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Acculturation of Culture and Religion in Religious Moderation of the Amanuban Indigenous Community: An SDGs Perspective

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to analyze the process of cultural and religious acculturation as a practice of religious moderation in strengthening the social identity and sustainability of the life of the Amanuban indigenous community in South Central Timor Regency (TTS). **Theoretical Framework:** This study is based on the theory of cultural acculturation, the concept of religious moderation, and the symbolic interactionism approach that views social identity and religious practices as the result of the construction of meaning through symbolic interaction in the context of local culture. **Literature Review:** The literature review shows that the integration of culture and religion plays an important role in maintaining social harmony in plural societies, but studies that directly link it to the sustainability of local identity and social development are still relatively limited. **Methods:** This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with traditional and religious leaders, participatory observation of socio-religious practices, and documentation studies. Data analysis was carried out thematically to explore the life experiences, social meanings, and symbolic values inherent in the practices of cultural and religious acculturation of the Amanuban community. **Results:** The results of the study indicate that cultural and religious acculturation serve as an effective social mechanism in shaping the character of an inclusive, tolerant, and harmony-oriented society among religious communities. Local values such as *feto-mone* and *natoni* act as an integrative medium that bridges differences in beliefs and strengthens the collective identity of the community without negating the basic principles of religious teachings. **Implications:** These findings confirm that cultural and religious acculturation contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 16 through strengthening peace and social cohesion, and SDG 11 through preserving cultural identity and community sustainability. **Novelty:** The novelty of this study lies in the phenomenological analysis of cultural and religious acculturation as a strategy for sustainable religious moderation in facing modern social dynamics.

Keywords: acculturation, culture, religion, moderation, timorese society.

INTRODUCTION

The Amanuban community in South Central Timor (TTS) is known as a community rich in local cultural traditions and has strong religious dynamics [1]. Their social life has long been shaped by customary values, oral traditions, and ritual practices passed down through generations. With the arrival of major religions such as Islam and Christianity, a unique process of acculturation has occurred, namely the meeting of local cultural values with religious teachings [2], [3]. This acculturation does not erase native culture, but rather gives birth to local forms of religiosity, such as the practice of cooperation (*nafè'u*), village deliberations, and the involvement of people from different religions in traditional ceremonies.

In the context of religious moderation, cultural and religious acculturation in Amanuban is a strategic path to fostering tolerance, justice, and balance in community life. Local cultural values that uphold solidarity and brotherhood are combined with religious teachings that promote mutual respect [4], [5]. This is what enables the Amanuban community to maintain harmony amidst differences. Indonesia, as a pluralistic nation, possesses cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, which is both a strength and a challenge in maintaining social integrity [6], [7]. In this context, religious moderation is an urgent need to manage differences fairly and equitably. Religious moderation does not exist in a vacuum, but is rooted in social practices formed through historical and cultural processes [8]–[10]. One concrete manifestation of religious moderation can be found in the process of acculturation between local culture and religion, when religious teachings interact with the values, norms, and traditions of the local community, thus giving birth to an adaptive form of religiosity without eliminating the cultural identity or spiritual meaning of the religion itself [11], [12].

This acculturation phenomenon is evident in the lives of the Amanuban people, whose social order is based on the values of kinship, deliberation, and respect for ancestors. These values are embodied in various traditional practices such as the *naketi* (peace ritual), *nuni* (harvest thanksgiving), *bifok* (ancestral reverence), and *pah tuaf* (vow of loyalty). With the spread of Christianity and Islam, these traditional practices have undergone inclusive adaptations. Traditional prayers in the *naketi* ritual are often combined with religious prayers, while in the *nuni* ceremony, Christians and Muslims engage together in expressions of gratitude according to their respective beliefs. This demonstrates a collective awareness that religion and culture are not mutually exclusive entities, but rather complement each other in strengthening the community's social and spiritual identity. However, the currents of globalization and modernization present new challenges to the sustainability of these local values. Developments in technology, social media, and the influx of transnational religious ideologies have the potential to influence the mindset of society, particularly the younger generation, toward a more individualistic and exclusive attitude. This shift in values could undermine local wisdom, social cohesion, and the practice of religious moderation that has been maintained. In this context, cultural and religious acculturation in Amanuban is crucial to reexamine as a local strategy to address global challenges and prevent cultural homogenization and narrow religious understanding.

This study also has relevance to the global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The practice of religious moderation based on local wisdom in the Amanuban community contributes to the achievement of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by strengthening peace, tolerance, and peaceful conflict resolution in multicultural communities. Furthermore, preserving local culture and strengthening the identity of indigenous peoples through cultural and religious acculturation aligns with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), which emphasizes the importance of protecting cultural heritage and the social resilience of local communities as the foundation of sustainable development.

