INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS IN THE VIEW OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF SOUTHEAST SULAWESI

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the meanings and strategies underlying the management of interreligious relations, with the goal of fostering collective awareness and harmony within multicultural communities in West Muna Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. Employing an exploratory qualitative approach, data were collected through observation, literature review, and interviews. The findings reveal that the people of West Muna live in a highly multicultural setting, shaped largely by government migration programs that brought Balinese, Javanese, and Bugis communities into the region. This process of assimilation has produced a society characterized by diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural affiliations. Rather than generating division, however, this diversity has fostered harmony and kinship across groups. The community's shared sense of collective social construction and collective identity strengthens solidarity and pluralist awareness, ultimately shaping West Muna into a cosmopolitan society.

Empirical evidence shows that West Muna has experienced no significant social or political conflicts, even during politically sensitive periods. This resilience is rooted in the strong cultural awareness and identity of the Muna people, which serve as guiding principles for intergroup relations and the preservation of social cohesion.

Keywords: Relations, between, Ummah, Multicultural, West Muna

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan makna dan strategi dalam pengelolaan hubungan antarumat beragama guna membangun kesadaran kolektif dan harmoni di masyarakat multikultural Kabupaten Muna Barat, Sulawesi Tenggara. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif eksploratif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, kajian literatur dan wawancara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa masyarakat Muna Barat hidup dalam konfigurasi sosial yang sangat multikultural, yang terbentuk terutama melalui program migrasi pemerintah yang menghadirkan komunitas Bali, Jawa, dan Bugis ke wilayah tersebut. Proses asimilasi ini menghasilkan masyarakat dengan keragaman agama, etnis, dan budaya yang luas. Menariknya, keragaman tersebut tidak memicu konflik, tetapi justru memperkuat harmoni, solidaritas, dan ikatan kekerabatan lintas kelompok. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa konstruksi sosial kolektif dan identitas kolektif masyarakat Muna menjadi fondasi penting dalam menciptakan kesadaran

pluralis dan membentuk Muna Barat sebagai masyarakat kosmopolitan. Bukti empiris juga memperlihatkan bahwa hingga kini Muna Barat tidak pernah mengalami konflik sosial maupun politik yang signifikan, bahkan pada periode politik yang sensitif. Ketahanan ini bersumber dari kesadaran budaya dan identitas masyarakat yang kuat, yang berperan sebagai pedoman dalam membangun relasi antar kelompok sekaligus menjaga kohesi sosial. Dengan demikian, studi ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap kajian hubungan antaragama dan praktik moderasi beragama di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci : Hubungan, antar, Umat, Multikultural, Muna Barat

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a plural nation characterized by religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity. According to the 2022 Interfaith Harmony Index released by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), Indonesia achieved a score of 77.90 on a scale of 0–100, reflecting a relatively high level of interreligious harmony. This finding suggests that tolerance and mutual respect remain strong among Indonesia's religious communities. Similarly, research by the Paramadina Center for the Study of Religion and Democracy (PUSAD) in 2021 showed that most Indonesians hold positive attitudes toward diversity, although intolerance and narrow fanaticism continue to pose risks for conflict.

Recent scholarship has increasingly focused on the nuanced dynamics of interfaith relations in Indonesia, moving beyond simplistic binaries of harmony and conflict. Crouch (2019) examined the role of local government policies in shaping interfaith relations, finding that decentralization has created varied outcomes across different regions, with some areas experiencing enhanced tolerance while others face increased tensions. This research underscores the significance of local context in comprehending interfaith dynamics, a perspective that has gained prominence in recent years. Buehler's (2022) comprehensive analysis of religious intolerance in Indonesia reveals a complex pattern where national-level tolerance coexists with localized discrimination. His study of 514 regencies and cities found that while overt religious violence has declined since the post-Suharto transition, bureaucratic discrimination and social exclusion have persisted in many areas. This finding challenges earlier assumptions about Indonesia's trajectory toward greater religious freedom, suggesting that harmony indices may not capture subtle forms of intolerance. Mietzner and Muhtadi's (2020) longitudinal survey research demonstrated that religious intolerance in Indonesia has become increasingly institutionalized through local regulations and social practices. Their analysis of polling data from 2001 to 2018 revealed that while violent religious conflict has decreased, discriminatory attitudes toward religious minorities have remained stable or even increased in some regions. This research underscores the need for more sophisticated measures of interfaith relations that go beyond the absence of overt conflict.

