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JURNAL ILMIAH AGAMA DAN SOSIAL BUDAYA

Negotiating Love and Faith: Interfaith Marriage in Manado, Indonesia

Rosdalina Bukido[1*], Edi Gunawan[2], Djamila Usup[3], Hayat[4]

[1] Institut Agama Islam Negeri Manado, Indonesia; e-mail: rosdalina.bukido@iain-manado.ac.id
[2] Institut Agama Islam Negeri Manado, Indonesia; e-mail: edigunawan@iain-manado.ac.id
[3] Institut Agama Islam Negeri Manado, Indonesia; e-mail: djamila.usup@iain-manado.ac.id
[4] Universitas Islam Malang, Indonesia; e-mail: hayat@unisma.ac.id

* Correspondence

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Abstract: Interfaith marriages have been practised in various parts of Indonesia, although their legal recognition and registration remain problematic. Indonesian marriage regulations do not provide a straightforward legal framework for marriages between individuals of different religions. This study examines the practice of interfaith marriage in Manado and explores how couples and their families maintain harmonious relationships across religious differences. Employing a qualitative approach, the study draws on interviews with 30 informants involved in interfaith marriages in Manado City. The findings reveal that many participants consider interfaith marriage permissible, distinguishing between religion as a relationship between humans and God and marriage as a relationship between human beings. More importantly, interfaith families maintain harmonious relationships through the local cultural principle of *Torang Samua Basudara* (we are all brothers and sisters). This principle encourages mutual respect, inclusive communication, and the avoidance of religious symbols or expressions that may generate tension among family members. This study contributes to the understanding of interfaith marriage by demonstrating how local wisdom functions as a social mechanism for negotiating religious differences and sustaining family harmony. It highlights the role of cultural values in mediating tensions between religious identities and everyday family relationships in a religiously diverse society.

Keywords: Different religion; family; marriage; motive; religious symbol.

Abstrak: Pernikahan antaragama telah dipraktikkan di berbagai wilayah di Indonesia, meskipun pengakuan hukum dan pendaftarannya masih menjadi masalah. Peraturan pernikahan di Indonesia tidak menyediakan kerangka hukum yang jelas untuk pernikahan antara individu yang berbeda agama. Penelitian ini mengkaji praktik pernikahan antaragama di Manado dan mengeksplorasi bagaimana pasangan serta keluarga mereka menjaga hubungan yang harmonis di tengah perbedaan agama. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini mengandalkan wawancara dengan 30 informan yang terlibat dalam pernikahan antaragama di Kota Manado. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa banyak peserta menganggap pernikahan antaragama diperbolehkan, dengan membedakan antara agama sebagai hubungan antara manusia dan Tuhan serta pernikahan sebagai hubungan antarmanusia. Yang lebih penting lagi, keluarga antaragama mempertahankan hubungan yang harmonis melalui prinsip budaya lokal "Torang Samua Basudara" (kita semua adalah saudara). Prinsip ini mendorong saling menghormati, komunikasi yang inklusif, serta menghindari simbol atau ungkapan keagamaan yang dapat menimbulkan ketegangan di antara anggota keluarga. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman tentang pernikahan antaragama dengan menunjukkan bagaimana kearifan lokal berfungsi sebagai mekanisme sosial untuk menengahi perbedaan agama dan mempertahankan keharmonisan keluarga. Penelitian ini menyoroti peran nilai-nilai budaya dalam menengahi ketegangan antara identitas agama dan hubungan keluarga sehari-hari dalam masyarakat yang beragam secara agama.

Kata Kunci: Beda agama; keluarga; motif; pernikahan; simbol keagamaan.

1. Introduction

Interfaith marriage, defined as a marital relationship between individuals adhering to different religious traditions, represents a complex intersection of religious identity, personal commitment, and social expectations (Çiğdem, 2015). In Indonesia, such marriages remain contested because of tensions between religious diversity, individual choice, and institutional restrictions, particularly the Indonesian Ulema Council's (MUI) opposition to interfaith marriage (Jauhari & Ghoni, 2020; Yusuf, 2013). Parker et al. (2014) demonstrate that acceptance of interreligious social relationships does not necessarily extend to interfaith marriage, highlighting the persistence of religious boundaries in intimate relationships. These complexities also involve questions of religious affiliation and legal recognition, as spouses may maintain different beliefs while negotiating conversion or marriage registration (Lukito, 2008; Suhasti, Djazimah, & Mada, 2018). Manado, North Sulawesi, provides a distinctive context for examining these dynamics because of its ethnoreligious diversity and longstanding traditions of intercommunal interaction (Sarib et al., 2020). The local philosophy of *Torang Samua Basudara* (we are all brothers and sisters) emphasizes kinship, solidarity, and mutual recognition across religious differences and has been identified as an important cultural resource for sustaining interreligious harmony (Mantu, 2018; Muslim, 2016; Rajafi, 2016). Nevertheless, communal solidarity does not necessarily eliminate tensions within interfaith households, raising questions about how couples negotiate religious commitments, family expectations, and everyday domestic relationships.

