**Surviving as a Syncretic Minority:
The Survival Strategies of the Masade Community in Sangihe, Indonesia**

**Abstract**

*The Masade community is a minority religious group in the Sangihe Islands, North Sulawesi, Indonesia, characterized by a syncretic blend of Islam, Christianity, and local traditions. This community lives among a society predominantly influenced by Protestantism, Islam, and Catholicism. Using an ethnographic approach, this study examines the survival strategies of the Masade community amidst the dominance of majority religions and modernization. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with key figures, and document analysis. The study reveals that the Masade community's survival strategies include: 1. Syncretism by adopting elements from Islam, Christianity, and local traditions without losing the essence of their teachings; 2. Social adaptation through formal identity adjustments in administrative documents; 3. Engagement in education and interfaith activities through MLKI (Majelis Luhur Kepercayaan Indonesia); 4. Religious rituals and collective celebrations, such as Sholat Jumatee and Diko’u Soro, which serve as strong social bonds among community members and as bridges to the broader society; and 5. A tolerant attitude within the surrounding society. This study concludes that the Masade community’s success in sustaining itself lies in its ability to integrate traditions with social innovations, creating a unique model of adaptation amidst the dominance of other groups.*

**Keywords:** *Masade, Survival Strategies, Local Religion, Sangihe*

**Introduction**

The sound of a bell marks the beginning of worship. A group of men dressed neatly, some in long robes, sarongs, and *peci* (cap), while women wear *mukena* (prayer garments), walk to a place of worship. This scene does not occur on a Sunday but on a Friday. Their house of worship, called “masjid” or “mosque”. Unlike typical mosques in the Indonesian archipelago, which often have minarets, domes, and drums *(beduk)*, this mosque resembles a church, complete with a hanging bell rung every Friday to signal prayer time. Upon seeing the bell, one might assume it is a church (Azis, 2019).

Judging by their Friday prayers and attire, they appear similar to most Muslims in Indonesia. However, they do not identify themselves as Muslims. They call themselves Masade, while the general Sangihe community refers to them as *“Islam Tua/*Old Islam.” The term distinguishes them from *“Islam Muda/*Young Islam,” which Masade followers call “Islam Qur’an/Qur’anic Islam.”

Although Masade’s religious rituals and traditions resemble Islamic practices, such as Friday prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and celebrating Eid al-Fitr, significant differences exist. For instance, during the *Shalat Jumaate* (Friday prayer) ritual, Masade worshippers sit in a circle around the Imam, who burns incense while reciting prayers, mostly in Arabic, similar to prayers typically recited by Indonesian Muslims.

 Masade represents one such traditional belief system, rooted in the Sangihe Islands, North Sulawesi. According to the 2023 North Sulawesi Statistics Agency, 77.34% of Sangihe’s population identifies as Protestant, 21.29% as Muslim, and 0.89% as Catholic. Masade does not appear in the statistics, grouped instead under the 0.47% category of “Believers in One Almighty God” (Sulut, 2024).

In a pluralistic society, minorities often face discrimination or pressure to assimilate, as experienced by the Masade community. Complex bureaucracy, such as for marriage registration, poses challenges. Consequently, some Masade followers live as unregistered spouses according to their traditional rites.

In general, followers of local religions are those who are still considered “primitive,” such as the Orang Rimba (Suku Anak Dalam) in the interior of Sumatra, the Tengger community in the Bromo, Tengger, and Semeru mountains in East Java, the Badui tribe in the Kendeng Mountains of Banten, and the Aboriginal people in Australia, who live separately from the general society. The Tengger and Badui are examples of communities that fled during the fall of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms in Indonesia. They fled to the interior regions and formed their own communities (Hakiki, 2011; Setiawan, 2023; Sintya & Siregar, 2023; Ului & Sudrajat, 2024).

In contrast, followers of Masade are different. Although they are a minority, Masade is not a “rejected” or “primitive” community. They are also not a tribe that fled due to the arrival of Islam or Christian missionaries in the Sangihe Islands. The followers of Masade do not live in isolation in the interior. They live together with Christian and Muslim communities. From this, we see the strength of the Masade followers to “survive,” allowing them to exist until today.

