



Multicultural relation between religious communities in Indonesia



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Indonesia is a nation with different religious affiliations and this diversity has substantial implications for inter-religious relations. The multi-religious context presented challenges in the form of potential horizontal conflicts. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the significance of cultivating an attitude of openness and engaging in constructive dialogue among different faiths to address the challenges effectively. Traditions in Minahasa show various important values for religious moderation, which have the potential to contribute ideas to issues of relations between communities. This article is a qualitative descriptive analysis method. Several references such as articles, books and other related sources are the backbone to construct the ideas and insights of this work. The results show that the multicultural reality accompanied by fundamentalist attitudes has an impact on interreligious relations. This can be prevented and reduced with the concept of dialogue from the values and philosophy of *si tou timou tumou tou* and *torang samua basudara*.

Contribution: This article serves as a valuable contribution to the religious discourse within the Indonesian community, particularly by incorporating the rich local values derived from Minahasa. It adds depth to the ongoing religious dialogue, fostering a nuanced understanding that embraces the diverse cultural and spiritual perspectives present in Indonesia.

Keywords: multiculturalism; relationships; communities; religion; Minahasa.

Introduction

Multireligiosity is a defining characteristic of Indonesia, contributing significantly to the rich tapestry of cultural diversity and religious tolerance within the nation. This diversity should serve as a wellspring of strength, shaping the distinctive identity as a mosaic of varied beliefs and practices, but the reality falls short of the potential. However, comprehensive studies exploring the positive impacts of such diversity are scarce. Some study depicts the existing religious landscape, often overlooking the inherent benefits (Koswara & Viktorahadi 2022; Labobar 2022). Historical records attest to a harmonious coexistence in Indonesian society, where individuals from diverse religious backgrounds cohabit peacefully and share common spiritual and religious spaces. Some works have been shared that attempted to bring harmony to religion-culture and cross-religion relations (Hutagalung, Rumbay & Ferinia 2022; Pangalila, Rotty & Rumbay 2024; Rumbay 2021; Rumbay & Hartono 2021; Rumbay & Siahaya 2023; Rumbay, Siahaya & Hutagalung 2024), but multicultural and multireligious context in Indonesia, however, still share significant tensions.

This pluralistic fabric intricately weaves a societal framework that celebrates differences, enhancing mutual respect and understanding among its citizens. The positive impact of multireligiosity is seen in the various ways traditions and rituals intersect, creating a rich mix of customs. Festivals and celebrations, rooted in different beliefs, often transcend religious boundaries to become shared cultural experiences (Ramadhan & Aziza 2023) (Cakranegara 2022; Faidi 2020; Nugroho 2022). This fusion of religious practices strengthens a sense of unity and reinforces the idea that diversity is an asset rather than a source of division. Indonesia showcases a model of living together with the potential to inspire global conversations about tolerance and peaceful living through multireligiosity. However, maintaining relations between religious communities does not touch on the values of life but is limited to celebrating the rituals and sacramentals of religions. The multireligious landscape poses formidable challenges, particularly evident during periods of political or social upheaval. Instances of inter-religious conflict may surface, laying tensions that pose a threat to harmony (Hisyam 2006; Sukamto 2013).

Addressing these challenges necessitates a thorough examination of their root causes, often connected with socio-political factors, economic disparities or external influences that exploit religious differences for various objectives. A significant factor contributing to conflict between

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religious communities is the intricate and diverse context of multiculturalism, supporting fundamentalism. Hidayati (2020) shows the importance of imparting multicultural education to prevent fundamentalism and establish peace among religions. Rizki (2022) echoes this perspective, asserting that cultural diversity profoundly influenced inter-religious relations and led to fundamentalism. This linkage arises because specific cultural contexts are closely associated with particular religions (Bauto 2014; Parida 2020). Therefore, the intertwining of multiculturalism and fundamentalism cannot be separated from the broader context of multireligiousness.

