

RELIGIOUS MODERATION THROUGH JOJAO INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP OF MAT BAT COMMUNITY IN WEST MISOOL

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Jojao traditional leadership in fostering religious moderation among the Mat Bat indigenous community in West Misool District, Raja Ampat Regency, Southwest Papua. The study is based on the observation that the Mat Bat community comprises Muslim residents in Gamta Village and Protestant Christian residents in Magei Village, who coexist harmoniously within a shared customary system. While previous studies have separately discussed traditional leadership and religious moderation, limited attention has been given to the relationship between indigenous institutions and religious moderation practices in Papua's multi-religious communities. This study aims to analyze how Jojao leadership contributes to maintaining social harmony and strengthening religious moderation among the Mat Bat people. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving customary leaders, religious leaders, village officials, and community members. The findings reveal that Jojao functions not

only as a traditional leader but also as a social mediator who preserves interreligious solidarity, resolves conflicts through deliberation, and maintains inherited communal values. From the perspective of religious moderation, Jojao leadership reflects tolerance, non-violence, commitment to social harmony, and accommodation of local cultural values. This study concludes that the Jojao institution serves as a significant social mechanism for strengthening religious moderation by integrating customary and religious values within the Mat Bat community.

Keywords: Tolerance; Religious Moderation; Jojao Leadership; Custom

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is recognized as one of the most culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse countries in the world (Bowen, 2003; Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). Such diversity represents both a social asset and a potential source of tension if not managed through mechanisms that promote mutual understanding and social cohesion (Menchik, 2016). In recent years, religious moderation has emerged as an important approach for maintaining harmony within plural societies (Kasdi, 2019). Religious moderation refers to a balanced religious attitude characterized by tolerance, respect for differences, rejection of violence, commitment to national unity, and accommodation of local cultural values. While studies on religious moderation have often focused on religious institutions, education, and state policies (Jubba et al., 2022), the contribution of indigenous institutions to fostering religious moderation remains relatively underexplored, particularly in Papua.

Many indigenous traditions in West Papua have gradually declined due to the predominance of oral transmission from one generation to another (Timmer, 2007). The absence of written documentation has caused some customary practices to disappear, as cultural continuity was interrupted across generations. Nevertheless, several indigenous traditions and customary institutions continue to survive and function as important social mechanisms that preserve collective identity and social harmony (Mentansan, 2022). In some communities, customary institutions remain highly respected and continue to regulate social relations despite increasing social change and religious diversity. These institutions often serve as cultural resources that strengthen community resilience against social fragmentation and ideological divisions.

One such example can be found in the Indigenous communities of Gamta and Magei villages in West Misool, Raja Ampat. Despite adhering to different religions, the communities maintain a strong customary structure that is

recognized and respected by all members of society. The most distinctive feature of this structure is the institution of *Joiao*, a traditional leadership system that is not commonly found in other regions of Papua (Yusuf, 2020). The continued relevance of *Joiao* demonstrates how indigenous institutions can function beyond cultural preservation by contributing to social integration among communities with different religious affiliations.

Indigenous leadership in West Papua is generally hereditary, with leadership positions passed down through family lineages and customary clans. However, the appointment of *Joiao* in West Misool represents a unique exception. The traditional leader originates from the Muslim community of Gamta, which is culturally regarded as the elder brother. At the same time, the authority to legitimize and appoint the *Joiao* is shared with the Protestant Christian community of Magei, which is considered the younger brother within the customary kinship system. This arrangement reflects a longstanding tradition of interreligious cooperation embedded within indigenous social structures. Such cooperation demonstrates the existence of social capital that strengthens trust, solidarity, and collective identity among communities despite religious differences (Field, 2016).

The indigenous leadership system of the Mat Bat people provides an important example of how religious moderation is practiced through local cultural institutions. The relationship between Gamta and Magei communities is not merely based on coexistence between Muslims and Christians. However, it is rooted in a shared customary identity that predates the arrival of world religions in the region. Through the institution of *Joiao*, both communities maintain collective responsibility for preserving social harmony, resolving conflicts, and safeguarding customary values. Consequently, religious differences do not function as sources of division but rather coexist within a broader framework of indigenous brotherhood. This condition contrasts with many plural societies where religious identity often becomes a source of tension and social conflict.

Several previous studies have examined indigenous leadership and its role in social organization. Firmando (2020), for example, found that the traditional leadership system of the Toba Batak community remains relevant both theoretically and practically, despite transformations resulting from colonial intervention and changing voter behavior. Similarly, Matsiliza (2024) argued that contemporary traditional leaders face challenges due to constitutional and administrative limitations that restrict their authority in public governance. While these studies provide important insights into indigenous leadership, they primarily focus on leadership structures, governance, and

political legitimacy. Limited attention has been given to the role of indigenous leadership institutions in promoting religious moderation and maintaining interreligious harmony within multicultural communities.

