members which include her parents, husband, and her siblings, she left Mapun for Palawan in 1989.

Then, Jean (33 years old), born in Zamboanga del Sur, migrated to Palawan when she was five years old with her parents in 1993. Jean came from the tribe of Sama Pangutaran/Bisaya. However, Palawan was not their first destination. In three previous years, her family lived in Jolo. The reason why they migrated was because of the conflict that took place in Mindanao. Other than Palawan, she thinks there were a few other locations such as Cagayan de Tawi-Tawi, Tawi-Tawi Province, and Visayan area. They already had a family who lived in Palawan. This family were the one who provided for them for a while before they got a job. When asked whether she still had any contact with the family from Mindanao, she explained that most of her family had migrated to Palawan and other regions in the Philippines.

In 1994, Fat (29 years old) must live apart from her father who moved from Lanao del Sur to Brooke's Point, Palawan. She was only two years old at the time. She and her mother still lived in Lanao because his mother worked as a middle school teacher. She, along with his mother and two brothers, moved to Palawan in 2002. Fat explained the reason why her father first migrated to Palawan:

“When he was still 24 years old, my father went to Palawan because he wanted to look for a job for our little family. He worked hard to have an income. Together with a family of his friends, he opened a roadside store that grew from time to time (Sunggod, 14 August 2021).”

Fat herself could memorize the condition of Lanao del Sur, despite her life in Palawan. Her family had to go shopping for daily life in the city once a week. Her homeland in Maranao, Lanao del Sur was undeveloped. Transportation to the town was still limited at that time. There, his father could not get a good job so ~~that~~ his father decided to leave and go to Palawan.

ESTABLISHING PALAWAN MUSLIM IDENTITY

This chapter explain the existence of mosque, *Balik-Islam*, and Plebiscite – Muslim collective identity in Palawan. Mosque became an effort and a symbol of establishing Muslim migrants’ identity in Palawan. At the same time, *Balik-Islam* phenomenon shows that there was a collective identity which shared meaning among Palawan Muslims with all of the Muslims in the Philippines. Lastly, the plebiscite which was a voting mechanism to decide whether Palawan Muslims wanted to be a part of Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) or not.

A. Islamic Teaching in Mosques

Akiko Watanabe explained that at least two functions of the mosque built among the Muslim migrants in Manila were there. First, the government built a mosque as a political symbol even though there was no Muslim community there. Accordingly, a Muslim community was gradually created there. Secondly, a mosque was built independently by the Muslim migrants who had long lived in the area (Watanabe, 2008, p. 3).

In Puerto Princesa, the capital of Palawan province, Muslim migrants worked together to build mosques (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, p. 111). There is still no exact data on numbers of mosques in Palawan, but there was, at least, research about some mosques in the capital of Palawan. The first mosque that was built in Puerto Princesa in 1977 was Abad Santos Mosque which was initiated by Hadji Sirad from the Tausug tribe. The second one, *Dawwah* mosque, was built in 1991 when the immigrants from Maranao tribe came to Palawan and formed a community in San Pedro in the 1980s. Then the third mosque, Al-Farouq which was also a school was inaugurated in 1994.

Interestingly, the donation for constructing the third mosque came from an

Indonesian General. He donated about 100.000 thousand American dollars to buy the land of this mosque. Al-Farouq was located in *Barangay* Sicsican, Palawan. But mosques were built only because of the growing population which needs mosques. The fourth mosque, Al-Akhdar, was built in 2002 for such a reason (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, pp. 120–123).³ This mosque was established for any tribe. Consecutively in 2003 and 2007, mosques were also built. Behind this construction of these mosques was a story of how Mindanao Muslim migrants organized themselves despite of the difference in their ethnicity. Migration and Mosque are interesting phenomena that can be found in the community of Muslim migrants in the Philippines (Watanabe, 2008).

Islamic activities in Palawan were centred in mosques. Mosque was not only a place to pray five times a day, but to have Friday prayer, *Eid al- Fitr*, and *Eid al- Adha*. But learning activities were also held there, mainly Arabic and Quranic chapters memorization – there has not been any attempt to lecture about the wearing of *hijab* (head covering) (Omar, 24 September 2021). These Islamic activities are the wish of the community to provide Islamic teaching not only for adults but also for their children (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, p. 129). This differs from the conditions in Mindanao where informal education had been there while in Palawan such education did not grow (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, p. 132). Up to now, Islamic teaching like memorizing Quran and learning Arabic is still held in mosques and take place on holidays or long holidays like Sunday School in Churches.



Abad Santos Mosque: The first mosque built by Mindanao Migrants in Puerto Princesa.
January 4, 2008

Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/musa_abuaisha/2273135733

³ I had contacted Eder to obtain the information about the Indonesian General who donated this mosque. But unfortunately, he did not know.

Recently, rather than in the mosques, Palawan Muslims prefer to put Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) in schools. Therefore, the availability of the ALIVE teachers is also considered by ARMM as an agency that handles the implementation of the idea. Palawan State University became one institution that provides teachers training and offers elementary school teachers with Arabic and Islamic studies concentration (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, p. 133).

B. *Balik-Islam*

Balik-Islam has been a growing phenomenon in the Philippines, no exception in Palawan. *Balik-Islam* is a term for the Christians who embraced Islam. *Balik-Islam* is also called *mualaf*. *Balik-Islam* refers to people who weren't Islam before, then embraced the religion. However, in the context of the Philippines, the Muslims in Palawan believe that people there are initially Muslims. Still, because of the political "condition" – the successive colonization from Spain to America, they left Islam. They assumed if there was not any colonization, most people would embrace Islam. However, Luis Lacar is confused about this phenomenon. He wonders how we can classify a person who does not know Islam, born from Christian parents, baptized in the church, and goes to a church regularly as a revert (*Balik-Islam*) when they embraced Islam – they are not considered a convert, as though they already accepted Islam, then converted, and then re-embraced Islam (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, p. 42). *Balik-Islam* came up in conjunction with the conflict in Mindanao in the 1970s (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b). From 1970 to 1998, Lacar notes there were at least 498 Christians who converted to Islam in Palawan – the Muslims there call them *Balik-Islam* (2001, p. 41).

Nevertheless, this term at least has a historical-sociological root in the Muslim Community in the Philippines. They believe they are back to their first and original religion after they were "separated by a mistake in history". They have no control over the force of the colonial government (Lacar, 2001). The *Jamaah Tabligh*, a congregation that scripturally exercises the Prophet's *da'wa* model, supposes that if there were not any imperialism in the 16th century, the Philippines would be a Muslim majority country (Lacar, 2001, pp. 41–42). Instead to be called "convert", those who embraced Islam are happier to be called "*Balik-Islam*" or "revert". According to Lacar, they are displeased to be called converters (Lacar, 2001). The religious leaders from *Jamaah Tabligh*⁴ who converted those people also called them *Balik-Islam*.

⁴ *Jamaah Tabligh* is an Islamic missionary movement which was established in India in 1926 M.

The *Balik-Islam* phenomenon happened a lot. From 1970-1998, Lacar noted that at least 498 Christians embraced Islam or *Balik-Islam* in Palawan (Lacar, 2001, p. 41). While at the end of the 1990s, there were at least 3700 *Balik-Islam* who were known in a few provinces, such as Lanao del Sur (including Marawi city and Malabang), Lanao del Norte (including Iligan city), North and South Palawan (including Puerto Princesa, Balabac, Bataraza, Narra, Aborlan, San Vicente, and Taytay) (Lacar, 2001, p. 43), Zamboanga (Norte and Sur), Cotabato city, General Santos, Sultan Kudarat, and Davao. In Puerto Princesa, there is a non-profit organization called “Balik-Islam Foundation” which is managed and operated by the *Balik-Islams* who serve its’ members economic or religious needs (Lacar, 2001).

From the phenomenon of *Balik-Islam* which happened in Palawan, it can be seen that Palawan Muslims have a collective identity which is the same as Mindanao Muslims. This phenomenon confirmed what Snow had written that common origin, colonisation, then “history mistake” as a destiny based the feeling of *we-ness* that forced the Palawan Muslims not only to spread Islam, but also to do collective agency to form an organization to help the revert.

C. Plebiscite: Integration with the Government

On 23 December 1976, Imelda Romuáldez Marcos, as a representative from the Philippines Government, sat with Ali Abdussalam Treki, signed the Tripoli Agreement in Libya. This agreement was facilitated by Libya’s leader at the time, Muammar Qaddafi. The point of this agreement was a ceasefire between the MNLF military and the government of the Philippines. Then on 25 March 1977 President Marcos made a presidential decree No. 1628 which was an instrument to form an autonomous area in the South Philippines. The decree was signed at the National Palace of Malacañang, Philippines (*Proclamation No. 1628, s. 1977*, 2021).

The Tripoli Agreement failed because of three reasons (Suaedy, 2018, p. 241). Firstly, President Marcos divided Mindanao into two regions whereas MNLF in the agreement was in favour of clause that the autonomous area of Mindanao consisted of 13 areas such as Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, North Cotabato, South Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Davao del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Palawan as a single autonomous area unit. Secondly, the central government forced a referendum⁵ for each of the areas, despite no such a referendum in the Tripoli Agreement. Words like “to be discussed later” and “to be fixed later”

⁵ Referendum or plebiscite in the Philippines is a voting mechanism of yes or no to decide for an issue.

became a boomerang for Bangsamoro in the future. Thirdly, Marcos used *datu* to undermine Nur Misuari's leadership in MNLF which also resulted in the weakening of MNLF. Such situation worsened when President Marcos insisted on holding a plebiscite or referendum because the majority of the people in those thirteen provinces did not embrace Islam. On the other side, the MNLF objected to the plebiscite because it was not in the Tripoli Agreement. This plebiscite brought about a conflict between Bangsamoro and the government of the Philippines Republic.

To follow up on the decision of President Marcos, the first plebiscite was held on 17 April 1977. The result of the plebiscite was as follows: 90%: Lanao del Sur, Sulu, and Tawi-tawi; 70%: Basilan, North Cotabato; < 50%: Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat; and < 20%: Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, South Cotabato, Davao del Sur, and Palawan. The result of this plebiscite was set in Republic Laws No. 6734 on 1 August 1989. Only four regions joined ARMM which were: Lanao del Sur Province (except Marawi city), Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Basilan. It is obvious that the plebiscite held by the Philippines government and was not mentioned in the Tripoli Agreement was unfavourable to Bangsamoro. The people at least 18 years old in the provinces or municipalities deserved the right to choose in the referendum. If in a province or municipality the number of Muslims was not more than that of non-Muslims, it would be sure that the result of the plebiscite was to disintegrate with the ARMM. On the other side, Palawan as High Urbanized City (HUC), which consisted of 23 municipalities and 1 capital, was the only province opted for the plebiscite. In contrast, other municipalities, especially in south Palawan where its people were mostly Muslims, were not given a chance to hold a plebiscite. Accordingly, the plebiscite resulted in the disintegration of the ARMM.

Furthermore, there was almost no difference when the second plebiscite was held in 2001. Based on the presidential decree No. 9054, only two regions were opted, i.e.: Palawan Province and Puerto Princesa.

“The plebiscite shall be conducted in the provinces of Basilan, Cotabato, Davao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Palawan, Sarangani, South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur and the newly created Province of Zamboanga Sibugay, and (b) in the cities of Cotabato, Dapitan, Dipolog, General Santos, Iligan, Kidapawan, Marawi, Pagadian, Puerto Princesa, Digos, Koronadal, Tacurong and Zamboanga.”

Four regions that had already decided to integrate with the ARMM in the

first plebiscite remained there but with different sets of questions such as the following:

“Do you vote in favor of the amendments to Republic Act No. 6734, the Organic Act for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, as proposed under this Organic Act, which includes, among other things, the expansion of the area of the autonomous region?”

While other than those four regions, the question posed was: *“Do you vote in favor of the inclusion of your province or city in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao?”* The result of this plebiscite was the province of Palawan and Puerto Princesa refused to join. On the paper, there were only seven percent of Muslims in Palawan and one percent in Puerto Princesa. It was apparent that for the second time, Palawan and Puerto Princesa rejected to join ARMM. The result of the Plebiscite above shows that Palawan Muslims chose to integrate with the people’s government. So, it was understandable if the relationship there between Muslims and non-Muslims was peaceful. They tolerated one another. Eder even argues that they had so close social relationships that Muslims came to the religious activity in the church (Eder, 2010a, p. 328). The integration of Palawan Muslims can happen because economically and politically they had the same background as the non-Muslims in Palawan (Eder, 2010a) – the phenomenon of *Balik-Islam* proved it. In this case, Lacar notes at least 498 Christians embraced Islam or *Balik-Islam* in Palawan (Lacar, 2001, p. 41).

CONCLUSION

Migrations of Mindanao Muslims to Palawan in the 1970s could not be separated from the political and religious conflict in Mindanao. The flow of the migration afterwards showed that economic factors as well as family and friend ties became the main reasons for the Muslims to move to Palawan. In the new place they made efforts to establish their identity using the following media: mosques, the memory of *Balik-Islam*, and plebiscite. Palawan Muslims used mosques to learn the basics of Islam and overcome the lack of Islamic education in traditional schools. Then, *Balik-Islam* and plebiscite represented that Palawan Muslims were a collective part of Mindanao Muslims who had shared meaning which was “narrative bonding” to their view of Islam. Uniquely, in the context of plebiscite, the narrative bonding as Muslims from Mindanao did not appear even though the plebiscites were conducted more than once – they rejected joining Mindanao. They chose to integrate with the local people.

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CHURCH AND YOUTH RESILIENCE TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE: Assessing Church Responses, Challenges and Gaps

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ABSTRACT

Realising the fundamental role of the church in youth development and social work, the study investigates the responses, challenges and gaps in combating youth substance abuse by the church. It highlights the need for holistic interventions while emphasising the need for mental health resilience. The study employed a qualitative approach, combining document analysis and review of literary materials to assess church and substance abuse among youth, especially cases studied in the Philippines and Kenya. The findings indicate that the church's interventions in youth substance abuse include moral teachings, awareness raising and support project activities. The study also underscores the importance of family dynamics in developing resilience against substance abuse. The major challenges faced by the church concerning youth substance abuse and promoting resilience include poverty and peer pressure, which hinder the youth's desire to undergo interventions. Moreover, cultural stigma and denial from the parents or guardians block the youth from seeking help. Cultural belief systems also disrupt family connections, further underlining the need for robust support systems. An enormous gulf exists between the church and the youth, which undermines any preventative measures that might be undertaken. The research proffers useful pointers for policymakers, church leaders, and social workers regarding the life-style aspects that link faith, culture, and youth substance addiction. It recommends that the church customise its approaches to address the specific challenges faced by young people struggling with substance abuse, focusing on health, healing, and resilience, aligning with the challenges faced by different youths and the need for urgent attention.

Keywords: Church; Youth Resilience; Substance Abuse

INTRODUCTION

The rampant use of substances among youth seems to be raising concern about its impact on the health, social and economic aspects of their life. Substance abuse tends to have a plethora of adverse effects through various addictions

or disorders of mental health, or by downgrading one's social functioning (Izdebski *et al.*, 2025). It becomes, therefore, essential to examine factors associated with substance abuse among young people, as this is important for crafting any effective preventive strategies. Psychoactive substance use predicts high-risk behaviours such as illicit sexual activities, which by itself warrants an intervention (Izdebski *et al.*, 2025). This further necessitates an investigation into the rising prevalence of substance abuse among youth, particularly how the church, as a pivotal institution in community life responds to this issue. This, therefore, necessitates church programmes to educate youth on the risks surrounding drug use and how to make the right choices. Furthermore, providing mental health resources and support for young people who struggle with substance abuse provides an avenue to deal with some innate problems and prevent risky behaviours. All communities, schools and healthcare systems come together to jointly work toward bold prevention and intervention programmes targeting substance abuse behaviours among the youth.

In this study, the term "church" refers to the various religious institutions and communities that are significant in the lives of people. The church often contributes significantly to value formation, providing support and nurturing a sense of belonging. It acts as a guide through moral teachings, influencing youth behaviour and their choices. While resilience in this study is defined as adapting and recovering from adversity, stress, or trauma, particularly among young people. In substance abuse, resilience can take the form of resisting peer pressure, managing life's challenges and asking for help when needed. Therefore, building resilience to substance abuse by youth is very imperative to combat and recover from substance abuse problems.

The awareness of the dangers that accompany substance abuse and the knowledge of coping strategies and healthier alternatives to prevent them go a long way in preventing and reducing substance abuse among youths (Nwogu, 2022). Substance abuse does not help the youth; it makes them develop poorly and brings up many societal issues, thus calling for urgent measures as effective interventions, such as prevention, early intervention strategies and access to treatment services. Efforts made by churches and communities in dealing with substance abuse should be linked closely to the genuine issues faced by young people. This, therefore, further indicates the urgency of this study on how church support systems would manage to effectively address youth issues concerning substance abuse, including but not limited to faith-based treatment, pastoral counselling and community outreach programmes, is relevant. Awareness of what these church-based initiatives do for the prevention and mitigation of substance abuse among young people is vital

in developing more comprehensive and effective prevention and intervention strategies (Kumar & Reddy, 2025).

Certain groups, such as sexual and gender minorities, face elevated risks of substance abuse and mental health challenges that call for a customised approach by the church to meet distinct community needs (Coulter et al., 2019). These approaches could include diverse and affirming support groups, counselling services and educational strategies that focus on substance abuse and mental health issues. The church can be an agent for the holistic health and healing of all people by identifying and responding to the particular demands of marginalised communities within the community. Engaging with critical social work principles may enable an engagement by the church to try to treat substance abuse as oppression within the broader context of seeking equality and justice for all (Rogowski & Thi, 2025). Such an approach emphasises the need to address not just personal behaviours, but also the more critical conditions that give rise to substance abuse, such as poverty, trauma and systemic inequalities. Studies show that parental communication and connection directly affect drug usage by urban youth (Boyd et al., 2021), and perhaps these faith-based family initiatives might even enhance protective factors against substance use. Also, family fighting and lack of supervision among parents are associated with an elevated consumption of different substances among adolescents. Despite the church's efforts, substance abuse among young people is still prevalent. Therefore, this study advocates for building resilience among the youth as a means of fighting substance abuse.

This study has a dual focus on resilience theory and the role of the church in combating youth substance abuse. While many existing studies analyse substance abuse trends among youth, few examine the specific responses and adaptations of religious institutions in this regard. The research highlights the intersection of faith, culture, and youth challenges, contributing unique insights into how church interventions can be tailored to meet the distinct needs of various youth groups, particularly marginalised communities. The study, therefore, addressed the following research questions: How does the church contribute to building resilience among youth in the context of substance abuse? What are the specific responses of the church to substance abuse issues faced by youth? What challenges does the church encounter in its efforts to mitigate substance abuse among young people? How can the church bridge the gaps related to substance abuse mitigation and resilience development? And what new modes of collaboration can be established in the fight against substance abuse? This study examines how the church helps build youth resilience to substance abuse, assessing its responses, challenges and

gaps to substance abuse and resilience development among the youth.

Despite the efforts made by the church, there still exists a gap between the efforts of the church toward the substance abuse problem and its actual mitigation among youth. The study highlights the need for more effective strategies and collaboration to enhance the church's role in supporting youth resilience. The study identifies and bridges gaps in substance abuse mitigation and resilience development among the youth by the church. The study discusses the challenges and opportunities for the church to develop resilience among individuals struggling with substance abuse. It provides insights into the temporal link between substance dependence and the church, and its pivotal role in offering support, intervention and rehabilitation. The study's core thrust revolves around new modes of collaboration between those addicted to substances and the church by assessing the church's present responses and challenges. The intended outcomes are to build effective answers to problems around substance use, recovery, and holistic healing within the church context. Applying resilience theory, the study emphasises the building of resilience to substance abuse among young people as a means to mitigating and preventing substance abuse behaviours and effects.

RESILIENCE OF THE CHURCH, YOUTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Resilience theory, particularly as sought by Ann Masten, offers insight into how individuals and systems sustain changes to adapt successfully in the wake of adversity. Resilience should be considered within various levels of analyses, from purely individual through interpersonal contexts, to societal traits, highlighting important concepts, determinants, and applications. There is a definite movement toward unifying the resilience approaches across different systems to act more robustly when facing dire threats (Masten, 2018; Yates *et al.*, 2015). Resilience is understood in many ways but mainly refers to positive functioning over time after adversity, which brings forth its many-sided character (Southwick *et al.*, 2014). Self-regulation abilities and good parenting may nurture resilience across a variety of populations (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). In addition, nurturing resilience means scrutinising and working on social determinants, cultural and economic challenges to accommodate a familiarity with resilience being a layered and complex construct (Southwick *et al.*, 2014; Yates *et al.*, 2015).

Michael Ungar's work on resilience theory emphasises the role of culture and context in understanding thriving under pressure as an indicator of growth. Resilience is more than an individual trait; it is a deeply kindled influence of one's social environment and culture. Resilience is definable differently

across academies of knowledge, with common themes revolving around adaptive functioning over time following adversity (Southwick et al., 2014; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). It is shaped by various determinants across multiple levels, including genetic, cultural and social factors. (Southwick *et al.*, 2014). This indicates the need for comprehensive approaches in resilience research. For instance, a specific application of resilience theory, 'shame resilience' focuses on how women develop strategies to cope with and overcome shame, demonstrating the importance of social-support relationships and personal awareness (Brown, 2006).

All of these reconceptualizations between ecological resilience, defined in terms of how much the ecosystem tolerates disturbance and psychological resilience, which concerns the coping ability of individuals, centre on adaptive capacity (Gunderson, 2000; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). According to this view, resilience should be perceived from a social-ecological framework, which includes both internalised and external factors that build positive development during stressful experiences (Ungar *et al.*, 2013; Ungar, 2011; Ungar, 2005). Different context-culture combinations offer specific legacies and pathways that serve in resilience, resulting in distinct patterns and manifestations of well-being (Ungar *et al.*, 2013; Ungar, 2013; Ungar, 2005). Resilience varies from one population to another, with protective mechanisms that are sensitive to individual and environmental factors, of which the contextual understanding is significant (Ungar, 2011; Ungar, 2013). Ungar describes strategies on how practitioners may scale up resilience development in contexts by identifying and channelling local resources that support health and general well-being (Ungar, 2010; Ungar, 2005).

The example of church and resilience development is cited in the U.S.A., where most addiction rehabilitation programmes are spirituality-based, thus making considerable economic savings and providing recovery from substance abuse (Grim & Grim, 2019). While going, participation in religious activities and spiritual practices has been associated with reduced substance usage among American Indian urban adolescents and thus, possible protective influences (Kulis *et al.*, 2012). The adolescent's belief system concerning spirituality brings better well-being to coping capabilities, thereby promoting psychological and emotional well-being, which could serve to deter drug use (Kim & Esquivel, 2011). Researchers have recognised spirituality as a key factor in adolescent resilience, as it contributes to positive mental health outcomes and effective coping strategies (Kim & Esquivel, 2011).

An effective community-based effort to improve family resilience has strikingly reduced the drug abuse involvement of high-risk youth in many different

churches (Johnson *et al.*, 1998). There are plenty of different programmes that have been implemented throughout church communities, showing that family strength not only delays adolescent entry into substance use but also reduces prevalence at very early ages (Johnson *et al.*, 1998). Furthermore, it was found among urban American Indian youth that such a combination of beliefs of Christianity with traditional spiritual practices produced lower occurrences of substance use (Kulis *et al.*, 2012). This reveals the great potential of culture and religion in improving lifestyles toward healthier ones

The church can help the youth by providing an environment within which they can thrive through resilience-promoting activities. These would include talking about substance abuse, mentorship programmes for youth, and workshops on coping skills, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving. The church can further engage such youth in volunteer activities and church activities to enhance their sense of belonging. Through the eradication of stigma and ushering in understanding and good relationships, it is possible, therefore, for the church to support young people to feel connected and peer with them.

THE CHURCH TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

The findings of several studies reviewed in this study point out how the church rallies behind adolescents struggling with substance abuse. Church organisations often put-up psychosocial support and other protective factors that help lessen the negative effects of substance abuse. The church has a place in community support and enhances individual resilience in managing cases of youth substance abuse. It acknowledges the social and personal determinants related to substance use and subsequently strives to create an environment conducive to healthy development.

Psycho-Social Support

Churches are important psychosocial supporters for the recovery of youth addicted to substances. They break the threat of stigma and bad examples to create a nurturing atmosphere of healing and growth (Muswerakuenda *et al.*, 2023). The faith-based community also actively take part in identifying children who require care and assisting anyone in ensuring the care is more than just physical but also addressing the vital psychosocial and spiritual aspects, which often coexist with substance abuse prevention efforts in recovery (Spaumer & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2025). These findings echo the relationship between youth substance abuse and psychological well-being,

indicating the need for urgent, comprehensive and holistic strategies that fully integrate mental health support into recovery programmes (Kumar & Reddy, 2025). The community and peer-level dynamics are the strongest influences on youth behaviour and choices (Izdebski *et al.*, 2025). This proposes that churches should become active agents of revolutionary change to bring about these positive social environments and connections among young people.

Churches are significant in the literature for providing psychosocial support to adolescent populations who struggle with substance abuse. Muswerakuenda *et al.*, (2023) and Spaumer & Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2025) studies indicate that faith-based communities can combat stigma and promote healing environments. Kumar & Reddy (2025) support holistic recovery by arguing for integrating mental health support into recovery programmes. Where churches provide spiritual resources, important recovery-related emotional and social environments also arise from other sectors of the community schools, organisations, and such. It can therefore be argued that church-based support may further reinforce stigmas that link substance use with sinfulness. These stigmas may outrightly deter persons from seeking support. For recovery programmes to be effective, it is essential to find a balance between the spiritual and the evidence-based perspectives.

Religiosity and Substance Abuse

Religiosity serves as a protective shield against substance misuse and mental health issues (Quinn *et al.*, 2023). This suggests that one's faith can curb risky behaviours among youth, linking belief in God to less engagement in risky behaviours. Both intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity significantly reduce the likelihood of substance abuse among adolescents. Therefore, participating in religious activities may directly influence substance use behaviours (Carrà *et al.*, 2023). Programmes integrating spirituality and addiction interventions are seen as effective in supporting recovery from substance use disorders (Grim & Grim, 2019). This demonstrates the strong association between spirituality and recovery.

For instance, according to Berrien *et al.*, (2021), black church-led community initiatives have successfully engaged youth and have been tackling violence, implying the potential for applying the same approach to address substance abuse. Participation in church activities serves to lessen health-risk behaviours among adolescents; hence, church involvement can be protective and serve as a buffer against substance abuse only when combined with regular attendance (Buchtova *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, black churches mobilise community resources and facilitate moral accountability, thus deterring the youth from

substance abuse and violence (Berrien *et al.*, 2021).

According to reviewed studies, it is a proven fact that religiosity can technically defend against the abuse of substances in adolescents. For example, studies by Quinn *et al.*, (2023) and Carrà *et al.*, (2023) argue that strong faith and involvement in religious activities often correlate with reduced use of substances among adolescents. Both types of intrinsic as well as extrinsic religiosity are supposed to be considered in the protection brought forth by faith, although some studies indicate that religion might not address the possible causes of addiction. Meanwhile, secular interventions have their focus on the accountability of the individual and those associated with welfare. Differences in terms of social class, education, and type of support received may also result in varying effects of religious communities in preventing substance abuse. More studies will be needed to compare the spirituality impacts on these and other religions.

Collaboration with Community and Professionals

It is possible to develop successful strategies for preventing drug abuse among adolescents using a combination of community involvement and holistic church approaches (Chifamba & Chifamba, 2023). Moreover, bridging the gap between church leaders, social services, police, and psychologists prop up a strong intervention for youth suffering from substance abuse (Spaumer & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2025). The problem of substance abuse among youths calls for comprehensive responses from society in training, legal frameworks and very effective educational campaigns (Nwogu, 2022; Chifamba & Chifamba, 2023). Collaborative strategies of various stakeholders, such as families, schools, churches and communities, can be said to be the most effective way of preventing drug abuse in the post-pandemic context (Chifamba & Chifamba, 2023). Internal determinants of development, such as planning and decision-making, are critical in preventing adolescent substance use, which signifies the need for programmes that impart these values (Belintxon *et al.*, 2022). Parent-child communication quality is a strong predictor of substance-use behaviours, as strong parent ties can help curtail drug usage in urban youth exposed to societal stress (Boyd *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, programmes involving community service, combined with restorative practices, lessen substance use among justice-involved youth. (Church & Marcus, 2021). Thus, meaningful engagements can positively redirect behaviours towards better meanings.

CASES FROM KENYA AND THE PHILIPPINES

This section examines the cases of church participation in addressing substance

abuse and other issues amid the youth within the Presbyterian Church in Kenya (Mathai, 2022), the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Embu, Kenya (Nyaga *et al.*, 2024) and the Catholic Church in the Philippines (Cornelio & Lasco, 2020) as presented in these literary sources. It examines the various initiatives taken towards young men and women and the barriers that hinder the development of comprehensive programmes to combat youth-related substance abuse crises in these churches. Different strategies and influences from church communities have emerged on how churches address youth substance abuse. Churches have held that their role is crucial by conducting educational projects, advocating for communities and looking into broader social contexts.

The Presbyterian Church in Kenya treats this fight against substance abuse as a complex venture, which includes addressing drug abuse among the young congregants in its congregations. From lively youth camps, interactive workshops and buoyant, energetic and high-impact community service, the Church offers an inclusive environment, conditioning members towards healthy living and sound social connections (Mathai, 2022). The Presbyterian Church believes in active engagement through youth camps, workshops, community service, and so forth. It provides recreational activities and space for forming healthy relationships and social skills of utmost importance to resilience development. The participants learn strategies and life skills that are positive in building healthier choices. The youth may feel a sense of belonging and support from the community, which would help boost emotional resilience.

For some time now, the Catholic Church has engaged itself very constructively in meaningful conversation around drug use by making deep moral arguments. It is here emphasised that compassion and social harmony should play a vital role in confronting the devastating effects of substance abuse on individuals and communities (Cornelio & Lasco, 2020). As time passed, so too did the approaches of the Church, which now shows a deeper appreciation for the issues surrounding drug use. Today, the church emphasises more empathy and assistance while addressing urgent issues such as moral decay and concerns about the welfare of the youth (Cornelio & Lasco, 2020). This shift illustrates the Church's commitment to promoting compassionate dialogue, ultimately enhancing community resilience in addressing pressing social issues.

The Anglican Church is known for being at the forefront of offering compassionate guidance and counselling services through its initiatives aimed at reducing drug abuse (Nyaga *et al.*, 2024). Being a well-renowned institution, there is an ongoing organisation of seminars and recreational activities to attract the youth into its affairs, which forms a basis for nurturing an

environment that effectively discourages substance abuse (Nyaga *et al.*, 2024). Several challenges prevent the church from achieving its goals, including financial limitations that restrict resources, a shortage of skilled professionals to effectively carry out programmes, and an apparent reluctance from the community to support such initiatives. These barriers seriously undermine the capabilities of the Anglican Church in developing and conducting effective substance abuse programmes (Nyaga & Kagemu, 2024).

The fusion of resilience theory with church interventions in the context of youth substance abuse requires multidimensional approaches. These cases demonstrate how faith-based organisations can create holistic resilience through community activity, moral empowerment, and support systems. Effectively, adopting the same frameworks would enable organisations to counter substance abuse and enhance resilience among youth globally. The church's involvement in substance abuse is manifested in community involvement and moral guidance. The above and other studies have shown these initiatives as crucial among faith-based initiatives and effective communication in reducing substance use and its associated behavioural complexities among the youth. These studies show a variety of ways in which the church and faith-based organisations relate to substance abuse among the youth, emphasising the blend of faith-based approaches with community action. These findings, therefore, suggest the development of effective interventions through pastoral care, education and addressing common underlying socioeconomic factors. On the contrary, traditional values within churches would limit the effectiveness of the churches in adapting to modern treatment approaches. Each denomination has its culturally comparative responses to substance abuse, leading to diverse results concerning the addict.

MITIGATING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

The church faces challenges in building resilience among the youth. These challenges include: socio-economic factors, cultural myths, and youth engagement in religious activities.

