

# RELIGIOUS MODERATION: RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN THE CHRISTIAN REGION OF TANAH BATAK (CASE STUDY OF PAHAE JULU DISTRICT)

**Maringan Sinambela<sup>1</sup>, Wendy Sitindaon<sup>2</sup>, Masniar H. Sitorus<sup>3</sup>, Omta Purba<sup>4</sup>, Priska Silaban<sup>5</sup>, Holmes Rajagukguk<sup>6</sup>**

123456. Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung

maringansinambela78@gmail.com  
sitindaonwensdy@gmail.com  
masniarsitorus76@mail.com  
omta.purba@gmail.com  
priskanatalia11@gmail.com  
holmesrajagukguk540@gmail.com

## Abstract

The objective of the study is to analyze the process of religious conversion that gave birth to religious moderation and to know the role of Toba Batak customs in producing religious moderation in Pahae Julu. The context of different religious reference values at a certain point can increase the opportunity for friction and conflict in society. This condition requires a moderate attitude that can soften the form of religious beliefs that can confront each other in direct interaction in daily life. In practice, it can be seen in Pahae Julu that the moderate attitude is not top-down but rather bottom-up. The community consciously lives side by side with the context of different religious identities. However, the knowledge to behave, prevent and maintain interaction has been going on for several generations. This study uses a qualitative method assisted by interview techniques and direct observation in the field. The result of the study is activity of religious moderation in Pahae Julu is seen to be bridged through the Batak customary system. For the Batak tribe, it has an egalitarian nature that does not differentiate between religious identities. In the role of custom, all Batak tribes have obligations and rights that are reciprocal in nature. This customary position cannot be replaced by others arbitrarily so that there is no other way than to be obliged to follow it. This customary mechanism seems coercive but becomes a communication bridge that maintains the diversity of different religious identities in community life.

**Keywords:** moderation, diversity, batak customs, identity

## INTRODUCTION

The most critical point of an individual when there is a shift in their religious identity to determine a new identity. In general, this reality is often explained by religious conversion which can cause positive or negative reactions from the environment. Batak land which is identical to Christianity explicitly makes Christian identity the main choice, especially the Toba Batak tribe. This condition does not guarantee (automatically making the Batak tribe Christian in the Batak land). In one of the areas in the Onan Hassang sub-district which is still categorized as a Christian area and has a strong Christian influence, an identity anomaly occurs. The Toba Batak tribe in Onan Hasang actually makes Islam their identity and becomes a minority group in the Christian area. This is interesting to explore and explore its reality in order to be able to reveal the process of the Toba Batak tribe's religious conversion to Islam in the Christian area.

Religious conversion can occur due to the formalization of the state with the provisions of a set of rules and laws for its citizens. This is explained in research from (Aziz, 2009; Schiller, 1996; Sukamto, 2013; Wensdy Sitindaon, 2019) that some local beliefs are required to choose one of the official religions determined by the state and are given citizenship rights. The social position of groups with marginal identities and no recognition from the state and the majority group can have implications for a series of social exclusions. Surviving in a position of social exclusion leads individuals and groups to negotiate their identities in the form of religious conversion that is stronger in its position.

The selection of individual and group identities is not always based on urgent conditions but can be motivated by pragmatism. The latent nature of this identity selection cannot be captured in its purpose at the beginning when wanting to be part of a particular identity. However, the nature of individual or group pragmatism can be seen from the consistency between the values held by the group and implementing them in their lives. If the gap is too wide between actions after identity conversion can be an indicator of pragmatism. Individuals convert their identities only to make life easier but do not consider the consequences of their new identity. This is in line with

the findings of research from (Shofi, 2021) which saw that religious conversion was carried out to achieve personal goals in the form of access to marriage, getting a job, status, etc.

Religious conversion can also result in a dichotomy, namely gluing together religious communities or spreading hatred for different religious identities. Being wise about this condition is a careful step that can determine the changes that can occur in society. If religious conversion has more negative impacts on public life, it can certainly cause horizontal conflict. On the other hand, if religious conversion is a middle way to strengthen harmony between religious communities, it becomes a solution that is worthy of being taken. Quantitative and qualitative calculations of the consequences of individual/group religious conversion in society can be done by projecting their future. The statement above is in accordance with research from (Asri et al., 2023; Rosidi, 2016; Solin, 2023) that religious conversion has a glue side and a source of conflict so that serious consideration is needed in making the final decision on religious conversion.

One thing that is often overlooked by many people is that religious conversion is closely related to something personal (personal experience). The form of long-term exposure to a particular religion makes religious conversion a life decision. Religious conversion correlates with personal in research from (Haris, 2014; Pulungan, 2022; Sumbullah, 2007) because it becomes a life choice and inner peace. Personally, religious conversion occurs over a long period of time so that careful consideration is needed to have a new identity. Its personal nature is certainly supported by a supportive social structure (friends, neighbors and partners). In this personal religious conversion, it is closely related to exposure to positive things from the expected identity and values that are considered in accordance with the personal personality possessed. If all indicator above has been fulfilled then the probability of personal religious conversion may be realized.

In a multicultural society, there is an identity attached to each individual to distinguish one from another. Identity has two opposing sides, namely the source of social cohesion and the source of conflict. However, in reality, individuals can strategize over social pressure on their identities. This strategy is placed in the form of identity negotiation that provides an opportunity for comfort in interacting with their environment. (Mutiaru et al., 2022). Identity negotiation can be in the form of religious, ethnic, racial or social class identities that are not in accordance with the established social structure in society. the problem background above, the formulation of the problem in this study is as follows:

1. How did the religious conversion process give birth to religious moderation in Pahae Julu?
2. What is the role of Toba Batak customs in producing religious moderation in Pahae Julu?

The objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze the process of religious conversion that gave birth to religious moderation in Pahae Julu.
2. To know the role of Toba Batak customs in producing religious moderation in Pahae Julu.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### A. Conversion to Islam in Batak Land

Identity conversion can occur due to various forms of social background or structural changes in society. The concept of conversion is identical to radical changes experienced by individuals so that they enter a new order of life. The important point of conversion is closely related to changes that are voluntary or forced by individuals. This will later have implications for pseudo or total conversions felt by individuals/groups when experiencing identity conversion. There is a tendency in this case that individuals/groups who experience pseudo conversions are more pragmatist. Likewise with total conversions that carry out identity conversion as a reorientation of the soul by entering a new value system that is accepted to replace the old values.

It is not always something new replaces the old, sometimes there is a probability that individuals/groups convert by accepting new values that are considered useful for their lives and not as a replacement. This concept of adhesion is one that can be applied in adapting to a different environment so that it requires acceptance of a new identity that is considered useful. This social adhesion scheme refers to the social adhesion of two different elements that are considered to have a mutualistic symbiotic side. This can also be seen from research from (Moo hurh & Kim, 1983) that social adhesion is a strategy applied by a minority group to be able to adapt to a new environment by attaching a minor/peripheral identity. This social adhesion strategy makes the minority group appear to be part of the wider community but does not actually change the basic/significant identity of the individual/group.

Back to the concept of conversion, there are several indicators that can determine the change of individuals/groups, namely: membership status, demonstration of events and rhetorical patterns. This is explained in research from (Snow, 1984) related to several schemes that allow individuals/groups to carry out the process of religious conversion in their lives.

#### 1. Membership Status

In seeing the beginning of identity conversion lies in the shift in membership affiliation of religious organizations/denominations or membership of certain religious groups. In its journey, the transfer of membership or status becomes the starting point that has implications for the conversion of its identity. Slowly the values of the newly accepted group are internalized over a fairly long period of time. The most decisive phase is related to identity conversion with the commitment within itself to enter a new

identity, however, the significance between membership and conversion still needs to be studied further because becoming a member does not automatically result in identity conversion.

## 2. **Exposure to Moments of Certain Identities**

The many performances directly or indirectly by certain groups in public spaces can attract the attention of many people, including from different groups. The intensity of rituals or celebrations of certain religious holidays in public spaces becomes a positive or negative manifestation that is seen by all people. If a certain religious group is able to display something that attracts the hearts of individuals to find out more about the meaning of the ritual displayed. This interest is the basis for individuals to be able to become a determining factor in identity conversion. However, on the contrary, if the ritual/celebration performance emphasizes roughness, violence and arrogance, it actually makes individuals avoid identities that tend to be rough.

## 3. **Rhetoric in Conversion**

In individuals who have been exposed to experience conversion, it can be indicated from the form of speech, actions and reasoning. There are 4 reasonings from individuals who have had the nature of rhetorical change in themselves, namely: the first rhetoric, biographical reconstruction by dismantling past identities / throwing away the old (changing names) and constructing a new identity. The second rhetorical indicator in the form of a new peripheral causal scheme or vocabulary motif that authoritatively informs all causal attributions about oneself, others and world events. Finally, the entire causal scheme has been interpreted from the perspective of a new identity to give meaning to life. The third rhetoric is in the form of a suspension of analogical reasoning that their perception is something unique and unmatched and their reluctance to talk about their beliefs and practices. People who convert tend not to want to have universal values such as God is love because they equate the old identity with the new one. This rhetoric of universality can be a threat and cancel the authenticity and sacredness of the religious conversion they have. The last rhetoric is to accept the role of people who convert totally. People who have experienced religious conversion introject (defence mechanism and soul it) and reorient their entire life including interactions. Sometimes routines that are considered trivial but after religious conversion become more deeply meaningful by the new identity. Tendency to enthusiastically acknowledge the new identity in all interactions.

In the context of religious conversion in Batak land, not all of the above indicators can be applied directly. Researchers can certainly observe the political, social and cultural situations that have and are ongoing in life in Batak land. Changes in religious conversion to Islam can be caused by different factors by membership status, exposure to Islamic rituals/events or celebrations, and finally related to the rhetoric experienced by those who converted to their religion. All of this cannot run simultaneously, but there can be one or two more indicators that influence someone to convert to their religion in Batak land.

## **B. Religious Conversion**

For its adherents, religion focuses on faith or belief based on belief rather than things based on scientific evidence. While sociologists try to understand, explain, and analyse how religious adherents practice their faith or belief. Furthermore, without intending to judge or evaluate whether it is right or wrong, sociologists will study how religion (including religious activities) and society influence each other in various spaces (Macionis, 2012). In its development, sociologists also highlight how the changes experienced by adherents of the religion, both individually and in groups in society. Where the change in religion is often interpreted as the concept of religious conversion.

Religious conversion is a frequently studied topic, especially in two scientific fields, namely psychology and sociology. The field of psychology, which is the predecessor, understands the issue of conversion as a sudden and intrapersonal change. While the field of sociology understands conversion as the center of social influences that occur gradually. in the process. Briefly, sociology attempts to study conversion from the perspective of the individual/group that carries out the conversion. Where often, research groups liken individuals/groups that carry out the conversion to the term “seeker” (Jindra, 2011).

Snow & Machalek (1984) divide conversion into two major themes, namely first, as a radical personal change and second, as a change in a person's universe of discourse. First, radical personal change is rooted in the concept of the Hebrew scriptures, namely epistrophe, strephein, and metanoia. Where the concept indicates a dramatic change, a shift from one point of view to another, or a return to the initial principle. While second, conversion as a change in the individual's universe of discourse does not only refer to a series of changes in values, beliefs, and identities, but also touches the centre of the core of consciousness of the individual who converts. Thus, when the conversion has reached the centre of the core of consciousness, it is likely to have a radical impact.