This study fills the existing research gap by examining how the *Joja* indigenous leadership institution functions as a mechanism for strengthening religious moderation, fostering interreligious tolerance, and maintaining communal harmony among the Mat Bat community in West Misool, Raja Ampat. Previous studies have demonstrated the significant role of indigenous leadership in maintaining social order, preserving cultural values, and strengthening community cohesion. Studies on indigenous communities in Indonesia indicate that customary leaders derive their legitimacy from traditional norms and play a central role in conflict resolution, social integration, and the preservation of local wisdom (Arizona & Cahyadi, 2017). Similarly, studies of Dayak Salako traditional leadership indicate that indigenous leaders continue to play influential roles despite the pressures of modernization and globalization, largely because of their cultural legitimacy and charismatic authority (Musa et al., 2021). In Papua, the position of Ondoafi also demonstrates the importance of customary leadership in regulating community life through hereditary authority combined with personal qualities that are considered essential for leadership (Sudayasa et al., 2021).

Beyond governance and cultural preservation, indigenous leadership has increasingly been recognized as an important mechanism for strengthening social cohesion and collective identity. Indigenous leadership studies argue that leadership practices should be understood within their local cultural contexts because dominant Western leadership theories often fail to capture the complexities of indigenous governance systems (Zhang et al., 2012). In this regard, indigenous leaders are frequently viewed not only as political authorities but also as mediators, facilitators of social integration, and custodians of communal values. Similar findings are evident among Maya-Mam communities, where leadership competencies emphasize leading by example, inclusivity, and community solidarity as foundations for collective well-being (Lamino et al., 2024).

Studies on religious harmony and moderation have likewise emphasized the importance of social interaction, dialogue, and mutual understanding in fostering peaceful interreligious relations. Nazmudin (2018) argues that effective interreligious dialogue is essential for reducing prejudice and preventing conflicts among religious groups. Likewise, Hermawati et al. (2017) found that high levels of religious tolerance are strongly associated with positive social interaction and effective mechanisms for managing differences

within diverse communities. These studies suggest that sustainable religious harmony is often supported not only by religious institutions but also by social and cultural structures that facilitate communication, trust, and cooperation among different groups.

Although previous studies have examined indigenous leadership and religious harmony separately, limited attention has been paid to the relationship between indigenous leadership institutions and religious moderation within multicultural indigenous communities. Existing research has primarily focused on traditional authority, governance structures, cultural preservation, or interreligious relations as distinct themes, leaving a limited understanding of how customary leadership functions as a mechanism for promoting religious moderation and sustaining social cohesion across religious boundaries. This gap is particularly evident in Papua, where indigenous institutions continue to play an important role in regulating social life and resolving communal issues despite increasing social change and religious diversity. Therefore, this study examines the *Joiao* indigenous leadership institution among the Mat Bat people in West Misool, Raja Ampat, to explore how customary leadership contributes to strengthening religious moderation through mechanisms that foster interreligious cooperation, mutual trust, collective identity, and communal harmony between Muslim and Protestant Christian communities. The novelty of this study lies not in the hereditary nature of *Joiao* leadership, which remains rooted in customary succession, but in demonstrating how a customary leadership institution can obtain cross-religious legitimacy and function as an indigenous social mechanism for sustaining religious moderation within a pluralistic society.

The study was conducted in Gamta village and Magei village in West Misool district, Raja Ampat Islands. To analyze the research problem obtained from two sources, specifically, primary data and secondary data. The data is collected through passive participatory observation. In addition, an in-depth interview was also conducted. The interview is conducted as a dialogue to obtain data for research, with informants more freely to elicit more open-ended problems, using unstructured interviews and recording tools and notes to collect data. The data analysis technique used is the flow model developed by analyzing data by describing it in three stages regarding firstly doing data reduction: summarizing data, choosing various core things, focusing on various important things, and removing various things that are not needed, secondly conducting data display (data presentation): make brief descriptions, relationships between categories and the like, and thirdly drawing conclusion/verification: drawing conclusions and verification.

THE EXISTENCE OF *JOJAO* LEADERSHIP IN MAINTAINING INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN WEST MISOOL, RAJA AMPAT ISLANDS

