

***Pela* and *Gandong* in Maluku, Indonesia: Fostering Interfaith Dialogue and Community Cohesion between Diverse Religious Communities**

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Abstract

Pela and *Gandong* serve as cultural foundations that facilitate cohesion between Islamic and Christian communities in Maluku, which occupy distinct geographical regions. This article intends to elucidate the bond of brotherhood engendered by the *Pela*, or customary agreements, established between Islamic and Christian villages in Maluku. Additionally, it will examine the manifestations of interreligious harmony reflected in the construction of mosques and churches. This research employs a case study methodology with a bounded system approach, focusing on the *Pela* relationship between Hitu Lama village (Islam) and Galala village (Christianity). This relationship serves as a representative example in illustrating the mechanisms of *Pela* in the context of mosque and church construction. Established in 1959, the *Pela* relationship between Hitu Lama and Galala villages reinforces brotherhood through shared traditions and historical narratives that transcend religious divides. A notable example of this collaboration is the joint construction of a mosque and church, which both communities regard as shared properties. This research aims to contribute to strategies that bolster Maluku's reputation as a laboratory for harmony through the practice of establishing places of worship rooted in the *Pela* relationship. The construction of mosques and churches represents a culmination of harmonious events and stands as a model of the positive relations between Muslims and Christians in these two villages.

Keywords: *Pela-Gandong*, Islamic-Christian, harmony, house of worship

Introduction

As a multi-religious country, Indonesia has a long history of interfaith relations marked by both harmony and tension.¹ One of the main challenges is maintaining social cohesion amid religious differences,² particularly between Muslim and Christian communities. In fostering harmony and mitigating tensions, effective strategies based on local genius as social capital are essential.³ Through this local genius, a model of tolerance is established, which Jeremy Menchik refers to as "toleration without liberalism."⁴ The established tolerance forms a shared consensus to coexist peacefully.⁵ The strength of *local genius* as cultural capital has, in some cases, been effectively utilized as a force for reconciling religion-based conflicts, as seen in Maluku (1999-2002).⁶

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¹ Ihsan Ali-Fauzi and Raditya Darmingtyas, "Religious Freedom and Mediation: Some Notes on Three New Initiatives in Indonesia," *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 6, no. 2 (2023): 213–21.

² Dadang Kuswana et al., "Indonesian Religious Social Movements: Analysis and Impacts," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 14, no. 2 (2024): 351–80.

³ Sabarudin Sabarudin et al., "Navigating Existence and Community Harmony: A Case Study of Pondok Pesantren in Muslim Minority Ende, Nusa Tenggara Timur," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 3 (September 30, 2024): 1335–56; Sung Min Kim, J.B. Banawiratma, and Dicky Sofjan, "Religious Pluralism Discourse in Public Sphere of Indonesia: A Critical Application of Communicative Action Theory to Inter-Religious Dialogue," *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 10, no. 2 (2020): 158–88.

⁴ Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁵ Yohanes Parihala and Busro Busro, "Reclaiming Jesus as Source of Peace in Luke 12:49–53 through the Perspective of Religious Pluralism in an Indonesian Context," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2020): 1–7; I Wayan Sumertha, Busro Busro, and M. Yusuf Wibisono, "Sacred Spaces, Shared Souls: Interfaith Harmony at Taman Kemaliq Lingsar, Lombok, Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 1 (2025): 127–54.

⁶ Birgit Bräuchler, *Reconciliation and the Revival of Tradition, The Cultural Dimension of Peace* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

One of Maluku's key social assets in fostering peace is *Pela* and *Gandong*, two cultural concepts that have long served as bonds between religious communities. *Pela* is a bond between two villages established through historical agreements, often as a means of conflict resolution, while *Gandong* is rooted in kinship ties, signifying shared ancestry. These traditions function as social mechanisms that reinforce the idea that all people of Maluku are brothers and sisters, regardless of religious or ethnic differences. Various studies highlight the crucial role of *Pela* and *Gandong* in post-conflict reconciliation, strengthening communal solidarity, and serving as instruments for building social harmony.⁷

Maluku is a meeting place of Islam and Christianity in Eastern Indonesia. The relationship between Islam and Christianity in Maluku has been longstanding. Islam first entered the Maluku Islands through North Maluku around 470 or 502 Hijriah (1077 or 1108 AD). Through Sultan Zainal Abidin of Ternate, who came to power at the end of the 15th century, Islam entered the central Maluku region, especially Seram Island, Ambon Island and Lease.⁸ Christianity first entered Indonesia through a Catholic mission led by the Portuguese in the 16th century. The arrival of the Dutch (VOC) in the 17th century made the Catholic mission stop and changed to a Protestant mission then spread massively in various regions in central Maluku in the 18th century.⁹ Currently, the populations of the two religions are nearly equal, and their relationship is characterized by fluctuations between periods of harmony and conflict. The competition for missionary efforts and the struggle for influence—particularly in the political realm—has resulted in tensions between the two religions. Nevertheless, local cultural institutions have established mechanisms that facilitate the reconciliation of both parties following instances of conflict.