Furthermore, the determination of conversion indicators is often wrong through the following empirical indicators. First, membership status, emphasizing that the membership status held by an individual is not directly proportional to the commitment given to a particular religious group. Therefore, further research is needed to distinguish between the two. Second, demonstration events that refer to a number of activities carried

out in public spaces as a form of status confirmation ritual. This is done to provide a dramatic effect to oneself and others that he has converted and is affiliated with a new religion. However, some experts question whether the dramatic effect that is intended to be displayed is rooted in pure personal acceptance or commitment or only for the public interest. Third, rhetorical indicators, referring to the understanding that individuals who convert will usually be seen from their speech and reasoning. Fourth, it is a biographical reconstruction that refers to the dismantling and reconstruction of the past (Snow & Machalek, 2011).

Some experts often consider conversion as a concept that is considered less stable. Individuals who convert have a great chance of returning to their original religion, then converting again to another religion, or having a different understanding of religion that varies in interpreting their conversion actions. This is because every change in religious beliefs and practices that occurs, over time will adjust to the process of acculturation, hybridity, syncretism, and also transformation (Baer, 2014). Meanwhile, Rambo (1993) argues that religious conversion consists of the following seven dimensions, namely: label context, crisis, search, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences.

In various religions, this religious conversion is often referred to by various terms. Like in Christians it will be called metanoia, while in Muslims it is called submission, and in Buddhists it is called 'going for refuge'. While in some countries such as Egypt and other Muslim countries consider this religious conversion as something that is prohibited. Furthermore, religious conversion will always be considered beneficial for the religion that is being converted, and will always be detrimental to the religion that is being abandoned.

### **C. Model of the Causes of Religious Conversion by Individuals in Society**

The process of religious conversion can be caused by various triggers that can be analysed theoretically and empirically. Analysis related to the triggers of religious conversion can be explained in the form of a model determined by structural factors and agency factors. The following is an explanation of this religious conversion model explained in research from (Indra, 2011), namely:

#### **1. Structural factors family and society**

The personal life of an individual is one of the factors that can determine religious conversion. The vulnerable condition of an individual's identity is determined by what social networks are available in the group (society) and family in smaller units. If the community and family are strong enough to support and help individuals experiencing an identity crisis, then religious conversion does not occur. Individuals can access various resources that can be used to provide meaning and assistance to themselves who are vulnerable. However, the situation can be reversed if the family and community structure is so weak and unable to fill the emptiness experienced by the weak individual. The emptiness factor experienced by the individual can be in the form of a life experience crisis in the form of friendship conflicts, divorce, chronic illness, divorce or alienation from relatives. This condition requires a structure that can support the individual to eliminate anxiety in themselves and find the best way out. In the end, it is seen that the individual feels the uselessness of the old structure. The individual finally searches for a new structure with a new identity (religious conversion) that can provide peace, a sense of security and access to many conveniences when experiencing a life crisis. Of course, this is what leads the individual to become committed to converting to a new religion.

#### **2. Dissatisfaction and searching identity by agent/actor**

Throughout life, humans experience good and bad experiences that can determine the dissatisfaction of existing identities. The search for a new identity is carried out to revive the expected meaning of life and provide peace of mind. Especially if in the family there is a figure who should be a figure who protects and provides comfort but instead has a negative impact on vulnerable individuals. The unfortunate conditions experienced by vulnerable individuals ultimately become a bad precedent for the old identity they have. Actors begin to actively separate themselves from society (groups) and family and seek a new identity that is in accordance with their social expectations. The discovery of a new identity is a solution to the dissatisfaction of the expectations of the old identity that is less than satisfactory. Actors also begin to find a mentor figure who can explain the meaning of life from the new identity they have. The closeness to this mentor is what finally establishes him to enter an identity that is a consequence of life that must be lived.

### **D. Religious Moderation**

Religious moderation is a flagship program of the Ministry of Religious Affairs that seeks to encourage the fulfilment of government expectations in managing the diversity of the Indonesian nation. In addition, religious moderation also has an urgency to accommodate differences through an attitude of tolerance and equality. Furthermore, the Ministry of Religious Affairs argues that there are three urgencies for implementing religious moderation. First, religion is a basic human right and dignity as an individual. Second, the spread of religion affects the development and spread of society. While third, religious moderation is a strategy to maintain the heterogeneity of the nation.

The religious moderation campaign prioritizes the middle way in how to practice religion in a pluralistic society. Where religious moderation avoids extremism and all excessive actions in carrying out religious practices. Ultimately, individuals who carry out these religious moderation actions will be called moderate (Ministry of

Religion, 2019). Furthermore, this religious moderation is based on three pillars, namely: moderation of thought, moderation of movement, and moderation of action.

The intersection between cultural and ethnic identity with religious identity held by the same ethnic group is the focus of the study in this research. Seeing How the domains of each primary identity and situational identity work will be further analysed through this research.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research method is a type of qualitative research with a descriptive approach. According to Moleong (2005:4), a qualitative descriptive approach is a research approach where the data collected are in the form of words, pictures and not numbers. These data can be obtained from interviews, field notes, photos, video tapes, personal documentation, notes, or memos and other documentation. This qualitative descriptive approach aims to study and clarify the existence of a phenomenon that occurs in society. A phenomenon or reality in society that reveals that with the existence of a qualitative descriptive method can be used as a procedure to solve the problem being studied. The problem being investigated is based on the facts that exist and appear in society. According to I Made Wiratha (2006), qualitative descriptive analysis is analyzing, describing and summarizing various conditions and situations from various data collected in the form of interview results or observations regarding the problems being researched that occur in the field. This study was conducted to determine Religious Moderation: Religious Conversion in Pahae Julu District. Religious negotiation occurs to adapt to inevitable changes. This change is explained in this study (Ansor, 2016; Mardiansyah, 2013; Suryandari, 2017; Tumbelka, 2020) can be in the form of the entry of such great power into the structure of society that individuals have no choice but to become part of the existing changes. The community in Pahae Julu has a slight anomaly regarding changes in society. When drawn based on geographical distance, there is a tendency for the number of Batak Muslims to be small in number. Because the position of the center of Christianity in the city of Tarutung to Pahae Julu is relatively close. When referring to the closest Islamic community base in the city of Sipirok or Sidempuan, the distance is relatively far. This condition is somewhat confusing because the Batak Toba people with surnames choose to become Muslims rather than Christians. In this study, it finally opens up a space for inclusivity in all ethnic, religious and racial entities. Transparency and inclusivity become discourses that are difficult to manifest in the structure of society. Inclusivity provides equal opportunities for all different entities to be involved together in formulating the form of social life in society. Providing inclusive opportunities certainly disturbs most of those who already have privileges in society. Some people can have privileges over social positions, status and authority compared to others. However, the discourse of inclusivity can destroy this privilege because the social structure is reorganized according to new social expectations. In an inclusive structure, it also allows oppressed groups to be recognized by the state and the majority group so that they have the same rights and obligations in the structure of society. Optimism in all entities of society becomes a future that can determine positive change and achieve common will in a society that is based on cultural, religious and ethnic differences.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 History of the Wave of Islam Entering Pahae Julu**

