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Mang gariang: A paradigm of religious-cultural resilience

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates *mang gariang*, an indigenous moral philosophy of Ilawe Hamlet, Alor Island, Indonesia, as a locally grounded framework for sustaining social cohesion in a religiously plural society. While existing scholarship often explains interreligious harmony through institutional mechanisms or formal peacebuilding initiatives, this article highlights the role of indigenous ethical systems embedded in kinship, spirituality, and collective memory. Using a qualitative approach, the research draws on in-depth interviews with purposively selected participants from Ilawe and six neighbouring hamlets in Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, with data analysed thematically. The findings demonstrate that *mang gariang* functions as a living socio-cultural system constituted by four interconnected principles: *esah uu karang* (love and compassion), *fui so tohamou* (ancestral blood ties), asala ahol (self-awareness), and *uur fed lahtal* (divine presence and guidance). These principles underpin everyday practices of Muslim – Christian cooperation, reciprocal responsibility, and shared belonging across religious boundaries. Theoretically, this article contributes to debates on social solidarity by extending Durkheim's *vinculum sociale* through an indigenous perspective, showing how communal bonds are actively produced through ritual memory, oral tradition, and embodied cultural practices. *Mang gariang* offers an alternative Indigenous model of resilience and peaceful coexistence amid rising religious polarisation and intolerance.

KEYWORDS *Mang gariang*; religious-cultural resilience; Ilawe Alor; Durkheim; religious intolerance

Introduction

The issues of intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism are not just threats to physical safety; they reflect our shared struggle to honour diversity properly. When hate speech becomes tolerated and religious communities face persecution, it is a sign that our communal bonds have

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weakened. Acts such as the 2018 Surabaya suicide bombing are grim reminders of what radicalised ideology can achieve, especially when aided by digital communication (Takdir, Basri, and Dindin Hamam Sidik 2023, 31). Between May 2024 and July 2025, Indonesia witnessed a series of religious intolerance incidents targeting Christian communities, including disrupted services (BBC News 2024), child bullying (SETARA Institute 2025), and attacks on worship sites (BBC News 2025). Ongoing investigations and arrests have drawn criticism from human rights organisations citing systemic failures to protect religious minorities. Often, these acts arise from people who feel excluded – lacking both societal belonging and cultural foundations. The result is growing divides – on social media, in neighbourhoods, between faiths – particularly with Muslims and Christians in Indonesia experiencing persistent tension. Rebuilding interfaith trust and cultural anchors is essential to prevent further division and violence.

Rather than proposing *mang gariang* as a universal solution to Indonesia's interreligious tensions, this article positions it as a context-specific indigenous framework emerging from the historical and cultural realities of Alor society. Indonesia's religious landscape is immensely diversified, and patterns of interfaith cooperation vary greatly between regions based on historical memory, demographic composition, local authority systems, and state intervention (Berger 1999; Hefner 2001). Therefore, the experience of Ilawe and adjacent villages should not be viewed as directly similar to bigger conflict-prone locations in Indonesia. Instead, this research contributes to broader discourses on religious coexistence by demonstrating how localised cultural ethics may operate as social resources for resilience within certain socio-historical situations.

The incidents described above reveal how religion, while often a source of moral cohesion, can also become a site of contestation when appropriated by exclusive or politicised ideologies (Roleder 2024, 21; Sholeh and Rahman 2025, 1; Susanto, Amri Tajudin, and Thalib 2024, 277). In settings where religion becomes detached from its embedded cultural and social contexts, it risks being weaponised, giving rise to what Berger (1999) refers to as 'desecularized conflicts' (Batista 2025, 15; Tănase and Dascălu 2024, 62). These conflicts are not confined to public institutions but also infiltrate private and familial spaces. In Indonesia, the persistence of religious violence illustrates the tension between state-endorsed pluralism and the lived realities of interfaith relations at the community level (Hefner 2001). Against this backdrop, the significance of local wisdom traditions such as *mang gariang* becomes increasingly clear. These practices offer grounded examples of how communities can negotiate religious difference and build resilience, echoing Casanova's (2011) idea of 'public religions' that shape civic life in pluralist societies (Maimun et al. 2025, 254; Roleder 2024, 20).

This dynamic reveals that local wisdom in Alor operates not only as folklore or symbolic heritage, but as a live social institution. *Mang gariang* develops communal expectations regarding care, reciprocity, and interfaith responsibility. In this way, cultural authority remains immensely important even within groups formally organised around modern religious identities. Such findings confirm Casanova's (2011) argument that religion and public life cannot be divorced from the cultural environments in which they are embedded.

This article also contends that the continuation of societal harmony in Alor cannot be described exclusively through formal religious doctrine or state-sponsored pluralism. Rather, harmony is maintained through ongoing negotiations between religious authority, customary norms, kinship memory, and local moral obligations. In this sense, the challenge faced by communities in Alor is not primarily modernisation itself, but the gradual erosion of shared indigenous practices under competing claims of religious legitimacy and formalised identities. As Tule (2004) and Gomang (2006) suggest, local cosmologies and customary relations in eastern Indonesia often function as mediating spaces where religious difference is socially managed. *Mang gariang* emerges precisely within this negotiated space, where communal belonging frequently takes precedence over rigid sectarian boundaries.