The central Maluku region is a collection of autonomous regions called Negeri.¹⁰ The regions have a continuous relationship of coexistence,¹¹ even before Islam or Christianity entered the region. Conflicts often occur due to issues of boundaries and struggles for resources and influence. After the entry of religion, the conflict that occurred predominantly was interreligious conflict. However, through a strong cultural approach, it succeeded in re-establishing peace between warring villages.¹² The cultural approach as a reconciliation mechanism is known as *Pela* and *Gandong*. The goal of *Pela* and *Gandong* is harmony, unity in diversity, and embracing each other.¹³

Previous studies have explored *Pela* and *Gandong* as cultural mechanisms for fostering peace and harmony in Maluku.¹⁴ Other research has examined the application of *Pela* values in social life, such as *ale rasa beta rasa*¹⁵ in Muslim-Christian village relations.¹⁶ Some studies highlight how *Pela* and *Gandong* influence social reconciliation,¹⁷ character formation,¹⁸ and community leadership in Maluku.¹⁹ Meanwhile, research on places of worship in the context of religious harmony has largely

⁷ Frets Keriapy and Talizaro Tafonao, "Pela Gandong from the Perspective of Christian Religious Education," *Sanctum Domine: Jurnal Teologi* 12, no. 2 (2023): 203–14; Tati Hartimah, Setyadi Sulaiman, and Nina Farlina, "Pela Gandong for Social Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Ambon," *Buletin Al-Turas* 27, no. 2 (2021): 361–78; Anju Nofarof Hasudungan, "Peace Education Based on Local Wisdom of Pela Gandong in Social Science," *Berumpun: International Journal of Social, Politics, and Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2020): 151–65; Elsin Titaley, "Pela Dan Gandong Culture As Basic of A Network Formation For Poverty Alleviation In The Village," *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 5, no. 3 (2018): 14–22; Beatrix J.M. Salenussa et al., "Development of Integration Education Model Pela-Gandong Local Based on Local Content in Primary Schools in Ambon City," *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering* 8, no. 2 (2019): 118–27; Petronela Sahetapy and Samson Laurens, "The Effectiveness of Leadership Based on Pela Gandong Values in the Population and Civil Registration Office of Ambon City," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 12, no. 5 (2023): 105–20.

⁸ Hamzah Tualeka, "The History of Islam and Its Dissemination in Ambon-Lease, Maluku," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 5, no. 2 (2011): 298.

⁹ Steve G.C. Gaspersz and Nancy N. Souisa, "Sailing through the Waves: Ecclesiological Experiences of the Gereja Protestan Maluku Archipelago Congregations in Maluku," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 1.

¹⁰ Saat ini pemerintahan negeri disamakan statusnya dengan pemerintahan desa, selanjutnya dalam artikel ini kata negeri disubstitusi dengan kata desa.

¹¹ Hatib Abdul Kadir, "(Re)Building Interethnic Relations Through Sharecropping in Post-Conflict Maluku," *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2023): 154.

¹² Bräuchler, *Reconciliation and the Revival of Tradition*, 69.

¹³ Rachel Iwamony, Steve Gaspersz, and Nancy Souisa, "To Embrace and Be Embraced: School Pela in Post-Conflict Ambon," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 9, no. 1 (2019): 86.

¹⁴ Bräuchler, *Reconciliation and the Revival of Tradition*.

¹⁵ Nilai local genius di Maluku yang secara harfiah berarti "apa yang kamu rasakan, aku juga rasakan", yang maknanya saling berbagi rasa, saling mengerti dan saling menerima.

¹⁶ Fransina Matakana et al., "The Self-Concept of Ale Rasa Beta Rasa in the Orang Basudara Community in Ambon (Studies on the Community of Passo and Batumerah Country)," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology* 9 (2020): 1306–11.

¹⁷ Hartimah, Sulaiman, and Farlina, "Pela Gandong for Social Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Ambon."

¹⁸ Sahetapy and Laurens, "The Effectiveness of Leadership Based on Pela Gandong Values in the Population and Civil Registration Office of Ambon City."

¹⁹ Olivia Laura Sahertian, Margono Setiawan, and Sunaryo, "Culture and Employee Performance: The Mediating Role of Personality and Commitment," *Management Science Letters* 10, no. 7 (2020): 1567–74.

focused on issues related to their construction and the conflicts that arise from it.²⁰ Some studies have discussed the role of local genius in mitigating conflicts over places of worship, but they often view it as a symbol of tolerance rather than an active mechanism for fostering social cohesion and harmony.²¹

This article offers a fresh perspective by examining the *Pela* relationship in fostering harmony between Muslims and Christians through the symbolic role of places of worship (mosques and churches). Unlike previous studies that primarily highlight *Pela* in the context of social relations or conflict resolution, this article focuses on how the *Pela* institution is manifested in the construction of places of worship as symbols of harmony.

A case study of Hitu Lama (Muslim) and Galala (Christian) villages on Ambon Island provides a concrete example of how *Pela* functions in strengthening brotherhood through the joint construction of mosques and churches. Academically and socially, this research is significant in revealing *Pela* and *Gandong* as both social mechanisms and instruments for interfaith reconciliation. Practically, the findings can serve as recommendations for fostering religious harmony in other conflict-prone regions of Indonesia. Thus, this article presents a new perspective on *Pela* as a mechanism that not only maintains social relations but is also physically embodied in religious spaces as monuments of harmony rooted in local genius.

Methodology

This type of research is qualitative-explorative with a case study approach, a bounded system, which sees mosques as cases in relation to *Pela* institutions as units that work on an integrative and patterned system.²² This research emphasizes explanatory knowledge about the case studied. Mosques and churches, as a fact, are explained in the parameters of the *Pela* relationship between Hitu Lama and Galala.²³ The cases of *Pela* Hitu Lama and Galala were chosen as representations to explain how the *Pela* mechanism works in mosque and church buildings, thus further strengthening harmony between the residents of the two villages of different religions. The duration of this research spanned a period of 14 days and was conducted during June 2023. The collection of field data took place in Hitu Lama Village and Galala Village throughout this month.

