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Reconciliation as Lived Intercultural Praxis: Local Culture as Locus Theologicus and Pedagogical Space in the Kloangdualiat Community Indonesia

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Abstract: This study examines the socio-cultural dynamics of the Kloangdualiat community in Wairbleler Village, Sikka Regency, through the lens of intercultural theology and reconciliation theory. While existing studies predominantly conceptualize reconciliation as a post-conflict mechanism, this research addresses the gap by exploring reconciliation as a continuous and lived process embedded in everyday social life. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that social cohesion is sustained through kinship structures, collective memory, and cultural practices such as gotong royong and customary deliberation. At the same time, structural challenges—including migration, economic hardship, and family conflict—generate ongoing tensions that require continuous relational negotiation. This study demonstrates that reconciliation is not merely a mechanism of conflict resolution but a lived intercultural praxis through which relationships are restored, identities are negotiated, and social meaning is constructed. Methodologically, the study contributes by integrating qualitative social analysis with intercultural theological interpretation. The findings further show that local culture functions not only as a locus theologicus where reconciliation is interpreted, but also as a pedagogical space where intercultural competencies are formed. Thus, reconciliation is reframed as a relational, cultural, theological, and educational process rooted in lived experience.

Keywords: Reconciliation, Intercultural theology, Local culture, Social capital.

INTRODUCTION

Social life in local communities in Indonesia is shaped by complex interactions between cultural values, kinship systems, and historical experiences. In many rural contexts,

social cohesion is maintained through practices such as mutual cooperation (gotong royong), communal deliberation, and norms of reciprocity. These practices function not only as social mechanisms but also as moral frameworks that regulate relationships and sustain trust, solidarity, and collective identity (Putnam, 2000).

From an intercultural theological perspective, culture is not a static structure but a dynamic and dialogical space where meaning is continuously negotiated through lived experience. Petrus Dori (2021) emphasizes that culture constitutes a locus of theological meaning where faith is expressed through everyday life. In this view, reconciliation cannot be reduced to an abstract concept but must be understood as a lived and formative process emerging from concrete intercultural encounters. Similarly, Gara et al. (2024) argue that intercultural awareness and competence are shaped through dialogical engagement and shared communal practices. This is reinforced by Kasiwali et al. (2024), who show that values such as empathy, openness, and cooperation develop through participatory intercultural processes rather than through normative teaching alone.

At the same time, socio-economic transformations such as labor migration, inequality, and shifting family structures have altered the social fabric of rural communities, often weakening kinship ties and increasing interpersonal and familial tensions (Geertz, 1973). Under such conditions, social relationships require continuous negotiation and adaptation. Reconciliation therefore becomes essential not only as a response to major conflict but also as a daily process that sustains communal life. Lederach (1997) conceptualizes reconciliation as a process integrating truth, justice, mercy, and peace, while Schreiter (1992) highlights the healing of memory and reconstruction of identity. However, much of the existing literature still frames reconciliation primarily within large-scale conflict settings, treating it as an exceptional post-crisis phenomenon.

Despite these theoretical developments, several gaps remain insufficiently addressed. First, reconciliation studies largely emphasize macro-level conflicts and overlook micro-social reconciliation as a continuous process embedded in everyday interaction. Consequently, the ways reconciliation is practiced, negotiated, and sustained within ordinary community life remain underexplored. Second, social capital theory highlights trust, networks, and cooperation as foundations of social cohesion (Putnam, 2000), yet it rarely addresses the deeper dimensions of moral transformation, emotional engagement, and relational healing that are central to reconciliation. Third, intercultural theology, particularly in the work of Dori, emphasizes contextual dialogue and lived experience but often remains normative and lacks empirical grounding. Conversely, empirical studies on intercultural competence (Gara et al., 2024; Kasiwali et al., 2024) provide valuable insights into processes of formation but are seldom integrated into theological frameworks of reconciliation. Fourth, there is still no integrative approach that connects reconciliation theory, intercultural theology, and intercultural competence formation into one analytical framework. Existing studies tend to separate social dynamics from theological interpretation, or discuss intercultural formation without linking it to reconciliation as a relational and theological praxis.