The institutional regulation of marriage in Indonesia introduces additional complexities into these relationships. Law No. 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage, as subsequently amended, establishes religious requirements as central to the legal validity of marriage. Article 2 provides that marriage is valid when performed according to the laws of the respective religions and beliefs, while marriage registration is governed by applicable regulations. These provisions have generated debates concerning the legal position of interfaith couples and the relationship between religious requirements and state recognition. Lukito (2008) examines these tensions within the broader context of legal pluralism in Indonesia, while Suhasti et al. (2018) discuss the discrepancies between marriage regulations and social practices. Such debates demonstrate that interfaith marriage involves not only personal relationships but also competing religious and institutional understandings of marital legitimacy.

These institutional complexities are reflected in Indonesia's differentiated marriage registration system. Under Article 2 of Government Regulation No. 9 of 1975, Muslim marriages are registered through the Office of Religious Affairs (*Kantor Urusan Agama*, KUA), whereas non-Muslim marriages are recorded through the Civil Registration Office. This administrative division operates alongside the religious requirements for marital validity established by Law No. 1 of 1974, creating particular difficulties for couples belonging to different religious traditions (Lukito, 2008; Suhasti et al., 2018). Suhasti et al. (2018) demonstrate that divergent legal interpretations have generated uncertainty regarding the recognition and registration of interfaith marriages, while Zuriyati et al. (2019) identify the practical consequences of registration difficulties for marital property, children's legal status, and inheritance relationships. These findings indicate that marriage registration is not merely an administrative procedure but an institutional process with significant implications for the legal recognition and protection of interfaith families.

Beyond legal recognition, interfaith marriage involves different patterns of religious adjustment and negotiation within the household. Some couples agree to maintain their respective religious identities, while others negotiate conversion before or after marriage. In certain circumstances, conversion may be connected to family expectations, social acceptance, or the administrative requirements surrounding marriage. Hutapea (2011) emphasizes that marital adjustment involves the commitment of both spouses and their ability to respond to interpersonal and extended-family relationships. These considerations are particularly relevant to interfaith marriages, where differences in religious identity may influence everyday decisions, family communication, and expectations concerning children's religious upbringing. Consequently, marital harmony cannot be understood simply as the absence of religious differences. It also requires attention to how spouses negotiate their

commitments, accommodate religious practices, and respond to disagreements within their relationships.

Previous studies have examined interfaith marriage through the interconnected dimensions of religious tolerance, social interaction, and family relationships. Muhammad (2020) and Syatriadin (2019) address the challenges of maintaining family harmony across religious differences, while Ruandini (2011) highlights the importance of interpersonal communication in interreligious relationships. Parker et al. (2014) demonstrate that positive attitudes towards interreligious friendships do not necessarily translate into acceptance of interreligious marriage. Meanwhile, Aini et al. (2019) identify the demographic patterns and regional variations of interreligious marriage in Indonesia. Collectively, these studies establish that interfaith marriage is shaped by broader social attitudes, religious commitments, and interpersonal negotiations. Nevertheless, understanding how couples manage these factors within everyday family life requires closer attention to their lived experiences and the cultural contexts in which their relationships develop.

In North Sulawesi, *Torang Samua Basudara* has been recognized as an important expression of local wisdom supporting interreligious relationships and social solidarity (Mantu, 2018; Rajafi, 2016). However, existing discussions of interfaith marriage and local religious harmony have not sufficiently connected the broader ideals of communal solidarity with the everyday processes through which spouses negotiate religious differences within their households. This distinction is important because religious coexistence in family life may involve both mutual accommodation and conflict, particularly when individual religious commitments intersect with expectations concerning conversion, worship, and family responsibilities. The perspective of *lived religion* offers a useful analytical orientation by emphasizing how religious identities and commitments are experienced and practiced in ordinary social settings rather than understood exclusively through institutional prescriptions (Ammerman, 2013; McGuire, 2008). Accordingly, this study addresses the gap between understandings of interreligious harmony as a collective cultural ideal and the practical negotiation of religious identities within interfaith marriages.