Indonesia's multireligious context includes positive and negative dimensions and is closely related to multiculturalism. The ability to navigate this complex landscape depends on the commitment to enhance tolerance, understanding and open dialogue. By embracing the positive aspects of diversity and actively addressing challenges, Indonesia has the potential to further strengthen its unique position as a model of religious life for the world. This study discusses multireligiousness and its implications in relations between religious communities. Various concepts offered for relations between religious communities have been presented by previous results, but no one takes local values as the object of discussion (Arif 2021; Arifinsyah & Damanik 2020; Kawangung 2019). Moreover, local ideas should have the greatest opportunity to offer a concept of peace for relations between religions. Several philosophies of life can be explored and discussed in the national context for relations between religions. Even though the cultural and religious context in Indonesia is very heterogeneous, local values and philosophies related to dialogue in Minahasa can offer alternative contributions to relations between religious communities. Therefore, the principle of fundamentalism can be opposed because these ideas are local values collected from the archipelago.

Discussion

The quest for multiculturalism

Etymologically, multiculturalism became widely used in the 1950s in Canada. According to *Longer Oxford Dictionary*, the term 'multiculturalism' is a deviation from the word 'multicultural'. This dictionary quotes a sentence from the Canadian newspaper, the *Montreal Times*, which described Montreal society as 'multicultural' and 'multi-lingual'. R. Stavenhagen states that multiculturalism recognises the ethnic and cultural diversity of a nation. The fundamental concept underlying multiculturalism is rooted in the word 'culture'. As articulated by Bikhu Parekh in 'Rethinking Multiculturalism' (2001, Harvard University Press), the term includes three integral components, namely culture, cultural plurality and specific methods of addressing plurality. Multiculturalism is a pragmatic political doctrine, representing a comprehensive perspective on human life. Given the inherent diversity of cultures within all countries worldwide, differences serve as the foundational fabric of society.

The escalating movement of communities across the globe intensifies this cultural diversity, necessitating the translation of multiculturalism into practical policies for managing the cultural distinctions of citizens. Therefore, it is important to first comprehend the term multiculturalism. The adjective 'multicultural' refers to the fact of diversity, while 'multiculturalism' designates a normative attitude towards diversity, advocating for the recognition, acceptance, and promotion of diverse cultural identities within a society. Multiculturalism needs to sort out the forms of 'cultural' diversity within the country. Will Kymlicka (1995) distinguishes two categories of diversity, namely multinational and polyethnic countries. A multi-national state was born from the coexistence of several nations that originally existed independently within their respective territorial boundaries. This coexistence may have occurred through invasion and colonisation and perhaps also voluntarily. In multinational states, the relevant political unit is the nation or ethnic group and demands autonomy or self-government to maintain its uniqueness vis-à-vis the majority culture. In a philosophical context, multiculturalism is the most severe form of postmodernism, which is seen as access to a clash of civilisations. Because of this clash of civilisations, postmodernism is often considered to have 'killed reason'. Therefore, the reality and obligation that are very relevant are multiculturalism. Postmodernism must respect the rights of culturally diverse communities (*the right of cultural diversity*). By carrying out this obligation, this concept shows the divisions caused by *incommensurability*. However, 'tolerance' is recommended in the form of norms between communities and cultural differences. As a product of postmodernism, multiculturalism dismisses *ethnocentrism*, *xenocentrism* and *xenophobia* as speech and attitudes irrelevant to its principles. In this framework, the focus shifts towards the importance of respecting the rights to cultural diversity and the right to be culturally different. Multiculturalism advocates for the emancipation of small cultures, each endowed with a 'right to life' that demands acknowledgement and respect. This shows a departure from narrow perspectives and enables the recognition of the inherent value in the diversity of cultures, promoting a more inclusive and equitable societal landscape.

