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## Embracing Diversity: Navigating Religious Identity in Multicultural Societies

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the experiences of minority religious groups in maintaining their religious identity within a multicultural society dominated by a majority religion. Through an extensive literature review, the author analyses key works that examine the complex dynamics between religious minorities and majorities. The study delves into the challenges faced by minority groups, including marginalization, discrimination, and the tension of identity negotiation, as they strive to preserve their distinct religious identity in the face of societal pressures to conform to the dominant culture. The research uncovers various strategies employed by these groups to navigate these challenges, such as building intra-community solidarity, engaging in interfaith dialogue, and advocating for greater religious tolerance and understanding. The findings of this research highlight the intricate nature of interreligious dynamics in heterogeneous societies and underscore the importance of fostering an environment of mutual respect, tolerance, and dialogue. By shedding light on the lived experiences of religious minorities, this study provides valuable insights into the mechanisms of religious identity preservation amidst external pressures. The practical implications of this research are significant, as it offers guidance for developing social intervention strategies aimed at promoting interreligious tolerance and cultivating a more inclusive, civic, and multicultural society. These strategies can serve as a foundation for policymakers, educators, and community leaders in their efforts to enhance religious harmony and social cohesion within diverse communities.

**Keywords:** interreligious; majority-minority; multicultural relations & tolerance.

### Introduction

Religious minorities across Southeast Asia often face the challenge of preserving their unique identities within predominantly Muslim national contexts. This is particularly evident in

Indonesia, where religious pluralism is constitutionally recognized but inconsistently practiced.<sup>1</sup> Within this landscape, the island of Bali offers a compelling case study. As a predominantly Hindu enclave in a Muslim-majority nation, the Balinese community exemplifies how a minority religious group can sustain a distinct cultural and spiritual identity. Their religious practices—ranging from temple ceremonies and elaborate festivals to daily offerings—reflect a deeply embedded cultural resilience.<sup>2</sup> Despite broader national pressures toward homogenization, the Balinese have not only preserved their traditions but have also transformed them into a source of global cultural interest, particularly through religious and heritage tourism.<sup>3</sup> The case of Bali illustrates how localized religious identity can coexist with national religious dominance, a phenomenon that merits deeper exploration within the broader discourse on multiculturalism and religious minority dynamics.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, in Malaysia, the state of Penang presents an interesting case where the Chinese Buddhist and Hindu communities coexist alongside the Malay Muslim majority. Penang is often cited as a model of multicultural harmony, where religious tolerance is actively promoted through state policies and community initiatives. However, tensions occasionally arise, particularly around issues of religious conversion and the rights of religious minorities. These tensions highlight the delicate balance that must be carefully maintained. While generally harmonious, tensions sometimes arise over issues like religious conversion and the rights of minorities. Disputes related to interfaith marriages, or the religious upbringing of children can trigger legal and social conflicts. However, efforts by the state and local communities, including interfaith dialogues, help to address these challenges and promote peaceful coexistence.

Beyond these regions, the situation of the Christian communities in the highlands of Papua and the Toraja people in Sulawesi also warrants attention. These groups face unique challenges related to their geographic isolation, economic marginalization, and the pressures of religious conversion. In Papua, for instance, the influence of Christian missionaries has deeply shaped the local culture, but this has also led to conflicts with the central government and other religious groups, particularly when issues of land rights and autonomy arise. In Papua, Christian missionaries have profoundly influenced local culture, but this has created tensions with the central government and other religious groups. Conflicts often center around control of land and resources. Similarly, the Toraja people in Sulawesi, known for their unique funeral traditions, face pressure from religious conversion efforts while striving to preserve their indigenous beliefs alongside Christianity.

In recent decades, the world has witnessed significant changes in the social fabric of many nations due to globalization, migration, and the increasing interconnectedness of societies. Indonesia and Malaysia, being at the crossroads of diverse cultural and religious interactions, have become key examples of how multiculturalism and religious pluralism can shape national

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<sup>1</sup> Susanti, Susanti. "Moderasi beragama dalam masyarakat multikultural." *TAJID: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman Dan Kemanusiaan* 6, no. 2 (2022): 168-182.

<sup>2</sup> Geertz, C. *The Interpretation Of Cultures*. (Basic Books, 1973), 77.

Weiland, Steven. "The interpretation of culture and the culture of interpretation." *College English* 44, no. 8 (1982): 784-797.

<sup>3</sup> Reisinger, Y. *International Tourism: Cultures and Behavior*. (Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009), 17-19.

<sup>4</sup> Huda, M. Assessing the relation between majority and minority groups: a critical study on the spirit of domination in a heterogeneous society. *AT-TURAS: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 4(2)(2018), 191-207; Nützel, G. (2024). Die Entwicklung des Sakralbaus als sichtbarer Ausdruck der inner-und interreligiösen Pluralisierung in den 1920er Jahren. *Evangelische Theologie*, 84(1), 47-63.

identity and social cohesion. These nations offer a rich tapestry of religious diversity, where Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and various indigenous beliefs coexist, creating a dynamic environment for the study of religious identity.

However, this diversity is not without its challenges. The rise of religious conservatism, the politicization of religion, and the occasional outbreaks of sectarian violence have brought the issue of religious identity to the forefront of academic and public discourse. Understanding how minority religious groups maintain their identity within such a complex and often volatile context is crucial for fostering social harmony and tolerance. This study, therefore, aims to provide a deeper understanding of these dynamics by exploring the experiences of religious minorities in Indonesia and Malaysia, highlighting the strategies they employ to navigate their identities in predominantly Muslim societies.

The significance of this research extends beyond the academic realm, as it offers practical insights for policymakers, educators, and community leaders who are working to promote interfaith dialogue and social cohesion in multicultural societies. By shedding light on the lived experiences of religious minorities, this study contributes to the broader discourse on how societies can manage diversity in ways that are inclusive and respectful of all cultural and religious identities.

Indonesia and Malaysia are characterized by highly diverse societies consisting of multiple races, ethnicities, and religions.<sup>5</sup> These multicultural societies possess a wealth of human and cultural resources, offering a tapestry of diverse perspectives, traditions, and experiences.<sup>6</sup> To coexist harmoniously amidst diversity, it is imperative that we cultivate a profound understanding and appreciation of different cultures, thereby fostering multicultural awareness. This consciousness serves as a guiding force, steering humanity towards a state of concord and tranquillity, despite the myriad variations in culture, history, language, customs, ethnicity, race, nation, and religion.<sup>7, 8, 9</sup>

Cultural diversity has become an incontrovertible phenomenon in the evolution of contemporary societies. The phenomenon of multicultural exchange has played a substantial role in the rapid expansion of the global economy.<sup>10</sup> However, individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds may not always share the same ideas, interests, or behaviors. This divergence can precipitate conflicts when attempting to promote multicultural harmony.<sup>11, 12, 13, 14, 15</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hasanuddin, et al. Contextualizing sociocultural beliefs about cleft, knowledge of the treatments, and factors associated with delay of treatment in Eastern Indonesia. *Journal of Stomatology, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*. Vol. 125, No. 6, (2024): 17-26.