Several previous studies have examined religious moderation in the Indonesian context, both through the approach of state policy, religious education, and the role of formal institutions such as Islamic boarding schools and religious organizations [13], [14]. Other studies also highlight cultural and religious acculturation in local communities as important factors in maintaining social harmony and community cohesion [15], [16]. However, most of these studies still focus on Western Indonesia or Java-centric regions and have not deeply linked the practice of religious moderation based on local wisdom to issues of social sustainability and sustainable development. Research that specifically positions the cultural and religious acculturation of indigenous communities in Eastern Indonesia, especially the Amanuban community, as a strategy of religious moderation that directly contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is still very limited. This gap is an important basis for this research. This study is significant because it not only expands the academic treasury on locality-based religious moderation, but also shows how Amanuban cultural wisdom plays a role in supporting SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Resilient Institutions) by strengthening harmony and social resolution based on custom, and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) through the preservation of cultural identity as a foundation for the sustainability of indigenous communities. Thus, this research offers new conceptual and empirical contributions in integrating the study of religion, local culture, and sustainable development in the context of indigenous communities in Indonesia.

This research is also important because cultural and religious acculturation in Amanuban is not merely a form of syncretism, but rather a concrete manifestation of religious moderation in everyday social practices. Local values such as *mutis* (mutual respect), *tasi'ana* (brotherhood), and *bete-ufa* (cooperation) have become pillars of interfaith community life. The Amanuban community lives side by side without significant religious conflict, despite the diversity of beliefs. This phenomenon demonstrates that local communities have their own ways of building social harmony and internalizing the values of religious moderation through tradition and culture. From an academic perspective, studies on religious moderation have tended to focus on the context of Javanese society, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), educational institutions, or formal religious institutions. Meanwhile, studies on religious moderation that grow from the cultural roots of local communities in Eastern Indonesia are still very limited. Yet, this region holds great potential for enriching the understanding of plurality and local wisdom in religious life. Therefore, research on cultural and religious acculturation in Amanuban is very significant in presenting a new perspective on religious moderation based on local wisdom.

In addition to its scientific value, this research also has practical value for strengthening the identity of the people of South Central Timor. Amidst the rapid flow of social change, the Amanuban community requires a new understanding of how to maintain cultural values and religious teachings without losing its identity. Cultural and religious acculturation can be the foundation for building a religious, humanistic, and character-based society, while also serving as a cultural strategy to strengthen social resilience amidst pluralism.

From an academic perspective, research on religious moderation has been dominated by studies of formal institutions, religious education, or communities in Western Indonesia. Studies that highlight religious moderation that grows from the cultural roots of indigenous communities in Eastern Indonesia are still relatively limited. Therefore, research on cultural and religious acculturation in Amanuban is significant in presenting an alternative perspective on religious moderation based on local wisdom. Therefore, cultural and religious acculturation in Amanuban is not merely a form of traditional adaptation, but rather a social strategy that plays a crucial role in maintaining religious moderation, strengthening community identity, and supporting sustainable social development. This research is expected to provide conceptual and empirical contributions to the development of studies on religious moderation based on local culture, both in the Indonesian context and in the global discourse on diversity and sustainable development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Acculturation of Culture and Religion from the Perspective of Social Theory

Cultural acculturation is a classic concept in anthropology that refers to the process of meeting two or more cultures that occurs continuously, resulting in changes in cultural patterns without eliminating the basic identity of each element [17], [18]. In a religious context, acculturation is not interpreted as the obscuration of theological teachings, but rather as the process of adapting religious values into local cultural structures so that they can be accepted and practiced contextually. Koentjaraningrat emphasized that acculturation allows religion to develop peacefully in traditional societies because it respects the value systems that have existed previously [19]. Thus, religion does not exist as a hegemonic force, but rather as a source of ethics and spirituality that is integrated with social life.

In the study of religion and culture, Geertz (2013) views religion as a system of symbols that functions to shape the inner mood and motivation of humans through cultural meanings. Therefore, religious practices always take on local forms and are never completely separated from the socio-cultural context of society. The process of acculturation between Islam and local culture in various regions, including Eastern Indonesia, demonstrates that Islamic teachings can function as a moral force that strengthens social solidarity without negating customary traditions. This perspective emphasizes that acculturation is not a form of deviation, but rather a cultural mechanism that allows religion to contribute to social stability and community sustainability.

Religious Moderation as a Social and Cultural Practice

Religious moderation is conceptually understood as a religious attitude that prioritizes balance (*wasatiyyah*), justice, tolerance, and respect for differences [20]. In the Islamic context, this concept is rooted in the principle of *ummatan wasathan*, which rejects extreme attitudes, both in the form of radicalism and excessive secularism. However, in social practice, religious moderation is not only present in normative texts but also grows out of the historical interaction between religion and local culture. Berger and Luckmann (2023) emphasize that social reality, including religious practices, is a result of social construction that is continuously negotiated through the collective experiences of society [21].

