

Harmony in Diversity: An Exploration of Peaceful Coexistence between Muslim and Christian Communities in Aceh, Indonesia

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Abstract

In this age of globalization and social complexity, the peaceful coexistence of Muslim and Christian Communities in Pertabas Village, Simpang Kanan District, Aceh Singkil District is an important research topic. This study investigates the factors influencing peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities and identifies effective strategies and approaches to promote religious tolerance and harmony in Pertabas Village. The research method is a qualitative case study involving interviews, observation, and documentation. Significant findings indicate that cooperation in education, economy, and social affairs are concrete manifestations of civil coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village. In support of peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities are the role of the government, clans' similarities, and economic ties. This study contributes to how cooperation and mutual respect between religious groups can form harmonious social and religious relations by encouraging additional research on the factors that influence the establishment of peaceful coexistence in a society with multiple religions. Further research can be conducted to deepen the understanding of the factors that influence the peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Christians in other areas.

Keywords: Christian community; harmony; muslim community; peaceful coexistence; tolerance.

Abstrak

Di era globalisasi dan kompleksitas sosial saat ini, hidup berdampingan secara damai antara komunitas Muslim dan Kristen di Desa Pertabas, Kecamatan Simpang Kanan, Kabupaten Aceh Singkil merupakan topik penelitian yang penting. Penelitian ini menyelidiki faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi koeksistensi damai antara komunitas Muslim dan Kristen serta mengidentifikasi strategi dan pendekatan yang efektif untuk mempromosikan toleransi dan kerukunan beragama di Desa Pertabas. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah studi kasus kualitatif yang melibatkan wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Temuan signifikan menunjukkan bahwa kerja sama dalam bidang pendidikan, ekonomi, dan sosial merupakan wujud nyata dari koeksistensi sipil antara komunitas Muslim dan Kristen di Desa Pertabas. Faktor-faktor yang mendukung koeksistensi damai antara komunitas Muslim dan Kristen adalah peran pemerintah, kesamaan marga, dan ikatan ekonomi. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi tentang bagaimana kerja sama dan saling menghormati antar kelompok agama dapat membentuk hubungan sosial dan agama yang harmonis dengan mendorong penelitian lebih lanjut tentang faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pembentukan koeksistensi damai dalam masyarakat yang memiliki banyak agama. Penelitian lebih lanjut dapat dilakukan untuk memperdalam pemahaman tentang faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi koeksistensi damai umat Islam dan Kristen di daerah lain.

Kata kunci: Komunitas Kristen; kerukunan; komunitas muslim; ko-eksistensi damai; toleransi.

INTRODUCTION

The diversity of religions and cultures in society frequently leads to conflict and tension (Croissant & Trinn, 2009; Jereza, 2016; Levine, 2006), particularly in regions with a long history of religious conflict. Researchers are concerned about investigating the factors that influence peaceful coexistence among people of different religions. For instance, prior research by Pickering (2006) showed that social relations

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and networks play a significant role in developing the social capital required to attain social objectives, such as promoting peaceful coexistence among those of different religions. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the factors that promote peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village, Simpang Kanan District, Aceh Singkil District, and identify effective strategies and approaches for promoting tolerance and harmony among them.

There were two research focuses in the previous literature on religious practice in pluralistic societies. First, research focused on conflict (Basedau, Pfeiffer, & Vüllers, 2016; Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000; Langer, Mustapha, & Stewart, 2007; Østby, 2008; Riyadi, 2016). These studies demonstrated a horizontal gap or horizontal inequality (HI) between groups with the same cultural identity, such as differences in ethnicity, religion, race, or region, which can lead to conflict and violence in multiethnic societies. In order to build a more harmonious and peaceful society, the research also offers policy recommendations to reduce these horizontal disparities. Second, research focused on religious tolerance. This category of research attempts to comprehend the factors that affect the level of interreligious tolerance in society. A study by Kostina et al. (2015) demonstrated that belief in authority and universal values can impact religious tolerance. In other studies, for instance, the practice of ethnic tolerance fosters the development of religious tolerance by promoting acceptance of differences through families with diverse beliefs, fosters a spirit of acceptance, and fosters understanding among people of diverse beliefs (Rahman & Khambali, 2013).