The historical trajectory of the United States of America (USA) and Western European countries shows that these societies predominantly recognised a singular culture, namely the Christian White culture until the Second World War. Other groups within these societies were systematically labelled as minorities, experiencing limitations and constraints on their rights. In the USA, a significant shift occurred in the late 1950s, marked by the movements advocating for equal rights for minorities, blacks and communities of colour. The pinnacle of the transformative period unfolded in the 1960s, characterised by the prohibition of discriminatory practices by white individuals against black and coloured individuals in public spaces. This marked the onset of a protracted struggle for civil rights, further catalysed by affirmative action initiatives aimed at addressing

historical disadvantages faced by minorities. These efforts bridged the gaps in various positions and fields of work or business, enhancing a more equitable distribution of opportunities and resources among diverse communities. In the 1970s, efforts to achieve equality in diversity experienced various obstacles. The Protestant and dominant white cultural style is different from black communities, Indians or Native Americans and various national and ethnic cultures classified as minorities (Nieto 1992). Intellectuals and government officials who championed democracy with human rights and opposed racism, and discrimination played an important role in promoting the concept of multiculturalism during the 1970s. The efforts manifested through the integration of multicultural education into schools. Meanwhile, children from diverse backgrounds, including those of Chinese and Mexican descent, can learn using their mother tongue in schools up to certain stages (Nieto 1992). The influence of these initiatives is reflected in the contemporary reality described by Glazer (1998) stating that 'we are all multiculturalists now'. This statement encapsulates the current state of affairs in the USA, showing a collective acknowledgement of multiculturalism. The phenomenon is a direct outcome of the systematic implementation of multicultural education processes that have unfolded since the 1970s. Since then, multiculturalism has become an official policy in English-speaking countries, specifically starting in Canada in 1971. This policy was adopted by the majority of European Union members, as an official policy, and social consensus among elites. Multiculturalism is a philosophy interpreted as an ideology that requires the unity of various cultural groups with the same social and political rights and status in modern society. The term is also often used to describe the unity of different ethnic communities in a country (Hanum, Alfarabi & Firmansyah 2022).

In Indonesia's context, Chang-Yao Hoon's (2017, 2006, 2013) vision of multiculturalism presents a compelling framework that emphasises cultural diversity and mutual respect as cornerstones for societal cohesion. This approach diverges from the more assimilationist models that seek to homogenise distinct identities under a singular national culture. Instead, it advocates for recognising and validating each unique cultural expression as integral to Indonesia's collective identity. The relevance of Hoon's ideas becomes even more pressing when considering contemporary incidents of inter-ethnic conflict and intolerance within the country. Chang-Yao Hoon's idea of multiculturalism is not merely idealistic but indeed a necessary strategy for promoting unity and harmony in Indonesia. His vision of multiculturalism offers a viable and essential framework for fostering societal cohesion through mutual respect and the celebration of diversity. Embracing Hoon's ideas not only honours each distinct cultural expression as integral to Indonesia's collective identity but also paves the way for a more inclusive society. By recognising that unity does not require uniformity, Hoon's multiculturalism serves as a foundational strategy for ensuring lasting harmony in one of the world's most culturally diverse nations. In moving forward with this approach, Indonesia can transform its rich

diversity from a source of conflict into one of its greatest strengths, ultimately contributing to national resilience and global admiration.

Therefore, multiculturalism is a discourse and ideology that must be fought for, as a basis for upholding democracy, human rights and the welfare of society. The ideology requires a set of concepts to serve as a reference for its understanding and development in social life. To understand multiculturalism, a foundation of knowledge is needed in the form of building relevant concepts and supporting the existence and function of human life. The building blocks must be communicated among experts with the same scientific concerns about multiculturalism; hence there is a common understanding and mutual support in fighting for the ideology. Various concepts relevant to multiculturalism include democracy, justice and law, cultural values and ethos, togetherness in equal differences, ethnicity, ethnic culture, religious beliefs, cultural expressions, private and public domains, human rights, communities cultural rights and other relevant concepts (Surandi in press). The essence is the willingness to accept other groups equally as a unity, without regard to differences in culture, ethnicity, gender, language or religion.

