

RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND COLLECTIVE ETHICS (THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL SPIRITUALITY IN TIDORE ISLANDS CITY)

PEMIMPIN AGAMA DAN ETIKA KOLEKTIF (DINAMIKA SPIRITUALITAS SOSIAL DI KOTA TIDORE KEPULAUAN)

Alwi Abdul Haq<sup>1</sup>, Syahrir Ibnu<sup>2\*</sup>, Athirah Rizki Salsabila<sup>3</sup>

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Ushuluddin, Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt<sup>1</sup>

Department of Social Anthropology, Universitas Khairun, Ternate, Indonesia<sup>2</sup>

Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Tadulako, Palu, Indonesia<sup>3</sup>

\*syahrir.ibnu@unkhair.ac.id<sup>2</sup>

\*Corresponding Author

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze the role of religious leaders in shaping collective ethics and the dynamics of social spirituality in Tidore Islands City, North Maluku. In a socio-religious context, religious leaders function not only as spiritual guides but also as moral agents who shape social awareness, reinforce communal solidarity, and internalize public ethics amid modern social transformations. The study employs a mixed-methods approach with a phenomenological model to explore the subjective experiences of religious figures, complemented by quantitative survey data on community perceptions of their influence. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and questionnaires. The findings reveal that religious leaders in Tidore exert a significant influence on the formation of social norms; however, their effectiveness largely depends on their public communication ability, social legitimacy, and openness to intergenerational dialogue. Contextually articulated spiritual values serve as a foundation for reconstructing collective ethics within the local community. This article contributes to the study of religious communication by positioning religious leaders as central actors in the moral transformation of society.

**Keywords:** religious leaders, collective ethics, social spirituality, public communication, Tidore Islands.

**ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran pemimpin agama dalam membentuk etika kolektif serta dinamika spiritualitas sosial di Kota Tidore Kepulauan, Maluku Utara. Dalam konteks sosial-keagamaan, pemimpin agama berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai pembimbing spiritual, tetapi juga sebagai agen moral yang membentuk kesadaran sosial, memperkuat solidaritas komunal, dan menginternalisasi etika publik di tengah transformasi sosial modern. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan campuran dengan model fenomenologis untuk menggali pengalaman subjektif para tokoh agama, dilengkapi dengan data survei kuantitatif mengenai persepsi masyarakat terhadap pengaruh mereka. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan kuesioner. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemimpin agama di Tidore memiliki pengaruh signifikan dalam pembentukan norma sosial; namun, efektivitas mereka sangat bergantung pada kemampuan komunikasi publik, legitimasi sosial, dan keterbukaan terhadap dialog antargenerasi. Nilai-nilai spiritual yang dirumuskan secara kontekstual menjadi dasar dalam merekonstruksi etika kolektif masyarakat lokal. Artikel ini memberikan kontribusi pada kajian komunikasi keagamaan dengan memposisikan pemimpin agama sebagai aktor sentral dalam transformasi moral masyarakat.

**Kata kunci:** pemimpin agama, etika kolektif, spiritualitas sosial, komunikasi publik, Tidore Kepulauan.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

In Indonesia's plural and deeply religious society, religious leaders hold a strategic position in shaping social consciousness and collective ethics. Amid modernization and global cultural penetration, their role extends beyond ritual instruction to encompass public

communication, moral education, and the formation of shared social values (Syahrir, 2024). In Tidore Islands City, a region with a strong Islamic heritage and community-based social structure, religious leaders occupy a crucial role as mediators between spiritual teachings and social realities. They bridge transcendental values with contemporary social demands, presenting spiritual narratives that nurture social responsibility amid ongoing value transformations.

The rise of information technology and social media has significantly altered the pattern of public communication among religious figures. Whereas sermons and moral teachings once occurred mainly in mosques or religious forums, Tidore's religious leaders now adapt to digital platforms and local media. This transformation presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, media offers an effective means of expanding moral and spiritual outreach; on the other, it demands digital literacy and sensitivity toward audience diversity, particularly among youth who are increasingly critical of traditional authority (Hidayat, 2023).

This phenomenon can be analyzed through Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration (1984), which emphasizes the dialectical relationship between social structure and individual agency. Religious leaders in Tidore operate within a complex social structure comprising norms, values, and customary institutions, yet they possess reflective capacity to reinterpret these values within modern contexts. Thus, their actions are not mere reproductions of tradition but forms of social reflection that contribute to moral transformation. Syahrir (2024) notes that in Indonesia, political and moral socialization often unfolds through symbolic interaction between moral authority and broader social structures.

Habermas's concept of the public sphere (1989) is also relevant in understanding religious leaders as moral communicators in the public domain. The public sphere is a discursive arena where citizens form collective opinions and will through rational communication. In Tidore, religious leaders activate a moral-spiritual public sphere, where religious values become the basis of social action and civic solidarity. Collective ethics thus emerge not through dogmatic enforcement but through deliberative communication and shared understanding.

However, preliminary findings suggest a decline in moral influence among younger generations, attributed to rising individualism, popular culture, and social pragmatism (Latief, 2021). This condition requires adaptive, participatory, and contextual communication strategies. Religious leaders must evolve from being mere preachers to becoming public communicators capable of articulating spiritual messages in accessible social language. A phenomenological approach is therefore crucial in uncovering the subjective meaning of religious leaders' experiences in fostering public ethics and social relations.