Against this background, this study examines how interfaith couples in Manado negotiate religious differences while maintaining their marital and family relationships. It specifically investigates the motivations and circumstances surrounding interfaith marriage, the ways spouses accommodate religious commitments in everyday domestic life, and the role of *Torang Samua Basudara* in shaping relationships across religious boundaries. The study also considers the tensions that arise when religious autonomy, family expectations, and institutional requirements become difficult to reconcile. Employing a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, the research draws on interviews with 30 informants, including individuals involved in interfaith marriages, community leaders, religious leaders, KUA officers, and Civil Registration Office personnel. Interviews are complemented by observations, documentary materials, and relevant literature, with data examined through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. By connecting local cultural solidarity with the everyday negotiation of religious identities, this study seeks to contribute to Religious Studies scholarship on interfaith marriage, lived religion, and religious coexistence in plural societies.

2. The regulation of Interfaith Marriage in Indonesia

Muslim jurists, except for a few 20th-century scholars, unanimously hold that Muslim women may not marry non-Muslim men. However, Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women of ahl al-kitāb, that is Christians or Jews (Çiğdem, 2015). It is said that 'Marriage should be contracted between the people who share the same religion.' This statement is a misleading analogy because, for Cigdem, a marriage is based on love, mutual respect, and understanding and cannot be compared to any other things like politics or economic that do not involve love in its decision.

Every marriage will have its ups and downs relationships, but interfaith marriages have some extra challenges. For example, in Malaysia, research by Sintang et al. mentioned that there is a clear division of jurisdiction in family law between civil and sharia courts; non-muslims can only marry

Muslims after converting to Islam (Sintang, Khambali, Baharuddin, & Ahmad, 2014). According to this research, interfaith marriage can have a double-edged sword effect. It has several benefits and, at the same time, can cause harm. Many believed that the harm (mafsadah) is greater than its benefit (maslahah), thus, Islam suggests not to practice this interreligious marriage (Islam, 2014). Besides, it is assumed that interreligious marriage will cause many problems and impossible to create a sakinah (harmonious) family (Jalil, 2018). In Nigeria, interfaith marriages are only permitted for Muslim men and non-Muslim women (Imam, 2016). In the Mediterranean, individuals and groups adjust to a new and changing political and religious context as interreligious marriages occur parallelly, intertwining with religious conversions in complex ways (Sant-Cassia, 2018).

Different interpretations of Sharia Law (Islamic Law) exist in several countries concerning the possibility of accepting this practice experienced in each country. In turn, these experiences can affect Muslims' attitudes regarding interfaith marriages (Van Niekerk & Verkuyten, 2018). And this research by van Niekerk and Verkuyten (2018), conducted in 22 countries, reported that Perceived religious similarity was associated with more positive attitudes.

However, the experience is quite different in Indonesia since it is implied in the regulations of marriage that do not allow interreligious marriage. It is stated in the Marriage Law Number 1 of 1974 article 2 paragraph (1) states: 'marriage is valid if it is carried out by the religious law and beliefs of each party. Islam is the majority religion in most parts of Indonesia. Several regions, however, have its majority of other religions like the Hindu majority in Bali Province, the Catholic majority in East Nusa Tenggara Province, the Christian majority in North Sulawesi, West Papua and Papua Provinces, and other areas with equal proportions of Islam and Catholicism (Aini, Utomo, & McDonald, 2019).

Some Indonesian people who intend to practice interfaith marriages choose to conduct it in another country. It is because the regulations regarding interfaith marriage in Indonesia are unclear. In addition, most people who wish to have interfaith marriages find it difficult to register their marriage to the Civil Registry Service Office. The office cannot register interfaith marriages because there are no religions and practices that allow such marriages.

Indonesia has regulations that regulate human rights, namely the rights inherent in human beings by nature, universal and eternal. The regulations include the right to life and have a family, the right to develop oneself, the right to communicate, justice, independence, and security and welfare rights (Baso & Nurcholis, 2010). Human Rights, Marriage comes from the agreement of two parties. Interfaith marriages of the United Nations Convention on Civil Rights Decisions state that there is no intervention on people and their families to choose their life partner.

