



## **MAINTAINING HARMONY: STRATEGIES OF RELIGIOUS AND CUSTOMARY LEADERS IN BUILDING ISLAM-CHRISTIAN HARMONY IN GULILING VILLAGE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to examine the strategies of religious and traditional leaders in maintaining harmonious relations between Muslims and Christians in Guliling Village. Religious diversity living side by side at the local level requires a contextual approach so that potential conflicts can be avoided, and social harmony is maintained. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the social practices that shape interfaith harmony. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with religious leaders, traditional leaders, and the community, accompanied by direct observation and review of supporting documents. The results of the study show that harmony in Guliling Village develops through a process involving local cultural values, social closeness, and the example set by community leaders. Social relations. This study contributes to the development religious figures play a role in instilling values of tolerance and mutual respect through religious guidance, while customary leaders strengthen social harmony by preserving local wisdom that emphasizes interfaith brotherhood. Tolerance is manifested in everyday practices, such as respecting the implementation of worship, observing dietary boundaries, and participating in joint social activities. These findings affirm that harmony among religious communities is stronger when built through cultural approaches and sustainable studies on interfaith harmony based on local wisdom in multicultural societies.*

### **Kata kunci:**

Kerukunan antarumat  
beragama; Tokoh agama;  
Tokoh adat; Kearifan lokal;  
Masyarakat multikultural

### **ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji strategi tokoh agama dan tokoh adat dalam menjaga keharmonisan hubungan antara umat Islam dan Kristen di Desa Guliling. Keberagaman Agama yang hidup berdampingan di tingkat lokal membutuhkan pendekatan yang kontekstual agar potensi konflik dapat dihindari dan kerukunan sosial tetap terjaga. Penelitian ini menggunakan



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pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus untuk memahami secara mendalam praktik-praktik sosial yang membentuk harmoni antarumat beragama. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan tokoh agama, tokoh adat, dan masyarakat, disertai observasi langsung serta telaah dokumen pendukung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kerukunan di Desa Guliling tumbuh secara Proses melalui nilai budaya lokal, kedekatan sosial, serta keteladanan para tokoh masyarakat. Tokoh Agama berperan dalam menanamkan nilai toleransi dan sikap saling menghormati melalui pembinaan keagamaan, sedangkan Tokoh Adat memperkuat harmoni sosial dengan menjaga kearifan lokal yang menekankan persaudaraan lintas agama. Toleransi diwujudkan dalam praktik kehidupan sehari-hari, seperti saling menghargai pelaksanaan ibadah, menjaga batasan konsumsi makanan, dan keterlibatan dalam kegiatan sosial bersama. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa harmoni antaraumat beragama lebih kuat ketika dibangun melalui pendekatan kultural dan relasi sosial yang berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi bagi pengembangan studi kerukunan umat beragama berbasis kearifan lokal di masyarakat multikultural.

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is recognized as a nation characterized by a highly diverse population in terms of religion, ethnicity, culture, and traditions. This diversity constitutes a significant strength in national life; however, at the same time, it may also pose challenges in maintaining social relations. Therefore, efforts to preserve interreligious harmony are essential in order to foster a peaceful and harmonious life within a pluralistic society.

The diverse nature of society requires individuals to cultivate mutual respect and to practice their religious teachings with wisdom, so that existing differences do not become sources of conflict. In this context, values such as respect for diversity, mutual understanding, and openness serve as essential foundations for strengthening social cohesion within a pluralistic community (Kurniasih et al., 2022; Rofiq et al., 2024).

