Localizing Inclusive Theology: A Bottom-Up Model of Interfaith Harmony in Rural Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to show how sustainable inter-religious harmony can be formed in an agrarian multicultural environment through a *bottom-up* model of harmony that is different from the elite-centered approach in the study of pluralism. Based on a qualitative approach, which includes in-depth interviews and participatory observation in Kasembon sub-district, Malang, this study found that inter-religious harmony is built on the framework of inclusive theology and local cultural mechanisms. Coexistence between religious communities is maintained through thematic practices such as interfaith cooperation, rituals that share cultural values, and performative reconciliation through collective action, alongside local dispute resolution processes. This study contributes to the sociology of religion by integrating inclusive theology with *lived religion* in rural areas. At the policy level, the study suggests that government programs on religious moderation should be complemented by investments in cultural infrastructure as well as village-based interfaith initiatives.

Keywords: inclusive theology, multiculturalism, interreligious harmony, lived religion, rural pluralism

Abstrak

Studi ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan bagaimana kerukunan antarumat beragama yang berkelanjutan dapat dibentuk dalam lingkungan multikultural agraris melalui model kerukunan bottom-up (dari bawah ke atas) yang berbeda dari pendekatan berpusat pada elite dalam studi pluralisme. Berdasarkan pendekatan kualitatif yang mencakup wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipatif di Kecamatan Kasembon, Malang, studi ini menemukan bahwa kerukunan antarumat beragama dibangun di atas kerangka teologi inklusif dan mekanisme budaya lokal. Koeksistensi antarumat beragama dijaga melalui praktik-praktik tematik seperti kerja sama lintas agama, ritual yang berbagi nilai-nilai budaya, dan rekonsiliasi performatif melalui aksi kolektif, berdampingan dengan proses penyelesaian sengketa lokal. Studi ini berkontribusi pada sosiologi agama dengan mengintegrasikan teologi inklusif dengan lived religion (agama yang dihayati/dipraktikkan sehari-hari) di wilayah pedesaan. Pada tingkat kebijakan, studi ini menyarankan agar program pemerintah mengenai moderasi beragama dilengkapi dengan investasi pada infrastruktur budaya serta inisiatif lintas agama berbasis desa.

Kata Kunci: *teologi inklusif, multikulturalisme, harmoni antaragama, lived religion, pluralisme pedesaan*

Background

Indonesia is one of the countries with the highest level of religious and cultural plurality in the world. This raises the potential for social cohesion as well as vulnerability to conflict in the living spaces of the community[1]. This diversity is not only realized at the national level; rather, it finds the most intense dynamics at the local level, especially in rural areas where social interactions are close, repetitive, and highly personal[2]. In this context, religion emerges as a symbolic force that shapes social relationships, collective identities, and the structure of meaning that underlies common life[3]. Therefore, understanding how interreligious harmony is produced and maintained in a local context is a crucial agenda in contemporary sociology of religion and multicultural studies[4].

The complexity of these dynamics is especially evident in the case of East Java, where the dynamic interaction of dominant and minority religious

[1] Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2011).
[2] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation Of Cultures* (Hachette UK, 2008).
[3] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1990).
[4] José Casanova, *Global Religious and Secular Dynamics: The Modern System of Classification* (BRILL, 2019).

traditions in rural communities has very deep roots in the past[5]. In this case, Malang Regency can be considered as one of the regions in East Java that provides a forum to raise the complexity of interreligious relations in a multicultural rural environment. Although the majority of the population in the area is Muslim, there are also communities of Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists, so the area has become a rich social space for the continuous development of identity negotiations and religious practices [6].

Kasembon District has an agrarian economic structure that allows for intensive daily interaction and meetings between representatives of different religions in daily life[7]. Such social relations form a dialectical space for the continuous negotiation of potential conflicts and opportunities to achieve harmony in time. Pait Village in Kasembon District is one of the multicultural villages whose social life of its citizens is based on collective work in rice fields, coffee plantations and other collective activities[8]. Such an intensity of contact creates a situation in which religious differences transcend theology and become part of the social reality of people's daily lives.

Although quantitatively the index of inter-religious harmony in the Kasembon area shows an increasing trend, the potential for conflict remains and constitutes an issue that requires serious attention. Minor disputes related to religious rituals, the symbolism of worship spaces, or differences in religious practices reveal that social harmony is inherently fragile and requires continuous strategies of maintenance [9]. In this regard, top-down normative approaches—which rely heavily on elite interfaith dialogues, formal theological doctrines, and state-driven administrative tolerance often prove insufficient to explain why harmony can endure at the grassroots level. A more nuanced reading of lived religion within the everyday practices of multicultural communities is therefore indispensable [10].