Marriage Law Number 1 of 1974 does not recognise interfaith marriages. The law only considers marriages to be valid based on the laws of the respective religions. In the teachings of Islam, the exegetes (mufassir) agree that marriage to non-Muslim women is allowed as long as the woman still adheres to the teachings of ahl al- Kitab, as stated in the Qur'an. However, when her belief deviated from it, it is forbidden to marry.

The prohibition of interfaith marriages has existed before Indonesia's independence. At that time, several regions in Indonesia adhered to indigenous religions and then followed by the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism. The practice of marriages is carried out according to religious teachings with local customary rules. There is a tendency to prohibit or discourage marriage between parties of different religions or other groups (Abubakar, 2008).

Regarding interfaith marriages that occur in Indonesia, different opinions emerged between Muslims and Christians. The Islamic religious elites argue to obey the existing laws in Indonesia and that person should deepen religious understanding to avoid interfaith marriages. In contrast, the Christian religious elite responding to religious conversions caused by marriage is more open as it falls within the individual free choice regarding one's faith. When the marriage involved religious conversion, the couples should maintain the harmony of the marriage and the commitment to make it work (Jihaduddin, 2015).

Several religious groups impose restrictions on their members not to marry someone outside their religion (Kurttekin, 2020). In Indonesia, interfaith marriages are not supported by many regulations

such as the Marriage Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage Chapter 1 Article 2 paragraph (1), the Compilation of Islamic Law Article 40 paragraph (c) and Article 44, the MUI Fatwa, and the Constitutional Court decision Number: 68/PUU-XII/2014, all of which banned interfaith marriages. Therefore, the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) and the Civil Registry office will not carry out administrative records of interfaith marriages. Practising interfaith marriage is considered ignorant to these laws and regulations of the country.

The consequences of the prohibition of interfaith marriages and difficulty in registration of the marriage caused several fundamental problems regarding the rights of the citizens. They are for example, has no marriage certificate informing that they are a married couple. When the children born from this marriage could not get a birth certificate while this certificate is usually a requirement to apply for school. In June 2015, Indonesia's Constitutional Court rejected a petition for judicial review of the 1974 Marriage Law. The plaintiffs argued that the current interpretation of the law violated the right of interfaith couples to marry (Aini et al., 2019).

The laws in Indonesia regarding marriage show that it is difficult to have interfaith marriage to be recorded officially. Following the fatwa of the Ulama Indonesian Council that banned interreligious marriage, the marriage registrars in each district are prohibited from recording the marriage involving non-Muslims (Patricktts, 2010).

The legal consequences of unregistered interfaith marriages will impact marital status, the status and position of children, and inheritance relationships (Zuriyati, Yaswirman, & Yasniwati, 2019). Since the validity of the marriage is the main requirement to protect and recognise the rights of children and wives, marriages between people of different religions that are not legalised nullify the rights of wives and children born from such marriages. Interfaith marriages negate the inheritance rights between husband and wife and their children. In addition to inheritance rights, interfaith families will also experience problems in the dispute resolution process in court, whether the religious court is authorised to adjudicate cases between Muslim parties or the state court entitled to adjudicate cases of non-Muslim parties. Dispute resolution is slow and convoluted.

Inherently, Indonesia prohibits interfaith marriage, which can be seen from several religions' various rules and statements. However, this does not condemn the Indonesian people for carrying out interfaith marriages in various ways (Judiasih, Asrimayasha, & Sudini, 2019). Merely, interfaith marriages carry heavy social responsibilities: the couple must be ready to be ostracised by society (Çiğdem, 2015).

3. Local Values of Manado: A Buttress for Interfaith Marriages

North Sulawesi contains various tribes and ethnicities, with Minahasa being the most prominent tribe. Bolaang Mongondow, Sangihe directly adjacent to the Philippines, previously the Gorontalo tribe was included in the North Sulawesi region, which later separated itself into its independent province. In addition to various inland ethnicities, various outland ethnic groups present in North Sulawesi include Arab, Chinese, Javanese, Sumatran, and Kalimantan. Subcultures also existed on this island, like the clans' group of Mamentu, Mamonto, Manopo, Makalunsenge, Paputungan, Karim, etc. The same is true for religious sub-cultures. For example, religious subcultures are consisting of Islam and Catholicism. Protestants, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians, and religious sects on the island of Sangihe are known as the Masaade community or old Islam. Within such religion, various sects exist like Sunni and Shiite in Islam, etc.