Jojao Election

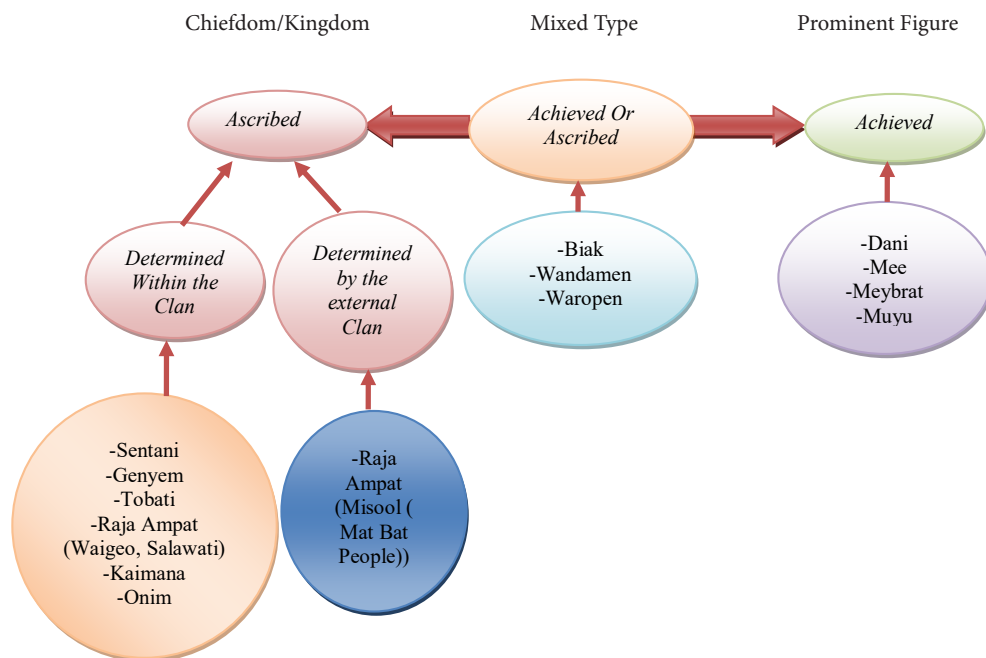
The indigenous Mat Bat community has a unique tradition of electing leaders. *Jojao* chosen came from Gamta Village, related to Muslim people, which in the selection was based on descent from the same clan of Wihel, who have traditionally been *Jojao* in the region. *Jojao* was chosen and appointed by the Mat Bat community, who are Christians inhabiting the Magei Village area. Gamta villagers who are Muslims only agree to the choice of the Magei Village people. The Magei people consider the Gamta people to be their elder brothers, even though the religions adopted by the two villages are different. Their religious differences have been a source of conflict for a long time, especially when the older brother, Wihel, who came down to the beach, adhered to Islam. In comparison, the younger brother who settled in his area adhered to Protestant Christianity. The respect given by the younger brother to his elder brother is reflected in the election of *Jojao* or traditional leaders in the region.

Papuan indigenous communities have long maintained traditional leadership systems that play an important role in regulating customary law, social relations, and communal life. In anthropological studies, leadership is generally understood as being acquired through two principal mechanisms, namely ascription, in which authority is inherited through lineage or customary succession, and achievement, in which leadership is attained through individual abilities, personal qualities, and recognition from the community (Sahlins, 1963; Ramandei et al., 2026). In addition, Kartono explains through the genetic theory of leadership that certain leadership systems are based on hereditary succession, where leadership is transmitted across generations according to established social and cultural norms (Kartono, 2009). These perspectives are relevant to the indigenous leadership system of the Mat Bat community in West Misool, where the *Jojao* institution derives its legitimacy from customary inheritance while simultaneously maintaining its authority through continuous recognition and acceptance by the community in preserving social order and customary values.

The election of *Jojao* indigenous leaders to the Mat Bat indigenous people is more of an inheritance (ascription) nature, a feature of leadership that takes place in Papua and West Papua regions, where choices are made from one generation to the next. As is the case with *Jojao*, traditional leadership, where the *Jojao* traditional leader in the Mat Bat community in West Misool Region has been surnamed Wihel for generations, and is a resident of Muslim Gamta Village, yet the determination of the Wihel clan that will become *Jojao* is very

secret. It depends urgently on the Mat Bat community, who come from other clans in the Magei region and are the original people of Mat Bat, who are adherents of Christianity and have the right to choose and appoint *Joiao*, whose clan, Wihel, is in Gamta village, which is considered an older brother to the Magei community, while those who are Muslim who live in Gamta include the Wihel clan itself, considered an elder brother to Magei villagers, even though they are native to the Mat Bat people and *Joiao* candidates. However, it does not have the authority to participate in determining who will become *Joiao*.

Chart 1. Political System in Melanesia/Land of Papua



The system of selecting a *Joiao* within the Mat Bat customary community reflects a construction of leadership grounded in genealogical legitimacy combined with collective recognition. The position of *Joiao* is consistently attached to the Wihel clan in Gamta Village, thereby situating leadership as an ascriptive inheritance rather than the outcome of open competition. This pattern aligns with leadership typologies, particularly lineage-based leadership models, and with theoretical perspectives that position leadership as a product of socio-cultural determination. Nevertheless, such genealogical authority is not absolute. The determination of the individual to be appointed as *Joiao* lies within the authority of the Mat Bat community in Magei Village. This mechanism indicates the presence of customary checks and balances that ensure traditional authority remains subject to collective consent. Customary leadership operates within a relational framework that balances

the kinship symbolism of “elder sibling-younger sibling” with communal social rationality. Customary institutions thus function as instruments of social integration. Religious differences, Islam in Gamta and Christianity in Magei, do not generate fragmentation; instead, they are negotiated within the framework of kinship and customary norms. This demonstrates that religious identity does not become a source of domination, but is internalized within a stable structure of coexistence. The practice of selecting the *Joiao* not only safeguards the continuity of tradition but also affirms the role of customary institutions as regulatory mechanisms for social cohesion, the legitimacy of authority, and the reproduction of kinship structures.