The description above shows that Masade has its own religious rituals, even though they use bells that are associated with Christianity as a sign for worship on Fridays, observe fasting during the month of Ramadan, and celebrate Eid al-Fitr, which is identical to Islamic teachings. Furthermore, as a minority group, Masade has managed to survive amid the dominant mainstream religions.

Masade, as a syncretic religious community, has managed to endure amidst major religions and the wave of modernization, making it a unique phenomenon worthy of study. This is why the researcher is interested in exploring the existence of Masade in more depth. In this study, an important question to be uncovered is: How did the Masade community manage to survive amid the majority religions and modernization?

**Conceptual Framework**

Change is a phenomenon that always colors the journey of every society. No society is static, whether traditional or modern, although the pace of change may differ. As a minority group, the followers of Masade live amidst the great changes occurring outside of them. Naturally, this brings a significant impact on the traditions and culture of Masade. Like other communities, the Masade people often undergo change and adapt to these broader forces in order to preserve their existence.

Suparlan, in Suyuti, states that changes within a society occur due to several reasons, namely: (a) The intensity of contact with external societies; (b) New elements that are accepted because they are not seen as conflicting with local beliefs; (c) The social structure of the society is not authoritarian; (d) The emergence of new ideas that are seen as similar to local culture; and (e) These new elements are perceived as beneficial by the local community (Suyuti, 2011, p. 131).

Suparlan's theory of change is appropriate to understand the cultural changes occurring among the Masade community. The Masade community is not an isolated group. They live amidst the general society, which necessitates interaction with non-Masade communities since they share the same environment. This interaction exposes the Masade to new ideas that differ from what they have traditionally believed. Naturally, the Masade community can accept new ideas from outside that are seen as non-conflicting with their beliefs or beneficial to their community. Additionally, the leaders or Imams of Masade often attend meetings with other belief groups, both at the regional and national levels.

The cultural change among the followers of Masade is an adaptation to survive amidst the dominant culture and the wave of modernity. Not everything changes, of course. Many aspects of Masade's traditions remain intact, particularly those related to religious beliefs and rituals. The ability to follow change while adhering to fundamental principles has allowed the Masade community to endure without being swept away by the forces of change. Masade continues to exist and endure to this day without having to isolate itself from the general society.

**Method**

This research is a field study conducted in Lenganeng Village, North Tabukan Subdistrict, Sangihe Islands Regency, North Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, from July to October 2024. This location was chosen because it is the center of the development of the local religion of Masade in Sangihe, although this religion is also present in the Kalekube, Mala, and Nusa Tabukan islands.

This study uses an ethnographic method aimed at understanding the life, customs, and culture of a group or community through direct observation and in-depth interaction with its members. In the context of this research, the ethnographic method is used to explore how the Masade community adapts to a social environment dominated by the majority religion. Data collection was carried out through participatory observation, where the researchers directly engaged in the daily activities of the Masade community, such as attending religious rituals and other social activities. This allowed the researchers to observe behavior, interaction patterns, and social dynamics within the community from an insider’s perspective.

Additionally, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with key figures in the Masade community, including the Chairperson of MLKI (Majelis Luhur Kepercayaan Indonesia), the *Kapitalaung* (village head), and members of the belief community. The questions were designed to explore the challenges in maintaining their belief identity. Key informants included Agung Masihor (Chairperson of MLKI and Masade figure in Sangihe Islands Regency), Rineke Kirimang (Secretary of MLKI and Masade member), and other religious leaders.

Each informant was provided with a full explanation of the research objectives and methods, and their consent was obtained to participate. The researchers also ensured the confidentiality of the informants’ personal information and that the data collected would only be used for research purposes. The results of this study are expected to provide in-depth insights into how the Masade community navigates the complexities of life among the majority religion while maintaining their identity and beliefs.

Although the researchers prepared key questions for the interviews, the process was intended to flow naturally during daily activities and interactions. This was important to create an informal atmosphere so that the informants would feel comfortable and be able to share more in-depth information. For this reason, the study does not include the specific dates and times of the interviews in the quotes from informants, whether direct or indirect.

The researchers also collected various official documents, such as administrative records (ID cards, marriage registrations), and visual documentation, including photos of ritual activities, religious holiday celebrations, and social activities among village residents. Additionally, documentation on local and national policies affecting the local religious community was also gathered.

