

The role of Ondofolo to maintain religious harmony: A study in a Christian perspective

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Local wisdom refers to the cultural heritage of a community, which is derived from its cultural origins and includes a wide range of values, rituals and traditions. Ondofolo is the current paramount chief of the Sentani community in Papua province, a position that remains in effect at the moment. The local community holds Ondofolo's leadership in high esteem and places substantial trust in it. The research aims to investigate the function of Ondofolo within religious congregations using a qualitative phenomenological design approach. Data were gathered via participatory observations, interviews with Ondofolo, leaders of prayer rooms and Islamic boarding schools and a review of literature and research conducted in the indigenous area of Sentani. The local knowledge of Sentani 'Ondofolo' plays a crucial role in fostering the religious community by embodying the fundamental qualities of leadership, peace, love and brotherhood found in the Bible. The preservation of wisdom in all its manifestations is imperative, as it represents an irreplaceable cultural legacy.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This study applies the interdisciplinary characteristics of contextual theology to Ondofolo's leadership of the religious congregation in Papua, drawing on Christian wisdom. The findings positively impact the formation of religious communities in Sentani, Papua. They also present a viable leadership model specific to the local context and can be used as an option for guiding the faithful community in Indonesia.

Keywords: Ondofolo; leadership; local wisdom; religious harmony; Sentani; Papua.

Introduction

Indonesia is one of the pluralistic countries in the world that has a lot of diversity, so it is called a multicultural nation (Parera & Marzuki 2020), being home to many different ethnicities, races and religions, and is a great cultural diversity (Simanjuntak & Tanamal 2022). Furthermore, the picture of the fusion of various races, ethnicities, cultures and religions has long been an example of Indonesia's heterogeneity. Indonesia is home to more than 300 ethnic groups, namely 1340 tribes, as recorded in the Central Statistics Agency (Antonio, Kezyanto & Warnars 2022; Gede Agung et al. 2024; Pangalila, Sobon & Sumilat 2023). One of them is Papua, consisting of 254 tribes scattered across four ecological zones with different socio-cultural characteristics between one tribe and another (Rumansara 2015). Indonesia is a pluralistic country, as reflected in its basic ideology, Pancasila, which consists of five principles, one of which is 'belief in the one and only God' (Simanjuntak & Tanamal 2022). The concept of Pluralism as a teaching that teaches diversity in believing, respecting and respecting people of different religions should be understood for religious people (Arliman 2018). It is a sociological reality that the Indonesian nation consists of a multicultural society that must be upheld, respected and maintained. With the recognition of this diversity, the Indonesian nation was formed. One form of diversity in Indonesia is the issue of religion. Indonesia is not a secular country, nor is it a religious country, but the recognition of religion by the state only includes six religions, namely Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism and Confucianism (Fidiyani 2013).

Religion has long been associated with peace, compassion and the noble values of humanity. Meanwhile, conflicts involving religious differences continue to occur in Indonesia (Gede Agung et al. 2024). The development of religious harmony has actually been carried out through the Ministry of Religion with various ideas that have been proposed by the Ministers of Religion from time to time. Each minister offers several policies related to the future of religious harmony as a prerequisite for the creation of a peaceful life without conflict (Takdir 2017). Religious harmony

in Indonesia as stated in the Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs number 9 and 8 of 2006 is (Mughtar 2013):

[T]he state of relations between religious people based on tolerance, mutual understanding, mutual respect, respect for equality in the practice of their religious teachings and cooperation in the life of society, nation, and state in the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the State Constitution Republic of Indonesia in 1945. (p. 136)