This phenomenological perspective enables researchers to understand the lifeworld of Tidore's religious leaders, including their sense of social responsibility, community interaction, and encounters with changing moral values. Combined with quantitative methods (community perception surveys), this approach provides a comprehensive picture of how religious figures serve as moral and spiritual drivers within Tidore's dynamic social structure.

The relevance of this study grows alongside the need to strengthen moral foundations in an age of disruption. Collective ethics serve as an essential basis for sustainable social development, especially in regions where moral and symbolic authority remains vital. As shown in Ibnu (2023), the social legitimacy of moral actors can reinforce adherence to public norms, including the implementation of welfare-oriented local policies. Understanding the role of religious leaders in building collective ethics is thus both theoretically and practically significant for shaping civilized local governance.

This research contributes to the development of religious communication and moral sociology in Indonesia, offering a reference for strengthening religious leadership in value-based social development. By combining phenomenological analysis with empirical data,

it highlights not only the symbolic authority of religious leaders but also their communicative practices within Tidore's everyday social life.

## 2. METHODS

This study employs a mixed-methods approach with a sequential exploratory design, where qualitative data are first collected to explore religious leaders' lived experiences, followed by quantitative data from community surveys. This design enables a comprehensive understanding of the subjective meanings and social spirituality embedded in Tidore's religious practices, while also measuring the leaders' influence on the formation of collective ethics.

Qualitatively, the study adopts an interpretative phenomenological approach (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2019), allowing an exploration of how religious leaders perceive spiritual responsibility, social interaction, and moral authority amid modern change. Eight religious figures were interviewed representing formal religious institutions, mosque communities, and Islamic social organizations selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in moral and social leadership.

Quantitative data were obtained from a survey of 120 community respondents across four districts in Tidore Islands City. A Likert-scale questionnaire measured trust levels, perceived influence, and communication effectiveness of religious leaders. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were processed through reduction, thematic categorization, and phenomenological interpretation.

Data integration occurred during the analysis phase, with survey results used to support or contrast qualitative findings. For instance, interview insights about moral responsibility were compared with community trust levels identified through the survey. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, participant confidentiality, and academic data usage were observed. Data validity was ensured through triangulation and member checking. This mixed phenomenological approach thus provides a holistic understanding of how religious leaders shape collective ethics in Tidore, balancing subjective experience and community perception.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Religious Leaders as Moral Mediators in the Social Structure

Religious leaders in Tidore act as custodians of social cohesion in a plural community. They see their role not only as conveyors of doctrine but as bridges linking transcendental values with social needs. Their moral authority is rooted in both religious legitimacy and social trust.

This aligns with Habermas's (1989) view of the public sphere as a moral-discursive space. In Tidore, religious figures facilitate ethical dialogue that fosters collective awareness through communication rather than dogma. Collective ethics thus emerge through reflective interaction rather than indoctrination.

### 2. The Dynamics of Social Spirituality in the Digital Era

Digital transformation has reshaped religious communication in Tidore. Social media serves as a platform for preaching, moral education, and faith-based discussions. While senior clerics remain cautious, younger religious leaders have adapted effectively, using digital tools to expand their moral influence.

Within Giddens's (1991) theory of reflexive modernity, this reflects the shift from ritual-based spirituality to reflexive spirituality where faith is articulated contextually through digital means. Yet, competition with visually engaging popular culture challenges the maintenance of moral substance. Hence, collective ethics serve as a guiding framework for preserving spiritual depth in digital communication.

### 3. Reconstructing Collective Ethics in Local Contexts

Findings indicate that spiritual values remain a strong foundation for social solidarity in Tidore. Religious gatherings, mosque volunteerism, and Islamic celebrations foster community identity. However, there is growing demand for more contextual ethics expanding beyond ritual obedience to include social justice, environmental care, and empathy. Religious leaders thus emerge as moral reconstructors who reinterpret religious teachings to align with contemporary social needs. True spirituality, they emphasize, is not only vertical worship but also horizontal social practice a shift from religious piety to social spirituality, where faith inspires just and empathetic social action.

#### **4. Sociological Implications: Religious Leaders as Agents of Social Reflection**

The public presence of religious leaders in Tidore illustrates their reflective role amid social change. They critique inequality, resist religious commercialization, and advocate intergenerational solidarity. This positions them not merely as value guardians but as catalysts of social transformation.

This supports Berger and Luckmann's (2018) thesis that social reality is a symbolic construction. Religious leaders produce and reproduce moral symbols through public communication both traditional and digital constructing a social spirituality that negotiates between the sacred and the profane, tradition and modernity.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that religious leaders in Tidore Islands City play a strategic role in balancing spirituality and social morality. They function as mediators who cultivate fair and inclusive public spaces grounded in ethical and spiritual values. Collective ethics in Tidore emerge from the dialectic between religious principles and modern social contexts. Religious leaders reinterpret teachings to remain socially relevant, thereby maintaining moral continuity amid globalization and digital disruption.

Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on the role of religion in shaping public morality in Indonesia. The mixed phenomenological approach provides an in-depth understanding of the subjective and empirical dimensions of religious influence. Practically, the findings recommend that religious leaders enhance their digital literacy to remain relevant in new public spheres. Local governments and religious institutions are encouraged to facilitate intergenerational forums to strengthen shared social ethics. Researchers are also encouraged to expand studies on social spirituality in Eastern Indonesia as a rich moral and cultural laboratory.

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