<sup>6</sup> Umam, F., & Barmawi, M. Indigenous Islamic Multiculturalism: Interreligious Relations in Rural East Java, Indonesia. *Ulumuna*, Vol.27, No.2, (2023), 649-691

<sup>7</sup> Guilherme, M., & Dietz, G. (2015). Difference in diversity: multiple perspectives on multicultural, intercultural, and transcultural conceptual complexities. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, Vol.10, No.1, (2015), 1-21.

<sup>8</sup> Halse, C. (2022). Building a Collective Multicultural Consciousness. *Multicultural Education Review*, 14(2), 1-12.

<sup>9</sup> Umam, F., & Barmawi, M. Indigenous Islamic Multiculturalism: Interreligious Relations in Rural East Java, Indonesia. *Ulumuna*, 27(2)(2023): 649-691

<sup>10</sup> Huang, S. et al. (2024). Research Hotspots and Visual Analysis of Tolerance in Multicultural Contexts (2000-2022). *SAGE Open*, 14(1), 21582440241237145.

<sup>11</sup> Abdullah, M. A. *Pendidikan Agama Era Multikultural-Multireligius*. (PSAP, 2005), 79.

<sup>12</sup> Mubit, R. Peran Agama dalam Multikulturalisme Masyarakat Indonesia. *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan*

An examination of intercultural interactions across religious communities is critical for understanding societal dynamics, promoting tranquillity and harmony among religious groups, and formulating policies that are equitable and inclusive for all members of society (Lu, Lee, & Wan, 2024). Tolerance, as conceptualized in the field of social psychology, refers to the characteristic of being open-minded and possessing a positive attitude towards different cultures, or a general inclination to promote cultural diversity.<sup>16, 17, 18</sup>

Several prior studies have been conducted on the topic of multicultural interactions between religious communities. Among these studies is research undertaken by Arrebola et al. (2024) which examines the competence of intercultural and interreligious interaction in two contrasting contexts: Barcelona and Melilla, cities characterized by significant ethnic and cultural diversity. The research indicates that despite displaying acceptance of religious diversity and receiving education in schools on subjects pertaining to coexistence and spirituality, teenagers and young adults in these settings do not engage in relationships with individuals who are underage.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Nützel underscores the necessity for diverse religious groups to engage in dialogues on how they can effectively contribute to positive societal development. This is especially crucial in addressing significant challenges and pervasive social disparities.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, a study conducted by Akande, Ogunbiyi, and Fahm (2024) investigates interreligious relationships in Ilorin, Nigeria, with a particular focus on Sobi Hill. This study examines the various ways in which religious communities interpret and engage with this symbol of unity. The analysis identifies three primary factors contributing to peaceful coexistence: influential individuals, evolving generational perspectives, and the religious significance of Sobi Hill. The study posits that the harmonious coexistence in Ilorin is exemplified by Sobi Hill, where people from diverse religious backgrounds come together for collective festivities, demonstrating the town's commitment to unity.

In a separate study by Gualberto and Gierus (2024), the focus is on the increasing levels of violence, particularly the murder of women, and the presence of religious fundamentalism in Brazil. This study underscores the importance of examining the underlying causes and consequences of religious racism. Using an intersectional perspective, the essay analyses key

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*Ilmu Keislaman*, 11(1)(2016): 163-184.

<sup>13</sup> Paramita, S., & Sari, W. P. Intercultural Communication to Preserve Harmony Between Religious Group in Jatón Village Minahasa (Komunikasi Lintas Budaya dalam Menjaga Kerukunan antara Umat Beragama di Kampung Jatón Minahasa). *Pekommas*, 1(2)(2016): 153-166.

<sup>14</sup> Kustini. *Monografi Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Indonesia*. LITBANG DIKLAT Press.

<sup>15</sup> Ahmad Tohari, D. (2021). Indeks Toleransi Antarumat Beragama di Kabupaten Lombok Timur. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Humaniora*, 10(3)(2017): 563-575.

<sup>16</sup> Rapp, C., & Freitag, M. Teaching tolerance? Associational diversity and tolerance formation. *Political Studies*, 63(5)(2015): 1031-1051.

<sup>17</sup> Verkuyten, M., Yogeeswaran, K., & Adelman, L. The social psychology of intergroup tolerance and intolerance. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 34(1)(2023): 1-43.

<sup>18</sup> Lau, E. Y. H., Li, H., & Rao, N. Exploring parental involvement in early years education in China: Development and validation of the Chinese Early Parental Involvement Scale (CEPIS). *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20(4)(2012): 405-421

<sup>19</sup> Nützel, G. Die Entwicklung des Sakralbaus als sichtbarer Ausdruck der inner-und interreligiösen Pluralisierung in den 1920er Jahren. *Evangelische Theologie*, 84(1)(2024): 47-63.

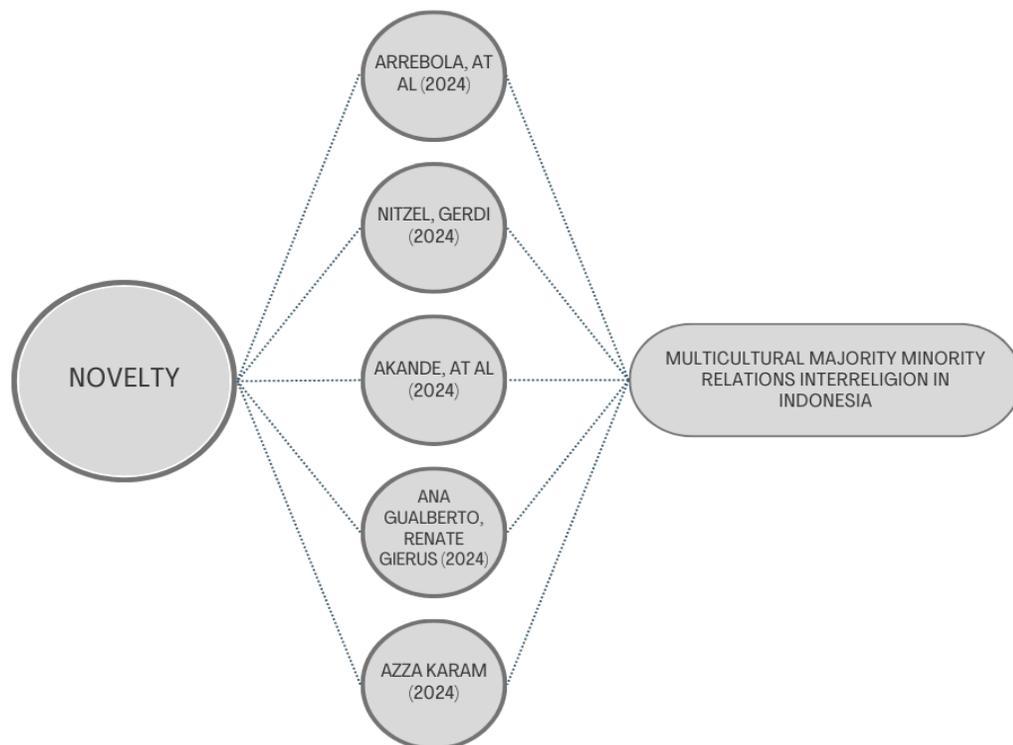
aspects of gender justice and proposes strategies to address domestic violence and other forms of violence.