The history of the entry of Islam into Pahae Julu began with Si Parpar then entered the Simasom area, which is of the same descent as Olo Panggabean. Before the entry of religion into this area, the ancestors (oppung nisi Olo Panggabean) were in power at that time. When colonization occurred, the ancestors sought hiding in the forest and opened a village that was considered safe to live in. The village was called Siparpar. Siparpar is a village that is the residence of the ancestors and a place that is considered sacred and not allowed to be entered by just anyone except if there is a traditional party or if there is an entry permit. The Siparpar area used to have spiritual powers that made this area difficult to enter. The descendants of the ancestors ( oppung nisi panggabean) spread to Pagar Batu, Sipoholon and Tarutung. And at that time religion was not yet known, there were only beliefs such as Parmalim. However, after religion entered, this area could be reached by the general public. In the Siparpar village, Tunggal Panaluan, the Sisingamangaraja Flag, and Ulos Batak were once found. However, these objects are no longer found because the generation could not maintain and preserve them properly. Religion was known in Pahae Julu when Oppung (Panggabean) and his friend went to the Sipirok area and married a girl (Boru Sipirok) who came from the Sipirok area. And according to the interview results, Oppung boru (Panggabean's wife) is suspected of being boru Siregar, a Muslim (Islamic religion). This is because Islam had already spread to the Sipirok area, brought by the Padri troops from Padang. Religious activities such as religious studies were carried out there. And this is where Oppung (Panggabean) began to learn about Islam. And after having knowledge about Islam, Oppung (Panggabean) returned to Siparpar. Sipirok is the center of Islamic teachings spread by the Padri troops from Padang, while Islamic teachings in Tarutung (Rura Silindung) are the teachings of Muhammadiyah Muslims originating from Barus. And the spread of this teaching was influenced by Faisal Tanjung. Based on interviews with Informants, they have embraced Islam from their grandfather (fourth generation). Their Grandfather migrated to Barus and raised a family there. After studying Islam in Barus, they returned to the village (Pahae Julu) with their families by embracing Muslim teachings. Meanwhile, the grandfather's family who did not migrate to Barus continued to adhere to their

previous beliefs (beliefs) and lived side by side. The spread of Christianity had already existed in the Pahae Julu area, long before Oppung (Panggabean) returned to Siparpar. In the past, in this area (Pahae Julu) the residences were in the form of stilt houses. In this village, animals (pigs) and other livestock roamed freely and were not kept in pens. This was what disrupted worship activities (prayer) because prayer requires a clean place. This was the reason why Oppung (Panggabean) opened a new village and the village was open to anyone who wanted to come to the village. This was what caused the development of Islam to spread in Pahae Julu. In addition, the spread of Islam was also caused by the existence of the PGA foundation which changed its name to the State Islamic High School (MAN) in Peanornor. With the presence of MAN in this area, the growth of the Islamic (Muslim) population has not increased, instead it has decreased. This is because students who study at MAN come from outside the region. If student those who graduate will return to their respective regions. And if there are one or two people who marry young people from this region, they will only stay temporarily and will move. According to the results of the dialogue with Mr. Panggabean, there are several factors that have reduced the Islamic religion in Pahae Julu, namely: a) Place of worship (Mosque) is not available; b) The value of incense is decreasing. This is what causes the decline in Muslim communities in this place so that they prefer to try their luck abroad for the sake of survival.

#### 4.2 Negotiations of Religion and Custom in Producing Religious Moderation in Pahae Julu

Dilemma is something that is always experienced by individuals when faced with two inevitable choices. This article shows the existence of two significant identities that are attached to individuals, especially in the Batak community. Custom is a guiding value that first guides and regulates the expected social, political and transcendental lifestyle (Kharimah Aryani, 2022; Schiller, 1996; Thontowi, 2015; Wensdy Sitindaon, 2019). Custom no longer lives alone in the lives of individuals in society, but there is the presence of religion that accompanies it. The values in religious practices are not always in harmony and in line with custom. This condition sometimes forces individuals to choose between custom and religion. Totally siding with religion or custom actually creates new problems. Siding with custom can be labelled as a person who is astray and irreligious. Likewise, siding with religion can be labelled as an individual who is not customary and forgets the legacy of ancestral values. In the context of pahae Julu, between custom and religion, it is made in situational conditions by making logical arguments to be accepted simultaneously. This process is discussed within the family (decision of the head of the family) followed by asking permission from the traditional and religious leaders. If the traditional and religious leaders allow, negotiations can occur to avoid conflicting values in practice. This can be seen in the following interview excerpt from a retired teacher (panggabean): (interview date June 12, 2024) Between custom and religion are sometimes separated and sometimes united according to the conditions. For example, in my family, for Muslims if someone dies then it is expected to be buried immediately. However, because of several things that become obstacles and having to spend the night the body is not a problem. According to custom, the body is also carried out a traditional procession but can be buried first and the traditional process is carried out afterwards. However, this is all with the permission and knowledge of the traditional elders.