The data obtained through observations and interviews were analyzed using a thematic approach to identify key patterns in the social and religious adaptation of the Masade community. Emerging themes include interfaith tolerance in Lenganeng Village and the identity struggles faced by followers of Masade. The researchers are aware that direct involvement in the community may affect perceptions and observations. Therefore, the researchers maintained objectivity by staying sensitive to the values and norms upheld by the Masade community.

**Results**

**Identity and Challenges as a Minority**

In the Masade community, religious identity is a complex issue, especially when community members interact with the outside environment. One striking example is the experience of a Masade member, MJ, who chose to conceal his belief identity when socializing with friends outside the community. MJ admitted that when he was in a school environment, he adapted to his Muslim friends by participating in prayers. Even when registering as a civil servant, MJ listed Islam as his religion on his ID card, even though his belief remained as a follower of Masade. “I joined the prayer when my Muslim friends invited me, and I listed Islam on my ID card to avoid any problems,” said MJ.

Hendri Habimaisa, a Masade member who once attended SD GMIST Syaloom Lenganeng, experienced something similar. At this Christian school, he took Christian religious studies because no other religious subjects were offered. His parents were also not opposed. However, when Hendri continued his education at SMP Negeri 5 Tahuna, he chose to take Islamic studies, as he felt there was a similarity between Islamic rituals and Masade teachings. Hendri’s experience, along with those of his peers, shows that the education system at that time did not provide space for adherents of beliefs to formally learn about their faith. Although the teachers in school understood the situation of the belief-following students, they still participated in Islamic religious lessons to earn grades, most of which were based on their character.

Agung Masihor played a crucial role in coordinating belief-following students in schools to ensure they were accepted and embraced by the school community. He personally visited schools to provide understanding and ensure that students following beliefs were not discriminated against. “We want to ensure that they can continue their education without sacrificing their identity,” he explained.

Religious identity became even more sensitive when community members entered the workforce or higher education. For instance, MJ, who continued his studies in Manado, felt the need to hide his identity as a follower of a belief when interacting with his Muslim and Christian friends. However, when asked directly, MJ explained his belief. He admitted to having experienced discrimination from his Muslim friends. “They judged me for not praying and said I would go to hell,” he said. This made MJ even more reluctant to disclose his religious identity in public spaces.

Rineke Kirimang also shared her experience of listing Islam as her religion on her ID card, despite being a follower of the belief. This was done because their community was often referred to as “Old Islam” by outsiders. Additionally, when she took the civil servant entrance test in 1994, Rineke faced discrimination because she could not perform the Islamic prayers or recite Islamic prayers, even though her ID card listed Islam as her religion. “I was called an infidel and told I had no religion by the examiners. I was also taken to the military district command (KODIM),” she said.

Rineke also decided to transfer her child from SD GMIST Syaloom Lenganeng to a public school so that her child could receive more appropriate religious education. She was concerned that her child would only learn Christianity at the school, while she wanted her child to have a foundation in Islam for the future, especially when her child continued higher education. “I don’t mind my child learning Islam, because there are similarities between Masade teachings and Islam, such as the recitation of Al-Fatihah and the Shahada,” she explained. A similar admission came from Agung Masihor, who chose to list Islam as his religious identity on his ID card because of the ritual similarities between Islam and Masade belief. “Our rituals are similar to Islam, so I felt more comfortable listing Islam on my ID card than Christianity,” he explained.

These stories show that religious identity within the Masade community is often adjusted to the social context faced by each individual. There is adaptation and compromise made to maintain harmony with the outside environment, although in the end, the identity of belief adherents remains at the core of their beliefs and spiritual practices.

Rineke Kirimang also mentioned that one of the major issues for the Masade community was marriage. In the past, when they wanted to marry, belief adherents had to go through a court process, waiting about 10 days to get a hearing letter, and only then could they hold a traditional wedding ceremony. In 1977, some belief followers tried to marry at the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) but were required to perform the Islamic prayer rituals. This led them to be excluded from the Masade community after marrying at KUA. As a result, they sought alternative solutions, which eventually involved the court and civil registration. In 2016, Law No. 32 on Marriage began allowing belief followers to marry according to their belief practices, with the marriage being recorded by civil registry.

