

## MUSLIM MINORITIES IN JANJI MATOGU, TOBA: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-RELIGIOUS EXISTENCE AND CULTURAL ADAPTATION (1970–2020)

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the existence and socio-religious dynamics of the Muslim minority community in Janji Matogu Village, Toba Regency, from 1970-2020. The primary focus of this research is the cultural adaptation process carried out by the Muslim community amidst a Christian majority environment deeply rooted in Batak customs. The research employs the historical method, consisting of four stages: heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with religious and traditional leaders, field observations, and searches of local historical documents. The results indicate that the existence of Muslims in Janji Matogu is maintained through a “social syncretism” strategy, where Islamic identity is preserved without abandoning the values of Dalihan Na Tolu. The dynamics over five decades show a shift from mere survival to the strengthening of educational institutions and places of worship in harmony. This study concludes that cultural adaptation is the key to social integration, proving that differences in belief do not hinder community cohesion within the framework of inclusive Toba local wisdom.

**Keywords:** Muslim Minority; Janji Matogu; Toba; Cultural Adaptation; Social Dynamics.

### INTRODUCTION

North Sumatra is a region characterized by a highly heterogeneous sociological landscape, where the relationship between religion and culture often forms unique and complex patterns of interaction. In the discourse of Islamic history in Indonesia, academic attention has predominantly focused on coastal areas that served as the initial gateways for Islamization through global trade routes. Conversely, the inland or hinterland regions, which constitute the strongholds of non-Muslim cultural bases, are frequently overlooked in the grand narrative of national history. According to Reid (2014, p. 12), the process of Islamization in the Sumatran hinterlands faced structural and cultural challenges that were far more significant than those in the cosmopolitan and open coastal areas. In these inland regions, Islam had to negotiate with established customary laws (*adat*) and local belief systems that were highly protective of their original identity.

One area that represents this dynamic with precision is Janji Matogu Village in Toba Regency. Situated at the heart of Toba Batak culture, the existence of a Muslim minority in this village is a crucial historical phenomenon to examine. The primary challenge for this community is how they maintain their religious existence amidst the dominance of Christian traditions and powerful customary laws. Steenbrink (2006, pp. 45–48) notes that religious expansion in North Sumatra during the 19th and 20th centuries often created identity friction, where new religions were perceived as threats to the existing social structure. However, the Muslim community in Janji Matogu demonstrates a fascinating anomaly; they have remained capable of preserving their Islamic identity without being alienated from their Toba Batak cultural roots.



The urgency of this research is based on a void in the narrative (research gap) regarding the micro-history of the Muslim community in the Toba region. To date, literature on Islam in the Batak Lands has focused more on the Mandailing or Karo regions, which historically had earlier ties to Islam. Meanwhile, specific studies on the socio-religious dynamics in Janji Matogu Village from 1970 to 2020 remain largely untouched by historians and sociologists. The 1970–2020 period was chosen as it encompasses a crucial transition phase, ranging from the political stability of the New Order to the influx of information in the Reformation era, which influenced the patterns of adaptation and interaction between religious groups at the local level.

The central problem addressed in this article is how a minority community continuously negotiates its identity without losing its cultural essence. There is a common assumption in Batak society that becoming a Muslim means “leaving” the Batak identity (*tading di adat*); however, the sociological reality in Janji Matogu suggests a different pattern through a mechanism of harmonious adaptation. This aligns with the theory of cultural adaptation proposed by Koentjaraningrat (2009, p. 152), which posits that minority societies tend to develop social defense mechanisms through syncretism or acculturation to avoid destructive conflict with the majority. Through a socio-cultural history approach, this study aims to trace the traces of Islamic development in Janji Matogu diachronically and analyze the cultural adaptation strategies used to maintain social harmony. Practically, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the historiography of Islam in North Sumatra and serve as a model for studies on tolerance and social integration in other minority regions across Indonesia.