Figure 1: Hitu Village



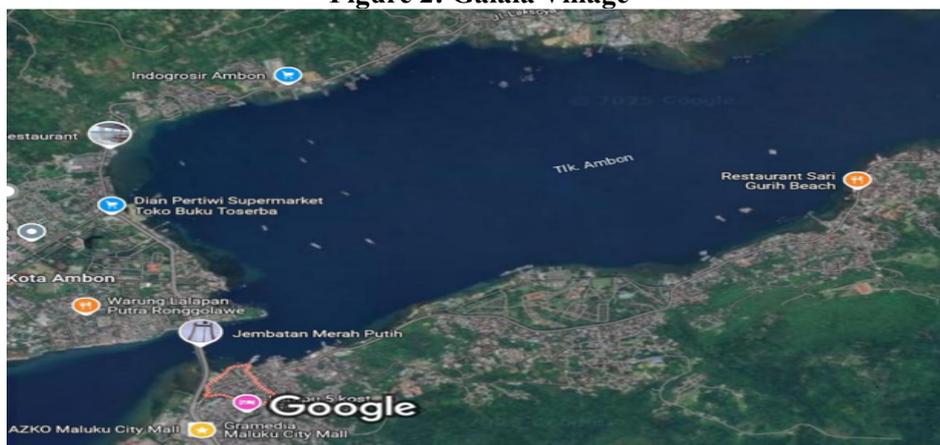
²⁰ Abdul Halim and Pahrudin Hm, "The Study of Seloko Adat as Safety-Valve to Prevent Religious Conflict in Jambi City, Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 23, no. 3 (March 1, 2020): 223–36; Anwar Sadat Harahap et al., "Dalihan Na Tolu as a Model for Resolving Religious Conflicts in North Sumatera: An Anthropological and Sociological Perspective," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 3 (November 30, 2023): 1943–70; Erawadi Erawadi and Fadlan Masykura Setiadi, "Exploring Religious Harmony Through Dalihan Na Tolu: Local Wisdom in Peacebuilding in Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeum* 12, no. 3 (September 30, 2024): 1379–1408.

²¹ Sabara and Aksa, "Religious Harmony Through the Establishment of a House of Worship Based on Local Wisdom," *Al-Qalam* 28, no. 2 (2022): 279–92; Joesana Tjahjani and Sonya Indriati Sondakh, "Bukit Kasih Kanonang as a Religious Tourism Site Based on Local Wisdom of North Sulawesi, Indonesia," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 11, no. 1 (2023): 58–71; Muhammad Dachlan, "Best Practice in Building House of Worship Based on Local Wisdom in Palu," *Al-Qalam* 27, no. 2 (November 2022): 291–02; Sitti Arafah et al., "Best Practice in Building Houses of Worship Based on Local Wisdom: A Study in the Indonesian Christian Church the Congregation of Bongo IV," 2021, 290–93.

²² Coombs Hayden, "Case Study Research Defined," *Case Study Research*, 2022.

²³ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches 3th Edition* (SAGE Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks, 2013), 98-99.

Figure 2: Galala Village



Both villages are situated on Ambon Island; however, they are governed under different administrative jurisdictions. Hitu Village falls within the Leihitu District of Central Maluku Regency, whereas Galala is incorporated into the Sirimau District of Ambon City. The data collection process involved observational studies within the villages, with a particular focus on the establishment of the Jami Hitu Lama Mosque and the Immanuel Gatik Church in Galala, which exemplify the harmonious coexistence of the two religious communities. Structured interviews were conducted with a selection of key informants who were purposively chosen from among the customary, religious, governmental, and community elders, all of whom have firsthand knowledge of the historical relationships between Hitu Lama and Galala. The selection of these informants was based on their expertise and experience relevant to the research subject. Furthermore, a review of documents pertinent to the research themes, including statistical data and records related to the construction of the Hitu Lama Mosque and Galala Church, was undertaken. Data analysis utilized an ethnographic approach, providing a comprehensive description of the research subjects along with their social contexts. The Jami Hitu Mosque and Galala Gatik Church are examined in relation to the *Pela* relationship between the two villages, which serves as a critical social framework. This analytical process aims to gain insights into the dynamics surrounding the mosques, involving interpretations of the meanings, functions, and repercussions of the actions undertaken by the respective communities.²⁴

The data analysis process in this ethnographic research follows several key steps. It begins with data collection, where information is gathered through observations, interviews, and documentation. Next, data organization is carried out to structure the collected data for easier processing and analysis. Once organized, the data undergoes coding, where key themes are identified, such as religious harmony, the role of religious and customary institutions, or traditions related to building places of worship. This coding process helps researchers recognize patterns within the data that align with the research objectives.

Following this, a thematic analysis is conducted, in which the coded data is examined in depth to extract the main themes relevant to the research questions. These findings are then mapped and structured into a logical framework to provide a clearer understanding of the studied phenomenon. The next step involves reporting on the research findings, where the analyzed data is compiled into a coherent and structured report. Finally, a reflection and validation process is conducted to review and verify the findings, ensuring their accuracy and reliability before finalizing the study.

Theoretical Framework: *Pela-Gandong*, as a Cultural Base Building Islamic and Christian Village Cohesion

The concept of *Pela* represents a framework of cooperation that serves as a foundational cultural element shaping the social dynamics between Muslim and Christian communities in Maluku. The term “*Pela*” is derived from the word “*pila*,” which conveys the notions of unification and resilience,

²⁴ Hélio R. S. Silva, “A Situação Etnográfica: Andar e Ver,” *Horizontes Antropológicos* 15, no. 32 (2009): 171–88.

signifying both the act of bringing entities together and the intent to maintain integrity and cohesion.²⁵ At the same time, the term “*Gandong*” conveys a meaning similar to the word “content.” In contrast, the concept of “*Pela*” is established through a bond of allegiance that fosters a fraternal relationship, whereas “*Gandong*” arises from kinship ties that result from genealogical similarities.²⁶ In contrast to *Gandong*, *Pela* represents a formal agreement established between two villages that previously lacked any customary ties. This agreement is enacted in response to a significant event, thereby fostering a sense of obligation and commitment between the involved parties.²⁷ There are two recognized forms of *Pela*, which are deeply rooted in historical events. The first is known as *Pela karas* (hard), which represents a formal agreement between two villages to conclude hostilities and establish peace. The second form is referred to as *Pela tanpa sirih* (betel place), which is initiated through minor events or signifies cooperation between villages, often facilitating trade relations. The relationships established through *Pela* and *Gandong* create a sacred bond of brotherhood among villages of differing religions. Villages that cultivate *Pela* and *Gandong* connections are expected to collaborate in the development of essential public facilities, including places of worship, educational institutions, traditional communal houses (*baileo*), wells, and other communal projects.²⁸

