

The Intertwining of Cultural Identity and Religious Identity in Church Musical Harmony for Social Harmony in Multicultural Societies

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to show a creative approach to uniting the diversity of cultural and religious identities in musical harmony for efforts to build social harmony between multicultural and multireligious societies. **Methodology:** With an art-based qualitative analysis approach, this study analyzes elements of religious, cultural, and musical identities in the traditions and songs of the Maluku Protestant Church (GPM). **Findings:** This study found that GPM Songs have offered a new treasure in the tradition of religious songs by creatively and harmoniously combining elements of the cultural identity of the Maluku people who embrace all different religious identities through the shared language of *pela-gandong*, *ain ni ain*, *kalwedo*, in musical harmony for efforts to build and maintain social harmony in multicultural and multireligious societies. **Implications:** The findings of this study provide a new insight that can be applied to preserving peace in multicultural societies, namely that diverse cultural and religious identities can be harmonized through musical harmonization. **Originality and Value:** This study contributes to the discourse of music, rituals, and tradition studies, as well as multicultural and multireligious identities, and offers a new insight into creative diplomacy by using musical harmony in church song for social harmony.

Keywords: *ain ni ain*; cultural identity; *kalwedo*; musical harmony; religious identity.

Introduction

Indonesian society is multicultural and multireligious. Its inhabitants come from two large races, Malay and Melanesian. The multicultural society occupies a territory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, which has 17,508 islands. More than 350 ethnic groups speak 583 language dialects. The country embraces six major religions worldwide and has many beliefs and spiritualities rooted in various local traditions (Lestari, 2020a). The diversity of religions and cultures within the Indonesian nation is a blessing from Almighty God. The reality of this diversity has existed and become an essential factor in establishing the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, as emphasized in the nation's motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which means 'different yet one.' In the reality of living together as a nation, the diversity of cultural and religious identities, on the one hand, is a strategic opportunity to build a life together, if the diversity is managed well. However, on the other hand, the diversity of cultural and religious identities is very often used as a threat to social harmony.

In recent years, Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity—long celebrated as a national strength—has increasingly become a site of tension and conflict. According to the *Imparsial* (The Indonesian Human Rights Monitor) report, in 2024, there were 23 cases of violations of religious freedom, and the Indonesian government was considered to have only sat back, even though it has the responsibility to ensure that citizens' rights to belief are not taken away (Putra, 2024). In 2025, conflicts and clashes between different

identity groups are still rampant in Maluku, such as the conflict between two youth communities of other religions at the Trikora monument in Ambon in January 2025 (Kristian & Pardede, 2025), the conflict between communities of different villages in West Seram in March 2025 (Patty & Rastika, 2025), conflict between two youth groups in Southeast Maluku in March 2025 (Barends, 2025), and what recently happened was a conflict between two different religious communities in North West Seram, Central Maluku Regency in April 2025 (Patty & Purba, 2025). The reality of various disputes that have occurred shows that the diversity of cultural and religious identities held by Indonesian society, including the Maluku society, still needs to be managed creatively to build social harmony between communities.

Related to various conflict issues, several previous studies have seen how important it is to strengthen cultural values that bind the kinship of life between communities in Maluku. The Maluku cultural language and local wisdom, such as *pela* and *gandong* are considered still relevant to building a peaceful life (Garing et al., 2023). Local wisdom and *pela-gandong* culture also shape people's daily behavior in public spaces (Pattipeilohy, Suharti, Joi Ihalauw, & Dwiatmadja, 2024). In addition, rituals and practices of cooperation between communities of different religions based on religious and cultural practices must be continuously promoted to instill the values of peace in a pluralistic society (Saimima, Sinaga, & Islahuddin, 2023). Unlike previous studies, this study fundamentally examines the root of the conflict problem that always occurs in a pluralistic society, such as in Maluku, which is the error in managing the differences in cultural and religious identities held by the community. The diversity of identities is still often exploited as a commodity to fuel conflict within the community. Therefore, a creative approach or creative diplomacy is still needed to bring together the different and usually separated cultural and religious identities, forming a unified force to build social harmony (Lestari, 2017; Tika Lestari, 2019). In this study, I found that musical harmony has the power to serve as a creative diplomatic medium, weaving different and separate identities into a beautiful song of peace that everyone can sing and enjoy.

Research on the role of music in striving for social harmony in society has been widely conducted and published. However, I can demonstrate that there is still a research gap between this study and other existing research, thereby offering a novel contribution from the results of this study. In reviewing various literature, I classify them into two categories to map the main issues and ideas of each research as well as the empty spaces that have not been explained so that they become the findings of this research. First, research on music, conflict, and peace. Music has the power to become a war drum on one side (Bergh & Sloboda, 2010; Lestari, 2017; O'Connell & Castelo-Branco, 2010), and on the other hand, musical harmony contributes to building social harmony in society (Barrie, 1987; Ibrahim Khalil & Hormuz Toma, 2023; Lestari, 2020b; Shaughnessy, Ockelford, Bonneville-Roussy, & Mann, 2024; Tika Lestari, 2019; Wei et al., 2023). The role of music in conflict and peacebuilding efforts is facilitated through the use of musical elements, including melody, harmony, text, and lyrics, which can influence and alter human emotions, feelings, thoughts, and actions. I also use the same approach, which suggests that musical harmony can contribute to building social harmony in society. However, my research is more specific, focusing not on musical harmony in general, but rather on musical harmony in church singing that combines elements of culture, theology or ritual site, and music to foster social harmony in society.