## METHODS

This study employs the historical method with an orientation toward a socio-cultural history approach. The selection of this approach is based on the need to dissect the dynamics of the Muslim community in Janji Matogu Village beyond mere grand narratives, focusing instead on “history from below,” which encompasses mentalities, social behavior, and inter-group interaction patterns. As emphasized by Kuntowijoyo (2003, pp. 38–40), socio-cultural history allows researchers to explore changes in social structures and values held within a specific timeframe diachronically. The research site in Janji Matogu Village, Toba Regency, was selected through purposive sampling due to its unique characteristics as a Muslim minority enclave in the heart of a Christian-majority region, offering a distinct case study of cultural adaptation over five decades (1970–2020).

The research procedure was conducted systematically through the four main stages of the historical method as outlined by Gottschalk (2015, p. 32). The first stage is heuristics, the effort to track and collect relevant sources. The researcher collected primary sources such as village archives and population records, alongside physical observations of cultural artifacts and religious facilities, specifically the mosque in Janji Matogu. Given the scarcity of written documents regarding the village's micro-history, oral history techniques served as the primary pillar through in-depth interviews with key informants. The research subjects included early converts (*mualaf*), religious leaders (*Imams*), customary leaders (*Raja Adat*), and local Christian residents who witnessed the



village's social transition since the 1970s. The use of oral history aims to capture emotions, perceptions, and collective memories often unrecorded in formal documents.

The second stage is verification or source criticism to ensure the authenticity and credibility of the data. The researcher performed external criticism to test the physical authenticity of documents and internal criticism to verify the accuracy of the information provided by informants. At this stage, oral accounts from Muslim figures were cross-referenced with those from non-Muslim figures to minimize subjectivity. The third stage is interpretation, where a deep analysis of validated facts is conducted. This process utilizes synthesis techniques to assemble fragments of information into a cohesive causal relationship to understand why and how specific cultural adaptation strategies were chosen by the Muslim community to maintain its existence.

The primary research instrument is the researcher themselves (human instrument), serving as both data collector and analyst, supported by interview guides and digital recording devices. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively-descriptively by applying a diachronic historical analysis model, observing the development of phenomena over a long chronological sequence. To ensure findings' validity, the researcher applied source triangulation. According to Zed (2014, p. 85), objectivity in socio-historical writing relies heavily on the researcher's ability to compare written and oral sources while confronting various perspectives. The final stage is historiography, where the analysis results are presented in an analytical chronological narrative, depicting a comprehensive and scholarly portrait of the socio-religious dynamics of the Janji Matogu community.

The theoretical foundation of this research rests on the theory of cultural adaptation developed by Koentjaraningrat (2009, p. 152), which posits that minority groups tend to develop social defense mechanisms through the adjustment of external elements to avoid conflict with the dominant majority. In the context of Janji Matogu Village, adaptation is not interpreted as a dissolution of faith (*aqidah*), but rather as a social syncretism where religious and ethnic identities coexist. This process allows the Muslim community to remain integrated within the Toba social structure without abandoning fundamental Sharia principles. These adjustments cover daily interactions, participation in customary ceremonies, and the use of culturally neutral symbols.

Beyond adaptation theory, this study utilizes the *Dalihan Na Tolu* kinship structure as an instrument for social integration. According to Sairin (2002, pp. 60–63), the Toba Batak kinship system—comprising *Somba Marhula-hula*, *Elek Marboru*, and *Manat Mardongan Tubu*—serves as a powerful social capital because it prioritizes bloodlines and lineage (*tarombo*) over religious differences. In this perspective, an individual who changes their religion retains the customary rights and obligations attached to their clan (*marga*). This structure acts as a sociological bridge that minimizes potential segregation, as the identity of being “clan kin” provides a guarantee of security and social recognition for the Muslim minority.

Furthermore, this study refers to the concept of “Civil Islam” offered by Hefner (2000, pp. 201–203), which emphasizes that harmony in Indonesia's heterogeneous society often arises from bottom-up local social contracts. The strengthening of religious institutions like mosques and madrasas in minority areas does not necessarily trigger a “clash of civilizations,” as feared in Western theses, but can instead become a space for the



“dialogue of life.” These dynamics show that through honest cultural communication and the utilization of local wisdom, dogmatic differences can be tempered by a shared interest in maintaining village stability. Thus, this theoretical study illustrates that the Muslim existence in Janji Matogu is the result of an intersection between religious devotion, customary loyalty, and an awareness of the importance of social cohesion.