Building trust across individuals and groups by increasing the intensity of encounters or meetings (*Bakudapa*) is the local wisdom of society in Sulawesi, especially Manado. The people of Manado grow and tighten their social relationships through the habits of *basingga* (stopping by) and *bakudapa-bacarita* (meeting-telling) as an integral part of the daily interactions of the Manado people. *Bakudapa-bacarita* is a sign of tightening the friendship and brotherhood.

Bakudapa can also mean dialogue in a general sense. In this case, *bakudapa* is the main prerequisite for building a dialogical and dynamic relationship. At the same time, *bakudapa* can be an excellent medium to manage disputes and prevent or minimise the possibility of other conflicts due to different

perspectives. In short, the *bakudapa* is an early rarity for the *bakubae* (peace). Meanwhile, *bakubae* are an ideal solution for reconciliation and rehabilitation. In this perspective, the *bakudapa* process carried out by Muslims and Christians in the tradition of the feast of the valve is one of the fundamental aspects for a culturally-based dialogue process in depth for conflict resolution.

The *bakudapa* habit is a daily activity for the people of Manado. In *bakudapa* there is a process of listening to each other, respecting each other's position, and understanding each other. Suppose some conditions require forgiveness, then through bakudapa and the internalisation process among others. In that case, forgiveness is given so that there is a genuine acceptance of one another. this condition is the foundation of the *bakubae.*

In a multicultural society, contact between people of different identities or *bakudapa* is a sociological consequence. This contact even manifested in marriage bonds, between Minahasa people with Bolaang Mongondow, Sangihe with Gorontalo people, Arabs with Javanese, even inter-religious marriages, especially between Muslims and Christians *Bakukaweng.*

The people of North Sulawesi are get used to differences, taking care of each other, and respecting one another as a daily scene of inter-religious interactions. When many Muslims in other regions in Indonesia call out against giving greetings or wishing a merry Christmas to the Christians, Muslims in North Sulawesi spread the banners in many corners of the city saying merry Christmas from the Muslim community. Everyone does not hesitate to mention that one has relatives or parents of different religions and, in fact, tightens their relationship with other religions in North Sulawesi.

Bhineka Tunggal Ika means unity in diversity, is represented Indonesia as a nation with multi-ethnic groups, languages, cultures, and religions. Indonesian society is a pluralistic society, especially in terms of ethnicity and religion. Indonesian people in living their lives are faced with fundamental differences in various ways. Thus, interreligious marriage could not be avoided, and the government should respond to this practice and give a solution through its regulation.

The pattern of interfaith communication in Manado does not emphasise the religious aspect, because religion falls within the individual responsibility towards God. In Manado, the principle of *torang samua basudara*, *torang samua ciptaan Tuhan* (we are bound through kinship, and we are all God's creation) is the basis for relationships. Thus, the emphasis on relationships that are promoted in Manado is based on the kinship system (Stanley, Personal Communication, July 26, 2018). Deny Pinontoan also mentions that interfaith marriages still occur until now and sociologically it is unproblematic. Since the beginning where the native and the immigrant are in contact in North Sulawesi, interfaith marriages had already occurred (Deny Pinontoan, Personal Communication, July 29, 2018).

4. The Practice of Interfaith Marriage: Managing Love, Respect, and Tolerance

In Indonesia, marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims used to be easy and quite common, especially in Central Java and Yogyakarta. Local registrars often find ways to accommodate dual religious couples seeking to marry (Jones, Leng, & Mohamad, 2009). The data obtained by Aini in Jakarta shows 3,447 interfaith married couples (or an average of 138 cases per year) registered their marriage at the Civil Registry Office between 1975 to 1999. In 1980, at least 1.5% of married couples in Yogyakarta was interreligious. That figure increased to 1.8% in 1990 (Aini, 2008). Among non-Muslims, this figure is much higher, around 5% in 1980, 1990, and 2000 (Aini et al., 2019).

Apart from Java, North Sulawesi, especially Manado, also had several cases of inter-religious marriages. This article provides the story of interreligious marriages experienced by participants of this study—for example, the marriage of Toar Palilingan, who is Christian with his Muslim wife. The marriage, which took place in 1982 last longer and harmoniously up to 2010, whenhis wife passed away. At the beginning of their marriage, they did not get approval from the family of Toar's wife, who is Muslim (Toar Palilingan, Personal Communication, July 25, 2018). However, as time goes by, the family can accept it, so they decide to marry according to their respective religions. The first marriage is based on Christianity and then carried out based on Islam without baptising the bride and groom.