One theoretical approach that is particularly relevant for interpreting this phenomenon is inclusive theology, which offers a conceptual framework for understanding religious diversity without falling into dogmatic exclusivism. Inclusive theology views religions as distinct symbolic pathways through which human beings respond to the same transcendent reality, without negating the faith commitments of each tradition[11]. This approach enables interfaith relations to operate on mutual respect and recognition. Within this framework, inclusive theology becomes the normative basis for achieving social harmony in a diverse society[12].

In the context of Islam, this idea of inclusive theology is in line with progressive Islamic thought and the discourse of religious moderation. This idea was initiated by one of Indonesia's Islamic intellectuals, Nurcholish Madjid. He emphasized that Islam is a religion that carries an ethical mandate to foster peaceful relations with adherents of other religions without sacrificing its theological

[5] Hefner, *Civil Islam*.

[6] Umi Sumbulah, 'Muslim-Christian Relation on the Basis of Christian Village in Malang, East Java, Indonesia: Socio-Theological Reconstruction for Building Religious Harmony', *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6.12 (2016), p. 1; Usamah Al Turki and others, 'Rethinking Da'wah Strategy as a Basis for Mitigating Conflict Involving Muslim Minorities: Insights from Bali and Peniwen Malang, Indonesia', *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 15.1 (2025), pp. 36–58, doi:10.15642/teosofi.2025.15.1.36-58.

[7] Mohamad Anas, Millatuz Zakiyah, and Siti Rohmah, 'Menyemai Perdamaian Dalam Perbedaan: Strategi Mayoritas Mengayomi Minoritas Pada Basis Multikulturalisme Di Kasembon Malang', *Peradaban Journal of Religion and Society*, 1.1 (2022), pp. 11–21, doi:10.59001/pjrs.v1i1.31.

[8] Syamsul Arifin, Moh Anas Kholish, and Dzikrul Hakim Tafuzi Mu'iz, 'TEOLOGI KONVERSI AGAMA DAN UPAYA MENUMBUHKAN NILAI-NILAI TOLERANSI DI BASIS MULTIKULTURAL', *Waskita: Jurnal Pendidikan Nilai Dan Pembangunan Karakter*, 6.1 (2022), pp. 43–59, doi:10.21776/ub.waskita.2022.006.01.4.

[9] Anas, Zakiyah, and Rohmah, 'Menyemai Perdamaian Dalam Perbedaan'.

[10] Nancy T. Ammerman, 'Lived Religion as an Emerging Field: An Assessment of Its Contours and Frontiers', *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, 29.2 (2016), pp. 83–99, doi:10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2016-02-01.

[11] John Harwood Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1985).

[12] Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Orbis Books, 2010).

integrity[13]. This principle has subsequently been institutionalized through policies on religious moderation that stress a balance between faith commitment and social openness. Within this framework, inclusive theology functions not merely as doctrine, but as a lived social praxis embedded in everyday interactions.

Nevertheless, inclusive theology does not work in a social vacuum; rather, it continues to interact with the local cultural structures and traditions in which the theology is articulated. Local culture becomes a symbolic space where theological values are translated into socially acceptable behavior. In Javanese society, traditions such as *gotong royong*, *slametan* and *bersih desa* have played a role as an integrative mechanism that transcends religious boundaries[14]. These traditions create a neutral common ground, where religious identity can be implicitly negotiated using cultural symbols.

Clifford Geertz proves that in Javanese agrarian society, religion operates in a cultural symbolic system that is quite flexible and adaptive. Religion can be integrated into a culture that is in harmony with the ideas of harmony and balance[15]. Thus the local culture becomes a buffer zone that eliminates theological friction with the help of ritual and ethical practices. Such a process is clearly seen in the Kasembon community.

Nevertheless, there are many contemporary factors, such as the rise of religious fanaticism and the penetration of transnational religious ideologies, that have the potential to disrupt this condition. The idea of Islamic puritanism, which tends to be scriptural and exclusive, is often at odds with the local culture. In such a situation, both local culture and theology are tested for their relevance in maintaining social harmony. It is therefore important to study the ways in which local communities connect religion with culture in a multicultural society.

Previous studies have tended to separate theological analysis from cultural practice, thus ignoring the complexity of the dialectical relationship between the two [16]. In fact, social harmony in interreligious relations can be achieved through religious encounters with socio-cultural practices. This research combines the sociology of religion with multicultural studies to bridge this gap and understand inclusive theology through practice and not just as idealistic normative theory. Thus, this study seeks to provide a more holistic picture of how the processes towards social harmony take place.

Kasembon, with its complex cultural and social characteristics, is an excellent empirical setting for studying the dialectic between religion and local culture. The characteristics of agrarian life that require collective effort are a prerequisite for social solidarity as well as the embodiment of idealism. From the point of view of the relevance of inclusive theology, it is necessary to emphasize that it is in line with the local cultural value system. It is in this way that social harmony continues to be created.