The same statement was also confirmed by the village secretary in the following interview excerpt: (interview date June 16, 2024)

*The most contrasting difference in customary practices between Muslims and Christians is seen in the customary practices of the deceased. For Muslims, the burial process is carried out on the same day (no more than 2 hours). For Christians, they can wait for days for all the distant family. But Muslims still carry out their customs even though the body has been buried. This means that religion is carried out and customs are also carried out for Muslims.*

Furthermore, it is also seen that Muslims are quite tolerant in carrying out customs even though they are strongly opposed by religion. This can be seen from Oppung Kaila's statement in the following interview session: (interview date August 6, 2024)

*In the event mengaongkal holi (lifting bones) is a Batak tradition but is prohibited in the Muslim religion. This tradition for us cannot be carried out but if there is a Christian family invites us to come to the mangongkl holi tradition then we participate. This is how we do as Muslims to remain in harmony with tradition and customs.*

The series of interviews between researchers and informants above show that customs and religion have different roots. This difference can certainly be ambivalent between customary and religious values in certain conditions. The ambivalence of customary and religious values can be a source of conflict that can divide the existing community. However, there is a safety valve in the Pahae Julu community by prioritizing religious tolerance and moderation. Customary and religious values do not have to be forced into extreme conditions. However, a middle ground is sought through joint discussions that do not reduce the meaning of religion or customs. This negotiation process produces new forms of customary and religious practices that can be accepted by the Pahae Julu community. This condition makes religion and customs able to run together in society. There is no need to get rid of customs or religion in order to be accepted by the community in Pahae Julu. The benefits of this negotiation of religion and customs are what ultimately become a form of satisfaction

for the Pahae Julu community to produce understanding and understanding in the spaces of differences that exist.

### **4.3 Opportunities for Religious Conversion (Muslim-Christian/Christian-Muslim) with Permissive Family and Community Attitudes**

The potential for religious conversion is often a concern for individuals when they become different from family members and society (Kumar, 2022). Dominant and minority groups have concerns about religious conversion. Referring to the mathematical concept of looking at the chances of religious conversion, it can be stated that families and societies that are permissive to their members are more likely to experience religious conversion. (Nurhayati, 2023). The form of permissiveness is not introducing religion in depth, not understanding its meaning, not carrying out worship regularly and there are no sanctions when not carrying out worship. In the family there is usually a role model and supervises the changes that occur in family members. Changes can lead to religious conversion because they are no longer relevant or there are more satisfying benefits to be lived in life.

The process of religious conversion with its relation to family history was also explained by Oppung Ramlan Panggabean when his son wanted to marry a Sundanese woman who was Muslim. The following is a quote from Oppung Ramlan during an interview in the field: (interview date July 18, 2024):

*When my child brought a prospective parumaen (daughter-in-law) to the house and expressed her desire to get married and change religions, I accepted it well. It was the child's choice, so we respect it and parents should not interfere in their child's family affairs (not good). When I also changed religion from Muslim to Christian, my parents did not stop me, so that's what I do to my child now.*

In the family there are factors of exclusivity (ethnicity, religion) and children can also have implications for religious conversion. This happened to Oppung Ramlan who migrated to Jakarta in the 1980s. Nationally in the 1980s, Batak was still identical to Christianity so it was rather difficult to be accepted by other tribes (Desmon Baringin Sitompul, Martua Sihalohe, Roida Lumbantobing, Sudirman Lase, 2024). The religious labeling attached to the Batak tribe makes it difficult for Batak families to be accepted well by other tribes in Muslim-majority areas. This also has implications for discriminatory attitudes towards children who often receive unpleasant treatment from the majority group. This statement is explained in the following interview session: (interview date July 18, 2024)

*I took my children to study abroad in 1982 with very limited economy. My children always cried every time I asked them to study the Quran because they were treated differently by their friends and teachers. As a parent, I started to think about my children and their religion if they experienced this pressure every day. After that, I asked permission from my parents in the village to convert to Christianity because Jakarta still did not accept that there were Bataks who were Muslim. So I sacrificed for my children so that they would not be too stressed when they were studying abroad. Maybe if my economy was good enough then I would not have had to change religion because I could have found a better environment.*

The consideration of a match is also one of the factors that encourage individuals to convert religion. Several informants stated that the majority of religious conversions occur by choosing a life partner. Usually those in a subordinate position prefer a partner who is in a superior position. Analysis This class is a fairly reliable reference in seeing the reality of religious conversion by having a soul mate. This can be seen from the statement of Mrs. Tety Panggabean in the interview session on August 6, 2024:

*I got married when I was still in the 2nd grade of high school. It so happened that my husband came with serious intentions to me with a permanent job status (PNS). I do not deny that at that time there were also men of the same faith who approached me even though my job status was not yet permanent. But finally, fate said that my Christian husband would be my soulmate.*

The driving force for religious conversion by informants in the field is mostly driven by marriage. Couples prefer to unite with their partners with the consequence of having to convert their religion. This is the challenge that must be faced by couples who are in a relationship with different religious statuses. However, in the end we cannot escape the fact that there is a loose family and community structure so that religious conversion occurs in society. If the family provides space for choice, either from the father or the mother, then the child makes it a logical reason to be able to change religions. Likewise with a society that does not give too much social sanctions to individuals who convert their religion. This opportunity is utilized by couples who want to marry with different religious statuses.