In addition, Karam's (2024) research discusses the terminology employed and highlights significant initiatives undertaken by the United Nations and worldwide multi-religious organizations over the past 25 years. The primary argument is that efforts to amalgamate diverse religious entities to promote collective welfare, including gender equality and women's empowerment, will foster genuine cooperation between society and organizations/institutions. The paper concludes by discussing the significance of interactions between different religions as a catalyst for fostering love towards God, which is essential for achieving gender justice.

In this study, we aim to contribute novel research by presenting case studies from less extensively documented regions. Our focus will be on areas in Indonesia that have received limited attention in prior research. This investigation offers a new perspective on interfaith connections that may diverge from those in more traditionally targeted regions.

Additionally, we will assess the significance of cultural identity in interfaith collaborations and explore how cultural and religious identities impact the dynamics between religious majorities and minorities. We will examine whether specific cultural practices enhance or undermine religious tolerance in societies where one religious group is dominant and in nations with religious minorities. Furthermore, we will employ a comprehensive qualitative approach, such as ethnographic research or narrative interviews, to gain a profound understanding of the intricacies of interfaith relationships at both the individual and communal levels. This method can provide a deeper understanding of the experiences and viewpoints of individuals engaged in interfaith relationships.

**Figure 1: Research Novelty**



The research gap in multicultural interactions between majority and minority religious communities pertains to specific regions or characteristics that have not been thoroughly investigated or comprehended. Several potential deficiencies may be present in this area of study. Initially, the issues of violence and inequality are prominent. Despite increased studies on tolerance and integration within religious communities, there remains limited comprehension of the reasons and mechanisms behind violence and discrimination in the context of religious pluralism. This includes research on the political, economic, and social ramifications of interreligious conflict.

Next, consider the viewpoint of the minority, most research tends to prioritize the perspective of the dominant group in multicultural partnerships. Thus, it is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, challenges, and expectations of religious minorities when engaging with the majority. This includes studies on feelings of insecurity, disparities in resource availability, and coping mechanisms employed by minority groups in response to pressure from the majority.

Furthermore, the significance of religious institutions should be considered. Additional investigation is required to comprehend the influence of religious institutions on the dynamics of relationships between dominant and subordinate religious communities. This entails an examination of the impact of religious organizations on the beliefs, principles, and actions of their adherents in managing religious disparities.

Identifying these gaps is crucial as it helps determine more targeted and relevant study directions, contributing significantly to understanding and resolving issues in multicultural interactions across religious communities. Prior research has examined diversity, particularly focusing on the extent of parental engagement in their children's overall education.<sup>20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27</sup>

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics between majority and minority religious communities in multicultural settings. Specifically, it focuses on the impact of

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<sup>20</sup> Lau, E. Y. H., Li, H., & Rao, N. (2012). Exploring parental involvement in early years education in China: Development and validation of the Chinese Early Parental Involvement Scale (CEPIS). *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20(4), 405-421

<sup>21</sup> Farver, J. A. M. *et al.* (2013). The home literacy environment and Latino head start children's emergent literacy skills. *Developmental Psychology*, 49(4), 775.

<sup>22</sup> Tadesse, S. (2014). Parent involvement: Perceived encouragement and barriers to African refugee parent and teacher relationships. *Childhood Education*, 90(4), 298-305.

<sup>23</sup> He, T. H., Gou, W. J., & Chang, S. M. (2015). Parental involvement and elementary school students' goals, maladaptive behaviors, and achievement in learning English as a foreign language. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 39, 205-210.

<sup>24</sup> Ma, X. *et al.* (2016). A meta-analysis of the relationship between learning outcomes and parental involvement during early childhood education and early elementary education. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28, 771-801.

<sup>25</sup> Woodrow, C. *et al.* (2016). *Researching Parent Engagement: A Qualitative Field Study*. Western Sydney University.

<sup>26</sup> Hornby, G., & Blackwell, I. (2018). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An update. *Educational Review*, 70(1), 109-119.

<sup>27</sup> Wilder, S. (2023). Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement: a meta-synthesis. In *Mapping the Field* (pp. 137-157). Routledge.

religious diversity on attitudes towards intercultural relations by addressing two key questions: 1) What connection patterns are exhibited by the majority and minorities in a multicultural society? and 2) How do these groups contribute to the formation of a multicultural society?

## Theoretical Framework

### *Studies on Multiculturalism*

From a sociological standpoint, multiculturalism refers to the way specific societies address and manage cultural diversity. It is the belief that people from diverse cultures can live together harmoniously. Multiculturalism promotes the idea that cultural differences should be acknowledged, appreciated, and even fostered. In the realm of political philosophy, multiculturalism pertains to how a society develops and executes official policies to ensure the equitable treatment of various cultures.<sup>28, 29, 30</sup>

Multiculturalism can manifest either at a national level or within a specific community within a country. Natural cultural blending can occur through immigration, while artificial cultural blending can result from legislative actions, such as the merging of French and British Canada. Advocates of multiculturalism argue that societies should preserve certain aspects of their traditional cultures. Conversely, critics contend that diversity challenges the established social structure by eroding the identity and influence of dominant cultures.<sup>31, 32, 33</sup>

The theory of melting multiculturalism posits that different immigrant groups will gradually blend together, relinquishing their distinct cultures and ultimately merging fully into the prevailing society.<sup>34, 35, 36</sup> Academics like Horace Kallen and Israel Zangwill (as quoted in Sasmita, 2023) proposed the idea of the melting pot, suggesting that it can lead to coerced cultural assimilation and the disregard of genuine differences. However, some argue that this strategy promotes integration and the development of a robust national identity. As America experienced an increase in ethnic diversity and cultural heterogeneity, the melting pot hypothesis faced criticism, leading to the emergence of an alternative theory known as the salad bowl theory.<sup>37</sup>

An alternative perspective is the notion of a “salad bowl” or “mosaic”, which underscores the recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity without advocating for assimilation into a singular entity. This concept emphasizes that each component (culture) within the “salad bowl”

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<sup>28</sup> Gutmann, A. (2003). *Identity in Democracy*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>29</sup> La Torre, M. A. D. (2009). *The Problem With the Melting Pot*. EthicsDaily.com.

<sup>30</sup> Fry, R., & Kim, P. (2018). *Benchmarks Show ‘Post-Millennials’ on Track to Be Most Diverse, Best-Educated Generation Yet*. Pew Research Center.

<sup>31</sup> Gutmann, A. (2003). *Identity in Democracy*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>32</sup> La Torre, M. A. D. (2009). *The Problem With the Melting Pot*. EthicsDaily.com.

<sup>33</sup> Fry, R., & Kim, P. (2018). *Benchmarks Show ‘Post-Millennials’ on Track to Be Most Diverse, Best-Educated Generation Yet*. Pew Research Center.

<sup>34</sup> Gutmann, A. (2003). *Identity in Democracy*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>35</sup> La Torre, M. A. D. (2009). *The Problem With the Melting Pot*. EthicsDaily.com.