Given the issues outlined above, fostering harmony in a multicultural society is essential. To this end, examining the local wisdom of *mang gariang*—and its role in promoting harmony and resilience between Islamic and Christian communities in Ilawe, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara – is particularly valuable. In this research, *mang gariang*—in the Adang language meaning 'unconditional caring' – is articulated through four core values: *esah uu karang* (love-compassion), *fui to hamou* (blood ties), *asala ahol* (self awareness), and *uur fed Lahtal* (God is the owner of sun and time). We investigate the degree to which this wisdom is acknowledged as pivotal in advancing development and strengthening resilience within Ilawe's diverse community. Moreover, *mang gariang* in Ilawe – as well as in the six neighbouring communities (Sei Laan-Lendola, Adang-Buom, Hulnani, Seydon-Kokar, Topbang, and Tabolang) – can serve as a paradigm for the preservation of national cohesion in Indonesia, especially under threats from intolerance, radicalisation, and terrorism.

In academic discourse, the body of research focusing on Alor's local wisdom remains limited. One significant contribution is Thesa Dewi Angriani Djobo's research (2017), conducted in Mebung, North Central Alor. Her work explores the indigenous concept of *taramiti tominuku*, which she presents as a framework for fostering communal tolerance. This article stands out as one of the few efforts to engage deeply with Alorese cultural values in the context of intergroup harmony and coexistence. Another relevant research was conducted by Iswanto, a student at the Institut Agama Kristen

Negeri Kupang, and Yudhi Kawangung, from Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Teruna Bakti, Yogyakarta (2021). Their research, titled *'Moko Symbolization as Socio-Religious Harmony in Alor Society, East Nusa Tenggara'*, explores the role of the moko (a traditional metal drum) as a cultural symbol. They argue that while the *moko* is not indigenous to Alor, it has been culturally adopted and reinterpreted as a symbol of socio-religious unity. Social harmony, they suggest, is achieved through the integration of shared symbolic values rooted in customary law. While the aforementioned studies contribute to our understanding of local cultural practices in Alor, neither specifically addresses the concept of *mang gariang*, which encapsulates key indigenous values. This gap underscores the importance of investigating *mang gariang* as a vital expression of Alorese wisdom-one that is deeply rooted in love, compassion, mutual care, and self-awareness. This research, therefore, offers an original contribution by positioning *mang gariang* not only as a cultural legacy but also as an active social practice that promotes resilience in the face of intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism.

This article is guided by two central research questions: (1) What is *mang gariang*? and (2) In what ways does *mang gariang* contribute to the cultivation of harmony and resilience within Ilawe and its six neighbouring villages? The article is organised into three main sections. The first section provides an overview of the topic and introduces the research context. The second section explores Alor as a microcosm of Indonesia's broader cultural and ethnic diversity. The third section presents an in-depth analysis of *mang gariang*, interpreted through four core values: *esah uukarang* (love and compassion), *fui tohamou* (blood ties), *asala ahol* (self-awareness), and *uur fed lahtal* (God as the owner of the sun and time). The article concludes with a summary of key findings and implications for further research.

Alor: a mosaic of Indonesia's diversity

The archipelago of Alor is a mosaic of Indonesia's diversity. This diversity includes language, race, custom, and religion (Sulistyono et al. 2024, 236–238). Character and stages of the Alorese social exchange have both enlarged the modern world and erased old boundaries and distinctions (Tule 2004; cf. Sulistyono et al. 2024, 250). Alila Timur village has four hamlets i.e. Hanartel, Batu Putih, Tinahing, and Ilawe. There are 1875 people with 1663 Muslims and 212 Protestants. The hypothesis that Muslims and Christians come from the same ancestors, Bali Buling and Lilo Buling, should be investigated. Bali Buling married Buijmo, and Lilo Buling later married Mobitang. Buijmo and Mobitang were siblings hailing from the neighbouring hamlet of Tang Al, which is now known as Domloli. Originally, the ancestors lived in the old village: Alila, located at the inland area. In Alor, in the late 1940s, there occurred a big migration from inland to the coast. Alila residents also went

down to the coast. Those who took to the beach then settled in Ilawe, Tinahing, Batuputi, and Hanartel (BPS 2024, 37; I13 2025; I6, 2024). It is evident that migration subsequently established itself as a recurrent motif, playing a pivotal role in defining the distinctive characteristics of East Alila village and other villages in Bird's Head of Alor Island. This phenomenon contributed significantly to the formation of social cohesion within the community. Kotak's observations indicated a contemporary trend of increased travel frequency among individuals (Kottak 2009, 268; cf. Joewono et al. 2023, 24; Handayani and Syahrani 2025, 81). I2, the village head of Alila Timur, also observed that contemporary villagers tend to travel more frequently, yet also wish to maintain connections with their family roots. Individuals who embark on excursions beyond the confines of their village, such as those who travel to Java to attend Islamic boarding schools (Pesantren), invariably return with a renewed sense of perspective and experiences to share.