As a result, it remains unclear how everyday socio-cultural practices simultaneously function as mechanisms of social cohesion, processes of reconciliation, and spaces for the formation of intercultural competencies. In response to these gaps, this study focuses on the Kloangdualiat community in Wairbleler Village, Sikka Regency (Subun et al., 2025), a rural context characterized by strong kinship structures and enduring cultural traditions alongside contemporary socio-economic challenges. Specifically, the Kloangdualiat community in Wairbleler Village presents a distinct context defined by its deeply rooted *Huu Kian* kinship network, a traditional clan-based alliance system that governs land tenure, ritual obligations, and conflict resolution mechanisms. Unlike generic rural settings, Kloangdualiat features a

unique dual-normative reality where customary laws (*adat*) and Catholic religious traditions closely intertw, creating complex localized channels for moral authority and daily negotiation. Furthermore, the community experiences pronounced intergenerational and socio-religious friction caused by high rates of seasonal labor migration to Malaysia, which shifts traditional household headship to women and introduces external cultural influences into a historically endogamous social structure. These specific empirical conditions—where rigid traditional structures directly collide with and adapt to modern socio-economic pressures—make Kloangdualiat a particularly compelling case for examining micro-level reconciliation and intercultural learning in ordinary, non-violent post-crisis settings. This study aims to analyze the socio-cultural dynamics shaping everyday relationships, examine how these dynamics operate as lived practices of reconciliation, interpret these practices through intercultural theology, and explore how reconciliation is formed as intercultural competence through communal life.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative and empirically grounded approach. It reconceptualizes reconciliation as a lived intercultural praxis rather than merely a post-conflict mechanism, bridges intercultural theology (Wrogemann, 2016; Dori, 2021) with empirical studies on intercultural competence (Gara et al., 2024; Kasiwali et al., 2024), and positions local culture not only as a locus theologicus but also as a pedagogical space where reconciliation and intercultural competencies are formed (Gahungu, 2017; Dori, 2024). By developing a multidimensional framework connecting social dynamics, theological reflection, and intercultural education (Wrogemann, 2016; Gahungu, 2017; Dori, 2024), this study contributes to advancing reconciliation studies and intercultural theology by emphasizing reconciliation as a relational, cultural, theological, and educational process rooted in lived experience.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a case study design to explore reconciliation as a lived intercultural process within a specific community context. A qualitative approach is appropriate because this research aims to understand meanings, experiences, and social practices as they are lived and interpreted by community members. The case study design enables an in-depth and holistic examination of the Kloangdualiat community in Wairbleler Village, Sikka Regency, where reconciliation is not an isolated event but an ongoing process embedded in everyday life. Rather than treating reconciliation as a post-conflict phenomenon, this study conceptualizes it as a continuous relational and intercultural praxis.

Specifically, this study adopts an **instrumental single-case study design** (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The Kloangdualiat community was selected not merely for its geographic or cultural uniqueness, but because it serves as an exemplar *instrument* to unpack and extend the theoretical understanding of micro-social reconciliation. Rather than treating the community as an isolated phenomenon, this single case provides a rich, bounded context where three distinct operational dimensions converge: high-density customary kinship networks (*Huu Kian*), dual-normative legal-religious structures (*adat* and Catholicism), and severe external socio-economic disruptions (e.g., labor migration). Concentrating on a single, highly integrated case allows for a deep, holistic, and process-oriented investigation into how everyday communal interactions function as continuous reconciliation and intercultural competence formation—a depth of contextual immersion and relational nuance that a multi-case comparison or broader survey would inevitably fragment.