Multiculturalism and its impact on religious diversity in Indonesia

As articulated by Ignas Kleden (2010), the essence of the multicultural principle lies in the capacity to engage in a continuous process of linking and delinking within various cultural contexts. This includes establishing connections with a value system and liberating oneself from its constraints to genuinely comprehend others. In the case of Indonesia, characterised by a mosaic of ethnic, cultural and religious groups, the nation-state qualifies as a 'multicultural' society. However, this reality is juxtaposed with the pressing necessity to reconstruct an Indonesian national culture'. The reconstructed national culture is seen as a unifying force, serving as the cohesive element that binds the diverse ethnic and cultural components of Indonesia. The challenge lies in creating an inclusive and integrative national identity that respects and embraces the richness of the country's multicultural tapestry. Multiculturalism in religious field is a reality in the lives of Indonesian communities with various dimensions. Religious multiculturalism is proven by the presence of six religions with various sects or beliefs. Few nations experience life such as Indonesia, where the world's major religions coexist and flourish. It is important not to perceive religious multiculturalism as a utilitarian concept aimed at mitigating fanaticism. This should be regarded as a genuine integration of diverse elements within the framework of civilisation. Religious multiculturalism is a necessity for the well-being of humanity, incorporating essential monitoring and balancing mechanisms. This form of multiculturalism constitutes a valuable asset capable of making a substantial contribution to the fabric of the Indonesian nation. Simultaneously, it poses a threat to existence that demands

constant vigilance. The critical inquiry is related to the reasons behind the role of multiculturalism as a catalyst for horizontal conflicts.

Multiculturalism is inevitably accompanied by the looming presence of fundamentalism. Even within religious multiculturalism, the spectre of religious fundamentalism is an unavoidable reality, often catalysing conflicts between different faiths. In inter-religious relations, three distinct models are developed, namely exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Exclusivism is an ideology asserting that the core tenets of each religion can be valid, acknowledging and respecting other religious traditions, where salvation is exclusive to one particular faith. This inclination is observed across various religions, as exemplified by the Catholic Church's pre-Second Vatican Council doctrine, which explicitly stated, 'There is no salvation outside the church'. Inclusivism represents a more radical ideology, contending that no single religion possesses absolute truth. Every religion includes certain fundamental truths but not all can complete paths to salvation. Within religious inclusivism, a proclivity persists to regard specific religions as superior to others. Conversely, pluralism stands as the belief that all religions enjoy equal legitimacy. In this perspective, no religion can assert exclusive ownership of absolute truth and salvation. This promotes the idea that every faith holds equal standing, rejecting any claims of superiority among religions. The proclivity to embrace exclusivism can lead to a perilous descent into the delusion of religious fundamentalism. The origins can be traced back to formative traditions that improve internal harmony, transforming into a formidable force capable of launching attacks against perceived external threats. Religious fundamentalism causes religions to view others as enemies that must be eliminated (Race 2013). According to Yong Ohoitumur (2004):

[...]fundamentalism does not mean the inevitability of every religion having fundamental truths believed to be the essence of its religion. The concept has a pejorative style and is a movement against the beliefs held by most communities. However, conversations about hardline movements within religious circles are often clouded by a failure to distinguish religious fundamentalism from radicalism. (p. 10)

Religious fundamentalism in the Indonesian context is closely linked to radicalism. The concept is seen as an ideology that tends to fight for something radical. Groups or communities who adhere to fundamentalism are known as fundamentalists. In a religious context, these individuals are understood as adherents of old-fashioned and reactionary religious movements who always feel the need to return to the original teachings as written in the respective Holy Books or teaching sources. Also state that: fundamentalist movements and fundamentalists are characterised by an attitude of resistance or struggle (*fight*) (1) against any group that threatens its existence and identity, (2) strive to uphold general life issues, such as family and religion, (3) struggling with a framework of values and identity taken literally from Scripture or interpreted exclusively, (4) fighting against any communities considered to have deviated from the

theological fundamentals and (5) fighting in the name of God or religious symbol. The tendency to fall into religious fundamentalism essentially causes enormous difficulties in the realisation of a harmonious society, specifically multicultural Indonesian society in the context of relations between religions. Multiculturalism, intended to serve as a foundation for respecting diverse religions and fostering a truly inclusive Indonesian state that embraces 'bhineka', is impeded by the presence of religious fundamentalism.