It is important to recognise that emerging social awareness and shifting perspectives within multicultural settings do not always translate into clear or uniform expressions. Despite the rich diversity present within local communities, the potential for harmonious coexistence remains viable. On Alor Island, particularly in the *Kepala Burung* (Bird's Head) region, persistent social cleavages are observable along lines of language, ethnicity, and religion – factors frequently exacerbated by patterns of migration. These divisions are often articulated through local dichotomies, such as between Adang and non-Adang language speakers (*Adang mateng*), distinctions between Adang and non-Adang ethnic identities (*Adang hinung*), and religious affiliations, notably between Muslim and non-Muslim populations.

In response to these challenges, I2 (2025) has implemented a unifying approach aimed at fostering social cohesion. He regularly facilitates dialogues with young individuals returning from Java, seeking to harmonise diverse viewpoints with the core values upheld by the local community. Within Alila, diversity is not framed as a divisive force but rather embraced as a vital source of social and cultural vitality. Over time, the inhabitants of the Bird's Head region on Alor Island have intentionally nurtured a collective sense of belonging, recognising themselves as a community shaped by intersecting cultural influences. This appreciation of difference as a contributor to social richness is deeply rooted in their artistic and oral heritage – including folk songs, dances, riddles, rhymes, and proverbs – that continue to be transmitted across generations (Haan et al. 2022, 21).

The longstanding divisions between inland and coastal populations, indigenous communities and migrant settlers, as well as between Islamic and Christian groups in Alor, should not be interpreted as organic or inevitable. Rather, they are the product of socially constructed dichotomies, often shaped and sustained by political, religious, or economic interests. As noted by scholars such as Lévi-Strauss and Feinberg

(Abidoğlu 2023, 599–600; cf. Gomang 2005, 143), such dichotomies serve strategic purposes, typically benefiting dominant actors or elite groups who seek to preserve their influence by reinforcing group boundaries. These binaries are often institutionalised in everyday discourse and social practice, thus perpetuating cycles of exclusion and division. The Dutch colonial presence in Alor, as in other parts of the archipelago, was underpinned by the classic colonial triad: the pursuit of economic gain, the assertion of imperial dominance, and the propagation of Christianity. This expansion was not merely territorial but also ideological, as colonial agents sought to reshape local social and religious landscapes. Anthropologist Cora Du Bois (1903–1991) identified a central axis of social tension in Alor – the division between coastal Muslim communities and the animist populations of the mountainous interior. She noted that both groups viewed each other with mutual suspicion and anxiety. This climate of mistrust became a tool for colonial administration, enabling Dutch officials to manipulate internal divisions, weaken indigenous solidarity, and entrench their authority through calculated dependency (Bois 1944, 6; cf. Kusuma, Sihabudin, and Widowati 2023, 135).

The contradiction between religious membership and indigenous identity in Alor should also be understood within broader disputes for social authority. Formal religions, particularly Islam and Christianity, have historically introduced institutional systems that sometimes compete with customary structures in regulating communal life. In many cases, local traditions are marginalised or reinterpreted through external theological frameworks. Yet, as evidenced in Ilawe and nearby villages, *mang gariang* continues to act as a cultural authority capable of resolving these disputes. Rather than opposing religion, it provides an ethical vocabulary through which different religious communities negotiate coexistence, mutual obligation, and collective belonging. Our findings reveal a deep-seated aspiration among residents of Ilawe and six neighbouring communities in the Bird's Head region of Alor Island for the establishment of dedicated houses of worship – specifically, mosques for Muslims and churches for Christians (I20,2013; I5 2024; I8 2024; I1 2024; cf. Doeka 2015). These spaces are perceived not merely as religious institutions, but as tangible expressions of a shared cultural heritage and communal identity. This collective yearning is intertwined with a strong desire to preserve social unity, which is further reinforced by the widespread belief in a common ancestral lineage.

Although they adhere to different religious traditions, community members trace their lineage to a common ancestor – an identity marker that underscores the enduring importance of kinship in shaping social cohesion. This shared ancestry becomes a cultural anchor for the practice of *mang gariang*, as illustrated in the following local rhyme in the Table 1 (I6 2024; I18 2024; cf. I7 and I17 2025).

Table 1. Shared ancestry and *mang gariang*.

No.	Rhymes	Translation	Meaning
1	*Pi melang ta tara* *Pi mateng lurung mi salahany* *So bo piri fui nu aain nu* *Piri so **dor*** nu* * A simple stone structure for spiritual devotion and personal worship.	We all have our own houses. We misunderstand each other because of the words we use. But we are all connected by the same blood and womb. We are one altar.	According to the wisdom passed down through generations, we may belong to different tribes and pray to different names of the Divine, but we all come from the same life-source. The elders remind us: 'We drank from the same river and lit fire from the same flame'. The local philosophy of *mang gariang* draws strength from this recognition—that difference is not a threat, but a variation within unity.

Table 2. Lifang and adang: unity in diversity.