This study draws on primary field data collected directly by the researcher and research team, which has not yet been formally published in a journal article (Subun et al., 2025). The

term “unpublished” in this study therefore refers to original field materials such as interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation that constitute primary empirical evidence. These data are treated as legitimate research data because they were collected systematically through established qualitative procedures and are supported by triangulation and validation strategies.

Importantly, this research integrates empirical social inquiry with intercultural theological interpretation. Thus, the study does not only describe social reality but also interprets lived practices as a locus of theological meaning and intercultural formation.

Research Site and Context

The research was conducted in Wairbleler Village, Waigete District, Sikka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, with a focus on the Kloangdualiat community. Fieldwork was carried out over a period of three months, from January to March 2025, allowing sufficient time for observation, interviews, and contextual immersion.

This site is particularly relevant for several reasons. First, the community maintains strong cultural and kinship structures through practices such as gotong royong and musyawarah adat, which sustain social cohesion. Second, the presence of structural challenges such as economic hardship, labor migration, and family conflict creates tensions that require continuous relational negotiation. Third, the coexistence of tradition and socio-economic change forms a dynamic environment where reconciliation is not only practiced but also learned and developed as intercultural competence. These characteristics make the site suitable for examining how reconciliation operates simultaneously as a social practice, a theological reality, and a formative process.

Data Sources and Participants

Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary Data

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 participants, consisting of community leaders, elders, youth representatives, and residents. In addition, participant observation was conducted during daily activities and communal practices, supported by field notes documenting interactions, rituals, and social events. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they possess relevant knowledge and lived experience of the community’s social dynamics and reconciliation practices. Although the number of informants is limited, qualitative case study research prioritizes depth of understanding rather than statistical representativeness. The selected informants represent key social roles within the community, enabling the study to capture diverse perspectives on reconciliation practices.

Secondary Data

Secondary data include village documents and local records, previous research reports, and relevant academic literature. These sources were used to strengthen contextual understanding and support triangulation.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through the following techniques.

In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of social relationships, conflict, and reconciliation. This method allows flexibility while maintaining thematic consistency.

Participant Observation

The researcher conducted direct observation of everyday life, including gotong royong, communal gatherings, and informal interactions. This method is essential for capturing implicit practices of reconciliation that are not always verbally articulated.

Documentation

Relevant documents and local records were analyzed to provide historical and contextual insights into community life and relational structures.

Analytical Framework: Integrating Social Analysis and Intercultural Theology

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. However, this study adds a second interpretative layer through empirical-theological analysis. In this process, social practices are interpreted as expressions of reconciliation, processes of intercultural competence formation, and manifestations of locus theologicus. This dual analytical approach enables the study to bridge sociological analysis, theological interpretation, and educational perspectives of formation.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the primary data, this study applied several strategies. First, triangulation was conducted by comparing interview findings with observation results and documentary evidence. Second, member checking was performed by confirming key interpretations with selected participants. Third, prolonged engagement was ensured through sustained field immersion during the research period, allowing the researcher to build trust and understand local meanings. Fourth, thick description was used to provide detailed contextual explanation, enhancing transferability and strengthening the validity of interpretation.

Methodological Positioning within Intercultural Theology

A distinctive contribution of this study lies in its methodological positioning, which integrates qualitative research with intercultural theological reflection. In line with Wrogemann (2016) and Dori (2021), this study treats lived experience as a legitimate source of theological knowledge. It further strengthens this approach by incorporating intercultural competence perspectives (Gara et al., 2024), emphasizing that reconciliation is not only a social reality but also a process of intercultural learning and formation. Therefore, this research positions methodology not merely as a technical procedure, but as an intercultural interpretative process in which social practices are analyzed empirically, interpreted theologically, and understood pedagogically as processes of intercultural formation (Gahungu, 2017, p. 125).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Reconciliation as Lived Intercultural Praxis in Everyday Life

The findings of this study reveal that reconciliation within the Kloangdualiat community is embedded in everyday socio-cultural practices, such as kinship solidarity,

mutual cooperation, and customary deliberation. These practices function as mechanisms for restoring relationships and sustaining communal harmony in contexts marked by economic hardship and social tension. Thus, reconciliation is not merely conceptual but lived and continuously enacted in social interaction.