Minahasa dialogical values and philosophy

The pressures and threats from religious fundamentalism have diminished the uniqueness of multiculturalism, rendering the concept less deserving of intellectual scrutiny and appreciation in practical life. This trend has resulted in religious multiculturalism being characterised by pronounced contradictions and conflicts, enhancing hostile and separatist attitudes. In Indonesia, such situations and conditions have evolved into significant challenges. The matter of cultural and religious differences has been developed as a central issue in various aspects of life, exemplified by incidents such as the riots in Ambon, Poso, the HKBP case and similar occurrences. Religious fundamentalism poses a challenge to the practice of multiculturalism, impeding the uniqueness and merits of various religions. The importance is to discern the measures required to reestablish religious multiculturalism, enhancing harmony among diverse communities. According to Panikkar (1994), engaging in dialogue among religious communities is crucial for the creation of a truly multicultural Indonesian society. The dialogical discourse should unfold in a personal and pluralistic manner, refraining from reducing or isolating communities from one another. Furthermore, Zakiyuddin Baidhaway (2010) states that dialogue transcended conversation, constituting a convergence of minds and hearts addressing common issues. According to Baidhaway, 'change' in this context implies that open, honest and empathetic dialogue can lead to a reduction and elimination of prejudice, stereotypes and blame. The transformative nature of the dialogue is evident in the capacity to obtain information, provide clarification from primary sources and facilitate open and sincere discussion. The dialogue serves as the foundation for cultivating conscience and reason, enhancing the maturation of religious ethos that upholds and respects the 'difference' inherent in diverse religious perspectives. In the reality of religious existence, the encounter of diverse faiths provides a profound intercultural experience. Engaging in dialogue between religions navigates this intricate landscape, creatively integrating significant forces into civil life and mitigating potential ideological conflicts among faiths. This multicultural exposure catalyses increased awareness, offering a renewed and more correlated perspective. Religious multiculturalism is not a paradoxical notion but a forward-looking method from an authentic and rational viewpoint. This perspective serves as a fundamental for all religious and cultural experiences. The dialogue between religions propels Indonesians towards a religious and cultural worldview that transcends partiality, avoiding discriminatory civil ideologies.

The concept of dialogue may not be indigenous to the archipelago, but the concept becomes crucial to accord greater emphasis to local values and philosophies. In examining the intricacies of diverse perspectives, the incorporation of indigenous values and philosophies related to the concept takes precedence, ensuring a more culturally resonant and contextually grounded method. In Minahasa, there is a motto *si tou timou tumou tou*, which means humanising other communities (Supit & Pangalila-Ratulangie 2022). In the context of interreligious relations, the expression can reflect the spirit of unity in diversity. Indonesia faces challenges and opportunities in maintaining harmonious relations between religious communities. This enables citizens to engage in dialogue, respect and celebrate differences and face the challenges presented by diversity. The importance of dialogue within a frame that humanises one another between religions becomes clear in nurturing this spirit. Minahasa's values and philosophy show that diversity is wealth, not an obstacle. Constructive and inclusive dialogue is the key to overcoming misperceptions, building a sense of mutual understanding and reuniting the togetherness underlining the spirit of 'Si tou timou tumou tou'. In the face of changing times, the spirit remains relevant as a glue for interfaith relations (Pangalila et al. 2018). The philosophy of communal living in Minahasa incorporated into the motto 'torang samua basudara' contributes valuable dialogical insights to inter-religious relationships. Pangalila, Mantiri and Biringan (2019) and Sumampow (2016) state the significance of this phrase, originating from the Manado dialect, which translates to 'we are all brothers'. In the Indonesian context, this expression holds profound meaning, supporting brotherhood and unity amid religious diversity (Mantu 2018). The concept of contributive dialogue gains enrichment from the ethos of 'torang samua basudara' in reinforcing positive relationships among religious communities. The essence of the phrase lies in the acknowledgement of fundamental equality as fellow countrymen. Within the framework of contributive dialogue, this principle forms the bedrock for mutual respect and understanding of religious differences. The recognition of brotherhood dialogue develops into a platform that cultivates mutual trust and collaboration among diverse religious communities. The spirit of 'torang samua basudara' also sets the stage for collective learning. In contributive dialogue, religious communities can engage in the exchange of experiences, values and traditions (Nassa 2021; Rajafi 2016). This exchange presents an opportunity to deepen understanding of religious diversity, diminish stereotypes and construct a more profound foundation for mutual comprehension.