The cultural foundation for the analysis of *Pela* and *Gandong* in this paper is based on Raymond Williams’ theory, which conceptualizes the base as a dynamic process rather than a static entity. As elements of cultural heritage, *Pela* and *Gandong* represent legacies from the past that continue to exert significant influence on contemporary events.²⁹ This is due to the recognition that culture extends beyond mere “artistic monuments” and plays a significant role in shaping social relations.³⁰ *Pela* is a cultural tradition of the Maluku community that establishes a bond of brotherhood (referred to as *basudara* relationship) among residents of different villages, irrespective of their religious affiliations, be it Islam or Christianity.³¹

Pela and *Gandong* serve as foundational cultural elements that facilitate interaction between the Muslim and Christian communities in Maluku. As cultural underpinnings, *Pela* and *Gandong* have significantly influenced the social superstructure, encompassing aspects of social interaction, customary relations, and the dynamics between adherents of Islam and Christianity. The bond established through *Pela* and *Gandong* has fostered the principle of Moluccan brotherhood, encapsulated in the phrase “*ale rasa beta rasa*,” which translates to “I feel what you feel”.³²

According to Frans Thomas, *Pela* has several key elements that can be used to understand interreligious relations in Ambon and its relevance in fostering social harmony amidst religious plurality. *Pela* is a tradition that involves a fraternal relationship between two parties (for example, two villages or two families) from different religious backgrounds. The *Pela* tradition is usually based on principles of mutual respect and assistance, despite differences in religion and beliefs. Typically, *Pela* is bound through agreements or ties that strengthen the relationship between the two parties, often marked by specific ceremonies or rituals.³³

As a cultural foundation, *Pela* and *Gandong* became a strong valve of cohesion between two villages of different religions. Keams and Forrest call the main dimensions of social cohesion: civic culture and shared values.³⁴ In this context, *Pela* and *Gandong* reinforce a sense of community, reciprocal

²⁵ Sharon Michelle O. Pattiasina, “Tiang Rohomoni: Memaknai Simbol Budaya Berbasis Agama Di Gedung Gereja Pniel, Tuhaha, Maluku,” *Fikrah* 10, no. 2 (2022): 306.

²⁶ Novita Loma Sahertia et al., “Open Peer Review on Qeios *Pela Gandong* Culture: Construction of Christian Education Values in the Allang Society,” *Qeios*, 2023, 1–19.

²⁷ Elsina Titaley, “*Pela* Dan *Gandong* Culture As Basic of A Network Formation For Poverty Alleviation In The Village,” *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 5, no. 3 (2018): 15.

²⁸ A. Basir Soliasa, “Falsafah *Pela Gandong* Dan Toleransi Beragama Dalam Masyarakat Ambon Yang Multikultur,” *Refleksi* 14, no. 2 (2014): 217.

²⁹ Neema Parvini, “New Historicism and Cultural Materialism,” in *Companion to Literary Theory*, ed. David H. Richter (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2018), 243.

³⁰ Ning Wang, “Remembering Raymond Williams: His Theoretical Heritage to China’s World Literature and Culture Studies,” *Journal of Foreign Languages and Cultures* 6, no. 2 (2022): 92.

³¹ Frans Thomas, Wacana Tradisi *Pela* Dalam Masyarakat Ambon, *Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni dan Pengajaran. FKIP Universitas Pattimura Ambon* 38, no 2 (2010). ISSN 0854-8277. E-ISSN 2550-0635. Page 166-180

³² Iwamony, Gaspersz, and Souisa, “To Embrace and Be Embraced: School *Pela* in Post-Conflict Ambon.”, 90.

³³ Frans Thomas, Wacana Tradisi *Pela* Dalam Masyarakat Ambon, *Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni dan Pengajaran. FKIP Universitas Pattimura Ambon* 38, no 2 (2010). ISSN 0854-8277. E-ISSN 2550-0635. Page 166-180

³⁴ Vladimir Ponizovskiy et al., “Sticking to Common Values: Neighbourhood Social Cohesion Moderates the Effect of Value Congruence on Life Satisfaction,” *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 30, no. 5 (2020): 531.

relationships, and social trust.³⁵ In the social praxis, it refers to Islamic-Christian relations to live together as brothers based on customary values and institutions. *Pela* and *Gandong* are the social bond between Muslim and Christian villages,³⁶ that have forged a sense of shared fraternity between residents of the two villages brothers.

During the significant conflict between Muslims and Christians in Maluku from 1999 to 2002, the effectiveness of *Pela* and *Gandong* as a cultural foundation for fostering harmonious relations was called into question.³⁷ However, it is during this period of strife that *Pela* and *Gandong* effectively served as a cultural cornerstone, leveraging suprastructural elements such as traditional bonds, institutional frameworks, and the reconciliation of conflicts that transpired in Maluku.³⁸

In the aftermath of the conflict, *Pela* and *Gandong* were revitalized as a cultural foundation aimed at reinforcing solidarity and brotherhood, thereby mitigating the potential for future conflicts and acting as a safety valve against disputes.³⁹ Post-conflict, the cultural principles embodied by *Pela* and *Gandong* have proven efficient as a traditional basis for promoting justice, emphasizing not only distributive justice but also restorative justice.⁴⁰ Furthermore, *Pela* and *Gandong* serve as a poignant reminder of the enduring brotherhood between Muslims and Christians in Maluku, exemplified through collaborative endeavors, such as the joint construction of mosques and churches.