Current studies are based on the assumption that religious harmony is a dynamic and contextual social process[17]. This process involves interactions between adherents of religion, culture and complex social structures. Using inclusive theology and local culture as a basis, the current study hopes to understand how the two are interconnected in creating a harmonious society.

Theoretically, this research will contribute to the development of the sociology of religion related to the role of cultural aspects in inclusive theological analysis. In addition, this research expands the discourse of Islamic studies by showing how Islamic values are transformed in a

[13] Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam: Doktrin & Peradaban* (Gramedia pustaka utama, 2019).

[14] Turki and others, 'Rethinking Da'wah Strategy as a Basis for Mitigating Conflict Involving Muslim Minorities'; Anas, Zakiyah, and Rohmah, 'Menyemai Perdamaian Dalam Perbedaan'.

[15] Geertz, *The Interpretation Of Cultures*.

[16] Ammerman, 'Lived Religion as an Emerging Field'.

[17] Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Transaction Publishers, 2011).

multicultural local culture. In the context of multicultural studies, this study shows that social harmony depends not only on official government policies, but also on the socio-cultural practices of the people in daily life.

Practically, the results of this research are expected to be used to formulate a religious moderation policy that is more contextual and rooted in local wisdom. The model of harmony found in Kasembon can be replicated in other multicultural rural areas after relevant socio-cultural adjustments. In addition, the results of this research can be used as a reference in formulating dialogue strategies for religious actors. Thus, this research has great academic and practical significance.

Considering all of the above factors, it can be stated that this study focuses on the interaction between inclusive theology and local culture in a multicultural space in Kasembon, Malang. By analyzing the dialectic between religion and tradition in everyday practice, this study seeks to uncover the social mechanisms that work so that religious harmony can be realized.

The Empirical Landscape of Interreligious Harmony in Kasembon

The results of empirical research show that inter-religious harmony in Pait Village, Kasembon District, is not a phenomenon that is formed instantly, but a continuous negotiation process that takes place in the context of multicultural social life. Empirical data collected through in-depth interviews with 25 interfaith participants, participation in cultural activities, and analysis of FKUB reports for the 2021–2025 period show how social relations there are relatively stable and dynamic. The demographic composition of the village, with Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists as minorities among the Muslim majority who make up 80% of the population, creates a dynamic pattern of interaction and demands continuous social adjustment.

The fact that the dominant Muslim population has, in turn, exerted an influence on the public, symbolic, and architectural spaces of the village. Although minority groups (Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists) have the freedom to practice worship privately, attempts to express religious symbols explicitly in public spaces, such as the celebration of religious holidays, remain limited by the unwritten sensitivity of minority groups.

As a result, religious activities in conspicuous public spaces are *self-regulated* by minority groups to avoid the potential jealousy of the majority group. Interviews with minority respondents indicated that their participation in joint rituals in the village was not always an expression of non-coercive interfaith brotherhood; In some cases, it represents a form of self-adjustment to ensure social safety and prevent communal marginalization.

However, the existence of this asymmetry of power relations does not necessarily trigger disintegration or open conflict. On the contrary, these dynamics actually emphasize the vital functions of local wisdom (such as *mutual cooperation* and *slametan*) as well as the space for deliberative dialogue as a mechanism for catharsis and relationship recovery. It is through this social infrastructure and local communication forums that the pragmatic compromises and "forced accommodations" of minority groups are gradually transformed into a peaceful, functional, and meaningful coexistence for all villagers.

This is confirmed by statistical data obtained from the Inter-Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) of Pait Village (2025). The data indicate a significant decrease in the number of inter-religious conflicts, dropping from 12 in 2022 to 4 in 2025. Furthermore, the inter-religious harmony index rose from 68 in 2022 to 85 in 2025[18]. However, despite the importance of this information to our study, it must be noted that these statistics cannot serve as the primary indicator of peaceful inter-religious coexistence; this is because the data were collected to record

[18] FKUB Kasembon, 'Direct Interview', 2025.

overt conflicts (open conflicts) and do not account for latent (hidden) conflicts. These figures may be interpreted as the result of changes in the evolution of administrative governance systems.

A thematic analysis of qualitative data using NVivo 14 (QSR International) revealed three key themes in the management of interfaith relations. Of the total coded concepts, 38% related to "Practical Interfaith Cooperation," 31% to "Culture-Based Joint Rituals," and 22% to "Everyday Informal Dialogue" [19] . This demonstrates that recurring social practices lead to the development of a shared moral order that transcends doctrinal boundaries. However, it would be a mistake to interpret these practices as socially neutral, as they are linked to societal norms. Thus, interfaith harmony in Pait is not determined by a homogeneity of beliefs, but rather by the ongoing negotiation of religious differences through everyday social practices.