Contemporary scholarship has also advanced theoretical frameworks for understanding religious pluralism in Indonesia. Hefner's (2019) concept of "civil pluralism" builds on earlier work to argue that Indonesian interfaith relations are best understood through the lens of civic engagement rather than theological tolerance. His research suggests that successful interfaith coexistence depends more on shared civic values than on religious dialogue per se. Woodward et al. (2020) introduced the concept of "vernacular pluralism" to describe how local communities in Indonesia develop their own forms of interfaith accommodation that may differ from both state-sponsored tolerance and elite religious discourse. Their comparative study of four Indonesian cities found that grassroots pluralism often involves creative adaptations of religious practices that enable coexistence without requiring theological compromise. Recent work by Wahid (2021) on "Islamic pluralism" challenges the assumption that Islam and pluralism are inherently incompatible. His analysis of progressive Islamic movements in Indonesia demonstrates how Islamic theology can provide resources for interfaith cooperation, contradicting narratives that frame Islam as inherently intolerant.

Despite the growing body of research on Indonesian interfaith relations, significant gaps remain in both geographic coverage and demographic focus. Most studies have concentrated on Java, particularly urban areas like Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya, while eastern Indonesian regions remain understudied. This geographic bias is problematic given that eastern Indonesia hosts some of the country's most complex interfaith dynamics, including areas with Christian majorities, significant Hindu populations, and indigenous belief systems. Demographic gaps are equally pronounced. The majority of research has focused on Muslim-Christian relations, reflecting Indonesia's largest religious communities, but has paid insufficient attention to Hindu-Muslim relations, Buddhist communities, or the experiences of indigenous belief systems. This narrow focus limits understanding of Indonesia's full religious diversity and may miss important dynamics that could inform broader theoretical frameworks.

Existing research suffers from significant methodological limitations in measuring interfaith harmony. Most studies rely on survey data or conflict incident counts, which may miss subtle forms of discrimination or fail to capture the quality of interfaith relationships. The BPS Interfaith Harmony Index, while valuable, has been criticized for its top-down approach that may not reflect grassroots experiences (Hasyim, 2020). Recent scholarship has called for more ethnographic and participatory research methods that can capture the lived experiences of religious minorities and the everyday practices of interfaith coexistence. However, few studies have employed such methods systematically, leaving significant gaps in understanding how interfaith relations actually function at the community level.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to model interreligious relations through a pluralist-constructivist approach, using West Muna Regency as a case

study in 2023. By mapping the potential for interfaith conflict and examining how identities, perceptions, and policies interact, this research aims to provide insights into managing religious diversity in Indonesia. Such an approach is expected to contribute to both scholarly discourse and practical strategies for sustaining harmony in Indonesia's multicultural and multi-religious society.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative methodology using a case study approach. The research focused on West Muna Regency, an area shaped by transmigration and characterized by multicultural and multi-religious dynamics. This site was selected as a testing ground for pluralist constructivism to examine whether the theory is contextually applicable in minimizing interfaith conflict across regions. Data were collected through direct observation of events and intergroup relations among religious communities in West Muna. In addition to observation, interviews were conducted with young religious leaders representing both Islam and Hinduism. Youth leaders were chosen because they tend to be more rational in their interpretations and more visionary in their perspectives. Islamic leaders were asked to reflect on other religions from an Islamic standpoint, while Hindu leaders provided perspectives on Islam. This dialogical approach was designed to reveal whether interreligious relations were synergistic or conflictual. Data were analyzed using a triangulation model and tracing process to ensure validity and reliability.