One case example in the Masade community is the marriage of Masade member Endi Hebimisa (33 years old) to Sukarni Areros (32 years old), who is Muslim. Initially, the wife’s family rejected the marriage, but Endi convinced them that the marriage would be carried out according to Islamic practices. The marriage took place at KUA, where Endi was asked to recite the two shahadas. For Endi, this was not a problem because the Masade community also has the concept of the two shahadas. After the wedding, the couple held a thanksgiving event in Desa Lenganeng, attended by neighbors from various religious backgrounds, including Christians and Masade. Despite having different religions, the couple agreed to uphold their respective beliefs, and to this day, they have been blessed with two daughters: Raya Hebimisa (5 years old) and Esha Hebimisa (3 years old). Throughout their marriage, they have never experienced religious conflict within their household.

Rineke Kirimang explained that another issue faced by the followers of the Masade belief is education. Many children from the Masade community attend SD GMIST Syaloom Lenganeng, a Christian-based private school. As a result, the children of belief followers are forced to take Christian religious lessons, as there are no other elementary schools in Lenganeng village that can accommodate them. After entering junior high school, religious studies become elective subjects for students. Some Masade children take Islamic religious lessons, but those who are unable to take Islamic religious lessons usually opt for Christian religious education. A challenge for children wanting to study Islam is the requirement to memorize and read the Qur’an, which makes some children struggle, ultimately leading them to choose Christian religious studies instead.

In fact, the Masade community wishes to develop religious education for children so they can understand the Masade belief. Furthermore, Rineke said, the Masade community even aspires to establish a Masade-specific religious educational institution. However, this desire is still hindered by funding issues. Formally, the desire has been accommodated by the state through the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 26 of 2016. In 2018, there was even a training session for belief education counselors, which was hoped to enable them to teach children in public schools.

Counselors are volunteers from belief followers who serve as teachers in public schools. In the Nusa Tabuka highland area, there are five counselors, while in the islands, there are only two. For students who cannot be reached by counselors, they can study at the mosque or at the home of the Masade community secretary every Sunday. However, Rineke complained about the lack of successors for belief counselors because the children of belief followers are scattered across different schools, which raises concerns about them losing focus on their beliefs. Currently, there are only seven counselors, and the Masade counselors want to enlighten the community, but they are hindered by a lack of funding.

The Masade organization raises funds from prayers held during Friday prayers and weekly prayers for mosque renovations. In June 2024, Rineke proposed a fund of 25 million for the activities, but the Head of the Cultural Department stated that the fund would be redirected to another post. Meanwhile, government assistance only consists of textbooks for belief followers, and the printing of books and other learning materials must be funded by the personal funds of the Masade organization secretary. Overall, the Masade organization is working hard to ensure education for the next generation, despite having to spend personal funds and facing many challenges from various parties.

Rineke Kirimang explained that between 2002 and 2016, the Masade community faced difficulties in listing their religious identity on their ID cards. During that time, their ID cards only had a hyphen (-) as a sign that they did not have a clearly defined religious identity. However, when dealing with government documents, many community members felt the need to fill in the religion column on their ID cards, and some of them chose to write Islam, while others listed Christianity. Mrs. Rineke mentioned that some people chose Islam because they felt there were visible similarities in rituals between Islam and Masade, while those who chose Christianity generally followed the religion of one of their parents. In this case, the inclusion of a religious identity on the ID card became a requirement mandated by the government, especially when processing documents to become civil servants.

The followers of belief felt the need to replace the empty religion field with one of the six official religions in Indonesia. Although the hyphen in the religion column did not mean they had no religion, it symbolized that they were followers of belief. Eventually, the Ministry of Home Affairs Regulation allowed followers of belief to fill the religion column with a hyphen (-), indicating that they were followers of belief. The Constitutional Court’s Decision No. 09 of 2016 also marked an important turning point, where followers of belief were allowed to list “Belief in God Almighty” as their religious identity on their ID cards. Since then, the religious identity of Masade community members, including Mrs. Rineke and the head of the MLKI district, has been changed to “Followers of Belief in God Almighty.”

Mrs. Rineke also added that the administrative process for followers of belief, including processing ID cards and marriage registrations, has become easier. For those who do not yet have an ID card, only a letter from the neighborhood head is required to obtain one. Additionally, for marriage registration, followers of belief no longer have to go through a court hearing but can simply visit the civil registry. Rineke acknowledged this as a significant advancement in the state’s recognition of the rights of the Masade community in Indonesia.