In the context of personal interactions, data triangulated from in-depth interviews and participant observation within the farming community of Pait Village reveals that religious identity is never prioritized as the primary identity in daily interactions. In-depth interviews with community leaders, village administrators, and religious leaders from Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist communities consistently show that respondents view their social identities in terms of their roles within the community, rather than as formal members of a specific religion. Residents of Pait Village tend to identify themselves as "villagers" (*wong desa*), "neighbors," or "fellow field workers" (kanca sawah). This phenomenon illustrates the concept of "lived religion," where solidarity between individuals takes precedence over formal doctrinal boundaries. Consequently, social cohesion is actively constructed through social interactions within practical daily routines, rather than through theological claims[20].

These findings support the argument that interfaith harmony at the grassroots level is achieved through practical—rather than formal or theological—interactions [21]. Harvesting, irrigation, and the provision of other community services create interdependence; consequently, individuals set aside their religious identity differences to safeguard their pragmatic interests—namely, survival.

Participatory observation of the *slametan* and *Bersih Desa* ceremonies shows that these rituals and ceremonies can function as a space for interaction and a meeting point between people's identities and social backgrounds. These rituals and ceremonies are also considered to be a neutral space, free from ideological claims based on religion. The ritual is not associated with a particular religious identity, so people of different religious backgrounds participate in these ceremonies regardless of their social status or beliefs. However, local culture also needs to be celebrated through a critical lens. Local culture cannot be considered a completely neutral space, as it can also be a means of social control. There is a "hidden power" in the local culture that encourages citizens to participate in ceremonies in order to be considered a "good citizen." [22].

The results of the interviews show that the absence or absence of participation in these ceremonies can cause problems related to social integration, as well as trigger the emergence of gossip, social sanctions, or even exclusion. Thus, other religions are viewed pragmatically. At the same time, this intensive interaction in neutral space creates the conditions for the "contact

[19] Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (University of California Press, 1987) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppfv1> [accessed 13 January 2026].

[20] Meredith B. McGuire, Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life (Oxford University Press, 2008), doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195172621.001.0001; Ammerman, 'Lived Religion as an Emerging Field'.

[21] Ammerman, 'Lived Religion as an Emerging Field'.

[22] Andrew Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion: An Anthropological Account*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Cambridge University Press, 1999), doi:10.1017/CBO9780511612497.

hypothesis" and reduces prejudice [23]. However, above all, the building of social solidarity in this process is possible if there is a balance between solidarity and the community's desire for uniformity.

Institutionally, the FKUB (Inter-Religious Harmony Forum) serves as an instrument of dialogue that helps balance inter-community relations. Yet, the FKUB's strength lies in its ability to align its activities with local culture. To reach a consensus, the FKUB typically conducts informal dialogues using the local language. This reinforces the notion that social legitimacy is gained through communicative rationality rather than bureaucratic rationality [24].

Ultimately, the research indicates that the conflicts examined were latent and triggered by practical issues—such as land use or ritual scheduling—rather than ideological disputes. These conflicts were resolved through village council deliberations followed by post-conflict collective action. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that conflict resolution in Kasembon is conducted in a restorative spirit [25].

Therefore, the decrease in the number of conflicts recorded in administrative documentation during the period 2022 to 2025 can be an example of how efficient these mechanisms are. According to conflict theory, conflict can be used to improve social cohesion if there is an appropriate mechanism. Empirical data from Kasembon demonstrates that minor conflicts often transform into well-managed social cohesion. Consequently, harmony is defined not by the absence of conflict, but by the collaborative resolution of conflict.

Meanwhile, the blend of inclusive theology and local culture distinguishes Kasembon from other multicultural regions prone to high levels of conflict. Inclusive theology serves as the normative foundation for social inclusivity, while local culture acts as the vehicle for realizing that inclusivity. As a result, religious values can be translated into social action without hindrance[26]. In other words, theology is indirectly channeled through culture.

From the perspective of "lived religion", these findings indicate that religion in Kasembon is expressed not through symbols, but through social ethics [27] Religion is not merely shielded by the community; rather, it is an integral part of the daily lives of this agrarian society. This approach fosters the solidarity essential to a pluralistic society.

Thus, these findings challenge the notion that interfaith peace can only be achieved through the roles of the state and religious leaders[28]. The data demonstrates that grassroots action is the most effective means of resolving conflict. Thanks to an open cultural environment and community dialogue, conflicts are resolved independently, without reliance on external parties. Consequently, this information offers valuable insights for the development of policies regarding religious moderation.

In conclusion, the empirical situation in Kasembon demonstrates that interfaith peace emerges from the interplay of social structures, culture, and moderate religious interpretations [29]. The decrease in the number of conflicts and the increase in the harmony index are evidence that the ongoing social dynamics in this region are moving in a positive direction. In other words, the diversity management pattern in Kasembon can be considered as a micro-model for the management of religious pluralism in rural Indonesia.