Through this framework, the research is expected to produce findings regarding a model of “Functional-Social Syncretism”—a condition where the community of Janji Matogu successfully separates the private theological realm from the communal social realm. The practical benefit of this research is to serve as a policy reference for local governments in managing diversity in sensitive areas. Academically, this study is expected to fill the research gap in the historiography of inland North Sumatran Islam and prove that Toba's local wisdom possesses a strong resilience in nurturing religious plurality in Indonesia.

## DISCUSSION

### The Origins and Early Growth of the Muslim Community in Janji Matogu (1970s)

The existence of the Muslim community in Janji Matogu Village during the early 1970s represents a unique sociological and historical phenomenon. Situated in the heart of Toba culture—demographically dominated by Christians and remnants of local traditional believers (*Parmalim*)—the emergence of a Muslim community in this region challenged the mainstream historical narrative of the area. The growth of this community did not occur through mass expansion, political penetration, or institutionalized missionary movements; rather, it transpired through a microscopic process that was persuasive, organic, and gradual. History records that the emergence of this community was the result of a dialectic between economic needs, personal interactions, and the inherent openness of the local social structure.

This process involved two intertwined factors: the religious conversion of indigenous inhabitants (*mualaf*) and limited migration triggered by economic factors. Based on social mobility theory, the introduction of individuals with new beliefs into a well-established traditional social structure often brings a subtle shift in religious values through intense face-to-face interaction. Sjamsuddin (2007, p. 88) explains that in local history writing, the smallest unit—the family—acts as the most effective agent of change in transforming values at the grassroots level. In Janji Matogu, the early families who embraced Islam acted as “cultural bridges,” reconciling Islamic doctrine with the noble work ethic and customary laws (*adat*) of the Batak people.

Specifically, the early Islamization process in Janji Matogu during the 1970s was largely triggered by interfaith marriages. In the context of Batak society, marriage is not merely the union of two individuals but the unification of two large kinship groups (*marga*). Marriage became the most organic gateway because, within the Batak customary structure, kinship ties or *marsisolkotan* are often positioned as a more fundamental variable than dogmatic differences. Both matrilineal and patrilineal lines played vital roles in this process. A son-in-law (*anak boru*) who was Muslim, for instance, was still required to fulfill his customary obligations to his father-in-law's side (*hula-hula*). This consistency



in practicing *adat* ensured that the new identity (*Islam*) was not perceived as a threat to the existence of tradition.

Beyond the domestic factor of marriage, trade interactions with coastal regions such as Barus, Sibolga, and Central Tapanuli provided significant material contributions to the community's growth. Despite being located in the hinterland, Janji Matogu was part of a local economic network connected to coastal markets. Muslim traders who stopped by or temporarily settled for trade exerted spiritual influence not through pulpit sermons, but through daily conduct (*akhlaq*) in transactions—such as honesty, prayer discipline, and hospitality—which garnered the sympathy of local residents. This aligns with Ricklefs (2001, pp. 22–25), who states that the spread of Islam in the Sumatran hinterlands often moved in tandem with economic activities and intense personal interactions between traders and locals, where the marketplace became the most fluid space for identity negotiation.

During this initial phase in the 1970s, the Muslim community in Janji Matogu remained very small, consisting of only a few scattered households. The limited number of adherents and economic resources at the time meant that permanent public worship facilities, such as mosques or *musholla*, were not yet available. Consequently, collective religious activities—such as congregational prayers, basic Quranic recitations for children, and the celebration of major holidays like Eid al-Fitr—were conducted clandestinely or privately within residents' homes. The house of a Muslim elder usually served as the center for religious activities as well as a space for social consolidation.

This domestic and private practice of worship was not only due to financial constraints in building a house of worship but was also a deliberate social strategy to maintain harmony and sensitivity amidst the surrounding Christian majority. The early Muslim community in Janji Matogu recognized their position as “guests” in an established religious space. Gottschalk (2015, p. 112) emphasizes that minority groups in history often choose private spaces as a means of identity consolidation before eventually emerging publicly, in order to avoid unnecessary sociological friction. By limiting the visual and auditory aspects of their religious propagation (*syiar*), they successfully built mutual trust with the surrounding community.

