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RELIGION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN BUILDING COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Putri Aulia Umar

Faculty of Usuluddin and Islamic Studies, Study Program of Religious Studies, State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Indonesia

Putriauliaumar04@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study delves into the complex interplay between religion and ethnic identity, focusing on how religious beliefs and practices play a crucial role in shaping and strengthening community identity. Utilizing a sociological framework, the research examines a variety of communities to uncover how shared religious experiences cultivate a sense of belonging and collective identity among their members. Through the analysis of case studies and qualitative approaches, the findings indicate that religion acts not only as a cohesive force but also influences cultural values and social norms within different ethnic groups. Ultimately, the results highlight the significance of recognizing religion as a fundamental factor in the development of ethnic identities, providing valuable insights into the mechanisms of community unity and diversity.

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of an increasingly diverse society, the relationship between religion and ethnic identity has emerged as an important issue that requires serious attention. The influence of globalization has brought significant changes to traditional values and norms, raising

questions about how ethnic groups can maintain their identity amidst the rapid flow of change (Nur Hidayah, 2021, p.45-62). Religion, as one of the fundamental elements in social life, often serves as a foundation in maintaining community identity. Religion plays a central role in the formation of social identity. Religious practices and values held by a group can create strong emotional bonds between its members. For example, religious rituals performed together not only affirm beliefs but also create collective experiences that strengthen solidarity. Moments such as the celebration of religious holidays or religious-based social activities become an arena for strengthening collective identity and affirming a sense of togetherness among community members. Thus, religion serves as an effective link between individuals and their ethnic communities. However, the interaction between religion and ethnic identity is often not smooth. There is potential for conflict between the values espoused by religion and the cultural norms that exist within a community. For example, certain religious practices may be seen as contradictory to local traditions, which can create tensions among community members. In cases like this, it is important to understand how these dynamics play out so that communities can maintain their identities despite rapid social change.

The identity crisis faced by various ethnic groups also highlights their need to find support through religious practices. In times of uncertainty and change, religion is often a source of strength and comfort for individuals. Through religious practices, they can feel connected to their history, culture, and ancestral values. Identities formed through these religious experiences tend to be more solid, as individuals feel they have a clear place and role in the larger community.The study of the role of religion in building ethnic identity is also very important in the context of multicultural societies. In many countries, ethnic and religious diversity often presents challenges to social cohesion. By understanding how religion contributes to shaping collective identity, we can formulate strategies to encourage dialogue and cooperation between groups. This

It is vital that all individuals feel recognized and treated fairly, regardless of their ethnic or religious background.Through a sociological approach, this study aims to explore more deeply how the interaction between religion and ethnicity contributes to building community identity. By analyzing various case studies, we can identify common patterns that emerge in this relationship and how communities respond to the social changes that occur. This understanding will provide richer insights into the dynamics of identity in complex societies, where religion and ethnicity interact and influence each other.

Religion not only offers spiritual meaning, but also serves as a channel to express cultural values that are unique to a group (Hasan Amir, 2020, p.15). In many cases, religious

beliefs and practices become a tool to build solidarity among community members. However, with the emergence of modernization and rapid social change, the role of religion in building ethnic identity has become increasingly complex. Therefore, in-depth research is needed to understand how the interaction between religion and ethnic identity takes place. The identity crisis experienced by many ethnic groups shows that they often seek support in religious practices to maintain their existence. Previous studies have shown that shared religious experiences can strengthen social bonds and build a sense of togetherness. However, there is still a lack of in-depth understanding of how these experiences contribute to the formation of collective identity in diverse ethnic contexts (Abdul Rahmad, 2022, p.23-39) For example, in some communities, religious practices are not only related to rituals but also bind individuals to their history and ancestral values. This creates a strong and sustainable identity. Therefore, it is important to further explore how religion functions as a binder in a pluralistic society. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a comprehensive sociological analysis of the role of religion in building community identity. By focusing on various communities with different ethnic backgrounds, this study is expected to provide new insights into the dynamics between religion and ethnic identity. Through this approach, it is hoped that it will be revealed how shared religious experiences can create a sense of belonging and collective identity (Lilia Sari, 2021, p.12).This article aims to explore the complex relationship between religion and ethnic identity from a sociological perspective. This study recognizes that religion often plays a key role in the formation and strengthening of ethnic identity. community. Using relevant theoretical frameworks, this study will analyze how religious beliefs and practices shape social experiences that support solidarity among community members.

In this study, we will study different communities to understand how shared religious experiences contribute to the formation of a sense of community. The methods used include case study analysis and in-depth qualitative approaches. The findings of this study are expected to show that religion not only functions as a bond, but also has a significant impact on cultural values and social norms in different ethnic groups.