Another issue faced by the Masade community is funding. According to Rineke Kirimang, this has caused the Masade community difficulties in carrying out various activities, including mosque repairs and the construction of other religious facilities. She further explained that the Masade leadership had actually planned to build a secretariat office as a center for activities and administration. To realize this plan, they had requested donations twice from Masade community members and support from local residents. Of course, the donations were not enough, because of the Masade members are not many, and most are not from the upper class. However, this issue was addressed with the help of the local government, where the Masade leadership submitted a proposal for assistance to the Regent of Sangihe Islands Regency and received a grant of IDR 50 million. The funds raised were used to build the secretariat office. The local government's attention to the religious needs of the Masade community has actually been quite good. In addition to helping build the secretariat office, the local government also assisted in the renovation and repair of several religious facilities of Masade.

**Fighting for Rights Through Organization**

Rineke Kirimang explained that the struggle of the Masade community to gain recognition of their rights as citizens has been very difficult. Masade community can only voice his complaints to the central government, with the final decision remaining in the hands of the government. According to Rineke, MLKI (Majelis Luhur Kepercayaan Indonesia) or the Supreme Assembly of Indonesian Religious Beliefs, plays a role as a coordinator between religious belief communities, conveying the complaints and aspirations of these communities, including Masade, to the national level to fight for their rights to be recognized by the state. Previously, organizations such as BKOK (Badan Koordinasi Organisasi Kepercayaan) and HPK (Himpunan Penghayat Kepercayaan) also played a role in this struggle before eventually evolving into MLKI (See Viri & Febriany, 2020).

Agung Masihor explained that the issues faced by religious belief communities throughout Indonesia are discussed in MLKI forums attended by representatives of various communities. After listening to the issues from each community, MLKI brings these issues to the National Work Meeting (Rakernas). For example, issues of discrimination are discussed with the Human Rights Office to find protection solutions, while education-related issues are submitted to the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) and discussed in joint sessions with the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI).

In conveying their aspirations to the local government, besides directly meeting with government officials, it is also done by inviting them to attend events organized by the Masade community. They usually invite local government officials to attend the *Diko’u Soro* festival. The presence of officials at the festival becomes an opportunity for the MLKI chairperson to voice the complaints and aspirations of the Masade community so that the officials can better understand and empathize with their struggle. Agung, as one of the MLKI leaders, often becomes the “messenger” conveying these complaints to the national level.

To some extent, the struggle through MLKI has been quite successful. Several complaints that had been voiced by religious belief communities have eventually been formally recognized by the state. Issues such as the religious identity of belief adherents on ID cards, marriage, and religious education for the children of belief adherents have now gained recognition from the government, although it took tireless efforts and a long time. However, the resilience of Masade and its followers is not solely due to MLKI and state recognition. There are other factors that serve as the foundation for their continued adherence to their beliefs. The following explains these factors.

**Rituals as a Builder of Collective Bonds**

During this research, we had the opportunity to interview several key figures and members of the Masade community. What we discovered was more than just quantitative facts: there is a rich social relationship and unique traditions that strengthen bonds between individuals, transcending religious boundaries, and seem to serve as a safeguard against modernization. Here are some observations that provide an insight into how the Masade community builds collective ties through worship, prayer, celebrations, and moments of death.

When we participated in the “Sholat Jumatee” (Friday prayers), we felt the uniqueness and intimacy of the worship atmosphere in the Masade community. Around 11:00 AM, the congregation began to arrive: children, teenagers, adults, and the elderly all made their way to the Masade mosque. The sound of bells being rung as a sign for prayer created a different atmosphere compared to the call to prayer *(adhan)* commonly heard in other Muslim places of worship.

Outside the mosque, small groups gathered. Children sat cross-legged with their worship report books in hand, while the men casually chatted on the porch of the house next to the mosque. The women, dressed in hijabs and long skirts, were conversing in the courtyard in front of the mosque. The physical presence and light interactions before prayer time created a strong sense of togetherness, as if every moment before worship began was an opportunity to strengthen relationships. Upon entering the mosque, there was intimacy in the seating arrangement: the men sat in a circle around the imam, while some women leaned against the wall, listening attentively. The imam ensured that all the congregants were gathered before beginning the prayer, a symbolic act that presence and togetherness were the essence of worship itself.