No research has examined the factors influencing peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society, such as in Pertabas Village, Simpang Kanan District, Aceh Singkil District, among these categories. This study seeks to investigate the factors that influence peaceful coexistence in Pertabas Village and to identify effective strategies and approaches for promoting tolerance and harmony among religious communities in the region. Differences in beliefs, values, and culture in a pluralistic society can be a source of conflict. This research is crucial to understand how people can peacefully coexist and respect one another's religious and philosophical differences. Hopefully, this research will contribute to our comprehension of how a plural society can coexist in peace by illuminating the factors influencing peaceful coexistence and the most effective strategies for promoting it.

When discussing the hypothesis in the study of the peaceful coexistence of Muslim and Christian societies, the theory of contact between groups (Allport, 1954) serves as its primary framework. This theory emphasizes intergroup contact's significance in reducing prejudice and fostering mutual understanding. Therefore, this research hypothesizes that the peaceful coexistence level between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village increases with the frequency of their interactions. It is consistent with other findings from Allport's research (Allport, 1954), which indicate that contact in a positive atmosphere can enhance awareness and improve previously conflicting relationships between groups.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative methodology, with the Muslim and Christian communities of Pertabas Village serving as the research object and utilizing a case study as the research method. This research method was selected because it was appropriate for getting in-depth information about the factors influencing peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village. In-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies are data collection methods. This research methodology is based on a previously formulated theoretical framework, namely the intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954). The theory suggests that intergroup contact conducted with common goals,

equal status, and mutual understanding can help reduce prejudice and increase understanding between groups. Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors that influence peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village through intergroup contact conducted with common goals and mutual understanding.

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews and participant observation, are ideally suited for case studies. In this context, interview techniques and participant observation offer the chance to directly comprehend people's perspectives and attitudes, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the observed phenomenon. In addition, documentation studies are employed as a method of data collection to obtain additional information regarding the history and social context of the residents of Pertabas Village. The data collection method was then qualitatively analyzed by identifying themes that arose and linked to the previously developed theoretical framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Multicultural Society in Pertabas Village

This research was conducted in Pertabas Village, Simpang Kanan District, Aceh Singpil District. Pertabas Village is a clan-based community of 573 people (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021, p. 13). This village is located in the highlands, and most of the land is used for plantations, agriculture, and grazing (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021, p. 13). Pertabas Village has various facilities and infrastructure, including the Al-Quran Education Centre, village hall, soccer field, river, bridge, *meunasah* (mosque), and volleyball field. The community has a relatively high awareness of formal education, such as elementary, junior high, high school, diploma, and undergraduate programs. Most Pertabas Village residents are farmers, breeders, and industrial laborers (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021).

Most people's religion in Pertabas Village differs from other areas of Aceh Province, where Islam is the dominant faith because Christianity and a few other religions dominate in this village. Based on the statistics, 314 residents of Pertabas Village are Christians, and 239 are Muslims (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021, p. 17). It indicates that Pertabas Village is an example of a pluralistic, multireligious society. In a pluralistic society, cultural and religious diversity influences social interaction among people and groups (Nickel, 1987). This religious diversity has promoted social interaction and cooperation between Muslim and Christian communities there.

Forms of Peaceful Coexistence of Muslim and Christian Communities

Cooperation in Education

Cooperation in education is essential for the peaceful coexistence of Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village. The findings of this study indicate that educational institutions in this village foster an inclusive and tolerant environment in which students from various religious backgrounds can learn and respect one another's beliefs.