The second category is research on the relationship between music and collective memory and cultural identity of a society. In this research, the contribution of music in supporting the process of building peace occurs through the reactivation of the collective

memory of society related to cultural values that form the cultural identity of society (Foscarini, 2018; Gilbert, 2010; Lestari, 2020a; Lestari & Parihala, 2020; Tika Lestari, 2019). The composition of musical works is based on local traditions or culture and the social life of the community that owns the music (Hood, 2020; Shaughnessy et al., 2024; Turino, 2008). Unlike all studies in this second category, this study further examines the intertwined relationship between cultural identity and religious identity in a pluralistic society, as expressed in the musical works of church hymns. Interestingly, this study also found that ritual songs, such as church hymns, serve not only a ritual function but also play a social role in fostering peace between religious communities.

Methods

The research, thus, aims to fill the gap in research mentioned above, namely that music that has the power to build peace also includes ritual music, such as the songs of the Maluku Protestant Church (GPM). Therefore, this study conducts a musical analysis to explain the musical elements in the songs of the Maluku Protestant Church that can contribute to building social harmony between communities. The central thesis of this study is that ritual music, specifically the songs of the Maluku Protestant Church, which harmoniously combine cultural and religious identity, makes a positive contribution to building peace between religious communities in Maluku. This central thesis is described in depth, beginning with an analysis of the concepts of cultural and religious identity diversity, the social function of music, and the musical analysis of the songs of the Maluku Protestant Church.

The thesis statement of this research is analyzed in more depth using art-based qualitative research methods, as proposed by Susan Finley. Artworks not only present aesthetic data that contain elements of beauty to be enjoyed but also communicate meaningful values for social life (Finley, 2011). Data in art-based qualitative research, in addition to referring to musical elements such as melody, harmony, and lyrics, is also closely related to the cultural context, habits, and social life of the community that influences a musical creation, as well as the ownership of the musical work. With a qualitative descriptive and hermeneutic analysis approach, the central thesis that has been proposed will be discussed systematically, analyzing the diversity of cultural and religious identities, the role of musical harmony for social harmony, and analyzing the key components in the lyrics of the Maluku Protestant Church hymn that contribute to building social harmony between communities.

Result

Intertwining of Cultural and Religious Identities in Church Music

Starting the result of this research, I'd like to display the data of the relational expression of cultural and religious identity for social harmony through musical harmony in the liturgical singing tradition of the Maluku Protestant Church (GPM), entitled *Hallelujah*, by relating the religious and cultural languages of the Maluku people, namely *pela-gandong*, *ain ni ain*, and *kalwedo*.

10. HALELUYA, HALE, HALELUYA

do = g 4 ketuk

3 4 5̣ . . 6̣ 5̣ 3̣ 0 1. Ha-le-lu - - ya. 2. Ha-le-lu - - ya. 3. Ha-le-lu - - ya. 4. Ha-le-lu - - ya. 5. Ha-le-lu - - ya.	1 1 6̣ 6̣ 5̣ . . 6̣ 5̣ 3̣ 0 Ha-le, ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le, ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le, ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le, ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le, ha-le-lu - - ya.
3̣ 3̣ 3̣ 2̣ . . . 1̣ 2̣ 0 Ain ni a - in O-kal-we-do, Pe-la, gan-dong Pu-ji Tu-han, Lof de Heer,	4̣ 4̣ 4̣ 3̣ . . 4̣ 3̣ 2̣ 0 ain ni a - in o - kal-we-do pe-la, gan-dong pu-ji Tu-han Lof de Heer
3 4 5̣ . . 6̣ 5̣ 3̣ 0 Ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le-lu - - ya.	1 1 6̣ 6̣ 5̣ . . 6̣ 5̣ 3̣ 0 Ha-le, ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le, ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le, ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le, ha-le-lu - - ya. Ha-le, ha-le-lu - - ya.
2 3 4 4 . 2 1̣ . 7̣ . 1̣ . . . 1̣ 0 Ma-ri nya-nyi ain ni a - in. Ma-ri nya-nyi o-kal - we - do. Ma-ri nya-nyi pe-la gan - dong. Ma-ri nya-nyi pu-ji Tu - han. Ma-ri nya-nyi lof de Heer.	

Lirik : Christian Izaak Tamaela, 1996
 Lagu : Christian Izaak Tamaela, 1996

Figure 1 The Song of Halleluya in GPM Hymn No10.

In Figure 1, we can see the sheet music for the hymn "Hallelujah," which is an integral part of the liturgical tradition of the Maluku Protestant Church. This hymn, composed by Christian Izaak Tamaela in 1996, exemplifies the blending of religious and cultural expressions within the context of the Maluku people's musical heritage. In the GPM Congregation Songs book, this song is part of the category "Facing God, Praise and Opening of Worship" (Nu. 1-41). MH, a theologian who is also a member of the GPM singing core team, explained that in the liturgy or worship tradition, it always begins with the congregation facing God. The theological meaning is that worship or gathering of the congregation (liturgy) has the primary purpose of praising and worshipping God. Therefore, the GPM songs grouped in the Facing God category are intended so the congregation can easily use them as opening songs in worship. MH further explained about the song Hallelujah, there is a uniqueness of the GPM congregation's song, namely an expression of praise worshipping God, which can be expressed through the life practices of the brothers in Maluku, such as *ain ni ain*, *kalwedo*, *pela-gandong*, as described in the lyrics of this song. Thus, the life of the people as a cultural value ingrained in the ethnicity of the Maluku people is an act of glorifying God. This is a real form of the relationship between cultural identity, religion, and music (MH, interview, 10-29-2024). The discovery of the interrelation between cultural, religious, and musical identities in this Congregational Song can be achieved, among other things, through the interpretation of the text or lyrics of the song, which convey messages of social harmony through music. Thus, in this one song, we find several essential expressions, namely the expressions *hallelujah*, *pela-gandong*, *ain ni ain*, and *kalwedo*. I attempted to explore the realm of meaning behind these expressions. The following table outlines the key components of the hymn and their symbolic significance.