Findings from observations and interviews suggest that interfaith relations in West Muna are shaped by community-based harmony. Islam, while the majority religion, is perceived as open and non-superior, fostering partnership rather than dominance. This dynamic minimizes the risk of religiously motivated social unrest. Although political, economic, and cultural tensions exist, they have not escalated into interreligious conflict. Instead, relationships between communities are sustained through cultural and structural collaboration, supported by relational and needs-based interdependence. These factors collectively strengthen social cohesion and illustrate the contextual applicability of pluralist constructivism in West Muna Regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Diversity of West Muna

One of the ethnic groups inhabiting Indonesia, particularly in Southeast Sulawesi Province, is the Muna people. The term Muna derives from the word Wuna, which in the local language means "flower." Philosophically, flowers symbolize beauty, love, fragrance, and comfort. The Muna people are divided into two administrative regions: Muna Induk and West Muna, which are distinct regencies but located on the same island.

West Muna Regency was established as a new autonomous region on July 23, 2014, through Law No. 24 of 2014, with Laworo as its capital. Covering a total area of 1,022.89 km², West Muna had a population of 84,182 people according to 2020 data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS). Administratively, the regency consists of 11 sub-districts, five urban villages, and 81 rural villages. The majority of the population adheres to Islam (95%), followed by Hinduism (3.77%), Christianity (0.43%), Buddhism (0.14%), and other belief systems (0.01%).

The regency is characterized by rich ethnic diversity, with communities originating from various transmigration programs, including Javanese, Balinese, Maluku, Bajo (coastal communities), and Bugis. This diversity makes West Muna one of the more pluralistic regencies in Southeast Sulawesi. Despite potential differences, the coexistence of ethnicities, religions, and cultures has created a shared identity rooted in unity, synergy, and collaboration for regional development. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Southeast Sulawesi, the province reflects this diversity in its religious composition, with variations across regencies and cities.

Region	Percentage of People according to City/Town and Religion																
	Islam			Protestantism			Catholic			Hinduism			Buddhism				
	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022		
Buton	3.88	3.94	4.73	0.14	0.27	0.51	2.04	2.04	1.17	2.37	2.37	3.54	6.50	6.50	-		
Muna	8.05	8.17	8.98	2.40	3.15	1.97	20.88	20.88	11.72	0.72	0.72	0.96	-	-	0.07		
Konawe	11.68	11.86	9.85	16.30	16.13	8.17	7.31	7.31	2.55	26.62	26.62	21.25	11.15	11.15	4.41		
Kolaka	7.96	6.54	8.96	24.52	24.25	39.01	17.29	17.29	11.28	9.14	9.14	7.39	6.20	6.20	4.00		
Konawe Selatan	9.42	9.56	10.24	12.85	12.71	8.66	7.49	7.49	2.16	27.76	27.76	32.49	21.04	21.04	10.58		
Bombana	6.10	6.20	6.40	3.68	3.77	1.57	0.35	0.35	0.64	3.11	3.11	3.87	1.60	1.60	-		
Wakatobi	3.99	4.06	4.70	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.10	0.10	0.04	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Kolaka Utara	5.02	5.10	5.57	2.45	2.43	1.53	0.14	0.14	0.40	-	-	0.01	3.65	3.65	-		
Buton Utara	10.85	11.01	2.62	0.11	0.15	0.23	0.30	0.30	0.39	1.77	1.77	3.82	-	-	-		

Konawe Utara	2.02	2.05	2.39	1.58	1.56	1.40	1.68	1.68	2.68	2.65	2.65	9.65	1.33	1.33	1.56		
Kolaka Timur	4.16	4.23	4.61	6.42	6.35	0.54	3.13	3.13	2.26	13.28	13.28	1.90	-	-	6.17		
Konawe Kepulauan	1.21	1.23	1.48	0.01	0.01	0.00	1.04	1.04	1.46	0.14	0.14	0.22	-	-	-		
Muna Barat	2.76	2.81	3.25	0.31	0.30	0.28	0.52	0.52	0.53	5.74	5.74	10.76	15.63	15.63	5.97		
Buton Tengah	4.32	4.38	4.73	0.03	0.03	0.19	11.84	11.84	6.98								
Buton Selatan	3.36	3.41	3.85	0.02	0.01	0.01	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Kota Kendari	10.55	10.72	12.96	25.90	25.62	24.72	19.10	19.10	29.69	2.50	2.50	5.84	24.90	24.90	67.37		
Kota Baubau	4.66	4.73	7.07	3.22	3.19	12.61	6.77	6.77	28.73	4.21	4.21	7.95	7.99	7.99	1.42		
Sulawesi Tenggara	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00		