After marriage, they are compiling their marriage to be recorded to the District Court and registered it at the Civil Registration Service office. During their marriage, opposition came from friends and relatives of both sides. Many of them suggested to each spouse, Toar and his wife, that both invite each to join one religion. However, Toar and his wife believe that all faiths they profess are true and no need to force someone, especially the loved one, to convert. Toar and his wife remain adamant in maintaining the harmony of their marriage with tolerance and defending each other's religions.

From this marriage, Toar Palilingan and his wife have a son. Both of them do not force their son to follow one of their religion, but instead, leave it to their son's choice. The son rather chooses Jew as his religion. Toar did not question his son's choice of religion as long as he is a good adherent of the religion. Toar builds religious harmony within his family based on mutual tolerance, understanding, and awareness and do not force the family member to follow one religion. He said:

> My family upholds religious freedom. I give my wife and children the freedom to worship. On every religious celebration day, such as Eid al-Fitr, their families visit each other. During the month of Ramadan, I respect my wife who is doing fasting. I believe that everyone's freedom to practice their religion and freedom of religion will give birth to a tolerant attitude in religious life. This kind of attitude will never be present in the people who do not respect their beliefs (Toar Palilingan, Personal Communication, July 25, 2018).

The principle of interfaith marriage carried out by Toar is prioritising the meeting point of religious goals and religious teachings. He believes that all religions have the same principles, namely educating people to behave appropriately and correctly based on the substance and essence teachings in their respective religions. All religions teach universal truth values, such as compassion, peace, respect, mutual help, justice, etc.

Endang Kadir experiences another example of a successful interreligious marriage. Endang, a Muslim, married her husband, who is Christian. They met for a short period but immediately decided to get married. Endang's family did not oppose her marriage.

> We have been married to this day for 17 years. At first, my husband's family opposed our marriage, but in the end, they agreed. Before we married, we do not have a long courtship, but we directly got married. Now, my husband converted to Islam" (Endang Kadir, Personal Communication, July 22, 2018).

Endang and her husband can manage their marriage well. There were no problems related to their belief. They still have no child yet. Endang said that the most important aspect in maintaining a family with different religions is respecting and appreciating one another.

> There should be no coercion, we manage maturely in responding to our differences. When we manage to be tolerant in the family, we can do it in the society in general" (Endang Kadir, Personal Communication, July 22, 2018).

The principle of marriage used by Endang in undergoing interfaith marriages is to promote an open-minded attitude and tolerance. The existence of religious plurality is the destiny and will of God Almighty. Islamic teachings teach us to be generous and to be tolerant of the diversity of religions. Endang's tolerant and open attitude made her marriage last. Even her husband, who was previously non-Muslim, later chose to take the *shahada* and embrace Islam.

Other cases of interfaith marriages are experienced in Valentin's marriage. Valentin converted to Islam amid the challenges of her family. After marriage, she returned to Christian because she felt unguided. However, she manages the marriage well. Her husband supported her with her religious activities. Whenever she needs to attend church, he will drop her there. They also help each other preparing religious celebrations for each partner (Valentin, Personal Communication, April 20, 2018). This harmonious interreligious marriage also happens in Ida's family (a pseudonym). Ida is married to her husband, who is Christian and active in his church activities. Meanwhile, she is also active in mosque activities. They help each other organise religious festivals and do community service (Ida, Personal Communication, June 27, 2018).

These interreligious marriages presented in this study have the same principle in managing their harmonious marriage, namely tolerance and mutual respect for the beliefs held by their respective partners. By implementing the principle of tolerance, interfaith marriages can be maintained well.

Interfaith marriages that practiced in North Sulawesi did not always run smoothly. This study also found that several cases failed. The main factor was unpreparedness in dealing with differences between partners, even though the trigger was not solely related to different religions. Still, other factors made interfaith marriages untenable, for example, economic factors, different cultures, and the emergence of awareness on the legal status of marriage that is not recognised by the state.

This was experienced by one of the informants, Mimin Parera. Mimin married at quite young when she was about 19 years old. She is a devout Muslim and from a religiously fanatical family background. She married a Protestant. To received approval from Mimin's parents, her prospective husband 'pretended' to be a Muslim. However, during the marriage, they experienced conflict especially related to the legal status of their marriage (Mimin Parera, Personal Communication, March 6, 2018). Several fail interreligious marriages are caused by converting one spouse following the other religion. However, when the marriage did not work out, one will return to the religion of origin as experienced by Rivai Madabi (Rivai Madabi, Personal Communication, March 20, 2018).