No.	Rhymes	Translation	Meaning
1	*Bap nu* *So tafain* *Tofang tofang sah* *Den lifang lol*, *Den Adang lol*	one ancestor the same who gave birth to us a lot of descendants a part of people goes to down others follow to the top	The figurative use of the words *lifang* and *adang* reflects more than topography—it reflects the diverse, yet interconnected, identity of the Alorese people. *Lifang* refers to the anchor, symbolizing those who live by the sea and practice Islam; *adang* refers to the people of the hills, most of whom are Christian. Despite these differences, both groups see themselves as part of the same extended family, descended from a shared ancestor. This symbolic language helps bridge religious divides, fostering a cultural narrative of unity through diversity.

In a world often marked by religious division, the communities of Ilawe and its surrounding villages in Alor offer a different story-one of shared ancestry and mutual respect. Muslims and Christians here both trace their roots back to the patriarch Abraham, through his sons Ishmael and Isaac. Reflecting this connection, the Christian church in Alila Timur is named *GMIT Ismail*, and the mosque in nearby Tinahing is called *Masjid Nurul Ishak* (Haan et al. 2022, 20). Muslim leaders like I20 (2013) and I6 (2024) believe that Ishmael stands for a spirit of self-giving and concern for others, including Christians. Christian leaders such as I18 and I14 (2024) echo this sentiment, seeing the names as powerful symbols of unity. Such naming practices should be viewed as cultural affirmations that support grassroots resilience. They draw on the value of *asala ahol* (self-awareness), a locally embedded form of self-knowledge that contributes to community harmony, social cohesion, and the sustainable management of religious diversity.

In Ilawe and six neighbouring villages, the cooperation between Muslims and Christians is a powerful testament to interfaith solidarity. When building places of worship, both communities contribute labour, materials, and expertise, reflecting a shared commitment to mutual

Table 3. God as the source of unity.

No.	Formula	Translation	Meaning
1	*o nimang lahtal* *o buij no'* *o' pa' bala* *oo esah o uu karang*: *ma niraham*	O God, our Father, All-good, All-gentle, All-loving and compassion for us.	Among the communities of the Bird's Head region of Alor Island, God is invoked through a constellation of attributes—goodness, gentleness, love, and compassion. These divine qualities serve not only as theological affirmations within both Islam and Christianity but also function as a shared ethical foundation. They enable interfaith cooperation and provide a moral framework for navigating communal challenges and fostering mutual support.
2	*Taplolo* *(Ni mateng)*: *O no tenangêl lame* *Lahtal sô ho' se'bur puiny* *Bang ba Sa aahou horo leam* *Horo uuling aasel, uuling aasel* *Nani puiny mih* *Horo uuling aasel* *(Ei mateng)*: *Mi he ha'ai iiri sibung ee* *Mi he ha'ai iiri sibung ee*	Impression and message (the living impression): O my companion on the journey, God who comes to guide the way, The village/house He commands—that is the destination. the One who steers the way, Steers wheel of a ship the One who records my name. the One who steers wheel of a ship the death message: stay united—never be scattered— uphold the unity of family and village	The ritual of *taplolo*, sung by a spiritually inspired individual, exemplifies the community's deep belief in continuity between life and death. The chant accompanies the deceased, invoking *Lahtal*, the divine presence, as a compassionate guide on the soul's final journey. This divine voyage symbolizes God's intimate involvement: calling the departed by name, sailing beside them, and leading them to His eternal dwelling. The closing message is not of grief, but of guidance—a spiritual reminder to the living to preserve unity, cherish kinship, and remain anchored in the shared presence of God.

respect and collaboration. The Christian community of Seydon-Kokar has also done the same thing for their Muslim brothers and sisters. The GMIT Baitesda Seydon congregation provided a plot of land for the construction of the Nurul Islamiah Mosque in Weileng-Seydon (I5 2024; cf. Doeka 2015, 174; Steenbrink 1993, 143–144). In the 1950s, some Muslim overseers converted to Christianity to fulfil church membership requirements, a decision made with the understanding and approval of their Muslim peers. According to I20 (2013) and I6 (2024), the result of conversion is (1) Timung Tang, who was previously Muslim, converted to Christianity and changed his name to Anderias Timung Tang; (2) Musa Maro-Lobang converted to Christianity by bearing the same name; Hasan Peni (Han Pen Bubung) becomes Habel Peni; (3) Sulaiman Pada became Arkalaus Pada. While this pragmatic choice strengthened inter-community bonds, it also attracted scrutiny from religious authorities and the government, which imposed restrictions on Muslim participation in Christian ceremonies. Despite these challenges, the Ilawe experience underscores the potential

for faith communities to build bridges through shared responsibility and understanding.

These practices should not be glorified as spontaneous manifestations of social connection. Rather, they are sustained through intentional cultural education transmitted across generations. Elders, religious figures, and customary leaders actively teach younger generations to preserve interfaith kinship through oral narratives, ritual participation, and shared communal obligations. As Haan et al. (2022) demonstrate, Adang proverbs and oral traditions function not only as linguistic expressions but also as pedagogical tools that cultivate solidarity and tolerance. *Mang gariang* therefore represents a conscious social project aimed at maintaining collective resilience amid changing religious and political landscapes.