This dynamic also illustrates how the early Muslim community reinterpreted space. Private residences were transformed into “functional mosques” at specific times. In these spaces, Islamic teachings were socialized in a manner highly contextual to Toba culture. The use of the Batak language to explain concepts of monotheism (*tauhid*) and ethics (*akhlak*) became a common method to ensure that Islamic teachings were understood without feeling foreign. This demonstrates that from the beginning, the Muslim community in Janji Matogu did not seek to separate itself from its Batak identity.

In conclusion, the 1970s in Janji Matogu represented a challenging “seed-planting” phase. During this period, the Muslim community constantly grappled with a duality of identity: being devout servants of Sharia while remaining loyal villagers of the local Toba tradition. Their success in surviving and gaining acceptance during these difficult years became the foundation for a more stable community growth in the following decades. They proved that Islam could grow in the heart of Toba not as a disruptive



foreign element, but as a new color enriching the mosaic of diversity in Janji Matogu society.

### Cultural Adaptation Strategies: Identity Negotiation within the Dalihan Na Tolu Framework

The essence of the long-term existence of the Muslim community in Janji Matogu Village lies in their collective success in conducting a fluid yet principled identity negotiation. The most apparent theological challenge arises when Islamic law (*Sharia*) stands in diametric opposition to Toba Batak customary rites (*adat*), which are communal and often involve elements considered non-halal in Islamic tradition—specifically the consumption of pork during traditional ceremonies. However, the Muslim community in this village did not choose the path of “extreme puritanism,” which tends toward self-seclusion from social interactions. Instead, they adopted a creative adaptation path that allows them to remain “devout Muslims” while simultaneously being “loyal Bataks.”

This adaptation strategy aligns with the theory proposed by Koentjaraningrat (2009, p. 152) regarding the social defense mechanisms of minority groups, wherein small groups perform functional adjustments to remain accepted without losing their core identity. In Janji Matogu, the Muslim minority firmly positions itself within the *Dalihan Na Tolu* (The Three Pillars) structure. This structure consists of *Somba Marhula-hula* (respect to the wife’s family), *Elek Marboru* (gentleness toward the daughter’s side/women’s group), and *Manat Mardongan Tubu* (caution and solidarity toward fellow clan members). They fully realize that in the land of Toba, the “clan” (*marga*) represents self-esteem and social capital that transcends dogmatic religious barriers. Sairin (2002, pp. 60–63) explains that for the Batak ethnic group, the kinship system is the primary social protector that guarantees the security and recognition of an individual within the group. A Muslim bearing a surname such as *Pardede*, *Simanjuntak*, or others in Janji Matogu is still considered a blood sibling (*sisolkot*) by Christian residents, provided they continue to fulfill their customary functions and obligations.

Technical modifications in traditional ceremonies serve as evidence of the local community’s sociological intelligence. In wedding feasts (*mangoli*), when a Muslim family acts as the host (*hasuhuton*), they implement highly detailed logistics management to respect multi-faith guests. The phenomenon of “separate plates and pots” is not merely a kitchen matter but an unwritten law upheld in Janji Matogu. Muslim families completely separate cooking areas, dining utensils, and raw ingredients. Unique to this setting, non-Muslim relatives will voluntarily help locate a Muslim cook (*parhobas*) to ensure the halality of the food for other Muslim guests.

Conversely, when Christian relatives host a feast, they proactively provide a “special table” or an area serving *naniarsik* (carp) cooked by Muslims for their Muslim siblings. This demonstrates that tolerance in Janji Matogu is not just a slogan but a motoric action in the kitchens of tradition. Abdullah (2006, pp. 115–117) views this phenomenon as a form of “integrative-interconnective” integration. In this perspective, religious identity does not destroy local culture; instead, it enriches the meaning of humanity through inclusive practical actions. The identities of “Muslim” and “Batak” are no longer seen as two repelling poles but as two intertwined identities.