<sup>36</sup> Fry, R., & Kim, P. (2018). *Benchmarks Show ‘Post-Millennials’ on Track to Be Most Diverse, Best-Educated Generation Yet*. Pew Research Center.

<sup>37</sup> Sasmita, H. (2023). Pendidikan Multikultural di Indonesia Sebuah Pandangan Konseptual (Telaah Terhadap Sistem Pendidikan Nasional dan Pendidikan Agama Islam). *Innovative: Journal Of Social Science Research*, 3(3), 8303-8320.

retains its individuality and distinctiveness, while collectively contributing to a larger whole. This approach is commonly associated with nations that embrace and safeguard their cultural diversity, such as Canada.<sup>38</sup>

Ultimately, multiculturalism serves as the guiding principle for enhancing the resilience of a society comprised of diverse ethnic, religious, racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. It achieves this by upholding and honouring the civil liberties of all groups, with a particular emphasis on safeguarding the rights of minority communities.<sup>39, 40</sup>

Public schools in multicultural societies frequently incorporate the tenets of multiculturalism into their curricula, aiming to familiarize the younger generation with the merits and advantages of cultural diversity. Despite occasional criticism as a manifestation of “political correctness”, educational institutions in multicultural contexts prioritize the inclusion of minority histories and traditions in classrooms and textbooks. A study conducted by Fry and Kim (2018) revealed that the generation known as “post-millennials”, aged 6 to 21, is the most diverse generation in American society. This finding is corroborated by previous research undertaken by Crevecoeur in 1782 and La Torre in 2009, which also highlighted the increasing diversity within various national contexts.

### ***Intercultural and Interreligious Interactions***

Culture is a conceptual framework consisting of an intricate web of meanings and representations. This framework serves as the foundation through which individuals develop their worldviews, express their feelings, and form opinions. These meanings are manifested symbolically through historical processes, acting as a medium for communication, knowledge storage, and attitude formation. Consequently, culture functions as a symbolic toolkit that governs behavior and serves as a significant external source of knowledge. Hence, comprehending culture necessitates the ability to decode, interpret, and construe the mechanisms embedded within it.<sup>41</sup>

Anthropologists posit that culture emerges as a means for humans to adapt to their environments. This entails the creation of tools, techniques, and knowledge systems that enable individuals not only to survive but also to thrive in various contexts. Culture is shaped by the interactions that occur among individuals and groups within a community. History plays a crucial role in shaping culture. Historical events, such as colonization, migration, conflict, and trade, have resulted in intricate cultural encounters and the flow of ideas, values, and customs among different human groups. Culture undergoes transformation and evolution over time in response to historical occurrences.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Sasmita, H. (2023). Pendidikan Multikultural di Indonesia Sebuah Pandangan Konsepsional (Telaah Terhadap Sistem Pendidikan Nasional dan Pendidikan Agama Islam). *Innovative: Journal Of Social Science Research*, 3(3), 8303-8320.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Azra, A. (2003). Pendidikan Multikultural: Membangun Kembali Indonesia Bhineka Tunggal Ika. *Journal Tsaqafah*, 1(2).

<sup>41</sup> Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation Of Cultures*. Basic Books.

<sup>42</sup> Hidir, A. (2009). *Antropologi Budaya*. CV Witra Irzani; Nurcahyono, H. (2021). *Antropologi*. Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi.

Cultural variations encompass a wide array of aspects of human existence, such as customs, norms, values, and practices, that exhibit differences across diverse human communities. The following are some common examples of prevalent cultural variations.<sup>43, 44</sup>

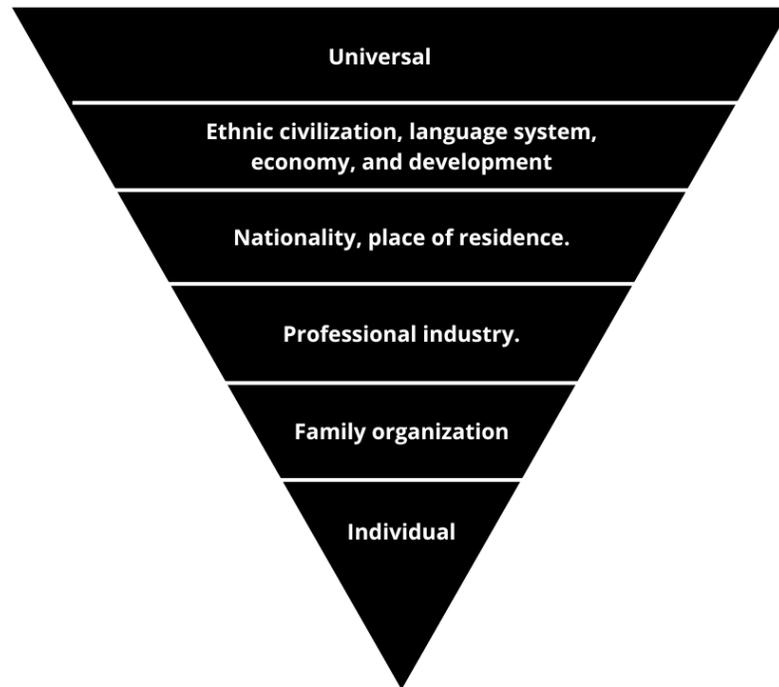
- 1) Each human group possesses a unique language that they utilize for communication purposes, known as their first language. Language serves as a reflection of cultural elements, encompassing traditions, values, and ethnic identity.
- 2) Both religions and diverse spiritual beliefs offer structured systems of values and rules for their adherents. Religious activities, rituals, and traditions are integral components of cultural identity.
- 3) The diversity in food and cuisine is a direct consequence of disparities in food ingredients, culinary techniques, and gustatory preferences among various societies.
- 4) Within each ethnic group, there exists a unique and distinctive fashion and clothing style, often influenced by factors such as climate, traditions, and social norms.
- 5) Visual arts and culture encompass a wide range of artistic expressions, including visual arts, music, dance, architecture, and literature. These forms of creative expression serve as reflections of the myriad cultural values found worldwide.
- 6) Cultural diversity is apparent in the diverse family structures, marriage traditions, social hierarchies, and norms regulating interpersonal relationships within a society.
- 7) Celebrations and festivals hold great significance in the culture of a society as they serve as manifestations of the values, beliefs, and identity of that specific community.
- 8) Social norms and ethics, which include traditions and moral principles, act as standards for individuals' behavior and interpersonal connections within a society. It is crucial to acknowledge that cultural norms and ethics may vary significantly among different cultures.

The aforementioned concept of culture might be regarded as a cultural universal. The disparities across cultural universals can be observed in the following manner:

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<sup>43</sup> Reisinger, Y. (2009). *International Tourism: Cultures and Behavior*. Butterworth-Heinemann.

<sup>44</sup> Kuserdyana, R. (2020). Pengertian Budaya, Lintas Budaya, dan Teori yang Melandasi Lintas Budaya. *Pemahaman Lintas Budaya*, 1-63.