### **4.4 Manifestation of Religious Moderation in the Practice of Two Religions (Islam and Christianity) in the Pahae Julu Community**

Fear of being different from others is a social problem that can arise in society. However, society is not something that is static and does not grow in terms of numbers, composition, culture, social and the traditions that follow it. These growing differences are something that cannot be avoided and must be accepted by all entities in society. This condition requires a mature society to face large and small changes in society (change is inevitable) (Naufal et al., 2023). Pahae Julu has experienced changes in religious identity long before the formation of the Indonesian state. The story of the informant (aged 70 years) that there has been Islam in Pahae

Julu since two generations above them. This is validated by the separation of Islamic and Christian graves in the village of Pahe Julu. The traces of the tombstones on these graves explicitly confirm the existence of Islam which is deeply rooted here. Interestingly, the long journey and contact between Islam and Christianity have given birth to local wisdom that can only be seen in this village. This can be seen from the statement of the informant Tulang Panggabean (elementary school principal) regarding the practice of Batak customs by Islam and Christianity: (interview, July 26, 2024)

*If there is a Batak traditional event, such as a saur matua (death) or pangoli anak (marriage), the Christian automatically gives the Muslim a portion of the buffalo to be cut in accordance with Islamic law (shared consumption). Likewise, with parjambaran (division of meat pieces according to customary positions), then if there is buffalo meat, the Muslim will receive it, but if there is only pork, it is represented by the Christian family.*

The same statement was also conveyed by Kaila's mother as a Muslim, according to the following interview excerpt:

*In this village if there are Christians who hold traditional events then their Muslim family has been considered. Even Christian Adventists cannot eat pork and blood. Slaughtering buffalo is also usually directly handed over to Muslims so that all can receive and consume.*

*The form of local wisdom is also very visible in every celebration of Christian and Islamic religious holidays in Pahae Julu. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Marulitua, the village official: (interview date July 16, 2024)*

If there is a church event such as Christmas, church construction, church auction, then Muslims also come to celebrate it in this village. Likewise, if there is Eid al-Adha (sharing qurban meat) then we Christians also get meat and sometimes take it to the stall to be roasted together. Moreover, if it is a holiday, all Christian neighbors are given plates of cake. Later, during Christmas and New Year, we will repay with halal packaged food.

From the interview results above, it can be seen that the social structure of the community in Pahae Julu village is influenced by Islam and Christianity. In customary practices, there is a form of new tradition that is inherited by adopting religious tolerance in it. The egoistic nature of religious groups is minimized in order to be able to walk together in customary activities. The Pahae Julu community is aware of the importance of maintaining the values of other religions in order to achieve common goals in custom. In the realm of Christianity and Islam, there is local wisdom that is born from the experience of living together. Adherents of Islam and Christianity already understand each other about what should not be done in everyday life and interfaith relations. Experience that has lasted almost hundreds of years has resulted in the formation of a mutually beneficial form of cooperation. There is always a consideration of Muslim values for Batak traditional events. One of the most vital is related to consumption to prioritize halal. The consumption section is handed over to Muslims or food is separated.

#### **4.5 Relations between Christianity and Islam in Realizing Religious Tolerance in Pahae Julu.**

Pahae Julu District, especially in Simasom Toruan Village, as previously explained, is a village that has a heterogeneous community composition both in terms of religion and ethnicity. Where the Christian religious group dominates by 70% and is followed by the Islamic religious group by 30%. While based on ethnicity, this village is dominated by the Batak Toba ethnic group with the Panggabean surname. Then followed by with other members of the Toba Batak ethnic group with the surnames Sitompul, Manalu and Gultom.

The heterogeneity of religion is believed to be inseparable from the long history of their previous generations who brought the influence of Islam when they migrated from several areas such as Barus, Sipirok, Aceh, and Tanah Deli before returning to the Simasom area. Where the reason they migrated was to deepen their knowledge of Islam because previously in the Simasom area the previous generation had not embraced any religion.

After the entry of Islamic influence into the Simasom Toruan area in particular or Pahae in general, the condition of society developed from previously being a society that did not adhere to religion at all, to an area that was not only influenced by Islam but also by Christianity and slowly eroded the population that did not adhere to religion at all. In the end, Pahae Julu developed into one of the meltingpot villages, a meeting place for diversity and was able to display the face of a tolerant society in harmony, especially in terms of religious diversity. Where this diversity is present in the midst of a population composition dominated by the Batak Toba ethnic group.

The existence of successful tolerance between religious communities built through Christian-Islamic relations in Pahae Julu can be proven through several series of Batak Toba traditional ceremony sessions that are regularly carried out by local residents. Despite the fact that the ethnic similarity, namely Batak Toba among all the people of Simasom Toruan Village, has become a bond between the differences in religion that they have. A number of informants admitted that in their social lives, they have almost no problems in balancing religious life with the implementation of all the Batak Toba traditional ceremonies.

#### 4.6 Parhobas and Martonggo Raja in the Traditional Wedding Ceremony

In the Batak Toba wedding ceremony held by the Pahae Julu people, some evidence of tolerance of diversity was found. In line with the spirit of the Batak Toba ethnic customs in general, the Batak Toba people in Pahae Julu also usually hold an activity session called tonggo raja before a traditional ceremony is held. Tonggo raja is a preparatory activity before the main event is held. Where in this activity the host who will hold the traditional wedding ceremony will invite and gather the traditional king/traditional figure and members of the traditional community who are included in the saparadatan group (the same traditional group) to discuss and discuss all things that will be prepared in the traditional wedding ceremony that will be held. The tonggo raja activity is also intended as a moment to divide tasks according to the series of traditional wedding ceremonies. Each individual who has been given a task must be responsible for overseeing the task until it is completed. This aims to make it easier for the organizing family in the series of traditional wedding ceremonies.

In addition, in the tonggo raja activity, jambar panggoaron and juhut will be discussed which are distributed in the traditional wedding ceremony. Jambar panggoaron are parts of raw meat intended to be distributed to the guests who attend the traditional wedding ceremony. While juhut is cooked meat that will be enjoyed in the series of traditional wedding ceremonies. This is in line with what was conveyed by the following informant.