This empirical reality can be interpreted through intercultural theology. Henning Wrogemann (2016, p. 52) argues that theology always takes shape within concrete cultural contexts where meaning is negotiated and expressed. This perspective underscores that culture is not merely a background of theology but a constitutive medium of theological reflection. In this sense, the socio-cultural practices of the Kloangdualiat community function as a hermeneutical space in which reconciliation is interpreted and embodied.

Furthermore, reconciliation emerges through dialogical processes embedded in practices such as *musyawarah adat*, where tensions are addressed through collective dialogue, listening, and mutual recognition. These processes demonstrate that reconciliation is not a static condition but an ongoing relational process shaped by everyday interaction (Subun et al.).

This finding extends Lederach's framework by showing that reconciliation is not only reactive but also preventive and continuously sustained through ordinary social practices. In line with Gahungu (2017) and Dori (2021), these practices can be understood as forms of intercultural praxis, where social relations function as spaces of encounter in which differences are negotiated and transformed.

Social Capital as the Relational Infrastructure of Reconciliation

Field data indicate that values such as mutual cooperation, trust, and solidarity form the core of community life. These practices reflect what Robert D. Putnam conceptualizes as social capital—networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation.

However, this study expands Putnam's framework by demonstrating that social capital in the Kloangdualiat context is not merely functional, but also transformative and restorative. It serves as a relational space where broken relationships are repaired and communal identity is continuously reconstructed (Subun et al.).

In this sense, social capital encompasses multiple dimensions: emotional (healing of relationships), moral (shared responsibility), and transformative (reconstruction of communal identity).

This interpretation resonates with Robert J. Schreiter, who emphasizes reconciliation as a process of healing memories and rebuilding identity. In this community, such processes are enacted through everyday social practices. As one participant stated, "We always try to solve problems together as a family, so that no conflict lasts too long" (Participant 3).

Although the findings demonstrate that social capital strengthens reconciliation through trust, solidarity, and communal cooperation, this relational infrastructure may also produce social dysfunctions. Strong kinship-based cohesion can generate social pressure to maintain harmony, which may lead individuals to suppress personal grievances or avoid expressing dissent openly. In such contexts, reconciliation may risk becoming procedural and symbolic, emphasizing outward peace while leaving deeper emotional wounds unresolved. This condition can create what appears to be stability, yet may conceal latent tensions that remain embedded within family and communal relationships.

Furthermore, customary deliberation such as *musyawarah adat*, while effective in restoring communal order, may also reflect unequal power relations. Elders and dominant kinship groups can potentially shape decisions and moral expectations, which may limit the voice of youth, women, or socially vulnerable members. As a result, reconciliation processes may unintentionally reproduce hierarchical structures and reinforce conformity rather than critical transformation. This suggests that reconciliation as lived praxis should not only be

understood as a harmonious intercultural practice, but also as a contested social process shaped by authority, cultural obligation, and the risk of exclusion within communal life.

Culture as Locus Theologicus: Interpreting Lived Reconciliation

The findings further demonstrate that local cultural practices are not merely social habits, but carry deep symbolic meanings that embody values such as forgiveness, solidarity, and communal belonging.

From the anthropological perspective of Paul G. Hiebert, culture functions as a system of meaning that shapes how individuals interpret reality, including religious experience. Cultural practices, therefore, serve as mediating structures through which reconciliation is understood and lived.

In line with this, Petrus Dori argues that culture can be understood as a *locus theologicus*—a site where faith is expressed and interpreted through lived experience. The findings of this study confirm that reconciliation is not merely a theological abstraction but a concrete, embodied reality within local culture.