Mosques and churches in *Pela* and *Gandong* serve not only as sacred symbols for Muslims and Christians but also as shared spiritual sites for both communities. Religion functions as a value system that governs various aspects of life,⁴¹ rendering places of worship as tangible representations of the unique sacred symbols inherent to each faith. Consequently, conflicts may frequently arise concerning issues related to these places of worship. However, *Pela* and *Gandong*, as cultural foundations, play a crucial role in moderating religious perspectives on these matters. In the spirit of *Pela* and *Gandong*, Muslims engage in the construction of churches, while Christians contribute to the establishment of mosques, whether through labor or financial support. Thus, *Pela* and *Gandong* promote a culture of religious moderation, which is increasingly pertinent given the significant influence of religion in multiple facets of life.⁴²

Hitu Lama and Galala: From *Belang* to *Pela*

The *Pela* agreement between Hitu Lama and Galala was established on May 19, 1959, and is commemorated by a monument erected in Galala. This agreement, known as *Pela tampabetel*, signifies the absence of conflict between the two villages and serves as the foundation for their relationship. The rapport between the inhabitants of Hitu Lama and Galala has been cultivated over an extended period. A significant event leading to the *Pela* agreement was the boat race, or *belang*, which took place in early 1959. Prior to this race, a solid relationship had already been formed between the two communities. This historical context is further corroborated by Wem Joseph, a 78-year-old elder from the Galala community, who witnessed the *Pela* agreement in 1959 and shared his insights during an interview conducted on June 5, 2023, in Galala:

Good relations between the people of Galala and Hitu Lama have been established for a long time, and our ancestors often went to Hitu to catch fish and buy some produce from there. Similarly, the people of Hitu Lama often stop at Galala when going to Ambon City.

³⁵ Ben Robaeyst et al., "Online Neighborhood Networks: The Relationship Between Online Communication Practices and Neighborhood Dynamics," *Media and Communication* 10, no. 2 (2022): 108.

³⁶ Resa Dandirwalu and Husnul Qodim, "Baileo as a Peace Model for Christian and Muslim Communities in Maluku," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 3 (2021): 1–11.

³⁷ Muhamad Ali, "Confrontation and Reconciliation: Muslim Voices of Maluku Conflict (1999-2002)," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 01, no. 02 (2007): 379–402.

³⁸ Anju Nofarof Hasudungan, "Peace Education Based on Local Wisdom of *Pela Gandong* in Social Science," *Berumpun: International Journal of Social, Politics, and Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2020): 152.

³⁹ Beatrix J.M. Salenus et al., "Development of Integration Education Model *Pela-Gandong* Local Based on Local Content in Primary Schools in Ambon City," *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering* 8, no. 2 (2019): 121.

⁴⁰ Bräuchler, *Reconciliation and the Revival of Tradition*.

⁴¹ Jason W Alvis, "Phenomenology 's Rejects : Religion after Derrida ' s Denegations," *Open Theology* 3, no. 1 (2017): 590–99.

⁴² Umi Musyarofah and Zulhannan Zulhannan, "Religious Moderation in the Discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's Dakwah in the Era of Industry 4.0," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 22, no. 2 (2023): 409–34; Dadang Kuswana, Deden Sumpena, and Yoshy Hendra Hardiyan Syah. "The Religion and Social Movements in Indonesia: Analysis of Contemporary Problems, Their Impacts, and Their Implications A Review of the Theory of Relative Deprivation". *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 14, no. 2 (2025): 351-80.

In the past, when it was evening, there was no car to take them back to Galala. The Hitu people make the bridge in Galala a place to rest and even stay overnight if they don't get a vehicle home. Galala people used to come to bring them drinking water; among them, some took baths in the houses of Galala people. The Hitu Lama people, who often participate in *belang* competitions, often tether their *belang* at Galala Beach. This triggered the fraternal relationship between the people of Galala and Hitu Lama. Until early 1959, at that time, Colonel Herman Pieters, Commander of the Pattimura Military Regional Command, held a *belang* competition between villages on Ambon Island and its surroundings, in local terms called *Arumbae Gurabae*. The people of Galala are interested in seeing the *belang* of Hitu Lama that are good and can run fast. Hitu Lama always wins if there is a *belang* race. Therefore, the people of Galala asked the people of Hitu Lama also to make *belang* like they had to be used during the race. After the *belang* was completed, Hitu Lama did not want to accept money as payment for making the *belang*. The king (village head) of Hitu Lama at that time, namely Arsyad Pelu, told the head of Galala village, Esau Jorris, that the *belang* became a symbol of brotherhood between Hitu Lama and Galala. Finally, the two leaders agreed to strengthen the fraternal relationship between the two by appointing the *Pela*, which was inaugurated on May 19, 1959. I witnessed the historic event when I was a teenager and danced during the ceremony of taking the oath.

Prior to the swearing-in ceremony, a minor incident occurred during the *belang* training on the eve of the race. While one of the *belang* personnel from Hitu Lama was rowing, a splash of water inadvertently reached the Galala individuals who were positioned on their *belang*. This resulted in a dispute that nearly escalated into a physical confrontation; however, the situation was swiftly defused in light of the longstanding amicable relations between the two villages. The fraternal bond formed through significant community engagement between Hitu Lama and Galala, which culminated in the establishment of the *Pela* oath between the two villages, was articulated by Salhana Pelu, the village head of Hitu Lama (interview, 03/06/2023, in Hitu Lama):

The good relationship between Hitu Lama and Galala has long been established since our ancestors. The peak was during the *belang* race held by the Pattimura Military Regional Command, whose commander at that time was Colonel Herman Pieters, who was also a native son of Ambon Island. In every *belang* race, the Hitu Lama is often the champion because the *belang* of the Hitu Lama are famous for running fast. Galala people themselves are not new to the sea; they are used to the sea and their physique is also quite good. Before the race, when the Hitu Lama team was training, there was a small event that had caused a misunderstanding, namely when the paddle pedaled by the Hitu Lama team caused a splash of water that hit the Galala team. There was a dispute, but it was finally successfully reconciled by community leaders. The Galala people then asked the Hitu Lama people, why are your *belang* good and can run fast? Driven by that curiosity, they then asked the Hitu Lama people to make *belang* like the Hitu Lama had. When the *belang* ordered were finished, my grandfather, who was then the head of Hitu Lama village, namely Arsyad Pelu, did not want to accept the *belang* payment money from Galala. However, he requested that the two villages establish a brotherly relationship in a bond, which later formed the *Pela* relationship that continues to this day.