According to Hefner, religious moderation grows more effectively in societies with strong local traditions, because culture functions as a social buffer against religious exclusivism [22]. Local wisdom, such as deliberation, cooperation, and communal solidarity, becomes a medium for internalizing the value of religious moderation in practice [23], [24]. Thus, religious moderation is not solely a project of the state or formal religious institutions, but rather a cultural practice embedded in everyday life. This perspective is relevant to the context of the Amanuban indigenous community, where social harmony is built through the ongoing integration of religious and customary values.

Cultural-Religious Acculturation and the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda

Cultural-religious acculturation in local communities, such as that occurring in the Amanuban community, demonstrates strong relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda, particularly SDG 16 and SDG 11. Within the framework of SDG 16, acculturation serves as an effective social mechanism for building peace and justice based on local values. The integration of religious teachings with customary norms creates a shared ethical system recognized across groups, thereby minimizing the potential for conflict and strengthening social trust. Religion is not positioned as an exclusive identity, but rather as a source of moral values that are integrated with local culture and serve as an instrument for reconciliation and community-based conflict resolution. Meanwhile, from

the perspective of SDG 11, cultural and religious acculturation contributes to community sustainability and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

Table 1. Literature Review on Cultural–Religious Acculturation and SDGs

Subtopic	Key Points
Acculturation of Culture and Religion	Acculturation refers to continuous interaction between cultures, producing adaptation without eliminating core identities. In religion, it enables contextual acceptance of values within local traditions. Religion becomes integrated with social life, functioning as an ethical and spiritual guide rather than a dominant force, supporting harmony in traditional societies.
Religious Moderation	Religious moderation emphasizes balance, tolerance, and justice. It develops through social and cultural interaction, not only doctrine. Local wisdom strengthens inclusive attitudes, making moderation a lived cultural practice embedded in everyday communal experiences.
Acculturation and SDGs	Cultural–religious acculturation supports SDG 16 and SDG 11 by promoting peace, social cohesion, cultural preservation, and sustainable community development rooted in local wisdom.

Traditions, rites, and customary values integrated with religious practices remain alive and relevant amidst the dynamics of modernization, thereby strengthening the social resilience of local communities. Acculturation enables culture not merely to be maintained as an artifact of the past, but to function as a resource for adaptive and sustainable social development. Thus, cultural-religious acculturation can be understood as strategic social capital that bridges global development goals with local realities and strengthens development that is rooted in the identity and wisdom of local communities.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-qualitative design, as stated by Creswell, which aims to understand in depth the process of acculturation of Islam with local culture in the social life of the people of Timor Island [25]. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meanings, values, and socio-religious practices that exist and develop contextually within indigenous communities. The research was conducted over three months in and around Timor Island, with subjects consisting of local communities, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and social actors involved in cultural and religious practices. The research design used is a qualitative case study, which focuses on the process of encountering and integrating Islamic values with the cultural traditions of the people of Timor Island [26], [27].

This method is relevant for capturing the social and religious dynamics of society holistically, while simultaneously exploring the role of cultural-religious acculturation in building social harmony and the sustainability of local communities. In the context of sustainable development, this approach is also used to identify the contribution of local cultural-religious practices to strengthening social cohesion and peace, which is in line with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), as well as preserving the cultural identity of indigenous communities as part of SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Data collection techniques were carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation [28].

Participatory observation was used to directly observe social and cultural practices influenced by Islamic values, such as religious rituals, wedding customs, funeral ceremonies, and forms of cross-group social interaction. In-depth interviews were conducted with religious figures, traditional leaders, Islamic students (santri), and local communities to explore their perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of the acculturation process between Islam and local culture. Documentation included the

collection of written and visual data, such as local historical archives, photographs of cultural activities, and relevant religious documents.

The research instruments included a semi-structured interview guide, observational field notes, and a document analysis format. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively, referring to Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which encompasses three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting, grouping, and summarizing data from interviews, observations, and documentation to focus on the main research issues. The data presentation was structured in a descriptive narrative format, supplemented by informative quotes from informants and a summary table of key findings to clarify patterns and relationships between data Vagisha.