However, framing local culture as a *locus theologicus* requires a critical hermeneutic that avoids romanticizing indigenous customs. Cultural practices are not value-neutral spaces of pure harmony; rather, they are embedded within established gender hierarchies, generational inequalities, and social expectations. In Kloangdualiat, for example, customary norms (*adat*) often privilege male elders as authoritative interpreters of cultural wisdom, while younger members and women may face structural marginalization or subtle coercion to conform to patriarchal consensus during *musyawarah adat*. Consequently, if local culture is to serve as a genuine *locus theologicus*, it must be understood as an ambivalent space—one that simultaneously holds the capacity for genuine relational healing and the risk of reproducing internal power asymmetries, social exclusion, and structural dominance.

Intercultural Competence as a Product of Lived Experience

An important finding of this study is that members of the Kloangdualiat community demonstrate a strong ability to manage differences, both within the community and in relation to external groups. This reflects a form of intercultural competence that emerges through lived experience (Wanda & Dori, 2025; Vinsensina et al., 2025).

This finding is consistent with Wanda and Dori (2025), who show that intercultural competence develops through participatory engagement and relational interaction in community-based settings. Their study highlights that leadership and social harmony in diverse contexts are sustained not primarily by formal instruction, but by continuous interpersonal encounters that cultivate empathy, adaptability, and mutual understanding.

Similarly, Vinsensina et al. (2025) demonstrate that intercultural competence is formed through processes of adaptation and integration within communal environments, particularly in contexts where individuals must navigate differences in background, identity, and experience. Their findings emphasize that intercultural sensitivity is not an innate trait but a learned capacity shaped through interaction, dialogue, and shared practices.

These findings can be further illuminated through the framework of Milton J. Bennett, particularly his Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). Bennett conceptualizes intercultural competence as a developmental process moving from ethnocentric stages (denial, defense, minimization) toward ethnorelative stages (acceptance, adaptation, and integration). In this perspective, the ability of the Kloangdualiat community to manage differences and maintain harmonious relationships indicates a positioning within the more advanced ethnorelative stages, especially adaptation and integration, where individuals are able to shift perspectives and engage constructively across cultural boundaries.

By aligning with both empirical studies and Bennett's theoretical model, the present research reinforces the argument that intercultural competence is fundamentally experiential and relational. In the Kloangdualiat community, such competence is not developed through formal education alone but is embedded in everyday social practices, where individuals continuously learn to negotiate differences, build trust, and sustain social cohesion. This lived process reflects what Bennett describes as the internalization of intercultural sensitivity, where cultural difference is no longer perceived as a barrier but as a resource for mutual enrichment.

Thus, intercultural competence in this context is not merely a set of skills but a developmental orientation shaped through ongoing interaction, making it deeply interconnected with the processes of reconciliation and social harmony.

Reconciliation as a Pedagogical Process: A Freirean Perspective

The study also finds that reconciliation operates as a form of social learning that occurs organically within the community. Values such as empathy, solidarity, and openness to difference are learned through active participation in communal life.

This finding resonates with the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, who argues that learning emerges through dialogue, reflection, and engagement with lived reality. Freire's concept of praxis highlights that transformation occurs through the interaction between action and reflection.

In this sense, reconciliation can be understood as a pedagogical process (M. Gahungu, 2017; Dori, 2024), in which individuals learn to transform relationships through lived experience rather than through abstract instruction. Drawing on Gahungu's emphasis on interculturality as a formative necessity, this process involves continuous formation through encounter, dialogue, and openness to difference, where individuals are gradually shaped in their capacity for empathy, mutual recognition, and relational responsibility (Gahungu, 2017, p. 52). Thus, reconciliation is not only a social goal but also a deeply formative process that reshapes individual consciousness and relational attitudes, enabling persons to internalize dispositions that sustain coexistence and social harmony over time.