Émile Durkheim, alongside other foundational sociologists, introduced the concept of *vinculum sociale* -the social bond- as a way to explain the deep, often unseen ties that connect individuals and sustain social harmony. This bond manifests through shared language, emotional connections such as affection and sympathy, and the institutional frameworks of civil society. Yet for Durkheim, it runs even deeper, embedded within the very structure of human existence. He posited that solidarity is not merely a moral ideal, but a social fact – an intrinsic condition of human life. While individuals may not always be in full control of their actions, they remain responsible for striving towards self-regulation. Durkheim's framework provides valuable insight into the dynamics of cohesion and fragmentation in contemporary organisations. He distinguished between mechanical and organic solidarity, the latter of which – grounded in shared values and functional interdependence – is particularly vital in today's complex social systems. However, rapid societal or organisational change can destabilise these bonds, leading to a state of anomie. In response, Durkheim emphasised the role of collective rituals, which, through what he called 'collective effervescence', serve to restore moral order and reinforce group identity (Durkheim 1933, 413; cf. Mañez 2025, 302–303). As Alexander Gofman has stated, Durkheim at times asserted that traditional behaviour is, in general, nearly identical to moral behaviour. This is particularly evident in his reasoning about the close relationship and near-identical nature of 'collective habits' and genuine morality. The Durkheimian theory can be interpreted as a valuable contribution to contemporary understandings of modernisation processes (Gofman 2018, 25).

Although Durkheim's division between mechanical and organic solidarity provides a vital beginning point for understanding social cohesion, the realities of *mang gariang* reveal several limitations within this binary framework. Durkheim prefers to identify social solidarity either with inherent communal likeness or with functional interdependence caused by current differentiation (Durkheim 1933). However, the social cohesion found in llawe cannot be reduced to either category. *Mang gariang* is neither merely

'organic' in the sense of naturally emerging interdependence, nor 'mechanical' as a rigid collective system imposed through external authority. Rather, it represents a consciously cultivated ethical practice grounded in collective memory, kinship consciousness, and deliberate cultural labour.

In this respect, *mang gariang* invites a reconsideration of dominant sociological assumptions concerning solidarity and religion. The cohesion observed in Alor is actively maintained through ritual participation, reciprocal care, oral tradition, and intergenerational transmission of moral obligations. Community members intentionally reproduce these values through shared ceremonies, cooperative labour, and everyday acts of mutual protection between Muslims and Christians. Thus, solidarity here is not accidental or automatic; it is socially produced and continuously negotiated. This article expands Gofman's (2018) interpretation of Durkheim by suggesting that 'collective habits' become socially effective only when deliberately internalised as moral commitments.

As Durkheim theorised, a key characteristic of the Ilawe Muslim community's behaviour is the resurgence of long-suppressed moral sentiments, particularly those rooted in compassion. I11 (2025), the current Head of the Ministry of Religious Affairs for Alor Regency, interprets this moral reawakening as being deeply embedded in the community's cultural heritage – or what he refers to as their 'cultural genes'. He closely links this revival to the concept of *mang gariang*, which encapsulates values of mutual care, preservation, and nurturing.

Paradigm of *mang gariang*

Practice of mang gariang

The word *mang gariang* comes from the Adang language (Haan 2001), which consists of the words *mang* and *gariang*. *Mang*: (1) literally, interpreted as 'only', which leads to the form of an adverb 'only; nothing else; solely'. Several words explain *mang* as an adverb in the Adang language, namely *mang ade-na* (just eat and drink); *mang panen* (just do it); *mang mih* (just sit); *mang toh* (just stand up), *mang lame* (just walk); and *pi mang gariang* (we just caring); (2) in addition, *mang* is classified into the superlative form or the highest level of comparison, that is uncountable, implicit, and so on. Therefore, *mang* is interpreted as a just action that must be carried out by someone without any strings attached, limits, conditions, and considerations from anywhere. While *gariang* is a form of a verb, it is used to indicate the condition of humans who essentially have the nature to care for one another (I9, 2021). *Mang gariang* is often used to express a noble, strong, and responsible action in filial brotherhood and understood in job description of a guarder, nurse, and protector. *Mang gariang* in this extended, metaphorical sense can care not only ones but any plant and animal, too.

Examples of Muslims and Christians practicing *mang gariang* can be seen in the celebration of religious holidays such as *Eid al-Fitr* and Christmas. When families in the inland celebrate Christmas, families on the coast always go to the inland to celebrate Christmas together. During Christmas celebrations, Christians enjoy a series of worship services while Muslims take care of the food and drink and serve the guests. Afterwards, Muslims also go to the church to watch the Christmas drama performed by the church youth. In the church building, Muslims are given a special place in the front pews to watch the performance. Similarly, at other times, at the *halal bi halal* celebrations, Christians attend with vocal groups and choirs to support and enliven the gratitude of Muslim brothers and sisters for successfully completing one month of fasting (I18 and I14 2024; I6 2024; I2 2025; I19 and I4 2024; I7 and I17 2024, I1; I8 and I10 2024; I16 2024, and I5 2024). An interesting experience is when Christian families on the inland bring garden produce to sell at the market 20 km away, the Muslim brothers and/or sisters on the coast without being asked are responsible for feeding the dogs, pigs and chickens of the Christian families (I15 2021; I3 2025; I9 2021). Taking care of each other as described is still practiced in Ilawe and other hamlets in the Bird's Head of Alor Island to this day.