Interactions between teachers and pupils at the school in Pertabas Village illustrate cooperation in education. Muslim and Christian educators collaborate to develop a curriculum emphasizing universal values such as tolerance, cooperation, and justice (Gökçe, 2021). One of the interviewed teachers stated, "*We try to teach these values to students so that they can respect each other and cooperate with their friends*

of different religions" (Morina Boru Tumangger, Pertabas Elementary School Teacher, Interview, October 08, 2022).

This research shows that Christian and Muslim students at Pertabas Elementary School interact effectively and without problems. Even though there are religious differences among students, it does not impact their social interaction. Teachers at Pertabas Elementary School also play a crucial role in educating students from different religious communities by promoting mutual respect. Moreover, Christian and Muslim students interact outside the classroom and within organizations. In the interaction process at school, there is no separation of same-religious groups, instead incorporating a variety of religions, allowing Christian and Muslim students to unite and make friends regardless of religion (Morina B. Tumangger, Interview, October 08, 2022).

Pertabas Elementary School has fewer students than other elementary schools, with eighty-one students. Fifty students are Christians, and thirty-one students are Muslims. As for the number of teachers, there are eleven people, including five Christians and six Muslims. Despite it, the interaction among students of various religions at Pertabas Elementary School was relatively positive. Even though they have the typical characteristics of children, such as being playful, mischievous, or arrogant, they can make excellent friends regardless of their religion (Morina Boru Tumangger, Pertabas Elementary School teacher, Interview, October 8, 2022). It indicates that Christian and Muslim communities coexist peacefully in Pertabas Village, reflected in the social interactions at Pertabas Elementary School.

This study also discovers that Pertabas Village held non-school training for young men, including entrepreneurship training for dropouts. The training method is applied in apprenticeship training by providing guidance and directly practicing it.

We accept this entrepreneurship training for anyone who wants to join, both young people from Christianity and Islam, as long as they want to join well. This training does not regard religion because teenagers who drop out need it to find jobs to make a living after joining the training (Joshua Boru Tumangger, Christian Society, Interview, October 06, 2022).

The quotation explains that religion is not a focus of entrepreneurship training. Any Christian or Muslim adolescent who wants to join and participate in the training will be warmly welcomed. It is due to the reality that dropout youth have a robust demand for entrepreneurship training to acquire skills and knowledge that will enable them to obtain financially rewarding jobs. By omitting religion from entrepreneurship training, it is anticipated that Christian and Muslim communities will experience greater inclusion and cohesion in this environment.

Inclusive and tolerant policies and regulations enacted by the village government also support cooperation in education in Pertabas Village, fostering peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities. As the Secretary of the Village Head stated in an interview, "We always try to accommodate the educational needs of all children in our village, regardless of their religion" (Andi Solin, Secretary of the Village Head, Interview, September 20, 2022).

In the context of Allport's theory (1954) of intergroup contact, cooperation in education between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village can be viewed as a form of positive contact that helps reduce prejudice and enhance relations between religious groups. In this case, education is a powerful tool for fostering peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society like Pertabas Village.

Overall, this research shows that cooperation in education is essential in building peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village. Through positive and inclusive interactions in educational institutions, extracurricular activities, and educational assistance

programs, the people of Pertabas Village can build a harmonious and tolerant environment for their young generation, which will become the foundation for a sustainable, peaceful coexistence in the future.

Cooperation in the Economy

Cooperation in the economy is a necessary form of cooperation for coexistence. Most people in Pertabas Village earn their living from plantations and livestock, such as plantation of oil palm, durian fruit, vegetables, and livestock of goats, chickens, catfish, and poultry. This cooperation allows people to interact, buy, and sell regardless of religion or social standing. In this case, cooperation in the economy is one of the crucial factors in sustaining a peaceful and harmonious community in Pertabas Village. During interviews with several sellers at the village market, it was revealed that they maintain excellent relationships with colleagues of different religions and assist one another in overcoming various business challenges.