In relation to the symbol representing the *Pela* agreement, which took place on May 19, 1959, Abdullah Pelu, an 80-year-old elder from Hitu Lama and a witness to the event, provided an explanation during an interview conducted on April 6, 2023, in Hitu Lama:

At the time of taking the oath of the *Pela* there is no agreement in writing; there is a customary agreement. The agreement was symbolic, namely biting fingers between the leaders of Hitu Lama at that time, namely Arsyad Pelu and Esau Jorris from Galala. Biting each other's fingers is a symbol that between the two taking care of each other in the name of brotherhood.

The *Pela* tradition serves as a powerful symbol of brotherhood that transcends religious boundaries, fostering social solidarity through cooperative efforts in the construction of public facilities and active participation in each community's religious celebrations. For instance, the residents of Galala will come together to assist in repairing the king's house or renovating the synagogue and other public facilities when such events occur in *Galala*. Conversely, when activities are held in Hitu Lama, the community of Galala will similarly offer their support in the spirit of the *Pela* alliance.

Annually, during the Christmas holiday, residents of Hitu Lama visit *Galala*, while during Eid al-Fitr, individuals from Galala reciprocate by visiting Hitu Lama. Each citizen of Hitu Lama is assigned adoptive parents, referred to locally as *mama piara* or *father piara* in Galala, and vice versa. These adoptive parents serve as hosts during visits. According to Wem Joseph, the term *mama piara* emerged among the communities of Hitu Lama and Galala following the *Pela* agreement of 1959, which facilitated increased interactions between the two villages.

To ensure the continuation of the *Pela* relationship and to instill an appreciation for this bond in future generations, a *Panas Pela* event is organized every five years. This event is designed to reinforce the fraternal connections that have been established over time, serving to strengthen the relations between the two villages that share the traditions of *Pela* and *Gandong*.⁴³ The *Panas Pela* event serves to commemorate the *Pela* oath established by our ancestors, as well as to reinforce the fraternal relationship that has developed between the two villages. Activities associated with *Panas Pela* encompass communal feasting, specifically the sharing of *patita*, along with various forms of folk entertainment that engage the community.⁴⁴ The last *Panas Pela* event between Hitu Lama and Galala was conducted on October 20, 2015, in Galala Village. The subsequent *Panas Pela* was originally scheduled for 2020; however, it was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with Hitu Lama designated as the host for the rescheduled event.

The relationship between Hitu Lama and Galala is characterized by a brotherly bond that has naturally developed through sustained interaction, culminating in the tradition of the *belang* race. This event exemplifies a model of community cohesion among two villages with differing religious backgrounds, demonstrating that such unity can arise from simple interactions and events. In the context of Maluku society, the *belang* race serves as a symbol of affection and an inspiration for harmonious cohabitation among diverse groups.

This sentiment is particularly evident in the communities of Hitu Lama and Galala, where the *belang* serves not only as a backdrop but also as a symbol of the enduring brotherhood that is preserved in the collective memory of both villages across generations. The significance of this event fosters strong communal bonds that transcend religious differences. The *belang* race has not only reinforced the identity of Hitu Lama and Galala but also facilitated deeper social interactions and collaborations, including matters of religious significance, such as the construction of synagogues and the celebration of various religious holidays.

The *Panas Pela* between Hitu Lama and Galala reflects a commitment to maintaining a fraternal relationship within a simple framework. This simplicity, however, underlines a profound dedication to nurturing a spirit of brotherhood that is intended to endure among future generations, regardless of existing differences, including those pertaining to religion.

The most significant test of the *Pela* and *Gandong* relations in Maluku occurred during the extensive religious conflict between 1999 and 2002. The communities of Hitu Lama and Galala became embroiled in the divisive atmosphere, aligning themselves with their respective religious factions. Despite the intensity of the conflict, the fraternal ties between the two communities remained intact. According to Salhana Pelu, the prevailing conflict hindered their ability to engage in open relations with Galala. However, both communities continued to communicate and exchange information, demonstrating a commitment to preserving their relationship even under duress. Notably, they refrained from direct confrontations, choosing instead to keep their interactions mutually respectful. This situation illustrates

⁴³ Anju Nofarof Hasudungan, "Panas Pela of Education: Desegregation of Muslim and Christian Post-Reconciliation at SMPN 4 Salahutu Liang and SMPN 9 Ambon," *Simulacra* 3, no. 2 (2020): 230.

⁴⁴ Jenny Koce Matitaputty and Ida Masinay, "The Ceremonial Procession and Meaning of Mekan Patita in Negeri Oma - Maluku," *Society* 8, no. 2 (2020): 304.

the limitations of *Pela* as a social mechanism in the face of larger political forces. Although the bonds of *Pela* were upheld during these tumultuous times, they proved insufficient to fully mitigate the involvement of both villages in broader societal tensions.