Religious harmony in Indonesia is one of the problems that has recently emerged. Local wisdom in Indonesia actually provides a means to overcome these problems (Fidiyani 2013). Local wisdom is the knowledge, belief and understanding of the community regarding habits, customs or ethics that guide human behaviour in ecological and systemic life (Mahrinasari, Bangsawan & Sabri 2024; Pesurnay 2018). Local wisdom, which is a fundamental force for each region in maintaining cultural traditions that have developed from generation to generation, can also be understood as an idea, behaviour or action that is pure from the traditions and beliefs of the community based on the experience of living in an area that still maintains culture as the result of their works, creations and dedication (Takdir 2017). Local wisdom is a term that sticks out to the surface by adopting the principles, advice, order, norms and behaviours of our ancestors in the past, which are still very important to be applied in arranging various phenomena that arise (Arliman 2018). Ondofolo is the highest traditional leader in the order of the indigenous people of the Sentani tribe of Papua province, which is still valid today. Ondofolo's leadership is highly respected and trusted by the local community whose role is very important in maintaining harmony and harmony in its community. Ondofolo has strong moral and social authority, which allows him to be a mediator in conflicts (Warwer & Pontoan 2023). Ondofolo frequently acted as a mediator in the resolution of inter-religious conflicts. In Sentani, a society characterised by religious diversity with Islam, Christianity and traditional religions coexisting, a trusted mediator who can effectively communicate with all sides is crucial. While we acknowledge Ondofolo's contribution to the religious community's development, we need to conduct a thorough empirical investigation into the efficacy and dynamics of this role.

Method

This study uses a phenomenological qualitative design approach that examines the role of Ondofolo in religious harmony from the perspective of Christian faith. The selection of the research location was carried out purposively in Yobeh village, considering that Ondofolo only exists in the Sentani customary area, and in the village, there are places of worship for Christians and Muslims. Data collection was carried out by observation, interviews and literature study.

The researcher conducted participatory observations to find out about the role of Ondofolo, conducted interviews with traditional leaders, church and mosque leaders and reviewed

literature related to Ondofolo, local wisdom and religious harmony. The holy book (Bible) is used as a source to study religious harmony from a Christian perspective. The data were analysed by triangulation as a validation of information obtained from various sources and the results of the study were displayed descriptively.

Ethical considerations

This article does not contain any studies involving human participants performed by the author.

Results

The role of Ondofolo in religious harmony

The title of Ondofolo and/or Onoafi is bestowed on the paramount traditional leader of the Sentani tribe, an indigenous community residing in the Jayapura region of Papua province. Ondofolo and/or Onoafi is responsible for overseeing, governing and administering a region that encompasses both land and sea, as well as the inhabitants residing within their jurisdiction. Each geographical boundary is presided over by its own customary head. Ondofolo is characterised by its structural nature, while Onoafi lacks any functional properties. The people residing in the Sentani customary region, regardless of their tribal affiliation, hold great esteem for his leadership. Ondofolo and/or Onoafi plays a crucial role in Sentani village as the highest-ranking traditional leader. As a general leader, he follows a set of traditional mandates, which include leading a devout life, possessing intellectual prowess, understanding the intricacies of the economy, effectively governing the people and dedicating special attention to their needs on a daily basis (Warwer & Pontoan 2023). Participants confirmed the observations in literature (see participants' socio-demographic information in Table 1):

'Ondofolo is the male leader responsible for guiding and safeguarding the customary law community. This position is hereditary and follows a lineage-based structure. The successor to the Ondofolo is determined by birthright.' (An.F)

Another participant echoed the role and rank of Ondofolo:

'Ondofolo and/or Onoafi holds the highest position of authority in Sentani Village, overseeing the implementation of customary laws. We are shaped and brought into being by the creator, thus it is imperative that we adopt a disposition akin to that of God; one characterised by love, protection, adherence to truth and justice, and the cultivation of virtuous characters.' (Al.F)

In Jayapura Regency, Papua Province, Ondofolo and/or Onoafi is an official government collaborator. They work together to address issues and explicitly make decisions about the Sentani indigenous people. Furthermore, obtaining consent from Ondofolo is necessary to utilise the site and construct residential dwellings. The Sentani customary territory (as stated in Jayapura Regent Decree Number 319 of 2014) encompasses customary rights over land, water, air, forests and natural resources. For example, if an individual intends to live in the Sentani customary

TABLE 1: Socio-demographic information of participants.