There are no restrictions or discrimination between sellers and buyers of different religions in Pertabas Village, where buying and selling occur regardless of religious differences. In certain circumstances, such as buying and selling foods containing pork, which Muslims revere, Muslim consumers must be prohibited from purchasing foods that Christians sell. It demonstrates an appreciation for religious diversity while maintaining harmony in everyday life.

Cooperation in the economy between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village is consistent with the principles of Allport's intergroup contact theory (1954), which asserts that positive contact between different groups can reduce prejudice and strengthen relationships. The mutually beneficial economic interaction between the Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village establishes a relationship of mutual dependence and mutual respect, which ultimately contributes to the establishment of peaceful coexistence in this pluralistic society.

Putnam (2000) also emphasizes the importance of social relations and networks in creating the social capital needed to develop local economies and promote peaceful coexistence between religious groups. In Pertabas Village, cooperation in the economy between Muslim and Christian communities is a form of social capital that facilitates positive, mutually beneficial, and supportive social relations. This economic cooperation creates an environment where trust, social norms, and networks can develop, allowing the Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village to work together for the common good and overcome potential conflicts that may arise due to religious differences.

In addition, cooperation in the economy provides an opportunity for Muslim and Christian communities to learn about each other's values, beliefs, and habits to appreciate differences and seek out similarities in their daily lives (Andi Solin, Chief Secretary Village, interview, October 6, 2022). In this context, cooperation in the economy can be viewed as a form of "positive contact" by Pettigrew (1998) as a significant factor that can reduce prejudice and foster harmonious intergroup relations.

This study reveals that cooperation in the economy between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village has contributed to peaceful coexistence in the region. However, it is essential to remember that cooperation in the economy is not the only factor influencing peaceful coexistence. Other factors, such as the role of the village government, community organizations, and influential figures, also play a role in building and maintaining peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society like Pertabas Village (Andi Solin, Secretary of the Village Head, Interview, September 20, 2022). Therefore, it is essential to conduct further research to investigate these factors and how they interact to build and foster peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society.

Social-religious Cooperation

Social-religious cooperation is essential in building peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village. The community can develop close and respectful relationships through various social activities involving both religious groups, reducing prejudice and increasing understanding between groups.

In social life, *gotong royong* (cooperation) is one of the joint activities. It is a form of social cooperation that plays a significant role in the lives of residents (Effendi, 2013; Irfan, 2017). They collaborate to complete social duties, such as repairing roads, cleaning the environment, and constructing places of worship. This cooperation mentality accelerates the completion of duties, strengthens social ties among them, and fosters a sense of community. In addition, it is a symbol of the spirit of kinship, unity, and social solidarity that defines Indonesian culture. According to Muriani Solin, Head of Welfare and Services (interview, October 04, 2022), "*Gotong royong is the cultural legacy of our ancestors; we must protect it because mutual cooperation is the key to unity and harmony in village communities.*"

The harmony and unity between Muslims and Christians in Pertabas Village due to their practice of cooperation demonstrates that religious differences may not be a factor dividing them but can instead serve as a bonding agent that strengthens social cohesion. Through the spirit of kinship, volunteerism, and altruism manifested in cooperation, the people of Pertabas Village can work together and solve various problems, fostering a sense of community, familiarity, and getting to know one another. These admirable values must be maintained and preserved as ancestral cultural heritage. This solidarity and cooperation between religious communities are anticipated to strengthen brotherhood and harmony in society and provide advantages for balance, comfort, and togetherness.

In Pertabas, values are deeply rooted in the life of each community, they are accustomed to cooperation and assistance, and there is no doubt about togetherness because this attitude is extremely positive and promotes balance. The comfort of togetherness leads to mutual acceptance of differences (Andi Solin, Village Head Secretary, interview, October 06, 2022).