The results of this study will emphasize the importance of understanding religion as a key factor in the development of ethnic identity. Thus, this study is expected to provide significant contributions to academic discussions on the relationship between religion and ethnic identity in the modern era. With a better understanding of the role of religion, we can identify the mechanisms underlying unity and diversity in society

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Religion and ethnic identity are two fundamental components in social structures that are often closely related to each other. Religion provides a moral and spiritual framework that guides individuals in their lives, and shapes social perspectives and behaviors. Meanwhile, ethnic identity includes cultural heritage, language, and traditions that distinguish one group from another. The interaction between the two creates complex dynamics in society (Abdurrahman, 2012, p.67).

First of all, religion plays a major role in the formation of ethnic identity. Many religious practices, such as ceremonies and celebrations, become symbols of a group's identity. For example, in the Hindu community in Bali, the Ngaben ceremony not only has a spiritual dimension, but also serves as a means to express the richness of local culture. In this case, religion serves as a bond that strengthens solidarity among members of an ethnic community. However, ethnic identity also influences individual religious practices. The values and norms held by an ethnic group can be seen in the way they practice religious teachings. In Indonesia, for example, there are variations in the implementation of Muslim worship that are influenced by local culture. This shows that although religious teachings have similarities, their practices can differ significantly depending on ethnic background (Mulyana, 2015, p.23).

Despite the positive relationship, the relationship between religion and ethnic identity is not always harmonious. Religious differences have sometimes been a source of conflict between ethnic groups. Many examples in history show that the tensions that arising from differences in belief can lead to discrimination and violence. In Indonesia, for example, conflicts between Muslims and Christians are often rooted in ethnic identity tensions exacerbated by religious differences. In this context, religion can become a divisive tool if not handled wisely.

On the other hand, religion can also serve as a bridge that strengthens relations between ethnic groups. In some situations, religion has been used to promote peace and harmony among different groups. Interfaith activities, involving different ethnicities, can be a platform for dialogue and understanding. Through such collaboration, prejudice can be minimized and mutual respect can be enhanced.

Furthermore, a strong ethnic identity can enrich spiritual experiences. When ethnic communities celebrate their traditions in a religious context, this opens up opportunities for dialogue between cultural heritage and spirituality. For example, an Eid celebration that is colored by local traditions, such as traditional cuisine or art performances, can give a deeper meaning to the event. In this way, the integration of religion and ethnic identity creates a richer religious experience. Understanding the interaction between religion and ethnic identity is

especially important in the context of a diverse society. Both influence and shape the existing social dynamics. By understanding this relationship, we can not only maintain harmony between groups but also strengthen the sense of nationhood in a diverse society. Respecting religious and ethnic diversity is an important step in building an inclusive and harmonious society. As a first step, this article will present an in-depth literature review of previous research related to religion and ethnic identity. After that, the methodology used in this study will be explained in detail, followed by an analysis of the findings and a discussion. With this systematic approach, it is hoped that this study can provide a comprehensive view of the role of religion in shaping community identity and its broader social implications.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method to explore the crisis of identity and religious diversity, and its implications for tolerance and conflict in urban communities. A qualitative approach was chosen because it can provide an in-depth understanding of social dynamics and individual experiences in the context of diversity, as expressed by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) who stated that qualitative research is able to capture the complexity of human interactions and the meanings they create. This study will collect and analyze various relevant literature, including journal articles, books, and research reports related to the crisis of identity, interreligious tolerance, and social conflict. As a first step, the researcher will conduct a literature mapping to identify the main themes that emerge from previous studies, such as the relationship between religious identity and conflict, which has been discussed by Williams (2016), and the importance of interreligious dialogue in creating tolerance. In its analysis, this study will follow a thematic analysis approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Religion plays a crucial role in shaping social structures and ethnic identities in Indonesia. In many communities, religion serves not only as a spiritual guide, but also as a foundation for norms and values that govern social interactions. For example, in Muslim communities in Java, Islamic teachings shape patterns of social relationships that emphasize the importance of mutual cooperation, mutual assistance, and respect for parents. These values build strong bonds among members. ethnicity, which in turn strengthens solidarity and cohesion in society (Nasution, 2019, p.56).

Collective religious practices also play an important role in strengthening ethnic identity. Religious rituals and celebrations, such as Eid al-Fitr or Christmas, are not only spiritual moments, but also opportunities for communities to come together, share stories, and

celebrate their cultural heritage. In Bali, for example, the celebrations of Galungan and Nyepi are not only expressions of religion, but are also an integral part of the cultural identity of the local Hindu community. Through these celebrations, Balinese people can strengthen their sense of togetherness and mutual respect, and affirm their ethnic identity amidst the diversity that exists.