Table 1 The key components of the hymn GPM 10: Haleluya

No.	Hymn Element	Lyric Content	Identity Dimension	Cultural/Religious Meaning
1	Title	Haleluya	Religious	Christian expression of praise
2	Line 1	"Haleluya <i>kita bersaudara</i> "	Cultural-Religious	Unity and brotherhood in God
3	Line 2	" <i>Pela-gandong</i> "	Cultural	Kinship across villages in Maluku
4	Line 3	" <i>Ain ni Ain</i> "	Cultural-Religious	Kei Islands' philosophy of unity beyond religion
5	Line 4	" <i>Kalwedo</i> "	Cultural	Symbol of non-violence and peace in Southwest Maluku

Table 1 presents the key components of the hymn "GPM 10: Haleluya," offering an insightful breakdown of its elements and their symbolic meanings. This table serves as a foundation for understanding how each part of the hymn reflects the interconnectedness of cultural and religious identities within the Maluku Protestant Church. In the following sections, a more detailed explanation of each component will be provided, examining how the title, lyrics, and cultural references in the hymn contribute to the overall message of unity, peace, and social harmony. This breakdown will explore how religious expressions and cultural practices are woven together through the song, illustrating the profound relationship between the Maluku people's traditions and their Christian faith.

a) **Hallelujah**

The hymn of GPM Nu. 10 begins with the phrase Hallelujah as the title of the song. The phrase hallelujah is a theological expression taken from the biblical tradition. From Hebrew, this word is called "hal'uh-loo'yuh," which means "praise the Lord." In the Bible, this word is found in the Psalms and the text of the book of Revelation. The word hallelujah is mentioned 23 times in Psalms 104-150. In the book of Revelation, the author translates the Hebrew phrase into Greek, which means praising God in Heaven (Rev. 19:1-6). In the Bible, this phrase refers to a liturgical expression or worship, and is also a song of praise to God. This praise expresses gratitude and joy for the salvation that God has bestowed upon the lives of believers. This expression has also become a model of the language of the community of people who gather together, share, love each other, and are friends or brothers. It signifies a harmonious community in which God reveals His blessings and presence (Brettler, 2011). This belief confirms that praise to God has two meaningful sides, namely to glorify Allah and create peace and prosperity on earth (Lambert & Martin, 1986).

b) **Brotherhood (*Orang Basudara*): *Pela-Gandong***

Living as brothers is a way of life that places oneself as fellow children of the Maluku nation, whether from different islands, cultures, languages, or religions, in a life of virtue as siblings to live caring for each other—*Baku Kalesang*—loving each other—*Baku Sayang*—and making peace with each other—*Baku Bae*. Siblings have the meaning that all children of the nation or people of Maluku come from the womb of the motherland called Maluku (A Watloly, 2012). The collective memory of the *Orang Basudara* in

Maluku is based on historical-cultural experiences such as Gilbert's idea of a chronicle (Gilbert, 2010). Historical and cultural experiences can be presented in various rituals that bind collective awareness as a society, while also allowing for collective representation of a community. In Maluku, historical experiences and collective memories that form cultural identity are manifested in the cultural rituals of the lives of the people of the brotherhood, such as *pela-gandong*, *ain ni ain*, and *kalwedo* as expressed in the lyrics of this song.

The word *pela* can refer to at least three kinds of meaning (Ruhlessin, 2005, pp. 145–152). First, in the linguistic environment of Ambon Island, Haruku, and Lease, the word *pela* means enough or to end. *Pela* refers to the historical context of war between tribes, community groups, or families. In that context, the *pela* bond was formed as a cultural mechanism to end or terminate the war so the community could live again as brothers. Second, the meaning of *pela* from the language of the community on Seram Island was written with the word *peia*, which means brother. *Peia* or brother in the *kakehan* tradition does not refer to a genealogical relationship, but to tribal membership. This word becomes a bond that unites one person with another as brothers, and is distinguished from other tribes seen as enemies. Third, the meaning of *pela* comes from the term *pela-hela*, which refers to the relationship between parents in the past or the relationship of ancestors. This understanding shows that a *pela* bond between countries or community groups comes from the same ancestors or elders, and later became known as the term *pela-gandong*. The word *gandong* itself is associated with the phrase *rachim*, which refers to the womb, so people with a *gandong* bond mean that their ancestors are fellow siblings.