| Respondents | Position | Traditional village | Indigenous territory | Subdistrict | Month and year interviewed |
|-------------|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| Al.F | Ondoafi | Yomokkrouw and/or Yobeh | Sentani and/or Bhuyakha | Sentani Tengah | July–August 2022 |
| An.F | Ondofolo | Yomokkrouw and/or Yobeh | Sentani and/or Bhuyakha | Sentani Tengah | August 2023 |
| MMA | Leaders of prayer rooms and Islamic boarding schools | Yomokkrouw and/or Yobeh | Sentani and/or Bhuyakha | Sentani Tengah | October 2023 |

Source: Waluyo, J., 2014, *Keputusan Bupati Jayapura Nomor 319 Tahun 2014* [home page on the Internet], Academia, viewed n.d., from https://www.academia.edu/10173830/Keputusan_Bupati_Jayapura_Nomor_319_Tahun_2014&nav_from=44122486-76ad-4f43-a9a1-fde8a5e4a1c8&rw_pos=undefined; Waluyo, J., 2014, *Keputusan Bupati Jayapura Nomor 320 Tahun 2014* [home page on the Internet], Academia, viewed n.d., from https://www.academia.edu/10223254/Keputusan_Bupati_Jayapura_Nomor_320_Tahun_2014

village area, they must seek Ondofolo's approval to obtain protection in the event of a calamity or if there is opposition from the community over their presence (Warwer & Pontoan 2023). Ondofolo also acts as a liaison between indigenous peoples and the government or religious institutions, such as in the construction of houses of worship and the organisation of religious celebrations.

'In 1995, I arrived in Papua, settled in the village of Sentani, and sought employment as an Islamic religion teacher at one of the first secondary schools. I was very well received by the local residents; I even had the opportunity to garden on land owned by one of the PLN employees [*the state electricity company, Perusahaan Listrik Negara*]. In 2005, I felt compelled to dedicate myself to the Islamic community surrounding my garden. This motivated me to open a *musolah* and *pesantren*, and I received permission to do so from the village head of Yobeh village, the Papuan *ulema* council, and the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia through the Papua Regional Office. In addition to the aforementioned officials, Mr. Anton Felle, the landlord of Yobeh village, has also given his approval. Therefore, the development is proceeding without any issues, as it has received permission from Ondofolo. In addition, I request security assistance from Ondofolo to ensure that no one obstructs the development process. Even now, I still frequently visit Ondofolo's house to tie a brotherhood rope.' (MMA)

Ondofolo fosters religious harmony in Sentani by promoting inclusivity and unity among religious groups. Every citizen in the hamlet can practice their beliefs and simply construct their own house of worship. The predominant religions in Papua, particularly in Sentani, include Protestantism, Catholicism and Islam. There are a total of 61 Protestant Christian churches in Papua, Indonesia. These include 13 Evangelical Christian churches, 23 Gospel Tabernacle churches, 5 Pentecostal churches, 7 Indonesian Bethel churches, 4 Seventh-day Adventist churches, 4 Gidi churches, 2 Baptist churches, 2 Kalam Kudus churches and 1 Pondok Daud church. There are an estimated 16 mosques and only one Catholic church. The religious peace in Papua is excellent, thanks to the influence of Ondofolo Local Wisdom. Christians provide security for the place of worship during prayers on the Muslim feast of Eid al-Fitr. Similarly, on occasions like Easter or Christmas, Muslims take on the responsibility of safeguarding the church premises while Christians engage in worship.

In the context of interreligious relations, harmony is something very important for people's lives. Harmony means feeling harmony and the absence of hostility between groups, which describes the relationship between groups with different characters while still upholding mutual

respect, justice and goodwill. In general, harmony is described as warmth, calmness and silence without noise and strife that disturb the harmony of life (Takdir 2017). Ondofolo also plays a role in strengthening local values that support religious harmony. Values such as mutual cooperation, mutual respect and tolerance are taught and practiced in daily life. These values are in line with the Christian teachings of love and brotherhood, so that they can strengthen social cohesion among Christians and people of other religions (Ricklefs 2001).