However, the relationship between religion and ethnicity is not always harmonious. In some situations, differences in belief can trigger tensions between ethnic groups. Conflicts between Muslim and Christian groups in a number of regions, for example, often stem from differences in identity that are exacerbated by social and economic factors. Therefore, it is important to remember that although religion can function as a social bond, it also has the potential to become a source of division if not managed properly. For this reason, interfaith dialogue and a deep understanding of diversity are essential in efforts to create a harmonious society.

Ethnic identity is a concept that encompasses cultural traits, language, traditions, and values that a particular group possesses, distinguishing it from other groups. This aspect includes not only physical appearance, but also patterns of thought, behavior, and social interaction. In an increasingly diverse global era, the importance of understanding ethnic identity is becoming increasingly clear, especially in building intercultural communication and easing social conflict.

First of all, ethnic identity is often a source of pride for individuals and groups. Members of an ethnic group usually feel a deep attachment to their cultural heritage. For example, cultural celebrations, the language used, and typical cuisines often serve as symbols that strengthen solidarity among group members. This shows that ethnic identity is not just a label, but an important element that influences how individuals see the world (Kuntowijoyo, 2004, p.78)

Furthermore, ethnic identities can change over time. Modernization, globalization, and interaction with other groups can influence how people express their identities. In urban areas, for example, interactions between individuals from different ethnic backgrounds often result in cultural merging or acculturation. This process can create more dynamic and inclusive ethnic identities. However, ethnic identities can also be a source of conflict.

Discussion

When tensions arise between ethnic groups, differences in identity often trigger discrimination, stereotypes, and even violence. Conflicts that occur in several regions in Indonesia, for example, are often rooted in identity tensions that are exacerbated by religious

or cultural differences. Therefore, a deep understanding of ethnic identity is essential to creating harmony in a diverse society (Siahaan. 2016, p.90).

Ethnic identity is closely related to political aspects. Many ethnic groups struggle to gain recognition and equal political rights in the wider context of the country. In some situations, ethnic identity movements emerge as a response to marginalization or oppression. Through these movements, they seek to fight for social justice and their cultural rights (Nasution, 2019, p.114-115). In addition, education plays an important role in the formation of ethnic identity. A curriculum that includes the history and culture of various ethnicities can help children understand and appreciate diversity. Conversely, education that ignores or belittles certain ethnic identities can lead to feelings of inferiority and lower the self-confidence of members of that group.

Media also contributes to the formation and representation of ethnic identities. Positive representations in film, television, and social media can foster pride in ethnic identity, while negative stereotypes can reinforce stigma. Therefore, it is important for media to portray ethnic diversity fairly and accurately, thereby promoting greater understanding between groups. In addition, ethnic identity serves as a mechanism for adaptation. In the midst of rapid social change, individuals and ethnic groups can use their identities as a source of strength to survive and adapt. These identities help them find supportive communities and maintain traditions that are important to their lives.

In a global context, migration also affects ethnic identity. Individuals who move to a new country often face challenges in maintaining their ethnic identity while adapting to a new environment. In many cases, they create dual identities that combine elements of both cultures. This shows that ethnic identity is something that is dynamic and continues to develop along with life experiences. Finally, it is important to recognize that ethnic identity affects not only individuals, but also society as a whole. The power of ethnic identity can be used to foster cooperation and mutual respect between groups. In a pluralistic society, recognizing and respecting the diversity of ethnic identities is an important step towards creating an inclusive and harmonious society. In Indonesia, ethnic conflict is a complex problem that often arises due to differences in culture, religion, and political interests. The country, which consists of more than 300 ethnic groups, is rich in diversity, but also prone to tension. For example, the conflict in Ambon in the late 1990s showed how identity tensions can trigger violence between Muslim and Christian groups. In addition, economic and political factors also play an important role, where competition for resources and power can worsen the situation and create distrust between ethnic groups (Rahardjo, 2023, p.87).

Some ethnic conflicts in Indonesia are rooted in colonial history, which left a legacy of injustice. Policies implemented during the colonial period often treated different ethnic groups differently, leading to tensions that are still felt today. One example is the conflict in Papua, which reflects the dissatisfaction and injustice felt by indigenous Papuans. They often feel marginalized in the process of economic and political development, which adds to tensions based on ethnic identity and nationalism.

However, it is important to note that ethnic conflicts do not always result in violence. In many areas, there are efforts to build dialogue between ethnic groups in an effort to resolve existing tensions. Initiatives such as reconciliation programs involving community leaders and religious leaders can play a role in reducing conflict and improving relations between groups. By prioritizing dialogue and mutual respect, communities can create a more harmonious atmosphere despite their differences.