Socio-Economic Factors

Socio-economic challenges amplify the intensity of the problem of substance use, especially among youth, as is the case in Zimbabwe. Mugari (2024) explains that many young people are trapped in a serious crisis of substance abuse, which is worsened by several socio-economic hardships and emerging drug abuse trends. Substance abuse itself does not exist in a vacuum; it somehow came into being because of wider social problems, namely, endemic poverty

and gross inequality (Rogowski & Thi, 2025). Institutions like the church should not merely recognise these underlying problems, but also engage in their intervention. The topic of substance abuse continues to present challenges even within the church community due to the realities of peer pressure and the shockingly easy availability of drugs (Mathai, 2022). Various barriers to recovery include stigma, denial from the family and harsh religious views. All this discourages youth from seeking much-needed assistance in dealing with substances within their church communities (Muswerakuenda *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, there must be an environment where the youth feel empowered to seek recovery freely and without the judgment of their communities.

Cultural Influences

Culturally rooted beliefs and stigma surrounding substance abuse have a deep impact on family subtleties in communities, thus further justifying the urgent need for focused public health programmes and general awareness to assist the youth who are being affected (Monari *et al.*, 2024). A good number of parents of adolescents battling substance abuse are under great emotional turmoil and practical distress (Mathibela & Skhosana, 2019). This creates an avenue for churches to build support networks for these families. The anguish faced by the parents is universal, as many stumble through raising teenagers involved in substance misuse (Mathibela & Skhosana, 2019). This further shows the urgent need for churches to assist them in building resilience and understanding of families in need.

Youth Engagement in Religious Activities

Youth engagement in religious activities tends to be very helpful in dealing with substance abuse. As indicated by Mbuthia *et al.*, (2020), students not participating in any form of religious activity are at a significantly higher risk of turning to substance abuse. The church, therefore, has a huge role in nurturing relationships with youths. However, an even more alarming widening gap between the youth and religious institutions now poses a real challenge to all the attempts to put in place to curb substance abuse. Ntsanwisi (2024) argues that in light of the current divide, there is an urgent need for targeted programmes aimed at bridging this gap. The sight of youth stepping away from religious practices and activities has become so overwhelming that access to spiritual and religious programmes that promise positive behavioural change has become even harder to attain. This challenge is key in creating conducive settings for discouraging substance abuse among young people. But all religious teachings may not touch young people, especially the

disadvantaged, who feel judged. The church's limited knowledge of mental health hinders its effectiveness in addressing the issue.

BRIDGING THE GAP: MITIGATING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND BUILDING YOUTH RESILIENCE

There are gaps in the Church's efforts to mitigate substance abuse and build youth resilience. Some challenges mentioned in various studies assessing factors associated with substance abuse and evaluation of existing prevention activities are peer pressure, community awareness and engagement of, and education for the youth. These multidimensional challenges faced by the church while fighting against substance use are driving home the need for culturally appropriate methods and integration into the community. Multiple studies suggest that socio-economic issues, cultural perceptions, and engagement of trusted community leaders, including church officials, are major players in determining intervention efficacy. A huge call, therefore, exists for better mobilisation strategies and funding to develop and sustain youth welfare and substance abuse prevention initiatives (Nyaga & Kagema, 2024).

Community Leadership and Engagement

Community leadership and engagement have shown great efficacy in resolving substance abuse. For instance, Black American church leaders play a crucial role in fighting Opioid Use Disorder, emphasising the need for compassion and the adoption of innovative, culturally sensitive strategies that address the particular needs of their communities (Dankwah *et al.*, 2024). These leaders understand that community support is vital for action. Churches are excellent resources for the dissemination of critical information and mobilising communities for substance abuse prevention efforts (Nwagu *et al.*, 2020). In this way, churches can employ culturally relevant strategies, significantly enhancing alcohol and drug interventions through the direct involvement of their youth in the adaptation of mental-health literacy programmes (Jumbe *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, involving church organisations in the mobilisation of community readiness is essential and acts as the proactive mouthpiece for information and interventions to curb substance abuse, especially in rural settings (Sadeghi *et al.*, 2024). The need to design, implement and maintain records on community-based preventive approaches to youth substance use, inextricably linked to the work of social practices inside the Church, must therefore not be overemphasised. Churches provide supportive and knowledge-ready environments that arm individuals and families with the resources to access and overcome the challenges associated with substance-

related disorders.

Holistic Prevention Strategies

The involvement of various stakeholders, such as families, schools and churches, through collaborative measures is an effective intervention strategy for adolescent substance abuse (Chifamba & Chifamba, 2023). For instance, programme models like the “Lifestyle Risk Reduction Model” aimed to address substance abuse from developmentally appropriate methods at all ages (Dykstra *et al.*, 2023: 864). By interrogating the mainstream narratives around substance abuse, the church can develop more impactful interventions that resonate with the youth and incorporate their voices into the change (Rogowski & Thi, 2025). Possessing the element of holistic approaches calling for community support, engagement, and advocacy is essential to effectively counter youth substance use (Rogowski & Thi, 2025). The cultural context surrounding substance use is important because stigma and secrecy concerning family members who misuse substances are often highlighted (Monari *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, monitoring parental love and supervision contributes greatly to the avoidance of substance use among adolescents (Belintxon *et al.*, 2020). Thus, this suggests that both family and communal aspects are imperative in the church’s response towards these issues. Furthermore, interventions and programmes must be gender sensitive to address their specific determinants of risky behaviour among the two genders in supporting both boys’ and girls’ behaviours (Izdebski *et al.*, 2025). Ultimately, positive self-image and family support are very important in delaying risky behaviours (Izdebski *et al.*, 2025). Thus, the church could assist in enhancing these protective factors.

Faith-Based Support and Awareness Campaigns

Since many addiction treatment programmes have begun embracing spirituality as a central element, this places the church’s role as critically important in resisting substance abuse using faith-based recovery programmes (Grim & Grim, 2019). Churches serve as important social support networks, effectively bridging access to vital psychosocial services while encouraging recovery through organised support programmes that care for mind and spirit (Muswerakuenda *et al.*, 2023). It has been shown that religious engagement can correlate with lower patterns of substance abuse and reduced mental health issues in the youth (Quinn *et al.*, 2023). This points to the possibility that the church is a protective factor within this vulnerable group. Also, social marketing strategies must be adopted to change the perception and behaviour of young people on drug use. According to Nnam *et al.*, (2021), these strategies can complement the Church’s outreach

efforts and lead to stronger and more meaningful programmes for promoting healthy choices and lifestyles. The increasing concerns raised by universities and organisations regarding the devastating effects of substance abuse call for intensified awareness campaigns and collaborative relations with religious institutions to nurture an amicable environment that supports individuals in their recovery processes (Mbuthia *et al.*, 2020).

Religious Education, Family and Community Support

Religious education is seen as a lifeline for the youth, as it normally helps solve both prevention and cure measures when life becomes so challenging, especially in areas concerning substance abuse (Zellma & Mākosa, 2024). The relationships and social networks developed in tough times like the current ordeal, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, reflect the importance of community. Such would serve as positive influences in facilitating one's mental healing process, especially for someone recovering from substance abuse (Song *et al.*, 2025). In families suffering from substance use disorders, adult siblings often develop resilience through communication strategies that enable them to manage the challenges of emotions across their shared experiences (Nolan-Cody & Scharp, 2024). One has to appreciate the relationship for support established through different interpersonal exchanges from churches to local community organisations. Mushonga & Breda (2024) argue that these exchanges go a long way to improving resilient outcomes among young adults raised in environments characterised by alcohol misuse and provide them with a supportive network that enhances healing and growth.

Psychosocial Support

Psychosocial support from the church is necessary in helping the youth build resilience and fight substance abuse. Adult children from parents with substance-related problems undergo dual processes of nurturing resilience, yet also adapting to the negative behaviours that somehow, they may unconsciously pick up from their parents. This complex interaction brings into sharp relief the profound impact of family context mediating access to social support systems (Jeremiah *et al.*, 2024). Within this framework, psychosocial support networks provided by churches come out as one pillar aiding the youth in recovery from substance abuse. Faith-based communities promote belonging and acceptance, often initiating structured recovery methods that provide direction and pathways to healing (Muswerakuenda *et al.*, 2023). For instance, coping strategies in African families affected by intimate partner violence tend to emphasise seeking social support. This creates a parallel situation to the

collective strength of existing community and church networks that also help individuals' recovery from substance abuse (Akinbode & Carter, 2025).

Religious and Spiritual Coping Approaches

Strongly held spiritual beliefs can significantly enhance health and resilience, especially within marginalised communities (Lefevor *et al.*, 2023). Religious beliefs foreground the relationship between spirituality and the ability to deal with challenges stemming from substance abuse. A crucial aspect of the model is self-transcendence, which strongly interacts with spirituality and can help prevent relapse among recovering individuals by providing them with a renewed sense of meaning and purpose in life. (Sørensen & Lien, 2022). Religious beliefs also act as a formidable protective factor against the abuse of substances, especially with black youth confronted with an excess of overly burdensome societal challenges. Faith acts as a source of significant resilience, allowing individuals to push through the pressure to abuse substances (Quinn *et al.*, 2023). In another case, spiritual resilience is very significant among Pacific peoples, where evidence shows that engagement in spiritual practices enhances mental health and therefore could very much be potent in reducing risks of substance abuse (Taumoepeau *et al.*, 2025).

It is therefore imperative that the church, as a provider of community, support and spiritual guidance, addresses the substance abuse problem among youths through a network-like climate, counselling and support services, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles and values. The church should act as a connection between the youngsters in addiction and the resources required for their recovery. It must leverage the collaborations established between the church and other community stakeholders, such as health professionals, social workers, and law enforcement, must create a more effective and holistic way of dealing with substance abuse in young people. Given its place and role in the lives of the youth and society, the church could strive to create a more just and equitable society in which every individual has access to the resources and support needed to overcome substance abuse and thrive by taking this critical stance.

CONCLUSION

The church's role in responding to substance abuse among youth, as seen in light of resilience theory, is very significant and loaded with complexity. Resilience theory suggests that people can develop adaptive coping mechanisms as a reaction to adversity, but the flourishing of such mechanisms requires interventions that reflect the particular experiences of marginalised youth. An ongoing

reflective practice must also be adopted to assess the impact of the programmes carried out by the church on youth dealing with substance abuse challenges. The church, through involving youth in the design and implementation of these strategies, can create an atmosphere that truly welcomes resilience. This could set a sustainable process in motion, therefore facilitating the youth not only to navigate present challenges but also to flourish in their quality of life and, by extension, towards wider community restoration. Resilience theory must underpin programme design and assessment to ensure that the church stays nimble and relevant to respond to the global epidemic of substance abuse among youth. As observed, the church is an important institution in countering the rising incidence of youth substance abuse and building resilience. Therefore, there should be a collaborative spirit with the community, schools, health providers and the church to strengthen the prevention and intervention of substance abuse. In this way, the church can empower youth by tilting towards management means of dealing with the substance abuse challenge and promote coping mechanisms that support the well-being of those affected. This strategy may tackle the short-term substance abuse problems, but more importantly, it develops the long-term resilience and vibrancy of youth in the community.

A critical reflection must be made concerning these existing programmes and support systems within religious circles, surveying their effectiveness in addressing the needs of young people dealing with substance abuse problems and in building substance resilience. This will ascertain why partnerships between churches, community entities and youth are vital in crafting integrated strategies that target substance abuse while also empowering youth to be resilient and make healthy choices. Future research should focus on evaluating the long-term impacts of church-led interventions on youth resilience and substance abuse outcomes, comparing faith-based approaches across different cultural contexts, and optimising collaborative partnerships between churches and community entities.

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HARNESSING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING: Faith in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

This study explores social media's potential as a tool for religious peacebuilding, focusing on its capacity to foster harmony through faith-based values in a digitally connected world. With 5.24 billion users globally and 90.8 million in the Philippines, where religion shapes cultural identity, social media offers unprecedented opportunities to connect faith communities, amplify sacred narratives, mobilize action, and educate for peace. Drawing on global and Philippine examples, we examine how platforms like Facebook, X, and TikTok channel religious teachings to promote reconciliation, while addressing challenges like polarization, misinformation, hostility, and slacktivism. Historical narratives, including Hong Kong's Yellow Umbrella Movement and the Philippines' #FaithForTruth campaign, illustrate faith's role in digital peacebuilding. Eight strategies, grounded in religious ethics, propose harnessing social media's strengths: global reach, real-time engagement, education, and community-building to counter division. By embedding values like forgiveness and truth, religion transforms social media into a sacred space for peace, offering a model for conflict-affected regions like Mindanao.

Keywords: Social Media; Peace; Facebook; YouTube; Instagram.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a world where billions of voices, united by faith, leverage digital platforms to foster peace rather than discord. As of early 2025, social media dominates global connectivity, with Facebook commanding 3.07 billion monthly active users, YouTube engaging 2.5 billion, Instagram reaching 2 billion, and X connecting 436 million people worldwide (DataReportal, 2025). These figures, projected from 2024's 5.24 billion social media users, represent nearly 65% of the global population. In the Philippines, with a population of 116 million, 90.8 million social media user identities account for 78% penetration, reflecting deep digital engagement in a nation where religion—predominantly Christianity, alongside Islam and indigenous faiths—shapes

cultural and social life (DataReportal, 2025). This intersection of faith and digital connectivity offers a transformative opportunity for peacebuilding, yet it also poses risks that demand careful navigation.

This study addresses a critical question: How can social media, as a tool for religious communities, promote peacebuilding by amplifying faith-based values, and what challenges must be overcome to prevent it from fueling division? The aim is to explore social media's potential as a platform for religious peacebuilding, focusing on its ability to connect believers, amplify sacred narratives, mobilize faith-inspired action, and educate about peace, while mitigating risks like polarization and misinformation. Religion, with its emphasis on compassion, forgiveness, and community, serves as a mediating force, guiding social media toward peace rather than conflict.

Previous research on social media and religion highlights its dual role. Ellison et al. (2015) found that social media strengthens religious communities by fostering online prayer groups and spiritual discussions, yet Campbell (2017) notes it can amplify sectarian divides when religious rhetoric fuels polarization. For example, studies on India's religious conflicts show social media spreading both interfaith harmony and communal violence (Udupa, 2018). In the Philippines, research by Cornelio (2016) explores how Catholic youth use social media for spiritual expression, but little attention is paid to its peacebuilding potential in conflict zones like Mindanao, where Christian-Muslim tensions persist. These gaps—limited focus on social media's role in religious peacebuilding and its application in diverse religious contexts—underscore the need for this study.

This research is vital because religion remains a powerful force in shaping values, particularly in the Philippines, where 86% of citizens identify as Catholic and 6% as Muslim (PSA, 2020). Social media's reach can amplify religious teachings of peace, such as Christ's call to "love your neighbor" or Islam's emphasis on salaam (peace), to counter conflict. In a world with over 110 armed conflicts in 2023 (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2023), harnessing social media for faith-based peacebuilding could transform divided communities, making this study both timely and impactful. This article examines social media's role in religious peacebuilding through global and Philippine lenses, analyzes historical narratives, and proposes strategies to leverage faith-driven digital engagement. By addressing polarization, misinformation, and hostility, we aim to illuminate how religion can steer social media toward peace, fostering a digital landscape where faith unites rather than divides.

THE POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING

Social media's promise as a peacebuilding tool lies in its unparalleled ability to connect, amplify, mobilize, and educate, particularly when infused with religious values. As Pope Francis noted, "The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people" (Francis, 2014). This vision underscores social media's potential to channel religious feelings—compassion, forgiveness, and hope—into peacebuilding mechanisms, fostering dialogue and reconciliation. Below, we explore these dimensions, emphasizing their religious significance and mechanisms for promoting peace.

Connecting Faith Communities

Social media transcends borders, uniting religious communities in shared spiritual goals. A 2023 Pew Research Center survey found that 62% of users felt more connected to global events through platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp (Pew Research Center, 2023). For religious communities, this connectivity fosters virtual congregations. The 2022 #PeaceDay movement, with 500,000 posts on X and Facebook, included interfaith prayers led by Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist leaders, creating a digital space for shared worship (Sprout Social, 2024).

In the Philippines, social media bridges urban-rural and ethnic divides, a cornerstone of peacebuilding. Platforms like Facebook, used by 80% of Filipino internet users (DataReportal, 2025), enable dialogue between communities in Metro Manila and those in remote provinces. The Bangsamoro Youth Network, for instance, uses WhatsApp and Facebook to connect young leaders across conflict-affected areas in Mindanao, fostering collaboration on peacebuilding initiatives like community dialogues, cultural exchanges, and vocational training programs. These digital connections build trust and mutual understanding, essential for reconciliation in post-conflict regions. Mark Zuckerberg captured this potential at the 2017 Facebook Community Summit, stating, "Social media has the power to shrink the world, turning strangers into neighbors" (Zuckerberg, 2017). By humanizing distant conflicts and fostering cross-cultural empathy, social media lays a foundation for peace.

The mechanism here is digital *communitas* (Turner, 1969), where shared religious experiences online create a sense of collective identity. For example, livestreamed Masses on Facebook during the COVID-19 pandemic reached 10 million Filipinos, reinforcing Catholic values of charity and peace (Cornelio, 2020). These connections reduce prejudice by exposing users to diverse faiths,

aligning with the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), and foster peace by emphasizing shared humanity.

Amplifying Religious Narratives

Social media amplifies religious voices, giving believers a platform to share sacred teachings. In 2023, Instagram posts tagged #Peace or #HumanRights, often tied to religious themes, generated 50 million interactions (Hootsuite, 2024). Globally, figures like the Dalai Lama use X to share Buddhist principles of nonviolence, reaching 19 million followers.

In the Philippines, indigenous groups like the Lumad use Facebook to highlight their struggles against land displacement and violence. Their posts, often featuring videos of community gatherings, traditional dances, or peaceful protests, have garnered international attention, pressuring policymakers to address their concerns. Similarly, women's groups in Mindanao use TikTok to share stories of resilience, challenging stereotypes and advocating for gender-inclusive peace processes. For instance, the Mindanao Women's Peace Network posts short videos of women mediators negotiating local ceasefires, inspiring others to join peacebuilding efforts. This amplification is not just about visibility but agency; social media hands the microphone to those on the margins, enabling them to shape narratives of peace and justice.

The impact of amplification extends beyond awareness. Social media's viral nature can influence policy. In 2023, Lumad advocacy campaigns on X led to a UN Human Rights Council resolution calling for investigations into their displacement (UN Human Rights Council, 2023). Such outcomes highlight how digital platforms empower marginalized voices to drive systemic change, a critical component of sustainable peace.

This amplification leverages narrative theology (Hauerwas, 1989), where religious stories shape moral behavior. By sharing Quranic verses on *rahma* (mercy) or Bible passages on reconciliation, believers inspire peace-oriented actions. For instance, a 2023 Jesuit-led campaign on X, #PrayForMindanao, shared stories of Christian-Muslim cooperation, influencing 500,000 users to support peace talks (Philippine Star, 2023). This mechanism transforms digital spaces into platforms for spiritual advocacy, fostering peace through shared values.

Mobilizing Faith-Inspired Action

Social media mobilizes religious communities for peacebuilding action. Sparked by outrage over police brutality, young Nigerians used Twitter to

organize protests, share evidence of abuses, and crowdfund over \$2 million for victims (BBC News, 2020). The movement's momentum led to the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, a rare victory for digital activism. A 2023 Morning Consult survey found that 70% of Gen Z have taken action – donating, volunteering, or protesting – after encountering a cause online (Morning Consult, 2023). In the Philippines, the 2021 #FreeLeila campaign on X, backed by Catholic bishops, mobilized 100,000 signatures for Senator de Lima's release, citing Christian justice principles (Rappler, 2021).

The mechanics of mobilization are rooted in social media's ability to create "networked publics" (Boyd, 2010), where individuals coalesce around shared goals. Hashtags like #EndSARS or #FreeLeila create virtual communities that sustain momentum through shared content, from protest schedules to fundraising links. The religious authority also inspires collective action. For example, the Philippine Catholic Church's "Caritas Online" campaign on Facebook raised \$1 million for Mindanao peace projects in 2023, driven by Gospel calls to serve the poor (Caritas Philippines, 2023). These efforts show how faith-based social media campaigns translate spiritual values into tangible peacebuilding outcomes.

Educating Through Religious Wisdom

Social media serves as a global classroom, disseminating knowledge about peace and conflict resolution to diverse audiences. On YouTube, TED Talks on topics like nonviolent communication and reconciliation have collectively surpassed 100 million views by 2024 (TED.com, 2024). Channels like Peace Direct, which shares stories of grassroots peacebuilders, have grown exponentially, educating audiences about innovative solutions to conflict. Former Google CEO Eric Schmidt noted, "The internet is the first thing that humanity has built that humanity doesn't understand, but it can teach us empathy if we let it" (Schmidt, 2014).

In the Philippines, educational campaigns on platforms like TikTok have gained traction among youth. Short videos explaining the Bangsamoro peace process, created by NGOs like the Institute for Peace and Development in Mindanao, have reached millions, demystifying complex agreements and fostering public support (Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute, 2023). For example, a viral TikTok series featuring animated characters discussing autonomy agreements garnered over 2 million views, making peacebuilding accessible to Gen Z. Online webinars hosted on Zoom and streamed on Facebook have trained thousands of Filipinos in conflict resolution, covering topics like mediation and restorative justice. These efforts demonstrate social

media's role as an educational hub, engaging younger generations critical to sustaining long-term peace.

Social media's educational power lies in its accessibility and interactivity. Unlike traditional media, platforms like YouTube allow users to comment, share, and create derivative content, fostering dialogue. In the Philippines, Facebook groups like "Peace Educators Network" connect teachers to share curricula on peacebuilding, reaching thousands of students. Yet, the effectiveness of these efforts depends on combating misinformation, as false narratives can undermine educational goals.

This educational role aligns with religious pedagogy (Freire, 1970), where faith-based learning empowers communities. Online webinars by PeaceTech, streamed on Facebook, train 5,000 Filipinos annually in mediation, using parables like the Good Samaritan to teach reconciliation (PeaceTech, 2023). By making religious wisdom accessible, social media fosters a culture of peace, countering narratives of division.

THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PEACEBUILDING

Despite its potential, social media is a double-edged sword. Its design and usage patterns can exacerbate division, making peacebuilding more difficult. Below, we explore four key challenges, supported by global and local evidence, and analyze their implications for peacebuilding.

Echo Chambers and Polarization

Social media algorithms prioritize content that aligns with users' existing beliefs, creating echo chambers that deepen societal rifts. MIT research shows users are 30–70% more likely to engage with like-minded content, reinforcing biases and limiting exposure to diverse perspectives (Vosoughi et al., 2018). In polarized societies, this entrenches divisions. During the 2022 Brazilian elections, WhatsApp groups amplified partisan narratives, with 60% of users reporting exposure to divisive content (Reuters Institute, 2022). These echo chambers stifle dialogue, a cornerstone of peacebuilding.

In the Philippines, political polarization on platforms like Facebook has intensified. Supporters of opposing political camps inhabit separate digital bubbles, sharing content that vilifies the other side. For example, during the 2022 presidential election, rival groups spread memes and posts that deepened mistrust, undermining efforts to foster national unity (Rappler, 2022). In post-conflict regions like Mindanao, where trust-building is essential, these digital divides complicate reconciliation. The psychological mechanism here

is confirmation bias, where users seek information that validates their views, reducing openness to compromise – a critical barrier to peace.

Misinformation and Propaganda

Misinformation spreads faster than truth on social media, with dire consequences for peace. During the 2020 U.S. election, false claims on Facebook spread six times faster than accurate posts, reaching 35 million people (MIT Media Lab, 2021). In conflict zones, misinformation escalates tensions. In Myanmar, fabricated posts on Facebook incited violence against the Rohingya in 2017, contributing to a humanitarian crisis that displaced over 700,000 people (UN Human Rights Council, 2018). These lies, often spread by coordinated networks, exploit emotional triggers like fear and anger, amplifying conflict.

The Philippines has grappled with this issue acutely. During the 2016 and 2022 elections, troll networks spread disinformation on Facebook, manipulating public opinion and fueling distrust. In 2022, 67% of Filipino social media users encountered election-related fake news, with 40% believing it (Pulse Asia, 2022). This disinformation polarized communities, eroded trust in institutions, and incited election-related violence in Mindanao, where disputes turned deadly (Rappler, 2022). For instance, false claims about voter fraud in Maguindanao sparked clashes, delaying peacebuilding efforts. Addressing misinformation requires robust moderation and public education, as unchecked lies can turn digital platforms into weapons.

Online Hostility and Harassment

Social media often amplifies hostility, drowning out constructive dialogue. In 2020, 41% of U.S. social media users reported harassment, with 75% of incidents occurring on platforms like X and Facebook (Pew Research Center, 2021). Globally, this trend has worsened, with women, minorities, and activists facing disproportionate abuse. On X, hate speech frequently overshadows calls for peace, discouraging participation in online peacebuilding efforts. The anonymity of platforms exacerbates this, enabling trolls to act without accountability.

In the Philippines, online hostility is a growing concern. Political debates on Facebook often devolve into personal attacks, with users reporting doxxing, threats, and cyberbullying. For example, peace advocates in Mindanao have faced online harassment for promoting dialogue with former combatants, stifling their efforts (Rappler, 2022). Women mediators, in particular, report

gendered attacks, such as slut-shaming, which deter their participation. This toxic environment undermines open discourse, making it harder to build consensus on issues like peace agreements or reconciliation. Social psychology suggests that deindividuation – losing personal identity in online crowds – fuels such hostility, requiring stricter moderation to restore civility.

Slacktivism and Superficial Engagement

While social media can mobilize action, it also fosters superficial engagement, or “slacktivism.” Liking or sharing a post feels impactful but often lacks follow-through. According to Nonprofit Tech for Good’s 2023 report, only 10% of online cause supporters take offline action, such as volunteering or attending events (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2023). Evgeny Morozov critiqued this phenomenon, stating, “Clicking ‘like’ is not a revolution; it’s a sedative” (Morozov, 2011, p. 184). Slacktivism dilutes impact, as users mistake digital gestures for meaningful change.

In the Philippines, campaigns like #PeaceForMindanao have garnered thousands of likes but struggled to translate into sustained community involvement. For instance, while online support for peace rallies is high, attendance at physical events remains low, limiting their impact (Rappler, 2022). This gap is partly due to the “empathy-action disconnect,” where emotional engagement online doesn’t lead to tangible commitment (Slovic, 2007). Bridging this divide requires strategies that convert digital enthusiasm into real-world action, a challenge we address in the strategies section.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

To ground our analysis, we examine seven historical narratives illustrating social media’s role in religious peacebuilding, focusing on faith-driven successes and challenges.

Hong Kong’s Yellow Umbrella Movement (2014)

The Yellow Umbrella Movement, a 79-day pro-democracy protest in Hong Kong, showcased social media’s power to amplify Christian and Buddhist calls for nonviolence. Sparked by Beijing’s restrictive electoral policies in September 2014, protesters adopted yellow umbrellas as a symbol of nonviolent defiance. Social media fueled the movement’s reach, with #UmbrellaMovement trending on Twitter, garnering over 1.2 million mentions in its first month (Hong Kong Free Press, 2014). Live streams on Facebook and Instagram reached millions, showcasing the protesters’ commitment to peace. Over 70% of Hong Kongers

followed the protests online, with 40% reporting that social media shaped their views on democracy (The Guardian, 2024). The movement inspired solidarity protests in over 30 cities, from London to Sydney (AP News, 2014). Activist Joshua Wong told TIME Magazine, “The umbrellas were our shield, but social media was our voice” (Wong, 2014).

This case illustrates how authentic, visually compelling messaging can unite communities and inspire global support. Social media’s real-time nature allowed protesters to counter state narratives, ensuring their message of peace and democracy resonated worldwide. However, the movement’s long-term impact was limited by government crackdowns, highlighting the need for sustained offline strategies.

Philippines’ Election Disinformation (2016–2022)

In contrast, the Philippines’ experience with election-related disinformation reveals social media’s darker side. During the 2016 and 2022 elections, Facebook became a battleground for political propaganda. Troll networks spread fabricated claims, from fake endorsements to smear campaigns, reaching millions. In 2022, 67% of Filipino social media users encountered election-related fake news, with 40% believing it (Pulse Asia, 2022). This disinformation polarized communities, eroded trust in institutions, and fueled violence in Mindanao, where election disputes turned deadly (Rappler, 2022). Facebook removed over 200,000 pieces of false content in 2022, but the damage was done (Meta, 2023). Nobel laureate Maria Ressa warned, “Lies laced with anger and hate spread faster and further than facts” (Ressa, 2021).

This case underscores the need for proactive moderation and fact-checking. Unchecked disinformation can destabilize societies, making peacebuilding an uphill battle. The Philippines’ experience highlights the importance of media literacy to empower users to discern truth from lies, a strategy we explore later.

Colombia’s Peace Agreement Campaign (2016)

Colombia’s 2016 peace agreement, ending a 50-year conflict with the FARC guerrillas, offers another positive example. Social media played a pivotal role in building public support for the agreement. The #PazColombia campaign, led by the government and NGOs, used Twitter and Instagram to share stories of reconciliation, featuring former combatants and victims working together. The campaign reached 10 million users, with 65% of Colombians saying it influenced their vote in the peace referendum (El Tiempo, 2016).

Despite initial rejection, sustained online advocacy helped secure a revised agreement. The campaign's success lay in its human-centered storytelling, which countered divisive narratives and fostered empathy.

This case highlights how strategic, inclusive campaigns can use social media to bridge divides and sustain peace processes. By focusing on shared humanity—stories of ex-combatants rebuilding lives—the campaign neutralized opposition narratives, offering lessons for other conflict-affected regions like the Philippines.

Ethiopia's Tigray Conflict (2020–2022)

The Tigray conflict in Ethiopia illustrates how social media can exacerbate violence. During the 2020–2022 war, X and Facebook became platforms for hate speech and propaganda. Posts inciting ethnic violence spread rapidly, with 80% of inflammatory content originating from diaspora communities abroad (CNN, 2021). This digital hostility fueled real-world atrocities, complicating peace negotiations. By 2022, the conflict had claimed over 500,000 lives (ACLED, 2023). Efforts to moderate content were slow, highlighting the challenges of managing hate speech in conflict zones.

This case emphasizes the urgency of addressing inflammatory content. Platforms must act swiftly to remove harmful posts, and governments must collaborate to regulate diaspora-driven propaganda. Ethiopia's experience underscores the need for global cooperation to prevent social media from amplifying division.

South Africa's #FeesMustFall Movement (2015–2016)

South Africa's #FeesMustFall movement, a student-led campaign against university fee increases, demonstrates social media's role in fostering dialogue and nonviolent protest. Beginning in 2015, students used Twitter and Facebook to organize protests, share demands, and highlight socioeconomic inequalities. The hashtag #FeesMustFall trended globally, with over 1 million mentions in 2016 (News24, 2016). Social media enabled students to engage policymakers directly, leading to government concessions on fee hikes. The movement's emphasis on nonviolence, amplified through live streams and infographics, inspired similar campaigns in Nigeria and Kenya (Al Jazeera, 2016).

This case shows how social media can empower youth to advocate for systemic change peacefully. By combining online organizing with offline protests, students achieved policy reforms, offering a model for engaging young people

in peacebuilding globally and in the Philippines.

India's #MeToo Movement (2018–2019)

India's #MeToo movement, which gained momentum in 2018, illustrates social media's power to amplify survivor voices and foster societal dialogue on gender-based violence, a key aspect of peacebuilding. Women used X and Instagram to share stories of sexual harassment, sparking a national conversation. The hashtag #MeTooIndia trended with over 1.5 million mentions, leading to resignations of prominent figures in media and politics (The Hindu, 2019). Social media platforms enabled survivors to connect, forming support networks that pressured institutions to adopt anti-harassment policies. By 2019, over 20% of Indian companies had implemented such policies, citing public pressure (Economic Times, 2019).

This case highlights how social media can drive cultural shifts essential for peace. By giving survivors a platform, #MeTooIndia challenged patriarchal norms, fostering inclusivity. The movement's success offers lessons for the Philippines, where gender-based violence remains a barrier to peace in conflict zones.

Ukraine's #StandWithUkraine Campaign (2022–2023)

The #StandWithUkraine campaign, launched during Russia's 2022 invasion, showcases social media's role in global solidarity and resource mobilization. Ukrainians and supporters used X, Instagram, and TikTok to share stories of resistance, document war crimes, and crowdfund humanitarian aid. The campaign raised over \$500 million globally, supporting refugees and medical supplies (UNHCR, 2023). Posts featuring civilians rebuilding communities went viral, with #StandWithUkraine garnering 2 million mentions in 2022 (Sprout Social, 2023). The campaign also influenced NATO's aid policies, amplifying Ukraine's call for support.