Joiao’s leadership is ascriptive, attached to the Wihel clan as its primary source of legitimacy. Appointment nevertheless requires social legitimacy, as the final decision rests with the Magei community, representing a different clan and functioning as an embodiment of collective authority. The “elder sibling-younger sibling” relationship constitutes the symbolic foundation of power, structuring both respect and mechanisms of social control. Customary law functions as an instrument of integration across religious boundaries, maintaining social harmony amid plural identities.

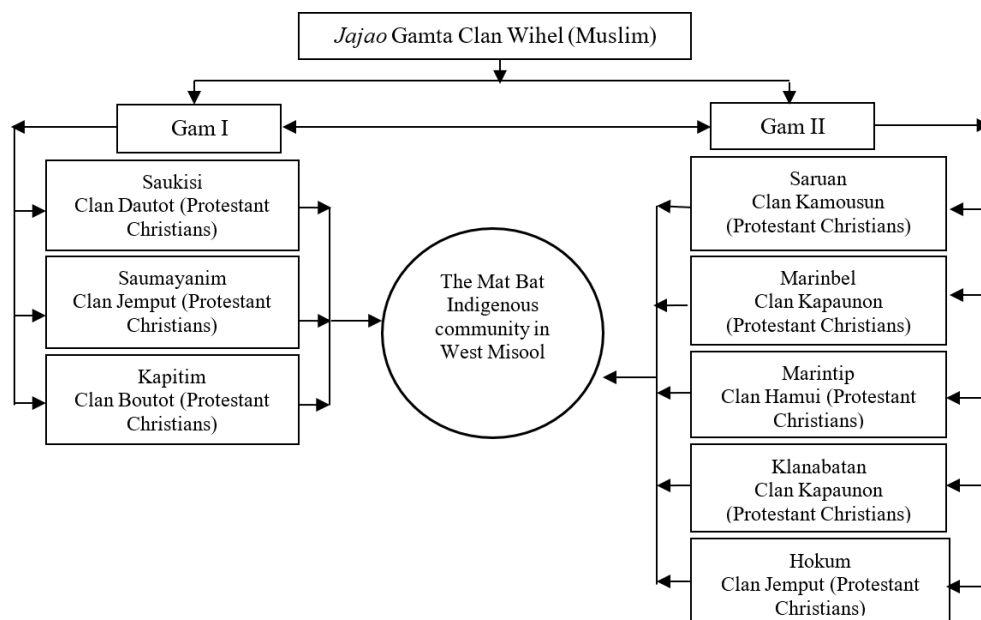
Maintaining the Customary Structures

The formation of the customary structure has been going on for a long time since the ancestors of the Mat Bat people divided the two areas between the elder brother, who was on the coast, and the younger brother, who was in an area somewhat inland in the Misool islands. The indigenous people of Mat Bat believe in taboos that should not be violated, as well as when the customary structure is not implemented properly, where the taboos are contained in the oath that has been pronounced by their ancestors to be obeyed and implemented properly by the next generation. When taboos are violated, there will be disaster for those who violate them. There are also customary sanctions that bind the community to maintain the customary structure so that every activity carried out by the community follows what was desired and mandated by their predecessors.

Radcliffe-Brown stated that social structure is viewed as a network of social relations that includes social groups, social categories, classes, and social roles whose existence is not easily changed or lost (Jenks, 2013). An individual’s involvement in intergroup associations is conditioned by identifiable structural circumstances, based on the assumption that people tend to prefer in-group relations (Blau, 1977; Au, 2023).

One of the defining features of the organizational structure of a community is, of course, that it not only influences how the community operates as a whole, but equally importantly, it also shapes the lives and opportunities of the people whose relations it organizes. These structures function to condition all human interactions, providing the essential means through which people act and relate to one another; and, as social beings, human persons themselves are reproduced and transformed over time through these processes (Lawson, 2022). Mintzberg argues that organizational structure constitutes the framework of relationships among jobs, systems, operational processes, individuals, and groups that work collectively toward the achievement of organizational goals. Organizational structure is a set of methods through which tasks are divided into predetermined responsibilities and systematically coordinated (Ahmady et al., 2016). Organizational structure delineates the division of tasks and responsibilities among leaders within an organization, including leadership arrangements in traditional village settings. Differences in power within a village's organizational structure clearly play an important role in shaping processes of decentralization and the democratization of decision-making (Jenks, 2013).