From the three definitions above, the Maluku people interpret and practice *pela-gandong* as a bond of brotherhood or fellowship developed between residents of two or more countries in Maluku. The bond of *pela-gandong*, or the bond of life as brothers, occurs through formal cultural rituals framed in the social and cultural system of the Maluku people, which is officially recognized and practiced in society (Aholiab Watloly, 2013). The cultural context of *pela-gandong*, a source of theology in the GPM hymn No. 10, is very thick in the lives of the people in Maluku. In reality, *pela-gandong* has become a cultural language and a religious language that contributes to building peace in Maluku (Pattipeilohy et al., 2024).

c) *Ain ni Ain*

Furthermore, the expression *ain ni ain* was born from the womb of the culture of the people of the Kei Islands. Weldemina Yudit Tiwery said that the cultural philosophy of *ain ni ain* and the cultural practice of *Larvul Ngabal* have existed for thousands of years in the lives of the Kei people and have been proven to maintain harmony in life between communities. Interestingly, this cultural bond is not only for people with the same religious identity, but also harmony in life between people of different religions (Tiwery, 2018, p. 8).

The customary law of *Larvul Ngabal*, adopted by the Kei Islands community, is beneficial in uniting the diversity of religions. This study found that *Larvul Ngabal* was successfully used by the highest customary holder (*Orsiuw*) and the sovereignty holder (Lor Lim) to reconcile the conflicts experienced by the Kei Islands community. Because in the *Larvul Ngabal* law, all communities are respected and united. This is also emphasized by the philosophy of *manut anmehe tilur, fuut anmehe ngifun*, which means eggs come from one chicken and eggs come from one fish. This philosophy manifests that the Kei Islands community comes from one lineage. Therefore, they must love and

respect each other despite their different religions. *Larvul Ngabal* also plays a role in uniting the ethnic diversity in the Kei Islands. Communities outside the Kei Islands (Java, Buton, and Bugis) can be accepted as part of the Kei Islands community. This proves that the customary law of *Larvul Ngabal* has been successfully interpreted as a basis for living together in diversity, even though there are still people in the Kei Islands who are not yet open to accepting diversity. However, this does not have a massive impact on the built collectivity.

In addition, *ain ni ain* is a philosophy of life that plays a significant role in the lives of the people of the Kei Islands. Its function is to unite the diversity (social and religious) of the Kei Islands society that has been inherited since ancient times. *Ain ni ain* is holistically interpreted as unity. *Ain* in the Kei language means "one", not singular, but plural. In the calculation of the Kei people, one (singular) is "*Sa*" which in the calculation is always called: *ain sa*, *ain ru*, *ain tel* (one-one = one, one-two = two, one-three = three, and so on); while *Ni* means "have or possess". Based on this terminology, *ain ni ain* means "one has one". Individuals or groups place/view other people (*liyan*) as their brothers. Another meaning is that the existing *ain* (the original) places and accepts the *ain* "who comes" as his brother, even as a sibling (Kudubun 2016). The meaning of *ain ni ain*, or "one has one," is still practiced in the lives of the Kei Islands community. The Kei Islands community uses the *ain ni ain* philosophy as the basis for living together in diversity, such as helping each other. More than that, the philosophy of life of the Kei Islands community can be used as a basis for building a life together in diversity by the Kei Islands community, Southeast Maluku (Tiwery, 2018).

d) *Kalwedo*

The cultural expression *Kalwedo* in congregational singing comes from the language of the people of Southwest Maluku. According to Watloly, finding the semantic (etymological) roots of the word *Kalwedo* is still challenging, which is very popular in the cultural circles of the Maluku people. This word is likely from the 'local language' of the local people, which is closed, so it is difficult to find its meaning again. However, Watloly explained that *Kalwedo* has equivalent words to several other expressions in the local dialect. For example, *Kalyel* = not strong, hard (East Babar), *Kale* = nothing (Kisar/Meher). Philosophically, the semantic roots of these words are intended to ensure the existence of an attitude of lack of strength or violence, or an attitude of surrender (surrender with the belief in goodness) to surrender part of life (love and sincerity) as a sign of a guarantee of safe, peaceful, comfortable, safe, or good living conditions (Aholiab Watloly, 2012, p. 9).

The word *kalwedo*, as the root of the phrase *kalyel* or *kale*, is intended to ensure that there is no need to be suspicious or prejudiced about the presence of poison, amulets, on the *sopi* drink that is served or that there is no plan of persecution or murder with physical violence on a meeting, arrival or farewell, because with the drink accompanied by *kalwedo* or with the meeting and arrival accompanied by *kalwedo*, we are united by the traditional *sopi* drink in a bond of brotherhood, or a promise to live in peace. That becomes a tradition and cultural custom to accept or release fellow brothers, both those who come to visit or meet or those who separate or leave us. So that, makes a *kalwedo* a tradition and custom of life.

This means that all semantic roots have synonymous meanings as signs and attitudes of friendship or brotherhood without suspicion, without violence, without physical strength, all of which mean the existence of a non-violent nature, a nature without cruelty that injures, or a nature of friendliness and gentleness of heart, without hurting, not lying,

not attacking, and not betraying with violent intrigues of reason or bad behavior. So, the true meaning of the words is intended to describe the existence of an attitude of frankness (nothing is hidden), purity of heart, gentleness of soul and relief of mind within them (ancestors and children of the MBD tribe) to accept each other, protect each other, unite in feeling, and live together in harmony, as brothers. In addition to semantic factors (language), the next difficulty is tracing the historical traces of the emergence and use of the word *kalwedo*, for which there is almost no data. However, there is a strong suspicion that the word *kalwedo* emerged as a sign (sign word) of the beginning of a paradigm of the original civilization of the people of the Southwest Maluku Archipelago (MBD), namely, a civilization without violence (Aholiab Watloly, 2012). This Protestant Church of Maluku song significantly differs from songs that emphasize particular religious messages or teachings. However, in the GPM song, we find a harmonious blend of cultural and religious identity intertwined with beautiful musical harmony. This song presents beauty when sung and the beauty of life that must be actualized in maintaining brotherhood, *pela-gandong*, *ain ni ain*, *kalwedo*, as God's Grace for all Maluku people.