Integrative Discussion: Toward a Model of Intercultural Reconciliation

Based on these findings, this study proposes an integrative model that brings together social, theological, and pedagogical dimensions:

- 1. Reconciliation as Lived Praxis**

Enacted in everyday interactions rather than limited to conflict situations

- 2. Social Capital as Relational Space**

Providing the social infrastructure for interaction and relational repair

- 3. Culture as Locus Theologicus**

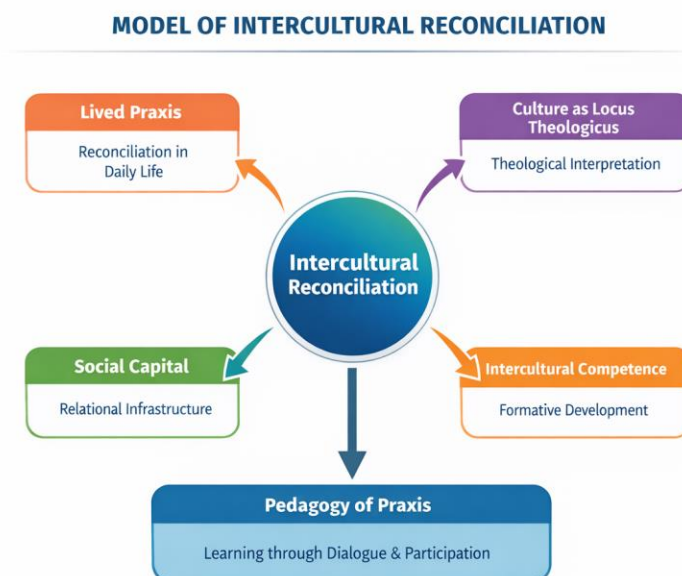
Offering a framework for interpreting reconciliation theologically

- 4. Intercultural Competence as Formative Outcome**

Emerging through lived engagement with diversity

- 5. Pedagogy of Praxis**

Positioning reconciliation as a process of learning through participation and dialogue



This model demonstrates that reconciliation is a multidimensional process emerging from the interaction between: social relationships, cultural meanings, theological interpretation, and, intercultural learning processes.

Key Insight

The central insight of this study can be summarized as follows: Reconciliation is not merely a mechanism for conflict resolution, but a lived intercultural praxis in which relationships are continuously restored, meanings are negotiated, and intercultural competencies are formed through culturally embedded and dialogical processes. This finding confirms that reconciliation is not merely a response to conflict but a constitutive element of social life.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that reconciliation in the Kloangdualiat community should not be understood merely as a post-conflict response, but as a lived intercultural praxis embedded in everyday communal life. Reconciliation is sustained through culturally rooted practices such as mutual cooperation, solidarity, and customary deliberation, which enable community members to maintain relationships and manage tensions within changing socio-economic conditions.

By applying an intercultural theological lens, this study demonstrates that local culture functions as a locus theologicus where reconciliation is experienced and embodied through concrete social practices. These practices simultaneously shape intercultural competence, as community members learn to engage difference through participation, dialogue, and shared experience. In addition, reconciliation operates as an implicit pedagogical process that forms values such as empathy, openness, and relational responsibility. Therefore, reconciliation in this context is best understood as an integrated social, theological, and formative process rooted in lived experience.

Crucially, the social, theological, and educational dimensions of reconciliation do not exist as isolated domains, but operate as a continuous, mutually reinforcing loop. The social dimension (manifested in daily communal friction, migration challenges, and customary deliberations) provides the concrete empirical context (*locus theologicus*) that grounds theological interpretation in real-life experience. In turn, theological reflection

elevates these routine cultural practices into value-laden, normative spaces of relational healing, which then serve as the pedagogical framework for the educational dimension. As community members participate in this lived framework, they organically internalize intercultural competencies such as empathy, critical dialogue, and perspective-shifting, which ultimately feed back into the social realm equipping individuals to constructively navigate internal power asymmetries, gender hierarchies, and social pressures. Thus, social experience supplies the empirical grounding, theological reflection provides the transformative vision, and educational formation cultivates the human capacity to sustain relational harmony.

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