Maryam Patutungan also experienced the failure of an interreligious marriage. When she and her husband decided to get married, they agreed to keep their religion. However, later in their marriage, he forced her to convert to her husband's religion, Christian, because of her husband's ego. Maryam refused it and asked for divorce instead (Maryam Paputungan, Personal Communication, February 14, 2018).

From the examples of interfaith marriages above, it can be seen that some successful marriages enforce a communication pattern of democracy and tolerance in the family. This can be proven by the existence of communication between husband and wife in determining the religion of their children, providing the widest opportunity for their partners to practice religious teachings based on beliefs, even taking them to places of worship and helping prepare for each of religious celebration.

Due to the difficulty in gaining the legal status of interreligious marriage, several couples converted to one of the spouse religions either for real or pretended. The pattern of interreligious marriage as experienced by the informants above and also by several other respondents are 1) each partner maintains their original religion (*baku tahang agama*) (Abdurrahman Konoras, Personal communication, June 10, 2018), 2) lives with one religion (Nasruddin Yusuf, Personal Communication, May 25, 2018), 3) wives follow their husbands for reasons of children stability, 4) When each of the spouses could not respect one religion divorce took place (Subardi Moodut, Personal Communication, October 27, 2018).

Several aspects should be considered in interreligious marriage: first, maintain the relationship of tolerance, respect for each other, help each other, or even remind each other about the teachings of each other's religions. Second, never force one religion into the family members, neither the partner nor the children. Third, strengthen each other beliefs and support each other in practising religion.

The pluralistic condition of North Sulawesi makes the community prepared in facing differences. The awareness of diversity in the community also helps them maintain social activities. Several problems may also occur, especially related to politics, economics and hot issues arrived from the national level like the case of Ahok. However, the people in North Sulawesi can maintain and reduce the conflict because of their bond based on the kinship system. This kinship system tightens the bond of people in North Sulawesi. Apart from interreligious marriage practice in North Sulawesi, they also practice interethnic marriage.

Thus, this article argues that in terms of communal level, this interreligious marriage is legal. However, the consequences of this practice, they may lose their constitutional rights as stated by the requirement of a valid marriage.

5. *Torang Samua Basudara:* Kinship, Religious Accommodation, and the Negotiation of Interfaith Family Life

The findings of this study suggest that *Torang Samua Basudara* operates not merely as a collective expression of interreligious harmony but also as a cultural framework through which religious differences are negotiated within family relationships. Rajafi (2016) identifies this philosophy as an important foundation for maintaining social solidarity and resolving family conflicts in North Sulawesi, while Mantu (2018) emphasizes its significance for interreligious relationships in Manado. The present findings extend these perspectives by illustrating how the principle of shared kinship can be expressed through everyday practices of religious accommodation. The experience of Kalesaran, a Christian father whose son is Muslim, demonstrates how different religious affiliations can coexist within a family without necessarily undermining familial relationships (Kalesaran, personal communication, June 20, 2018). Although this account concerns an interreligious relationship between family members rather than spouses, it illustrates the broader significance of kinship in maintaining relationships across religious boundaries. From this perspective, *Torang Samua Basudara* provides a shared cultural language through which family members may recognize religious differences while continuing to affirm their relationships.

The significance of this cultural framework becomes clearer when the findings are considered alongside previous research on interfaith relationships. Parker et al. (2014) demonstrate that acceptance of interreligious social interaction in Indonesia does not necessarily translate into acceptance of interfaith marriage, indicating that religious boundaries become particularly consequential in intimate relationships. The experiences documented in Manado complicate this distinction by showing how some families negotiate religious differences through mutual respect, religious autonomy, and practical cooperation. The experiences of Toar Palilingan, Valentin, and Ida, discussed in the preceding findings, illustrate that maintaining family relationships across religious boundaries does not necessarily require the elimination of religious practices. Instead, spouses may support one another's participation in religious activities while maintaining their respective commitments. These findings suggest that interfaith family harmony is better understood as an ongoing relational process than as a condition determined solely by shared religious affiliation.