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[23] Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

[24] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Polity Press, 1997).

[25] Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice: Revised and Updated* (Good Books, 2015).

[26] Casanova, *Global Religious and Secular Dynamics*.

[27] Ammerman, 'Lived Religion as an Emerging Field'.

[28] Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Yale University Press, 2008).

[29] Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*.

Inclusive Theology as Social Praxis: Localized Interpretations and Intercommunal Solidarity

Inclusive theology in the Kasembon context does not manifest as an abstract discourse confined to normative-theological debates, but rather materializes as a lived social praxis embedded in everyday interfaith interactions. Thematic analysis of interview and field data using NVivo 14 (QSR International) revealed contextual patterns of theological interpretation, cross-faith ethical reasoning, and measures to strengthen social cohesion. The results of the field findings show that religious interpretation in Kasembon is contextual and dialogical, and encourages social cohesion instead of exclusivism of the truth. This pattern was formed through a coding process based on participants' responses regarding religious diversity, interfaith relationships, and the application of religious teachings in people's daily lives. This pattern shows that religion plays a role as a source of ethical value for common life, not as a separator of identity. Thus, inclusive theology in Kasembon can be seen as "lived theology" that is integrated into social practice.

It is empirically proven that almost all religious leaders interviewed apply inclusive interpretation in their sermons and teaching activities in mosques, churches, temples, and monasteries. This pattern was revealed through the coding of interview results that contained themes around religious diversity, brotherhood between religious communities, and ethical obligations to maintain peace with adherents of other religions. Kyai H. Ahmad interprets QS 49:13 as the theological foundation for social diversity, by viewing interfaith neighborly relations as a form of brotherhood among human beings[30]. In the coding process, this account was categorized under "theological legitimation of diversity" and subsequently grouped within the broader theme of "inclusive theological interpretation. This interpretation affirms that plurality is not a threat to faith, but an ethical arena for realizing the value of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. Within Berger's framework, such narratives construct a plausibility structure that renders inclusivism socially intelligible[31].

A similar pattern is evident within the Christian community. In an interview conducted in 2025, Pastor Yohanes explained that Matthew 8:5–13 provides a theological basis for extending compassion beyond the boundaries of one's own religious community. This interview material was coded as "boundary-crossing compassion" and grouped under the broader theme of "inclusive theological interpretation. Emphasis on the Roman centurion's faith is interpreted as recognition of goodness beyond one's own faith community, thereby opening space for dialogical ethics. This interpretation resonates with Bellah's concept of civil religion, wherein shared moral values transcend institutional religious boundaries.

In the context of Hinduism and Buddhism in Kasembon, *ahimsa* and *metta* are the foundation for social harmony that prioritizes tolerance and maintains peace. Based on interviews with Hindu and Buddhist religious leaders, these concepts are always emphasized and actualized as ethical guides in daily interactions with adherents of other religions. Hindu religious leaders, for example, emphasized *ahimsa* as a cosmic ethics that implies harmony between humans, nature, and other living beings regardless of religious differences[32]; the interview was categorized under the theme of "Nonviolence and Interreligious Harmony**.** On the other hand, in the context of Buddhism, the idea of *metta* refers to the concept of universal affection[33]. In its smallest form, this concept is manifested through various social community

[30] Haji Ahmad, 'Interview', 2025, Direct.

[31] Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*.

[32] Abdul Kodir, Ahmad Qiram As-Suvi, and Faizah Ukhti Rianda, 'Reaktualisasi Ahimsa dalam Perdamaian Agama di India : Kritik atas Otoritarianisme Agama dalam Pemikiran Gandhi', *Peradaban Journal of Religion and Society*, 2.2 (2023), pp. 164–75, doi:10.59001/pjrs.v2i2.89.

[33] Okkansa Siddhi, Sanu Mahathanadull, and Somboon Vuddhikaro, 'A Metta-Buddhist Integrated Method for Conflict Management in The Modern Societies', *The Journal of International Association of Buddhist Universities (JIABU)*, 11.3 (2018), pp. 24–48.

activities as well as participation in ritual activities at the village level; The interview was categorized under the theme "Universal Compassion" and was associated with the theme "Ethical Values Across Traditions".

However, the way religious ethics are practiced in shared social spaces is shaped not only by religious teachings but also by the culture of the local community. This becomes evident in everyday activities such as *slametan* and *gotong royong*. These practices provide opportunities for residents from different religious backgrounds to work together and maintain social relationships. Interview participants commonly associated participation in these activities with maintaining good relations among neighbors. Observations by the author also confirm this. Although in the joint activity, many pond participants displayed the attributes of religious identity, but it did not make it a problem. Because all community members in Kasembon are aware that participation is understood as a form of responsibility and solidarity as part of village community members.