Chart 2. Customary Structure of Magei and Gamta Village



Source: Authors' compilation

The customary structure of the Mat Bat community has been shaped through a long historical process and legitimized by ancestral traditions. The division of territory between the “elder siblings” (coastal communities) and the “younger

siblings” (inland communities) is not merely geographical, but also produces a symbolic hierarchy that organizes social relations, authority, and obligations among members of the community. Taboos and ancestral oaths function as normative mechanisms that bind society together. Beliefs regarding disastrous consequences for offenders reinforce the effectiveness of customary rules. In contrast, customary sanctions operate as forms of social control designed to ensure the continuity of the customary structure across generations. Accordingly, customary law plays a regulatory role in maintaining order and social stability.

Social structure is understood as a relatively stable and institutionalized network of relations. Patterns of interaction within the Mat Bat community exhibit these characteristics: customary institutions, kinship relations, role differentiation, and taboo norms shape a social configuration that is difficult to change because it has become integrated into the collective belief system. Individual involvement in intergroup structures, particularly within the “elder sibling-younger sibling” relationship, demonstrates a tendency toward in-group preference, which simultaneously strengthens internal cohesion. However, this preference is not directed toward exclusion; rather, it functions to maintain balance and clarity of roles within the community. The customary structure is not merely a static framework, but a process that conditions everyday interactions, shapes life opportunities, and reproduces social identities over time. It enables the community to act, interact, and reproduce the same traditions, while also opening space for gradual transformation in response to social dynamics.

The Mat Bat customary structure is historical, hierarchical, and institutionalized, constructed upon ancestral inheritance and the symbolic territorial division between elder and younger siblings. Taboos, ancestral oaths, and customary sanctions function as mechanisms of social control that preserve compliance, stability, and the intergenerational continuity of the customary system. The community’s social structure forms a relatively stable web of relations that is difficult to alter because collective values and beliefs legitimize it. In-group preference strengthens internal solidarity and role clarity within the community. The customary structure not only regulates how the community functions but also shapes interaction, life chances, and the reproduction of social identity over time.

Having Customary Power

Jojao, the traditional leader of the Mat Bat community in the Misool region of the Raja Ampat Islands, certainly has indigenous strength in carrying out his

traditional leadership, which is supported by the Mat Bat Indigenous People, both Muslims and Christians. With his customary power, *Joiao* was able to order his community to defend his customary territory from various problems that arose both from his own community and from immigrants who occupied the area. This customary power is also fully supported by other territories that are still the customary territory of the Mat Bat people but are occupied by the Mat Lou people, who have inhabited the area for generations.

Ossip K. Flechtheim stated that social power is the sum of the abilities, relationships, and processes that produce obedience in others for the purposes set by the holder of power (Jenks, 2013). In addition, according to Robert. M. MacIver's social power is the ability to control the behavior of others, either directly by giving orders or indirectly by using all available tools and means (Budiardjo, 2003). Power is conceptualized as the capacity to bring about change and to act in alternative ways. In a general sense, power refers to the "ability" that mediates between the outcomes expected or desired by social actors and the actual realization of those outcomes within their everyday social practices (Avelino, 2021).

Joiao leadership represents a form of customary authority that is deeply rooted in cultural legitimacy. As the traditional leader of the Mat Bat community, the *Joiao* derives authority not only from his inherited position but also from the collective recognition of the community, both Muslim and Christian, who regard customary law as a shared normative framework. This cross-community support indicates that customary authority functions as an instrument of social integration. Power is expressed through the ability of actors to influence and direct the actions of others by mobilizing norms, beliefs, and social instruments. Authority is therefore not merely coercive; it operates through cultural legitimacy and normative compliance.

The power of the *Joiao* may be understood as the capacity to mediate between collective goals, the protection of customary territory, the maintenance of social harmony, and their practical realization in everyday life. This is reflected in his ability to organize the community to respond to both internal and external threats, including social dynamics arising from the influx of migrants. Support from other customary territories demonstrates that the structure of customary power generates networks of solidarity that reinforce social cohesion across groups.

Thus, *Joiao's* customary leadership derives strong legitimacy from cultural foundations and communal recognition. Customary power functions as a regulatory mechanism that maintains order, protects customary land, and prevents the potential for disintegration. Power is exercised relationally

and transformatively, connecting collective aspirations with concrete social action. Inter-territorial solidarity strengthens the sustainability of traditional leadership systems and serves as a form of social capital in navigating social change and population mobility.

Ability to Maintain Interreligious Tolerance through Joint Activities

The people of the Raja Ampat islands maintain an indigenous leadership structure that continues today. The region is known as West Misool. The community still recognizes the existence of *Jojao* as a landlord or leader of the Indigenous People in the Misool region, commonly called the Mat Bat people, who control and govern the area so that conflicts do not arise due to the large number of immigrants who settle in the region. *Jojao*'s leadership has a vital role in regulating his customary territories, including the control of community rights, so that there are no territorial disputes or disputes over customary land tenure, and the application of customary law in the community to regulate various community activities. Leadership underscores the importance of portraying leadership practices in a more complex, comprehensive, and nuanced manner that is responsive to cultural contexts (Case et al., 2015). To gain great recognition from the community, *Jojao* sometimes attends various activities carried out together. This shows the existence of leaders in their communities who are known and recognized by their people and who maintain unity and harmony. This, in turn, can generate a “moral ecology,” an ecosystem of values that functions by regulating, maintaining equilibrium, and acting as a cohesive force among individuals, religious communities, and state institutions (Glaeser & Teherani-Krönner, 2020).