The role of religious and traditional leaders is crucial in maintaining harmony within society. Religious leaders serve as key agents in promoting values of tolerance, moderation, and social cohesion through various platforms, such as sermons, interfaith dialogues, and religious education activities. On the other hand, traditional leaders, with their cultural authority and influence, function as intermediaries between religious teachings and local traditions. They play an important role in ensuring that cultural values and diversity are respected and collectively upheld within the community. (Dwi & Wardani, 2025)

A number of studies indicate that collaboration between religious and traditional leaders—through interfaith dialogue forums, customary-based deliberations, joint social activities, and the promotion of moderation and mutual respect—plays a significant role



in fostering harmonious life within diverse communities. Nevertheless, the implementation of these strategies is not uniform across regions. Each community possesses distinct social, cultural, and historical contexts; therefore, the approaches employed are typically adapted to the characteristics of the local environment, particularly in rural areas. (Ritonga, 2025)

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study focuses on Guliling Village to examine more closely how religious and traditional leaders collaborate in designing and implementing various strategies to maintain harmonious relations between Muslim and Christian communities. The study also seeks to understand the extent to which these efforts are effective in fostering a social environment characterized by harmony and mutual respect. Through this investigation, it is expected to provide a clearer understanding of the practices of tolerance and religious moderation within a local context, as well as to offer an example of approaches that may be applied to multicultural communities in other regions of Indonesia.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to directly explore how religious and traditional leaders maintain harmonious social relations between Muslim and Christian communities in Guliling Village. The site was selected due to its long-standing coexistence without significant conflict, thereby providing a suitable context for observing practices of social harmony in a real-life setting.

The selection of informants was conducted purposively, including religious leaders, traditional leaders, and community representatives involved in interfaith activities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation of religious and social activities, as well as the review of village documents and relevant archives. Data analysis followed the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman, encompassing data reduction, thematic data display, and conclusion drawing.

## **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Harmony between Muslim and Christian Families in Guliling Village**

One of the Islamic religious leaders explained that since the establishment of Guliling Village, relations among religious communities have never experienced significant tension. As stated by Mr. Musa, “Since the establishment of Guliling in 1972, unity has never weakened; mutual respect for each other’s customs has always been maintained between Muslim and Christian communities”. (Musa, personal communication, December 16, 2025)



He further added that such practices of tolerance have become a tradition passed down from generation to generation. As stated by Mr. Resmi, “Here, tolerance has been inherited across generations”. (Resmi, personal communication, December 16, 2025)

The interview excerpt indicates that interreligious harmony between Muslim and Christian communities in Guliling Village is not a condition that emerged spontaneously, but rather the result of a long-term social process. Social harmony is understood as a collective value that is inherited and collectively maintained by the community. This finding is consistent with previous research (Azahra, 2022), which suggests that tolerance rooted in local traditions tends to be more stable, as it is embedded in the social memory of the community.

Research by Mahfud and Muttakin (2025) further emphasizes that harmony transmitted across generations possesses greater resilience compared to tolerance that is established solely through formal regulations. In the context of Guliling Village, the value of tolerance has become an integral part of the community’s identity.

A community leader in Guliling Village explained that social relations among residents have remained harmonious without significant friction since he settled in the village. According to him, misunderstandings arising from differences in social or religious backgrounds have never occurred.

As stated by one of the informants, “As long as I have lived here, الحمد لله (alhamdulillah), there have never been any misunderstandings” (Musa, personal communication, December 16, 2025). He further explained that in everyday social interactions, residents do not experience any sense of awkwardness. As he noted, “Regarding feelings of awkwardness, I believe there are none, as the Toraja and Mamasa ethnic groups share similarities in language, which makes it easier for them to interact and integrate”. (Musa, personal communication, Desember 16, 2025)

Linguistic similarities and cultural proximity among community groups further strengthen mutual trust. Chotimah and El (2018) explain that local cultural factors serve as social capital that facilitates interaction across different identities. In addition, the transmission of cultural values to younger generations constitutes a key factor in sustaining social harmony, as emphasized by (Hermawan, n.d.).

This statement indicates that social communication in Guliling Village is constructed through ongoing processes shaped by cultural proximity and shared local language. Moreover, linguistic and cultural similarities play a significant role in fostering a sense of security and social closeness within a multicultural society.



## 2. The Practice of Tolerance in Everyday Life

Concrete forms of tolerance are evident in everyday community activities, particularly in consumption and social practices. One informant explained, “When Christians hold events involving animal slaughter, it is conducted at a distance as a form of respect for Muslims” (Resmi, personal communication, December 16, 2025).