Embodiment of *Pela* in Mosques and Churches

The *Pela* bond serves as a fundamental cultural framework for fostering social structures in intercommunity interactions between two villages connected through *Pela* relations. This bond, established by the ancestors of the Moluccans, aims to cultivate brotherhood and mutual support across various aspects of life.⁴⁵ *Pela* presents the spirit of gotong-royong, which, in practice, Indonesians gain an understanding of belonging, mutual support, and cohesiveness that underscores the high value of solidarity with the community.⁴⁶ The culture of gotong-royong in the traditions of Indonesian society fosters togetherness as well as plays an important role as a force that unites differences in society.⁴⁷ Gotong-royong is exemplified through the practice of cooperation that emphasizes mutual reliance among individuals. In the cultural context of Maluku, this tradition is referred to as *masohi*. Technically, *masohi* denotes collaborative efforts that engage various elements of society in a collective task. Furthermore, *masohi* serves as a manifestation of the values inherent in *Pela-Gandong*. In this context, *Pela* represents the cultural foundation guiding interactions between two villages that are bound by a mutual agreement, while *masohi* acts as its superstructural implementation.

The attachment of *Pela* to *masohi* culture as its superstructure reflects the nature of *nahulima*, which is a sense of belonging in communal shared responsibility.⁴⁸ When the *Pela* brother organizes an event, he plays a pivotal role in facilitating both energy and material support. The invocation of *Pela* has become a deeply entrenched tradition, prompting residents from surrounding villages to converge upon the *Pela* brother's village when a community project is initiated, particularly in the case of public facilities, including a synagogue. Each individual contributes according to their abilities, whether through financial support or manual labor, without the imposition of strict regulations governing participation. This communal effort is wholly motivated by a shared recognition of their connection to *Pela* as a foundational cultural element. Ikbal Pelu, the secretary of Hitu Lama village, elucidates this dynamic during an interview conducted on April 6, 2023, in Hitu Lama:

The *Pela* relationship makes kinship that lasts for generations to our generation. We came to help build the church in Galala, because there is a relationship that is embedded as brothers. We (Hitu Lama and Galala) feel that there is a connection with each other, so our *Pela*'s brother's life is our one too, even though we have different beliefs.

The implementation of *Pela* is rooted in a *masohi* or gotong-royong culture that ultimately gives rise to relics reflecting historical significance for future generations. Every public facility constructed through initiative and non-governmental funding is ensured to encompass the active participation of both *Pela* and *Gandong* brothers. These public facilities thereby transform into historical "monuments" that embody the bonds of brotherhood with individuals from other villages who share these *Pela* or *Gandong* relationships. This is exemplified by the Jami Hitu Mosque and the Immanuel Gatik Church located in Galala. Both structures serve as "monuments" symbolizing the strong brotherhood established through *Pela* ties between the villages of Hitu Lama and Galala, despite their differing religious affiliations.

In 1962, the residents of Hitu Lama initiated plans to renovate their mosque, which had previously been a simple surau, into a more contemporary edifice. Upon learning of this initiative, a prominent figure from Galala facilitated a connection between the construction committee and an architect residing in Mardika Ambon, known as Maruanaya. Notably, the architect was an Ambonese Christian who undertook the design of the mosque. The construction process unfolded in stages and spanned several years, during which both manpower and materials were willingly contributed until the mosque's

⁴⁵ Frets Keriapy and Talizaro Tafonao, "Pela Gandong from the Perspective of Christian Religious Education," *Sanctum Domine: Jurnal Teologi* 12, no. 2 (2023): 204.

⁴⁶ Idawarni Asmal and Rudi Latief, "The Presence of a Family Communal Space as a Form of Local Wisdom towards Community Cohesion and Resilience in Coastal Settlements," *Sustainability (Switzerland)* 15, no. 10 (2023): 3.

⁴⁷ Zaenal Siradjuddin, "Innovation on Mutual Cooperation Culture (Gotong Royong) Implementation for House Development," *International Review for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development* 11, no. 3 (2023): 173.

⁴⁸ Abdurachman, Andi Dody May Putra Agustang, and Andi Agustang, "Culture of Shame-Heart and Social Solidarity of Kaitetu People Central Maluku District, Indonesia," *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research* 9, no. 2 (2020): 5080–82.

inauguration in 1965. Controversy arose regarding the shape of the mosque's roof, which was perceived to resemble a cross when viewed from above. Initially, the Hitu community did not contest this design; however, amid the conflict in 1999, the roof was subsequently modified to eliminate this cross-like appearance.

Salhana Pelu, the head of Hitu Lama village, has addressed the speculation regarding the design of the mosque's roof, which some perceive to resemble a cross. He emphasized that such interpretations stem from personal perception rather than any intentional design. Consequently, the residents of Hitu Lama have chosen not to engage with these rumors. The mosque's roof was altered during the period of religious conflict in 1999, resulting in its current form. The Hitu Mosque, like several other mosques in Maluku, serves as a testament to the robust historical connections established through *Pela* and *Gandong* relationships with neighboring Christian communities. In addition to its relationship with Galala village, Hitu Lama shares a *Gandong* bond with Nusaniwe village, also a Christian community. Both of these villages significantly contributed to the construction of the mosque.

In mid-2016, residents of Galala and Hatiwe Kecil villages planned to renovate the Immanuel Gatik Church, which is situated between the two communities. The congregation encompasses members from both villages, with Galala maintaining a *Pela* relationship with Hitu Lama, while Hatiwe Kecil is linked through a *Pela* relationship with the neighboring Hitumessing village. The inhabitants of Hitu Lama and Hitumessing actively participated in the church renovation by providing labor and materials over the course of four years. Furthermore, the village leaders of Hitu Lama and Hitumessing participated in the groundbreaking ceremony on June 12, 2016. The majority of the construction materials, particularly timber, were sourced from Hitu Lama and Hitumessing. The church structure features twelve pillars, all of which were constructed with the assistance of these two villages, recognized for their *Pela* ties. The contributions of Hitu Lama and Hitumessing are inscribed on the two front pillars of the church, denoted respectively.