Diverse Cultural and Religious Identities in Music Harmony

This study draws on Paul Gilbert's thoughts on cultural identity as presented in his book, *Cultural Identity and Political Ethics* (2010). This book is interesting because, in addition to presenting the concept of identity politics and cultural identity both personally and collectively, Gilbert also discusses the role of works of art, especially music, in bringing a society's cultural identity (Gilbert, 2010) to life. Meanwhile, the concept of diverse religious identities has also been embedded in the idea of cultural identity, explained by Gilbert. Still, it will be complemented by ideas from Catherine Keller and Schneider regarding the multiplicity of religious identities.

The development of the world today has made human cultural identity very valuable, among other things, to provide support for political claims. So, political claims are always made in an appreciation of human identity. Political claims can be in the form of political recognition and support needed from the base of community members with interrelated cultural identities, such as being in the same place and having the same goals within the context of a multicultural society. In this context, the value of cultural identity is often seen as justifying the appropriateness of political recognition of a group whose members share such an identity. Thus, Gilbert asserts that the value of cultural identity allegedly justifies the appropriate political recognition of groups whose members share such an identity (Gilbert, 2010).

The discourse on cultural identity needs to be based on its proper understanding. According to Gilbert, there are two understandings of cultural identity. The first refers to an individual's identity in its cultural aspects, which is called individual cultural identity. The second refers to the identity of a member of a particular cultural group. Cultural identity attached to individual identity is relatively unproblematic because each individual will produce their own identity in cultural aspects, such as their language, religion, moral education, social behavior, etc. Cultural factors also contribute, among others, to the concept of self, how the individual understands, and how others know them. In this regard, Gilbert agrees with the idea of a hybrid identity resulting from mixing culture or characteristics and cultural aspects within a person with their surrounding environment.

In addition to individual identity, cultural identity is also inherent in a group of people collectively, which is also called a collective cultural identity. On the other hand, the cultural identity that refers to individual identity is relatively unproblematic. In that

case, the cultural identity attached to a cultural group is considered challenging to classify. This fact is caused by the combination of each individual's self-identity, which has a diverse self-concept, accompanied by the diversity of cultural aspects that accompany it. That is why Gilbert stated that it is not simply a group classified in terms of some cultural features or others.

In this regard, the idea of a culture group then becomes the idea of a group sharing a culture. Talking about a culture does not ignore the diversity of other cultural aspects, but rather a culture is collected together from the diversity of cultural aspects, which are then agreed upon by all members of the group or community to be used as a common culture. This method of collecting together is seen as a way of giving a special characterization to the entire life path of each participant or member of the community. Here, a culture that has been collected is seen as the whole way of life, which is globally distinguished from everything that comes from outside. This collective cultural identity then becomes a different or special lifestyle for the cultural group. However, it should be remembered that collective cultural identity involves broad support or includes many identities. Gilbert states that a cultural group is the idea of a group sharing a culture, not just some cultural features. To speak of a culture here is to presuppose that cultural features can be collected together in such a way as to characterize its participants' whole way of life, as this is often expressed, so that one culture can be distinguished globally from another as picking out a distinct way of living... Therefore, cultural identity as membership of a cultural group involves the concept of such a supposedly wide-ranging identity (Gilbert, 2010).

In the next section, Gilbert elaborates further on deep identity. This idea refers to constructing a collective cultural identity based on several bases, such as shared values, a common language, a common history, and so on, until the combination of several cultural aspects that characterize a single cultural identity (Gilbert, 2010). In constructing a deep collective cultural identity, one crucial element needs to be considered, namely, the narrative identity. In philosophical terms, the narrative identity is often referred to as a continuation of self-consciousness: what makes a person the same as another person at any given time – what gives them a sense of shared identity – and what historical facts or events can they remember as the driving force behind the formation of that collective identity. However, the narrative identity also requires a subject who can sharply reflect on the meaning of each series of events that form that deep collective cultural identity.

Talking about the meaning of cultural identity values, Gilbert realized that expressing these values or meanings is often ambiguous. That is the reason why a language criterion is frequently needed. This language criterion allows for the sharing of various meanings and values of existing cultural identities, and in particular, the process of sharing meanings can produce a common language. And this common language is proposed as one of the language criteria, which can then be said to be a cultural language. Cultural languages are always formulated or expressed from the perspective, experience, and context of the community that owns the culture. According to Gilbert, this cultural identity language is more fundamental than cultural identity values because changes in cultural identity values only become possible within the resilience of the framework of meaning shared with others, both those who believe and those who do not (Gilbert, 2010). All of this, of course, depends on how to discuss the value of cultural identity so that it can be accepted by all parties and is no longer trapped in obscurity.