**Figure 2:** Cultural Level

Individual culture exists at the lowest level and is defined by individual values and norms. The second level is characterized by the presence of organizational and family culture, which encompasses the smallest social units such as organizations, families, or clans. The third level encompasses industrial and professional culture, comprising various groups or communities, such as professional or industrial associations like doctors or the pharmaceutical sector. The fourth level pertains to the national, ethnic, or cultural identity that individuals of the same nationality, country of origin, or country of residence share. The fifth level is characterized by a civilizational culture and comprises multiple ethnicities that share similar political systems, stages of economic development, ethnic origins, and religious beliefs. The sixth level is symbolized by the concept of global human culture. The highest level encompasses the collective culture of all nations and individuals, including their lifestyles, behaviors, values, concepts, and ethics.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Majority-Minority Relations*

Despite the increasing diversity in many communities, marriages within the same ethnic group remain prevalent. When an ethnic minority has coexisted with the majority for an extended period, it is imperative to understand the dynamics of interethnic unions in order to grasp how ethnic boundaries are maintained or eroded.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Kuserdyana, R. (2020). Pengertian Budaya, Lintas Budaya, dan Teori yang Melandasi Lintas Budaya. *Pemahaman Lintas Budaya*, 1-63.

<sup>46</sup> Uggla, C., & Saarela, J. First Partner Choice in a Native Minority: The Role of Own and Parental Ethnolinguistic Affiliation. *European Journal of Population*, 40(1)(2024): 3.

When individuals from minority groups form relationships with members of the majority population, the distinctions between social groupings become less pronounced, and the sense of belonging to the minority group may gradually diminish or dissipate entirely. Hence, understanding the manner in which individuals belonging to minority groups navigate the partner market is crucial for comprehending the intergenerational transmission of ethnic identity.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, an increasing number of individuals are being raised by parents who belong to different ethnic background.<sup>48,49</sup>

One theoretical framework that elucidates the relationships between majority and minority groups is conflict theory. This perspective underscores the antagonism between dominant and subordinate groups as a result of their competition for resources, authority, and entitlements. Conflict theory posits that interactions between these groups are characterized by tension and competitiveness, often culminating in social conflict. It emphasizes the conflict that emerges from the struggle for resources and power between majority and minority groups. In contrast, social identity theory concentrates on how differences in group identification can lead to the development of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. The relationship between conflict theory and social identity theory can be explained by the notion that conflicts often arise from identity disparities, which are exacerbated by stereotypes and prejudice, thus intensifying the conflict.<sup>50, 51</sup>

Next, let us discuss integration theory. Integration theory focuses on minimizing disparities between dominant and minority populations through processes such as acculturation, assimilation, or integration. This perspective views the connection between these two factions as an opportunity to foster greater social cohesion and reduce discord. Integration theory emphasizes efforts to decrease disparities between majority and minority groups by means of assimilation or integration. In contrast, structural theory highlights the influence of social structure in determining the interactions between these two groups. The relationship between these theories can be elucidated by the fact that integration efforts are frequently impeded by structural disparities in the allocation of wealth, authority, and economic opportunities, which perpetuate distinctions between these groups.<sup>52, 53, 54</sup>

Furthermore, the concepts of domination and hegemony are also relevant. Theories of domination and hegemony emphasize the tendency of dominant groups to exert and uphold their influence over minority groups through the utilization of societal institutions and power structures. This power can be reinforced through cultural, political, or economic dominance. Conversely, critical sociology theory underscores the importance of examining social institutions from a critical perspective, highlighting the disparities and exploitation that can arise in

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<sup>47</sup> Frey, W. H. *Diversity Explosion: How New Racial Demographics Are Remaking America*. (Brookings Institution Press. 2014), 77.

<sup>48</sup> Kulu, H., & González-Ferrer, A. (2014). Family dynamics among immigrants and their descendants in Europe: Current research and opportunities. *European Journal of Population*, 30, 411-435.

<sup>49</sup> Andersson, G., Obućina, O., & Scott, K. Marriage and divorce of immigrants and descendants of immigrants in Sweden. *Demographic Research*, 33(1)(2015): 31-64.

<sup>50</sup> Susan, N. *Sosiologi Konflik: Isu-isu Konflik Kontemporer*. Kencana, 2009), 17-19.

<sup>51</sup> Zuldin, M. Ketimpangan Sebagai Penyebab Konflik: Kajian Atas Teori Sosial Kontemporer. *TEMALI: Jurnal Pembangunan Sosial*, 2 (1)(2009): 157-183

<sup>52</sup> Soekanto, S. (1983). *Sosiologi: Suatu Pengantar*. RagaGrapindo Persada.

<sup>53</sup> Mulyana, D., & Rakhmat, J. (2001). *Komunikasi Antarbudaya*. Remaja Karya.

<sup>54</sup> Romli, K. Akulturasi dan asimilasi dalam konteks interaksi antar etnik. *Ijtima'iyya: Jurnal Pengembangan Masyarakat Islam*, 8(1)(2015): 1-13.

interactions between dominant and marginalized groups. The relationship between these theories is that critical sociology provides a comprehensive analytical viewpoint to comprehend and question the hegemony and domination present in these interactions.<sup>55, 56</sup>

In summary, the interaction between different majority-minority theories demonstrates the intricate social dynamics between these two groups. It is crucial to recognize the significance of each theory in offering a thorough explanation of this phenomenon.

## Methods

This study employs the library research method. Creswell (2017) defines the library research method as a structured process that involves gathering, assessing, and integrating material from different library sources to address research inquiries or investigate a specific subject. The library research process can be broken down into the following main steps:<sup>57</sup>

- 1) Formulating the Research Question: The researcher must ascertain the research question, which involves the formulation of the specific inquiry or objective to be accomplished through the process of doing library research. Research inquiries must possess clarity and specificity.
- 2) Literature Search: The researcher conducts a literature search, specifically seeking out literature that is pertinent to the formulated research questions. This search can be conducted using academic databases, libraries, scientific journals, books, articles, and other relevant sources.
- 3) Selecting Pertinent Literature: After conducting a thorough search for relevant literature, the researcher selects literature that is pertinent to their study issue, exhibits high methodological quality, and comes from reliable sources.
- 4) Literature Review: The researcher assesses the chosen literature to determine the merits and drawbacks of each source, as well as its pertinence to the research topic. This evaluation may entail an examination of the methodological rigor, validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the material supplied.
- 5) Organizing and Integrating Information: The researcher systematically arranges and integrates information from different literature sources to address research inquiries or accomplish pre-established objectives. This procedure entails categorizing observations, discerning regularities or motifs, and presenting them in a methodical manner.
- 6) Composing the Literature Review Report: The final stage involves composing a literature review report that encompasses a thorough literature evaluation, analysis of findings,

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<sup>55</sup> Tilaar, H. A. *Kekuasaan dan Pendidikan: Manajemen Pendidikan Nasional dalam Pusaralan Kekuasaan*. Rineka Cipta. 2009), 78.

<sup>56</sup> Mafrukhi. *et al. Hegemoni Sosial, Budaya, dan Kekuasaan Wacana Sastra Buku Teks Bahasa Indonesia SMA*. Seminar Nasional Pascasarjana, 2019, 16.