Based on data from the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration (Dukcapil) of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the population of Southeast Sulawesi reached 2.68 million in December 2021. Of this number, 2.57 million (95.77%) were Muslims, indicating that Islam is the dominant religion in the province, whose capital is Kendari. The remaining population consisted of 50.81 thousand Hindus (1.9%), 44.8 thousand Christians (1.67%), 16.22 thousand Catholics (0.61%), 1.53 thousand Buddhists (0.06%), 15 adherents of Confucianism (0.0%), and 56 followers of other belief systems (0.0%) (Databooks, 2021).

West Muna Regency, as part of this broader provincial context, embodies a strong tradition of unity rooted in cultural and ethnic diversity. Although the Muna ethnic group forms the majority, they do not claim superiority over other groups. Instead, West Muna's cultural traditions are practiced as guiding values of community life while remaining open to assimilation with traditions of other ethnic groups. Rather than generating tension, these diverse traditions complement one another, creating synergy and reinforcing interethnic solidarity.

The population of West Muna is distributed across two main geographical areas: the lowland mainland and the coastal and island clusters. The Muna people predominantly inhabit the mainland, where many work as government employees or engage in traditional farming, cultivating corn, tubers, and fruit. In the Tiworo Islands District, transmigration communities such as the Javanese have settled in villages like Mekar Jaya, Wapae Jaya, and Wulanga Jaya, where they primarily work as farmers. Another transmigration area, Sido Makmur Village, is home to Balinese and Javanese families who have lived there for generations, earning livelihoods as fruit farmers, traders, and agricultural workers. The Bugis

community is also integrated into areas such as Wapae Jaya and Waturempe, where they work largely as traders, sharing cultural similarities with the Muna people. Finally, the Bajo tribe resides in coastal areas and island groups such as Tondasi, Katela Island, Maginti Island, and Pajala Village. Their integration with the Muna people has even produced a distinct Muna-Bajo dialect, reflecting deep cultural assimilation.

Field interviews reinforce the perception of strong interfaith harmony in West Muna. According to Sudirman (2023), a young Muslim cleric, interfaith relations are especially visible during religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Christmas, when communities visit one another in a spirit of solidarity. He estimated that West Muna is home to around one thousand Hindus, concentrated in SP 1, SP 2, and SP 3, and affirmed that conflicts between religious groups have never occurred. Instead, collaboration is evident in cultural practices such as the *ogoh-ogoh* festival, where Muslims and Hindus work together, and in the economic sphere, where trade fosters interdependence. Similarly, from the Hindu perspective, Komang Mariada (2023), a Hindu youth leader, emphasized that Muslims and Hindus in West Muna share harmonious relations. He noted that during Eid al-Fitr, Hindus actively contribute to maintaining security and ensuring the smooth running of congregational prayers. Thus, both Islamic and Hindu perspectives affirm that interfaith relations in West Muna are characterized by synergy, mutual respect, and the absence of conflict, despite differences in theology.

Diversity in the Perspective of Social Constructivism

The Muna people, although the majority in West Muna, do not exert hegemony over other ethnic groups. Instead, they collaborate with them to build and sustain the region. Muna identity is distinguished by the honorifics *Laode* for men and *Waode* for women, while the Bugis use *Andi* or *Karaeng*, and the Balinese employ *Bli*. These kinship terms illustrate how cultural markers foster a sense of similarity and mutual respect among ethnic groups, reflecting shared values and a collective attachment to the sea as an essential part of life.