Gotong royong is a form of social interaction that helps strengthen relationships between Pertabas Village's communities. The cooperative attitude is a characteristic that has been passed down through the generations. It is also an essential factor in promoting the harmonious coexistence of religious people. Through effective communication between Christians and Muslims, the community of Pertabas Village can establish world harmony and happiness regardless of religious differences. In this regard, the significance of mutual respect and appreciation among religious people is emphasized to create a peaceful, harmonious, and harmonious life. The Christian and Muslim communities of Pertabas Village have demonstrated that unity and harmony can be achieved with awareness and sincerity.

Social-religious cooperation is essential in strengthening interreligious relations. In Pertabas Village, the Eid al-Fitr celebration is a moment that Muslims have been waiting for, and the Christian community respects and appreciates this celebration. The Christians participate in celebrating Idul Fitri with Muslims. In an interview with a Christian Pastor in Pertabas Village, he revealed no separation between religions in celebrating Eid al-Fitr.

During Eid Al-Fitr, we visited our close family, relatives, and neighbors who were the nearest Muslims to maintain interaction, say *minal aidzin walfaidzin*, and greet. We were invited into their homes while eating Eid cakes provided by them (Lusriana Boru Sianturi, member of the Pastor, Interview, October 4, 2022).

This practice shows good socio-religious cooperation between Muslims and Christians in Pertabas Village in celebrating religious celebrations. Both parties respect and appreciate each other's religious beliefs and try to strengthen ties of friendship by visiting interfaith homes at special moments such as Eid al-Fitr. This attitude is essential for fostering unity and harmony among Pertabas Village's religious communities. According to the case study by Fitriani (Fitriani, 2020), "Coexistence, mutual respect and mutual appreciation of adherents of other religions is one of the manifestations of tolerance." The quote explains that tolerance is seen in the form of good social relations between Muslims and Christians in Pertabas Village in celebrating religious festivals. They respect and appreciate each other's religious beliefs, which is reflected in their visits to interfaith homes during important moments such as Eid al-Fitr. This shows mutual respect and strengthens social relations between people of different religions.

It is similar to commemorating Eid al-Adha, also known as the festival of sacrifice. The Christians assist in keeping animals safe for slaughter. This attitude demonstrates mutual respect, which is the basis for developing socio-religious cooperation in Pertabas Village. As stated by the Pastor, the commemoration of Eid al-Adha is also followed by greetings and congratulations. It demonstrates religious believers' tolerance and brotherhood.

During the celebration of Eid al-Adha, we only participate in security for the smooth running of the Eid atmosphere. It is the same as Eid al-Fitr. They also do not miss saying 'Happy Eid al-Adha' (Lusiana Boru Sianturi, member of the Pastor, Interview, October 04, 2022).

The quote shows mutual respect and assistance between religious communities in celebrating Eid al-Adha. Even though the sacrificing activity is a special worship for Muslims, Christians also help keep animals safe and wish them a happy Eid al-Adha. This attitude shows that social-religious cooperation can be established through mutual assistance and respect in religious celebrations.

The social and religious cooperation in Pertabas Village is linked to the theory of contact between groups, especially in creating "positive contact" that can reduce prejudice and promote harmonious inter-group relations. In this case, socio-religious cooperation is a form of "positive contact" that Pettigrew (1998) described as essential in building harmonious inter-group relations.

Socio-religious cooperation fosters a sense of belonging and familiarity, removing religious differences as a barrier to interacting and assisting one another. It is one of the four essential factors Allport describes in his theory of contact between groups: equality of status, common goals, cooperation, and the support of authority, law, or custom (Allport, 1954). Through good socio-religious cooperation during the holidays, it is hoped that a better and more peaceful society will be created and that Indonesia will become a more civilized and tolerant society, in accordance with the intergroup contact theory's goals of fostering harmonious intergroup relationships and reducing intergroup conflicts.