Table 2. Research Method Used in This Study

Aspect	Description
Type of Research	Qualitative research
Approach	Descriptive qualitative approach
Research Objective	To understand the process of Islamic acculturation with local culture in the social life of Timor Island communities.
Rationale for Approach	To explore contextual meanings, socio-religious values, and cultural practices within indigenous communities.
Key Figures Analyzed	Traditional leaders, religious leaders, santri (Islamic students), and local community members.
Main Data Sources	Participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation.
Method of Analysis	Interactive qualitative analysis model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.
Theoretical Framework	Cultural acculturation, social cohesion, and religious moderation based on local wisdom.
Focus of Analysis	Integration of Islamic values with local cultural traditions and their role in social harmony.
Expected Outcome	Understanding of cultural-religious acculturation contributing to social cohesion, peace (SDG 16), and preservation of local identity (SDG 11).

The final stage, concluding, was carried out by systematically interpreting the patterns of meaning emerging from the data, accompanied by an internal verification process to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings. Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation techniques, so that the research results are expected to be not only methodologically valid but also able to provide a conceptual contribution to the development of religious moderation studies based on local wisdom and relevant to the Sustainable Development Agenda (SDGs) in the context of indigenous communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings show that the Amanuban community in South Central Timor Regency possesses a unique social character in managing diversity through cultural and religious acculturation. This acculturation is not merely seen as symbolic practices, but is also manifested in social life, such as traditional ceremonies, religious celebrations, and daily interactions that emphasize the values of togetherness, solidarity, and mutual respect. The traditional practices of *naketi* (peace ritual) and *nuni* (harvest thanksgiving) serve as important examples of how cultural space is interpreted as an inclusive social space that involves people across the Islamic, Christian, and Catholic faiths without rigid religious identity barriers.

The integration of traditional prayers in local languages with religious prayers according to each religion's beliefs demonstrates that the Amanuban community places custom and religion in a complementary position. This pattern reflects the success of acculturation as a social mechanism that strengthens community cohesion. From a sustainable development perspective, this practice aligns with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), as custom serves as an effective informal social institution in building peace, preventing conflict, and strengthening social trust at the community level.

Anthropologically, cultural and religious acculturation in Amanuban reflects the community's ability to engage in cultural negotiation, namely the process of adapting foreign religious values to deeply rooted local traditions. This process occurs gradually and across generations, thus forming a stable and sustainable social identity. The community does not view religion as a threat to tradition but rather as a source of ethics that enhances ancestral cultural values. This aligns with Koentjaraningrat's view that acculturation will be successful if new elements are able to adapt without causing conflict with the local value system.

The Dawan community's identity as Atoni Pah Meto (people of the dry land) demonstrates the close relationship between ecological conditions, social structure, and culture. Timor Island's dry and harsh natural environment shapes communal lifestyles based on kanaf (clans), dryland agriculture, and clay crafts. This ecological adaptation pattern not only reflects local wisdom but also serves as the foundation for the community's economic and cultural sustainability. In the context of the SDGs, this practice is relevant to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), as the community utilizes natural resources contextually and sustainably.

The arrival of Islam on Timor Island did not erase these social and cultural structures, but rather selectively adapted them. One of the key findings of this research is how Muslim communities practice their religious practices according to Islamic teachings while still allowing space for local cultural expressions. In funeral ceremonies, for example, the practice of tahlilan (religious recitation) and communal prayer are combined with traditional traditions such as naton (religious offerings) and the serving of regional specialties. This integration demonstrates that Islamic values are translated into the local cultural context without losing their theological substance.

Acculturation is also evident in the celebration of Islamic holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. After Eid prayers, communities hold gatherings and folk festivals featuring likurai dances and traditional sasando music. These practices serve not only as cultural expressions but also as a form of cultural da'wah (Islamic outreach) that strengthens social ties across communities. From an SDG perspective, this phenomenon contributes to SDG 4 (Quality Education), specifically the education of values and character based on local culture that is passed down informally through social practices.

In the context of marriage, acculturation is evident in the continuation of the belis tradition, which coexists with the Islamic marriage contract. As long as it does not conflict with Islamic principles, the tradition remains preserved as a symbol of respect for family and community. This demonstrates that Islam on Timor Island developed through a process of adaptive cultural selection, not through a total rejection of local traditions. Factors that foster harmonious acculturation between Islam and local culture include: (1) a strong tradition of interfaith tolerance, (2) the role of religious and traditional leaders who prioritize a dialogical and cultural approach, and (3) mixed marriages that strengthen the exchange of cultural values and practices. These three factors form a social ecosystem conducive to the sustainability of religious moderation.

The strategy for maintaining Islamic-cultural identity on Timor Island is implemented through the preservation of positively acculturated religious traditions and religious education that emphasizes respect for local culture. This approach strengthens the position

of Muslims as an integral part of Timor's multicultural society and strengthens the community's social capital in facing the challenges of globalization.