Weismantel's (1995, 685) ethnography of Zumbagua highlights how kinship is forged through shared life experiences and acts of care, rather than solely through biological ties. A similar pattern is observed in the Bird's Head region of Alor Island, where familial bonds are cultivated through daily practices such as feeding, nurturing, and emotional engagement. These observations challenge the dominant Western emphasis on blood relations as the foundation of kinship. Even critical perspectives – such as those from feminist or symbolic anthropologists – often rely on a binary between nature and culture, which fails to fully account for the complexity of lived relationships (Weismantel 1995, 685). But in places like Zumbagua (Central Ecuador) and Alor (East Indonesia), being a parent means much more than biology – it means showing up and caring in tangible, ongoing ways.

The Ilawe community, alongside other groups within the Bird's Head region of Alor Island, adheres to a deeply rooted indigenous knowledge system that prioritises social cohesion and communal well-being. This framework is structured around four foundational principles: *esah uu karang* (love and compassion), *fui so tohamou* (blood ties), *asala ahol* (self-awareness), and *uur fed lahtal* (divine guidance). Each principle contributes to the cultivation of mutual respect and the reinforcement of interdependent relationships, forming the moral backbone of local governance and everyday life.

Four basic values

Esah uu karang

The term *mang gariang* is founded on the value of *esah uu karang*, which emphasises the importance of love and unconditional caring as a fundamental aspect of life that should be cherished and protected. The phrase *aada o no' mang uu gariang* translates as 'good customs should be based on unconditional caring'. This tradition is not just a symbolic or philosophical ideal – it calls for real, creative actions that reflect care and solidarity. At the heart of *esah uu karang* lies a spirit of mutual aid, beautifully expressed in the sayings: *eita ari muling, eita balleta* ('we help him/her and do what he/she needs') and *teita tari muling, teita balleta* ('he/she will help us and do what we need'). Such expressions highlight a deeply rooted cultural commitment to mutual care and shared responsibility – values upheld regardless of one's background, interests, ethnicity, or religion. In essence, these expressions place strong emphasis on the values of tolerance and solidarity (I7 and I17 2025).

In the daily lives of the Bird's head people, the values of tolerance and solidarity based on the core value of *esah uu karang* are not just ideals – they are lived realities. Passed down from one generation to the next, these values are taught through time-honoured sayings and folk songs, like the ones sung during the *masaer* dance, known locally and nationally as *legeo lego*. They are also woven into community life through traditional puzzle games and heart-felt speeches delivered at social and religious events, ensuring their relevance and resilience over time (Haan et al. 2022, 21).

Fui so tohamou

The concept of *mang gariang* that expresses peace and harmony can be reconstructed in blood kinship of *fui so tohamou*. The term of *fui so tohamou* consists of four words, namely (1) *fui* is 'blood' (2); *so* is 'remain'. This word is a proximal type form indicating something that returns to itself or refers to a third person singular pronoun or third person plural pronoun. The word *so* in connection to word *fui* means 'he/she remains; they remain'; 3) *to* signifies 'together', this word comes from *ta*, then this word undergoes a process to form a genitive case of *o* so that it becomes *to* which refers to the meaning of the first person pronoun plural. Thus, *to* signifies 'we are the same; 4) *hamou* indicates 'relationship; bond'. Literally, *fui so tohamou* shows the bond of blood that is in me and you (=us) is as same as in him/her and them (I9 2021).

There are two meanings of *fui* (blood) in the term *fui so to hamou*, the first is showing the genealogical kinship between the people of Alor, both on the coast and on the inland. The second is the blood understood as a core part that encourages the attitude of unconditional caring (*mang gariang*) between the coastal and inland communities because they are united by one ancestor.

It can be argued that there is an obligation, on the part of parents or predecessors, to instil in children or the younger generation this notion of a united family. The dissemination of these instructions can be facilitated in a variety of ways, including the use of sacred relics, betel nut left over from the speaker's mouth to the listener's mouth, stories, songs, or rhymes (I7 2025). The objective of this endeavour is to establish a profound emotional connection between the speaker, who represents the perspectives of the parents/older generation, and the listener/younger generation. The initiative's fundamental principle is the commitment to safeguarding the venerable concept of *fui so tahamou* (I12 2025). This concept is based on an oral promise, which is contained in the rhymes of *bela baja* (Gomang 2006, 480) delivered among *masaer* (commonly known as *legeo lego* in Bahasa Indonesia), the traditional round dance. The following Table 2 is an example of a rhyme (Haan et al. 2022, 16; I9 2021):

In his seminal work, Lévi-Strauss (1969) introduced the theory of dual organisation, asserting that many tribal and village-based societies are structured around a fundamental division into two moieties. These moieties maintain complex and dynamic relationships, ranging from open antagonism to deep intimacy, often expressed through interwoven patterns of rivalry and cooperation. Common features of dual organisation include matrilineal descent systems and the presence of cultural heroes – frequently represented as brothers or twins – who occupy a central place in mythology. This binary structure extends beyond the social realm to symbolic cosmologies, resulting in paired oppositions such as Red/White, Day/Night, Sky/Earth, Inland/Coastal, and Elder/Younger. The moieties are connected not only through the exchange of women in marriage but also through the mutual provision of goods, services, and ceremonial obligations, reinforcing social cohesion through reciprocal exchange (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 69; cf. Itao and Kaneko 2021, 1). As highlighted by Michael Asch, Lévi-Strauss strongly believed that for binary societies to thrive, they must engage in cooperative efforts. This mutual collaboration hinges on deep respect and the protection of each group's uniqueness and autonomy (Asch 2005, 426).