This case demonstrates how social media can unite global communities around peacebuilding. By combining emotional storytelling with actionable appeals, #StandWithUkraine sustained international attention, offering a model for mobilizing support in conflict zones like Mindanao.

STRATEGIES FOR HARNESSING SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media's strengths which are: global reach, real-time engagement, narrative amplification, education, and community-building offer immense potential for religious peacebuilding. To maximize this, we must address

challenges and leverage faith-based values. Below are eight strategies, supported by examples, to promote peace through religion.

Promote Faith-Based Positive Content

Religious stories of reconciliation outperform negative content. Positive storytelling can counter negativity and inspire peace. Platforms like Humans of New York, with over 20 million followers, share stories of reconciliation that resonate globally (Sprout Social, 2024). In the Philippines, initiatives like Grassroots Peacebuilding Mentors Training Program, which highlights peacebuilding efforts in Mindanao, have engaged thousands since 2018 (Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute, 2025). Positive posts often outperform negative ones, with 30% higher engagement rates (Sprout Social, 2024). Governments, NGOs, and influencers should invest in campaigns that celebrate unity, using compelling visuals, videos, and narratives. For example, short films showcasing interfaith collaborations in Zamboanga could go viral, fostering empathy and dialogue. Storytelling workshops for community leaders can enhance content quality, ensuring authenticity.

Build Interfaith Digital Spaces

Creating digital spaces that foster dialogue across divides is critical. In Sri Lanka, the Interfaith Youth Network, supported by Search for Common Ground, uses Facebook and WhatsApp to unite Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian youth. Since 2020, it has hosted virtual dialogues and workshops, reaching over 2,000 participants by 2023 (Search for Common Ground Sri Lanka, 2023). In the Philippines, PeaceTech uses technology to connect students from conflict-affected areas, fostering mutual understanding through moderated discussions (IEEE, 2022). These initiatives counter polarization by emphasizing shared values. Platforms should implement stronger anti-harassment policies, such as AI-driven moderation and user reporting, to ensure safe environments for dialogue.

Combat Misinformation with Fact-Checking and Media Literacy

Misinformation undermines peace, but fact-checking and media literacy can mitigate its impact. Tools like Snopes and Rappler's Tsek.ph have proven effective in debunking false claims. In the Philippines, Tsek.ph identified over 1,000 pieces of election-related disinformation in 2022, reducing their spread (Rappler, 2022). UNESCO's 2023 report found that countries with high media literacy see 25% less belief in fake news (UNESCO, 2023). Governments,

schools, and platforms should invest in media literacy programs, teaching critical thinking and source verification. For example, the Philippines' Department of Education could integrate media literacy into high school curricula, reaching millions. Social media companies must enforce stricter content moderation, using AI and human moderators to flag propaganda swiftly.

Encourage Faith-Driven Offline Action to Bridge Slacktivism

To overcome slacktivism, campaigns must bridge the gap between online engagement and offline impact. Peace One Day, which organized 2023 events in 50 countries, uses social media to promote local peace initiatives, encouraging followers to volunteer or donate (Peace One Day, 2023). Its founder, Jeremy Gilley, said, "Peace begins when we move from screens to streets" (Gilley, 2020). In the Philippines, #PeaceWalkPH organizes community walks alongside online advocacy, ensuring tangible outcomes (Rappler, 2022). Partnerships with barangay councils and NGOs can amplify these efforts. Gamification, such as rewarding offline actions with digital badges, could incentivize participation, as seen in apps like MyBarangay, which promotes civic engagement.

Leverage Religious Influencers and Grassroots Leaders

Influencers and grassroots leaders can amplify peacebuilding messages. In Kenya, Boniface Mwangi used Instagram to promote peace during elections, reaching millions (Quartz, 2017). In the Philippines, celebrities like Kathryn Bernardo have supported peace campaigns, leveraging their millions of followers (Cybersmile, 2017). Grassroots leaders, such as teachers or imams, can use TikTok to share localized stories. For example, a Maguindanao teacher's videos about interfaith projects inspired 10,000 local youth to join dialogues (Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute, 2023). Training these leaders in digital storytelling, through workshops by NGOs like PeaceTech, can maximize impact, ensuring messages resonate with diverse audiences.

Foster Cross-Platform Religious Collaboration

Peacebuilding efforts are more effective when platforms collaborate with each other and external stakeholders. A joint campaign by Facebook, X, and YouTube could promote global peace initiatives, pooling resources to reach billions. In the Philippines, a 2023 partnership between Meta and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation, and Unity launched a

Facebook campaign to educate Filipinos about the Bangsamoro peace process (OPAPRU, 2025). Such collaborations can standardize anti-hate speech policies, share best practices, and fund peacebuilding content. For example, a global “PeaceHub” platform, backed by tech giants, could curate verified peacebuilding resources, creating a unified digital ecosystem for peace.

Empower Youth Through Faith-based Digital Peacebuilding Programs

Youth, as digital natives, are key to sustainable peacebuilding. Programs that empower young people to create peacebuilding content can amplify impact. In the Philippines, the Youth for Peace Movement, supported by UNICEF, trains students to produce social media campaigns on conflict resolution, reaching 1 million users in 2023 (UNICEF Philippines, 2023). Globally, the UN’s #Youth4Peace initiative encourages young people to share peacebuilding stories on TikTok, with 500,000 participants in 2024 (UN.org, 2024). These programs teach skills like video editing, storytelling, and fact-checking, equipping youth to counter hate speech and promote dialogue. Schools and NGOs should expand such initiatives, offering microgrants for youth-led projects, such as podcasts or virtual peace summits, to sustain engagement.

Promote Religious Values for Peacebuilding

Religion can steer social media by embedding values like compassion and forgiveness. In the Philippines, the Catholic “Laudato Si” campaign on X promotes environmental peace, citing papal encyclicals, reaching 2 million users (Caritas Philippines, 2023). Muslim scholars share wasatiyyah (moderation) on WhatsApp, countering extremism. Religious institutions should partner with platforms to prioritize peace-oriented content, using algorithms to amplify interfaith posts and hosting virtual summits to draft peacebuilding guidelines.

CONCLUSION

Social media’s strengths: global reach, real-time engagement, narrative amplification, education, and community-building offer immense potential for religious peacebuilding, yet its challenges demand faith-guided solutions. Historical narratives, from Hong Kong’s faith-driven protests to Ukraine’s interfaith solidarity, show how religion leverages social media to unite communities. The Philippines’ disinformation crisis and Ethiopia’s hate speech highlight risks, but religion’s mediating role, through truth, compassion, and service, counters these. By promoting faith-based content, building interfaith

spaces, combating lies with ethics, encouraging action, leveraging influencers, fostering collaboration, empowering youth, and embedding religious values, social media can become a sacred space for peace.

In the Philippines, where faith shapes identity, social media amplifies religious calls for peace, uniting Christians, Muslims, and indigenous believers. Religion's mediating role, rooted in shared values of love and justice, transforms digital platforms into tools for reconciliation. My challenge: hashtag #FaithChallenge, is this: use your next post to share a religious teaching on peace, challenge division, or start an interfaith conversation. In a connected world, peace is a click away. Let us sow these #SeedsOfFaith, building a digital sanctuary where religion fosters harmony.

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INTERRELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN INDIGENOUS RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY WITHIN THE HUAULU COMMUNITY IN MALUKU

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ABSTRACT

The arrival of Western Christianity in the archipelago, alongside European expansion, solidified Christian dominance and asserted superiority over indigenous religious practices. European supremacy did not merely bolster this dominance but also fueled theological narratives that portrayed indigenous religions as “dark” and “heretical,” necessitating their conversion to Christianity. This framework shaped interfaith discourse, marginalizing indigenous religions and excluding them from meaningful engagement. This article aims to analyze the socio-religious engagement between the adherents of Memaham (an indigenous religion) and Christians in the context of interreligious relations. This research was conducted within the Huaulu indigenous community, North Seram District, Central Maluku Regency, Maluku Province. This study employs a participatory qualitative research methodology, using interviews and observations as data generation methods. The findings reveal that Memaham, as the indigenous religion of the Huaulu, experienced a complex and dynamic engagement with Christianity, such as harmonious collaboration, ongoing negotiation, and even direct confrontation. Those findings provide an empirical contribution to interreligious relations within a postcolonial context, by aiming to avoid the romanticization often oriented towards harmonious relationships.

Keywords: Interreligious Engagement; Indigenous Religion; Christianity

INTRODUCTION

Interreligious relations are frequently constrained within the world religions paradigm (Paais, 2023a). Engagement among adherents of Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism are commonly regarded as interreligious dialogue. In contrast, relationships with adherents of indigenous religion are often framed as interaction with primitive culture, irreligious society, and animistic practices (see Tylor, 1871). This paradigm is deeply rooted in the socio-theological construct of Western supremacy, which perpetuates the triumphalism of world religions as inherently superior

to indigenous religion (Cox, 2007; Smith, 1964). Christianity exemplified this dynamic with its extensive history of missionary activities—including proselytization, evangelization, or christianization—on a global scale (Patty 2019, p. 14). By emphasizing exclusive doctrinal creeds such as “Jesus is the only way of salvation and life”, alongside the Great Commission, Christianity has established a hegemonic and dominant presence. These same creeds have often been employed to legitimize efforts to christianize adherents of indigenous religion in various contexts (Paais, 2022). Although indigenous religions in Indonesia were granted formal-legal recognition through Constitutional Court Decision Number 97/PUU-XIV/2016 in 2017 (Mubarok, 2019), the prevailing *status quo* continues to marginalize their adherents in social, religious, and political spheres (Anggraeni et al., 2022; Marshall, 2018; Nenohai, 2023).

Numerous studies have analyzed the relationship between indigenous religions and Christianity in various contexts. Junsal Efendy Duan, focusing on Tobelo community, argues that the adoption of *Gikiri Moi* (Tobelo’s conception of the highest supernatural being) and its identification with the Christian God constitutes a practice that diminishes the intrinsic meaning of *Gikiri Moi* itself (Duan, 2019). A similar observation is made by Jear Nenohai in his study of the *Liturgi Bulan Budaya* (LBB) in the Evangelical Christian Church in Timor (GMIT). LBB is intended as an effort to contextualize Christian faith through dialogue with cultural practices. However, Nenohai critiques the LBB practice for perpetuating discriminatory narratives against indigenous religions. According to him, LBB merely associates indigenous religious practices as “culture” that enriches Christian theology, without genuinely incorporating the perspective of indigenous religious adherents (Nenohai, 2023). These subordinating Christian narratives are historically rooted in the methods of Christian proselytization, which systematically marginalized the indigenous religion. Elifas Maspaitella highlights various missionary approaches, from Portuguese Catholic missionaries to Dutch Protestant zending in Maluku. Protestantism had the greatest influence on Maluku’s Christian religiosity by employing coercive methods, referred to locally as *main larang* (imposing prohibition). Such prohibition included banning the use of local languages, forbidding visits to old villages (*kampung lama*), prohibiting practices such as chewing betel nut, and others (Maspaitella, 2020).

In Africa, practices such as “witchcraft”, often associated with notions of primitiveness, persist and exhibit a correlation with modernity. The emergence and growth of Pentecostal churches across Africa, particularly in Malawi, have been implicated in efforts to eradicate these practices. Pentecostal theology

often reinterprets local spiritual beliefs as satanic, leading to the organization of large-scale services aimed at expelling or “releasing” these perceived evil spirits (Dijk, 2001). Moreover, the actors discriminating against indigenous religions are not limited to adherents of world religion, but also include the state, which exerts control through various bureaucratic regulations (Abdillah & Izah, 2022). Furthermore, scholars have sought to engage indigenous religion in various discourse. For instance, Krisharyanto Umbu Deta endeavors to position indigenous religion within the religious freedom (Deta, 2022); Vikry Paais reconstruct Christians exclusive narrative towards indigenous religion and propose a pluralistic approach (Paais, 2022); similarly, Kristno Saptanno encourages for the inclusion of indigenous religion in interreligious dialogue (Saptanno, 2021).

After reviewing the various studies, the Author finds that these studies have not adequately navigated the relationship between adherents of indigenous religion and Christianity in daily life. Therefore, this article will analyze the relationship between Memaham (indigenous religion) and Christianity, with a focus on the perspectives and practices of Huaulu indigenous communities, in Seram Island, Central Maluku Regency—the place where this research is conducted. Grounded in the socio-religious relations of the people, this paper explores the dynamics of their engagement based on intersubjective, egalitarian, reciprocal, and dynamic relationships. This article seeks to avoid the romanticized language which tends to elevate interreligious relations within a discourse of harmony, such as the discourse of “interreligious dialogue” that often masks conflicts (Wijsen, 2007, p. 45). Therefore, it emphasizes that interreligious engagements are dynamic, not merely characterized by harmonious experiences, but also generating resistance and conflict in response to hegemony and domination. In short, this article seeks to go beyond the post-colonial study of interreligious relations that tends to avoid conflict. Consequently, the correlational dialogue proposed by Paul Knitter (2008) will be employed as an effort to emancipate indigenous religion as a subject within interreligious discourse, while also bridging its relationship with Christianity as a correlational one.

This article employs a qualitative research methodology, combining several data generating methods, including in-depth interview, semi-structured life-world interview, active participant observation, and literature study. Each method applied proportionally and contextually. Additionally, this article utilizes phenomenological analysis. Phenomenological analysis is used to understand and explain the meaning and structure of a phenomenon, as well as the essence of an individual's or a community's experience (Patton, 2002).

In this context, the engagement between Memaham and Christianity will be associated with the interaction between the people with different religious affiliation. Their engagement generates a complex socio-religious dynamic, including reciprocal negotiation and resistance that intertwine.

The structure of analysis in this article is divided into three sections: (1) exploring Memaham as an indigenous religious identity; (2) examining the existence and nature of Christianity; and (3) analyzing the dynamic engagement between the adherents of Memaham and Christianity. The research reveals that Memaham, as indigenous religious practices predating Islam and Christianity, is referred to as Hindu in administrative context for socio-political and recognition purposes. Over time, Memaham adherents encountered Christian (*Asaranyam*) and Islamic (*Laufaha*) communities. In the context of Christianity, its arrival in Huaulu reflects a dialogical social relationship between Huaulu (insider) and other people (outsider), with practices like interfaith marriage and religious conversion playing a key role in shaping these dynamics. This interaction enables hybridization and assimilation of identity between Memaham and Christian adherents. For instance, Memaham adherents who have converted to Christian do not entirely abandon Memaham practices and knowledge; conversely, Christians who convert to Memaham do not entirely relinquish Christian practices and knowledges. In addition, in social interaction and collective work, both are in an intersubjective relationship. Christians and Memaham both occupy strategic positions, both in *adat* government and village government. While such harmonious exchanges are evident, Christian evangelization efforts (christianization), legitimized by exclusive creeds, provoke resistance from Memaham adherents. This resistance underscores their resilience against coercive conversion and the subordinate nature of Christianity. Thus, the encounter between Memaham and Christianity is dynamic, characterized by both harmonious engagement and conflictual rejection.

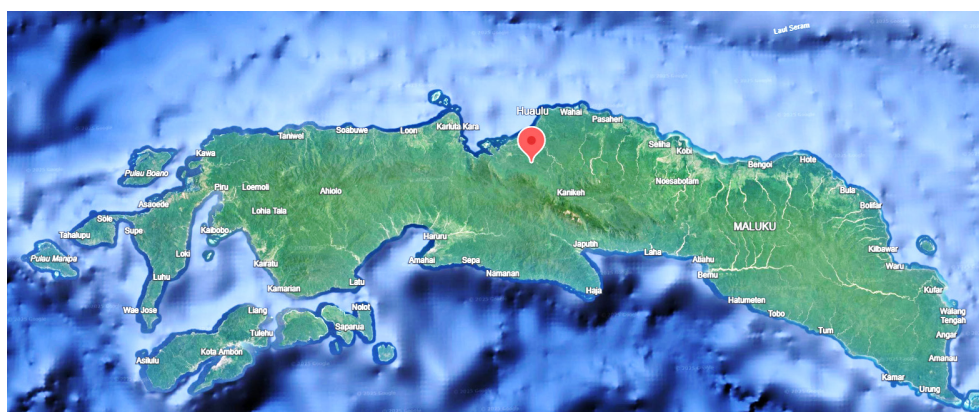
RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AMONG THE HUAULU

Huaulu is an indigenous village situated on Seram Island, in the mountainous region at the foothills of Mount Binaiya, and surrounded by tropical forests. Administratively, Huaulu is part of North Seram Subdistrict, Central Maluku Regency, Maluku Province. The settlement consists of four main areas: (1) *Kampung Lama*; (2) *Kampung Baru*; (3) *Kilo Lima* or transmigration settlement; and (4) Alakamat, which is located along the northern coast of Seram Island. For the purposes of this study, the term “Huaulu” refers collectively to Kampung Lama and Kampung Baru, which the Huaulu people

call *Mutulam*. Kampung Lama and Kampung Baru are adjacent, with a paved road marking their boundary and passing only through Kampung Baru. Kampung Lama maintains its traditional architectural style, characterized by stilt houses constructed with wooden planks and *gaba-gaba* (sago palm fronds), bamboo or *nibong* flooring, and sago leaf roofs. In contrast, Kampung Baru exhibits features of modernity, such as concrete houses that imitate urban architectural designs. Nevertheless, traces of modern influences, including electricity, televisions, solar panels, and motorized vehicles, are present in Kampung Lama¹; while traditional stilt houses can still be found in Kampung Baru. A defining feature of Huaulu culture is the red cloth headgear known as *asope* (Ambon Malay: *kain berang*), exclusively worn by adult men who have undergone the *puheli* ritual, a rite of passage. Daily practices among the Huaulu include chewing betel nut, which accompanies various activities such as socializing with neighbors, farming, or hunting in the forest.

In Huaulu, there are three religions or beliefs coexist: *Memaham* (indigenous religion), *Asaranyam* (Christianity), and *Laufaha* (Islam) (see Paais, 2023a; Valeri, 2000). The majority of Huaulu people adhere to Memaham, followed by Christianity, and Islam as the smallest population.

Figure 1
The Map of Seram Island, Maluku Province



Source: earth.google.com

Memaham as (Indigenous) Religion

Following the 2017 Constitutional Court which recognized indigenous religions, several scholars have sought to reconstruct various indigenous religions as an integral part of religious discourse in Indonesia (Deta, 2022;

¹ During my visit to Huaulu in October 2024, I found that the Huaulu people had prohibited vehicle access to Kampung Lama, marking it with a plaque clearly stating this prohibition.

Nawangarsi & Adnin, 2022; Saptanno, 2021; Tera & Palar, 2018). This reconstruction forms a part of an emancipatory effort to assert the equality of indigenous religions with other official religions. Similarly, the Author cautiously engages this effort, recognizing the need to critically interrogate how religious discourse is constructed and reproduced.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1964) elucidates how the term “religion” has been reified, particularly under the influence on monotheistic traditions, most notably Christianity. This process of reification has not only obscured the multifaceted nature of religious experiences but has also fostered reductive definitions that dominate global discourse. Within the Indonesian context, this phenomenon is further accentuated by the imposition of monotheistic paradigm (conducted by Islam) as prerequisites for religious recognition (Maarif, 2017). Such prerequisites—including the necessity of a prophet, a sacred text, and international recognition—reflect efforts to impose monotheistic framework onto belief systems that are not intrinsically non-monotheistic. Recognizing this epistemological problem, categorizing indigenous beliefs as “religion” risks reifying its practices that are inherently fluid and dynamic. To circumvent this conceptual impasse, a more inclusive definition of religion is essential. This study adopts James L. Cox definition in *From Primitive to Indigenous*, which posits:

“Religion refers to identifiable communities that base their beliefs and experiences of postulated non-falsifiable realities on a tradition that is transmitted authoritatively from generation to generation” (Cox 2007, p. 85).

By focusing on religious experience as transmitted within a community, Cox’s definition eschews theological-essentialist justification. This conceptual framework provides a foundation for integrating Memaham into interreligious discourse more inclusively.

Memaham, as a belief system predating the arrival of formal religions, is often referred to as Hindu. However, this Hindu does not correspond to Indian Hinduism but is instead understood as *adat* or ancient Hindu (Ambon Malay: *Hindu tua*). In the social imagination of the Maluku people, Hindu frequently serves as a term to denote indigenous religions outside the six officially recognized religions. Aholiab Watloly (2013) identifies this as *Hindu kultural*, a form of Hindu intertwined with the tradition and culture of Maluku, making it unique and absent elsewhere.

Administratively, Memaham is not listed as a religious option in the Identity

Card (*Kartu Tanda Penduduk*—KTP); instead, Hindu is used. Some sources suggest that this practice stems from the political upheaval and mass killing of Indonesian Communist Party members and sympathizers in 1965 (Damm, 2015; Paaïs, 2023a). At the moment, indigenous religions were not officially recognized, leaving their adherents vulnerable to accusations of being atheist or communist affiliates (Maarif, 2017). As a result, labeling their belief as Hindu became a strategy for negotiating religious identity during this politically volatile period. There are, however, suggestions that the identification of indigenous religions with Hindu predates 1965, stemming from the historical influence of Hindu-Buddhist religious-culture in *Nusantara* (Bartels, 2017). This historical context extended into the Dutch colonization period, during which the term “Hindu” was often used in the administrative affairs by the colonial government to refer to groups of people outside the major world religions (Ellen, 2015). Amid this complexity, the use of Hindu serves an essential function for Memaham adherents, enabling them to navigate the challenges of administrative identity, political rights, and public service accessibility.

The religiosity of Memaham adherents is oriented toward the internalization of earth and sky as spiritual values. They are known as *Ina Puhum* (Mother Earth) and *Ama Lahatala* (Father Sky), collectively referred to as *Ina-Ama* (mother and father) (Valeri, 2001, p. 94). In Huaulu cosmology, *Ina Puhum* and *Ama Lahatala* represent entities believed to influence human life, providing protections, fertilities, and even calamities. Rituals and prayers are therefore directed toward these entities. Practically, *Ina Puhum* is mentioned first, followed by *Ama Lahatala*. This sequence underscores the ecological relationship between the Huaulu and their surrounding environment, particularly the forest and land. According to local narratives, the ground they walk on, the soil they cultivate, the forest that provides sustenance, and the flowing rivers that sustain life are all representations of *Ina Puhum*. This worldview reflects a perception of nature as a nurturing mother (see Merchant, 1980). By highlighting *Ina Puhum*, the Huaulu emphasize the ecological harmony while asserting that humans are not the sole subject inhabiting the earth, but are part of an intersubjective network with other entities, including nature. Thus, Memaham cosmology encourages ecological relations as intersubjective, highlighting the interconnectedness between human, nature and ancestor within a framework of mutual existence (see Maarif, 2019).

The intersubjective relationships are further regulated through prohibitions known as *maquwoli* (taboo). These taboos not only regulate human-to-human relationships but also the relationship between humans and nature, and humans

and their ancestors. In human-to-human relationships, a younger sibling is prohibited from marrying before an older sibling. In relation to nature, the Huaulu are strictly forbidden from consuming domesticated animals (such as dogs and cats)², including wild animals that have been domesticated. Even hunters are not allowed to consume their game animals. In the relationship with ancestors, the Huaulu have a tradition of *nama Hindu*. A *nama Hindu* is an ancestral name passed down to subsequent generations. If descendants inherit this name, the taboos practiced by the ancestors automatically inherited as well. For instance, *Lafale* is the name of an ancestor who refrained from eating pork. Therefore, any descendants who carry the name *Lafale* are also forbidden from consuming pork.

The entire practice of Memaham rituals is centered in *lumapotoam* (Ambon Malay: *baileo*). *Lumapotoam* is a larger structure designed to accommodate numerous participants, as it functions as both a space for deliberation and the central venue for ritual activities. The architectural design and construction of the *lumapotoam* preserve local knowledge and traditions. The use of tools, other than machetes, is strictly prohibited in the construction of the building. The wooden joints are fastened using rattan ropes, as the use of nails is not permitted. Traditionally, building is overseen by an elder known as *tua adat*. The elder serves for a specific term and the position is rotated among members of different clans. As of 2024, Mahuleti Tamatae holds the position of elder for the Huaulu *lumapotoam*. In this context, the role of the elder is distinct from that of the *raja* (village leader). While the *raja* is responsible for administrative matters within the village, the elder is tasked with overseeing religious and customary affairs. Accordingly, some informants suggest that the position and duties of the elder within Memaham resemble those of a pastor in Christian contexts. Additionally, in matters pertaining to land or territorial rights, the Huaulu recognize the *Latunusa* (land king) as the individual most responsible. The division of roles and responsibilities is, therefore, a crucial factor in the functioning of Memaham within the Huaulu community.

In recent decades, various external pressures have posed serious challenges to the existence of Memaham adherents. These challenges include the state's unequal recognition of religions (Maarif, 2017), which has led to the stigmatization of Memaham as an animistic belief and its followers as primitive or even irreligious. This recognition bias has resulted in various imbalanced policies, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs' program that categorized the

² Valerio Valeri (1992) notes that chickens were also considered domestic animals that should not be consumed. However, over time, the Huaulu community has shifted to consuming chicken meat.

Huaulu community as an “isolated tribe” (*suku terasing*) requiring relocation. This policy, however, eliminated the customary order of the Huaulu society (Topatimasang, 2016). Furthermore, the implementation of transmigration programs and the reclassification of customary forests into national parks have created equally complex issues. Transmigration, which was claimed to boost regional income, has instead exacerbated social disparities between indigenous populations and migrants. Additionally, conservation efforts have excluded forest-dependent communities from accessing essential resources derived from the forest (Sasaoka, 2018).

The Existence of Christianity (*Asaranyam*)

The arrival of Christianity in Huaulu is inextricably linked to the social encounter between the followers of Memaham (insiders) and those of Christianity (outsiders). The earliest record of this encounter between both in Huaulu was documented by Italian anthropologist, Valerio Valeri, in the 1980s (Valeri, 2000). Valeri notes that Christians were referred to as *Asaranyam*. This term was used to distinguish the religious identity of Christians from that of the followers of Memaham, who were regarded as the mountain dwellers and the original settlers of the area.

During the period of Valeri’s research, Christians were a distinct community living in proximity to the Huaulu. Over time, their interaction has become more widespread and intensive. Today, the presence of Christians has become an integral part of the Huaulu collective identity. Through marriage and migration, Christian adherents have settled in the region and formed social cohesion alongside the Memaham adherents. Several Christian informants explained that they settled in Huaulu primarily due to marriage, while others cited owning land in the area as their reason for relocation. These individuals originated from various villages such as Maneo, Maraina, Kanikeh, Roho, Hatu, Selumena, and others.

Christians in Huaulu are affiliated to The Protestant Church in the Moluccas (*Gereja Protestan Maluku*—GPM),³ and most of them are the member of Oping Congregation (*Jemaat Oping*). In church administration, the Oping Congregation is one of the congregations in the Classis of Seram Utara Barat, located on the northern coast of Seram Island and is in close proximity to one of the Huaulu settlements, Alakamat. This congregation is gathered by the Congregational Council, which is led by a priest and assisted by several

³ Maluku Protestant Church in the Moluccas, or known as *Gereja Protestan Maluku* (GPM) is Calvinist church which introduced by Dutch zendeling. GPM territory include Maluku and North Maluku.

elders (*penatua*) and deacons (*diaken*). As of 2023, two members of Oping Congregational Council are Huaulu people who reside in Kampung Baru.

In the context of ritual practice, the Oping Congregation operates two buildings designated as centers for worship. The first is the church building situated in the central area of Oping Village, while the second is a spiritual hall constructed in the Kilo Lima area. The establishment of the spiritual hall in Kilo Lima differs from the church in the village center, as it aims to provide more accessible opportunities for Christians residing in Kilo Lima and Huaulu to engage in worship. However, not all Huaulu Christians participate in the worship services. During the Author's participation, only five to six people were present, none of whom were Huaulu residents from Kampung Lama or Kampung Baru. This limited attendance can be attributed to the considerable distance and prohibitively high transportation costs. The journey from Huaulu to Kilo Lima spans approximately 15 kilometers southwest, and due to the absence of public transportation, Huaulu residents are required to pay around Rp25,000 for a one-way trip via motorcycle taxi. Consequently, the round-trip cost amounts to Rp50,000, a significant sum when compared to the incomes of the community, which relies on the unpredictable yields of natural resources.

In addition to issues of cost and transportation, the time of worship, which is sometimes not punctual, also contributes to the lack of participation among Christian members. The Author has observed on several occasions that worship services often begin later than the scheduled time of 9:00 AM. As a result, some individuals prefer to go to the garden to work rather than attend the worship service. This phenomenon indicates that participation in Christian rituals is not considered a mandatory routine. In contrast, during traditional ceremonies, Christian Huaulu living far from Huaulu tend to make an effort to attend and participate. This pattern reflects a clear distinction between the religious practices of Memaham and Christianity. Christianity, with its fixed and scheduled rituals, demands more consistent participation, while in Memaham, religious practices are more flexible and not bound by strict routines.

Despite the various contemporary dynamics surrounding Christianity in Huaulu, the Author also seeks to highlight how the adherents of Memaham are not exempt from the influence of global Christianity, which emphasizes exclusive creed, orthodoxy, and soteriology (see Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008; Ellen, 2015; End, 1999; Maspaitella, 2020). The textual affirmation of creeds has made Christianity one of the most expansive missionary religions, particularly as the arrival of Western Christianity in the Indonesian archipelago coincided with the process of colonization, European imperialism, and white

supremacy. Valeri notes that in the 1980s, several American missionaries from the New Tribes Mission settled along the northern coast of Seram Island, near Alakamat. Their settlement in Alakamat was due to the Huaulu people's refusal to allow them to live in the mountain villages (Valeri, 2000, p. 41). However, the conflict between them and the indigenous people forced these missionaries to leave Huaulu. The Huaulu people of the 1980s still have vivid memories of them.

Muhammad Damm also recorded political efforts to instill Christian influence in Huaulu. In his research conducted in 2015, Damm noted several efforts made to "religiousize" the Huaulu people. He recounts:

"... pada bulan Juli 2015 beberapa orang perwakilan dari sebuah organisasi Kristen di Ambon berkunjung ke Huaulu. Mereka menemui Kamara untuk melaporkan bahwa mereka berencana mengadakan kegiatan sosial di Negeri Huaulu, yang diperuntukkan khususnya bagi anak-anak Huaulu yang menjadi siswa SD Kecil Huaulu. Pada tahun sebelumnya mereka juga pernah melakukan kegiatan serupa. Menanggapi permintaan izin mengadakan kegiatan tersebut, Kamara secara tidak langsung menolaknya karena beberapa kali telah mendapatkan laporan dari sebagian besar masyarakat Huaulu sendiri yang menyatakan bahwa mereka tidak berkenan dengan kegiatan sosial organisasi itu lantaran terkesan disertai misi-misi keagamaan" (Damm, 2015, p. 47).

[In July 2015 several representatives from a Christian organization in Ambon visited Huaulu. They met Kamara to report that they were planning to organize social activities in Huaulu, specifically for Huaulu children who were students at Huaulu Primary School. In the previous year they had also conducted a similar activity. In response to the request for permission to hold these activities, Kamara indirectly rejected it because he had received several reports from most of the Huaulu people themselves stating that they were not pleased with the organization's social activities because they seemed to be accompanied by religious missions].

In addition, Damm also noted similar issue suspected to be related to structural government intervention:

"... adanya rencana dari Dinas Pendidikan Kabupaten Maluku Tengah untuk menugaskan empat orang guru SD mengajar di SD Kecil Huaulu. Salah satu dari keempat guru tersebut merupakan guru agama Islam. Beberapa waktu sebelumnya, pernah pula seorang guru agama Kristen mengajar di SD itu dan akhirnya mendapatkan penolakan dari

masyarakat. Kamara sendiri mengungkapkan, masyarakatnya memang membutuhkan tenaga pendidik tambahan. Akan tetapi, jika yang ditugaskan adalah guru agama Islam atau pun Kristen, maka akan sia-sia mengingat anak-anak Huaulu yang menjadi siswa di SD Kecil Huaulu tak seorang pun menganut Islam atau Kristen” (Damm, 2015, p. 48).

[There is a plan from the Central Maluku District Education Office to assign four elementary school teachers to teach at Huaulu Primary School. One of the four teachers is a Muslim religious teacher. Some time before, a Christian teacher had also taught at the elementary school and eventually received rejection from the community. Kamara himself revealed that his community really needs additional educators. However, if the teachers are assigned to teach Islam or Christianity, it will be useless considering that none of the Huaulu children who are students at primary school adhere to Islam or Christianity].