Furthermore, this negotiation is profoundly moving during funeral rites. For the Toba Batak, death is a major customary affair involving the entire family lineage. Although the burial rites are performed according to Islamic tradition (washing, shrouding, and funeral prayers) and the deceased is buried in a Muslim cemetery, the procession from the funeral home is still attended by the entire customary community regardless of religion. The presence of non-Muslim relatives at a Muslim home is not to participate in theological rituals or faith-based prayers, but as a form of final respect for blood ties (*marsisolkotan*). They attend to perform customary duties, such as offering words of comfort (*mambosuri*) to the bereaved family.

This reinforces the thesis put forward by Lubis (2005, p. 78) that in the history of Islamic development in North Sumatra, the success of *dakwah* (proselytization) in the hinterlands relies heavily on the ability of its adherents not to separate themselves from traditional family structures. Herein lies the uniqueness of Janji Matogu: Islam is not viewed as a threat to the preservation of Batak *adat*, but as a new color enriching the village's social mosaic. The society has reached a consensus that "religion is the servant's business with God, while *adat* is a human's business with their siblings."

An analysis of these dynamics indicates the formation of a "Third Space" in Janji Matogu. This is a space of negotiation where Islamic symbols (such as the *hijab* or *peci*) coexist harmoniously with traditional symbols (such as the *ulos*). This adaptation strategy does not result in the loss of identity for either party; rather, it creates a stable social ecosystem. The Muslim minority does not experience cultural marginalization because they remain authority holders within the *Dalihan Na Tolu* structure according to their position in the clan lineage. The success of this identity negotiation proves that religious conflict can often be suppressed when local kinship structures are far stronger and more inclusive than narrow religious primordial sentiments. In this way, the Janji Matogu Muslim community has not only survived in quantity but has thrived in quality through mature social integration during the period from 1970 to 2020.

### ***Socio-Religious Dynamics: From Marginality to Institutional Strengthening (1986–2020)***

The transition of the Muslim community in Janji Matogu Village from a personal-domestic existence to an institutionalized presence represents a significant historical achievement. The period between 1986 and 2020 marked a phase of social establishment where this minority community no longer merely struggled to survive but successfully negotiated their permanent presence in the public sphere. By the mid-1980s, the need for a representative place of worship became urgent due to demographic growth from natural birth rates and stable inward migration. The construction of the first mosque in the village in the late 1980s was not merely a physical development; it was a historical milestone symbolizing the social recognition by the majority community of the Muslim minority's existence.

The process of building this house of worship serves as authentic evidence of "grassroots tolerance." According to oral history narratives from local community leaders, the mosque's construction was a collective effort involving non-Muslim residents. In the Toba community tradition, the concept of mutual cooperation, or *marsiadapari*,



transcends dogmatic boundaries. Non-Muslim residents in Janji Matogu participated in transporting building materials and clearing the land—actions demonstrating that the mosque's presence was viewed as a village asset rather than a threat to the dominant religion. This phenomenon aligns with Hefner's (2000, pp. 201–203) analysis of “Civil Islam,” which emphasizes that democracy and tolerance in Indonesia often do not stem from formal central government instructions but from “local social contracts” born out of mutual need and a sense of brotherhood as members of the same ethnic community. In Janji Matogu, the mosque's presence became a symbol that the Muslim community had been legitimately accepted as an integral part of the village's social ecosystem.

Entering the 2000s, socio-religious dynamics in Janji Matogu were strengthened by the emergence of non-formal educational institutions, such as the Madrasah Diniyah. The institutionalization of education provided a space for the second and third generations of Janji Matogu Muslims to access structured and in-depth religious knowledge. While the 1970s generation relied on oral religious knowledge limited to parental teachings, the millennial Muslim generation in this village began to possess broader religious literacy. However, a fascinating phenomenon occurred: despite studying religion more intensively, their loyalty to Toba Batak identity and customs showed no signs of fading. Their deep Islamic faith did not cause them to distance themselves from customary social rituals. This directly refutes Huntington's (1996) thesis, which predicts a “clash of civilizations” when religious identity strengthens within a heterogeneous society. In Janji Matogu, what occurred instead was an “embrace of civilizations,” where Islamic and Batak identities mutually confirmed one another.