Religion plays a crucial role in shaping ethnic identity in Indonesia, a country rich in cultural and religious diversity. Each ethnic group in the country is bound not only by language and traditions, but also by religious beliefs that are an essential part of their way of life. For example, the Javanese, Balinese, and Sundanese have unique religious practices that distinguish them from each other and make religion a vital aspect of their identity. Religious practices are often a manifestation of ethnic identity, encompassing rituals, celebrations, and moral values. In Bali, for example, ceremonies such as Galungan and Nyepi serve not only as spiritual moments but also as expressions of local culture. In this sense, religion acts as a social bond that strengthens a sense of togetherness among members of a community.

Religious practices in Bali are closely linked to the ethnic identity of the local community. Religious ceremonies, such as Galungan and Nyepi, not only have a spiritual dimension, but also serve as cultural expressions that strengthen social ties among members of the community. Galungan, for example, is celebrated as a tribute to the ancestors and is a time when families gather to celebrate togetherness. During this celebration, various rituals are held, from decorating the temple with penjor to serving traditional foods. This activity creates a strong sense of solidarity among community members, while reminding them of the cultural values passed down from generation to generation (Supriyanto, 2010, p.57).

In addition to Galungan, Nyepi is also an important moment in the Balinese religious calendar. Nyepi, known as Hari Raya Nyepi or Saka New Year, is a day of silence where Balinese people observe silence, fast, and self-reflection. Although it may seem to reduce social activity, Nyepi actually strengthens the sense of togetherness among Balinese people, as the

entire community participates in maintaining the tranquility and sanctity of the day. On the day before Nyepi, the Melasti ceremony is held, which is a procession of purifying sacred objects and oneself. All of this shows how religion is not only an individual practice, but also a social bond that binds communities together in a strong cultural identity.Thus, religious practices in Bali reflect how ethnic identity can be manifested through rituals, celebrations, and shared values. Religion serves as a bridge that brings together various cultural elements, as well as a means to build and maintain a sense of togetherness among members of an ethnic group. Through these practices, the Balinese people not only strengthen their faith, but also celebrate their rich and diverse cultural heritage

The impact of religion on ethnic identity can be seen clearly in the daily behavior of individuals. Religious teachings often regulate the norms and values adopted by certain ethnic groups. Among Muslims in Indonesia, Islamic norms influence many aspects of life, from how they dress to social interactions. This shows how religion contributes to shaping the characteristics and identity of these ethnic groups.

However, the relationship between religion and ethnic identity is not always harmonious. In some situations, differences in belief can trigger tensions between ethnic groups. For example, conflicts between Muslims and Christians in several regions in Indonesia are often caused by religious differences that are exacerbated by social and economic conditions. In this context, religion can be a source of division if not managed properly. Conversely, religion also has the potential to be a bridge in building solidarity between ethnic groups. Various religious organizations serve as platforms for dialogue and collaboration between ethnic groups. Interfaith initiatives in Indonesia, for example, have succeeded in reducing prejudice and promoting understanding between ethnic groups. With this approach, religion can contribute positively to creating harmony in a diverse society. Religious education also plays an important role in the formation of ethnic identity. A curriculum that includes local religious and cultural values can help young people understand and appreciate their heritage. On the other hand, education that ignores certain cultural or religious aspects can lead to feelings of inferiority and threaten group identity. The mass media plays a role in shaping how people view religion and ethnic identity. Positive representations of religious practices in the media can strengthen a sense of pride in ethnic identity. However, negative stereotypes can exacerbate tensions between ethnic groups. Therefore, it is important for the media to present religious and ethnic diversity fairly and accurately (Cahyono, 2020, p.16).

In the era of globalization, religion has become one way for ethnic groups to maintain their identity amidst change. Many communities use religious practices as a tool to preserve culture and tradition amidst the challenges of modernization. This shows that religion serves as a strong foundation for ethnic groups to maintain their identity.

CONCLUSION

Religion has a profound influence in shaping social structures and ethnic identities in Indonesia. In many communities, religion serves as a guideline that regulates not only spiritual aspects but also norms and values that guide social interactions. For example, in Muslim communities in Java, Islamic teachings shape social relationships that emphasize mutual cooperation and mutual respect, creating strong bonds among community members. Religious practices, such as rituals and celebrations, serve to strengthen ethnic identity and solidarity among group members, with religious celebrations not only serving as spiritual moments but also as opportunities to come together and celebrate their cultural heritage.

On the other hand, the relationship between religion and ethnicity is not always smooth. Differences in beliefs are often a source of tension between ethnic groups. Conflicts between Muslims and Christians in several regions in Indonesia are often triggered by differences in identity that are exacerbated by social and economic factors. Although religion can be a social unifier, it can also potentially be a source of division if not managed properly. Therefore, interfaith dialogue and understanding of diversity are very important to build a harmonious society.Ethnic identity itself is an important element that includes cultural characteristics, language, and values that distinguish one group from another. Although this identity can change along with modernization and intercultural interaction, it remains a source of pride and solidarity for group members. Amid the challenges of globalization, religion serves as a tool for

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