<sup>57</sup> Creswell, J. W. *Pendekatan Metode Kualitatif, Kuantitatif dan Campuran*. (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Pelajar, 2017), 14.

and interpretation of outcomes. Reports should be meticulously crafted and organized in accordance with widely accepted scientific study formats.

To further illustrate the challenges faced by religious minorities, it is useful to consider case studies from other regions. For instance, in India, religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians often find themselves navigating a complex landscape of religious nationalism, where Hinduism is increasingly intertwined with national identity. Similar to the experiences in Indonesia and Malaysia, these groups must employ various strategies to maintain their religious identity while engaging with the broader society. These strategies include forming strong intra-community networks, participating in interfaith dialogues, and advocating for legal protections that safeguard their rights.

In another example, the experiences of Jewish communities in Europe, particularly in countries with a history of religious conflict, provide valuable lessons on the importance of preserving cultural identity in the face of external pressures. These communities have historically relied on education, cultural preservation, and legal advocacy to maintain their religious practices and traditions, even in environments where they have been marginalized or persecuted.

These case studies underscore the universality of the challenges faced by religious minorities and highlight the diverse strategies employed across different cultural contexts. They also reinforce the importance of a supportive legal and social framework that protects minority rights and promotes tolerance and understanding among different religious groups.

Applying these theoretical frameworks to the specific context of Indonesia and Malaysia reveals several key insights. Conflict theory, for instance, helps explain the tensions that arise when dominant religious groups seek to maintain their cultural hegemony, often at the expense of minority groups. This can be seen in the way certain laws and policies are enacted to favour the majority religion, such as restrictions on the construction of non-Muslim places of worship in Indonesia or the legal privileges in Malaysia. Conflict theory shows how these dynamics create friction, with religious minorities facing limitations on their rights. In Malaysia, laws often favour the Muslim majority in matters like conversion and family law. In Indonesia, restrictions on non-Muslim worship spaces highlight similar issues. These frameworks reveal how power imbalances fuel tensions, while structural-functionalism explains how religion can both unify society and marginalize minorities.

Social identity theory also plays a crucial role in understanding the dynamics of intergroup relations in these countries. In Malaysia, the concept of “Ketuanan Melayu” (Malay Supremacy) has been a central aspect of national identity, with significant implications for how religious minorities perceive their place in society. The emphasis on Malay-Muslim identity has led to feelings of marginalization among non-Malay and non-Muslim communities, contributing to a sense of alienation and, in some cases, contributing to conflict. Social identity theory helps explain how the emphasis on “Ketuanan Melayu” fosters in-group solidarity among Malay-Muslims but also alienates non-Malay and non-Muslim communities. This marginalization can lead to tensions, as minority groups feel excluded from the national identity and social privileges, further straining intergroup relations.

Integration theory offers a more optimistic perspective, highlighting the potential for greater social cohesion through policies that promote assimilation and integration. In both Indonesia and Malaysia, there have been efforts to integrate religious minorities into the

broader national identity, though these efforts have often been met with resistance from both the majority and minority groups. For example, in Indonesia, the concept of “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” (Unity in Diversity) has been promoted as a way to foster unity. Integration theory emphasizes the potential for cohesion through shared national identity, as seen in Indonesia’s promotion of “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika”. However, efforts to integrate religious minorities often face resistance from both sides, with minority groups fearing assimilation and majority groups wanting to maintain dominance. In Malaysia, similar challenges arise as integration policies struggle to balance national unity with respect for cultural and religious diversity.

## Discussion

*First: Religious diversity fosters a mindset of multicultural relationships.*

Sofjan asserts that diversity is not solely a sociological truth or fact, but rather an integral component of Allah’s Divine Plan and Will. Religious and ethnic variety and pluralism are essential elements of God’s sacred blueprint for humanity. Individuals who adhere to and effectively transmit the principles of their religious beliefs are motivated to exhibit courteous conduct and possess virtuous qualities. The values encompassed in the Pancasila principles align with the teachings of all religions. As a nation that adheres to the Pancasila ideology, Indonesia supports and provides space for the practice of religious activities by its citizens. It ensures that every individual has the freedom to exercise their beliefs without government interference. Pancasila does not contradict the principles of any religion.<sup>58</sup>

Religious diversity presents a significant challenge for Indonesia. Occasional conflicts rooted in religious matters persist due to increasing disparities in interpretation, as well as attitudes of intolerance, extremism, radicalism, and even terrorism. Pancasila, as a state ideology, has undergone rigorous testing due to its origins in a consensus reached among diverse factions. The inception of Pancasila included individuals from various religious backgrounds and nationalist organizations. Nevertheless, the practical application of Pancasila’s principles requires a clearer translation for all religious communities to experience its benefits properly.<sup>59</sup>

Religious unity in Indonesia is highly commendable globally, despite isolated and sporadic occurrences of intolerance. These instances can serve as indicators of the overall state of Indonesia. Azra highlighted that the heavenly conditions depicted in the Qur’an align well with the natural environment of Indonesia. Thus, individuals who seek to incite violence under the guise of religion can be classified as “keblinger”.<sup>60</sup>

The presence of various religious beliefs plays a crucial role in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of people from different cultures in Indonesia. The country is renowned for its diverse array of religions and beliefs, including Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and

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<sup>58</sup> Ali, S. (2012). *Perbedaan Agama atau Golongan Jangan Timbulkan Perpecahan Ummat*. Kemenag. <https://kemenag.go.id>

<sup>59</sup> Razi, F. (2020). *Nilai dalam Sila-Sila Pancasila Sejalan dengan Ajaran Semua Agama*. LEMHANNAS. <https://www.lemhannas.go.id>

<sup>60</sup> Azra, A. (2003). Pendidikan Multikultural: Membangun Kembali Indonesia Bhineka Tunggal Ika. *Journal Tsaqafah*, 1(2); Juaini. (2022). *Moderasi Beragama dalam Masyarakat Multikultural*. Fakultas Usuludin dan Filsafat UIN Ar-Raniri.

various other faiths. This diversity has become an essential component of Indonesian identity and social interactions.<sup>61</sup>

Religious diversity fosters an understanding of pluralism and tolerance.<sup>62, 63</sup> In Indonesia, a nation characterized by religious diversity, individuals learn to coexist with those who have different religious views and engage in distinct religious activities. This environment promotes attitudes of mutual respect and tolerance for differences, which are crucial foundations for peaceful intercultural partnerships.<sup>64</sup>

Religious diversity also fosters the exchange of ideas and perspectives among different religions.<sup>65</sup> In Indonesia, the government has established and financially supports inter-religious dialogue through organizations such as the Interfaith Communication Forum (FKUB) and the Centre for Religious Harmony (PKUB). These organizations strive to foster interreligious dialogue by bringing together representatives from various religious groups. This discussion enhances comprehension of diverse religious ideas and practices, while simultaneously fostering mutual trust and collaboration across different religious communities.