This interpretation also invites reconsideration of the relationship between religious identity and tolerance. Çiğdem (2015) discusses interfaith marriage within different religious and legal traditions, illustrating how doctrinal interpretations shape the possibilities and restrictions associated with marriage across religious boundaries. However, the experiences examined in this study indicate that institutional religious prescriptions do not fully determine how individuals manage religious differences in everyday family life. In this respect, the findings are consistent with the perspective of lived religion, which emphasizes how religious commitments are interpreted, practiced, and negotiated in ordinary social relationships (McGuire, 2008; Ammerman, 2013). The support provided by spouses for one another's worship and religious celebrations suggests that religious coexistence may involve the recognition of visible religious differences rather than their exclusion from domestic interactions. *Torang Samua Basudara* can therefore be understood as a cultural resource that supports the negotiation of religious boundaries without necessarily requiring individuals to relinquish their religious identities.

Nevertheless, the findings also demonstrate that the cultural emphasis on kinship and solidarity does not automatically prevent conflict. The contrasting experiences of participants whose marriages encountered pressures concerning religious conversion, family expectations, or marital legitimacy indicate that accommodation has practical limits. In particular, the accounts of Mimin Parera and Maryam Paputungan reveal how disagreements concerning religious identity can become sources of marital tension when expectations of conformity conflict with individual commitments. These experiences suggest that the maintenance of interfaith relationships depends not simply on the presence of tolerant cultural values but also on the willingness of family members to respect religious autonomy. Thus, the significance of *Torang Samua Basudara* should not be interpreted as evidence that religious differences are inherently unproblematic in Manado. Rather, its relevance lies in providing a

framework of solidarity whose effectiveness depends on how it is translated into interpersonal practices.

An additional tension emerges between the social accommodation of interfaith relationships and their recognition within Indonesia's legal framework. Suhasti et al. (2018) demonstrate that divergent interpretations of marriage regulations have produced uncertainty regarding the recognition and registration of interfaith marriages. Similarly, Lukito (2008) situates these difficulties within the broader problem of legal pluralism in Indonesia. The historical case of Vonny and Andrianus, addressed through Supreme Court Decision No. 1400 K/Pdt/1986, illustrates how judicial intervention became part of the contested relationship between religious requirements and civil marriage registration. Such developments do not establish a general principle that all interfaith marriages are legally recognized. Rather, they reveal the institutional complexities surrounding attempts to reconcile social realities with religiously grounded marriage regulations. Read alongside the experiences of the participants, this literature suggests that social acceptance and legal recognition constitute distinct but interconnected dimensions of interfaith family life. Families may maintain supportive relationships within their immediate social environments while continuing to encounter difficulties associated with formal marriage recognition.

These findings contribute to the study of interfaith marriage by demonstrating that religious coexistence within families is shaped through the interaction of cultural solidarity, interpersonal negotiation, and institutional constraints. Whereas previous scholarship has emphasized the legal challenges of interfaith marriage or the importance of local wisdom for interreligious harmony, the Manado cases illustrate how these dimensions intersect in everyday family relationships. The contribution of *Torang Samua Basudara* lies not in eliminating religious differences but in offering a cultural framework through which family members may negotiate their significance. At the same time, the contrasting experiences of accommodation and conflict demonstrate that such negotiations remain contingent upon religious autonomy, family expectations, and institutional circumstances. This interpretation moves beyond treating interfaith marriage as either an expression of tolerance or an inevitable source of conflict and instead highlights the everyday practices through which religious boundaries are maintained, accommodated, and contested within plural societies.

6. Conclusion

Marriage is an important life stage in the Indonesian community. The diversity of Indonesian cultures, ethnicities, and religions enable each person to interact with one another. In the process of socialising, meeting people from different cultural and religious backgrounds is unavoidable, including attracting and developing love feelings. In Manado for example, as this article shows, interfaith marriage is a common phenomenon, and the community accepts this practice. North Sulawesi as a region with diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion, bound its community through the principle of *torang semua basudara*. This principle bound the community of respecting people based on kinship system, not religion. Thus, several interfaith marriages successfully maintain harmony for the respect and tolerance of each other's beliefs. Interfaith marriage will always occur in Indonesia as part of a multi-religious belief. In this regard, Indonesian marriage law should accommodate this interfaith marriage. However, today's law on interfaith marriage is still uncertain, making several people lose their constitutional rights. In this regard, Indonesian marriage law should be reviewed to accommodate this interfaith marriage.

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Conflict of Interest: This paper results from research carried out directly by the researcher and is not plagiarism, duplicate, or imitation of the results of other people's research, except in certain parts where the source is mentioned, so that this research can be accounted for.

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