Acculturation of Culture and Religion as the Foundation of Social Harmony in the Amanuban Community

The research results show that the Amanuban community in South Central Timor Regency possesses strong socio-cultural capabilities in managing differences through cultural and religious acculturation. This process does not occur sporadically, but is institutionalized in daily social practices, particularly in traditional rituals and religious celebrations. This acculturation allows local cultural values and religious teachings to coexist harmoniously without negating each other.

Traditional ritual practices such as *naketi* (peace ritual) and *nuni* (harvest thanksgiving) create inclusive social spaces involving people of all faiths, including Islam, Christianity, and Catholicism. This involvement is not merely symbolic, but reflects a collective awareness that tradition functions as a shared social space that transcends theological boundaries. This phenomenon demonstrates that religion is practiced within a contextual and inclusive social framework. From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, these practices demonstrate the success of cultural negotiation, namely the ability of a society to adapt religious values to established local cultural structures. Koentjaraningrat (1986) emphasized that acculturation will occur harmoniously if the new elements that enter do not conflict with the community's core value system. In the Amanuban context, religion is not positioned as a force that displaces tradition, but as a source of ethics that enriches local cultural values.

Acculturation, Social Identity, and Cultural Resilience of the Dawan Community

The identity of the Dawan people as *Atoni Pah Meto* (people of the dry land) represents the dialectical relationship between humans, the environment, and culture. From an ecological anthropology perspective, Steward (1955) emphasized that ecological conditions shape patterns of cultural adaptation and the social structure of society. The dry, water-limited environment of Timor Island, dependent on dryland agriculture, has given rise to a social character that emphasizes solidarity, collective work, and intergroup interdependence. This ecological identity is not only material but also symbolic, shaping how the community understands itself, its community, and its social relations. Thus, the Dawan identity cannot be separated from the ecological context that underpins their culture and social structure.

The *kanaf* (clan)-based social structure functions as a cultural institution that regulates the distribution of social roles, conflict resolution mechanisms, and communal solidarity. Within the framework of structural functionalism theory, Radcliffe-Brown views kinship institutions as the primary mechanism for maintaining social order [29]. However, this approach has been criticized for tending to view social structures as static entities. In contrast, Bourdieu, through the concepts of *habitus* and *field*, emphasizes that social structures are dynamic and continuously reproduced through everyday social practices [30], [31]. In the context of Dawan society, *kanaf* not only maintains traditions, but also becomes a space for negotiating new values, including religious values that come from outside.

The entry of Islam into Dawan society demonstrates an adaptive, rather than assimilative, acculturation process. The classical acculturation theory of Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) explains that cultural contact does not always result in the elimination of local culture, but rather often gives rise to new, hybrid forms [32], [33]. In the religious practices of the Amanuban people, Islam does not replace the *kanaf* kinship system, but rather adapts to it through the involvement of traditional figures in religious rituals and the adaptation of worship practices to the local cultural context. This reinforces Geertz's

argument that religion functions as a system of meaning that is always interpreted within a specific cultural framework. However, the process of integrating religion and culture is not free from normative debate, particularly regarding the boundaries between acculturation and syncretism. Some normative scholars view cultural integration in religious practice as potentially obscuring the purity of religious teachings [34]. In contrast, the contemporary sociological approach to religion sees religion as a living entity that is always negotiating with the socio-cultural context [35], [36]. In the context of Dawan society, Islam serves as a social glue that strengthens social cohesion without producing identity fragmentation. Religious practices, in fact, provide a meeting place for religious values and long-rooted communal solidarity.

This integration of religion and culture forms a pluralistic, inclusive, and dynamic social identity for the Amanuban community. This identity is neither theologically nor culturally exclusive, but rather open to social change without losing its traditional roots. According to Berger & Luckmann, the social constructivist perspective helps explain how social identity is formed through a continuous process of interaction, internalization, and legitimization of meaning. The religious and cultural identity of the Dawan people continues to be reproduced through rituals, social practices, and relationships between individuals across generations, thus forming a stable yet adaptive collective consciousness.

Within the framework of sustainable development, this condition reflects social resilience, the ability of communities to survive, adapt, and thrive amidst the pressures of social change and globalization. Dressel's concept of social resilience emphasizes that a community's adaptive capacity is largely determined by the strength of local institutions, social capital, and collective identity [37]. The acculturation of religion and culture in the Dawan community strengthens these three aspects, making them relevant to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), which places cultural preservation, social cohesion, and community resilience as key prerequisites for locally-based sustainable development.

Islam as a Socio-Cultural Practice and Religious Moderation

The practice of Islam on Timor Island demonstrates that religion is not merely positioned as a normative-ritual system, but as a living socio-cultural practice that interacts with local traditions. Geertz emphasized that religion functions as a system of symbols that shapes how humans understand their social reality. The integration of Islamic symbols with cultural practices such as *natoni*, weaving, and traditional foods demonstrates that Islam in Amanuban is practiced through a contextual, symbolic framework. This reinforces the view that religiosity is practical and tied to the cultural context in which it is practiced.