However, participation in local customs is not always entirely voluntary. As the results of the interviews show, individuals who do not participate in community activities—especially for religious reasons—tend to be perceived as uncooperative or even socially distanced. This will lead to gossip, gossip and exclusion activities on a small scale. Thus, local culture produces two impacts on interreligious relations. On the one hand, this culture can unite citizens by providing opportunities to interact. But on the other hand, this culture raises certain expectations regarding the behavior of community members.

However, observations of interfaith recitation activities show that cultural rituals are indeed an effective means of maintaining social interaction. The event is called "*pengajian lintas agama*". This was attended by a very large number of participants. In this event, the villagers participate while maintaining their respective religious identities. Prayer arrangements are carried out in turn. All existing religions were given the opportunity to perform. From this activity, it can be seen that social interaction is well maintained while still acknowledging religious differences.

The observed community activities provide a real example of how common norms are formed in Kasembon. Mutual understanding among citizens does not arise because of an agreement on religious doctrine, but through interaction in community activities. Joint events such as *gotong royong*, *kerjabakti*, and *pengajian lintas agama* are a means of interaction between residents. In these events, residents interact with each other in their positions as part of the Kasembon community. Thus, communal norms develop thanks to interaction and mutual recognition, not because of doctrinal agreement.

This approach is in line with the Allport contact hypothesis[34]. The importance of mutual cooperation and various interfaith social cooperation activities lies in the fact that citizens often meet in their daily lives. Such interactions open up opportunities to get to know people from other religious communities better, so that they can remove various assumptions or prejudices that previously existed. The results of the interview coding showed a decrease in the number of statements that reflected social prejudice. Although this cannot be considered an indicator of the reduction of prejudice obtained through experimental methods, these findings represent a proportion of the themes identified during the coding process in this study. Nevertheless, these results strengthen the thesis on the influence of interaction on inter-group relationships.

However, the sustainability of these practices also faces challenges. Some respondents said that there are religious narratives encountered on social media that have the potential to cause tension between groups. For example, an exclusive religious narrative that contains hatred for other groups. However, the narratives on social media

34 Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature Of Prejudice: 25th Anniversary Edition (*Basic Books, 1979).

did not develop into open conflicts. This happens because messages of hate and suspicion circulating outside the community can be effectively silenced through face-to-face interactions and social capital that has been built at the local level.

Similar dynamics emerged during general elections. The findings of the interviews show that during elections, religious identity becomes more prominent. This happens because political actors or campaign messages use religious affiliations as part of an effort to attract voter support. In this situation, religious identity is used as a divisive political tool. This is relevant to Coser's discussion of social conflict. Coser shows that the intensity of conflict increases when social relations are related to competing external interests[35]. This finding does not mean that electoral politics immediately caused religious conflicts in Kasembon. Rather, these findings indicate that there are conditions that can increase the likelihood of tensions emerging when pre-existing religious differences are politically activated.

In addition to political issues, economic problems are also things that need to be considered. Field findings suggest that members of Hindu and Buddhist minority communities may experience losses or obstacles that are not solely caused by religious attitudes. Economic position can affect access to opportunities and contribute to the emergence of feelings of marginalization. This kind of structural condition is important because interpersonal harmony does not automatically eliminate the inequalities inherent in everyday social and economic relationships. Therefore, inclusive theology cannot be maintained only through interreligious interactions. Its practical manifestation also depends on the social conditions that allow members of various religious communities to participate in the life of the local community without suffering systematic losses.

Youth mobility and migration seem to present their own challenges for the sustainability of communal practices in Kasembon. Based on the results of the interviews, it can be seen that young people are now less actively involved in various activities that were previously carried out within the scope of local communities and religious institutions. This is important because many values related to the spirit of mutual help and inter-religious interaction are instilled not only through education, but also through active participation in community life. With so much time spent by young people outside the village, it has become increasingly difficult to do. This pattern can be discussed in relation to Putnam's argument concerning changes in social capital under conditions of modernization[36]. In the context of Kasembon, however, the issue is not simply a decline in social capital, but a change in the way younger residents participate in community life. The finding suggests the need for forms of cultural and religious education that remain connected to the experiences and social realities of younger generations[37].

Taken together, the findings also provide a basis for connecting the theological and cultural perspectives used in this study. Hick and Madjid emphasize the possibility of understanding religious difference without reducing it to a competition between exclusive truth claims, while Wuthnow and Geertz draw attention to the importance of social and cultural contexts in shaping religious life[38]. The Kasembon findings bring these perspectives into an everyday setting.