Factors Supporting Peaceful Coexistence between Muslim and Christian Communities

Government Role

One of the crucial factors supporting peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village is the government's role in regulating and maintaining relations among religious groups. Through interviews with village officials and community leaders, this research found that the village government actively facilitates interfaith dialogue and ensures inclusive and fair policies for all villagers, regardless of their religion (Andi Solihin, Village Secretary, October 06, 2022).

Village governments or village apparatus place great importance on the harmony of their residents. During our monthly meetings, we always remind village apparatus and religious leaders to run the government and not discriminate residents from one another" (Andi Solihin, Village Secretary, October 6, 2022).

The statement above explains the awareness of the village government in maintaining harmony among residents in Pertabas Village. The seriousness of the village government in reminding village apparatus and religious leaders always to run the government without discrimination proves it. Thus, the village government is responsible for providing the facilities and infrastructure residents need and maintaining a conducive social environment in the Pertabas Village community. This awareness shows the village government's commitment to building and advancing Pertabas Village sustainably by prioritizing the principles of togetherness and equality in terms of public services and making policies that affect the lives of villagers.

In observation, the village government and residents around Pertabas Village contributed to the success of Christmas celebrations for Christians. The establishment of a security tent post during the Christmas celebration proves it. Besides, Muslims, the Indonesian National Armed Forces, and the State Police of the Republic of Indonesia also assisted in putting up tents for the Command Post and taking part in maintaining security at the Command Post. In this case, there is cooperation and tolerance between Christians and Muslims in celebrating religious holidays. The village government's presence as a community leader can positively impact strengthening relations among residents and maintaining a harmonious life in Pertabas Village.

The village government also fights inequality and discrimination by offering everyone equal education, employment, and public services. Equally distributed infrastructure is an example. Village funds were used to build the Al-Quran Education Centre of Al-Hafizd under the village head's Christian leadership. After meeting with the local community coordinator and receiving approval from the Christian community, the funds were withdrawn. A two-door building was used to build the Al-Quran Education Centre of Al-Hafizd, which is still operating. Because of the mosque's poor bathrooms, they built the Al-Quran Education Centre and a bathroom. The statement illustrates that even though most of Pertabas Village's residents are Christians, the village authority helps build mosque bathrooms. It demonstrates Christian-Muslim tolerance in Pertabas Village.

Thus, the government's role in regulating and maintaining relations between religious groups, ensuring inclusive and fair policies, and controlling the spread of information that may cause conflict helps Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village coexist peacefully.

Clan Similarity

According to Vergouwen, the surname indicates that the current bearers have the same ancestor. They refer to themselves as *Sabubata*, indicating they share the same intestines and blood. Therefore, no distinction between their children and those their siblings (Vergouwen, 1986, p. 10). Many members of the Aceh Singkil Pak-Pak tribe, particularly in the Pertabas Village region, use a surname in addition to their given name. Most clans in Pertabas Village are Berutu, Manik, Tumangger, and Solin. This fact makes a compelling allegation that if there are Christians and Muslims in the same village and they share the same surname, they share the same ancestry despite their different religions. Thus, it becomes increasingly obvious why the community of Pertabas Village can coexist peacefully.

The similarity of ethnic heritage among Pertabas Village residents is the key to peaceful coexistence. Despite differences in religious beliefs, the community lives in peace and harmony and gets

along. Community leaders and one of the clerics stated that if two members of the Pertabas community share the same surname but adhere to different religions, it indicates that they share a common ancestor and that Pertabas Village has never distinguished itself. If a villager is affected by a natural disaster, we are accustomed to assisting one another regardless of that person's religious background (Lusriana and Azmi, Interview, October 4, 2022).

The similarity of clans also influences the way people view religious differences. Interviews with villagers found that they tend to see religious differences as part of cultural diversity and kinship, not as a source of conflict. It aligns with previous studies, which show that the same clan or family origin can help reduce tensions between religious groups and create peaceful coexistence (Purba, 2022; Ridwan et al., 2023; Sulaeman et al., 2023, 2022).