The cultural *da'wah* approach that developed on Timor Island is in line with the theory of inculturation in religious studies, which emphasizes the importance of translating religious values into local languages and cultures [38]. However, this approach is not without criticism. Some normative thinkers view acculturation as a potential deviation from the purity of religious teachings. This criticism aligns with the textualist Salafi view that rejects religious practices based on local traditions. However, studies in the anthropology of religion show that resistance to acculturation often gives rise to exclusivism and social conflict [39].

From a sociological perspective, cultural Islamic practices in Amanuban demonstrate religion's function as a social glue. Durkheim argued that religious rituals primarily serve to strengthen collective solidarity [40]. The celebrations of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, followed by folk festivals, *likurai* dances, and *sasando* music, demonstrate that religious rituals are not limited to personal worship but become collective spaces that strengthen social cohesion across faiths. Thus, religion serves as a mechanism for social integration, not exclusive differentiation. However, some theories of religious modernization argue that the blending of religion and culture can undermine the normative authority of religion itself. This argument assumes that secularization and rationalization will lead to the separation of

religion from local traditions. The findings in Amanuban actually demonstrate the opposite phenomenon, where religion and culture reinforce each other. In line with Berger's desecularization thesis, religion remains relevant when it can adapt to the social and cultural context of society, without losing its ethical and spiritual values.

The concept of religious moderation that is developing in Amanuban reflects the *wasatiyyah* approach as put forward by Hasan, namely a balance between religious commitment and respect for plurality. This moderation is not formed through formal regulations or normative state discourse, but rather through everyday social practices passed down across generations. In this context, religious moderation becomes a social habitus [41], which is internalized through rituals, customs, and social interactions, not just abstract doctrine.

Theoretically, the phenomenon of cultural Islam on Timor Island enriches the debate on the relationship between religion, culture, and religious moderation. It challenges the dichotomy between “pure” religion and “local” culture, and emphasizes that religious moderation thrives when religion is practiced contextually and dialogically. From a social development and peace perspective, this practice contributes to strengthening social cohesion and preventing identity-based conflict, making it relevant to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), which emphasizes the importance of an inclusive and peaceful society as the foundation of sustainable development.

The Role of Local Wisdom in Da'wah and Sustainable Development

Local wisdom such as *mutis* (mutual respect), *tasi'ana* (brotherhood), and *bete-ufa* (cooperation) can be understood as local moral capital that plays a strategic role in the process of Islamic preaching on Timor Island. From the perspective of religious anthropology, these local values serve as a symbolic medium that bridges Islamic teachings with the social structure of society. The harmony between the principles of Islamic brotherhood and the values of local brotherhood demonstrates that *da'wah* does not always have to be based on a normative-theological framework but can be constructed through the social ethics already present within a community. This approach reinforces the argument that the success of *da'wah* is largely determined by the ability to read and utilize the cultural grammar of the local community.

Theoretically, the approach to *da'wah* based on local wisdom is in line with the concept of transformative *da'wah* put forward by Kuntowijoyo, namely *da'wah* that does not stop at conveying teachings, but encourages just social change [42]. However, this approach has also sparked debate among Islamic scholars. Some normative thinkers argue that the use of local traditions risks blurring the boundaries between *da'wah* and culture, potentially even leading to syncretism. This criticism stems primarily from scripturalist approaches that emphasize the purity of texts. However, empirical studies show that the rejection of cultural context often gives rise to resistance and social fragmentation.

From a sociological perspective, local wisdom integrated with religion functions as an effective informal institution in regulating social behavior and maintaining community stability. North asserts that informal institutions such as norms, customs, and social values are often more influential than formal institutions in shaping collective behavior [43], [44]. In the context of Timor-Leste, customs combined with Islamic values provide a cost-effective, legitimate, and sustainable community-based conflict resolution mechanism. This finding reinforces the relevance of cultural-religious acculturation in supporting SDG 16, particularly in building a peaceful, inclusive, and just society. However, some modernization theories argue that reliance on customary institutions has the potential to hinder formal rationalization and development [45]. This perspective views customs as traditional remnants that will fade with educational and economic advancement. Findings in Amanuban, however, demonstrate that customs are not static, but rather adaptive and capable of transforming into social resources relevant to contemporary development

agendas. Local wisdom does not replace formal institutions but complements them through strong mechanisms of social legitimacy.

From a sustainability perspective, the integration of local wisdom and religion also contributes to strengthening community resilience and socio-cultural sustainability. UNESCO (2013) emphasizes that the preservation of intangible cultural heritage is an integral part of sustainable development. Acculturation allows local traditions not only to survive but also to acquire new meaning through religious values, making them relevant to the younger generation. In this context, the practice of cultural da'wah supports SDG 11, particularly in maintaining the sustainability of local communities and preserving cultural heritage.