This reality illustrates that the existence of Christianity in Huaulu is shaped by the dynamics of interreligious relations. Christianity presents two opposing yet intertwined sides. On one hand, Christianity is represented by individuals with a pluralistic character who embody an accommodative and non-discriminatory relationship. This form of Christianity neither forces nor is forced, nor is it determinative or justificatory. The relationship with Memaham adherents is based on daily practices without attempts at conversion. On the other hand, Christianity emphasizes its exclusive soteriological aspect. This character is dominated by outsiders who view Memaham practices as heretical, dark, and unsaved, thus needing to be converted to Christianity. This form of Christianity becomes entangled in a messianic imperialism, seeing itself as a savior, while perpetuating a narrative of European supremacy that subordinates indigenous religions.

CORRELATIONAL INTERSUBJECTIVE RELATIONSHIP

In *Satu Bumi Banyak Agama*, Paul Knitter emphasizes “correlational” as an alternative approach to address the excesses caused by Christian exclusivism (Knitter, 2008, p. 41). Although he does not explicitly refer to indigenous religion, in an interview, Knitter affirmed that the correlational approach holds significant potential for incorporating indigenous religion into interreligious dialogue (Paais, 2023b). Instead of being in an exclusive paradigm, Knitter proposes a correlational approach to avoid absolutist language which is often tied to exclusive soteriological claims, and ultimately fostering global responsibility. This approach provides Christianity with a new perspective: to perceive the world as a shared home and embrace a shared responsibility

for cultivating relationships with the other. Thus, global responsibility is the way Christians contribute to address the dynamics and challenges existing on Earth without regard to religious identity.

Historically, the primary reason for the extensive encounters between Memaham adherents and Christianity was the spread of Christian missions on Seram Island. Christianity expanded its reach to mountain regions, even venturing farther than Huaulu. Consequently, the Huaulu people frequently interacted with their neighboring Christian villages. This argument does not intend to negate encounters with Islam. Encounters with Islam occurred in a different dimension, considering the spatial and dietary differences between the two.

In this relationship, Memaham adherents associate Christians as part of the Memaham community. During the research period, an elder in Huaulu asked the Author, "What is your religion?" The Author replied, "I am a Christian!" The elder immediately responded, "*Oh, ita Memaham!*" (oh, we are both Memaham). This phrase, *ita Memaham*, underscores two possibilities. First, it suggests that highland Christians were once Memaham adherents, like the Huaulu people. They shared the same geographical space: forests and mountains. Consequently, even though some neighboring villages have converted to Christianity, their former religious identity underwent hybridization with Christianity, one example being the conception of God as *Lahatala*.

Second, both Christianity and Memaham share a common dietary practice: the consumption of pork (Valeri, 1992, p. 159). As mountain dwellers, their diet primarily depends on forest resources, including pork, as well as other animals like deers, cassowaries, and cuscuses. This shared dietary pattern creates a cultural similarity between Christians and Memaham adherents, distinguishing both from Islam. Thus, diet and spatial dynamics emerge as two interrelated factors shaping the identity of both local Christian and Memaham communities. Why, then, is Islam absent from this discourse? The primary reason lies in the theological narrative that regards pork as forbidden. Additionally, some Memaham informants expressed reluctance, stating they felt compelled to hide pork when hosting Muslim guests.

Moreover, Muslim settlements are predominantly located along coastal areas (Valeri, 2000), as Muslims in these regions are often traders with an economic orientation centered on the exchange of goods and services. Consequently, the spread of Islam did not extensively reach the highlands but remained focused on coastal zones. This geographic separation resulted in less intensive

encounters between Memaham and Islam compared to Christianity.⁴ Valeri observes that interactions with Islam were often marked by conflict, framing the relationship between Memaham and Islam as a tension between the mountains and the coast (Valeri, 2000, p. 23).

In recent decades, the intensity of encounters between Memaham adherents and Christians has significantly increased. While earlier interactions were shaped by distinct territorial identities, today, some residents of Huaulu identify as Christians. In fact, certain Huaulu families now include members of different religions, specifically Memaham and Christianity. Despite forming interfaith families, neither Memaham nor Christianity recognizes interfaith marriages. Both emphasize the necessity of a conversion ritual—*titinufu* for Memaham and baptism for Christianity—prior to marriage. Nevertheless, some families choose not to undergo conversion, opting instead to retain their respective religions. As a result, they cannot formalize their marriages, either through Christian or indigenous marriage (*kateha*).

In the other context, some Memaham adherents convert to Christianity, while conversely, some Christians convert to Memaham.⁵ This process of conversion unfolds in a reciprocal dialectic, with both Memaham and Christianity practicing inward and outward conversion (Tylor, 1999). Individuals who undergo conversion rituals—*titinufu* or baptism—do not entirely sever their ties to their previous faith. In short, religious conversion in Huaulu fosters religious hybridity (Ruparell, 2013), multiple religious belonging, or what Raymon Panikkar (1999) refers to as *intrareligious dialogue*. Memaham adherents who convert to Christianity often remain connected to Memaham traditions, such as the prohibition against consuming dog meat (Paais, 2023c). Similarly, Christians who convert to Memaham continue to participate in certain Christian practices. Additionally, children in interfaith families occasionally engage in the rituals of both religions, a phenomenon referred to as interterritoriality (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015).

The encounter between Memaham and Christianity is marked not only by harmonious relations but also by significant social dynamics, one of which is the resistance of Memaham adherents to Christian proselytization efforts. As previously mentioned, Huaulu resistance was documented by Valeri when they opposed the presence of five American missionary families from the

⁴ Nonetheless, in contemporary times, Memaham adherents have experienced significant encounters with Islam, particularly due to the growing number of Muslim transmigrants who have settled in Huaulu territory, *Kilo Lima*.

⁵ It is important to note that the practice of conversion into or out of Memaham, marked by the *titinufu* ritual, is exclusively applicable to women and not to men. Conversely, conversion to Christianity, signified by baptism, is applicable to both women and men.

New Tribes Mission. Similarly, Damm recorded their rejection of a Christian religious teacher appointed by the Central Maluku Regency Government to serve at Huaulu's elementary school. In another instance, the Huaulu community recalls the death of an elementary school teacher believed to have occurred because he conducted Christian worship in the school, despite the students not being Christians. These various efforts at Christianization provoked resistance from the Huaulu people against the influence of Christian propagation. This response manifested in restrictions on Christian worship within *Kampung Lama*. In essence, Christian rituals could be performed in Huaulu but were prohibited within the boundaries of *Kampung Lama*. These restrictions were not instituted formally but emerged from individual awareness, passed down through collective narratives. The community associates *Kampung Lama* as the territory of Memaham and the center of indigenous ritual practices. In contrast, Christian rituals are perceived as a threat to the authority of Memaham.

Although this resistance may seem exclusive or even anti-Christian (christianophobia), it represents the Huaulu people's strategy for resilience against the expansive Christian missionary efforts. A similar pattern can be observed among the Boti community, adherents of Halaika, who exercise great caution in engaging with Christians due to fears of forced conversion (Nenohai, 2023, p. 267). Christians are not excluded from social or structural relationships within the Huaulu community. In daily interactions, some Christians reside in or frequently move between *Kampung Lama* and *Kampung Baru*. In the village governance system, both Memaham and Christian adherents are appointed based on meritocracy, ensuring equal opportunities. As of 2024, *Kamara* (chairperson of Huaulu village) is a Muslim, the village secretary is a Christian, and several village staff members are also Christians. Similarly, in customary governance, Christians can serve as *saniri*.⁶ Beyond structural inclusion, Memaham adherents also permit Christians and followers of other religions to participate in various rituals, such as *puheli*, *titinufu*, *kahua*, and others.

This phenomenon demonstrates that the resistance of Memaham adherents is not tied to religious identity but rather to intention or motive. Those who come with proselytizing intentions are inevitably rejected. This response underscores the prerogative right to determine both individual and collective religious identity (self-determination), while affirming the discourse on religious freedom as practiced by Memaham adherents. Therefore, in the context of human rights and freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), proselytizing

⁶ *Saniri* is an indigenous legislative body at the village level. In Maluku, *Saniri* comprises representatives from each *soa* (clan) or *mata rumah* (lineage).

efforts are perceived as a violation and disruption of their religious freedom (Lindholm, 2010; Sharma, 2011).

This dynamic reveals a complex interreligious relationship. Unlike the interreligious dialogue often aimed at fostering harmonious relations in response to religiously motivated violence (Swidler, 2013), the reality in Huaulu demonstrates that the relationship between Christianity and Memaham is negotiative, collaborative, and even confrontational. The negotiative relationship correlates with the practice of hybrid religious identity at the individual level. This reflects how the Huaulu community negotiates their Memaham identity with Christianity. Memaham adherents who convert to Christianity do not necessarily abandon their Memaham attributions, nor vice versa, thereby creating a hybrid identity (Ruparell, 2013). Furthermore, collaborative relationships are closely intertwined with shared interests. In this context, both Christians and Memaham adherents demonstrate a strong commitment to collective interests, despite their differing religious identities (Knitter, 2008, 2013).

Conversely, the confrontational relationship represents an antithesis to exclusive Christian dominance. Exclusivist proponents often associate indigenous religions as passive recipients and their religion as the determining agent (Azumah, 2013). Therefore, when Memaham adherents demonstrate resistance to conversion attempts or prohibit Christian worship in Kampung Lama, such actions constitute an effort to assert their often-subordinated religious identity. This confrontational dynamic frequently characterizes the relationship between indigenous religions and Christianity. In some societies that are now predominantly Christian, adherents of local religions in the past actively resisted efforts to spread Christianity (Mawuntu, 2020). This fact underscores that interreligious relations are a dynamic phenomenon. Such relationships are marked not solely by harmony but also by confrontation.

The above discussion highlights the dynamic and complex nature of interreligious relations. The Huaulu people accept Christianity, yet in certain contexts, they negotiate its presence when it poses a threat to their identity. The form of Christianity that is accommodated is non-discriminatory, non-coercive, and free of conversion-driven tendencies. Conversely, the type of Christianity that is rejected is exclusive, justificatory, determinative, coercive, and oriented toward conversion.

CONCLUSION

The dominance of the world religions paradigm in interreligious discourse

tends to exclude indigenous religions. Nevertheless, the interaction between adherents of Christianity and indigenous religions has a long history, unfolding alongside the global spread of Christianity. In this context, the relationship between indigenous religions and Christianity exhibits a dynamic character. For instance, in Huauilu, the representation of Memaham as an indigenous religion holds profound significance for the community's existence and the preservation of their distinct religious-cultural identity and values. Furthermore, the advent of Christianity has introduced novel dimensions to the socio-religious landscape of the Huauilu community.

The relationship between Memaham and Christianity can be categorized into three principal aspects: negotiative, collaborative, and confrontational. The negotiative aspect indicates that Christianity is not merely excluded but rather is openly negotiated. Moreover, adherents from both traditions engage in collaboration to achieve shared interests. However, despite its acceptance as part of the collective identity, in certain particular contexts, Christianity is indeed confronted by the Memaham identity. This confrontation arises from the exclusive behaviors of individual Christians, driven by theological imperatives to convert Memaham adherents. Consequently, the resistance demonstrated by Memaham adherents constitutes a strategic and significant measure to counteract various attempts at forced conversion, whether direct or indirect. This form of resistance is not aimed at eliminating the presence of Christians within the Huauilu community; instead, it seeks to assert the equality of identity between Memaham and Christianity and to reject the dominant nature of Christianity, which often tends to act as a determinant agent. Ultimately, this study carries significant implications for the comprehensive development of interreligious relations, specifically by avoiding the romanticized bias that often prioritizes harmonious interreligious engagements.

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LILEN SAN JUAN: The Light Of Social Cohesion and Religious Moderation

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ABSTRACT

The rituals and the symbols embedded therein serve as markers of national identity and sources of inspiration for harmony within Indonesia's multi-religious society. The researcher posits that the San Juan ritual and its accompanying symbols function as mediums for fostering social cohesion and hold significant implications for the promotion of religious moderation in Indonesia. This study seeks to explore the spiritual significance of the San Juan ritual as a contribution to the formation of a cohesive society grounded in the principles of religious moderation. The study adopts an anthropological and sociological approach. Data were obtained through field observations and structured interviews with 25 informants, including cultural leaders, religious leaders, government officials, educators, and youth. The data were analyzed in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and data verification, utilizing two analytical techniques—descriptive analysis and content analysis. The analysis of the rituals, their symbols, and the behavior of ritual participants is key to understanding the social structures and processes, as well as the broader social phenomena at play. This study finds that, in light of Victor Turner's theoretical framework, the San Juan ritual—especially the candle (lilen) as its central symbol—serves both to reinforce the identity of the San Juan community and to act as a conduit for fostering social cohesion that supports religious moderation in Indonesia. This implica-

tional meaning also contributes to the scholarly discourse in the sociology and anthropology of religion.

Keywords: Lilen San Juan; Social Cohesion; Religious Moderation

INTRODUCTION

The San Juan ritual, performed by both indigenous people and Catholics in Lebao Village, Larantuka, East Flores, serves as mediums for fostering social cohesion and hold significant implications for the promotion of religious moderation in Indonesia (Aksa & Nurhayati, 2020; Zahra et al., 2022; Mujahid, 2023; Fuadi et al., 2023; Harahap et al., 2023). North Sumatra requires a long transformation within the framework of religious moderation to build harmony and maturity. This study aims to reveal the dynamic spectrum of religious moderation in the bubble of North Sumatra's local wisdom. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method by involving six subjects who were selected through a purposive sampling technique. Subject criteria are natives of North Sumatra and have sufficient knowledge of religious moderation in the local custom of North Sumatra. In-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis were used to collect the required data. This study reveals a vast spectrum of diversity among the North Sumatrans. In the meantime, religious moderation is evidence of upholding religious ideals integrated with the local culture. Moreover, this research also shows how the people of North Sumatra from the following three regions, (1. Rituals in general—including the San Juan ritual—function as repositories of symbols that Victor Turner identifies as “dominant symbols” imbued with supernatural significance (Turner, 1968; Bull et al., 2015). In this context, rituals play a role in uniting individuals from diverse backgrounds. Among the Ndemu community, which forms the basis of Turner's research, rituals address divisions stemming from traditional political contestation and social conflict. According to Turner, through ritual practice, members of a community experience a profound emotional and spiritual bond, which in turn fortifies social cohesion (Sahar, 2019).

Turner interprets rituals as symbolic vessels that are rich in meaning for both social and religious life. These symbols not only reflect cultural values but also possess the power to connect individuals and communities with the transcendent or supernatural dimension (Bruner et al., 1986; Turner, 2000; Haggar, 2024). In Turner's perspective, ritual symbols generate shared values and norms (Dawsey, 2021), which—within the context of this study—

are understood to contribute to the construction of social cohesion and to support the idea of religious moderation. Participation in such rituals allows individuals and their communities to engage simultaneously in two interconnected dimensions: symbolic action and the internalization of shared values and norms essential to their collective identity (Tawabie & Amin, 2024).

During field observations, researchers found that *lilen* (candles), one of the central elements in the San Juan ritual, embody symbolic dimensions as proposed by Turner (Turner, 2000; Sahar, 2019; Uhrin, 2020; Kapferer & Gold, 2024). In the San Juan ritual, candles—traditionally representing the Divine Light or the presence of God in Christian, particularly Catholic, liturgical practice (Martasudjita, 1998; Martasudjita, 2011) —are accorded a place of special reverence (Ege, 2010; Anikpe et al., 2021). Within the ritual, *lilen* (candles) serve as a medium for the encounter between “the social” and “the divine.” The social dimension pertains to the religious aspects of communal life, including moral norms, interpersonal relationships, and the collective identity of the community. The divine dimension pertains to the connection between individuals and society with the transcendent or the sacred, and its impact on social action (Weber, 1930).

According to the researcher, the encounter between “the social” and “the divine” holds significant implications for the fostering of social cohesion and the internalization of religious moderation—particularly from within the practitioner community itself—and can further serve as social capital in building external social cohesion. This perspective is rooted in the foundational assumption that the San Juan ritual guides its participants from the profane realm—associated with the concerns of everyday life—into the sacred one (Ashkelon, 2020), and then returns them to the profane realm with transformative consequences. This two-dimensional encounter ultimately affects interpersonal relations in the profane realm, as the renewed bond with the divine—strengthened through ritual and symbolic action—shapes subsequent social behavior. For the researcher, analyzing ritual behavior and symbols within the ritual is key to understanding the social structures and processes that characterize a society, as well as the broader social phenomena at play.

Studies on religious and cultural symbols have been carried out by numerous scholars, including those on ritual symbols in relation to community identity and symbols and social harmony (Iswanto & Kawanggung, 2021); religious symbols and consumer brand preferences (Agarwala et al., 2021); the orchestration of the Islamic call to prayer (adhan) and the tolling of church bells as sacred symbols in fostering social harmony (Zahra et al., 2022);

symbols as elements of human life as homo symbolicus (Neacșu, 2024); and wayang as a national symbol of Indonesia and a medium for contextualizing religious teachings (Rumbay et al., 2024).

However, these studies have not deeply explored how the creation and use of such symbols affect social cohesion and religious moderation. This gap is precisely what the present study aims to address, drawing on Victor Turner's theoretical framework (perspective). The researcher posits that rituals and their symbols serve as media or instruments for fostering social cohesion within society (Wirata, 2023; Azka et al., 2024; Atasoge et al., 2022). *Lilen* as the central symbol of ritual practice, communal gathering, and collective participation, holds significant implications for efforts to build a cohesive society. The ideal of building a cohesive society is also part of the promotion of religious moderation in Indonesia (Fuadi et al., 2023; Pajariantanto et al., 2022; Wisnarni, 2023; Gaffar et al., 2022). However, these studies do not specifically examine religious moderation in relation to religious and cultural symbols or social cohesion within a multi-religious context. In this regard, the main point that distinguishes this study from previous studies is the argument that the San Juan ritual, along with the understanding of its accompanying symbols, enables its practitioners to foster social cohesion and ground the ideal of religious moderation within the multi-religious context of Larantuka in particular, and Indonesia in general.

The researcher maintains that the San Juan ritual can serve as both inspiration and guiding spirit in efforts to fortify and strengthen the idea of religious moderation—an ideal that culminates in the preservation and nurturing of social harmony in Indonesia, viewed through the lens of local wisdom (Yusuf 2022; Sunarno et al., 2023). This study supports and enriches the study of religious moderation in a multicultural and multireligious society in Indonesia from a sociological perspective that uses local wisdom as its foundational approach. This is important, as such studies can contribute to strengthening national unity and reducing the potential for discrimination and social conflict among communities, while also harnessing Indonesia's diversity to foster social cohesion (Anggoro, 2022; Regus, 2022; Sunarno et al., 2023).

The study of the San Juan ritual within the framework of social cohesion and religious moderation was conducted using qualitative research methods, aligning with the researcher's objective to explore and analyze the knowledge, experiences, opinions, and sentiments of informants regarding the process, implementation, and implications of the San Juan ritual. The study took place from January to June 2025. The research approach integrated both

anthropological and sociological perspectives. From an anthropological standpoint, with an emphasis on the etic perspective, the researcher examined the relevance, purpose, and benefits of the study, interpreting and treating the field data in accordance with its nature and quality, while also taking into account the emic perspective (Ratna, 2010). Meanwhile, from a sociological perspective, the researcher examined the interaction between the worldview and everyday practices of the San Juan community as the principal custodian of the ritual tradition (Northcott, 2020). Participatory observation was chosen as method to obtain objective data. This dual perspective facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the social structure, interpersonal interactions, and social phenomena present among members of the San Juan ritual community (Northcott, 2020). The community targeted in this study comprises 11 neighborhoods within the San Juan Lebao Parish, Larantuka, East Flores, NTT. These include the neighborhoods of Senhora Lajari Gege, Santa Anna Lebao II, Santu Aloysius Lebao I, Santu Antonius Riag Nyiur, Hati Amat Kudus Yesus Tabali, Tuan Meninu Kota Rowido I, Santu Yoseph Kota Rowido II, Santu Fransiskus Kota Rowido III, Santu Antonius Kota Sau I, and Santu Paulus Kota Sau II.

Data were obtained through field observations and structured interviews with 25 informants, including cultural leaders, religious leaders, government officials, educators (both male and female), and youth (both male and female). Informants were selected using probability sampling based on four criteria: (1) the extensive knowledge held by cultural, religious, and governmental figures regarding the San Juan ritual; (2) gender representation; (3) generational representation, encompassing both elders as tradition custodians and youth as tradition successors; and (4) the potential for dissemination of study findings through educators. To ensure the study's validity and reliability, triangulation techniques were used (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). The data of field analysis proceeded in three main stages: (a) Data reduction, involving the organization of raw data into a more systematic and thematic format; (b) Data display, involving the presentation of study findings in the form of direct quotations from interviews; and (c) Data verification, involving the re-examination and interpretation of the data obtained in line with emerging patterns and trends. The processed data of field were then analyzed through two analytical techniques. First, descriptive analysis was conducted as the basis for contextual interpretation. Second, content analysis was conducted by following the procedures outlined in the research methodology (Sugiyono, 2016). These analytical stages and techniques were utilized to formulate valid and meaningful conclusions.

RITUAL IN VICTOR TURNER'S PERSPECTIVE

Victor Turner closely examined each object, gesture, song or prayer, spatial setting, and temporal moment used in the rituals of the Ndemu community. He understood that the presence of these elements—objects, gestures, songs or prayers, spatial setting, and temporal moment—symbolized something beyond their immediate appearance. For Turner, all of these elements point toward a transcendent or “other” reality that surpasses their literal form: specifically, the creation and maintenance of ordered social relations within the Ndembu community. In his study of the rituals of the Ndemu community, Turner emphasized the role of symbols as a cohesive force binding individuals in the construction of communal life. He thus regarded symbols as integral elements within the broader system that governs social life (Turner, 1977). Furthermore, Turner showed that analyzing ritual behavior and the symbols contained within rituals provides a key to understanding the social structures and processes, as well as the broader social phenomena at play.

According to Turner, rites are formalized behaviors performed at specific times that cannot be reduced to mere technological or utilitarian routines, as they are rooted in beliefs concerning mystical beings and supernatural powers (Turner, 1967). He defined rituals as repositories of authoritative symbols imbued with supernatural potency, manifested in the form of objects, actions, words, relational dynamics, events, bodily movements, or spatial configurations (Turner, 1968). For Turner, symbols operate as catalysts within observable social processes. They are capable of inspiring collective action, strengthening communal norms, and mediating conflict.

Turner views that rituals can assume or compensate for the absence of effective mechanisms of social control—roles that are typically fulfilled by political authorities or kinship systems. Rituals serve to remind participants (families, clans, communities) of the core values upheld by the collective. Even this regulatory and admonitory function is not exempt from emotional dynamics and potential conflicts. In this process, symbols may reflect both natural needs and social desires. Turner asserts that, at this juncture, a symbol unites what is obligatory and what is desired—achieving an intimate synthesis of the material and the moral (Turner, 1967).

According to Turner, such a role is possible because a symbol condenses multiple associations into a single object, expressing seemingly disparate meanings that are interconnected through analogical relationships or associations of facts and ideas (Turner, 1967). The symbol simultaneously encompasses two poles of meaning: the ideological or normative pole, which refers to the moral and social order and to broader principles of social organization; and the sensory or

orectic pole, which refers to natural or physiological phenomena and processes, thereby evoking desires and emotional responses at a more fundamental level. For instance, in the rituals of the Ndemu community known as Nkula—a ‘ritual of suffering’ related to the reproductive or menstrual ailments of female patients—the ritual uses parts of the mukula tree. This tree produces a red sap referred to by the Ndembu as “mukula blood.” Within the ritual context, this ‘blood’ represents the orectic pole (associated with childbirth) and the normative pole (representing the matrilineal structure of society) (Turner, 1968).

Turner argues that ritual symbols are effective not because they possess a singular, fixed meaning or because they can be clearly and consistently articulated. Rather, their significance derives from their multivocality. This multivocality—the capacity of a symbol to convey multiple meanings simultaneously—is especially potent in ritual contexts, and its strength lies in its rich associative potential, particularly when the social order is fragmented or under strain (Coleman, 2013). According to the researcher, one of the factors that gives rise to multivocality is what Duncan refers to as “significant symbols”—signals that simultaneously stimulate and evoke a shared meaning in both the sender and the receiver (Duncan, 1968). When these signals are produced collectively, the symbols that emerge carry dense associative meanings within communal settings. Duncan affirms that symbols are not merely personal or subjective; rather, something is symbolized through something else, and that something else is made publicly accessible and socially meaningful.

Another perspective suggests that rituals and symbols not only serve as means of social order and connection to the transcendent, but also carry subjective meanings that enrich individual experiences. Rituals not only unite groups but also serve as arenas for conflict, relational change, and social transformation, especially in the digital age. Turner argues that symbols in rituals represent social order; however, this approach can be considered reductionist as it neglects the subjective dimension and the diversity of meanings for individuals who experience them.

This is supported by Barrett (2023) who states that symbols are not solely connected to transcendental meanings but also enrich life experiences in a more subjective and personal way. Symbolism functions to clarify existing meanings and serves as a source of emotional strength in religious practices. In this regard, Johannessen & Collins (2024) emphasizes that rituals, as social mechanisms, not only unite groups but also facilitate conflict and the transformation of social relations. Unlike Turner, who associates ritual

with symbol-based order, Johannessen & Collins highlight the significance of direct physical presence, even as rituals continue to evolve in the digital era. Similarly, Tavory & Hoynes (2025) stress that rituals are not exclusively connected to the transcendent but also operate as social mechanisms that shape and transform interpersonal interactions. The theory of interaction rituals underscores that rituals not only reflect social structures but also promote self-transformation and the reshaping of social relationships. Rituals thus open new possibilities for understanding social dynamics and addressing inequalities within interactions.

THE IDEALISM OF A COHESIVE SOCIETY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION

According to Gough and Olofsson, the concept of social cohesion has emerged and developed through a long and complex history within the realms of social, political, and economic thought. In the 19th century, concerns regarding social order and cohesion became central themes in sociology, as articulated by foundational thinkers such as Karl Marx, with his emphasis on the division of labor; Herbert Spencer, with his theory of social evolution; and Émile Durkheim, with his specific theory of social development. These foundational ideas were later extended by Talcott Parsons, who emphasized societal integration through a normative system rooted in civil and political culture within the framework of the modern nation-state (Gough & Olofsson, 1999).

Marx introduced what is commonly referred to as conflict theory. He maintained that within every social order, regulation of conflicting interests is inevitable. According to Marx (and those following his school of thought), the dynamic of conflict between individuals and social groups is an inherent and important element of all societal structures. Durkheim, conversely, introduced is commonly referred to as harmony theory. He asserted that the defining feature of any society is the cooperative interaction of social actors, especially in small-scale communities that are already well-integrated. Durkheim placed his confidence in the notion that harmony—not conflict—is what defines both the existence and functioning of society. His work was grounded in the analysis of social phenomena that highlight the roles and functions of each member of society in forming and producing what is termed social cohesion.

Andy Green, John Preston, and Jan Germen Janmaat state that the term social cohesion refers to a relatively harmonious social condition characterized by low crime rates and high levels of interpersonal and societal trust (Green et al., 2006). When expanded, this notion of a relatively harmonious social

condition includes a society marked by high levels of tolerance—both among individuals and between cultures and religious traditions. Such a condition is considered a fundamental prerequisite for fostering cooperation between individuals and between individuals and the broader community.

In line with this, Jensen defines social cohesion as the process involving commitment, willingness, and the capacity to live together in harmony. However, Jensen warns that the pursuit of cohesion must be balanced; involving too many social “ties” or insisting on value conformity may lead to stagnation and create a closed, insular community (Jensen, 1998). On the other hand, Maxwell (as cited in Green et al., 2006), emphasizes that social cohesion entails the fostering of shared values and a sense of community. This shared experience generally allows individuals to perceive themselves as participating in a common endeavor, facing shared challenges, and belonging to the same collective identity. (Green et al., 2006).

The desire to commit to harmonious coexistence among diverse community groups—particularly across ethnic and religious lines—is a central ideal of religious moderation in Indonesia. Religious moderation is understood as a perspective, attitude, and behavior, both individual and communal, that consistently seeks a middle path, upholds justice, and avoids religious extremism (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019; Aksa & Nurhayati, 2020; Rohmadi et al., 2022; Mujahid, 2023; Mutawali, 2023). A just and balanced disposition constitutes the foundation of religious moderation, alongside core values such as tolerance, egalitarianism, deliberation, uprightness, and principled firmness (Rahman et al., 2022; Wisnarni, 2023). From this perspective, religious moderation is key to fostering a climate of tolerance and harmony within Indonesia’s multi-religious society (Salim, 2022; Sukrawati et al., 2023; Hakim et al., 2023). It encourages a balanced way of life that integrates devout practice of one’s own religious beliefs with deep respect for the religious practices of others. This perspective represents a *via media* (middle way), preventing adherents from falling into extremism or fanaticism (Kruja, 2021; Bowling, 2021; Hefni & Muna, 2022; Jati et al., 2022). Accordingly, the primary goal of promoting religious moderation in Indonesia is the creation of harmonious interreligious relations—realized through the practice of one’s own religious beliefs in a way that is balanced, inclusive, and respectful of religious diversity (Suhendi & Rahman, 2022; Yanti et al., 2023; Purba et al., 2023).

Religious moderation is also understood as a means of preventing intolerance and radicalism in religious practice. The concept of moderation is viewed as a response to the rise of violence perpetrated in the name of religion by

groups categorized as extremist, fundamentalist, terrorist, and even certain liberal factions (Fuadi et al., 2023). In this context, religious moderation is considered a viable solution to all forms of intolerance that endanger the harmony of religious life.

Moderate religious attitudes are reflected in four main dimensions. First, a commitment to the nation that respects pluralism and cultural-religious diversity. Second, the practice of tolerance, which includes respecting differences in beliefs, doctrines, and religious practices (Ridwan & Abdurrahim, 2022; Manahung et al., 2022). Third, the categorical rejection of all forms of violence carried out in the name of religion (Santos, 2022; Wibowo & Pelupessy, 2022). Fourth, the recognition, acceptance, and accommodation of the richness of culture and tradition that live and develop within society (Sulistiyani et al., 2020) minority groups are embedded in the discourse of nationality and social harmony in Indonesia. The term social harmony signifies that each race, ethnicity, or religion must be placed in an equal standing/position. The research focuses on understanding the identity negotiation strategies, in establishing the social harmony, that are used by adherents of local religions which are considered minorities in a community where the majority of people believe in formal religions. This study uses the Co-Cultural Theory and employs a phenomenology research method to explore the way in which co-cultural groups' members negotiate their cultural differences with the members of dominant groups. The groups that are chosen as the subject of this research are the religious groups that live in a relatively supportive community (Kawruh Jiwa). Thus, religious moderation essentially encompasses teachings, principles, and values regarding how the faithful should embody and live out their religious convictions—especially in fostering respectful and constructive relationships with others, both within their own religious community and across different faith traditions (Rahman et al., 2022).

The encounter between the San Juan ritual and the ideals of religious moderation invites both cultural practitioners and religious adherents to express a spirit of unity, solidarity, and harmony in diversity (Harahap et al., 2023) North Sumatra requires a long transformation within the framework of religious moderation to build harmony and maturity. This study aims to reveal the dynamic spectrum of religious moderation in the bubble of North Sumatra's local wisdom. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method by involving six subjects who were selected through a purposive sampling technique. Subject criteria are natives of North Sumatra and have sufficient knowledge of religious moderation in the local custom of North Sumatra. In-

depth interviews, observations, and document analysis were used to collect the required data. This study reveals a vast spectrum of diversity among the North Sumatrans. In the meantime, religious moderation is evidence of upholding religious ideals integrated with the local culture. Moreover, this research also shows how the people of North Sumatra from the following three regions, (1; Wiguna & Andari, 2023). Therefore, in the context of religious life, the willingness to engage with and accommodate local culture encourages the faithful and broader society to adopt an inclusive and tolerant attitude toward diversity, thereby fostering a religious atmosphere that is peaceful, dynamic, and enthusiastic (Harahap et al., 2023) North Sumatra requires a long transformation within the framework of religious moderation to build harmony and maturity. This study aims to reveal the dynamic spectrum of religious moderation in the bubble of North Sumatra's local wisdom. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method by involving six subjects who were selected through a purposive sampling technique. Subject criteria are natives of North Sumatra and have sufficient knowledge of religious moderation in the local custom of North Sumatra. In-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis were used to collect the required data. This study reveals a vast spectrum of diversity among the North Sumatrans. In the meantime, religious moderation is evidence of upholding religious ideals integrated with the local culture. Moreover, this research also shows how the people of North Sumatra from the following three regions, (1.