After the prayer and *dhikr* (remembrance of God), the greeting process began, but this was not just a formality. As explained by Agung Masihor, the greeting is divided into three levels: with elders, the younger person holds the elder's hand; with peers, hands clasp tightly and are then placed on the forehead. This gesture is not only physical but also emotional—a symbol of acceptance without regard to age or status.

The Masade community also maintains their togetherness through weekly group prayers, held every Thursday afternoon. When we attended one of the group prayers, the atmosphere was very familiar. The host warmly greeted guests at the door, inviting them into a neatly arranged house. The worshippers, both men and women, sat in a circle, creating a striking circle of togetherness.

As with *Sholat Jumatee*, the greeting after prayer followed the same structure, reflecting the age hierarchy that is respected in this community. But what made this event special was that after the prayer, the worshippers gathered in the yard for a shared meal. Sitting on mats, they shared food equally, without regard to gender. This moment of communal eating depicted harmony in simplicity, showing that the togetherness of the Masade community is not only tied by religion but also by life experiences shared collectively.

After the meal, there was a simple raffle with matchsticks, conducted as a form of recreational activity. The joy that emerged from this raffle showed that the Masade community does not only worship together, but also celebrates joy in a unique way, strengthening the bonds between members in a very human manner.

The Eid al-Fitr celebration in the Masade community lasts for two months and becomes an inclusive celebration involving the entire village, including Christians. This togetherness is the most concrete form of interfaith harmony, where everyone is invited to participate, and absence is considered a “social debt.” Agung Masihor explained how the government figures present at the celebration became a symbol that the Masade community had received wider acceptance, not only within the village but also from outside. Their presence showed how the Masade community remains open and ready to adapt while maintaining their traditional values.

When someone dies, the funeral procession in the Masade community is a sacred moment that brings the whole community together, including Christians and Muslims. The funeral ceremony is a time when there are no differences; everyone is involved, both in helping with logistics and providing moral support. The process of washing the body by the imam and family members is done with solemnity, while the prayers said during the hundred days after the burial ensure that the grieving community members do not feel alone.

Agung Masihor stated that the involvement of the entire community, even from other religions, shows extraordinary solidarity. Death, which usually separates, in the context of Masade, actually strengthens social bonds, ensuring that everyone has a place and role in every phase of life. In our observations, what makes the Masade community unique is not only their religious practices but also how they use rituals, celebrations, and important moments to strengthen togetherness, not only within their own religious circle but also with the broader society.

**Interfaith Tolerance**

The Masade community is located in the midst of major religious communities, particularly Protestantism. Despite this, the Masade community experiences a sense of tolerance and harmony among the followers of different religions, especially in Lenganeng. This is acknowledged by Rineke Kirimang. Rineke gives an example that when the Christian community celebrates major holidays such as Christmas or holds wedding celebrations, they do not slaughter pigs in the village. They slaughter pigs in another village or purchase pre-slaughtered pork from other villages and then cook it. This is done to respect the beliefs of the Masade community, which forbids pork, in the same way that Muslims generally avoid it.

A similar sentiment is expressed by Agung Masihor. Agung explains that when the Christian community holds large events involving the general public, they often provide non-pork animals, such as cows or goats, for the Masade followers. These animals are handed over to the Masade imam to be slaughtered and cooked as offerings for the Masade community. This reflects a strong form of tolerance between the two groups.

This tolerance not only applies to Christian religious celebrations but also to the major holidays of Masade. Agung Masihor explains that when the Masade community celebrates Eid al-Fitr, the Christian residents of the village often visit the homes of Masade members to socialize and share meals. Likewise, during Christmas, members of Masade are invited to visit the homes of the Christian community.

In conversations with various parties in Lenganeng Village, the researchers learned that the villagers indeed have a tradition of visiting each other during the major religious holidays of every faith. For example, when Masade celebrates *Diko’u Soro*, the event is also attended by Christians and Muslims from the entire village, as well as government officials who are invited to celebrate together. During this event, the Masade community also expresses their grievances to the attending officials.