Figure 1. Implementation of the *Som* Tradition carried out by Magei Village and Gamta Village



Source: Authors' personal collection

Parsons said an essential element of social action is the actor's sensitivity to the meaning of people and things around them. The perception of these meanings, as well as the reactions to the messages that those meanings bring (Yusuf et al., 2021a). Meanwhile, Garfinkel stated that this is emphasized to ensure the continued existence of norms, values, and institutions always exist, and actors need to have complex skills and understanding of their own actions and awareness of what they do (Yusuf et al., 2021b). To tolerate, accept, or endure generally refers to a conditional acceptance or non-interference with beliefs, actions, or practices that are considered wrong yet still "tolerable," and therefore should not be prohibited or restricted (Forst, 2012).

The continuity of customary leadership structures in the Raja Ampat Islands, particularly in West Misool, places the *Joiao* as the central figure holding customary land rights (*hak ulayat*) and traditional authority. The existence of this customary leadership functions as a regulatory instrument for governing territory, preventing conflict, and organizing relations between indigenous residents and migrants. The practice of *Joiao* leadership demonstrates that customary action is not merely normative but is constructed through social meaning. *Joiao's* presence in collective activities articulates leadership as a symbol of recognition, legitimacy, and social solidarity. The sustainability of customary norms and values is only possible when social actors possess reflective awareness of their actions. In this context, both the community and customary leaders jointly practice and interpret customary law so that it remains relevant to everyday life, including in monitoring land rights, territorial boundaries, and social activities.

The growing number of migrants presents potential social frictions; however, customary leadership promotes conditional acceptance that preserves harmony without neglecting normative customary boundaries. Customary leadership not only maintains order but also serves as a mediating mechanism that balances the interests of diverse groups.

The structure of customary leadership in West Misool remains vibrant and functional, with the *Joiao* positioned as the center of social, political, and cultural legitimacy. Customary leadership plays a strategic role in territorial governance, the prevention of territorial conflict, and the protection of customary land rights. The legitimacy of *Joiao* is both performative and symbolic, reinforced through his presence in collective events that reaffirm his existence and authority before the community. Leadership practices resonate with theories of social action and ethnomethodology, as they rest upon shared meanings, awareness, and collective interpretation of customary norms. Tolerance becomes a crucial element in regulating relations between

Indigenous communities and migrants, enabling coexistence without dissolving the normative boundaries that protect the customary social structure.

Maintaining Tradition for Generations

In Eastern Indonesia, traditions develop orally, which is carried out by habituation through practice without written evidence, so that gradually the tradition is lost due to the decreasing number of people who can apply the tradition, as well as due to the development of the times that shift the existence of the tradition. Previous studies have shown that involving younger generations in intergenerational knowledge transfer is often challenging because differences in values, perspectives, and life experiences between younger and older generations can create barriers to meaningful dialogue and knowledge exchange (Lagacé et al., 2023; Scheuer et al., 2023). If culture can be learned (Spencer-Oatey, 2012), it can also be taught to younger generations (Zort et al., 2023). One way to maintain tradition sustainably is to continue to carry it out in routine practices that are not influenced by outside culture. Such is the case with the Mat Bat people in the West Misool region of the Raja Ampat islands, who observe various traditions collectively within their communities, especially since the region has its own uniqueness and still maintains the traditional leadership model, namely the *Joiao* leadership. *Joiao* plays an essential role in upholding various traditions with its citizens. The traditions observed are part of the ancestral heritage of the Mat Bat community and have been observed for generations. Cultural socialization is the most common form of socialization carried out by parents toward their children (Hughes et al., 2009). This practice is undertaken to ensure that the cultural traditions of the Mat Bat community remain preserved across generations.

Michele Lamont says actors create and retain meanings to organize, accept, and reject fellow human beings, transcending and countering the urgency of social structure (Turner, 2012). Gary Fine says small groups develop unique meanings involving beliefs, knowledge, and habits underlying shared understanding and further interactions and actions (Turner, 2012). Local wisdom constitutes an important resource for sustaining social life (Howes, 2022). The values embedded in local wisdom represent noble principles that should be preserved and transmitted to subsequent generations (Martínez & García, 2008). Local wisdom refers to knowledge that emerges from a community's lived experiences and represents an accumulation of locally generated understandings. This form of wisdom is embedded within societies, communities, and even individuals (Kongprasertamorn, 2007).