Wem Joseph, the chairman of the church construction committee, noted that material support from Hitu Lama was transported using twenty trucks. Nearly the entire population of Hitu Lama provided manpower, particularly during critical phases of the renovation, such as the demolition of old structures and the casting of the new church building. Ikbal Pelu, the village secretary of Hitu Lama, recounted these significant contributions made by the community:

Around 2016, the demolition and rehab of the Gatik Church in Galala Hatiwe Kecil was carried out. When the demolition of the church building at that time the whole community from Hitu Lama came to help. Our community helped demolish the old church building, even to the first level of construction, we were fully involved. Until the process of laying the first stone, the village chief from here also laid the first stone as a sign of respect. At the inauguration of the church on December 24, 2020, one day before Christmas, we were also invited. Because at that time, it was still in the atmosphere of the Covid-19 Pandemic, only representatives from the village were present; at that time, the Governor of Maluku was present to inaugurate the church.

The community perceives their participation in the construction of places of worship as a manifestation of brotherhood grounded in traditional bonds, specifically the concepts of *Pela* and *Gandong*. The involvement of the Christian community from Galala in the establishment of the Hitu Mosque, alongside the reciprocal engagement of the Hitu community in building the Galala Gatik Church, is regarded as a customary duty—an inherent outcome of the *Pela* bond that exists between the two villages. The Jami Hitu Mosque and Galala Gatik Church serve as tangible representations of *Pela*, highlighting the harmony that exists between religious entities in Maluku. The relationship embodied by *Pela*, as evidenced in the construction of both mosques and churches, illustrates the cohesion among religious communities in Maluku, which is fortified by cultural strength, with *Pela* serving as the foundation of their culture and the masohi tradition as the superstructure.

The *Pela* relationship promotes a sense of harmony through culturally-based communal connections and exemplifies a model of pluralism at the local level within the Moluccan community. *Pela* culture underpins a framework that fosters an awareness of pluralism, epitomizing pro-existence attitudes amidst diversity. The active involvement of the Hitu Lama Muslim community in the construction of

the church in Galala, as well as the full participation of the Galala community in erecting the mosque in Hitu Lama, illustrates the resilience of culture that surpasses religious divisions. Through the ethos of *Pela*, solidarity, unity, and harmony are manifested within religious spaces, symbolized by both mosques and churches. Ultimately, the *Pela* culture instills a consciousness of public ethics that facilitates comprehensive community engagement, allowing for the realization of harmony amidst differences,⁴⁹ Hitu Mosque and Galala Church are living proof of this.

The concept of *Pela*, as it pertains to the construction of houses of worship—specifically mosques and churches—holds significant value within the cultural framework of the Moluccan people. This practice reflects a community-driven model for fostering harmony, rooted in the collective desire to ascribe meaning to their historical journey. The tradition of collaboratively building mosques and churches embodies a social process that has historical resonance, serving as a continuous reminder of the importance of cultural awareness in promoting collective spirit and strength in improving social relations.

At this intersection of cultural and religious expression, the societal framework emerges, showcasing the intricate relationship between traditional customs and social organization. Mosques and churches stand as sacred symbols representative of their respective faiths, and warrant examination in the context of *Pela*. It is noteworthy that the construction of these houses of worship can often precipitate interreligious conflict. However, through the bond of *Pela*, the dual efforts in constructing mosques and churches become emblematic of exemplary practices, illustrating the potential for harmonious relations between Muslims and Christians from distinct villages.

Conclusion and Remarks

The fraternal relationship established through the *Pela* connection between Hitu Lama (Islam) and Galala (Christian) villages in 1959 exemplifies a model of interreligious brotherhood in Maluku. This *Pela* relationship emerged as a reconciliatory effort following a minor conflict, which was mitigated by a boat race that united the two distinct religious communities. The *Pela* relationship fosters intimate interactions grounded in cultural and historical ties that transcend religious divides. The camaraderie cultivated through *Pela* plays a significant role in moderating religious perspectives and attitudes in interreligious interactions. This relationship is manifested in the establishment of both mosques and churches within the villages. Traditionally, the residents of Hitu Lama view the Immanuel Gatik Church as their place of worship, while the Galala community identifies with the Jami Hitu Lama Mosque. Both the mosque and church serve as symbols of a shared cultural custom, having been built collaboratively. The *Pela* connections between Hitu Lama and Galala, along with the physical embodiment of Jami Hitu Mosque and Immanuel Gatik Church, represent a cultural construction of harmony between Islamic and Christian communities in Indonesia, particularly within Maluku.

The cultural significance of *Pela* (and *Gandong*) within Maluku functions as a vital cultural capital for promoting religious moderation, a goal that is currently being actively pursued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. The *Pela* mosques and churches exemplify local traditional practices that possess significant value in reinforcing Maluku Province's initiative as a laboratory for interreligious harmony. *Pela* culture serves as a foundational element that bolsters harmonious interreligious relations in the region. This research aims to contribute to the fortification of Maluku's program as a harmony laboratory, necessitating cooperation from both the Maluku Provincial government and the administrations of Central Maluku Regency and Ambon City. The findings of this study will lead to programmatic recommendations or strategies designed to enhance Maluku's role as a laboratory of harmony, utilizing best practices associated with the construction of *Pela* and *Gandong*-based houses of worship. It is essential to note that the limitations of this study pertain to its narrow focus on the cases of Hitu Lama and Galala, which may not allow for generalizable conclusions applicable to other regions exhibiting different social dynamics. Furthermore, the exploration of policymakers' involvement in this research requires additional examination to ascertain the level of governmental support for the implementation of the *Pela-Gandong* mechanism as a model of harmony. This study predominantly employs a qualitative approach, underscoring the necessity for quantitative research to systematically assess the efficacy of *Pela* and *Gandong* in promoting social harmony.

⁴⁹ Rochana Bajpai, "Pluralizing Pluralism: Lessons from, and for, India," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 20, no. 1 (2022): 27–42.

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