*Customs, especially Batak customs, are still carried out as they should be. What is different is that for the jambar panggoaron, buffalo meat is used. This was agreed upon during the tonggo raja, that the panjuhuti would be buffalo meat (in accordance with what was agreed upon before the custom was carried out)"* (Informant R. Panggabean, interview session July 18, 2024).

Where the parties involved in the tonggo raja activity come from members of the interfaith community. In this activity, the number of jambar panggoaron and juhut that must be prepared according to the needs of the invitation to the organizer of the traditional wedding ceremony will also be agreed upon. This is related to the needs of the traditional invitation consisting of Christian and Muslim communities. This is important because the two groups of communities have different rules and types of consumption in a traditional celebration event. The Christian community group will consume processed pork and carp, while the Muslim community will consume processed beef, chicken, buffalo and carp.

The Pahae Julu community can combine and harmonize these differences in consumption in a traditional wedding ceremony. The organizers of the traditional ceremony of Simasom Toruan Village have an interest in being able to provide the food needed by all guests by avoiding any group being ignored. In the case of Pahae Julu, consumption in traditional events is also a form of tolerance that can be found. In general, in every traditional wedding event, buffalo meat will be served for the Islamic community and pork for the Christian community. In serving the food, the parhobas will always consider the rules of the related religion so that it will not violate the rules of serving in their respective religions.

In addition, on the day of the traditional wedding ceremony, the parhobas will also be assisted by the parhobas who are tasked with serving the invited guests. The parhobas consist of members of the traditional community groups such as the boru party, STM members and young people in the village. A number of informants said that the parhobas are also diverse, consisting of a number of different religious community groups. In general, these parhobas already know the main work that will be carried out in the series of customs. The work of tolerance is increasingly felt when the preparations for the traditional wedding ceremony take place, namely the Muslim parhobas will slaughter the buffalo for consumption and vice versa the Christian parhobas will slaughter the pig. The process is carried out in accordance with applicable religious rules. In this case, both parties already have an oral agreement that will not be violated in all processes so that it will not interfere with the purity of both religion and customs of the wedding ceremony.

#### 4.7. Parking in the Traditional Death Ceremony

Meanwhile, in the funeral ceremony session, the relationship of diversity between Christianity and Islam can also be found in almost the entire series of events. Pahae Julu has a system known as precognisant. Where in this system one of them regulates the division of tasks in the traditional death ceremony. Similar to the traditional wedding ceremony, usually before the burial ceremony there is also a tonggo raja activity to facilitate the process of the ceremony. On that occasion it will also be determined who will be in charge of the series of customs before being buried. The parkongsian administrators are in charge of determining these officers.

The form of religious tolerance can also be found in this series of traditional death processions. The officers appointed by the parkongsian not necessarily individuals who come from the same religion as the family experiencing the grief. Except for carrying out their respective religious ceremonies, anyone can be appointed to serve in the traditional event. Even parkongsian have sanctions for parkongsian members who do not comply with the agreed rules. This is as conveyed by the following informant.

*In addition, in this village, there is something called parkongsian saur matua. If someone dies, we implement it, even the children of this village have used it as research material for their thesis. If there is a traditional party for someone who dies, if they have not been buried that day, that night all of us men will be at the funeral home in Manjonggori, at one in the morning we will mention names one by one to check attendance, and it will be reported to the parkongsian. If someone is absent without a clear reason, they will be given a sanction. The*

*sanction is that they will be tasked with lifting or digging the grave. That is the order/regulation in the punguan parkongsian. All residents will be together and there is no feeling of awkwardness for anyone who dies, be it Muslim or Christian, all are the same, no discrimination. Because everything is arranged and given their respective tasks in the kongsi" (Informant SH Panggabean, interview session July 26, 2024).*

Thighs Julu in general, especially in Simasom Toruan Village, especially in Siparpar Hamlet and Pea Raja Hamlet has shown a portrait of harmonious Christian-Muslim community relations in a series of traditional wedding and death ceremonies. The two traditional events above are two examples of several series of Batak Toba ethnic customs that can display tolerant Christian-Muslim relations in the village. In addition, there are also traces of Christian-Muslim relations in the mangadati and mangain marga customs that are carried out as well as by the Batak Toba ethnic community.

#### **4.8 Sharing Activities on Christian – Islamic Religious Holidays**

Traces of tolerant togetherness can also be seen in Simasom Toruan Village when celebrating Christian-Islamic religious holidays carried out by the people of both religions. This tolerance has taken root and has been passed down between generations to this day. This is in line with the results of interviews with informants as follows.

*So, in terms of religion now, we respect each other. Some of my family members went from Muslim to Christian, some from Christian to Muslim. What is important is to look after and respect each other. That is the uniqueness and comfort of this place. If it is a holiday, I will give to all the neighbors, and vice versa, if it is Christmas/New Year, they will give me food or cakes that are suitable for me to eat. There is mutual trust between neighbors" (Informant SH Panggabean, interview session July 26, 2024).*

Pahae Community Julu has believed that neighbors or groups of people who are different from them will not provide food, drinks or treats that can damage trust between them. Each religion can maintain the purity of its religious worship even though it is in an environment that has diversity.