Therefore, the Kasembon case shows that inter-religious harmony is more appropriate if it is seen as a sustainable social process. Kasembon residents maintain the harmony of their relationships through the process of daily social interaction. It includes various joint activities,

[35] Danielle N. Lussier and Mohammad Iqbal Ahnaf, 'Neutralizing the Sacred Space: Pre-Election Messages in a Typical Indonesian City', *Politics and Religion*, 17.2 (2024), pp. 341–61, doi:10.1017/S1755048324000117.

[36] Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*.

[37] James A. Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education* (Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2008).

[38] Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*; Madjid, *Islam*.

including cooperation, social interaction, and various other activities. This allows religion and social relations to go hand in hand. These processes can help minimize the potential for conflict caused by religious differences.

However, there are various challenges that must be taken into account. Misinformation, political campaigns, youth mobility, or income inequality have the potential to disrupt the stability of communal relations. Thus, the fusion of religious values and mechanisms of social collaboration can be seen as a means for society to respond to differences, rather than as a universal method for conflict resolution[39]. For Kasembon, religious inclusivity in the context of sustainable practices lies in the ability of the community to apply these interaction patterns in the midst of changing social situations.

Deliberative Dialogue and Performative Reconciliation in Conflict Resolution

The experience of resolving inter-religious conflicts in Paiit Village, Kasembon, provides an important lesson. Conflict resolution is not enough and cannot stop at the level of verbal dialogue alone. Efforts to resolve the conflict must continue to be developed into sustainable collective actions. The findings show that people do not view dialogue as the only way to resolve conflicts. It only serves as a starting point towards concrete forms of cooperation that are full of social meaning. In other words, this tendency implies that a living peace must be realized in social practices experienced directly by the parties to the conflict[40].

The effectiveness of this pattern is reflected in the institutional record of FKUB Bitter Village. Based on administrative data from FKUB Desa Pait, in the 2021–2025 period, around 80% of officially reported conflict cases have been successfully resolved through dialogue and collective action [41] . Although in a critical perspective, this level of resolution allows for the intervention of the hierarchy of power in the deliberative space, it at least proves that local dispute resolution institutions work fairly efficiently.

In reality, it is very possible that there will be socio-cultural domination of representatives of the majority group in the dialogue. However, the existence of the FKUB deliberative forum allows religious leaders, village officials, and residents to negotiate their interests. Thus, through the transformation of potential conflicts into discussions, these deliberative forums strengthen the social legitimacy of collective agreement and encourage society to abide by them, regardless of inherent power inequality.

To illustrate how such institutional mechanisms operate and help transform dialogue into performative action, the case of land disputes between mosques and churches needs to be reviewed. The village chief stated that the issue had been resolved through three days of intensive dialogue and continued with collective community service work as both sides built a fence together.[42] From Lederach's perspective, this suggests the existence of performative reconciliation, in which peace is realized through symbolic actions that transform social relations[43].

Observations of the FKUB dialogue forum show that 100% consensus is reached through a deliberative process without voting or any pressure from the majority. In this case, the process of deliberative dialogue in Kasembon is in line with Habermas' concept, where consensus is formed through rational reasoning in a communicative space that is free from domination[44]. The use of everyday language and local contexts makes dialogue more inclusive because all parties are involved and acknowledged in the dialogue.

[39] Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.

[40] Johan Galtung and International Peace Research Institute Oslo, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (SAGE Publications, 1996).

[41] FKUB Desa Pait, interview, 2025

[42] Kades Pahit, 'Interview', 2025.

[43] John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

[44] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Polity Press, 1997).

Therefore, dialogue not only solves problems, but also helps restore social relations that had been fractured.

The performative nature of this reconciliation is also reflected in a significant decrease in land conflicts, from eight cases in 2022 to only one case in 2025[45]. The decline shows that collective action produces sustainable impacts that are able to prevent future conflicts. As Zehr states, restorative justice requires reparation—that is, real action to repair the damage that has occurred[46]. The post-dialogue mutual cooperation action in Kasembon meets these criteria.

In addition to face-to-face dialogue, there is also a digital space in Kasembon that is used for conflict resolution. The space is in the form of a WhatsApp group called "Pait Harmoni" which involves around 500 residents[47]. This platform is a means to immediately clarify hoaxes and provocative statements that have the potential to trigger conflicts. Based on Habermas's concept, such a digital platform can be considered an extension of the local deliberative public space[48].

The ability of the "Pait Harmoni" network to prevent digital escalation shows how important communicative literacy is in the context of a multicultural society. A quick clarification of misinformation can stop the growing suspicion among religious communities. This conclusion reinforces the view that modern conflict management needs to reach both online and offline domains. Thus, the means of deliberative dialogue undergo a change of form without losing its ethical content.

In the study of the sociology of conflict, referring to the Kasembon conflict resolution model, it can be observed that conflict is not always negative because it can be a driving force for the development of social cohesion [49]. Conflicts managed through dialogue actually help strengthen social mechanisms in responding to differences[50]. In other words, social harmony is not the absence of conflict, but the ability of society to deal with it[51].