THE RITUAL OF SAN JUAN AS A SYMBOL

According to Turner, rituals serve as symbols of broader realities, particularly social order. Social order refers to the condition of a society that lives in harmony, which in this study is interpreted as social cohesion—a consequence of communal adherence to shared rules, norms, and values (Azizah et al., 2021). The San Juan ritual is governed by a series of regulations and stages that are executed based on collective agreements within the community, under the guidance of two main institutions: *adat* (traditional institutions) and the Church. Adherence to these is essential to ensure order throughout each stage of the ritual. This adherence is most visibly manifested in the process of making *lilen* (candles), which follows specific requirements in terms of raw materials, shape, and quantity according to the ritual's needs.

The ethnographic field study of the San Juan ritual examines the ritual as a symbolic action, consistent with Turner's perspective. The San Juan ritual, as a cultural and religious symbol, serves to reproduce and reinforce the shared values and beliefs of the community (Haggar, 2024). These shared

values and beliefs constitute the moral and spiritual principles, worldviews, and convictions held by the people, shaping behavioral norms, interpersonal relations, and the communal understanding of what is good, true, and ideal (Al-Fairusy et al., 2024). The following are excerpts of ideas from informants that affirm this perspective:

“Truly living out faith in Jesus Christ and having the willingness to repent and return to the righteous path.” (I-11).

“The San Juan Procession is an opportunity to foster unity and strength among the seven neighborhoods (villages) without neglecting the celebration of sacred rituals.” (I-16).

“Praising and glorifying the greatness of God through Saint John the Baptist as the patron saint of the parish, while fostering closer brotherhood and togetherness.” (I-20).

“The faithful of San Juan Parish understands this as a symbol of unity—by being fully involved from the Eucharistic devotion to the evening procession.” (I-23)

Turner, as cited by Al-Fairusy, suggested that values and beliefs form a collective identity for the community that observes ritual practices and serve as guiding principles for their actions. These shared values and beliefs also foster the preservation of social order and encourage cooperation among members of the community (Al-Fairusy et al., 2024). In this context, the San Juan ritual affirms Turner’s theoretical ideal, as reflected in the following excerpts of ideas from informants:

“In addition to practicing devotion and reverence toward the sacrament, there is also cooperation, solidarity, and collaboration among the faithful, the government, the Church, and traditional institutions.” (I-6)

“All members of the faithful are called to support one another, to strengthen each other, and to live in the love of brotherhood at all times and in all places, both in joy and in sorrow.” (I-9)

“As a community, this ritual increasingly binds individuals together in a spirit of unity, familial bonds, and neighborly relations, involving both those physically present and those participating morally.” (I-13)

“We respect and appreciate one another—the faithful of San Juan Parish, the faithful from nearby parishes, fellow Catholics, and those of different religious traditions.” (I-17)

“The central message of this ritual is to continually uphold harmony within the family, the community, and the religious diversity that exists within the territory of San Juan Parish in Lebao Tengah.” (I-18)

“The unity fostered through this ritual serves as a foundation of strength within diversity.” (I-22).

When functioning as a moral and spiritual guideline for its participants, the San Juan ritual also creates a framework for regulating their actions. This element of regulation is evident in the structured sequence of ritual stages, such as the registration of *mardomu*, the pouring of candles (*tuang lilen*), the *peresa lilen*, the San Juan Procession (*persisan*), and *serah punto dama*. The roles assumed by traditional leaders and institutions, the *mardomu* and the broader community form an integral part of the social order that serves as a prototype for achieving social cohesion (Kasidi et al., 2023; Akbar et al., 2023). Traditional leader and local institution often serve as mediator in social conflicts, including those involving differences in belief. They possess cultural authority to cultivate a spirit of tolerance and diversity. On the other hand, the role of *mardomu* (which can be understood as figures who nurture or safeguard social values) is vital in fostering harmony. They can serve as models of integrity, preserving religious values that remain inclusive and peaceful. Likewise, the broader community acts as a space for cross-identity interaction. When moderate values are instilled through local culture, society can coexist peacefully despite religious differences. These elements are the very essence of religious moderation.

In the San Juan ritual, candles (*lilen*) are one of the central symbolic elements that attract the focus and devotion of the community. Turner highlights the role of symbols as cohesive agents in human social relationships, contributing to the creation of shared life and mutual understanding. He argues that symbols integrate the obligatory and the desirable—forming an intimate union of the material and the moral (Turner, 1967). In this context, the researcher has identified two underlying aspects of the symbolic role of candles. First, the San Juan ritual and *lilen* (candles) function as symbols that shape and express the collective identity of the participating community. Second, the San Juan ritual and *lilen*, as its central symbol, act as social mechanisms that strengthen the solidarity of community groups. The ideas shared by informants, as previously discussed, affirm these findings.

During the San Juan ritual, thousands of candles are burned (lit) along the path traversed by the image of Saint John the Baptist, represented by a statue, and by Christ, present in the Blessed Sacrament. These candles also accompany the faithful—those who participate in the ritual by carrying candles in their hands, walking in procession with Saint John and the Eucharistic Christ, while praying and singing together (Valdés, 2022). The faithful come bearing countless *permesa* (form or intention: Progress in household economic endeavors, protection from disasters and dangers, abundant harvests, and the restoration of unity among divided families and tribes are highly valued).

Conversely, realities such as family poverty due to crop failure, the collapse of the family economy, and persistent disputes and conflicts within families and tribes are perceived as dark situations that burden this region. The candles in the San Juan ritual serve as a metaphorical unveiling of the darkness that covers the land of San Juan; they bring forth a new spiritual atmosphere in which what was hidden is revealed, what was veiled is interpreted, and what was in darkness is enlightened.

In the Christian tradition, candles symbolize Christ and those who profess faith in Him. “Christ is the light of the world” (John 8:12), and this light is extended to all Christians, as Jesus proclaimed in Matthew 5:14,16: “You are the light of the world.” (Rachman, 2009). When this theological symbolism is inculturated into the context of the San Juan religious tradition, its meaning and significance can be interpreted as follows: the candles in the San Juan ritual symbolize both Christ and the faithful of San Juan Parish. From this, two logical consequences arise, each carrying profound meaning.

First, the candles in the San Juan ritual are Christ. The candles in the San Juan ritual are made collectively: women boil the wax, pour it over a wick, compact it, pour again and compact it repeatedly; the traditional leaders and institutions observe the process attentively; and all participants present are involved in assisting the making of the candles. This process demonstrates the cohesiveness of the San Juan community. In this, Christ—as the symbol of the Light of the World—is being symbolically created in San Juan: He is heated to a boil (discussed, preached, prayed to, sought, worshiped) in the crucible of San Juan communal life; He is poured over the threads of their lives (lives marked by burdens and suffering) (Malbrough, 2016). He is then lined up—set in place along bamboo fences throughout the procession route—as a light that illuminates everything: the faithful and their surroundings (Olaveson, 2001). He who is symbolically “created” becomes the one who brings light (Gamau & Manik, 2023)—the light that frees them from the darkness of oppression, intimidation, conflict, and hardship, including failed harvests, poverty, and the social challenges endured by migrant families.

Second, the candles in the San Juan ritual represent the faithful of San Juan Parish. Just like Christ, the faithful of San Juan Parish are also engaged in their own transformation. They gather, refine themselves, and are “heated” (working, studying, striving to survive) until they are poured into the threads of their lives (family, clan, community). Like Christ, they are ultimately set in place as light on the night of San Juan, June 24th each year. They, too, appear as light illuminating their surroundings (*shedding light on what is hidden, bringing wrongdoing, falsehood, and evil into the open to be confronted and*

resolved). They illuminate a troubled world—confused, impoverished, and suffering—while simultaneously revealing more clearly the face of Christ: Christ who is discussed, preached, prayed to, sought, worshiped; Christ who lies down with an empty stomach; Christ who is evicted from the markets of Larantuka by tax collectors; Christ who hauls boats with empty baskets; Christ who is abandoned by her husband, terrorized, and stripped of her rights. The unity among the faithful reveals their shared social existence—joined hand in hand as they walk together through the struggles of life (Tawabie & Amin, 2024).

Christ and the faithful of San Juan Parish both manifest as *lilen* (candles). These candles share the same mission: to make all things bright, visible, understandable, and meaningful. Though both are candles, Christ is presented as the Main Candle (Main *Lilen*), from whom new light flows to the other candles—the faithful of San Juan Parish. This pilgrimage of light from the Main Candle to the smaller candles evokes the Catholic Church's Easter Vigil liturgy: the lighting of the Paschal Candle (Windhu, 1997; Martasudjita, 1998b). The Paschal Candle is the symbol of the light of the Risen Christ. The faithful bring their own candles and light them from the Paschal Flame. Through this act, they commit themselves to carry the light of Christ into their daily lives. Likewise, by receiving light from the Main Candle in the San Juan ritual, the community steps into its own troubled world carrying the light—seeking to illuminate problems and discover paths toward resolution.

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONSEQUENCES OF PROMOTING RELIGIOUS MODERATION

The faithful' anxiety and hope, together with the testimony and gaze of the candles, reflect their concern for the future, their longing for a life of beauty and dignity, as well as their witness to a prevailing darkness—a gaze that expresses a cry for solidarity. This solidarity is a recurring plea: to be truly enlightened and accompanied. From this phenomenon, several consequences can be analyzed in relation to the dimensions of anxiety, hope, testimony, and expression, particularly within the context of the San Juan Church. As a Church that serves as a sign and instrument of salvation (*sacramentum salutis*), San Juan plays a vital role in offering a space for spiritual reflection, especially for individuals seeking meaning and in responding to various forms of socio-religious distress. This perspective highlights the Church not only as a theological institution but also as a social agent that upholds human dignity and solidarity, contributing to the construction of a more meaningful and just life for the faithful.

First, the faithful who are burdened by personal anxiety and suffering need the comforting outreach of the San Juan Church—a hand that extends the light of peace and hope, fostering assurance, unity, and solidarity. This embodies the Church's preferential option for the poor, the weak, and the suffering. In this context, partisanship refers to an ecclesial solidarity—an intentional and committed choice to embrace the struggles, challenges, and full participation of the marginalized as one's own. This solidarity is essential to building a just and harmonious society. It aligns with the vision aspired by the promotion of religious moderation in Indonesia (Inayatillah et al., 2022; Ma'arif et al., 2023; Wisnarni, 2023; Harahap et al., 2023). North Sumatra requires a long transformation within the framework of religious moderation to build harmony and maturity. This study aims to reveal the dynamic spectrum of religious moderation in the bubble of North Sumatra's local wisdom. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method by involving six subjects who were selected through a purposive sampling technique. Subject criteria are natives of North Sumatra and have sufficient knowledge of religious moderation in the local custom of North Sumatra. In-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis were used to collect the required data. This study reveals a vast spectrum of diversity among the North Sumatrans. In the meantime, religious moderation is evidence of upholding religious ideals integrated with the local culture. Moreover, this research also shows how the people of North Sumatra from the following three regions, (1.

In the context of grounding the ideal of religious moderation, a key step that must be considered is building a San Juan Church that is inclusive of social realities. An inclusive San Juan Church can be recognized through the following expressions of its presence. The Church holds a strategic role in providing spiritual accompaniment to pilgrims who experience anxiety and suffering, through counseling, faith reflection, and pastoral guidance oriented toward psychosocial recovery and spiritual well-being. Religious community-based support can significantly increase individual resilience in facing emotional and social crises (Borualogo et al., 2023). In addition, a pastoral approach that emphasizes the strengthening of hope and a sense of belonging within the faith community aligns with the concept of spiritual well-being developed in the psychology of religion (Bili et al., 2022). In this way, the Church functions not only as a place of worship but also as a space of healing for those seeking meaning and peace on their spiritual journey.

One tangible expression of this vision is the community's economic empowerment through skills development and entrepreneurship programs aimed at promoting the independence of the poor and vulnerable. This

approach is consistent with the concept of a community-based economy that prioritizes solidarity and shared prosperity (Mannahali et al., 2024). Community-based initiatives, such as agricultural or handicraft training, can increase access to economic resources and strengthen social resilience in multicultural and multireligious environments (Kasman, 2024; Sagajoka & Fatima, 2023). In this way, the Church functions not only as a spiritual center but also as an agent of social transformation that contributes to equitable and inclusive economic development.

In more specific contexts, the San Juan Church can function as a facilitator in promoting religious moderation and social solidarity through regular interfaith and intercultural engagements, such as dialogue sessions, social outreach, and religious festivals. These initiatives align with the concept of religious moderation, which emphasizes tolerance, inclusivity, and dialogue (Nurlaili et al., 2024; Munif et al., 2023; Aelbrecht & Stevens, 2023). Moreover, this community-based approach is supported by the theory of social cohesion, which shows that positive intergroup interactions can strengthen solidarity and harmony in a multicultural society (Hellgren & Zapata-Barrero, 2022). In this way, the Church functions not only as a place of worship but also a center of social dialogue that contributes to the fostering of a more peaceful and balanced communal life.

From the perspective of a multireligious society and the principles of religious moderation, the San Juan Church must function as a space of inclusivity and solidarity for communities on pilgrimage and those striving to live a dignified life. As part of the broader communion of the Church, its leaders and faithful are called to move beyond institutional comfort and engage with smaller ecclesial communities and marginalized groups experiencing social, economic, and political distress. The San Juan Church, inspired by the spirit of *Lilen Utama*, must become a beacon of light for a multicultural and multireligious society, embodying the values of religious moderation that prioritize dialogue, tolerance, and a preferential option for the vulnerable (Albahri & Alfauzan, 2023; Nurlaili et al., 2024; Fuadi et al., 2023; Mutawali, 2023). A Church that stands with the poor and suffering is not one confined to grand altars, but one actively present in the social struggles of its people. This vision is aligned with the principles of liberation theology, which emphasize prophetic action and engagement in the pursuit of social justice (Missa, 2024). Therefore, the San Juan Church is called to reflect on how *Lilen Utama* can truly serve as a guiding light in the midst of social darkness—by advocating for the rights of the oppressed and fostering interfaith solidarity as a foundation for building a more just and harmonious society.

Second, in the context of religious moderation, the San Juan Church bears a moral and social responsibility to embrace and support smaller churches facing various challenges, such as poverty, oppression, and social conflict. Indifference to these realities indicates that the San Juan ritual has not yet fully functioned as a transformative force within society. In line with the concept of social cohesion, the Church must act as an agent of solidarity—one that not only strengthens spiritual bonds but also brings tangible improvements to the social welfare of its faithful (Alfiansyah, 2023). Religious rituals that fail to address the needs of vulnerable communities risk becoming mere ceremonial expressions, devoid of the substance necessary for real social transformation (Tawabie & Amin, 2024). Therefore, the Church must take proactive steps to ensure that the spirituality it promotes is not exclusive but actively contributes to social justice and the common good.

The social cohesion fostered through the San Juan ritual holds significant potential to reinforce religious moderation, particularly in multicultural and multireligious contexts. This ritual should serve as a space where diverse groups can engage in positive interaction, cultivate mutual understanding, and strengthen interfaith solidarity (Hasanah, 2023; Hulu et al., 2024). When religious communities unite in shared social commitment and communal life, they can become a powerful force in addressing social and economic disparities (Fakhrudin, 2024). In this regard, religious moderation should not be seen as passive tolerance but as active engagement that affirms the values of justice and the common good. At this level, religious moderation becomes not only a conceptual framework but also a grassroots social movement involving community actors in the pursuit of harmony (Wardi et al., 2023; Wiguna & Andari, 2023; Nurlaili et al., 2024). Thus, the San Juan ritual should be further oriented toward fostering harmonious social relations and cultivating collective awareness of the need for concrete action in building a more inclusive and just society.

CONCLUSION

Rituals and symbols play a vital role as mediating instruments and gateways in fostering social cohesion in Indonesia—a nation characterized by profound religious and cultural diversity. Through various religious rituals, communities experience a sense of togetherness, strengthen the values of tolerance, and foster mutual respect among groups of differing faith traditions. Religious symbols—whether expressed through customs, sacred architecture, or other forms of cultural expression—also function as cohesive elements that bind individuals to their communities, reinforce a shared identity, and promote

harmonious intergroup relations. When embraced as instruments of unity, rituals and symbols serve as effective vehicles for realizing the ideals of religious moderation, in which each individual is nurtured in a deeper understanding of the value of pluralism and a commitment to sustaining a peaceful and respectful religious coexistence. These efforts form a crucial foundation for building an inclusive society grounded in the principle of unity in diversity.

This study affirms and supports various initiatives led by the Indonesian government and local communities that seek to safeguard religious rituals as expressions of local wisdom—which carry deep cultural and theological significance. These efforts aim to preserve traditions that function not only as expressions of religious devotion but also as markers of social identity that reinforce solidarity and harmony within a pluralistic society. By sustaining these rituals, communities are able to deepen their spiritual values, enrich their cultural heritage, and open meaningful spaces for inclusive interreligious and intercultural dialogue. This study highlights the importance of safeguarding ritual practice as an essential component of the social ecosystem—preserving the delicate balance between tradition and progress.

Subsequent studies can be undertaken to explore how religious moderation is implemented within various religious rituals in multicultural societies. They could compare interfaith dialogue strategies in Indonesia with those in other Asian and global contexts to identify effective patterns of interaction in fostering social cohesion. Another important area for exploration is how religious rituals can be transformed to become more inclusive of vulnerable groups, such as religious minorities and individuals with special needs. Such studies are expected to critically assess the role of rituals as instruments of unity that remain relevant amid ongoing social and technological change.

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RESISTANCE OF TRADITIONALIST ISLAM TO THE INFLUENCE OF TRANSNATIONAL MOVEMENTS WITHIN CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the efforts of traditionalist Islamic groups within Indonesian universities to counter the growing influence of transnational Islamic movements. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study provides a comprehensive examination of the dynamics between transnational movements -such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, Jamaah Tarbiyah, and Jamaah Salafi- and traditional Islamic organizations, notably Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Indonesian Islamic Student Movement (PMII), within the context of the University of Yogyakarta. The findings reveal that transnational Islamic movements have strategically utilized existing campus infrastructure to expand their influence. The ideological contestation is accompanied by movement-based tensions, as traditionalist groups actively resist the growing presence of these transnational actors. The study concludes that universities play a critical role in mitigating radicalism by engaging constructively with the ideological frameworks of transnational Islamic movements.

Keywords: Traditionalist Islam; Transnational Movements; Higher Education Environment

INTRODUCTION

Campus radicalism remains a persistent concern in Indonesia (Harahap, et. al., 2018). Several violent incidents have highlighted how radical ideologies have infiltrated university environments. On June 3, 2019, a suicide bombing in Surakarta was carried out by Rofik Ansharuddin, a university student, who had previously declared allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi via social media (Antara, 2017). Later that year, on November 13, Rabbial Muslim Nasution detonated a bomb at the Medan Police Headquarters, killing himself and six others; Nasution was just 11 years old and still in school (BNPT Media Centre for Peace). These cases underscore the role educational institutions may play in fostering or failing to prevent radicalization.

Empirical data reinforce these concerns. According to a survey by the Indonesian National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), 39% of students in 15 provinces expressed sympathy for radical ideologies (Antara, 2017). Similarly, the State Intelligence Agency confirmed that 39% of students at public universities (Perguruan Tinggi Negeri/PTN) showed signs of extremist leanings (UNUSIA, 2010). The Setara Institute further identified ten Indonesian universities as particularly vulnerable to radical influences. President Joko Widodo has also acknowledged the infiltration of radical ideas into educational institutions, including universities.

Scholars have extensively examined the role of transnational Islamic movements in shaping campus radicalism. Research by LPPM UNUSIA (2010) indicates the political dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) in universities across Central Java and Yogyakarta, while Salafi-jihadist groups focus more on religious propaganda. Tahir (2015) highlights that students are often recruited by religious figures lacking formal theological education, using ideological indoctrination that leads to radical behavior and violence. Khamid (2016) emphasizes that radical Islamic violence is often justified through selective and literal interpretations of scripture, particularly targeting university youth. Rijal (2011) traces the roots of Hizb al-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) to transnational Islamic actors who disseminated their ideology through campus da'wah institutions, notably at ITB and IPB. Adiwilaga (2017) warns that puritan movements such as these not only undermine the Indonesian state ideology of Pancasila but also foster intolerance and exclusivism.

Building on these studies, this research focuses on the University of Yogyakarta (UY), a historically significant and nationally respected state university (Andries, 2012), as a case study for understanding the contemporary dynamics of campus radicalism. This article investigates how transnational Islamic movements at UY pursue their ideological agendas and how traditional

Islamic actors respond in efforts to resist radicalism and uphold inclusive religious practices. The choice of UY is deliberate, as it serves as a microcosm of broader national trends in the intersection between transnational Islamic movements and student activism.

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing interviews, document analysis, and field observations (Andries, 2012). Participants were identified using purposive and snowball sampling, targeting student activists affiliated with transnational Islamic movements. One challenge in data collection stemmed from the disbandment of HTI in 2017, which forced affiliated student groups like Gema Liberation to operate clandestinely (Prasetio, 2020). Nevertheless, insights were gathered from both primary sources, including interviews and organizational documents, and secondary literature, such as academic books and journal articles.

For analysis, this research employs the triangulation method developed by Miles et al. (2014 and 1994), which involves an iterative cycle of data collection, reduction, display, and verification to ensure reliability and validity. The triangulation process allows for the systematic interpretation of patterns in how transnational Islamic groups operate within university environments.

This study underscores the urgency of examining radicalization among transnational Islamic groups on university campuses. These groups view students as key targets for recruitment, considering them future leaders and opinion shapers (Aper & Hinkle, 1991). If left unchecked, the spread of radical ideologies among university students may pose a serious threat to Indonesia's national integrity and social cohesion (Singh, 2004). Understanding the mechanisms by which transnational Islamic movements mobilize resources and influence student bodies is crucial for designing effective counter-radicalization strategies. In this context, moderate Islamic groups must develop a nuanced understanding of these movements to offer viable ideological alternatives and promote tolerance on campus.

TRANSNATIONAL ISLAM IN THE THEORY OF MOBILIZATION

Wahid (2009) defines transnational Islam as Indonesian Islamic religious movements controlled by transnational networks. Their presence threatens the nation and state because he divides the community with Islamism. Islamism is an Islamic movement that governs all aspects of human life, including economic, legal, social, political, and state administration (Berman, 2003). The transnational Islamic movement views Islam as a political ideology rather than a religious movement with the goal of establishing an Islamic state (Roy,

1998). This ideology is textual, scriptural, fundamentalist, and intolerant.

Islamic symbols are used to stir up religious fundamentalism with slogans like “*syar’i*” and “*hijrah*” This radicalism encourages violence and destruction in the name of religion, kills people in the name of God’s verses, and doesn’t believe other Muslims. This movement aims to purify Islam’s teachings and eliminate Indonesia’s moderate Islam. Parts of Islam in Indonesia that fit with customs, traditions, culture, and “*volkgeist*” are called superstition by Islamists. Moderate Islamic practices in Indonesia, like *slametan*, *tahlilan*, *manaqiban*, and grave pilgrimages, are shirk.

A number of transnational Islamic movements, including the HTI, the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaah Islamiyah, Wahhabis, and Salafi Jihadists from Iraq and Afghanistan, have made their way into Indonesia (Fox, 2004; Suharto, 2014). Despite their distinct historical backgrounds, these organizations are all on the same spectrum when it comes to establishing a caliphate and enforcing Islamic Sharia law. Because it has the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia is a prime target for Islamists and other types of radicals. Islamism was introduced to Indonesia in the 1980s by graduates of Indonesian universities who had studied in the Middle East. In the beginning, it made use of underground movements to disseminate propaganda to students attending public universities. University campuses became production centers for congregations and regeneration centers following the overthrow of the Suharto regime (van Bruinessen, 2002) and the growth of democracy in Indonesia.

Congregations of an Islamist student group can be found on most campuses. Students from the Indonesian Muslim Student Action Unit (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia, KAMMI), which is a wing of the Islamic Movement (Ikhwanul Muslimin, IM), Gema Liberation (Gerakan Pembebasan, GP), which is a wing of the Holy Trinity Institute (HTI), and Salafi Jihadist students who lead cultural movements in campus mosques. This wing organization’s goals include the establishment of student congregations and the rectification of Islam. After the reforms in Indonesian higher education, this Islamic student organization flourished there. The student wing of the transnational Islamic movement will be analyzed through the lens of social movement theory by the researcher.

According to Locher (2002), social movement theory can be categorized into four main approaches: mass society theory, relative deprivation theory, political process theory, and resource mobilization theory. Mass society theory posits that social movements arise from the alienation of individuals from established social structures, particularly in contexts of rapid social change or modernization (Kornhauser & Horowitz, 2017). Relative deprivation theory,

on the other hand, emphasizes the perceived sense of injustice experienced when social expectations exceed actual conditions (Davies, 1962).

Political process theory conceptualizes social movements as outcomes of the interaction between political opportunity structures, organizational capacity, and cognitive readiness among participants (McAdam, 1999). Shifts in political power dynamics are seen as enabling conditions for collective mobilization. Resource mobilization theory, initially developed by Oberschall (1973), focuses on the strategic and organizational capabilities of movements to mobilize and utilize resources such as funding, networks, information, and leadership. This framework was later refined by McCarthy & Zald (2012), who introduced the concept of social movement organizations (SMOs) as key actors in sustaining mobilization. Among these perspectives, resource mobilization theory is regarded as the most influential in contemporary social movement research, offering a robust and practical analytical lens through which to examine movement dynamics and longevity.

TRANSNATIONAL ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON UNIVERSITY OF YOGYAKARTA

We typically rejoice at the toppling of oppressive governments. The hope for greater freedom and democracy following the collapse of the previous regime created the illusion of surplus. It offers a fresh premise on which to build the democratic success of a nation (Huntington, 2005). That occurred on May 28, 1998, when President Soeharto's New Order regime finally fell after 32 years in power (Romli, 2006). Since then, many facets of Indonesian society have undergone rapid transformations as a direct result of the widespread turning on of the democracy faucet. Even within the Muslim community, there are currently active religious groups or movements with clear missions and recognizable symbols. Some members of the Islamic movement seek to establish an Islamic caliphate and base their fight on Islamic law. In other words, the rise of radical Islamic movements like the Transnational Islamic Movement followed the fall of the New Order.

Several months prior to Suharto's resignation, on February 14, 1998, the Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah Communication Forum (Forum Komunikasi Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah, FKAWJ) was established in Solo. The organization operates from the Ihya' as-Sunnah Islamic Boarding School, located on Kaliurang Street, approximately 15 kilometers from Degolan, Pakem, Sleman, Yogyakarta (Nashir, 2007; Shaleh, 2001). FKAWJ was founded by Ja'far Umar Thalib, a prominent Indonesian Salafi leader. The movement was significantly influenced by the practical application of Wahhabi teachings (Yusanto, 2003a).

The Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah (FKAWJ) was founded by Ja'far Umar Thalib in 1998 in response to what he perceived as widespread misunderstanding of Islamic teachings and the growing influence of democratic ideas (Yusanto, 2003b). Rooted in Salafism, FKAWJ rejects independent interpretation (*ijtihad*) and traditional religious practices (Amal & Panggabean, 2004). Amid Indonesia's political and economic turmoil in 1998, Thalib established Laskar Jihad as FKAWJ's militant wing, gaining notoriety through its involvement in the Maluku conflict. After witnessing sectarian violence in Ambon, Thalib issued a three-month ultimatum to the government before mobilizing Laskar Jihad to the region. On 8 January 2001, local Islamic organizations in Maluku declared the enforcement of Islamic law at the Al-Fattah Mosque (Yusanto, 2003b). A controversial incident followed on 27 March 2001, when a Laskar Jihad member, Abdullah, was stoned to death for adultery in Ahuru Village, reportedly with his consent. Thalib was later arrested on 4 May 2001 in connection with the case. Laskar Jihad was officially disbanded three days after the 2002 Bali bombings.

Members of the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI) include *ulama*, *dai*, and *habaib* within the Islamic community. The organization was founded in 1998 at the Al-Umm Islamic Boarding School in Ciputat, South Jakarta (Ngatawi, 2006). According to Al-Zastrouw's historical account, the FPI was established to uphold the Islamic principle of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (promoting good and preventing evil). It operates as a nationwide private organisation, claiming a membership of up to five million across 17 provinces, according to its leader, Habib Rizieq (Tempo, 26 November 2000). The group's paramilitary wing, *Laskar Pembela Islam*, functions in a quasi-militaristic capacity, often described as enforcing a form of religious morality, leading to the group being labelled by some as a "sharia police". Rather than institutional reform, the FPI prioritizes a movement-based approach aimed at eradicating perceived moral deviance. As noted by FPI Secretary General Ahmad Sabri Lubis in an interview with Al-Zastrouw, the organization values its mission over formal organisational structures, which are seen as contingent upon specific times and contexts.

The Indonesian Mujahideen Council (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, MMI) was established following the First Mujahidin Congress held in Yogyakarta on 7 August 2000. During this congress, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir was appointed as *Amir Mujahidin* (the top leader), marking the formal inception of the movement. In 2003, Irfan Suryahadi Awwas was subsequently elected as Chairman of the *Lajnah Tanfidziyah* (Executive Committee).

The first Mujahideen Congress was held in the Mandala Bhakti Wanitatama

Building in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, from August 5-7, 2000, and was attended by over 1,800 people from a wide range of Islamic and political groups, including Laskar Santri, Laskar Jundullah, Badr Company, Taliban Brigade, Mujahidin Command, and the Islamic Party. At the conference, participants talked about caliphate, imamate, and jihad (Afadlal et al., 2005). For instance, the majority Muslim population in Indonesia was validated and acknowledged as having the right to practice and enforce Islamic law at this first meeting of the Yogyakarta Charter. Islamic law is seen as the only solution to all social and humanitarian crises. According to a 2004 report (Amal & Panggabean, 2004), the main recommendations for enforcing Islamic law in Indonesia came from the 1st Mujahideen Congress. According to this document (Awwas, 2001), efforts should be made to strengthen the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic law should be implemented, and a secular state should be rejected. The document also encourages Muslims to cultivate a spirit of *tasamuh* (tolerance) and to work toward the establishment of Islamic law.

On 26 March 2001, at Istora Senayan in Jakarta, radical Islamic leaders formally declared the establishment of the Indonesian Mujahideen Council (MMI). The organization aims to incorporate Islamic law into Indonesia's legal system through constitutional reform, drawing inspiration from the Yogyakarta Charter. MMI asserts that the country's ongoing multidimensional crisis can only be resolved through the implementation of Islamic law (Amal & Panggabean, 2004). Yogyakarta is considered a central hub for the radical Islamic movement in Indonesia, coinciding with the emergence of more structured and institutionalized transnational Islamic groups, including Jamaah Tarbiyah, Hizb al-Tahrir (HT), Jamaah Tabligh, and the Salafi movement.

In this context, the Salafi movement occupies a peripheral position within university life, with its adherents often establishing mosques in residential areas beyond the immediate proximity of university campuses. These mosques serve as strategic bases for disseminating their ideology and garnering support. This trend has emerged as a widespread phenomenon across Indonesia, including in Yogyakarta. The nature and content of the teachings promoted by the Salafi movement significantly influence the religious literacy of young people who are still in the formative stages of understanding their faith. Consequently, the Salafi movement, exemplified by the figure of Ja'far Umar Thalib, can be seen as a prominent representation of Islamic activism in Yogyakarta.

The Tablighi Jamaat has a significant presence in Yogyakarta, which has emerged as one of the movement's key centers of activity and religious study. Yogyakarta also serves as a hub for its publication efforts, with institutions

such as Al-Thaha and Pustaka Illahi, located in Doha near Islamic University of Yogyakarta, actively disseminating Tablighi literature. According to a Shura Council expert from the Jami Kebon Jeruk Mosque—who oversees Tablighi Jamaat activities nationally, including its publishing—these initiatives reflect the group’s strategic role in the region (Ichwan & Shaleh, 2019). In addition to Tablighi Jamaat, Yogyakarta is home to a number of other Islamic groups, such as GPSI (Gerakan Pemuda Surga Indonesia), the Kaaba Youth Movement, the Anti-Drug Movement (Gerakan Anti Narkoba or “Grenades”), Laskar Sabilillah, Laskar Jundullah, and the Mosque Youth Gathering Forum. These groups have been particularly active in campaigns against gambling, alcohol, drugs, and prostitution. Moreover, the Islamic Community Forum (FUI) and the Islamic Jihad Front (FJI) are notably prominent in defending Islamic values in Yogyakarta.