Conceptually, these findings challenge the dichotomy between da'wah and development, and between religion and culture. Da'wah based on local wisdom on Timor Island demonstrates that religion can catalyze social development rooted in local identity. By integrating the values of mutis, tasi'ana, and bete-ufa into religious practices, communities not only strengthen religiosity but also build an inclusive and sustainable social foundation. Thus, local wisdom is not merely an object of cultural preservation but also an active actor in achieving community-based sustainable development goals.

Table 3. Analytical Framework of Local Wisdom in Da'wah and Sustainable Development

Aspect	Core Idea	Theoretical Perspective	Development Relevance
Local Wisdom Values	Mutis (respect), tasi'ana (brotherhood), and bete-ufa (cooperation) function as moral capital in society.	Religious Anthropology	Strengthening social cohesion
Local Wisdom in Da'wah	Local cultural values become a medium for integrating Islamic teachings with community traditions.	Transformative Da'wah – Kuntowijoyo	Inclusive and culturally rooted religious outreach
Cultural Integration and Social Harmony	Harmony between the Islamic Brotherhood and local values creates peaceful social relations.	Sociology of Religion	SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
Local Wisdom as an Informal Institution	Customs and social norms regulate behavior and provide community-based conflict resolution.	Institutional Theory – North	Sustainable community governance
Cultural Adaptation and Development	Local traditions remain adaptive and support contemporary development processes.	Social Change Theory	Strengthening social resilience
Cultural Da'wah and Sustainability	Integration of religion and culture preserves intangible cultural heritage and community identity.	Cultural Sustainability – UNESCO	SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

Challenges and Dynamics of Cultural–Religious Acculturation

Although the acculturation process between Islam and local culture in the Timor Island community, particularly in Amanuban, has been relatively harmonious, this dynamic is not free from several structural and cultural challenges. One major challenge arises from the younger generation's increasing exposure to globalization and global popular culture, while

simultaneously experiencing a disconnection from their local cultural roots. This situation has the potential to weaken the transmission of local wisdom values that have long been the foundation of religious moderation. This phenomenon is relevant to SDG 4 (Quality Education), particularly the target of inclusive and contextual education that encourages the preservation of local cultural values as part of the development of sustainable character and social identity.

A small group still views local traditions as practices inconsistent with "pure" Islamic teachings. While not dominant, this puritanical view has the potential to create symbolic tensions between religion and culture. This challenge highlights the importance of strengthening moderate religious literacy based on local wisdom, in line with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), which emphasizes the importance of an inclusive, peaceful, and cohesive society. In this context, cultural education based on moderate Islam is a strategic instrument for preventing social fragmentation and maintaining social stability in a multicultural society.

The acculturation process between Islam and local culture in the Timor Island community is the result of a long and gradual historical interaction. Islam did not arrive by completely replacing cultural structures, but rather adapted through a process of cultural dialogue with deeply rooted customs. This is evident in social practices such as marriage and death rituals, where local elements are maintained while adapting to Islamic principles. The presence of Arabic prayers, the use of Islamic symbols, and the involvement of religious figures in traditional ceremonies reflect this selective and contextual integration.

This type of acculturation contributes to strengthening community social capital, a crucial element of SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Inclusive cultural and religious practices not only maintain social cohesion but also strengthen the resilience of indigenous communities in the face of social, economic, and environmental change. In the context of the Amanuban community, which lives in a dry and ecologically vulnerable area, culturally and religion-based social cohesion is a crucial resource for community sustainability.

Acculturation is also evident in local artistic expressions, such as traditional music and traditional poetry containing moral messages and Islamic preaching values. Folk songs sung at religious events often contain praise for the Prophet Muhammad and Islamic ethical teachings, but are still performed with local rhythms and using traditional instruments such as the gong and sasando. This art serves as an effective medium for cultural preaching, as it can reach people of all ages and social backgrounds without inducing resistance. From the perspective of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), these local cultural and artistic practices also have sustainable economic potential, particularly through the development of a culture-based creative economy. With proper management, local arts and religious traditions can become a source of livelihood for communities and a means of preserving cultural identity [43], [44].