In the tradition of the *Diko’u Soro* celebration, Agung Masihor explained that the event is celebrated with unique rituals, including the creation of a *gunungan* (a ceremonial mound). This gunungan is made from *ketupat, dodol* (a type of traditional sweet), and fruits, all hung above sugarcane. The sugarcane used in the *gunungan* has symbolic meaning, with vertical and horizontal ties. “The vertically tied sugarcane symbolizes the relationship of the Masade community with the Creator, while the horizontal ties symbolize relationships among fellow humans,” explained Agung.

Agung also mentioned that during the Islamic holidays in the Sangihe Islands, the Masade community often participates in the *tawaf* (walking around to visit the houses of the villagers). The villagers, both Christians and Masade community members, warmly welcome the Muslims performing *tawaf* by providing food and fostering social connections. This strengthens interfaith relationships in the village and demonstrates their close-knit unity.

Interfaith tolerance is not only seen in religious celebrations but also in their daily lives. According to Fahru Raji Makangiras, when Masade residents perform the Friday prayer or weekly prayers, the Christian community in the village refrains from activities that might disturb the worship, such as noisy work. In return, the Masade community also halts any activities that could create a disturbance when the Christian community is holding their Sunday services.

**Social Solidarity Among Villagers**

Interfaith tolerance in Lenganeng goes hand in hand with the strong social bonds among its residents. Hesky O Sasundu explained that the people of Lenganeng have long lived in groups to meet their daily needs, through farming groups and blacksmiths. The farming groups are generally composed of women, while the blacksmiths are predominantly men. The farming groups were formed through the initiative of the local community, while blacksmithing is the main livelihood of the village. Within both groups, there is no distinction between religions or families. This has created strong social ties among the villagers. The farming groups, which consist of 10 groups, were initially formed independently, but the village authorities later helped organize them for better structure. The village authorities, particularly the *Kapitalaung* (a title for the village head), also play a role in managing agricultural aid from the central government.

The agricultural produce from the farming groups is used individually by each group. Meanwhile, for the blacksmiths, when there is a wedding or mourning in the village, they gather to make swords (*peda*), which are then given to the family celebrating or mourning, regardless of their religion. This communal action helps ease the burden on the family involved, strengthening the harmonious relationships among the villagers. Hendri Hebimisa further emphasized this by recounting that when he built his house, the people of Lenganeng voluntarily came to help without being asked. The work was done in a *gotong royong* (mutual assistance) manner, with 16 people participating. The host provided coffee for the workers, and the house was completed in just one day.

Agung Masihor also acknowledged the strong social and familial bonds among the villagers, particularly those of Masade faith. Agung gave an example, stating that during major religious celebrations like Eid Fitri and Christmas, people visit their relatives and neighbors. When a family is unable to visit their relatives during the celebration, they usually wait for a later time to ensure that the bond of kinship remains intact. This family connection is further strengthened through clan relationships. Agung explained that the Masade community does not allow marriages within the same clan as they are considered to be one family. This is their way of maintaining a strong lineage and family relationships, while also expanding kinship ties with other clans.

The importance of family relationships is also reflected in how they manage funerals. Many Masade families bury their loved ones on private land behind their homes, regardless of religion. For example, in Hendri Hebimisa’s family burial site, his grandfather, who was Christian, and his grandmother, who was Masade, are buried side by side. A similar situation occurs in Agung Masihor’s family, where members of different religions are buried in the same location. This all demonstrates their close relationship despite religious differences.

Solidarity among fellow villagers, even across different beliefs, is also shown in mutual assistance activities. For instance, on July 25, 2024, Mrs. Femi (54 years old) came to help her sister, Mrs. Misye, who had an event. These two siblings have different beliefs: Mrs. Femi is Christian, while Mrs. Misye converted after marrying a Masade man. Despite their different religions, they maintain a good relationship, visiting and helping each other during major celebrations like Idul Fitri, Christmas, and *Diko'u Soro*. Religious differences do not hinder their family harmony.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study shed light on the survival strategies employed by the Masade community in Indonesia. As a religious minority, they encounter significant challenges in preserving their cultural and spiritual identity while coexisting with dominant religious groups. Their adaptation mechanisms provide insight into how minority groups navigate socio-religious pressures and institutional constraints. A key finding is the syncretic nature of Masade religious practices, which blend elements of Islam, Christianity, and local traditions. This approach enables them to maintain their unique identity while incorporating practices that resonate with the broader religious landscape in Sangihe. By embracing external religious elements such as Friday prayers, Ramadan fasting, and Eid celebrations, they mitigate the risk of exclusion while upholding their belief system. This aligns with Clifford Geertz’s (1986) concept of religious adaptation, where communities selectively adopt external influences to survive without fully assimilating.