The importance of contributive dialogue is the ability to create joint solutions and support inclusive societal development. By harnessing the spirit of 'torang samua basudara', religious communities can seek better understanding, identify shared values and work to achieve common goals. However, to make contributive dialogue effective, joint commitment from various parties is needed. Governments, religious institutions

and civil society can create an environment that supports the positive exchange of ideas and views. These initiatives need to promote multicultural education and interfaith cooperation to have a significant impact. By internalising the meaning of 'torang samua basudara', Indonesia can continue to be an example for other countries in realising harmony and tolerance between religious communities. Society can build strong bridges towards better understanding and cooperation amid rich religious diversity through this contributive dialogue based on the spirit of brotherhood. In essence, the purpose of dialogue between religions is to understand other communities's religions. Dialogue is not intended to triumph over other religions or attain absolute consensus or a universal religious doctrine. The objective to be realised is the promotion of effective communication to bridge mutual ignorance and misunderstanding among diverse world cultures to articulate and convey different perspectives in their respective languages. However, dialogue does not establish uniformity of form or diminish human diversity to a singular religion, ideology or tradition. In inter-religious dialogue, the presence of religious fundamentalism poses a significant impediment to the establishment of a truly multicultural Indonesian society in matters of faith. Besides conceptual concern, religious fundamentalism has the potential to manifest as a tangible reality. From a positive perspective, the concept of multiculturalism shows an awareness related to the diversity of cultures. At a practical level, the concept signifies the potential for 'cultural adjustment' and 'cultural dialogue' in individual and group experiences. Embracing multiculturalism facilitates the bridging and appreciation of cultural and religious diversity. However, multiculturalism does not advocate for the universalisation of culture or religion. Each religion and culture retains its distinct uniqueness and deserves appreciation. The pragmatic nature presents a challenge and this stance confines to conventions, local culture and communal rationality, resisting exploration beyond the boundaries. An unaddressed challenge in improving inter-religious relations is the persistence of religious fundamentalism. This perspective hinders understanding and disrupts harmonious relationships among religious followers. By adopting the principles of 'si tou timou tumou tou' and 'torang samua basudara', religious believers can use dialogue as a constructive means to broaden minds, encouraging acceptance and respect for religious diversity. This method can be effective when coupled with sustained dialogue efforts and a conscious avoidance of excessively fundamentalist attitudes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the reality of multiculturalism in Indonesia was reported to impact interreligious relations. To understand the concept with its various aspects, a dialogue perspective was needed from local values. In addition, complex multiculturalism and religious diversity could be interpreted positively when the idea of local dialogue was used in Minahasa. Multiculturalism could bring rich cultural diversity to the Indonesian nation but might also act as a counter-threat. Therefore, an important aspect of stating

inter-religious relations was promoting an attitude of openness and dialogue among different faiths. The authentic essence of multiculturalism was manifested within this context, particularly in relations between religious communities.

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Authors' contributions

T.P. contributed to the original draft, methodology, funding acquisition and data curation and resources. C.A.R. contributed to the supervision, validation, project administration and software.

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Disclaimer

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