Another Islamic religious leader added that Christian communities have a strong understanding of dietary restrictions observed by Muslims: “Christians clearly understand which foods are not permissible for Muslims; they refrain from eating when Muslims do not eat” (Musa, personal communication, December 16, 2025).

In addition, tolerance is also reflected in religious practices: “They have never felt disturbed by the worship activities conducted in the mosque, such as the call to prayer (adhan); in fact, they appreciate hearing it” (Musa, personal communication, December 16, 2025).

The interview data indicate that tolerance in Guliling Village is manifested through empathy and interreligious awareness. The attitudes of Christian communities, particularly in adapting slaughtering practices and food consumption, reflect a profound understanding of Islamic teachings. This finding is consistent with Takhim et al. (2022), who argue that practical forms of tolerance are more effective than symbolic expressions of tolerance.

(Dan & Sosial, 2018) This reinforces the notion that respect for the religious practices of others constitutes a strong indicator of social harmony. In the context of Guliling Village, the call to prayer (adhan) is not perceived as a disturbance, but rather as an integral part of shared communal life.

One concrete strategy for maintaining interreligious harmony in Guliling Village is the implementation of active tolerance through self-restraint in social spaces. Tolerance is not merely understood as a symbolic expression of mutual respect, but is manifested in concrete actions that demonstrate empathy toward the religious practices of others. Sianturi (2024) emphasizes that behavioral regulation in public spaces, particularly during sacred religious moments, constitutes a form of substantive tolerance that is effective in strengthening trust and fostering interreligious harmony.

These practices are also clearly reflected in interviews with a Christian religious leader in Guliling Village. The informant stated that the value of tolerance is deliberately conveyed to church congregants, particularly in the period leading up to Ramadan. He emphasized, “We convey in the church that as the fasting month approaches, we must exercise self-restraint by refraining from drinking, eating, smoking, and engaging in such



activities in the presence of Muslims” (Joni L, personal communication, December 17, 2025). This statement indicates that religious institutions play an active role in shaping congregants’ awareness to respect the religious practices of others through concrete actions. This finding is consistent with Tetap et al. (2018), who argue that the internalization of tolerance values through religious institutions can foster more stable and sustainable social harmony, and is further supported by Kebumen (2021), who asserts that practice-based tolerance in everyday life is more effective than mere normative discourse.

### **3. The Role of Religious Leaders in Maintaining Social Harmony**

The social life of the Guliling Village community reflects the presence of harmonious practices that develop organically and are sustained over time. Interreligious relations are not only built through formal agreements, but also through everyday interactions grounded in familial values, mutual respect, and open communication. Several studies emphasize that the intensity of social ties and emotional closeness among individuals across religious groups are key factors in fostering mutual trust and reducing the potential for social conflict (Fazrian, 2025). In this context, religious leaders play a strategic role as guardians of social harmony, serving as both moral authorities and intermediaries between community groups. (Sari et al., 2018)

These grassroots practices of harmony are reflected in the lived experiences of local religious leaders. As conveyed by Mr. Amas, a Christian religious leader, “We support one another in building places of worship; through this, we are reminded that we are one.” (Amas, personal communication, December 17, 2025)

A religious leader who also serves as a customary leader, Mr. Resmi, further recounted his involvement in the construction of a church: “I was responsible for providing the timber for the first church built here; there was no interreligious conflict”. (Resmi, personal communication, December 16, 2025)

Mr. Musa also shared his experience when he first settled in Guliling Village: “I was impressed by the level of tolerance in Guliling Village. When they invite us, we attend; when we invite them, they also attend.” (Musa, personal communication, December 16, 2025)

(Malahayati, 2024) This reinforces the notion that the exemplary conduct of religious leaders has a direct impact on the tolerance attitudes of the community. When religious leaders demonstrate openness, the community tends to adopt similar patterns of behavior.