The Masade’s strategy exemplifies a pragmatic adaptation that ensures continuity while minimizing social friction. The study also emphasizes the strategic adaptation of Masade followers in navigating bureaucratic challenges. Many members register as Muslims or Christians on official documents to access social and economic opportunities, including education, employment, and civil registration. This bureaucratic adaptation is vital for survival, as Indonesia’s legal framework has historically marginalized local religious communities that do not conform to the six officially recognized religions. Similar strategies are observed among other religious minorities, such as the Parmalim in Sumatra and the Sunda Wiwitan adherents in West Java, who also face bureaucratic constraints (Edwar et al., 2021; Katimin, 2012). The choice to align with mainstream religious identities in official records underscores the complexities of religious identity in Indonesia, where administrative practices often shape personal beliefs.

The role of Majelis Luhur Kepercayaan Indonesia (MLKI) is a crucial part of their strategy for survival. MLKI acts as a bridge between belief-based communities and the government, making sure that minority groups gain recognition and legal protections. This organization has been vital in achieving legal recognition for Masade marriage registrations, education rights, and documentation of religious identity. Similar advocacy efforts can be seen globally, where organized representation is essential in safeguarding indigenous beliefs and cultural practices (Viri & Febriany, 2020). The success of MLKI highlights the significance of institutional involvement in securing rights for marginalized communities.

Even though they are a minority, the Masade community enjoys a relatively high level of religious tolerance in Lenganeng Village. The mutual respect between Masade followers and the neighboring Christian and Muslim communities promotes a peaceful coexistence. Shared religious celebrations, support during community events, and the provision of alternative food options during interfaith gatherings reflect their dedication to interfaith harmony. This is consistent with research on interfaith relations in Indonesia, where local cultural norms and historical coexistence help navigate religious differences (Setiawan, 2023). The Masade’s ability to maintain social cohesion despite religious differences indicates that interfaith harmony can thrive through mutual respect and cultural understanding.

The Masade community has shown impressive resilience, but they still face several challenges. One major issue is educational access for Masade children, as the absence of formal religious instruction that aligns with their beliefs puts them at a disadvantage compared to students from officially recognized religions. Financial limitations also hinder their efforts to create new religious education institutions or enhance existing ones. The future sustainability of the Masade community hinges on ongoing legal recognition and institutional support. Strengthening advocacy through MLKI, boosting financial aid from local and national governments, and promoting interfaith dialogue will be essential for the long-term survival of the Masade tradition (Suyuti, 2011). The ability of the Masade community to endure amidst religious and bureaucratic obstacles highlights their adaptability and resilience. By utilizing strategies such as religious syncretism, bureaucratic flexibility, organizational advocacy, and interfaith engagement, they have managed to preserve their unique identity while coexisting with larger religious groups. This study emphasizes the critical role of legal recognition and social tolerance in ensuring the sustainability of minority religious communities, both in Indonesia and beyond.

**Conclusion**

This study reveals that the Masade community has managed to survive as a minority group amidst the dominance of major religions (Christianity and Islam) and the wave of modernization by adopting unique adaptation strategies. They have engaged in syncretism by blending elements of Islam, Christianity, and local traditions in their religious practices. Additionally, community members often disguise their religious identities, particularly in bureaucratic matters. Although initially done out of necessity, this approach has proven effective in maintaining their existence.

However, the Masade community faces challenges in accessing formal education that aligns with their beliefs, as there is no specific curriculum for local belief adherents. Nevertheless, they strive to preserve their teachings through informal education within families and communities. Their existence is further reinforced through organizations like MLKI, which advocate for the rights of local belief followers, including recognition of identity and ease of marriage administration.

The Masade community’s existence is maintained through religious rituals and traditions that not only strengthen internal solidarity but also foster positive interactions with the wider society. Their harmonious relationship with the majority religious groups in Desa Lenganeng demonstrates a high level of tolerance, where participation in each other’s religious celebrations is key to maintaining harmony. This study concludes that the resilience of the Masade community lies in its ability to adapt to social changes while preserving its religious identity and traditions, through tolerance, solidarity, and collective struggle.

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