If there are people with the same surname, different religions, for example, Pertabas Muslims and Christians with the Berutu surname, are still relatives because they are still in the same lineage. They have one ancestor and one surname (Lusriana Boru Sianturi, Pastor, Interview, October 04, 2022)

In addition, the similarity of clans also influences how residents resolve conflicts that may arise due to differences in religion. Interviews with community leaders found that villagers resolve conflicts through deliberations and consultations with indigenous elders or community leaders, who are often also close relatives (Azmi, Islamic Religious Leader, Interview, October 04, 2022). This approach aligns with previous research, which confirms that conflict resolution methods based on local wisdom and kinship can help create peaceful coexistence between different religious groups (Sulaeman et al., 2023, 2022).

Thus, the similarity of clans in Pertabas Village is essential in supporting peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities. It creates a sense of brotherhood and mutual respect and is more inclusive in resolving conflicts for all parties.

Economic Relations

The interdependence and symbiotic economic relations between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village are also essential in supporting peaceful coexistence. Through interviews with villagers and business owners, this research found that many Muslim and Christian residents depended on each other in various aspects of the economy, such as agriculture and trade.

I work with a Christian boss here. I get the same treatment as others somewhat. There are no restrictions on justice in terms of religion. Because we earn a living for our daily needs together (Syamsuddin Pohan, a Muslim, Interview, October 06, 2022)

The statement above shows that Christians and Muslims have coexisted peacefully in Pertabas Village. According to a Muslim worker, religion does not affect treatment or justice. This practice reveals that religion does not affect workplace interactions in Pertabas Village. Muslim and Christian traders cooperated in business during the observation. They trust each other and exchange capital, labor, and market information. According to Putnam (2000), "bridging social capital"—mutually beneficial economic interactions between religious groups—can enhance social bonds and promote peace.

Pertabas Village traders trade without religious issues. They do not look at whether traders or buyers are Muslim or Christian. However, Muslim-Christian food sales are restricted. A Christian resident stated that Christian food often contains pork, forbidden in Islam. Therefore, Muslims tend not to buy food from Christian traders. However, this did not cause conflict between the two religions in Pertabas Village (Lusriana Boru Sianturi, Pastor member, Interview, October 04, 2022).

Christian and Muslim communities can maintain positive relations through interactions at grocery stores and basic food shops, where they buy and sell necessities. Traders and customers of various religions interact and engage in transactions despite their religious differences. Nevertheless, product selection has some distinctions, such as Christian merchants not selling pork because it contradicts Islamic teachings. However, this does not affect the daily interaction and cooperation in purchasing and selling activities. In conclusion, the economic interaction between Christian and Muslim communities in Pertabas Village is thriving and mutually beneficial, regardless of religion.

Additionally, interdependent economic relations influence how villagers perceive religious differences. Villagers tend to perceive religious differences as an opportunity to work together and learn from one another rather than as a source of conflict (Muriani Solin, Head of Welfare and Service Section, interview, October 04, 2022). This approach aligns with Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory, which asserts that positive interactions between religious groups in an economic context can help reduce prejudice and foster tolerance.

Thus, the mutually dependent and symbiotic economic relationships between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village are essential in promoting peaceful coexistence. They foster mutually beneficial relationships, strengthen social ties, and reduce the possibility of religiously stimulated conflicts.

Peaceful Coexistence in Pertabas in the Perspective of Intergroup Contact Theory

The results of this study indicate that the peaceful coexistence of Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village can be analyzed through the Intergroup Contact Theory by Allport (1954). This theory explains that positive interactions between different groups can reduce prejudice and increase tolerance, provided that contact involves optimal conditions, such as equal status, common goals, cooperation, and the support of authority, law, or customs (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998).

First, this study found that cooperation in education between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village created equal status and shared goals in improving the quality of their children's education (Pettigrew, 1998). It aligns with previous research findings that education can promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence between religious groups (Banks, 2015).