Gilbert's explanation of the Art of Identity is the next theoretical idea closely related to this study. Gilbert begins his explanation with an interesting sentence emphasizing the relationship between music and cultural identity. Thus Gilbert states, that now it is widely

accepted that cultural identities, and in particular national identities, are constituted, at least in part, by distinctive artistic productions - literature, painting, music and so on - to which the members of a cultural group will have responses of a sort not shared by those outside it (Gilbert, 2010). Gilbert's statement emphasizes that artistic production, such as literary works, paintings, musical works, and so on, has been widely recognized and has an influence in raising various cultural identities, even national identities. Each member of a cultural group will have a special response to each work of art produced, and that response certainly cannot be shared by those from outside. Furthermore, Gilbert added that the response with aesthetic value will be a model that shows reactions to various cultural stories, where everyone can identify their collective cultural identity based on the value obtained from the artwork. The aesthetic response also indicates a sense of identity that is revealed through reflection on the reality experienced and felt through the presence of the artwork. However, the reflection produced from the sense of identity can be in the form of perception on the one hand, and on the other hand, can be in the form of an expression of emotion. One of the works of art mentioned here is music. Gilbert stated that people bring various thoughts to bear on the music, which enables them to hear it in a certain way. The music is hospitable to the standard features of these thoughts and people with shared experiences (Gilbert, 2010).

Gilbert sees music as a product of human thought and feeling, which is rooted in and expresses the context or experience of their lives. That means every piece of music starts from the context and understanding of humans, which, in particular, also communicates self-identity with feelings and expressions. Works of art also form human feelings inherent in their identity. Gilbert wrote, "I suggest, for the music and other artistic productions that are special to a particular people. They can identify with it because they undergo the feelings it expresses, and this can be the case even though the availability of those feelings, as shared in this form, is mediated by just these productions. So again, I want to see these feelings as shaped by the artworks viewed as expressing them, rather than pre-existing them" (Gilbert, 2010). Music creation in a particular context also applies to folk music. Thus, Gilbert stated that they are folk music, the music of a specific people with which they identify. What is involved here is, I want to say, a feeling of identification, not just an acknowledgment that group members make simply because they know that some artwork has special cultural significance for them.

Thus, musical works produced from the context of a particular society's cultural identity can be easily experienced and their aesthetic values felt. Even more than that, musical works can very easily help present or revive cultural significance for the society that owns the music and culture. Every member of a cultural group will experience works of art that are born from the context of their life experiences as something they own or possess. Furthermore, these works of art can be used to unite and share cultural feelings. Therefore, Gilbert states, the members of a cultural group experience their artworks as their own, then, because they have a serious use for them, a use which engages shared feelings—feelings which are only coincidentally shared by others outside the group, not shared in virtue of who they are. However, because members take the works to be specifically theirs through expressing these feelings, they expect fellow members to share their appreciation and thereby make the same identificatory responses. It is to this aspect that we now turn.

In Paul Gilbert's view, cultural identity includes religious identity, which has the same frame as personal and collective identity. However, it is interesting to add the flow of thought of the multiplicity of identity, which understands that human identity from the beginning has been created as a diverse entity or multiplicity, not just plural. Multiplicity

comes from two Latin syllables, *multus*, which means many, and *pli*, which means folds, so multiplicity means many folds. The meaning of this word can be described as the folding of origami paper, which forms many folds intertwined on one sheet of paper (Keller, 2003, p. 231). Although it emphasizes the many, multiplicity has a different meaning from plurality. Multiplicity weaves the many within the one, while plurality views the many outside the one.

Catherine Keller and Schneider distinguish multiplicity (*pli*) from plurality, namely multiplicity as a folded and unfolding relationality that does not indicate a relation between many separate things, but rather a relation between singularities, events that are folded together, intersecting, entangled, and interwoven, intertwined, as multiples together (Keller & Schneider, 2011, p. 7). In this concept, I want to show that the diversity of religious identities in Indonesian society is a relational diversity between different singularities. Differences in religious identity are not threats that lead to conflict and separation, but rather like the philosophy of *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* - the diversity of religious identities is a relational unity, different but still one as the Indonesian nation.

Musical Harmony for Social Harmony

Social harmony, which is always the main word in peace studies, cannot be separated from its origins in musical harmony. John M. O'Connell mentioned that one of the studies of the social function of music is related to efforts to transform conflict. Connell noted that the term harmony, for example, is very attached to the concept of music theory and the domain of anthropology. Social harmony in the conflict transformation scenario is inspired by musical harmony. In music theory, harmony is produced from a combination of different tones. This can also refer to the combination of each individual's cultural and religious identities to become a collective cultural and religious identity, to strive for social cohesion or social stability. In addition, Connell agrees with Johan Galtung's theory that music can resolve conflicts more empathetically and without violence (O'Connell & Castelo-Branco, 2010).

In his book *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (2005), John Paul Lederach explains concrete examples of music's function and role in reconciliation or peace efforts in several places. Lederach recounts one of his experiences as a keynote speaker and delegate for a peace declaration in Northern Ireland in 1994, between the Republican Party and loyal military supporters. During the event, there was tension between the two camps. The committee of this event spontaneously interrupted the declaration event with a dance and music performance performed by young people from the Catholic and Protestant churches. A traditional singer from Ireland, Paul Brady, performed and sang a traditional song entitled "The Island". At the back of the stage, where Brady sang, there was a large screen that played recordings of the conflict and violence that had occurred in Ireland for 32 years. Many lives were lost. Children who had lost their parents and were unable to go to school were shown. One of his song lyrics states that violence is trying to carve tomorrow from a tombstone and is wasting our children's future for the worn-out dreams of yesterday (Lederach, 2005).