If the radical Islamic movement in Yogyakarta aligns with the characterization often attributed to it, it seeks to establish Islamic law, or even an Islamic state, within Indonesia. The potential influence of such movements on students at UY is therefore significant, especially considering the geographical proximity of various radical Islamic groups. For example, the Al-Jihad Mosque—associated with the Tablighi Jamaat—is located just north of the campus, adjacent to the Al-Ridha Mosque (MPR), which functions as a Salafi base. Additional Salafi-affiliated centers, such as the MPD and other MPR mosques, are also situated off-campus near Public Hospital. Yogyakarta is also a notable base for Hizb al-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), having played a central role in the movement’s early development. Key figures such as Ismail Yusanto (HTI’s Secretary General), Dwi Condro (one of the early prominent members), Rasyid, Yoyok Tindyo Prasetyo, and Bukhari were instrumental in establishing HTI’s presence in the region. Dwi Condro, an alumnus of both UII and UGM Yogyakarta, was particularly influential. Hizb al-Tahrir was first introduced in Yogyakarta in 1992, and its presence later expanded to other regions, including Bogor, after a decade.

Hizb al-Tahrir (HT) established its presence in Yogyakarta through a student group led by Rasyid, known *own as Santer (Flying Santri)*. This group served as a forum for students from institutions such as UY who sought deeper religious knowledge but had limited access to it. These students perceived the religious education offered at university as insufficient. In response, HTI initiated *Santer* in 1986 as a platform dedicated to the study of Islamic religious teachings (Muhsin, 2007).

Rasyid (Chairman of DPD I HTI Yogyakarta), Dwi Condro (lecturer at STIE Hamfara Yogyakarta and PhD in Economics from Malaysia), Abu Hanif

(STM Development educator), and Dr Andang (lecturer at UY), along with Abu Haliya, Aris, and Karnadi, emerged as key figures in the leadership of Hizb al-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in Yogyakarta. In 1992, twelve leaders from the *Santer* group, who were then HTI cadres but not full members, underwent formal ideological training, marking the formation of HTI's regional leadership in Yogyakarta. These twelve individuals played a significant role in disseminating HTI's ideology, particularly within UY, highlighting a strong link between HTI's growth and its presence on the UY campus. This connection has significantly influenced student activities at UY. Transnational Islamic movements such as HTI, Tarbiyah, Salafi Jamaat, and Tablighi Jamaat have established a notable presence at UY. Despite UY's formal identity as a public institution, it has increasingly become a central hub for transnational Islamic movements in both Yogyakarta and Indonesia.

Undoubtedly, this movement has continued to expand, particularly after 2021 and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as this study is limited to the period prior to 2020, the researcher did not incorporate post-pandemic developments. Nevertheless, the analysis presented above offers a comprehensive overview of how the involvement of various Islamic *Tarbiyah* movements has shaped the dynamics of control and influence exercised by *Tarbiyah*-oriented groups.

TRANSNATIONAL ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS AND COUNTER-RADICALISM CONTESTATION

Any movement, including transnational Islamic movements, must consider its available resources when seeking influence on campus. Hizb al-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and Jamaah Tarbiyah are able to mobilize effectively due to their strong internal consolidation and highly structured, systematic, and sometimes militant organizational frameworks (Chaquoqo & Ma'mun, 2022). In contrast, Salafi Jamaat and Tablighi Jamaat exhibit less formal organizational structures but operate through influential religious figures. Key Salafi leaders such as Ja'far Umar Thalib, Abu Nida, Abdul Qadir Jawwas, Khalid Basalamah, Syafiq Riza Basalamah, and Firanda play pivotal roles in coordinating their movement. Meanwhile, Tablighi Jamaat functions as an enclave-orientated group, with strategic guidance from its Shura Council based in Jakarta (Mamun, 2019). These distinctions highlight the organizational diversity among transnational Islamic movements: HTI and Jamaah Tarbiyah rely on formalized structures, while Salafi Jamaat and Tablighi Jamaat depend on charismatic leadership and decentralized networks. These differences underscore the varying capacities for resource mobilization among the four movements.

The theory of resource mobilization was first introduced by Anthony Oberschall in his 1973 critique of the dominant Mass Society Theory. Oberschall's formulation addressed the limitations of earlier research by offering a new perspective on collective action (cited in Locher, 2002). He, along with other scholars, challenged the assumption that actors involved in collective mobilization are necessarily socially alienated or motivated by psychological tension. Instead, the resource mobilization paradigm posits that modern social movements require sophisticated communication networks and organizational structures (Singh, 2010). The theory emphasizes the formation of groups that strategically mobilize resources to achieve collective goals (Oberschall, 1973).

Collective goals cannot be achieved without the presence of groups, associations, or organizations. Resource mobilization theory posits that individual frustration, effort, or conviction is insufficient in the absence of structured organization and leadership. While protests or uprisings may occur spontaneously, sustained and meaningful change requires the strategic mobilization of resources (Locher, 2002). As Salafi Jamaat and Tablighi Jamaat are not structurally organized movements, this analysis of transnational Islamic resource mobilization will focus solely on Jamaah Tarbiyah and Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). The influence of Salafi and Tablighi groups on campus is minimal, as they operate largely on the periphery. In examining resource mobilization within transnational Islamic movements, this study will analyze the cases of Jamaah Tarbiyah and HTI across three research campuses, considering their mobilization of moral, cultural, socio-organizational, human, and material resources (McCarthy & Zald, 2012).

Collective goals cannot be achieved without the presence of organized groups, associations, or institutions. Resource mobilization theory argues that individual frustration, effort, or perceived truth is insufficient without effective organization and leadership. While protests or uprisings may occur, lasting change depends on how well movements mobilize and structure their resources (Locher, 2002). Given that the Salafi Jamaat and Tablighi Jamaat are not formally organized, analysis of transnational Islamic movements' resource mobilization will focus on Jamaah Tarbiyah and HTI. Furthermore, as Salafi and Tablighi groups operate largely on the periphery of campus life, they are less relevant to discussions of campus contestation (Mamun, 2019). In this context, the study examines how Jamaah Tarbiyah and HTI mobilize moral, cultural, socio-organizational, human, and material resources across three research campuses (McCarthy & Zald, 2012).

Moral resources, such as legitimacy, solidarity, public sympathy, and

endorsement by prominent figures, are central to resource mobilization, with legitimacy receiving the most scholarly attention due to its role in linking cultural contexts to organizational processes. Cultural resources include knowledge of protest legality, organizing press conferences and meetings, and forming associations. Socio-organizational resources are either intentionally formed for movements or appropriated from existing organizations, enabling access to networks, volunteers, and communication channels. Human resources—skills, labor, and leadership—are essential, as are material resources, particularly financial support, which remains critical regardless of other resource types (McCarthy & Zald, 2012).

The resource mobilization approach examines the variety of resources a social movement must mobilize, the interrelationships between social movements and other groups, the social movement's dependence on external support to succeed, and the tactics used by authorities to control or carry out social movements (McCarthy & Zald, 2012). The movement's success depends on how many people join, how determined they are, what sacrifices they make, and how their opponents react (Locher, 2002). The theory of resource mobilization is relevant when looking at transnational Islamic groups and their opponents on campus.

Moral Resources

Organizations require moral resources, particularly legitimacy gained from influential figures, patrons, or institutions. At UY, the Jamaah Tarbiyah movement—through KAMMI—has built a strong legitimacy network supported by urban Muslim communities and sympathetic campus elites. Fatih, KAMMI UY's newly elected Chair, notes that the group was founded by Fahri Hamzah in 1998 in Malang (personal communication, October 1, 2020). Since then, KAMMI has systematically mapped and mobilized support from external networks, faculty, and university bureaucrats aligned with its cause. This legitimacy has bolstered the group's influence, enabling its members to secure the student body presidency (Presiden Mahasiswa) six times in the past decade (Rahman, personal communication, September 30, 2020). In contrast, HTI also cultivates legitimacy at UY but adopts a more exclusive and hierarchical approach, with internal structures kept deliberately opaque—even to lower-level members—to maintain organizational secrecy and control (Aris, personal communication, October 4, 2020; Fatih, personal communication, October 1, 2020).

Cultural Resources

Culture plays a pivotal role in supporting social movements, particularly within Jamaah Tarbiyah, which has developed mature stakeholders, dynamics, and challenges. The movement is well-organized, with KAMMI UY's leadership recruiting students from elementary schools as cultural resources. Jamaah Tarbiyah runs Islamic schools at both the elementary and high school levels, while in public schools, Rohis (Rohani Islam) organizes Islamic studies that introduce the Tarbiyah manhaj and movement, thereby fostering future supporters of KAMMI (Rahman, personal communication, September 30, 2020). Cultural mobilization in Jamaah Tarbiyah began with the establishment of schools as key institutions for spreading its message. Rohis initiated Tarbiyah da'wah, a sentiment echoed by Imaduddin Fadlurrahman from UY.

Similarly, HTI boasts significant cultural resources, bolstered by prominent social media figures like Felix Siau, who propagate HTI's ideology across Indonesia. Yogyakarta hosts key HTI leaders, including Ismail Yusanto, Dwi Condro, Rasyid, Yoyok Tindyo Prasetyo, and Bukhari, who played instrumental roles in founding HTI and spreading its influence within UY. The "Santer" movement, initiated by Rasyid and Condro, served as a cultural gateway for HTI's expansion, with prominent leaders such as Dr. Andang—an influential "Santer"—instilling HTI's philosophy within UY. Despite HTI's strong cultural presence, identifying the movement's cultural resources remains complex, as it operates discreetly and strategically (Aris, personal communication, October 4, 2020; Dullah, personal communication, October 10, 2020). Key members such as Aris and Dullah play crucial roles within HTI and Gema Liberation, contributing to the movement's quiet mobilization.

Socio-Organisational Resources

According to Edwards and McCarthy (2007), social resources refer to organizations structured to achieve movement goals. Snow (2004) further categorizes socio-organizational resources into infrastructure, social networks, and formal organizations. These components are instrumental in facilitating transnational Islamic movements on campuses. At Universitas Yogyakarta (UY), Jamaah Tarbiyah effectively utilizes its socio-organizational resources through the Lembaga Dakwah Kampus (LDK), Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia (KAMMI), and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which functions as a platform for political engagement (Cahyono, personal communication, October 2, 2020). Despite its denial of formal affiliation, KAMMI is considered an extension of PKS, alongside other groups such as Garda Keadilan, Indonesian Muslim Students' Action Union (Kesatuan Aksi

Pelajar Muslim Indonesia, KAPMI, and Asia-Pacific Youth and Students Foundation (Yayasan Pemuda dan Pelajar Asia Pasifik, YPPAP) (Ilyasin & Ridho, 2021). These organizations help disseminate Jamaah Tarbiyah's ideological framework (manhaj) across the student body (Muhsin et al., 2019).

Jamaah Tarbiyah strategically utilizes “appropriable social organizations” to advance its agenda, notably through student orientation programs (Open Recruitment, Oprek), introductory Islamic courses (Assistensi Agama Islam, AAI), and targeted residential networks designed to consolidate its ideological influence. During the 2010s, the UY administration intervened to reassert control over OPREK and AAI, recognizing the depth of Jamaah Tarbiyah's institutional embeddedness.

Hizb al-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), while structurally different, shares a comparable reliance on organizational resources. At UY, HTI operates through tightly knit cell systems that obscure their hierarchy and operational structures. This clandestine approach has made it difficult for researchers to identify specific individuals and gather data. Interviews with UY's Gema Liberation members, such as Dullah and Aris, suggest that even members lack knowledge of the full organizational structure, knowing only their immediate mentors (Aris, personal communication, October 4, 2020; Dullah, personal communication, October 10, 2020). HTI's organizational strategy is centered on promoting a global Islamic caliphate governed by Sharia law, rooted in the teachings of its founder, Taqiyuddin An-Nabhani (Nashir, 2007).

HTI views the application of Sharia as encompassing all human actions—from faith and worship to societal interactions and legal sanctions (Yusanto, 2003a). It perceives the modern absence of the caliphate as the root of Muslim societal decline following the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. Consequently, HTI refuses to separate its resources from its political vision, linking its ideology, Sharia, and the caliphate as an indivisible triad.

To advance this agenda, HTI collaborates with student groups like Gema Liberation, reinforcing its influence within university spaces. Despite HTI's formal disbandment by the Indonesian government, its network remains operational in a subdued form, continuing to engage with students and propagate its ideological goals.

Human Resources

Human resource management plays a vital role in the success of social movement organisations. Edward and McCarthy (2007) highlight the significance of actors' skills, expertise, and experience as part of human resources, crucial

to advancing a social movement. Transnational Islamic groups, particularly Jamaah Tarbiyah, have effectively utilized this understanding to consolidate their presence in Indonesian state universities, including UY. To ensure sustainability, Jamaah Tarbiyah strategically mobilizes human resources through a structured framework of da'wah, referred to as "*da'wah ilallah*", which includes 21 core principles. One central principle is the importance of a correct and comprehensive understanding (*al-fahmu*), which forms the basis of right action. Hasan Al-Banna emphasized this in his ranking of *arkanul bai'ah*, placing *al-fahmu* at the top, describing it as the belief in a solid Islamic worldview based on twenty guiding principles (Parman & Badawi, 2006).

Jamaah Tarbiyah specifically targets university students for several reasons: campuses serve as youth hubs, students hold social prestige, universities are centers of knowledge, and campus da'wah is strategic for cadre development and leadership cultivation (Abdillah, 2012). Since the 1980s, Jamaah Tarbiyah has established a stronghold in elite state universities across Indonesia. The movement starts its regeneration as early as primary and secondary school, continuing into university, where incoming students are welcomed through initiatives like registration assistance, free Islamic boarding recommendations, and orientation programs (AAI). Furthermore, campus mosques are leveraged for Tarbiyah's activities, facilitating mass recruitment annually.

Once on campus, new members undergo systematic cadre development categorized into four levels: beginner, young, intermediate, and mature. Each stage involves *halaqah* sessions covering themes such as Islamic fundamentals, personal development, Islamic thought, and societal engagement. *Halaqah* and *liqa'* have become synonymous with Jamaah Tarbiyah's presence in campuses. This structured HR approach has enabled Jamaah Tarbiyah to dominate UY's social-political landscape. For example, UY Student President Sultan Fafa revealed that Tarbiyah-aligned groups held strategic positions at UY six times in the past decade (personal communication, July 23, 2020).

Hizb al-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), though similar in structure to Jamaah Tarbiyah, could not achieve the same dominance due to Tarbiyah's earlier establishment. HTI uses a cell system in which members remain unaware of leadership hierarchies above their immediate mentors. The HTI cadre formation begins with recruitment efforts using OPREK and continues with attempts to penetrate student organizations like BEM, DEMAS, and LDK. After HTI's dissolution by the Indonesian government in 2017, the group reverted to clandestine operations under the guise of Gema Liberation. Despite this, HTI continues to influence UY by operating through informal channels.

HTI's human resource development follows three key stages: cadre recruitment

and education (*marhalah tatsqif*), public interaction (*marhalah tafa'ul ma'a al-ummah*), and eventually, political takeover. The first phase includes intensive ideological education via *halaqah* systems. At UY, *halaqah 'am*, general halaqah sessions, serve as introductory platforms. Weekly meetings cover Islamic belief systems, law, history, politics, and the obligation to restore the Islamic caliphate. Each member must attend these sessions, which are designed to identify and develop new potential cadres. The more advanced stages, like *halaqah Aris* and *halaqah hizb*, require members to study foundational HT texts such as *Nizhamul Islam*, *Takattul Hizbiy*, and *Mafahim Hizb ut-Tahrir*.

The cadre development process within Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) places strong emphasis on adherence to Islamic teachings and organizational discipline. Members who violate the principles of HT or Shari'a norms may be deemed morally compromised (Arifin, 2005). Recruitment and ideological indoctrination are designed to ensure that individuals are deeply committed to the movement's objectives. Even following HTI's official disbandment, these ideological bonds have sustained the group's continuity through covert networks such as Gema Liberation.

In the second phase of human resource mobilization—public engagement—HTI seeks to disseminate its ideology to a broader audience by framing discourse around Islamic law and the caliphate, employing both direct action and media outreach. Although public activities have declined following the ban, online platforms continue to serve as vital tools for ideological propagation. If successful, this phase aims to culminate in the final stage: securing political control (Rahmat, 2005).

Before its dissolution, HTI had effectively mobilized human resources at UY by embedding sympathizers within student government, campus mosques, and student organizations. Despite the ban, these individuals continue to operate discreetly. Gema Liberation, while formally separate, remains ideologically aligned with HTI and functions as its clandestine campus extension. Their continued presence suggests that HTI's human resource strategy remains potent in sustaining its influence within UY's socio-political landscape.

Material Resources

Social movements rely heavily on material resources. Given the scale of mobilization and the diversity of interests involved, sustaining a movement requires substantial financial support. Ideally, this funding is generated independently, depending on how effectively the movement manages its human resources and organizational structure. Jamaah Tarbiyah, for instance,

funds its activities at UY through self-reliant means. According to Fajar Cahyono, cadre training is supported through modest member contributions, with each individual contributing approximately Rp. 1,000 per week (personal communication, October 2, 2020). Recruiting 100–200 students thus provide a significant fundraising base. Additional funds are generated through large religious gatherings, during which donations are collected via charity boxes to support the movement's operational needs.

Table. 1. Comparison of Resource Mobilization

Resource Type	Jamaah Tarbiyah	Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI)
Moral Resources	Legitimacy from campus elites, support from urban Muslim networks, frequent wins in student leadership elections (KAMMI).	Legitimacy through exclusivist, hierarchical networks; secrecy and control through closed structures.
Cultural Resources	Islamic schooling system (elementary to high school), use of Rohis, early cadre building, structured da'wah through schools and campus.	Cultural propagation via public figures (e.g. Felix Siauw); key founders and 'Santer' movement influence at UY.
Socio-Organizational Resources	Leverages KAMMI, LDK, and PKS; operates through OPREK, AAI, and structured residential networks.	Operates via cell-based clandestine structures; uses Gema Liberation; opaque hierarchy even to members.
Human Resources	Structured cadre system (<i>halaqah</i>), from elementary to university; systematic recruitment; influence in campus leadership.	Three-stage cadre development: education (<i>halaqah</i>), public engagement, and political takeover; covert mobilization post-ban.
Material Resources	Weekly member contributions (Rp. 1,000), donations from large events, financial self-reliance to support movement.	Member-driven support before disbandment; ongoing discreet financial contributions through Gema Liberation.

COUNTER RADICALISM AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS

Islamic Religious Assistance (AAI) is under strict control as part of a counter-radicalism strategy against transnational Islamic movements, with the goal of making AAI a monopoly not only for Islamic religious subjects but also for other religions taught in Indonesia. UY and other subjects in need of help are examples of this (Muhsin, 2020). According to Asnawi, the university is now in charge of PPSMB activities, which were previously under the control of student bodies. Under the control of the university, all first-year students are gathered in one location (personal communication, August 7, 2020). The

National Character Strengthening Movement was introduced to them there. In the last decade, UY has implemented the principle of strengthening the national character. Student Creativity Programme (Program Kreativitas Mahasiswa, PKM) in five fields is a programme that encourages students to be productive in their areas of expertise to love and defend the country, such as information technology and appropriate technology. Students will no longer have time to keep up with various movements, including the transnational Islamic movement, because of the plan. One of the biggest concerns for the campus, however, is that the campus mosque serves as a gateway for the transnational Islamic movement to exert its influence on the campus. For example, the Campus Mosque in Balaisiswa and the Al-Ridla Mosque, which is close to the Public General Hospital, are both important symbols of religious life at UY.

Hadipro laid the first stone on the Balaisiswa Campus Mosque on May 21, 1998 (personal communication, Oktober 2020). The mosque construction committee started with IDR 60 million. Thanks to the committee's persistence and the donations of various donors, the funds collected were enough to build a magnificent and representative campus mosque to fulfil the ideal concept of a mosque. After spending Rp 9.5 billion, the UY Campus Mosque opened on December 4, 1999, five days before 1 Ramadan 1420 H. The mosque's first and second floors and courtyard can hold 10,000 worshippers (Kemenag, 2020). Asnawi says this mosque was originally owned by a foundation that collected funds from the community and campus residents, not the campus. The mosque became part of the university's infrastructure in 2017, so it must be in line with the university's vision and mission. The *takmir* manages this mosque, and BPM is written above it (Massage Management Agency). This BPM will maintain all campus mosques according to the university's vision and mission. Certain flags shouldn't use this mosque.

Efforts have been made to safeguard the UY campus mosque from the influence of transnational Islamic movements. Prior to 2017, the mosque was frequently utilized by groups such as HTI, Salafi, and Tarbiyah for research and da'wah activities, often involving external participants, according to M. Nur, the mosque's Imam. Although permits were issued, they did not authorize any specific organizational affiliation. Over time, however, the mosque became associated with radical Islamic activity.

Since 2018, the Al-Ridla Mosque has undergone significant renovations, completed in mid-2020, as part of UY's initiative to reposition it as the university's Islamic Centre. Previously dominated by Salafi-Wahhabi influence, the mosque was a key hub for their gatherings. The renovation aligns with

UY's national and populist vision, aiming to foster a moderate and inclusive religious environment. The newly redefined mosque is intended to support progressive Islamic thought and equip students with essential skills relevant to the digital and technological era.

In response to the presence of transnational Islamic extremist groups, UY has undertaken a deradicalization strategy aimed at reclaiming control over its campus mosques. Deradicalisation seeks to reduce the spread of radical ideologies that may lead to violence, terrorism, or other threats to humanity (Arifin & Bachtiar, 2013). However, this approach has faced internal resistance. Asnawi, for example, opposed the involvement of external actors such as the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), arguing that UY is an autonomous academic space and should remain free from such interventions (Asnawi, personal communication, August 7, 2020). He warned that external deradicalization efforts might contradict university policies and create friction.

Nevertheless, moderate student groups have largely supported UY's internal deradicalization initiatives, viewing them as opportunities to influence and shape the university's socio-political landscape. Organizations such as the Indonesian Islamic Student Movement (Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia, PMII) and the Nahdlatul Ulama Student Family (Keluarga Mahasiswa Nahdlatul Ulama, KMNU) have increasingly engaged in extra-campus activities. Similarly, the Indonesian National Student Movement (Gerakan Mahasiswa Nasional Indonesia, GMNI) has reasserted its presence within extra-campus organizations (Interview with Asnawi). Notably, in 2020, a moderate student affiliated with GMNI was elected President of the Student Executive Board, marking the end of a decade-long dominance by KAMMI, a student organization aligned with the Tarbiyah movement. This shift is emblematic of UY's broader institutional identity as a "university of struggle", "a university for the people", and a "cultural center". All campus policies, including those addressing radicalism, are informed by this foundational ethos.

Further deradicalization measures have also been implemented by UY. According to discussions with Asnawi, several concrete steps have been taken. First, Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and anti-NKRI groups have been prohibited from using the UY mosque for cadre formation, a privilege they previously enjoyed without restriction. Second, permission is no longer granted to Wahhabi-affiliated groups, whose sermons often denounce other Islamic groups. Previously, Salafi-Wahhabi activists conducted weekly sermons every Sunday morning at the UY mosque, drawing followers from Yogyakarta and surrounding areas. Third, preachers for Friday prayers and Islamic holiday

commemorations at the UY mosque are now selected from moderate Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. Finally, a small mosque owned by UY and previously used as a center for Jamaah Tabligh activities is now directly managed by the university. A lecturer affiliated with NU has been appointed as the head of the *takmir* (mosque management board), while other members are drawn from NU and Muhammadiyah circles. Religious events at the mosque are now consistently led by moderate religious figures.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how transnational Islamic movements strategically mobilize moral, cultural, socio-organizational, human, and material resources to influence student life at the University of Yogyakarta (UY). Focusing on Jamaah Tarbiyah and Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), the research reveals that these movements adopt highly structured and ideologically driven mobilization strategies to penetrate campus institutions and cultivate future cadres. In contrast, moderate Islamic actors—primarily rooted in traditionalist organizations—have begun to counter these influences through internal deradicalization programs and the reinforcement of inclusive religious values. By applying the resource mobilization theory, this study demonstrates that ideological contestation on university campuses is not only a battle of beliefs but also a contest of organizational capacity and strategic resource use. The findings underscore the importance of campus-based interventions that support moderate Islamic frameworks and safeguard pluralism. As transnational movements continue to adapt, universities must actively reclaim their educational and religious spaces to prevent the entrenchment of exclusivist ideologies. Ultimately, the study highlights the university's dual role as both a target of ideological contestation and a critical actor in shaping counter-radicalism strategies in Indonesia's higher education landscape.

DISCLAIMER

To protect the privacy of research participants and the institution, the names of individuals and the university discussed in this article are presented using pseudonyms.

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FROM GUEST TO HOST RELIGION: The Transformation of Islam In Papua

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the dynamics of Islamic da'wah in Papua, highlighting historical challenges and contemporary transformations within a social, political, and cultural context. This study uses a qualitative approach with historical and social analysis through a review of literature, Islamic organizational documents, and narratives from Papuan Muslim figures. The results show that although Islam was the first Abrahamic religion to arrive in Papua, its spread was hampered by the influence of colonialism and the dominance of Christian and Catholic missions, which relegated Islam to a minority position with an exclusive image. However, over time, Islamic da'wah has undergone significant transformation, particularly through educational and empowerment initiatives undertaken by organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and the Papuan Muslim Council. These changes have fostered the emergence of educated and influential Papuan Muslim figures and strengthened awareness of Islamic identity as an integral part of Papuan culture. These findings confirm that Islamic preaching based on a cultural approach and social empowerment is more effective in transforming the old narrative of Islam as a "newcomer religion," toward recognizing it as a legitimate part of Papuan identity. Going forward, ethnographic-based research is needed to capture the pulse of Papuan Muslims at the grassroots level and understand Islam as growing from within,

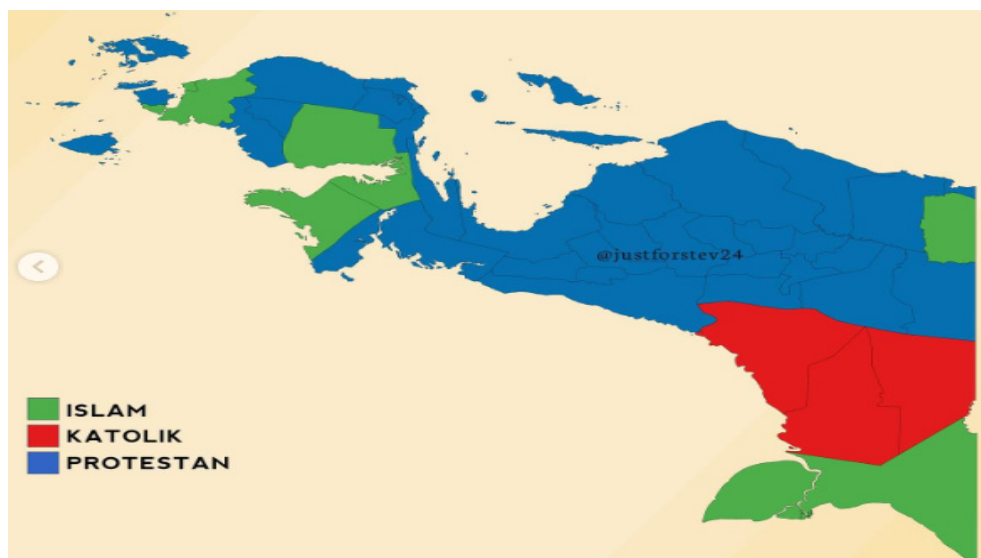
not simply coming from the outside.

Keywords: Transformation of Islam; Guest Religion; Host Religion; Papua

INTRODUCTION

The development of Islam in West Papua is a unique phenomenon of da'wah (propagation) amid the strong influence of Christianity, which has shaped the identity of the indigenous people of Papua. Generally, outsiders perceive West Papua as a predominantly Christian region in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Islam is a minority religion in Papua and is sometimes stigmatized as the religion of immigrants from outside West Papua (Pamungkas, 2015; Yamin et al., 2019). However, historical records about religions in West Papua indicate that Islam was actually the earliest Abrahamic religion to enter the region, especially in the West Coast area of Papua (Wanggai, 2008). Areas such as Fakfak, Kaimana, Bintuni, Sorong, Raja Ampat, and Merauke have a strong Islamic presence. In fact, in regions like Fakfak and Merauke, Islam is the majority religion among the local community.

Map 1.
Distribution of Religion in Papua



Source; Steven The Happer, 2023

There are several records about the period Islam entered West Papua, which is estimated to be around the 14th and 15th centuries (Burger, 1960; Suwiryadi,

2000; Wanggai, 2011; Onin, 2006). This estimate is based on various sources, including oral history, records of the Sultanates in North Maluku, and reports from European explorers. The presence of Islam is evidenced by Islamic communities, mosques, and various artifacts on the West Coast of Papua (Crawfurd, 1956). At that time, Islamic da'wah arrived through trade, marriage, and the expansion of power from the Islamic Sultanates in North Maluku, namely Ternate, Tidore, Bacan, and Jailolo, which are known to have extended their influence to West Papua. Muslim preachers from various countries, supported by the Sultans of North Maluku, played a significant role in introducing Islam to West Papua during that period.

However, in subsequent developments, especially after the 15th century, Islamic da'wah in Papua began to fade. One significant cause appears to be the increasingly strong Dutch colonial expansion in Papua. In addition, the persistent efforts of Christian and Catholic missions penetrating the interior of Papua contributed to Christianity becoming the majority religion. Islam then became a minority religion and, in a certain context, was sometimes perceived as a migrant force attempting to control Christian Papua (Yamin, 2019; Pamungkas, 2015). Local political dynamics further worsened the contestation of religious identities, resulting in resistance at the local level. This included the rejection of Muslim transmigrants from Java who flooded Papua during the New Order regime. Simona Sinkiewicz (2020) described transmigration as an instrument of the systematic Indonesianization and Islamization of Papua, which had been ongoing for decades and fueled the increase in the Muslim population in Papua. This gave rise to resistance and further reinforced the stigmatization of Islam as an outsider seeking to dominate Papua. This resistance is documented in various research studies and scholarly works published in recent years, which generally highlight the opposition to Islamic da'wah (Pamungkas, 2015; Alhamid, 2014; Ernas, 2014; Yamin, 2019).

This situation has prompted Islamic leaders in Papua to modify their da'wah methods. The goal is for Islam, which has been present in Papua since the beginning, to become a religion embraced by the indigenous people and a compelling force for da'wah. Initially, Islam was spread through doctrines, and in part through the influence of the Islamic Sultanates in North Maluku. Now, however, Islamic da'wah is adopting a more cultural, engaging, and transformative approach by integrating into educational services. At present, there is an increase in the Muslim population among the indigenous Papuan people. More importantly, there is a growing awareness to emphasize Islamic identity as part of Papua's heritage (Ernas, 2019). This shift emphasizes that

Papua is not solely Christian but also has a Muslim community that continues to grow in several regions.

Studies on Islam in Papua are a relatively new but increasingly significant area of research, several categories emerge prominently. Firstly, there are studies focusing on the historical trajectory of Islam in the region (Putuhena, 2000; Onim, 2006; Wanggai, 2008). The researchers research delves into the arrival of Islam and the multifaceted dynamics surrounding its establishment. Although these works may present varying perspectives on the exact timing of Islam's introduction to Papua, they collectively acknowledge Islam as the earliest Abrahamic religion to enter the region, facilitated by a number of preachers employing strategies such as trade and intermarriage. The second category comprises studies that delve into contemporary Islamic da'wah efforts, including the da'wah models implemented by various Islamic religious organizations in Papua such. For instance, Ramdani (2022) discusses the da'wah model devised, while Muslim's article (2004) explores the contributions of indigenous Papuan figures to Islamic da'wah from the 1930s onwards. The third category comprises studies examining the intricate relationship between religions in Papua, particularly the interplay between Islam and Christianity within the context of local political dynamics (Cahyo, 2008; Al-hamid, 2014, Ernas, 2014). This research highlights how cultural identities, including ethnicity and religion, serve not only as objective markers but also as symbols of power, constructed, contested, and exploited for political goals.