This sociological condition is evident in the interaction patterns of multi-faith youth. Muslim and Christian youths in Janji Matogu frequently collaborate on various social activities, ranging from national holiday celebrations to community service for village cleaning. This collaboration proceeds without theological suspicion because the foundation of their relationship is based on *Dalihan Na Tolu*. As explained by Sjamsuddin (Sjamsuddin, 2007, p. 95), social integration in minority areas will function harmoniously if cultural communication channels remain open. In Janji Matogu, these channels are the shared local language and clans (*marga*), which serve as a “mother tongue” bridging the gap between different “languages of faith.”

In the last decade, leading up to 2020, the Muslim existence in Janji Matogu reached a point of absolute social establishment. The dynamics of the past five decades show that the Muslim minority has not only survived periods of marginalization but has also achieved healthy assimilation. They are Batak people who disciplinedly practice Islamic *Sharia*, while simultaneously being Muslims who uphold the noble values of Toba tradition. There has been no evidence of aggressive “Arabization” that could disrupt the local order, nor has there been any effort at marginalization from the majority. According to Abdullah (2006), such harmony can only be created if there is an awareness to conduct a “dialogue of life”—a dialogue that no longer debates theological truths in the public sphere but focuses on cooperation for collective welfare.

The conclusion of this historical progression confirms that the primary key to socio-religious harmony in Janji Matogu is honest “cultural communication” and the utilization of the *Dalihan Na Tolu* kinship system as a golden bridge connecting two



different worlds. This customary system provides a security guarantee for the minority, while Islamic teachings provide moral guidance for adherents to remain inclusive and courteous (*rahmatan lil alamin*). The transformation from a clandestine existence in private homes in the 1970s to a community with widely recognized institutions like mosques and madrasas by 2020 is a successful narrative of the history of Islamic civilization in the minority hinterlands of North Sumatra. This research proves that diversity is not a source of conflict but a dynamic strength capable of creating a resilient and tolerant society when managed with appropriate local wisdom.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the existence of the Muslim community in Janji Matogu Village is the result of micro-historical dynamics that have unfolded organically since the 1970s. The historical background of this community is rooted in the religious conversion of indigenous inhabitants (*mualaf*) as well as limited migration triggered by economic factors and interfaith marriages. In the initial phase, this community formed small groups that maintained their existence through domestic religious activities to preserve social harmony amidst the Christian majority.

The cultural adaptation strategy employed by the Muslim minority in Janji Matogu is based on intelligent identity negotiation, utilizing the *Dalihan Na Tolu* kinship system as a social umbrella. The Muslim community has successfully maintained its religious existence without severing customary ties. This is evidenced by technical modifications in customary rituals, such as the “separate plates and pots” tradition during feasts, and active participation in clan structures. This integration demonstrates that Islamic identity and Batak self-identity are not viewed as contradictory; rather, they are intertwined in forming an inclusive local identity.

The socio-religious dynamics from 1970 to 2020 show a transformation from a phase of marginality toward institutional establishment. The construction of the mosque and madrasah serves as a symbol of social recognition supported by a cross-faith spirit of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*). The successful resolution of potential conflicts through local wisdom proves that stability in Janji Matogu is not top-down but grows from a collective awareness of the importance of blood brotherhood. This research affirms that persuasive cultural adaptation is the primary key to achieving social integration in minority regions.

Based on these findings, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

1. For Local Government and Community Leaders: It is hoped that they will continue to preserve spaces for cultural dialogue based on local wisdom, such as *Dalihan Na Tolu*. Strengthening inclusive customary values has proven more effective in minimizing potential religious friction than formal-administrative approaches.
2. For Future Researchers: Given the limitations of this study, which focuses on socio-cultural history, future researchers are encouraged to conduct studies using a linguistic anthropology approach to examine how local languages are used as instruments of *dakwah* (proselytization) in the Toba region, or a political-economy approach to analyze how the economic status of the Muslim minority affects their bargaining power within customary structures.



3. For the Development of Historical Science: This study recommends the need for more research on “blank spots” in the historiography of Islam in the North Sumatran hinterlands to enrich the narrative of Islamic civilization history beyond coastal-centric perspectives.

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