Local wisdom (culture and customs) shapes or influences human attitudes and behaviours

Local wisdom is an integral aspect of a community's culture, shaped by its diverse values, customs and cultural heritage. It begins with a cognitive perspective, develops an attitude towards events or objects and then determines various expressions or actions regarding customs, norms and art. Consequently, local wisdom led to the emergence of a community mindset. The intervention of cultural evolution in local wisdom highlights the synergy between local wisdom and culture (Mahrinasari et al. 2024). Local wisdom contains fundamental values such as clarity of heart, respect for others, self-reflection, sacrificing personal ego for the common good and openness to dialogue and deliberation. These values can strengthen the bond of brotherhood between fellow human beings. It is a society's primal knowledge or local intelligence that comes from the noble values of cultural traditions to regulate the order of people's lives. Etymologically, we can understand local wisdom as a human effort that utilises intellect and cognition to act and behave towards something, object or event that takes place in a specific space (Khusniati 2014).

Local wisdom reflects the ability of local culture to deal with the influence of outside cultures that increasingly put pressure on all traditions that develop in society (Takdir 2017). Affirming respect for religious freedom is also important because it can promote harmony in society by allowing people to practice their religion in accordance with their commitments under the social contract (Gede Agung et al. 2024; Sochmawardiah 2013). It is necessary to form an attitude of caring for others and respecting life. It is also related to responsibility for events and for past and current decisions whose results will affect the future (Pyżlak 2024). Therefore, in order to maintain harmony in creation, humanity must strive to live in mutual respect not only with each other, but with all living things (both visible and invisible), meaning that all creation must enjoy

it. Peace and order are maintained among fellow humans, plants, animals, rivers, seas and the supernatural world, ancestors and spirit creatures and Tuhan (Mpfu 2021).

Local wisdom (culture and customs) shapes human character

Local wisdom is a force that can create a conducive society in terms of life, human-human relationships and human-to-community relationships. Therefore, by cultivating and comprehending local wisdom within the context of a diverse community, we can foster a harmonious life that fosters mutual respect and appreciation among fellow religious people (Parera & Marzuki 2020). Substantively, local wisdom is the set of values that apply in the social order, the truth of which is a guideline in daily behaviour. Typically, families pass down local wisdom from generation to generation. Both tangible and intangible things, such as language, literature, art, ceremonies, customs, *keris* and so on, can manifest the local wisdom (Iswatiningsih 2019). Religious individuals should emphasise fostering a spirit of mutual collaboration with others in their lives. Engaging in mutual cooperation to carry out an activity can enhance the sense of harmony among individuals of different religious beliefs. The principle of mutual collaboration is a commendable virtue that should serve as a guiding principle for the entire community, irrespective of their religious beliefs (Fisher et al. 2015; Parera & Marzuki 2020). Mutually agreed upon and continuously applied local wisdom constitutes a social capital practice. Social capital can be in the form of an organisation or association, values or norms and a sympathetic attitude towards others to achieve a common goal. Local wisdom is also a form of social capital that can be a source of customs, traditions, habits and a series of control mechanisms, ranging from plans, recommendations, rules and instructions to guide community behaviour (Gede Agung et al. 2024).

Diversity in Indonesia affects religious harmony

A multicultural society aims to bring many religious people into harmonious coexistence. However, it is difficult to distinguish latent conflict from a multicultural society that constantly emphasises peace, compassion and noble ideals of humanity. Conflicts are mainly caused by the belief of certain adherents that other religions are not attractive, do not bring peace and do not guarantee entry to heaven (Gede Agung et al. 2024). Harmony in society is established when adherents of each religion always apply the values of balance, justice, honour and peace optimally in the lives of religious people (Parera & Marzuki 2020). The Indonesian people are aware that without harmony, this nation will not stand as a Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia so that the discussion about harmony always occupies a strategic position in the life of the nation and state. All of this is done to maintain and develop harmony among adherents of different religions because Indonesia is a pluralistic nation, which does not have a problem with the differences in beliefs

of each individual (Takdir 2017). The issue of harmony is a problem that must be a priority for the nation's children to continue to be maintained and managed properly. The harmony that has been happening has experienced ups and downs because of friction between religious believers and in every related social life. Religious tolerance is a persistent issue in the life of society, nation and state (Arifianto & Simon 2021). Cultural diversity can have a significant impact on societies' social harmony. Acculturation has a huge impact, fostering increased appreciation, affinity, tolerance and a sense of help among both individuals and tribes (Parera & Marzuki 2020).