However, despite the extent of research on Islam in Papua, two critical areas remain relatively underexplored. First, existing studies have not adequately addressed why the initial Islamic da'wah in Papua, as the first Abrahamic religion to enter the region, waned while Christianity, introduced later, emerged as the dominant religion. Second, prevailing studies often portray Islam as an external force competing for dominance in a confrontational manner, while Christianity is perceived as the indigenous or host religion. Consequently, Papuan Muslims are often viewed with suspicion, being deemed "less Papuan" due to their affiliation with a perceived foreign religion. Investigating these issues is important for comprehensively understanding the dynamics at play and how Papuan Muslims navigate their identity in response.

This article aims to address several crucial questions, such as why Islamic da'wah weakened and what strategic factors contributed to this phenomenon, so that Islam is then stigmatized as a guest religion in Papua. In addition, it explores the current methods and strategies developed by Islamic organizations and Muslims in Papua to restore the prominence of Islamic da'wah in Indonesia's easternmost region. The examination of these issues offers a compelling study

on the development of Islamic da'wah in Indonesia and provides insights into new methods of Islamic da'wah in the archipelago amid ever-changing socio-political dynamics.

Methodologically, this study adopted a social history approach (Nata, 1999) complemented by examining Islamic da'wah as a means of investigating the spread of Islam. This approach is crucial for understanding the social context of the history of da'wah and religious dissemination, which unfolds dynamically within Indonesia's plural society. Data for this paper were gathered through a combination of documentation study and library research. The author reviewed numerous existing studies and analyzed various news articles published in electronic media outlets. For this study, the author reviewed over 30 academic works on Islam in Papua and examined more than 50 online news stories and websites related to Papua. The collected data were then categorized and analyzed using an interactive descriptive method (Abdullah, 2008). This method involves careful examination and comparison of all available data to ensure the formulation of accurate information, ultimately facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Finally, the study culminates in the development of a conceptual conclusion aimed at addressing the significant questions in the research. The objective is to formulate a conceptual framework concerning the history of Islamic da'wah in Papua.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM IN WEST PAPUA

Papua stands out on the Indonesian map not only due to its location at the far eastern tip of the Archipelago but also because of its unique and diverse population. Alfred Russel Wallace, in Materay (2011), described the Papuan people as *having dark, brownish, or black skin color, distinct from the Negroid race but also differing significantly from Malay populations, with rough and dry hair*. Originally comprising two provinces, Papua and West Papua, the region has expanded since 2023 to include four additional provinces, currently with a total of six provinces.

Despite being perceived as homogenous by outsiders, Papua is incredibly diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, and language. Alongside local religions and beliefs practiced by various tribes, Islam is believed to be the first Abrahamic religion to have reached Papua, around the 14th and 15th centuries. There are multiple scenarios or versions regarding the arrival of Islam in West Papua. Papuan Islamic historian Toni Wanggai (2008) explained five versions of the beginning of Islam's arrival: the Papuan, Acehnese, Arabic, Javanese, and versions associated with Bandan, Bacan, Tidore, and Ternate.

In the book “Study of the History of the Introduction of Islam in Fakfak,” published by the Fakfak Regency Government in 1996, it is stated that Islam was present in Papua around 1360 AD, marked by the presence of Abdul Ghafar from the Sultanate of Aceh in the Fatagar Kingdom. Ghafar preached for 14 years (1360-1374 AD) in Rumbati and its surroundings before his death in 1374 AD. Subsequently, around the 14th century, another preacher and Sufi named Syarif Muaz al-Qathan, known as the “Sheikh of the Blue Robe,” arrived from the Arab peninsula. This aligns with the presence of the Tunasgain Mosque in Fakfak, estimated to be around 400 years old or built around 1587 (Putuhena et al., 2006). However, these oral sources require further verification to establish scientific evidence.

Other scholars, such as J.F. Onim (2006:85), propose that Islam arrived in Papua around the 17th century. Onim’s conclusion is based on an analysis of Miguel Roxo Debrito’s report (1581-1582), which indicated that during his visit to the Raja Ampat Islands, King Waageo had not yet converted to Islam. Thus, the presence of Islam in Papua is estimated to have emerged around the end of the 16th or early 17th century. The spread of Islam in Papua followed the archipelagic route, starting from Aceh at the tip of Sumatra, through Java and Maluku, before reaching Papua. Recent consensus among experts suggests that Islam’s presence in Papua marked the very end of its spread, as subsequent efforts to propagate the religion were interrupted and ceased altogether.

Ethnographically, two areas in Papua maintain close ethnic and cultural ties with the Maluku region due to their strategic geographic locations: the Raja Ampat islands and the Onin Fakfak Peninsula. The Raja Ampat Islands are close to North Maluku, while the Fakfak region is not far from Seram and Southeast Maluku. These areas have historically been arenas for power struggles between the two dominant sultanates or kingdoms of North Maluku, namely the Sultanate of Ternate and the Sultanate of Tidore.

Papuan historiography indicates that the Sultanate of Tidore exerted greater influence along the coast of the Raja Ampat islands and the Onin Fakfak Peninsula. Onim (2006) highlights that with the influence of these two Islamic Sultanates in Raja Ampat, Sorong, and Fakfak, Islam likely entered Papua via the southern coast of the bird’s head region. However, the spread of Islam in Papua did not occur through direct institutional efforts from the sultanates but rather through trade and migration between culturally interconnected regions. This may explain why Islam’s development in Papua was not uniform and did not penetrate all regions equally.

Early Forms of Da'wah and the Spread of Islam in Papua

Historians have observed that the Islamization process in the West Papua peninsula unfolded peacefully. This process is similar to the established pattern of the arrival of Islam in the Indonesian Archipelago, characterized by trade, marriage, and the extension of influence from Islamic kingdoms (Ricklef, 1983). This pattern is evident in the history of the arrival of Islam in West Papua.

First, Islam spread through trading activities, which had been prevalent since the 14th century. Papua, known for its spice production, attracted traders seeking products such as nutmeg, cinnamon, agarwood, resin, and *masoi* bark. Cross-island traders, aiming for higher profits, deliberately ventured into Papua to acquire these sought-after spices. In the process, they fostered closer interactions with local communities, which were initially challenging to engage with (Ernas, 2014). During these interactions, Muslim traders introduced Islam by teaching locals prayers and various worship rituals in accordance with Islamic teachings.

An observer of Islamic history in Papua, Kasibi Suwiryadi, as quoted by J.F. Onim (1997), recounts the process of Islamization in Fakfak:

Islam was introduced through the efforts of traders who also assumed the role of preachers. Among them was Abdul Gafar, a preacher from Aceh, who arrived in Fatagar Lama. Gafar, in pursuit of spices, traveled to Ternate, Bacan (North Maluku), and eventually Misol Island. The local community took notice of Gafar and his companions' practices, particularly their prayers—especially *Zhuhur* and *Asr*—conducted in open spaces. Residents were intrigued to witness them murmuring with their mouths and facing the wall. One resident remarked, "*Iangge Wagamaning wainbi, ma peti mijaai som yamarri marao rara toto weria faur wai*", which roughly translates to "These people apparently worship the devil, standing facing the wall and talking to themselves."

In fact, traders employed strategies to capture the attention and curiosity of the local people about Islam, gradually introducing them to this new religion. The success of these traders in converting Papuan people also had economic implications, as it fostered trust in trade relations strengthened by religious bonds. Many of these traders settled in the region and formed marital unions with local women.

Second, Islam spread through intermarriage with Papuan women. Muslim traders and migrants who resided in Papua for extended periods often married local women. These marriages served as a means to integrate into society and

introduced Islam to the families of their Papuan spouses. This method of Islamization through marriage was typically employed by traders who stayed in West Papua for prolonged durations, aligning their departure with seasonal changes to shipping routes back to the west. Some traders chose to remain in Papua, becoming influential figures within the community.

Several legendary marriage stories have left a significant change on the map of Islamic da'wah in Papua. For instance, the marriage between Boki Tayyibah, daughter of Sultan Ibnu Mansur from the Bacan Sultanate, and Kapitan Gura Besi on Misol Island, West Papua. This marriage resulted in the emergence of four Muslim kingdoms in the Raja Ampat Islands—the Salawati Kingdom, the Misool/Sailof Kingdom, the Batanta Kingdom, and the Waigeo Kingdom (Wanggai, 2006). Similarly, the marriage between Siti Hawa Faruk, a female preacher from Java (Cirebon), and a Waigeo figure named Kalawen around the 16th century, transformed Kalawen into a prominent Papuan Islamic figure.

During the 17th to 18th centuries, strong cultural ties between Muslims from East Seram and West Papua flourished through marriage and kinship connections. Despite Dutch-managed trading activities concentrated in the Company's markets in Ternate, Ambon, and Banda, Eastern Seram traders continued to play a crucial role in linking Maluku with the Sosolot trading network in the Raja Ampat Islands, Onin, Fakfak, Kowiai, and Kaimana (Budiman, 2019). The presence of cultural remnants between East Seram and West Papua is evident in linguistic similarities, shared family names, and the naming conventions of numerous villages. Cultural acculturation is further illustrated through culinary traditions and historical artifacts obtained from past trade in the Papua region.

Third, Islam spread through the influence of the four major Islamic sultanates in North Maluku: the Sultanate of Ternate, the Sultanate of Tidore, the Sultanate of Bacan, and the Sultanate of Jailolo. The impact of these Islamic sultanates is obvious in the government structures along the coast of West Papua, which adopted the royal system introduced by the rulers of Ternate and Tidore. This differs from the tribal power systems prevalent among Papuan rulers in the interior or mountainous regions (Mansoebon, 1994).

Local kings governing in Papua's kingdoms, such as Waigeo, Batanta, Salawati, and Misol in the Raja Ampat Islands, or the Kingdoms in the Fakfak and Kaimana areas, fell under the influence of the Sultanate of Ternate and Tidore. These rulers were known to periodically pay tribute (taxes) to the Sultan in exchange for protection. Moreover, rulers in North Maluku dispatched preachers to conduct Islamic da'wah in West Papua, spreading Islam and

teaching Malay to the local people. Malay subsequently became the *Lingua Franca* used for trade and the propagation of Islam throughout the Indonesian Archipelago.

Intensive power dynamics along the west coastal region of Papua have caused rapid growth and development of Islam. Many communities embraced Islam after witnessing their leaders' conversion from traditional beliefs. This Islamic expansion prompted the construction of mosques as places of worship, including the Great Mosque, built in 1870 and still standing today in Pattimburaq Village of Kokas District in Fakfak Regency.

According to Wanggai (2011), the various methods of spreading Islam mentioned earlier—through trade, marriage, and the influence of rulers from North Maluku—occurred within peaceful relations. Muslim traders fostered positive relationships with the local populace, facilitating their access to preach among them. As the traders integrated into the community, they gained social status and respect, leading many to skip returning to their home countries. Consequently, several Islamic villages emerged, such as Arab Village, Bugis Village, and Buton Village in the West Papua region.

Until the 19th century, the history of such Islamic preaching mostly explored areas on the coast of West Papua as ports and centers of trade and local power. That is why, the Muslim population is greater in coastal areas, or are often referred to by local residents as “coastal people.” Meanwhile, the interior of Papua remains a mystery that has hardly been touched by preaching for several centuries. Islam began to grow in the interior of Papua, at the same time as Indonesian Independence, which was also encouraged by the transmigration policy of the New Order government.

The End of Islamic Da'wah, Christian Domination and the Stigma of Islam as a Guest Religion

The remarkable development of Islam during the 15th to 17th centuries did not sustain its momentum. Instead, the da'wah of Islam slowed down and eventually halted along the coasts and small islands west of Papua. Since the 19th century, the expansive spread of Christianity and Catholicism replaced Islam. Missionaries from these Abrahamic religions penetrated the interiors and jungles of Papua, winning over the hearts of the Papuan people. Christianity emerged as the predominant religion embraced by Papuans, relegating Islam to a minority status perceived as an external entity. In local discourse, Islam is sometimes labeled a “guest religion,”¹ not indigenous to the Papuans (Kamma,

¹ The stigma surrounding Islam as a “guest religion” is a frequent topic of discussion among Papuans. This perception stems from Islam's minority status and its association with

1972; M. Ali, 2004; Wanggai, 2008;

Therefore, it is crucial to inquire why Islamic propagation in Papua ceased or failed to progress after the advent of Christianity, resulting in its diminished influence. Several explanations can be offered for this phenomenon, with two primary factors standing out: the consolidation of Dutch authority over Papua and the growing dominance of Christianity, shaping Papua into a predominantly Christian region in Indonesia (Ernas, 2015; Ismail, 2019).

Wanggai (2008) reveals in his works that Dutch colonialists, initially lacking a clear vision for West Papua, grew concerned about British presence in the region. Consequently, in 1828, the Dutch built a fort called “Fort Du Bus” near Triton Bay. This fort not only affirmed Dutch sovereignty over Papua but also symbolized their takeover of control from the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore. Muslim communities residing around the fort faced pressure and intimidation from the Dutch. With the Dutch monopolizing the spice trade, they imposed special permits for traders seeking entry into West Papua, gradually diminishing the influx of Muslim traders into the region.

Historian Muridan Widjoyo (2009) in his book “The Revolt of Prince Nuku, Cross-Cultural Alliance in Maluku 1780-1810,” reveals the dramatic shift in power dynamics. The Dutch intervention in the authority of the sultans in North Maluku, replacing them with individuals they could manage or cooperate with, reduced the sultanate’s influence over the islands of Maluku and West Papua. Moreover, the Dutch restricted trader access to Papua by issuing special permits (passes).

The consolidation of Dutch rule over Papua facilitated the spread of Christianity, highlighted by the arrival of two German missionaries named Carl Wilhelm Ottow and Johan Gottlob Geissler on a small island called Mansinam, West Papua, in 1855. Since their arrival, Christian missions have flourished extensively in the interior of Papua. The missionaries diligently studied the socio-cultural structure of Papuan communities and implemented culturally sensitive methods to attract them to the Christian faith. Ottow and Geissler even compiled a Numfor Language Dictionary to aid in mission efforts aimed at winning the hearts of Papuan people (Abineno, 1986).

The absence of a Christian prohibition on the Papuan habit of consuming pork, a traditional pet among the people in the rural area of Papua, also facilitates Papuan acceptance of Christianity. This contrasts with Islamic preachers, who forbid Papuans who have converted to Islam from consuming

immigrants. Christianity, on the other hand, is the dominant religion among native Papuans. See Republika “In Papua Islam is Not a Guest Religion,” in <https://khazanah.republika.co.id/berita/mc0zn3/di-papua-islam-bukan-agama-tamu-1>

pork, in accordance with Islamic teachings. This is not a problem for coastal communities, as other types of animals, such as fish, are readily available. However, for Papuan mountain communities, the prohibition on eating pork is seen as a serious conflict with local traditions and culture.

The missionaries' courage and perseverance to penetrate the isolated interiors and jungles of Papua constitute a remarkable religious phenomenon. Their boldness, coupled with diverse cultural approaches and intensive community empowerment initiatives, deeply resonated with Papuans, prompting many to embrace Christianity. Conversely, systematic efforts by Islamic preachers during the early stages of Islam's arrival in Papua were largely unsuccessful.

In subsequent developments, the Dutch government demarcated areas for the propagation of Christianity and Catholicism in Papua. The Protestant Zending took charge of northern regions such as Manokwari and Jayapura, while Catholic missions oversaw the southern region, stretching from Babo, Fakfak, to Merauke. The Christian and Catholic churches not only spread religious teachings but also established educational institutions or schools for Papuan people during the 19th to 20th centuries. The growing empowerment movement through Christian and Catholic education fostered a generation of educated Christians from indigenous Papuan backgrounds. Many of these individuals ascended to leadership roles within the church and contributed to the development of Christian missions across Papua, thus shaping Papua's educational identity rooted in its rich local culture.

The predominance of Christianity, as the majority religion in Papua, fosters the affirmation of identity through various socio-political channels. For instance, there is a push to enact regional regulations grounded in Christian religious teachings, commonly referred to as Biblical Regulations (Arowidodo, 2019), as evidenced in Manokwari. Simultaneously, there are local ordinances concerning places of worship, stipulating that mosque buildings and minarets should not exceed the height of the Ridwan Church Tower (2022). Such phenomena are frequently cited as examples of how Islam is not regarded as the indigenous religion of the Papuan people. Consequently, these issues often spark tensions and conflicts between the Islamic and Christian communities in Papua.

Education as Basis for Contemporary Islamic Da'wah in Papua

During the New Order regime in Indonesia, the government enforced strict political and security measures in West Papua. A security-centric approach aimed at maintaining social order was adopted to quell the separatist

movement led by the Free Papua Organization (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka* [OPM]). In addition, the government initiated development projects in Papua and introduced a transmigration program from Java to Papua. However, in these processes, the government, particularly through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, did not allocate sufficient space for Islamic da'wah, fearing it could destabilize security and social order.

Subsequently, there emerged a new phase for Islamic da'wah characterized by two significant developments: the establishment of Islamic educational institutions fostering formal religious education, and the increasing influence of Islamic religious organizations such as Nahdhatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and new entities like *Al-Fatih Kaffah Nusantara* (AFKN) founded by charismatic Papuan cleric, Ustadz Fadlan Garamatan.

The establishment of educational institutions marks a significant transformation in Islamic da'wah in Papua, which had long been overshadowed by Christian missions in the region. The earliest historical record of an Islamic educational institution in Papua dates back to a religious education center established by Habib Muhammad Ashgar, a cleric from Baghdad, in Jayapura in 1867, during the mid-nineteenth century. Unfortunately, this small Madrasah did not persist after Ashgar's passing in 1908 (Murtadho, 2015). The next trace of a Madrasah emerged in 1929 in Mopah, Merauke, founded by an Acehnese cleric named Teuku Bujang Salim, who, along with several Indonesian freedom fighters, was exiled by the Dutch to Boven Digul, Papua, for opposing Dutch oppression.

The Papua Islamic Education Foundation (YAPIS), established in 1968 by Anwar Ilmar, a Muslim official from West Sumatra, stands as the most influential Islamic educational institution in Papua. YAPIS's establishment stemmed from concerns over the sluggish development of Islamic education in Papua, lagging far behind Christian education. Recognizing that strong Islamic education forms a solid foundation for Islamic da'wah, YAPIS was established to address this gap and unify the efforts of various Islamic religious organizations in Papua, which were often divided along sectarian lines (YAPIS, 1999).

The presence of YAPIS has garnered not only positive responses from Muslims but also from parents of non-Muslim students. Many non-Muslim parents choose to enroll their children in YAPIS due to its reputation for instilling high levels of discipline and prohibiting behaviors such as alcohol consumption—a prevalent cultural practice among some Papuan communities that remains challenging to eradicate. Today, YAPIS holds a position in the eyes of the Papuan people similar to that of Christian educational institutions that emerged earlier. Recent data indicates that YAPIS has 24 branches across

Papua, managing educational institutions ranging from elementary schools to universities, comprising 179 school units and 80 partner schools under its administration. (<https://yapispapua.org/data/>).

Since 1970, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), through its Ma'arif educational institution, has been instrumental in establishing dozens of madrasas ranging from Ibtidaiyah [elementary] to Aliyah [high school] levels. The largest concentration of these madrasas remains in the Sorong and Fakfak areas. Similarly, around 1984, the leadership of Muhammadiyah initiated the establishment of several Muhammadiyah schools in Papua, culminating in the transformation of a high school in Sorong, West Papua, into Muhammadiyah University. Responding to the advocacy of Papuan Islamic figures, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia approved the construction of a State College of Islamic Studies, known as STAIN Jayapura in 2004, followed by STAIN Sorong in 2006.

Concurrently, another Islamic organization, Hidayatullah, has begun asserting its presence in Papua by establishing campuses in nearly every district in Papua Province. Currently, Hidayatullah operates in Sorong, Manokwari, Biak, Fakfak, Serui, Nabire, Jayapura, Wamena, Merauke, Kaimana, Timika, as well as in Teluk Bintuni, Raja Ampat, and pioneering efforts in Asmat, Enarotali, and Sarmi (<http://www.hidayatullah-papuabarat.com/p/sejarah-singkat.html>. akses 17/9/ 2014). This strategic focus on education as a cornerstone for da'wah in Papua has proven instrumental in advancing the development of Islam in the region.

DAKWAH TRANSFORMATIONS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ISLAM

The continuous growth of Islamic education in Papua has contributed to the development of a more skilled human resource base in the region. Many Papuan children now have access to Islamic education, with some even traveling to Java to receive religious instruction at various Islamic institutions. Upon their return, these individuals often become influential figures within the local Islamic community.

Moreover, government initiatives such as transmigration programs, which have brought many Javanese residents to Papua, have significantly increased the Muslim population. The opening of shipping routes from Java to Papua has further facilitated population movement, leading to greater exposure of Papuans to new developments in various sectors, including economics, agriculture, and socio-cultural aspects. Consequently, new economic hubs are emerging, driven by the growing Muslim community at the forefront of these

developments.

The growth of Islamic education also has broader implications for the Islamic da'wah in Papua. Not only has it led to an increase in the Muslim population, but it has also enhanced the quality of religious life in the region. The number of mosques and prayer rooms has increased, with statistics indicating a significant rise from around 300 to 2100 establishments in Papua-West Papua over the past two decades (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022). In addition, the growing presence of Papuan Muslims has strengthened their political influence, allowing them to actively engage in various political processes and assert their identity as a transformative force in the region, challenging previous stigmas of Islam as a hegemonic force.

Another intriguing aspect of the development of Islamic da'wah in Papua is the emergence of local figures as advocates for Islamic outreach. Several names gained prominence in the 1980s and 1990s and have since become increasingly recognized by the public. For instance, HM. Aipon Asso, a prominent tribal chief in the Wamena Mountains, underwent conversion to Islam along with his entire community or tribal members. Asso has played a pivotal role in fostering the growth of the Muslim community in the Wamena mountains, a role that continues to garner attention today (Muslim, 2014). Similarly, Papuan Muslim figures like Haji Sofyan Wanggai have been instrumental in the development of the Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama in Papua. Additionally, H. Ismail Bauw, also known as Raja Rumbati, has significantly contributed to Islamic preaching in the Fakfak area and its environs.

Among these figures, Ustad Fadlan Garamatan stands out as a prominent contemporary Islamic preacher. His efforts to spread Islam, particularly in remote areas of Papua, have been remarkable. Ustad Fadlan's emphasis on promoting clean and healthy living habits as part of his preaching method has resonated with many Papuans, contributing to the conversion of several tribes to Islam. His organization, *Al-Fatih Kaffah Nusantara* (AFKN), is actively involved in da'wah activities, education, and community empowerment, further solidifying his influence and reputation as a native Papuan religious leader.

Despite the development in Islamic da'wah outlined above, it has not managed to challenge the hegemony of Christianity, which has entrenched itself in various regions over time. Papua continues to be perceived as Christian territory, relegating Muslim Papuans to the status of allies of other Muslim immigrants. This situation is compounded by escalating social conflicts between the Papuan people and the Central Government in Jakarta, which is perceived to discriminate against Papuans. Protests and demonstrations

against the government frequently drag Muslim communities in a climate of conflict and unrest.

While the Muslim population in Papua and West Papua is gradually reaching an equal number with Christians, Muslims are often perceived as immigrants who have contributed to Indonesia's dominance over Papua. Consequently, Islam is viewed as the religion of immigrants rather than a native Papuan religion. Nevertheless, in places like Fakfak, Kaimana, and Merauke, Islam either equals or exceeds Christianity in terms of followers. This growing religious diversity underscores the significance of religious outreach efforts, particularly as an increasing number of native Papuans embrace Islam.

Table. 1
**Population Based on Religion
In Papua and West Papua Provinces**

Region	Islam	Christi- anity	Cathol- icism	Hindu	Bud- dhism	Others
Papua Province	320.442	689.401	60.374	1484	1602	51
West Papua Province	213.230	298.229	47.009	585	281	27
Total						

Source: Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2023

ASSERTING MUSLIM IDENTITY: EMBRACING THE ROLE OF HOST RELIGION

Despite Christianity and Catholicism maintaining their dominant positions as the majority religions in Papua, the displayed data illustrates a gradual growth of Muslims, both in terms of population and through various missionary movements. This trend is beginning to create opportunities to enhance the position of Islam, moving away from being perceived solely as an outsider religion to being accepted as a 'host' religion. A 'host' religion is one that is recognized as an integral part of Papuan culture and society, free from discrimination due to its minority status. This ongoing struggle for acceptance can be observed during significant moments for Muslims in Papua, particularly following the region's attainment of special autonomy status from the Indonesian government.

A thesis by Cahyo Pamungkas (2008) on *Islamic Papua and Special Autonomy* serves as an illustration of how minority Muslim Papuans navigate their religious identity within the predominantly Christian society of Papua. Pamungkas showcases their efforts to negotiate their identity by adopting a

flexible approach, blending elements of Islam with their Papuan identity. This involves contesting their cultural identity amidst the dynamic of immigrant Muslims and Papuan Christians in the realm of identity politics. Such dynamics became more pronounced during the 1998 reform era in Indonesia, prompting demands for special autonomy among Papuans who perceived unfair treatment.

After extensive study and debate, the Government enacted Law no. 21 of 2001 concerning Special Autonomy for Papua. However, the implementation of Special Autonomy has brought forth several significant implications for socio-political developments in Papua. These implications are not only observed in major cities such as Jayapura and Manokwari but also in regions like Fakfak, Kaimana, Raja Ampat, Sorong, and Merauke, which host considerable Muslim populations. One notable impact is the prevalence of identity politics, which manifests as symptoms of ethnocentrism. According to Levaan (2012), Special Autonomy has been interpreted as the freedom to determine one's destiny based on ethnic sentiments. This interpretation has led the entire political elite in Papua to advocate for the requirement that the Governor, Deputy Governor, Regent, and Deputy Regent in Papua must be native Papuans.

As a consequence of the Special Autonomy provisions favoring the Melanesian race in Papua, many Papuan Muslim communities face challenges regarding their Papuan identity. They are deemed insufficiently aligned with Papuan identity due to various differences in biological and cultural characteristics, including religion. Consequently, their political rights as Papuans are called into question. Papuan Muslims frequently encounter stigmatization through narratives that portray them as less authentically Papuan, aligned with the Indonesian military, or supportive of the Indonesian state. Consequently, they are subjected to numerous attacks and legal challenges.

Furthermore, Special Autonomy is often construed as a right exclusively for Papuans, thereby excluding Papuan Muslims at times. Another emerging issue in the current context of local bureaucratic segregation in Papua is the politicization of Papuan identity, which has led to the division of Papuans into distinct social strata. This informal categorization, often referred to as Papua B1, B2, B3, and B4, delineates the "status" of Papuan individuals based on their lineage. Papua B1 denotes those born in Papua to both Papuan parents, as indicated by specific surnames. Papua B2 refers to individuals born in Papua to Papuan fathers but with mothers from immigrant ethnic groups. Papua B3 comprises those born in Papua to Papuan mothers and immigrant fathers. Meanwhile, Papua B4, the lowest tier, includes individuals born and raised in Papua in recent years but with both parents originating from immigrant

ethnicities. This segregation has become particularly noticeable during civil service recruitment and the promotion of regional officials. Such conditions pose a significant challenge for the multicultural community in Papua, particularly the Muslim minority.

This situation prompted Papuan Muslims to take action, leading to the establishment of a unifying platform known as the Papuan Muslim Council (*Majelis Muslim Papua* [MRP]). This organization, as described by Cahyo Pamungkas (2008), evolved from the Papuan Muslim Solidarity (*Solidaritas Muslim Papua* [SMP]) group, which was founded by 47 Muslim leaders from diverse tribes in Papua on November 21, 1999. It appears that SMP emerged in response to the shifting political landscape in Papua following the implementation of special autonomy, which further entrenched the Christian identity of the region. Muslims representing various tribes in Papua sought to assert their presence and identity through SMP.

On April 10-13, 2007, the Papuan Muslim Solidarity (SMP) was established at the Papua Hajj Dormitory, later renamed the Papuan Muslim Council (MMP). The administrators of MMP focused on forging alliances and uniting key Islamic organizations in Papua, such as Nahdhatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, as well as the Islamic Student Association (HMI) Jayapura Branch and the Jayawidjaya Muslim Community Forum (FKMJ). Simultaneously, they aimed to strengthen the position of indigenous Papuan Muslims who felt marginalized during the post-reform political instability in Papua. MMP fostered communication and collaboration with the Papuan People's Council (MRP), established in accordance with the Special Autonomy law.

MMP is comprised of indigenous Papuan Muslim figures like Arobi A. Aituarow, who serves as its chairman. Figures such as Arobi act as cultural intermediaries with the diverse tribal groups in Papua (Pamungkas, 2008). In addition, MMP establishes networks with church communities in Papua and frequently advocates against human rights violations faced by indigenous Papuans. Criticisms leveled by MMP against the government, particularly towards the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and Indonesian National Police (POLRI) officials, are sometimes viewed as aligning with the Pro-M faction led by Toha Alhamid. However, this alignment ultimately benefits and solidifies MMP's position as an organization representing Papuan Muslim identity amidst the ongoing political turmoil between the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia [NKRI] and Independence in Papua. The efforts of MMP to advocate for the identity of Papuan Muslims have garnered support from media activists. An editor of the Papua Women's Tabloid (TSPP),

as cited by Cahyo Pamungkas (2008), hailed the establishment of MMP as an example demonstrating that Papua is not solely dominated by Christians but also comprises Muslims. MMP endeavors to portray Islam and Papua as two integrated sub-cultures.

The presence of MMP emphasizes the strong effort to secure a bargaining position, particularly in defining Islam and Papua. It asserts that Muslims are not transient religious adherents who recently arrived in Papua and are relegated to second-class citizenship. Rather, religious communities have a longstanding legacy in Papua with distinctive religious identities that deserve respect. Despite many Muslims not being indigenous Papuans, this reality does not diminish the Muslim identity among Papuans, which continues to grow steadily.

Efforts to articulate Islam as part of Papuan identity, as demonstrated by the Papuan Muslim Council, can indeed be read as an affirmative strategy, presenting Islam as an integral element in Papua's socio-political landscape (Fachruddin, 2020; Pamungkas, 2015). However, an identity politics-based approach that overly emphasizes religious symbolism has the potential to create polarization, particularly in the Papuan context, where relations between Islam and Christianity have long formed a relatively coexistent social space (Widjojo, 2010). Although the Muslim population in Papua is growing, this has not necessarily shifted the social construct that still views Islam as a "newcomer religion," a stigma reinforced by a history of migration and transmigration since the New Order era (Tebay, 2009; Sienkiewicz, 2020).

In this context, Islamic da'wah that emphasizes a cultural, participatory approach and the empowerment of indigenous Papuans holds greater promise as an integrative strategy. As Abdullah (1999) emphasized, Islam has a long history of acculturation with local cultures—and it is precisely through this process that Islam gains social legitimacy. Therefore, redefining Islam's position in Papua should not be solely through representative politics, but through deep-rooted cultural initiatives that establish Islam as a social and cultural partner in building Papua in an inclusive and civilized manner. Thus, Islam in Papua is not simply a "guest religion" but an authentic part of contemporary Papuan cultural entities.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that although Islam was the first Abrahamic religion to enter Papua, its spread did not continue to be widespread and profound, especially in the west coast. As a result, Islam tends to be perceived as a religion

of immigrants, not part of indigenous Papuan identity. Colonial domination and the expansion of Christian missions have reinforced Islam's marginal position in the Papuan religious landscape.

However, recent developments in Islamic da'wah (Islamic outreach) have shown a more transformative direction. Through education-based and empowerment approaches by organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, Alhidayah, and the Papuan Muslim Council (MUI), Muslims have begun to play an active role in shaping an inclusive Papuan identity. This signifies an effort to reposition Islam no longer as a "guest religion" but as part of Papuan culture itself.

This interdisciplinary research opens up space for dialogue between the history, sociology, and anthropology of religion. However, limitations of this study lie in the limited ethnographic data from grassroots Muslim communities and the lack of exploration of local religious expressions. Furthermore, more in-depth research into the religious experiences of Papuan Muslims at the community level, as well as integrative studies of the relationship between Islam and local culture, is needed. An interdisciplinary approach combining contextual theology, identity studies, and the sociology and anthropology of religion would be highly relevant to understanding the dynamics of Islam in the ever-changing Papuan context.