While Lévi-Strauss emphasises binary patterns as basic to social order, the Alorese experience illustrates that such dualities do not inevitably imply persistent opposition. In the context of *mang gariang*, disparities between inland/coastal, Muslim/Christian, or Adang/non-Adang identities are regularly reinterpreted through tales of shared lineage and mutual dependence. Binary distinctions remain culturally important, although they are changed into relational categories rather than exclusionary limits. This shows that indigenous systems of kinship may work not merely to conserve variety, but to manage diversity through reciprocal ethical commitments.

In contemporary Alor society, the traditional solidarity once rooted in binary social structures is showing signs of erosion. This weakening is largely

attributed to increasing social diversity, a result of modern human mobility and migration from various regions of Indonesia – an inescapable feature of modern life (Haan et al. 2022, 18; I6 2025). Consequently, kinship-based relations are gradually being supplanted by social ties grounded in shared cultural values and mutual ethical understandings. Within this shifting landscape, the meaning and application of *mang gariang* have both broadened and deepened, extending beyond familial care to encompass broader communal responsibilities.

Asala ahol

The notion of *mang gariang* is predicated on the value of *asala ahol*. The term *asala ahol* is composed of two words: 'asala', which is defined as habits, customs, or norms; and 'ahol', which is translated as 'to know', 'to understand', or 'to comprehend'. The utilisation of *asala ahol* is associated with the following sentence: *na ho'o na o asala ahol*. The word *na* in position in the sentence: *na ho'o*, signifies 'something' (nominative pronoun) in Adang can function as a subject. Then, *ho'o* (demonstrative pronoun) refers to an object – in this case, 'the existing problem'. The second *na* (nominative pronoun) refers to 'I' is accepted as a subject who knows *o asala ahol* 'the root of the problem'; So, on a deeper level, it is both 'something' and 'I' that recognise the root of the problem (I12 2025).

It has been demonstrated that the term *asala ahol*, meaning 'self awareness' can be interpreted as the individual who is cognisant of, perspicacious regarding, and fully informed of 'the root of the problem'. It is only when an individual comprehends the fundamental causes of a given problem that they are able to formulate a response that is informed by their knowledge, understanding and insight. This approach is intended to ensure that conversations and problem solutions are conducted with the requisite level of care and consideration. Furthermore, the word *asala* is understood to refer to traditions or customary norms, while *ahol* is translated as 'to know, understand, and internalize'. Thus, *asala ahol* describes someone who knows, understands, and internalises customary norms-one of the reasons they are held in high regard by society.

Uur fed lahtal

In terms of religions, or beliefs, Adang speakers originally believe in a 'god' called 'uur fed lahtal' (time – sun – owner). The approximate of this name is 'the owner (or god) of time and sun'. This god, according to John Haan, is symbolised by a wooden snake (Haan 2001, 3). However, it appears that the Adang-Bu'om people's interpretation of snake symbolism is influenced by the Christian tradition of the bronze serpent that Moses made and set on a pole. As written in Numbers 21:8–9, any Israelite who was bitten by a serpent would be healed if they looked at the bronze serpent. Likewise, in Topbang

Village, *uur fed lahtal* is symbolised by a rooster (I12 2025), which is typically placed at the top of the ridge of the *aasel* (warehouse house), which symbolises Peter's denial. This symbolism might also be influenced by Christian tradition (cf. Mark 14:72).

The word 'fed' refers to the sun in its fiery, boiling state. In everyday Adang language use, the word *fed* is depicted in the following sentences: *fed bune hala* (the sun is very hot); *fed ho'o mang kididi* (the sun alone is boiling); *fed ho'o bune kididi* (the sun is really boiling). The image of the 'hot sun' is thus given a double meaning as an attribute of *lahtal*. This is exemplified in the following sentence: *lahtal oo mateng pa' ho' bune hala* (God's word holds the power to bestow blessings as well as to pronounce curses). This dimension of God's character evokes both respect and fear among humans. Therefore, *Lahtal*'s name is rarely mentioned – and when it is, it is treated with great care and not misused in either professional or everyday contexts (I12 2025).

In prayers and songs, God's attributes are frequently invoked as expressions of reverence and as requests for divine assistance. The following formula, as described by I12—a Christian elder from Topbang – and I3—an Islamic leader from Adang-Anlafeni and a sociologist at Nusa Cendana State University – is as in the Table 3 (I12 2025; I17 2024; I3 2025).