Religious diversity enriches culture and traditions.<sup>66</sup> Each religion possesses a distinct cultural heritage and set of values,<sup>67, 68</sup> significantly contributing to the cultural richness of Indonesia. The country's cultural legacy includes festivities such as Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, Vesak, and Nyepi, which celebrate religious diversity.

The presence of various religious beliefs and practices allows for the development of social cooperation and the establishment of an inclusive community. Religious diversity facilitates collaboration among different religious groups in areas such as education, health, and economic empowerment, enabling them to collectively pursue common objectives and enhance mutual prosperity<sup>69, 70</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Mudzhar, A. (2005). Pengembangan Masyarakat Multikultural Indonesia dan Tantangan ke Depan: Tinjauan Dari Aspek Keagamaan. Dalam M. R. Lubis (Ed.). *Merentas Wawasan dan Praksis Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Badan Litbang Agama dan Diklat Keagamaan Puslitbang Departemen Agama.

<sup>62</sup> Polinska, W. (2011). Engaging Religious Diversity: Towards a Pedagogy of Mindful Contemplation. *International Journal of the Humanities*, 9(1), 159-167.

<sup>63</sup> Juaini. (2022). *Moderasi Beragama dalam Masyarakat Multikultural*. Fakultas Usuludin dan Filsafat UIN Ar-Raniri.

<sup>64</sup> Generali. (2024). *Pengertian Toleransi Umat Beragama serta Contoh-contohnya*. <https://www.generali.co.id>

<sup>65</sup> Pope, E. M., & Paulus, T. M. (2023). Agree to disagree? Allowing for ideological difference during interfaith dialogue following scriptural reasoning. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 58(1), 31-59.

<sup>66</sup> Anibueze, M. R. (2016). *Eucharistic Communion and Rituals of Communion in Igbo Culture: An Integrative Study of Liturgy, Faith, and Culture*. University of Notre Dame.

<sup>67</sup> Duque, E., & Durán Vázquez, J. F. (2023). Generations and Life Worlds: The Case of Braga in Portugal. *Religions*, 14(11), 1413.

<sup>68</sup> Tulung, F. (2024). *Indonesia Memiliki Kekayaan dan Keanekaragaman Budaya*. Kominfo. <https://www.kominfo.go.id>

<sup>69</sup> Efendi, M. (2021). *Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama Kunci Kemajuan Bangsa*. KEMENKO PMK. <https://www.kemenkopmk.go.id>

<sup>70</sup> Yevdokymov, S. (2022). Establishment and Development of Small Towns of Ukraine: On the Issue of Definition of Historical and Legal Retrospect. *European Political and Law Discourse*, 9(1), 25-42.

Nevertheless, despite the considerable potential of religious diversity to enhance multicultural interactions, obstacles remain. Instances of religious conflicts, bigotry, and intolerance persist in various locations. Hence, it is crucial to persist in promoting education on tolerance, fortifying institutions that foster interfaith discourse, and enhancing the legal framework that safeguards individuals' rights to freely exercise their religious beliefs. Thus, religious diversity can continue to serve as a catalyst for enhancing multicultural interactions in Indonesia.

*Second: Patterns of majority-minority relationships that can give rise to a multicultural society.*

Siebert asserted that in modern nations that proclaim themselves as bastions of democracy, there exists a persistent and likely ongoing occurrence of bias and bigotry towards minority communities. Myrdal further elucidated that the inequality observed in America can also manifest in any diverse nation with numerous ethnicities, religious groups, races, and cultures. The presence of diversity has, to some degree, led to conflicts between dominant groups and marginalized ones.

In a community with diverse characteristics, minority groups are distinguished from dominant or majority groups in a distinct manner. The term "minority" is regrettable due to its association with numerical implications. Although "minority" and "majority" have literal meanings related to numbers, they actually refer to social statuses rather than statistical categories. The term "majority" denotes the ability to exert influence on key aspects of societal existence, such as politics, culture, economics, law, and even the definition of beauty and worth. On the other hand, minority groups can be defined as socially aware people with inherited membership and a high prevalence of marriage within the group. These groups face disadvantages due to the actions of dominant segments within a country.<sup>71</sup>

In the context of the Indonesian economic sector, the descendants of Chinese ancestors (ethnic Chinese) are considered a majority-minority group. Despite making up less than 8 percent of the total population of Indonesian citizens, they play a crucial role in shaping the country's economic stability. During Saddam Hussein's leadership, the Sunni population constituted the majority in Iraq. Conversely, in Iran, which is governed by Ayatollah Khomeini, Sunnis constitute a minority while Shiites make up the majority.<sup>72</sup>

The dynamics of intergroup relations between the dominant majority and minority groups play a crucial role in fostering harmony and tranquillity within Indonesian society. Within this particular framework, the term "majority" typically denotes a group that possesses a greater numerical presence within a given population, whereas "minority" designates a group that holds a smaller numerical representation. Several relationship patterns can be employed to foster harmony and tranquillity, including promoting mutual respect, encouraging dialogue, and ensuring equal opportunities for all groups.

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<sup>71</sup> Zanden, J. W. V. *The Social Experience*. (McGraw Hill Publishing Inc, 1990), 15-17.

<sup>72</sup> Huda, M. Assessing the relation between majority and minority groups: a critical study on the spirit of domination in a heterogeneous society. *AT-TURAS: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 4(2)(2018): 191-207.

- 1) **Openness and Tolerance:** The majority should embrace diversity as a valuable asset and demonstrate openness and tolerance towards minorities.<sup>73</sup> This includes acknowledging and respecting the rights and needs of minority groups in various areas of life, such as religion, culture, and language.<sup>74</sup>
- 2) **Engagement and Representation:** Ensuring equitable access and opportunities for minorities in political, economic, and social engagement is of utmost importance. This encompasses the need for equitable participation in governmental institutions, community organizations, and the commercial sector, ensuring that their perspectives and concerns are acknowledged and advocated for.<sup>75, 76</sup>
- 3) **Fostering Dialogue and Promoting Teamwork:** To foster mutual understanding, majorities and minorities must actively participate in transparent and productive discussions to gain insight into the viewpoints, needs, and concerns of both parties. By fostering collaboration between the two groups, it is possible to generate equitable and enduring resolutions to societal challenges.<sup>77, 78</sup>
- 4) **Educating and Raising Awareness:** Acquiring knowledge and understanding about pluralism, tolerance, and human rights is crucial in shaping attitudes and behaviors that demonstrate respect for differences. Both majority and minority groups must be actively engaged in educational initiatives, including formal programs in schools and public awareness campaigns.<sup>79</sup>
- 5) **Provision of Legal Safeguards:** The legal system has the responsibility to safeguard the rights of minority groups against any form of discrimination, violence, and persecution. This includes protecting the freedom to practice one's religion, exercise the right to express oneself, gather peacefully, and uphold cultural customs and traditions without fear or coercion.<sup>80, 81</sup>
- 6) **Inclusive Economic Growth:** Promoting inclusive economic growth is crucial to ensure that marginalized groups are not excluded from accessing economic opportunities.

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<sup>73</sup> Perez, A. B. D. Religion and Spirituality in University Students: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*, 14(4)(2024): 135-162.