Second, this study also showed that cooperation in the economy between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village creates mutually beneficial relationships and strengthens social ties between them. It aligns with previous research, confirming the importance of interdependent economic relations in creating peaceful coexistence (Barbieri, 1996) and the theory of contact between groups, showing that cooperation can reduce prejudice between groups (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998).

Third, this study found that social cooperation between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village strengthened social bonds and created a conducive environment for peaceful coexistence. It aligns with previous studies showing the importance of participation in social activities in reducing prejudice and building positive relationships between religious groups (Putnam, 2000).

In addition, this study also found that several factors, such as the role of the government, clan similarities, and economic relations, played an essential role in supporting peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village. These factors create optimal conditions for positive intergroup contact, as described by intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998).

Overall, the results of this study support the intergroup contact theory by Allport (1954) and related research, which states that positive interactions between different groups can reduce prejudice and

increase tolerance. In Pertabas Village, peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities is obtained through cooperation in education, economy, and social activities that create optimal conditions for positive intergroup contact, such as equal status, common goals, cooperation, and authority support. In a pluralistic society, these findings demonstrate the significance of fostering an environment conducive to positive intergroup contact. Through this method, prejudice can be reduced, and tolerance between religious groups can be increased, fostering sustainable coexistence over time.

This research also emphasizes the significance of government, equality among clans, and economic connections in promoting peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village. Therefore, policies and interventions to promote interreligious tolerance and harmony must consider these factors to establish optimal conditions for positive inter-group contact and long-term peaceful coexistence.

In the context of this study, these findings validate the applicability of the theory of contact between groups to comprehend the peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village. In addition, this research contributes to a broader comprehension of how intergroup contact theory can be applied in the context of a pluralistic society as diverse as Indonesia.

In addition, this study emphasizes the significance of an inclusive approach that considers the roles of various factors, such as the role of the government, clan similarities, and economic relations, in promoting peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities. This study provides empirical support for previous research emphasizing the importance of positive intergroup contact in reducing prejudice and increasing religious tolerance (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). This research contributes to developing a theory of intergroup contact and creating optimal conditions for peaceful coexistence within a pluralistic society.

Implications of this study's findings for the people of Pertabas Village and other pluralistic societies include the significance of fostering and sustaining positive relations between religious groups. By understanding the factors that influence peaceful coexistence, such as the role of government, clan similarities, and economic ties, communities can implement effective strategies to prevent potential conflicts and promote harmony. For instance, establishing lines of communication between religious groups and the local government can help prevent misunderstandings and conflicts (Putnam, 2000). Creating opportunities for communities to engage in cooperative and social activities together can also help strengthen relationships between groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This research provides important insights for practitioners and policymakers interested in fostering peaceful coexistence and tolerance in pluralistic societies.

CONCLUSION

This research exposes significant findings concerning the peaceful coexistence of Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village. These findings address the various forms of cooperation in education, economy, and social activities that facilitate positive relations among religious groups. In addition, the government's role in establishing a conducive environment, clan similarities that strengthen social ties, and mutually beneficial economic relations between Muslim and Christian communities all contribute to peaceful coexistence. Consequently, the findings of this study shed light on how a pluralistic society can exist in peace and harmony, as well as the applicability of Intergroup Contact Theory in this context.

The limitations of this research include a restricted focus on one village, Pertabas Village, so the findings and implications may not be immediately applicable to other contexts. Moreover, this study

emphasizes a qualitative perspective, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Nonetheless, this study offers significant insight into the peaceful coexistence of Muslim and Christian communities in Pertabas Village.

Based on these limitations, the following recommendations are made for future research: (1) conducting similar studies in different locations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of peaceful coexistence in diverse contexts; (2) expanding research methods to include quantitative approaches that can provide stronger empirical support for research findings and allow for broader generalizations; and (3) exploring deeper into factors influencing peaceful coexistence, such as the role of religion.

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