The music performance simultaneously made hundreds of people who attended the declaration event silent. Many people took out their handkerchiefs to wipe away tears. Near the end of the performance, each opposing group embraced each other and apologized for all the events, conflicts, and violence that had damaged their lives and futures. In his study, Lederach stated: Music, it seems, has the power to push things either in the direction of greater violence or toward reconciliation... the concrete challenges of

their enemy through song and words to become sane human beings. One could argue that a song changed a person and transformed our globe (Lederach, 2005).

In his anthropological study, Edi Sedyawati explains the social function of art, including music. According to him, artistic expression or artistic performance, in addition to its aesthetic or entertainment value, also has social functions. To test the social function in art, the methodological question is what social needs are fulfilled by the creation and presentation of particular works of art; the artistic activity itself is the fulfillment of what social demands; or how the relationship between individuals, between communities, certain powers has given direction to a creative activity. Thus, for Sedyawati, art has the nature and function of *dolce* (entertainment, spectacle) and *utile* (useful, guidance) (Edi Sedyawati, 2006).

From Church Tradition to Music Harmony for the Sake of Social Harmony

The church tradition that has developed so far practices church music as liturgical music that has become part of Christian worship. Church music always contains church traditions and teachings, the proclamation of the Word of God, theological understanding, and the experience of the faith of believers. F. England, who wrote about Music, Theology, and Space, stated, "music, it will be claimed, intones the meaning of being human." According to England, in the Christian tradition, music is one of the centers of liturgy and worship, besides the proclamation of the word as the main center. Church music is called sacred music, which brings to life the sacred tradition and teachings of Christianity to strengthen the relationship between humans and God (England, 2017).

Unlike England's, this study shows that church music contains theological traditions and understanding of Christian faith, which is also separated from the reality of people's lives. In the songs of the Maluku Protestant Church, the combination of religious identity, especially including Christian teachings, traditions, and faith, is harmoniously combined with cultural identity, which also includes cultural teachings and traditions rooted in the daily lives of believers who are a cultured society. More than that, the harmonious combination of religious and cultural identities in GPM songs plays a crucial role, namely to strengthen the intimate relationship between people and God and the intimacy of relationships between fellow human beings, including those of different faiths. The cultural expressions contained in church songs, such as *pela-gandong*, *ain ni ain*, *kalwedo*, are intended and lived by church members and people of other religions. For this reason, GPM songs show a shift from the tradition of faith to musical harmony in order to build social harmony.

Christian I. Tamaela explained that Maluku ethnic and church music are separate elements. However, in practice, these two elements can be woven together as in the GPM song, thus producing aesthetic beauty in the music and a liturgical act. With it, music is also seen as a gift from God for life (Tamaela, 2015). Deeper than Tamaela's expression, I found a blend of cultural or ethnic identity with religious identity in the GPM song, which not only produces aesthetic beauty but also provides real guidance that differences in religious and cultural identity in the life of an artistic society are God's gifts to build harmony in life. The harmony of life can be celebrated through musical harmony that aesthetically combines differences in beautiful melodies of peace.

This study demonstrates how church music, which combines religious and cultural identities, plays a crucial role in fostering social harmony. In line with this finding, several previous studies have also explored the relationship between sacred music, cultural identity, and social harmony. Specifically, there is a similarity in how church or sacred

music serves as a means to strengthen cultural identity while promoting social unity. However, there are also differences in the context and approach, as seen in Brodd's (2006) study on the relationship between church music and ecclesiology, as well as Davies (2015), who emphasizes the importance of liturgy in shaping theological understanding.

This study aligns with previous research that examines the close relationship between church music, liturgy, and theology, but adds a new dimension by focusing on the fusion of religious and cultural identities in GPM church music. It highlights how church music functions not only as a tool to strengthen unity within the church community but also to create social harmony that transcends traditional theological boundaries. As Sawicki (2024) explains, GPM church music operates in a broader context, contributing to a more holistic understanding of interfaith relations and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

In contrast to previous research that focused more on the theological and liturgical aspects within specific church contexts, such as Suárez et al. (2013), who studied the relationship between church acoustics and liturgy, this study introduces a stronger social dimension. It emphasizes how church music in Maluku not only enriches the liturgical experience but also serves as a bridge between different cultural groups, fostering stronger interfaith relationships. Thus, this study provides a new contribution to understanding how church music can support broader social harmony.

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of how GPM church music uniquely blends religious and cultural identities, not only enriching the liturgical experience but also fostering social harmony. Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on the theological and liturgical functions of church music, this research highlights the significant role of church music in bridging cultural divides and promoting interfaith unity. By integrating cultural expressions, such as *pela-gandong* and *Ain ni Ain*, into the worship experience, GPM music transcends traditional religious boundaries, offering a holistic approach to social cohesion that aligns with both faith and cultural traditions. This study thus contributes a fresh perspective by demonstrating how church music can serve as a catalyst for interfaith and intercultural understanding, strengthening relationships not only between believers and God but also among individuals from diverse religious backgrounds.