Performivity also helps to realize the internalization of the values of tolerance across generations. In field observation of joint activities after the inter-religious conflict, it was seen that children and young people participated in community service work with representatives of adults from various religious communities. Their participation is not in the form of formal religious education, but is realized through direct involvement in joint activities. An informant from the community also described the participation of these young people as a common way to get used to working together in the midst of religious differences. Thus, children and young people involved in post-conflict community service experience encounters with religious differences in the context of practical cooperation. This is likely to help them form peaceful social habits, although the impact of such practices on the formation of individual attitudes cannot be ascertained based on current observations alone. Therefore, conflict resolution in Kasembon has a potential pedagogical meaning.

Inclusive theology views post-dialogue collective action as the practical legitimacy of inclusive religious values. The participation of religious leaders in community service helps theology become more relevant to the messages of love, *rahmah* (compassion), and *ahimsa* (nonviolence). In other words, theology is not only a normative discourse, but also a social ethics in life.

From an institutional perspective, FKUB's role as a mediator of dialogue and collaborative action makes it one of the crucial local institutions in the process of resolving multicultural conflicts.

[45] FKUB Desa Pait, interview, 2025

[46] Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*.

[47] Kades Pahit, 'Interview'.

[48] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*.

[49] Lewis A. Coser, *Functions of Social Conflict* (Simon and Schuster, 1964).

[50] Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Yale University Press, 2008).

[51] Johan Galtung and International Peace Research Institute Oslo, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (SAGE Publications, 1996).

FKUB not only acts as a mediator, but also provides a safe space for reconciliation. The participation of the community in this process clearly shows that the resolution of the conflict is not elitist or *top-down* (from top to bottom). Thus, efforts to build peace become a participatory and sustainable process.

All of these findings reinforce the hypothesis of the need to integrate dialogue communication and collective action in the conflict resolution process in order to realize effective peacebuilding efforts. The combination of the two results in a lasting and easily replicated reconciliation. Thus, Kasembon has become a successful model of community-based conflict resolution that is very beneficial for other multicultural communities.

Overall, the information obtained through interviews, observations, and documents reveals the synergy between inclusive theology and local culture, which is an important resource in creating conditions for social harmony between religions in Kasembon, Malang. Through qualitative coding, several recurring patterns—inclusive theological interpretation, interfaith cooperation, participation in communal rituals, and collective action—were identified—that became the mechanism for negotiating religious differences in social practice. According to the informants, religious leaders and community members view the practice of *gotong royong*, *slametan*, and community service as a means to maintain social relations in the midst of religious differences.

In addition to being discursive, the synergy between inclusive theology and local culture is also manifested in collective practices that help transform dialogical interactions into practical cooperation and reconciliation. Observation of discussions at FKUB, mediation of disputes between mosques and churches, and communication through the WhatsApp group "Pait Harmoni" show that it is important in maintaining religious harmony. That conflicts and negotiations of religious differences can be resolved through a dynamic process of social interaction. This is done both offline and online. In this case, local culture, with its various aspects, serves as a social infrastructure for daily interaction. Meanwhile, inclusive theology can be seen as the source of the norms that underlie cooperation between religious communities. Thus, harmony is created through the negotiation of religious values, cultural norms, institutions, and social relations. Thus, the Kasembon case shows that the mitigation of multicultural conflicts does not require the dominance of a single discourse, but rather requires continuous negotiation between religious values and local wisdom.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that sustainable interreligious harmony in agrarian multicultural settings emerges not from superficial tolerance, but from the interplay between inclusive theology and local cultural practices. The experience of Pait Village shows that when religious difference is framed as a divine blessing and enacted through shared cultural practices such as gotong royong, slametan, and village festivals, latent tensions can be transformed into productive solidarity. Quantitative improvements in conflict reduction, harmony indices, and interfaith participation indicate that harmony in Pait Village is not merely symbolic, but performative and empirically measurable. Academically, the study contributes an integrative bottom-up model of harmony that links theological, cultural, and institutional dimensions at the rural micro level. Policy-wise, the findings suggest that states and local governments should complement formal regulations with investments in shared cultural spaces, village-based interfaith funding, and contextual religious literacy. Future research should compare this model across diverse ecologies and adopt longitudinal approaches to assess its resilience amid digital disruption and identity politics. The Pait case illustrates that pluralism flourishes when theology is localized and culture is empowered, making harmony not a utopian ideal but a viable social legacy.

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Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

Abdullah Zainur Rauf contributed primarily to the conceptualization and design of the study. Abdul Rohman contributed primarily to data analysis and interpretation. Mahrus Ali contributed primarily to manuscript editing, academic language refinement, critical revision, and preparation of the final manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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