The successful acculturation of Islam and local culture on Timor Island is inseparable from the strategic role of religious figures and traditional leaders who function as value mediators. Da'wah is carried out through a dialogical and cultural approach, rather than a confrontational one, so that Islam is accepted as an integral part of the community's social life. This approach reinforces the findings of classical acculturation theory, which states that new cultural elements will be more easily accepted if they do not conflict with established local value systems. However, vigilance is needed to prevent the acculturation process from shifting into syncretism, mixing Islamic teachings with theologically contradictory religious practices. In this regard, Islamic scholars and educators play a crucial role in the cultural selection process, namely filtering out and accommodating traditional elements and modifying or abandoning practices that conflict with the principles of monotheism, such as the use of offerings or the invocation of ancestral spirits. This

selection process demonstrates that acculturation is not an unlimited compromise, but rather an effort to critically and sustainably align religious values with cultural identity [45].

Analysis

This study offers a nuanced and theoretically grounded contribution to the discourse on cultural–religious acculturation, religious moderation, and sustainable development by positioning the Amanuban indigenous community as a living laboratory of socially embedded pluralism. The findings demonstrate that acculturation is not merely a passive cultural adaptation, but an active process of negotiation, selection, and reinterpretation of values that produces a resilient and contextually grounded form of religiosity. This reinforces classical anthropological perspectives, particularly those of Koentjaraningrat and Geertz, while extending them into the contemporary framework of sustainability and social development.

From a sociological perspective, the study successfully illustrates how religious moderation operates not as a top-down normative agenda but as a bottom-up cultural practice rooted in everyday life. The integration of local wisdom—such as *mutis*, *tasi'ana*, and *bete-ufa*—with Islamic and Christian teachings functions as a form of “lived moderation,” aligning with Berger and Luckmann’s theory of social construction. Religious identity in Amanuban is thus continuously reproduced through ritual, interaction, and collective memory, resulting in a dynamic yet stable social order. This challenges rigid dichotomies between “pure” religion and “local” culture, offering instead a dialogical model where both mutually reinforce social cohesion.

Importantly, the study bridges local cultural practices with the global SDGs agenda, particularly SDG 16 and SDG 11, by demonstrating how acculturation contributes to peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and cultural sustainability. The role of informal institutions—customs, rituals, and kinship systems—emerges as central in maintaining social order, supporting North’s institutional theory while also critiquing modernization assumptions that marginalize traditional systems. Moreover, the adaptive capacity of the Amanuban community reflects strong social resilience, where cultural identity becomes a resource for navigating globalization pressures. However, the study also implicitly highlights tensions, especially the potential rise of puritanical interpretations that may disrupt acculturative harmony. This suggests the need for sustained cultural literacy and inclusive religious education. Overall, the research provides a compelling model of culturally grounded religious moderation that is both theoretically rich and practically relevant for plural and developing societies.

CONCLUSION

Cultural and religious acculturation in the Amanuban community is a strategic and ongoing socio-cultural process in building and maintaining the collective identity of the indigenous community. The integration of local values such as *feto-mone*, respect for elders, *natoni*, and various traditional rituals with the teachings of Christianity and Islam does not occur through compromise that eliminates the essence of each, but rather through a process of creative adjustment that reinforces each other. Local culture serves as a social foundation, while religion provides spiritual and moral legitimacy, thus forming a shared value system that is robust and adaptive to social change. This acculturation process gives rise to a form of religious moderation that is practical and contextual. Moderation does not exist as a merely normative concept, but is manifested in daily life practices, such as interfaith tolerance, social cooperation, and respect for customs as a source of shared ethics. This pattern makes religion act as a social glue that promotes peace and social cohesion, rather than a source of exclusivity or conflict. Thus, the identity of the Amanuban

community develops dynamically, inclusively, and dialogically, without losing its local cultural roots. From a sustainable development perspective, the findings of this study demonstrate the tangible contribution of cultural and religious acculturation to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). First, strengthening social harmony, customary-based conflict resolution, and the practice of religious moderation directly contribute to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Resilient Institutions) by creating peaceful, inclusive, and just societies. Second, preserving local wisdom integrated with religious values supports SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), particularly in maintaining the sustainability of indigenous communities and cultural heritage as social capital for development. Thus, this study confirms that cultural and religious acculturation in the Amanuban community is not merely a cultural phenomenon, but also a model of social development practice rooted in local identity. This model is relevant as a reference in strengthening religious moderation and sustainable development in other multicultural societies, particularly in the context of diverse Indonesia.

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Author Contribution

Yahya Nikmat Nobisa conceived the study, conducted field research, and drafted the manuscript. Akhsanul In'am supervised the research design and validated the methodology. Moh. Mahfud Effendi contributed to data analysis and theoretical development. Syarifuddin Darajad supported sociological interpretation and contextual analysis. Indah Febriana As'ari Putri assisted in literature review, language editing, and final manuscript preparation for submission, revision, and publication processes.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that this research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be interpreted as potential conflicts of interest. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to its submission. This study received no specific external funding, and the findings presented are solely based on independent academic inquiry without any external influence or competing interests involved.

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