The dynamics of sustaining tradition in Eastern Indonesia have largely been shaped by oral transmission. Reliance on collective memory without written documentation renders tradition vulnerable to erosion, particularly as modernization and socio-cultural change accelerate shifts in values. In the context of the Mat Bat community in West Misool, the continuity of tradition rests not only on repeated customary practice but also on the existence of the traditional leadership structure, the *Joiao*, who function as guardians of norms, mediators of meaning, and driving forces in the preservation of cultural practices. This role demonstrates that tradition is not merely the repetition of habits, but the result of an ongoing process of social construction and negotiation.

Traditions endure because actors, both leaders and community members, actively create, interpret, and reproduce meaning in everyday interaction. These meanings subsequently become shared references that organize social relations, filter external influences, and serve as sources of legitimacy for the continuity of tradition. Local wisdom emerges as a form of social capital that provides ethical guidance, practical knowledge, and collective identity. It becomes an essential instrument for communities to navigate social change while ensuring the continuity of ancestral values and practices.

Oral traditions are fragile when not supported by documentation and generational regeneration of practice, especially amid rapid social transformation. *Joiao*'s leadership functions as a primary pillar of cultural preservation, coordinating, reaffirming meaning, and ensuring that cultural practices remain relevant. Tradition persists not simply because it is repeated, but because it is continually reinterpreted collectively in everyday social life. Local wisdom becomes a social and moral resource enabling the Mat Bat community to maintain identity, harmony, and the sustainability of communal life. The preservation of tradition, therefore, requires a combination of routine practice, the legitimacy of customary leadership, and the community's ability to selectively absorb external influences without losing the core of its cultural values.

Maintaining Solidarity Among Indigenous People

Mat Bat community in Magei and Gamta villages in West Misool District, Raja Ampat islands, still maintains their customs and traditions as guidelines for life in society. Strengthening solidarity values is emphasized based on a sense of community that guarantees each individual is part of the Mat Bat community. This is what *Joiao* did, who tried to maintain solidarity among his citizens in order to strengthen and maintain unity from various divisions

that could arise due to the increasing number of immigrants who inhabit the region.

Durkheim states that social solidarity constitutes the cohesion among individuals within a society that ensures order and social stability. It underscores the interdependence among people in a community, which generates a sense of responsibility and commitment to improving the lives of others (Mishra & Rath, 2020). Furthermore, Durkheim emphasizes that social solidarity refers to feelings of mutual sympathy and reciprocal responsibility among members of a group, which encourage them to support one another (Johnson et al., 2017). Additionally, Durkheim also explains that mechanical solidarity emerges within traditional and homogeneous societies in which individuals share similar types of work, values, lifestyles, and individual rights, and thus exhibit little differentiation from the collective. This form of solidarity is rooted in the collective conscience, binding individuals through shared beliefs and practices, and is made possible insofar as individual personalities can be integrated into the personality of the group (Mabefam et al., 2025).

The Mat Bat communities of Magei and Gamta maintain customary practices and traditions as normative guidelines in social life. Customary law serves as a regulatory framework governing interpersonal relations and preserving social order, particularly as the community encounters new dynamics, such as increasing migration flows. The role of the *Joiao* appears central as an agent of solidarity. He is not only a symbol of customary authority but also an active actor who reinforces communal cohesion, manages potential conflict, and consolidates collective unity. Thus, customary leadership operates simultaneously as a mechanism of social control and a medium of integration.

Solidarity is understood as a moral and emotional bond that makes social stability possible. Within the Mat Bat community, the solidarity that emerges resembles mechanical solidarity, as it is grounded in shared values, practices, and collective consciousness. These commonalities reduce social differentiation and position individuals as inseparable parts of the community, emphasizing mutual dependence, collective responsibility, and reciprocal sympathy. Tradition, customary leadership, and social solidarity together form an interrelated whole that sustains the continuity of the Mat Bat community.

Custom and tradition function as primary guides for social life, providing a value-laden framework that regulates relations among community members. The *Joiao* plays a strategic role in strengthening solidarity, preventing fragmentation, and preserving unity, particularly amid increasing external pressures from migration. The social dynamics of the Mat Bat community display the characteristics of mechanical solidarity: shared values, practices,

and collective awareness bind individuals into strong moral ties. This solidarity becomes an essential form of social capital that ensures stability, order, and the continuity of the community, while simultaneously reducing the potential for social conflict.

Unifying Indigenous Territories

West Misool people of the Raja Ampat islands, which are part of the West Papua region, also use the term “customary land rights” for the determination of their customary territories that regulate the control of land and other natural resources they own, where *Joiao* influence as a traditional head should have the ability to be able to protect his customary territory from various disturbances from outside parties that can affect the stability of community security in the region and can even cause conflict among the people. The use of customary land in the area must be with *Joiao*’s knowledge, including the use of islands for tourist attractions that are often rented to immigrants who invest in tourism. In contrast, Raja Ampat attractions are well known abroad. Decision-making related to the customary land rights of the Mat Bat community by *Joiao* is very important in uniting indigenous territories, where the area is an area that has the potential for conflict due to the increasing number of immigrants who come to seek a better livelihood in the area.