Portrait and description of traces of Christian-Islamic religious tolerance in Pahae Julu is in line with the spirit of religious moderation led by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. Simasom Village the Torch In general, those located in the administrative area of Pahae Julu District, geographically adjacent to Tarutung District, the heart of Christianity was born and became one of the places of religious tourism, there is a place where Christian-Islamic interactions are quite harmonious in their social life. The harmonious relationship between Christianity and Islam in Pahae Julu is closely related to efforts to unravel the exclusivity among dominant religious groups and can encourage social cohesion in a heterogeneous society. Various studies have shown the seriousness of all parties who utilize various resources in many areas in maximizing the performance of the religious moderation campaign in Indonesia. No exception, namely from the perspective of North Tapanuli Regency, Pahae Julu District, specifically Simasom Toruan Village, where 70% of the population is Christian and 30% is Muslim, through the Pea Raja and Peanornor Hamlets have succeeded in embodying the values of religious moderation in their social lives.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Individuals who choose to be different tend to almost always create conflict in society, especially when they are in a society that tends to be dominated by a certain group. However, this is not the case in Pahae Julu District, which is close to the center of the Protestant Christian mission in Tanah Batak. Pahae Julu has become one of the areas where religious differences amidst ethnic similarities are not an obstacle to manifesting religious moderation. This study found that religious conversion carried out by the Pahae Julu community, both from Christianity to Islam and vice versa from Islam to Christianity, is possible and has received a permissive attitude from the local community. The similarity of the Batak Toba ethnic group in the Pahae Julu District, especially Simasom Toruan Village, has given birth to harmony that is recognized by the concept of religious moderation, such as the campaign echoed by the Ministry of Religion. That the choice to have different religions can actually be bridged through various negotiation actions presented by the community in their social lives, such as in various wedding ceremonies to death ceremonies. This context is utilized by Islam and Christianity that religious diversity can be bridged by the similarity of tribal identity. In customary practices, there is an egalitarian nature that treats all Batak tribes equally. In the end, the gap between religions is united in customary practices because the role of custom cannot be replaced according to the rules that have been mutually agreed upon and mutually recognized.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Asri, Y., Ni, D., & Putra, IWS (2023). Patterns of Community Interaction After Religious Conversion in Lokapaksa Village, Seririt District, Buleleng Regency. *Kamaya: Journal of Religious Studies*, 6 (4), 442–456.
- Aziz, Ahmad Amir. (2009). SASAK ISLAM: RELIGIOUS PATTERNS of local Islamic communities in Lombok. *Millah*, VIII No 2, 241–253.
- Desmon Baringin Sitompul, Martua Sihaloho, Roida Lumbantobing, Sudirman Lase, HBF (2024). Religiosity of the Toba Batak community in the modern era (case study in the Sianjur Mulmula Samosir sub-district). *Journal of Social Humanities Education Research*, 9 (1).
- Haris, M. (2014). The Search for Self-Authenticity of the Convert Community in Sorong Regency, West Papua. *Jurnal Harmoni*, 13 (3), 36–52.

- Indra, IW (2011). How Religious Content Matters in Conversion Narratives to Various Religious Groups. *Sociology of Religion*, 2 (1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srq089>
- Kharimah Aryani, M. (2022). Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967: A Form of Discrimination by the New Order Government Against Ethnic Chinese. *JEJAK, Journal of History and History Education*, FKIP, Jambi University, 2 (2), 1–12.
- Kumar, M. (2022). The Anxieties of the Dominant: Law, Society, and Religion in the Politics of Religious Conversion in India. *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, 11 (2–3), 343–347.
- Moo hurh, W., & Kim, K. C. (1983). Adhesive Sociocultural Adaptation of Korean Immigrants in the US: An Alternative Strategy of Minority Adaptation. *International Migration Review*, XVIII (2).
- Mutiara, VA, Rahardjo, T., & Nugroho, A. (2022). Identity negotiation of interfaith marriage couples in the Catholic church. In *identity negotiation* (Vol. 10, Issue 4). <https://ejournal3.undip.ac.id/index.php/interaksi-online/article/view/36143>
- Naufal, ML, Rahmawati, E., Bilkis Kuds, S., & Darmawan, I. (2023). Dynamics of Social Change and Its Impact on Sustainable Development: A Multidisciplinary Perspective. *Multidisciplinary Scientific Journal*, 1 (7), 185–190. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8205488>
- Nurhayati, S. (2023). The impact of permissive parenting patterns on the development of religious and moral values in early childhood. *Journal of Islamic Education and Early Childhood*, 6 (1), 36–44.
- Pulungan, MRD and HR (2022). Driving Factors for Conversion to Other Religions (Analysis of Recognition of Muallap). *Journal of Da'wah Management*, 4 (1).
- Rosidi, A. (2016). Social Integration of Religious Communities in Resolving Religious Conflicts in Kepil District, Wonosobo. *Jurnal Harmoni*, 15 (3), 20–32.
- Schiller, A. (1996). An "Old" Religion in "New Order" Indonesia: Notes on Ethnicity and Religious Affiliation. *Sociology of Religion*, 57 (4), 409–417. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711895>
- Shofi, MA (2021). Marriage and Religion: Dyanmics of Religious Conversion in Marriage and The Advancement of Community Religious Life Perspective of Religious Psychology and Sociology (Study in Lumajang Regency). *Journal of Dialogue*, 44 (1), 51–66.
- Snow, D. (1984). The Sociology of Conversion. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10 (1), 167–190. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.10.1.167>
- Solin, FD (2023). Interpersonal Conflict After Religious Conversion at the Medan Muallaf Development Foundation. *Journal of Islam and Contemporary Issues*, 3 (1), 32–39.
- Sukanto, A. (2013). Tensions Between Religious Groups During the Old Order to the Early New Order: From Conflict in Formulating State Ideology to Conflict. *Indonesian Journal of Theology*, 1 (July), 25–47.
- Sumbullah, U. (2007). HERETICAL SECTS AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (Perspective of Law No. 1 of 1965 on PNPS and Human Rights). *UIN MAULANA Malik Ibrahim Malang*, 1, 157–165.
- Thontowi, J. (2015). Regulation of Customary Law Communities and Implementation of Protection of Traditional Rights. *Pendecta Journal*, 10 (158), 1–13.
- Wensdy Sitindaon. (2019). Negotiating State Policy Towards Local Religion: Social Exclusion and Reconstruction of Ugamu Malim Identity. University of Indonesia.