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PROPHETHOOD IN ABRAHAMIC TRADITIONS: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Abrahamic Religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—are all prophetic religions. These religions share a common lineage of prophets with shared prophets. Prophets are the medium of communication between the divine and humanity. Although the faiths share the same lineage of prophets, starting with Adam, the description of the prophetic institution varies significantly in terms of the prophetic mission, authority, and finality. The paper aims to explore the prophetic mission of the Abrahamic religions, the link connecting them on a common platform, and the differences in the understanding of the prophethood in the three faiths. A systematic comparative framework is needed to explore shared roots and distinctive developments. The paper examines the concept of prophethood in the three faiths. It utilizes primary texts alongside secondary scholarship to identify the similarities and differences in the prophetic mission and its legacy, employing a comparative-theological approach. Judaism holds its roots in the teachings of Moses, Christianity in the teachings and resurrection of Jesus Christ, whereas Islam derives from the life and mission of the Prophet Muhammad. The three religions share a standard list of prophets with significant differences in the concept. It intends to evaluate and draw a comparison of the shared notions and differences between these faiths.

Keywords: Abrahamic Faiths; Covenant; Divine Revelation; Infallibility; Prophethood

INTRODUCTION

The three faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—adhered to the covenant of Abram (later called Abraham in the Biblical context and Ibrahim in Islam), worshipping one God called by different names, Yahweh or Elohim, God or Lord, and Allah, in essence, the same God of all, are Abrahamic Faiths (Peters, 2004, p. 1). Jews, Christians, and Muslims are called the people of the Book since the covenant of Abraham unites them all, recorded in their divine scriptures. The common link between the Abrahamic religions is their chain of prophethood, which started with Adam. This shared heritage serves as a unifying force in drawing Judaism, Christianity, and Islam onto a common platform. All three religions reveal their tradition of prophethood from

Abraham as their father in faith (Rom. 4).

The shared legacy draws its roots from the Old Testament and concludes with the birth of the Prophet of Islam. The Abrahamic religions also have momentous doctrinal differences, notwithstanding these similarities. Christianity recognises Jesus' divinity and his role as the saviors, while Judaism rejects accepting him as the Messiah. Islam, on the other hand, regards Jesus as a prophet rather than a god or second person of the Godhead. Despite their differences, all three religions share a common belief in Abraham's importance and covenant with God. Islam is similar to Judaism and Christianity regarding their prophets, books, and acknowledgement of religious truth.

Prophets are a medium of direct communication between God and human beings. In other words, prophets are individuals to whom God spoke directly and who, in turn, could interact with God in a way that an average person could not (Lewis, 2005, p. 3). Prophets act as a link between God and people and manifest divine decisions. In his work, Sa'd ibn Manşūr defined a prophet as someone who gives information about the Lord without having any human intermediary between him and the Lord. It includes the one who receives the word of Allah directly or by other means, i.e., an angel, or celestial soul, or intellect from the intellects, and so on (Ibn Manşūr, n.d, p. 91-92). All the Abrahamic religions have a definite system of the institution of prophethood, ingrained in the belief that God communicates His divine will to humankind through chosen individuals, i.e., prophets.

The Abrahamic faiths share the concepts of divine revelation and prophethood, which take on distinct potentials in the Biblical and Islamic frameworks. Each faith has its scriptures, prophets, and interpretations, leading to different perspectives on the nature and role of prophets. Nonetheless, the central idea of God communicating with humanity through chosen individuals remains a unifying element among these faiths. This belief highlights the significance of prophets as intermediaries between God and humankind, conveying divine guidance and messages to navigate the challenges of their era.

In Judaism, prophets are regarded as divinely appointed messengers of Yahweh who call the people of Israel to the covenant of God. The prominent Jewish prophets are Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, who play dominant roles as judges, leaders, visionaries, and elaborate Messianic prophecies (Deut. 3:10, Book of Isaiah, and Kings). Christianity is based on the Jewish institution of prophethood (Matt. 5:17) but considers Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of prophecy, the only begotten son of God (John 3:16 and Mk. 1:1) and his ultimate revelation- the second person of the Godhead. (Nicene Creed) Islam considers prophethood (*nubuwwah*) as a basis of their faith and Prophet

Muhammad as the last prophet, enduring the chain of prophets including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (Al-Qurʾān 33:40 and 61:6).

Prophets are supported by the miracles and by God's consent to confront the challenges of their time. In the case of Moses, he was confronted by skilled Egyptian magicians. However, through God's power, Moses could perform miracles that surpassed the magicians' abilities. Similarly, Jesus' contemporaries were skilled physicians, and thus Jesus raised the dead and cured lepers and those suffering from incurable diseases. The contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad were talented poets; the Qurʾān revealed to Muhammad by Allah was a literary and linguistic miracle that no other poet could match or surpass. The miraculous nature of the Qurʾān served as a testament to the divine origin of the Qurʾān and the prophethood of Muhammad.

Prophets generally arise during cultural and economic tension when people feel threatened, deprived, unsure, or ill at ease (s.v. 1984 (22), p. 663). Prophets restore humanity to the turbulent society of their day. Prophets are endowed with the mission and power of a word not their own but from a divine will, preaching a universal message to the audience. Prophets clearly state that whatever they speak is not their manifestation but from their Lord for the betterment of humankind. They confirm what was revealed before them and what will be revealed after conveying the message entrusted to them from the Lord. Thus, the word of God is reverberated in a man's voice. "The prophet's theme is, first of all, the very life of a whole people, and his identification lasts more than a moment. He is one not only with what he says; he is involved with his people in what his words foreshadow" (Heschel, 1962, p. 6). This paper explores the concept of prophethood as a shared institution among the Abrahamic faiths, highlighting their theological commonalities and key doctrinal differences.

This paper will employ a qualitative methodology integrating comparative, historical, and theological approaches to examine prophetic institutions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Textual and discourse analysis of primary sources—including scriptures and traditional literature like the Talmud and hadith—is used to compare the prophetic mission, attributes, and authority. This study ensures theological fidelity and critical engagement from an interdisciplinary perspective by situating each tradition within its socio-religious landscape and drawing on modern scholarship.

PROPHETHOOD IN JUDAISM

In the Biblical tradition, the word "prophet" derives from the Greek term

prophētēs, meaning one who speaks on behalf of God. It originates from the Hebrew term *navi*, which comes from the Akkadian *nabū*, meaning “to proclaim” (Schwartz, 2011, p. 583). Jewish prophethood is based on the belief that God chooses specific individuals to be prophets before birth. The Old Testament recounts, “Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jer. 1:5). The Bible mentions various titles for the prophets, such as *roeh*, meaning seer (1 Samuel 9:9), *hozeh*, also meaning seer (2 Samuel 24:1 and Amos 7:12-13), and *ish ha ‘Elohim*, meaning man of God or holy man (1 Samuel 9:6 and 2 Kings 4:9). The prophets serve as direct vessels of divine communication to the people, revealing God’s mercy and establishing His covenant with the Israelites. The prophetic writings, which are divinely inspired, manifest the divine and embody the concept of an ever-present, living, and self-determined God, the foundation of the spirit of prophecy (Davidson, 1903, p. 78). Referred to as men of God (1 Samuel 9:6 and 1 Kings 12:22), prophets are more closely associated with God than others, illustrating the moral and ethical concerns surrounding the institution of prophethood in Judaism. Hebrew prophecy aims to uphold Yahweh as the eternal, living God, providing spiritual guidance to the chosen nation, specifically, the Israelites. Consequently, the prophetic mission is spiritually religious, focused on instilling ethical ideals among the people (König, 1956 (10), p. 387). The Jewish prophets condemned social inequalities and injustices faced by the poor and oppressed while rejecting idolatry. Their primary concern was the upliftment of ethical covenants, regardless of social class (Amos 5:21-24). The Biblical prophets acted as reformers, advocating for repentance and cautionary measures against idolatry and injustices. The primary purpose of the prophets was to emphasise the fulfilment of the obligations of the Mosaic covenant for the spiritual and moral development of the Israelites, as well as their faithfulness to divine law.

The institution of prophethood in Jewish tradition forms the social fabric of Israelite society. However, there is a belief that the prophethood was specially reserved for the Israelite nation; only Israelite prophets were chosen to establish the divine covenant between Yahweh and the people. The Israelites were specially selected to be the deliverers and depositaries of the revelation. Only seven people among the Gentiles were deemed prophets, but they held a degree lower than the Israelite prophets. The Talmud elaborates on the parable of a king. When the king wished to interact with his friend, he lifted the curtain (in case of Israelites), but talked to the people behind the curtain (when conversing with Gentiles). Similarly, the parable of a king having a wife and a concubine. The king visits his wife publicly (in the case of the Israelites)

and secretly with his concubine (Gentiles). This shows that the Judaic system of prophethood holds special love and holiness for the Israelites over the Gentiles (Cohen, 1995, pp. 121-22). Moses Ben Maimon, commonly known as Maimonides (1138-1204), a Jewish philosopher and a Rabbi, discussed the different opinions and levels of prophethood. First, to attain the prophecy, a prophet must have moral perfection, intellectual perfection, and a sound imaginative faculty. It is the capability based on divine selection. Secondly, a prophet must have a higher level of human intellect to interact and understand the people best. Third, the hierarchy of the prophetic experience is divinely selected. It lays down the importance of divine acceptance and approval for the prophethood (Maimonides, 1904, pp. 219-21).

A peculiar feature of the Judaic and Christian notion of prophethood is the recognition of the female prophets. In the Judaic tradition, seven prophetesses of the Israelite nation were identified namely Sarah (Gen. 11:29-23:20), Deborah (Jud. 4 and 5), Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Hannah (1 Sam. 1-2), Abigail (1 Sam. 25), Huldah (2 Kgs. 22:14), and Esther (Est. 4) (Rodkinson, 1916, p. 36). In Judaism, prophetic utterances are the principal experiences of a prophet, denoting a feeling of fellowship with God and a communion with the divine consciousness, as well as sympathy towards the divine pathos. "The prophet's theme is, first of all, the very life of a whole people, and his identification lasts more than a moment. He is one not only with what he says; he is involved with his people in what his words foreshadow" (Heschel, 1962, p. 6). The prophetesses served differently from prophets in the Biblical tradition, but their presence marks the importance of gender equality in the prophetic tradition.

The Jewish prophets are categorised into former and later prophets in the section of the Hebrew Bible called *Nevi'im*. The former consists of the Book of Joshua, Samuel, and Kings, containing the narratives of the journey of the Israelites in the promised land, the rise and fall of the kings, the establishment of their monarchy, and the teachings of the pre-classical prophets, including Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha. The themes of the warning, repentance, and the message of hope and restoration are the key concepts of the prophetic books. The later prophets include the 12 minor prophets, including Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, addressing the issues of social justice, faithfulness to Yahweh, and the restoration of Israel. The classical period of prophecy, which extended from Amos to Malachi (9th to 5th century BCE), featured prophets from diverse social backgrounds who boldly challenged national leaders and often faced persecution. They used symbolic actions to convey their

messages, emphasising moral integrity over mere ritual observance. Though they acknowledged the Temple cult, they condemned those who neglected ethical conduct. Tradition holds that prophecy ended with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (Dan and Sherbok, 2004, p. 124). In Judaism, the cessation of prophecy was with Malachi (Mal. 1:1). Since then, no new prophet has come to the Israelites, and they have been waiting for the Messiah for their ethical transformation and salvation. However, they denied the prophethood and messiahship of Jesus Christ.

PROPHETHOOD IN CHRISTIANITY

In Christianity, a prophet is defined as a “Christian who functions within the Church, occasionally or regularly, as a divinely called and divinely inspired speaker who receives intelligible and authoritative revelations or messages which he is impelled to deliver publicly, or in oral or written form, to Christian individuals and/or the Christian community” (Hill, 1979, pp. 8-9). Christianity follows the Judaic system of prophethood, culminating with Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, and an atonement for people’s sins. The basis of prophethood in Christianity is rooted in the Jewish notion of prophets. However, they regard Jewish prophets as the foretellers of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God and second person of Godhead. Jesus is described as the promised prophet of the Old Testament, as promised in Deuteronomy 18:18, asserted in John 1:45, 5:39, and Acts 3:22. Jesus Christ is not considered just a prophet in Christianity; his blood is the remission of the sins of mankind, begotten from Adam. In the Christian tradition, Jesus is considered the greatest prophet (Lk. 7:16) in the line of Hebrew prophets (Acts 3:22). However, his presence is not limited to a prophet only delivering the message of the Lord; he acts as a mediator between the Lord and the human world by offering himself as an atonement for the sins of mankind.

The concept of prophethood shifted in emphasis in Christianity. Jesus Christ is regarded as the ultimate prophet, the Son of God, and the Messiah. He is seen as the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament and bringing a new covenant between God and humanity by his salvation on the cross. The crucifixion on the cross elevated his status beyond prophets and existed before prophets (Abraham), according to the Christian belief (John 8:58). Jesus is considered the foundation of the unity within the Church. In the Apostolic age, the three characteristic features of Jesus’ description are expounded in the work of Harnack. Firstly, Jesus was recognised as the living Lord; secondly, the followers of Jesus recognized the experience with Jesus and the consciousness of the Lord; and thirdly, the return of Christ, that is, the second coming of

Christ, was awaited by Jesus' followers (Harnack, 1902, pp. 164-65). According to Christian belief, Jesus is said to have the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father. The core belief of Christianity is that Jesus is fully God and the second person of the Godhead, not a created being, but existing since eternity. Only then can the Son be the true revelation of the Father. The Son is consubstantial and co-eternal with the Father, as established in the Council of Nicaea.

However, there has been a dispute about the person of Christ since the first century. The existence of different sects of early Jewish Christianity raised questions about the person of Christ. The Ebionites rejected the divinity of Jesus and considered him a prophet, whereas Docetists considered Jesus to be God. Another heresy, the Alogoi, rejected the concept of the divine Logos. The issues jumped and erupted fiercely in the first three centuries and were resolved in various Ecumenical councils (Priestley, 1871, pp. 11). Further, in Pseudo-Clementine literature, Jesus and the early Christians are depicted as Jewish Christians upholding Jewish laws and following the rites of Baptism. In the writings of Clementine Homilies, Jesus Christ is depicted as a true prophet, stressing the commandments of Moses (Homily 8:6-7). Concerning Jesus as God, the Homilies refuted Christ as God but as God's son since the Father is unbegotten and Jesus is begotten and cannot be of the same substance. He emphasises that Jesus is of the same substance as everyone else, clothed with the breath of God (The Clementine Homilies, 16:15-16, 252-53). The issue persists in modern times in the writings of critical writers. In the works of Weigall, the teachings of Jesus were suppressed by the Hellenistic wisdom of Paul, for he was more concerned with the sacrificial death of Christ rather than his earthly teachings. Paul preferred the ecstatic picture of the divine Christ instead of Jesus the man and prophet. Paul's revelation of the sacrificial lamb of God for the remission of the sins of humanity dominated the teachings and the wisdom taught by Jesus Christ (Weigall, 1928, pp. 276-77).

In Christianity, the prophethood is not limited to the Jewish prophets and Jesus but extends to the apostles. The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). The second Pentecostal blessing was received by all who heard the message (Acts 10:44 and 19:6). Thus, those people were chosen and endowed with this spiritual gift (1 Cor. 14:1). The ongoing prophecy involves the divine guidance, spiritual enlightenment even after the completion of the Bible. It is considered one of the everlasting gifts of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of prophecy is revealed by Christ to the Apostles when He breathes upon them, allegorically conveying divine vision. The prophetic leadership is confirmed when Christ guarantees that the Holy Spirit will guide them to the truth. Their decree to prophesy is conveyed in the knock: "*What*

you hear in the ear, proclaim from the housetops.” Prophets are considered in the Book of Acts as recognised teachers in the early Christian community, and Paul includes them among the ministries of the Church. According to Paul, the minister’s faith is both the basis and the degree of prophetic exclamation (Abbott, 1896, pp. 11-12).

Regarding the ongoing prophecy in Christianity, Irenaeus, a second-century scholar, asserts that since man was created in God’s image, prophecy is a spiritual gift declared by the apostles (1 Cor. 2:6). The people receive the spirit. Those who accept that spirit possess spiritual gifts and mysteries of God (Saint Irenaeus, Book V, Chapter 6). The verse in the Revelation of John states, “Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’” (Rev. 19:10). It emphasizes the essence of the ongoing prophecy centered around the testimony of Jesus Christ. This statement was used in the early church as the standard criterion for distinguishing between true and false prophets. True prophets exhibited a deep connection with the message of Jesus, establishing the discernment for the authenticity of the individuals claiming prophecy (Andrews, 1920, p. 940). Thus, the prophethood in Christianity starts with the Hebrew prophets to the birth of a son of God, Jesus Christ, expelling the original sin of humanity and ongoing prophecy for those having faith in the blood of Christ as the remission of sins.

PROPHETHOOD IN ISLAM

In Islam, there is a specific institution of prophethood starting from the Judaic and Christian prophets and culminating with the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. The institution of *Nubuwwah* forms the backbone of Islamic belief and practices. The Arabic word *Nubuwwah* is derived from the root word *naba’u*, which means news or to announce (Ibn Manzūr, 1984a, s.v. “Naba’a” p. 162). Alternatively, the word *risālah* is also used. The word *risālah* is derived from the root word *rasala*, which means to send or to deliver (Ibn Manzūr, 1984 (11), s.v. p. 281). A prophet is someone who has received a revelation from Allah and then communicates that revelation to others. He qualifies as a Messenger if he is sent to those who disobey Allah’s commands to deliver a message from Allah to them. A prophet is a messenger when he delivers the unseen message of Allah to the people. However, a prophet is not considered a messenger if he is sent as a successor of the former prophets to preach the message proclaimed by them already. Every messenger is a prophet, but not every prophet is a messenger (Al-‘Izz, 2000, p. 85). In the

works of Ibn Taymiyyah, prophethood is defined as a mediation between the Creator and the creature in conveying His law, an embassy between the king and his servants, and a call from the Most Merciful to bring them out of darkness into light and transfer them from the narrowness of this world to the spaciousness of this world and the Hereafter (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2000, p. 19). In Islam, the chain of the prophethood starts from Adam and incorporates all the Judaic and Christian prophets, culminating with the birth of the last prophet of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, the seal of the prophets.

The Qur'an recognises the prophets of the Old and New Testaments and names explicitly the 25 prophets, most of whom are shared by all the Abrahamic traditions. However, the Biblical and Islamic narratives differ greatly in narration and emphasis. The role of a prophet is understood in the fact that most people are made in a way that prevents them from understanding their rights and obligations without a mediator confirming Allah's proof (*hujjah*) for His servants in sending the prophets. Instead, their capacity is weak, allowing the prophets' messages to strengthen it, or there are evils among them that can only be stopped by force against their will because they will be held accountable in this life and the next. Allah's grace requires that when certain higher and lower causes come together, He will motivate the most upright individuals to lead them to the truth and beckon them to the right path (Dahlawi, 2005, p. 157). Without the community's support, the prophet's message may struggle to reach others; even if it does, it can be easily distorted. The Qur'an acknowledges this responsibility placed on the prophets, stating that on the day of judgment, the messengers and the people to whom they were sent will be questioned about their actions and interactions (al-Qur'an 7:7).

While upholding the duty of a prophet, it is necessary to proclaim the message of God loudly and without compromising the truth (al-Qur'an 5:67 and 15:94) without having any reservation in their minds (al-Qur'an 7:2). Thus, a prophet is chosen to convey this divine message to the people. In the works of Ibn Khaldūn, he highlights the prophets' efforts in conveying this sacred message. He states that, "God has chosen certain individuals. He honored them by addressing them. He created them so that they might know Him. He made them connect the links between Himself and His servants. (These individuals) are to acquaint their fellow men with what is good for them and to urge them to let themselves be guided aright. They are to make it their task to keep (their fellow men) out of the fire of Hell and to show them the path to salvation. The knowledge that God gave these individuals, and the wonders He manifested through their statements, indicated that there exist things beyond the reach

of man, that can be learned only from God through the mediation of (these individuals), and that (these individuals themselves) cannot know unless God instructs them in them” (Ibn Khaldūn, 1958, p. 184). The fundamental principle of Islam lies in the belief in all the prophets without distinguishing between any of them (al-Qur’ān 2:285).

The key belief in the institution of prophethood in Islam is that the message of all the previous prophets has been distorted, and to renew that message, Allah sent down his last prophet in the chain of the people of the Book. Prophet Muhammad is referred to as the *khātam al-Nabīyīn* or *khatam al-Anbiyā’* (the seal of the prophets) as mentioned in the Qur’ān: “Muhammad is not the father of [any] one of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of Allah and last of the prophets” (Al-Qur’ān 33:40). In his works, Imām Qurṭubī (1214-1273) states that all the traditional and contemporary scholars of the ‘Ummah agree that the words *khātam al-Nabīyīn* are entirely general (i.e., understood in their apparent meaning). These words demand no prophet after Muhammad as a clear textual stipulation. Refuting those who interpret the words *khātam al-Nabīyīn* in a manner that runs counter to the finality of prophethood is heresy and a cunning attempt to undermine Muslim belief in that concept (Al-Qurṭubī, 2006 (17), pp. 65-67).

Thus, the core doctrine of Islam is the finality of Muhammad being the last of the prophets, and no prophet will follow him. This belief is so essential to Islam that to deny the prophets’ finality is to deny the Qur’ān. Further, the prophets are free from all sorts of sins, whether major or minor, and never worship idols or assign partners to Allah. Prophets are divinely shielded from disobeying any of the commandments of Allah as they are sent on a divine mission. Therefore, a Muslim’s belief about the prophets is what the Qur’ān teaches about their lofty and sublime status.

ABRAHAMIC FAITHS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Fundamentally, Abrahamic religions believe that God communicates with humanity through prophets. The prophets provide God’s commandments and spiritual direction, and this belief is ingrained in the spiritual teachings of these faiths. Although Abrahamic religions follow a standard notion of the prophetic institution, they significantly differ in their prophetic descriptions. The significant difference between the Biblical and Islamic institution of prophethood is the fallibility/ infallibility of prophets. The Biblical prophets recognize the high standards and virtues of prophets divinely appointed for Yahweh’s mission, but consider them as other individuals capable of making mistakes and committing sins. The case of David having affairs with Bathsheba

and arranging the killing of his husband (2 Sam. 11), Elijah's fear and doubt and questioning his prophethood (1 Kgs. 19), Solomon's worship of foreign God's (1 Kgs. 11), daughters of Lot having conceived by her father to continue the lineage (Gen. 19: 30-38) and Jacob tricking his father Issac for receiving the blessing (Gen. 27). This flawed nature is due to the potentiality of human imperfect nature- the need for the forgiveness and repentance. Christianity strictly adheres to the sinlessness of Jesus Christ, while other previous prophets were fallible. On the other hand, Islam strictly adheres to the infallibility of the prophets from any kind of sin or mistake. The Islamic belief of prophethood rejects the Israelite narratives of the prophets as fabricated narratives. Islamic tradition presents prophets as morally exemplary for the people, divinely protected from every type of major sin.

Regarding the prophets' message, the Israelite people shared Yahweh's covenant, which was reserved for their nation alone. This covenant was not meant for any other country or tribe. The Talmud references where Israelite prophets held a more favorable position than non-Israelite prophets. On the other hand, Christianity shared the universal message of Jesus Christ for all nations. This message held equal importance to the Gentiles as that of the Jews. Jesus was sent for the universal salvation of all humanity. Jesus is seen as the scapegoat for the sins of humanity, and his two advents mark the importance of the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies. The suffering and the crucifixion of Jesus mark the first advent. The second advent glorifies the power, judgment, establishment of the kingdom of God, and fulfillment of Messianic hopes in Jesus (Martyr, 1930, pp. 79-81). However, the Jews reject his messiahship, and his presence is not mentioned in any of his contemporary Jewish writings. Except in the writings of Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (37-100) in *Antiquitates Iudaicae* and Tacitus (56-120) in *Annals*, no other Jewish writer mentions him. On the contrary, the Islamic message of monotheism had a universal appeal upheld by every prophet. The Qur'ān stresses the universal messenger of the prophethood that to every nation a prophet was sent (al-Qur'ān16:36). The prophets' message in the Islamic narrative transcended every race and tribe, and every Muslim shared equal reward with God. In the writings of Orientalists, the universal message of the prophets was the reason for Islam's success, accepted by all, especially the vulnerable class of society (Armstrong, 2001, pp. x-xi).

In Judaism, Yahweh had a special covenant with the Israelite people. In contrast, the Christian belief holds that a new covenant was established in the blood of Jesus, offering redemption for all those who believe in Him (Lk. 22:20). In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul expounds on the exceptional splendour of

Jesus' new covenant to the law of Moses (2 Cor. 3:7-18). The description of Jesus changed after the Transfiguration event. Jesus, at that point in history, is supposed to fulfil all the prophecies of the Old Testament. The alignment does not concentrate on the suffering of the Messiah and the coming glory. This event represents Jesus as the splendour of the kingdom of God and his Messianic declaration (Liefeld, 1974, pp. 178-79). Islam rejects all the claims of Christians as being distorted. The Qur'an mentions the pledge taken from the prophets to believe in the finality of the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad. "And [recall, O People of the Scripture], when Allah took the covenant of the prophets, [saying], "Whatever I give you of the Scripture and wisdom and then there comes to you a messenger confirming what is with you, you [must] believe in him and support him." [Allah] said, "Have you acknowledged and taken upon that My commitment?" They said, "We have acknowledged it." He said, "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses" (Al-Qur'an 3:81).

In Abrahamic faiths, different prophets uphold the prime identity according to the tradition's theological framework. In Judaism, Moses is considered the foremost prophet for his ability to communicate directly with Yahweh for the reception of the Torah (ten commandments). Further, Biblical prophecy began with Moses as a prophet, deeply rooted in his close connection with God, performing extraordinary signs and liberating the Israelites from Egypt. Moses was blessed with the ability to perform miracles, such as turning the river Nile into blood, parting the sea, and is thus considered a prophet par excellence. Moses is portrayed in the Bible in three ways. Firstly, as a leader for liberating the Israelites into a cohesive society. Secondly, as a promoter of the religion of Yahweh, He revealed His name (Yahweh) and introduced them to the new aspect of religion by revealing commandments and laws. Thirdly, as a prophet and a law-giver, it was Moses who taught the Israelites the method of worship, and all the later prophets upheld the Law of Moses (Neile, 1909, pp. 633-34). In Christianity, all the prophets preceding Jesus Christ serve as foretellers of the coming of Christ, who existed before all the prophets as the Son of God. Jesus Christ is considered the greatest and foremost prophet in Christianity. With the arrival of Jesus and his new covenant, all the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled with the blood of Christ. (2 Cor. 3:7-18). The orientation now focused on the suffering of the Messiah and the coming glory. The Last Supper, also called the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-30; Mk. 14:22-26; Lk. 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25), holds prime importance in Christianity, that is, Jesus' historical reconstruction of the old covenant. It gave rise to the new covenant by the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, that is, the atonement of the sins of all who believe in him as predicted

in John (the sacrificial lamb of God- Jn. 1:29). Jesus' ransom serves as the cornerstone of the new covenant, emphasising harmony and reconciliation for those who observe the Lord's Supper. In Islam, Prophet Muhammad, the final and last prophet, culminates the chain of prophethood (Al-Qur'ān33:40). His teachings surpass the teachings of all the previous prophets. The Islamic belief is that the earlier prophets' writings and teachings cannot be traced back reliably, making it difficult to determine the original teachings. Furthermore, the message of Prophet Muhammad was intended for the entire humanity, unlike earlier prophets who were sent to a specific nation. The life of Prophet Muhammad is the only prophetic description with complete detailing and written in the light of history (Mawdūdī, 2018, pp. 153-58).

The Abrahamic religions have a peculiar feature: man has been created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*). However, this concept differs in the faiths based on the theology and the understanding of the nature of God. Judaism draws likeness of man in the image of God based on the divine spirit. The spirit (*ruach*) breathed into man directly from the divine specifically makes a person a self with the power to determine his actions and control his nature, and above all, an ethical being able to direct himself towards God or move away. In Christianity, the original sin damaged the image, and the universal restoration of the image is offered in Jesus Christ. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature, and the old things have passed away. Thus, Jesus Christ is seen as the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). The image of God in the sinful man is renewed in the image of Jesus Christ, with the belief that Christ is all and is in all (Col. 3:11) (Davidson, 1956, pp. 160-63). In Islam, the image of God is not explicitly used. It rejects all the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the verse, "There is nothing like unto Him" (Al-Qur'ān 42:11). However, there are references that Allah created Adam in his image (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī 6227 and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2841). In Islam, it refers to man as an honored creation, as man was the last of the creation of Allah, and there is no likeness in the essence of man with that of Allah. The *muḥadithūn* have rejected any anthropomorphic comparison of God with man.

SUGGESTIONS AND RELEVANCE

The paper explores the comparative analysis of the prophetic institution in the Abrahamic faiths. It holds significant relevance in contemporary times' changing religious and social contexts. Religious misunderstandings, innocent killings, interfaith tensions, global religious issues, and the most recent and ongoing religious tension between nations have impacted the whole world. The recent decade has witnessed countless innocent killings in

the name of faith and political pressure. All are witnessing the global moral vacuum, and there is a need for a renewed and amplified framework of ethical and faith-based guidance. By exploring the theological foundations of the Abrahamic religions and the portrayal of their prophetic institution, all of them share the values of justice, truth, compassion, and above all, a shared prophetic legacy. The prophets' shared ethical teachings, spiritual values, and their shared moral responsibility can foster mutual respect and interfaith understanding among the faiths in times of global tension. This research offers an insightful contribution to the future dialogue among these faiths. Awareness of the convergences and divergences in prophetic teachings can assist in removing stereotypes, opening the doors of empathy, and building a platform for addressing contemporary moral and religious challenges. The prophetic model of bringing all the religions to a common platform will lead to the ethical reformation and the peaceful coexistence of the religions. The scope of trialogue is not a new concept in academics. It has been done in the past also, but there is a need for the renewed model to encourage violence-free religious preferences. From an academic viewpoint, the research enriches the developing subjects of comparative religion, theology, and hermeneutics by employing a comprehensive methodological approach that creates avenues for applying traditional theological ideas to contemporary issues, thus connecting the divide between historical religious scholarship and current realities.

CONCLUSION

All the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—fundamentally believe in the institution of prophethood, in which God speaks to people through prophets as divinely appointed messengers to convey God's word. This belief forms the foundational doctrine of these religions, deeply rooted in their scriptural teachings. The Abrahamic religions are united by their reverence for prophets and their central role in mediating the relationship between God and humanity. However, the significance, nature of the revelation, and understanding of prophethood are interpreted differently in Biblical and Islamic terms. Sharing the common prophets, especially Abraham, Moses, and others, the role, status, and interpretation of these prophets vary significantly in these faiths. While Judaism highlights the role of a prophet as a moral teacher and a reformer for the Israelites and the ability to predict future events, convey divine revelation and guidance, prophecy ceased with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, marking the end of the biblical era of prophets. Christianity, while acknowledging the Old Testament prophets, considers them as foretellers of the greatest prophet and the son of God, Jesus Christ, who served as a messiah and a savior of humanity from the destruction

of the original sin by offering himself as a sacrificial lamb, restoring the divine relationship of God and people. He is seen as a universal savior instead of focusing only on Jews. On the other hand, Islam recognises the Biblical chain of prophets and considers them the people of the Book, culminating with the Prophet Muhammad, the final and the seal of all prophets. Despite the difference in the interpretation and the understanding of the prophetic mission, all the Abrahamic faiths adhere to the belief that God sends divine guidance, upholding the Law, and spiritual direction via prophets, focusing on the shared veneration and sacred communication between God and the whole of humanity until the end of the world and the hereafter.

All the Abrahamic religions share the same roots, tracing back to Abraham. History has witnessed the unending conflicts and tensions among the sister religions- political, social, territorial, and economic concerns. All the conflicts are deeply rooted in the religious doctrines despite sharing a common lineage. The Israel-Palestine war, Christian-Muslim conflicts, Israel-Iranian conflict, the rising antisemitism and Islamophobia in the West have intensified the scope of reconciliation. Religion can be a binding force among these faiths, sharing a similar ethical and social message. Thus, interfaith dialogue is needed in contemporary times to restore peace and harmony. The renewed efforts are needed for conflict resolution as a mutual responsibility of these faiths.

The study is primarily limited to the theological and textual analysis of the canons of the faiths and their understanding of the prophetic institution. Although it employs a doctrinal framework, it does not count the socio-political dynamics and their impact on the prophetic institution in the changing times and the contemporary reinterpretations. The research prospects can incorporate the ethnographic fieldwork in diverse religious and cultural contexts. The interdisciplinary approach, incorporating theology, sociology, and politics, can reinterpret the prophetic institution to combat the modern-day challenges.

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