Jeffrey Week said that belonging is about similarities with several people and what distinguishes one person from others. This opinion emphasizes the importance of identity for individuals and a group or community (Widayanti, 2009). Political identity represents individual participation and is determined more by the culture and psychology of the person. If the formation process is depressed (identity resistance) with the dominance of other parties, then identity will emerge in terms of Calhoun’s political identity (Castells, 2010). Moreover, Cressida Heyes posits that political identity is the marking of political activity in a broader and isolated sense to discover experiences of injustice shared by members of certain social groups. This identity is then used as a tool of struggle against other threatening forces (Buchari, 2014). Social identity is grounded in a range of attributes that define a group, creating relevant social categories that emerge through social interaction both within and among various types of social groups (Raskovic, 2021).

Customary land rights function as an instrument for regulating the control of land and natural resources, while simultaneously serving as a mechanism of protection against external intervention, particularly amid the expansion of tourism activities and the arrival of migrants. Within this context, the position of the *Joiao* becomes central. As the customary leader, he performs not only

administrative functions, but also normative and symbolic ones. His authority is essential to supervise the use of customary land, ensure community participation in decision-making, and prevent the penetration of external interests that may generate conflict. Thus, customary leadership operates as a form of local governance that safeguards stability and social cohesion.

A perspective grounded in identity theory deepens understanding of these dynamics. In line with Week, the sense of belonging is rooted in both similarity and differentiation: members of the Mat Bat community construct identity through attachment to customary territory while simultaneously drawing boundaries vis-à-vis “outsiders.” When external actors enter (for example, tourism investors), the potential for identity-based resistance increases. Identity then ceases to function merely as a symbol and becomes a political arena, a means of articulating experiences of injustice, and a tool of struggle. Customary attributes, values, and practices shape social categories that organize interaction. In the case of West Misool, customary land rights, *Joiao* leadership, and ritualized decision-making processes become key markers of community membership that distinguish “us” from “them.” Accordingly, the governance of customary land is not simply an economic or legal matter, but also encompasses cultural, political, and symbolic dimensions that sustain community continuity.

Customary land rights operate as instruments of social and cultural protection rather than merely mechanisms of land control; they prevent the penetration of external interests that may provoke conflict. The role of the *Joiao* is highly strategic in maintaining the integrity of customary territory, mediating between community interests and outside actors, and ensuring that decisions regarding resources remain grounded in customary principles. Community identity is shaped by a sense of belonging to customary territory while also being constituted through differentiation from external actors; when threatened, identity may become a source of political mobilization. Political and social identity function as collective capital that enables the Mat Bat community to defend socio-cultural sovereignty amid pressures from tourism and migration. The interaction between customary land rights, customary authority, and identity demonstrates that the sustainability of Indigenous communities requires both the strengthening of customary institutions and the recognition of local authority in decision-making processes.

CONCLUSION

The leadership of the *Joiao* is ascriptive in nature and grounded in the genealogical legitimacy of the Wihel clan. However, it nevertheless requires

social recognition through the authority of the Magei community. The Mat Bat customary structure is historical, hierarchical, and institutionalized, with taboos, ancestral oaths, and customary sanctions functioning as mechanisms of social control across generations. The *Joiao* thus attains both cultural and communal legitimacy, enabling his leadership to operate as a system of social regulation that maintains order, protects customary territories, and prevents disintegration. In practice, customary leadership in West Misool plays a strategic role in territorial governance, conflict prevention, and the protection of communal land rights, while also serving as a mediating arena between Indigenous communities and outsiders. Oral traditions are preserved through collective reinterpretation, supported by local wisdom and the authority of the *Joiao* as a principal guardian of cultural preservation. Community solidarity, resembling mechanical solidarity, rests on shared values, norms, and collective consciousness, thereby strengthening social cohesion. Customary land rights function not only as an instrument of land control but also as a form of socio-cultural protection against external interests.

The interaction among customary land rights, *Joiao* leadership, and collective identity demonstrates that the sustainability of Indigenous communities requires strengthening customary institutions and recognizing local authority in decision-making processes. Various cultures that exist in the Mat Bat Indigenous community should be maintained as community cultural assets in order to unite the Indigenous People. Support and help are also needed from various parties, both primary stakeholders, referring to the government, and secondary stakeholders, referring to the community, to respect the existence of indigenous leaders in uniting the integrity of indigenous peoples.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted only within the Mat Bat indigenous community in West Misool, Raja Ampat, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other indigenous communities with different cultural and social contexts. Second, the study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach based on interviews and observations, which emphasizes participants' lived experiences rather than measuring the broader impact of indigenous leadership on religious moderation. Future research could adopt comparative studies across different Indigenous communities in Papua or other regions of Indonesia to examine similarities and differences in customary leadership systems. In addition, mixed-methods or quantitative approaches are recommended to assess the influence of indigenous leadership on indicators of religious moderation, social cohesion, and interreligious trust more comprehensively.

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