The interpretation of the results of this study shows that the integration of religious and cultural identities in GPM church music not only enriches individual spiritual experiences but also has profound social implications. Socially, church music can serve as a tool for building bridges between different cultural and religious groups, as discussed in previous studies on the role of church music as a means of connecting these groups (Latif, 2025; Wiebe, 2018). By incorporating local cultural elements into church songs, such as *pela-gandong*, GPM successfully creates a space where religious and cultural differences are not seen as barriers but as a wealth that enhances togetherness. This concept aligns with the view that religion and culture are mutually enriching and inseparable in human life (Li & Zhang, 2025). Historically, the church in Maluku has adapted to social changes, using music as a tool to respond to social challenges and promote interfaith harmony (King, 2016; Lowry & Littlejohn, 2006). This study illustrates how church music not only enriches the liturgical experience but also strengthens the relationships between different groups, deepening the understanding and meaning of the role of religion and culture in a pluralistic society.

Moreover, the understanding that religion and culture are an interconnected whole makes church music a tool for strengthening social bonds and building peace. Music, as an expression of both culture and religion, plays a crucial role in building bridges between

groups with different religious and cultural backgrounds. Through church music that blends local elements, as seen in the church in Maluku, religious and cultural differences are harmonized into forms that are acceptable to all parties, fostering a sense of community and a stronger shared identity (Roberts, 2013). Therefore, this study demonstrates that understanding religion and culture as an interconnected whole is highly relevant in creating social peace and harmony between different groups, while also strengthening intercultural understanding in shared life.

The reflection on the results of this study reveals several important implications, both in terms of the functions and dysfunctions arising from the integration of religious and cultural identities in GPM church music. On the positive side, this study highlights the significant role of church music in strengthening social harmony and enhancing understanding between different groups. Church music that integrates local cultural elements and religious traditions not only enriches the spiritual experience but also serves as an effective tool for building bridges between different faith communities. This approach aligns with findings showing that the integration of local cultural elements into church music creates a worship experience that is more relevant and acceptable to the local community, making it easier to understand and more meaningful (Priatelj, 2017; Ristiniemi, 2022). It can strengthen social bonds and reduce tensions between groups with different religious and cultural backgrounds, creating an inclusive space that enhances social cohesion in a pluralistic society, as discussed by Schnabel & Groetsch (2014) regarding the role of religion in building relationships among groups from different backgrounds.

However, there are also potential dysfunctions that need to be considered. One potential risk is if the integration of local culture into church music is not done carefully, it could lead to the marginalization or dilution of the core religious values. For instance, in an effort to unify various cultures, deeper theological messages may become obscured or reduced. This phenomenon is particularly evident in churches that adopt external, often globalized forms of worship music at the expense of their local cultural identity, leading to a diminished appeal within their own community (Devalve, 2019). In some cases, this marginalization occurs when churches that prioritize globalized music over indigenous cultural elements lose their relevance and prophetic voice in their own cultural context (Hellberg, 2010). Additionally, while church music has the potential to foster harmony between groups, there is a risk that the integrated cultural elements might cause tension within certain communities, especially when one culture feels dominant or undervalued in the process, which could lead to resistance from members who feel that these changes are inconsistent with their religious beliefs (Marti, 2012). Therefore, to avoid these potential issues, it is crucial to integrate local culture with sensitivity and inclusivity, ensuring that both cultural and religious elements are respected and properly understood, as suggested by Steuernagel (2021).

Based on the findings of the study and the identification of potential dysfunctions in the integration of local culture into church music, the actions or policies that need to be implemented include developing clearer guidelines for integrating culture and religion in worship practices. This policy should involve active engagement with local communities and religious leaders to ensure that the cultural elements integrated do not dilute the theological meaning or core religious messages. The church should facilitate open dialogue with congregants to assess sensitivity to proposed changes, ensuring that the local cultural elements introduced still respect and enhance religious teachings. Additionally, careful monitoring of the influence of globalization in church music is crucial to prevent the marginalization of local cultural identities. Training for church

leaders and musicians on how to blend cultural elements while respecting core religious values should be part of this policy. This approach aims to create harmony between religious traditions and local cultures without compromising the integrity of existing religious teachings.

Conclusion

Conflicts due to differences or diversity of cultural and religious identities in Indonesia are difficult to avoid and resolve simultaneously. Conflict as a social reality will always occur when the potentials of diversity are not appropriately managed. This study has shown that through the harmonization of music, the language of different cultural and religious identities can be harmonized to communicate hopes and messages of social harmony. Musical harmonization can be a non-violent approach, a form of creative diplomacy to strive for and maintain peace. In the church songs that have been analyzed, a harmonious blend of elements of Maluku cultural identity inherent in the lives of the Maluku people is clearly found, which are harmoniously interwoven with aspects of religious identity in musical harmony. These cultural elements are in the form of values and views on life, expressions of Maluku cultural lectionaries such as *pela-gandong*, *orang basudara*, *ain ni ain*, *kalwedo*, and various languages contained in the song text, and expressed in tones, melodies, and *musical* rhythms. The blend of cultural, religious, and musical identity has a role and function of being an expression of worship and the social function of building cultural identity and religious identity that contribute to building and maintaining social harmony between communities.

The intertwining of cultural and religious identities produced through musical harmonization can be a creative diplomatic approach to realizing peace in a multicultural and multireligious society. The songs of the Maluku Protestant Church that combine elements of the cultural identity of the Maluku people of different religions with the traditions, teachings, and identities of the Christian faith are one example of the contribution of religion through church traditions and songs in building and maintaining peace. This study has offered a new perspective in understanding church traditions and songs, namely not only as a central part of the liturgical tradition to worship God, cementing the intimacy of human relations with God, but at the same time, communicating messages of fellowship and intimacy of human relations with fellow human beings in the diversity of identities to realize social harmony.

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