<sup>74</sup> Sunarto. *Implementasi Nilai-Nilai Multikulturalisme di Kalangan Komunitas Masyarakat Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) Guna Mewujudkan Ketahanan Nasional*. LEMHANNAS, 2023), 19.

<sup>75</sup> Riskiyono, J. Partisipasi masyarakat dalam pembentukan perundang-undangan untuk mewujudkan kesejahteraan. *Aspirasi: Jurnal Masalah-masalah Sosial*, 6(2)(2015): 159-176.

<sup>76</sup> Yuliani, A. (2024). *Hak Konstitusional Warga Negara*. JDIH Kabupaten Sukabumi.

<sup>77</sup> Nakamura, H., & Chen, W. L. Dialogue and collaboration for sustainable development in Japan and Taiwan: Epistemic foundation of partnership toward Sustainable Development Goals. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 145, (2023): 238-249.

<sup>78</sup> Nkomazana, F., & Motswapong, E. Interfaith Collaborations and Development in Botswana: Focus on Pentecostals and Other Christian Denominations. *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, 48(1)(2024): 90-102.

<sup>79</sup> Salimi, E. A., & Rad, M. R. Nurturing multiculturalism in Iranian EFL teacher education: an in-depth scrutiny of experts' and teachers' perceptions. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 9(1)(2024): 9.

<sup>80</sup> Haiti, B. *Perlindungan Terhadap Kebebasan Beragama*. (Jakarta: Mahkamah Konstitusi RI, 2015), 31.

<sup>81</sup> Rohaida. *Perlindungan Hak-hak Minoritas dan Kebebasan Beragama Tidak Boleh dikompromikan*. (t.t: UII, 2021), 66-68.

Development programs should be formulated to ensure equitable distribution of benefits across all strata of society, irrespective of religious or ethnic affiliations.<sup>82</sup>

- 7) **Promoting Inter-religious and Inter-ethnic Collaboration:** Initiatives that foster interreligious and interethnic collaboration can effectively cultivate robust social networks and reciprocal assistance among diverse segments of society. These efforts include interreligious dialogue programs and cooperative cultural activities.<sup>83,84</sup>

In Indonesia, the celebration of Nyepi, the Balinese Hindu day of silence, highlights communal respect, as the entire island, including airports and seaports, shuts down. This fosters interfaith harmony and shows how a religious festival can transcend its cultural origins. In Malaysia, Thaipusam, celebrated by the Tamil Hindu community, draws participants from various backgrounds. Non-Hindus also join in, either as spectators or volunteers, reflecting Malaysia's rich diversity and cultural interaction.

Grassroots movements have played a vital role in promoting interreligious harmony where government efforts may be limited. In Central Java, the "Pesantren for Peace" initiative brings Islamic schools and religious minorities together through community projects and cultural exchanges. In Penang, Malaysia, the "Interfaith Fellowship Group" bridges religious divides with regular dialogues and events. Their inclusive approach, especially focusing on youth and women, has been key to their success in fostering understanding.

Landmark legal cases have shaped the religious freedom landscape in both Indonesia and Malaysia. In Indonesia, the 2008 decree against the Ahmadiyya community restricted their religious activities, drawing criticism from human rights groups. In Malaysia, the M. Indira Gandhi case, where a mother challenged her children's conversion to Islam without her consent, was a major victory for religious minorities. It also highlighted the ongoing tensions between civil and Sharia law in Malaysia.

Personal stories offer a deep understanding of the challenges faced by religious minorities. Anisa, a Christian in Jakarta, has built strong ties with her Muslim neighbours through mutual respect, though she faces subtle discrimination. In Malaysia, Ramesh, a Hindu businessman, struggled for years to obtain a permit to build a temple, facing resistance from the local majority. His perseverance highlights the resilience of religious minorities in navigating bureaucratic obstacles.

Interfaith dialogue initiatives have played a key role in fostering religious tolerance in both Indonesia and Malaysia. The Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP) has organized interfaith dialogues to promote understanding. In Malaysia, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism (MCCBCHST) advocates for religious minorities and engages with officials to push for policies that protect religious freedoms. However, overcoming deep-rooted prejudices remains a challenge in both countries.

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<sup>82</sup>Basyuni, M. M. *Kebijakan dan Strategi Kerukunan Umat Beragama*. (Badan Litbang dan Diklat Departemen Agama RI, 2006), 78.

<sup>83</sup> Fahy, J. The international politics of tolerance in the Persian Gulf. *Religion, State & Society*, 46(4)(2018): 311-327.

<sup>84</sup>Grzywacz, A. Indonesia's (inter)national role as a Muslim democracy model: Effectiveness and conflict between the conception and prescription roles. *Journal Pacific Review*, 33(5)(2020): 728-756.

Globalization has significantly influenced religious identity in Indonesia and Malaysia. The rise of global Islamic movements has introduced new interpretations of Islam, challenging traditional practices. At the same time, globalization has allowed religious minorities to connect with global communities, strengthening their identities. However, concerns about the erosion of local traditions persist. In urban areas like Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, younger generations are more influenced by global trends, creating tensions with older, more traditional generations.

## Conclusion

Indonesia and Malaysia can promote a more cohesive, tranquil, and equitable society for all its inhabitants by embracing an inclusive relational framework and bolstering collaboration between the majority and minority. After examining the interaction between the dominant and non-dominant religious groups in Indonesia, it can be inferred that this relationship is a crucial element of the nation's social and cultural structure. The analysis reveals that religious diversity significantly impacts the perception of intercultural relations in Indonesia. The presence of various religious beliefs enriches the religious experience and provides a strong foundation for building an inclusive, respectful, and peaceful Indonesian society. This is achieved by fostering tolerance, encouraging discourse, and promoting harmony among different religions.

To foster lasting harmony and social cohesion, it is essential for all sectors of Indonesian society to actively promote the ideals of tolerance, inclusivity, and dialogue. Although Indonesia officially upholds the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), marginalized communities continue to exist due to a combination of structural inequalities, discriminatory policies, and sociocultural biases. For example, certain religious minorities—such as the Ahmadiyya and Shi'a communities—have faced restrictions on their religious practices, as seen in the 2008 joint ministerial decree limiting the Ahmadiyya's religious expression.<sup>85</sup> These instances reflect deeper systemic issues that hinder full inclusivity.

However, Indonesia has demonstrated capacity for reconciliation and positive change through state-supported interfaith institutions like the Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB) and civil society-led initiatives such as Pesantren for Peace, which engage diverse religious communities in dialogue and cooperation. These examples indicate that, despite ongoing challenges, the country possesses institutional mechanisms and cultural foundations that can be harnessed to address marginalization. Thus, achieving a more harmonious and inclusive society is not only aspirational but feasible—provided that all stakeholders, from policymakers to community leaders, commit to sustained and genuine efforts at reform and engagement.

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<sup>85</sup> Huda, M. (2018). Assessing the relation between majority and minority groups: a critical study on the spirit of domination in a heterogeneous society. *AT-TURAS: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 4(2), 191-207; Rohaida. (2021). *Perlindungan Hak-hak Minoritas dan Kebebasan Beragama Tidak Boleh dikompromikan*. UII.

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