Discussion

Cultural values and local wisdom, serving as guiding principles for the community, nation and state, have strongly influenced the nation's foundation. These values notably promote harmony and tolerance among different religious communities in this archipelago. The nation's culture is characterised by harmony and tolerance, which are evident at both the local and national levels (Takdir 2017). Ondofolo became a tribal leader in Sentani and acted as a traditional leader, tasked with maintaining, regulating and solving social problems in his community. His leadership acknowledged that above him was still God, the creator of the earth, meaning that there was no power higher than him other than the power of God. Ondofolo, as a recognised power holder within the community, serves as a symbol of unity and harmony among tribal members. From a Christian perspective, the Bible's concept of leadership can describe Ondofolo's role. Romans 13:1–2 says:

Let every soul be in subjection to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God. Therefore he who resists the authority, withstands the ordinance of God; and those who withstand will receive to themselves judgement.

This verse underscores the significance of adhering to the authority that God has established. Ondofolo's leadership can be considered a recognised and respected authority that has the task of maintaining order and peace in the Sentani customary village. 1 Peter 2:17 states, 'Honour all men, love your brothers, fear God, honour kings!' Ondofolo's role is in accordance with this verse, which teaches the local community to respect and love one another. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God', says the gospel of Matthew 5:9. In addition, Ondofolo's duty to maintain harmony and brotherhood in Sentani is very much a reflection of Christian teachings, which emphasise the importance of respecting and loving all people without exception.

In the Ondofolo tradition, this indigenous leader acts as a mediator in inter-group conflict, acting as a bridge that connects various groups of society to reach agreement and peaceful settlement. This is in line with biblical principles that emphasise the importance of peace and reconciliation. As it is written in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19:

And all this is from God, who through Christ has reconciled us to Himself and who has entrusted the ministry of atonement to us. For God reconciled the world with Himself by Christ by not taking into account their transgressions. He has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation.

Based on this verse, it is emphasised that the ministry for peace is the duty of Christians, and the role of Ondofolo as a mediator of conflict can be seen as a form of reconciliation ministry in the context of local culture. Religious harmony is one of the goals pursued by Ondofolo. From a Christian perspective, this harmony is not only important for social stability but is also a tangible manifestation of the teaching of Christ's love. In the gospel of Mark 12:31 'And the second commandment, which is the same as that, is: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself', and in Ephesians 4:3 'And seek to maintain the unity of the Spirit by the bonds of peace'. Love for fellow human beings is at the heart of Christian teachings. Maintaining harmony between religious communities is one way to apply this love in daily life. This letter, written by the apostle Paul, reminds Christians to always strive to maintain unity and peace. Ondofolo's role in maintaining religious harmony is a tangible form of efforts to maintain unity and peace in a pluralistic society.

Affirming respect for religious freedom is also important because it can promote harmony in society by allowing people to practice their religion in accordance with their commitments under the social contract (Gede Agung et al. 2024; Sochmawardiah 2013). Ondofolo local wisdom is not only important for the Sentani community, but it can also serve as an example for the Christian community in practicing biblical values. In the context of globalisation and modernisation, there is often a clash between traditional values and modern values. However, by blending local wisdom such as Ondofolo with the teachings of the Bible, Christians can find a harmonious way to coexist peacefully and respectfully. Recognising and appreciating local wisdom, such as Ondofolo, while adhering to biblical principles can help Christians find the right path to maintaining religious harmony.

Conclusion

The significance of local wisdom in preserving religious harmony is a crucial matter within the diverse setting of Indonesian culture. The Sentani 'Ondofolo' local knowledge plays a crucial role in upholding religious concord, mirroring the fundamental biblical values of leadership, peace, love and fraternity. The preservation of wisdom in all its manifestations is imperative because of its invaluable status as a cultural legacy. From a Christian standpoint, the principles encompassed in this indigenous knowledge can be assimilated with the doctrines of the Bible to establish a cohesive and tranquil society. Through recognising and valuing the function of Ondofolo, Christians can enhance their effectiveness in fulfilling the commandment of atonement and love as instructed by Christ.

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Data availability

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