#### 4. The Role of Customary Leaders and Local Cultural Values

In the context of a plural society, local wisdom often serves as a more effective social adhesive than formal regulations. Several studies in Indonesia indicate that customary values, which are sustained and transmitted across generations, are capable of fostering mutual respect among religious communities without the need for formal agreements. Local wisdom functions as a framework of social ethics that guides how communities interact, manage differences, and maintain harmonious coexistence. These values operate organically, as they are embedded within the collective consciousness of the community and practiced in everyday life, enabling them to transcend boundaries of religion, ethnicity, and race. (Aji et al., 2025)

These findings are consistent with the results of interviews conducted by the researcher with Mr. Amas, a customary leader from the Christian community in Guliling Village. He emphasized that relations between Muslim and Christian communities in the village are characterized by harmony and tolerance, even in the absence of formal agreements or written regulations. According to him, such harmony is a legacy inherited from previous generations and continues to be preserved to this day. Mr. Amas also highlighted the cultural principle of “*Mesakada depotuho, patangkada depomate*” (Amas, personal communication, December 16, 2025), which promotes a sense of brotherhood regardless of religious, ethnic, or racial differences. This customary principle functions as a foundation of social ethics that unites the people of Guliling Village and creates an inclusive social space for all members of the community.

The ethnic diversity present in Guliling Village does not necessarily lead each group to prominently display their respective cultural practices in everyday life. This is reflected in the statement of a customary leader from the Christian community, who noted, “Although there are various ethnic groups here, they do not fully express their respective cultural practices in daily life. While they are capable of doing so, they deliberately limit such expressions in order to maintain social harmony.” (Joni L, personal communication, December 17, 2025)

The ethnic diversity in Guliling Village does not necessarily lead each group to prominently express their respective cultural practices in everyday life. This is reflected in the account of a customary leader from the Christian community, who noted, “Although various ethnic groups coexist here, they do not fully express their respective cultural practices in daily life. While they are capable of doing so, they deliberately limit such expressions to maintain social harmony.” (District & Regency, 2024)



## 5. Concrete Strategies for Maintaining Social Harmony

Based on interviews conducted with a Christian religious leader in Guliling Village, strategies for maintaining interreligious harmony are implemented through mutual understanding of each group's religious teachings and boundaries. The informant stated, "It is about understanding each other's religious principles, striving together on the path of salvation and goodness; there is no place for claiming that one religion is superior before God" (Amas, personal communication, December 17, 2025). This statement reflects an inclusive pattern of diversity, in which differences in beliefs are not used as a basis for asserting superiority, but are instead respected as part of shared social life. This finding is consistent with the perspective of religious moderation, which emphasizes the importance of respecting theological differences within the social sphere. (Suhail et al., 1907)

In addition, the interview findings reveal that harmony in Guliling Village is reinforced by a sense of interreligious kinship. The informant emphasized, "Once someone becomes part of Guliling Village, they are regarded as family or kin, without distinction" (Amas, personal communication, December 17, 2025). This principle fosters strong social solidarity and prioritizes a shared village identity over religious differences. This practice is consistent with previous studies, which indicate that kinship values and local identity are key factors in maintaining interreligious harmony in multireligious societies. (Lubis, 2017)

## D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that harmony between Muslim and Christian communities in Guliling Village is constructed through social processes that develop organically, are sustained over time, and are grounded in local values transmitted across generations. Such harmony is not solely shaped by individual attitudes, but is largely determined by the strategic roles of religious and customary leaders as key agents in maintaining the stability of interfaith social relations. Religious leaders contribute by instilling values of tolerance, mutual respect, and understanding of other religious teachings through religious guidance, while customary leaders reinforce social harmony by preserving local wisdom that emphasizes kinship and togetherness regardless of religious differences.

The practice of tolerance in Guliling Village is evident in everyday life, including respect for religious practices, adaptations in food consumption, and active participation in community social activities. Interreligious kinship values serve as the primary foundation, prioritizing a shared village identity over differences in belief. These findings affirm that cultural approaches and inclusive social relations constitute effective strategies for building and sustaining interreligious harmony. This study contributes to the



advancement of scholarship on interreligious harmony, particularly those grounded in local wisdom, and may serve as a reference for efforts to maintain social cohesion in other multicultural societies.

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