In Ilawe and surrounding Bird's Head communities, *taplolo* represents a bridge between human and divine experience. It calls out the deceased by name, traces their journey beyond mortality, and offers the assurance of a forever home with *Lahtal*. But this assurance rests upon unity – only in solidarity, free from strife, can this divine power be truly lived. The concept of *uur fed lahtal*, central to *mang gariang*, is a shared cultural value across faiths here: mutual caring, protection, and responsibility among neighbours, regardless of religion.

Conclusion

This research arrives to the two central conclusions: First, *mang gariang* is best understood as an indigenous moral and spiritual system—a complex sociocultural practice rooted in kinship, reciprocity, ancestral memory, and divine consciousness. It is not merely a ritual or customary law, but a living ethic of relational harmony, built upon four interlocking principles: *esah uu karang* (love and compassion), *fui so tohamou* (blood ties), *asala ahol* (self-awareness), and *uur fed lahtal* (divine presence and guidance). These principles guide interpersonal and interfaith relationships, shaping not only how people relate to one another, but also how they understand their shared destiny as a community. Second, *mang gariang* functions as a resilient mechanism for social cohesion and interfaith harmony in a pluralistic setting marked by religious, linguistic, and historical divisions. In the communities of Ilawe, Topbang, Tabolang, Seydon, Adang-Bu'om, Hulnani, and Lendola, the practice of *mang gariang* has enabled

Muslims and Christians – descendants of the same ancestral lineage – to transcend sectarian identities and maintain a deeply rooted ethic of solidarity. This is evidenced not only in rituals and oral traditions but in daily acts of cooperation, such as joint church and mosque construction, mutual participation in life-cycle ceremonies, and the naming of sacred sites with shared religious symbolism.

Notably, this research does not argue that *mang gariang* can serve as a single solution for resolving interreligious tensions across Indonesia. The social and cultural conditions of Alor are unique and influenced by particular historical experiences, patterns of migration, political dynamics, and religious compositions that differ from those found in other parts of the country. Even so, the example of the Alorese villages illustrates that local cultural traditions can become key sources of social resilience, especially when institutional systems of plurality are limited or fragile. In this view, the importance of *mang gariang* lies not in its ability to be universally applied, but in the way it illustrates how regionally grounded ethical traditions may encourage peaceful coexistence within certain social and historical situations.

From a theoretical perspective, this research also contributes to broader conversations on religion, culture, and social cohesion. The findings suggest that solidarity is not simply produced by social structures or functional interdependence, as classical sociological theories often emphasise. In Ilawe and neighbouring communities, solidarity is actively nurtured through shared rituals, collective memories, kinship narratives, moral teaching, and reciprocal relationships between Muslims and Christians. Seen in this light, *mang gariang* offers a perspective that moves beyond the strict divide between Durkheim's notions of 'mechanical' and 'organic' solidarity. Instead, it points to a form of resilience that is consciously maintained through ongoing cultural practice and communal commitment. This understanding contributes to contemporary discussions on indigenous peacebuilding, interreligious coexistence, and community resilience in plural societies.

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Interviewees (I)

I1 = Ahmad Bao (50 years old, former head of Hulnani Village), *interviewed* on December 14, 2024.
I10 = Kasim Lahal (71 years old), *interviewed* on December 2024)
I11 = Mansur B. Samah (57 years old), *interviewed* on July 18, 2025.
I12 = Marthinus Duka (62 years old), *interviwed* on September 18, 2025
I13 = Masrohan Duka La'an (43, years old, Secretary of Alila Timur Village) on July 28, 2025.
I14 = Matius Mali (40 years old), *interviewed* on December 15, 2024.
I15 = Nikolas Ani (70 years old), (Traditional Leader of Aboic Village), *interviewed* on June 13, 2021.
I16 = Petrus Duka Tela (74 years old), *interviewed* on December 12, 2024)
I17 = Rudolof Aloisius Haan (45 years old), *interviewed* on December 7, 2024)
I18 = Semuel Lobang-Lem (51 years old), *interviewed* on December 15, 2024.
I19 = Stefanus Maro, *interviewed* on December 8, 2024
I2 = Ahmad Timung (57 years old, head of Alila Timur Village), *interviwed* on July 18, 2025.
I20 = Usman Mautang (72 years old), one of Islamic f igures in Ilawe, *interviewed* on April 17, 2013.
I3 = Ajis Salim Adang Djaha (59 years old), one of the Anlafeni Islamic f igures and a sociologist of Nusa Cendana State University), *interviewed* on September 20 and 22, 2025.
I4 = Amon Ouw, *interviewed* on December 8, 2024

I5 = Anton Z. Alelang (90 years old), one of the Christian f igures in Seydon, *interviewed* on December 14, 2024.
I6 = Buhanudin La'an (69 years old), one of the Islamic f igures in Ilawe, *interviewed* on December 16, 2024.
I7 = Gerson Dael (61 years old), *interviewed* on September 20, 2025
I8 = Habel Adang (76 years old), *interviewed* on December 8, 2024.
I9 = John W. Haan (62 years old), Adang Language Expert who teaches at Nusa Cendana University Kupang, *interviewed* on July 17, 2021