In West Muna, such identities function as a social construct that shapes communication and interaction within the community. From a constructivist perspective, identity plays a central role in building collective empathy, interdependence, and a shared vision, which together cultivate cohesion and self-restraint (L.M. Fathun, 2018). The Muna philosophy reflects this worldview through enduring maxims: *Hansuru-hansuru ana badha sumonokono hansuru adhati* (The body may be destroyed as long as tradition is preserved), *Hansuru-hansuru ana adhati sumanokono hansuru liwu* (Tradition may be destroyed as long as the territory is preserved), and *Hansuru-hansuru ana liwu sumanokono hansuru agama* (The territory may be destroyed as long as religion is preserved) (Fathun, 2021).

These sayings emphasize the Muna people's deep-rooted commitment to protecting custom, territory, and religion as the pillars of their identity.

This philosophical foundation illustrates the Muna community's strong sense of cultural awareness, expressed in the principle of *mandeh owuto* (self-awareness). They perceive themselves as a cultured people who live in harmony with nature while assuming social, cultural, and economic responsibilities. This interdependence is evident in the relationship among tribes: for instance, the Muna, who are often engaged in governance, assist other communities in administrative affairs, while the Bajo contribute significantly by providing fish and marine resources. Such exchanges demonstrate how cultural philosophy and mutual reliance shape a cohesive and cooperative plural society in West Muna.

In Muna culture, the concept of *falia* refers to something forbidden, particularly acts that disrupt communal harmony. Conflict with other tribes is considered a violation of ancestral traditions. The Muna people believe that deliberate attempts to break kinship bonds provoke *sumanga*, or ancestral anger, bringing consequences upon the individual. Harmony, therefore, is regarded as *a common fate*, or shared destiny, in which cultural values and the historical struggle for territorial formation are viewed as collective traditions that transcend ethnicity.

Communication within the Muna tradition is also guided by the principle of *kabasa*, which requires every act of gratitude to be expressed verbally as both an acknowledgment of God's blessings and a responsibility to ancestors for future generations. The *kabasa* tradition functions as a way of preventing *sumanga* caused by individual mistakes and fosters a sense of cultural homogeneity. This shared ethic allows different tribes to perceive conflict over territorial management not as an opportunity for domination, but as a call for collective responsibility. In practice, tribal egos in West Muna are relinquished in favor of cooperation. This is evident during the Balinese *Ogoh-ogoh* festival, which has become a communal event celebrated by multiple groups. Visitors to Muna and Buton are often introduced to customary rules intended to prevent cultural violations. This spirit of unity is encapsulated in the regional motto, *witeno wuna liwuku barakati kalembohano realu* ("My land of Muna, a blessed land where blood was shed").

Sociological perspectives, such as those of Weber, view conflict as an inherent part of social life and as a tool for change and power struggles across various domains, including religion, education, and trade (Sabban, 2015). Similarly, Peter Harris and Ben Reilly argue that internal conflict is often rooted in identity issues related to ethnicity, religion, and culture, as well as distributive issues tied to economics, politics, and law. Identity-based conflicts are particularly persistent and complex because they involve group claims that are emotional, primordial, and competitive. These dynamics often lead to the perception that Islam, as the majority religion, is monolithic, closed, and intolerant, with extreme

interpretations equating it to radicalism. Such discourses shape cultural perceptions and influence interfaith relations.

However, the reality in West Muna challenges these theoretical assumptions. Interview data with Hindu leader Kadek Resana (2023) revealed that interfaith relations in the region are highly harmonious and tolerant. Approximately 709 Hindu families reside across villages such as Suka Damai, Wapae Jaya, Labokolo, Wulanga Jaya, Abadi Jaya, Lawada Jaya, and Ksimpa Jaya. Despite theological differences, there have been no reported interfaith conflicts. Instead, communities actively synergize to preserve harmony. This is exemplified by Hindus in West Muna who helped maintain security and facilitated the smooth conduct of the 2023 Eid al-Fitr celebrations, underscoring the cooperative and inclusive spirit that characterizes interfaith relations in the region.
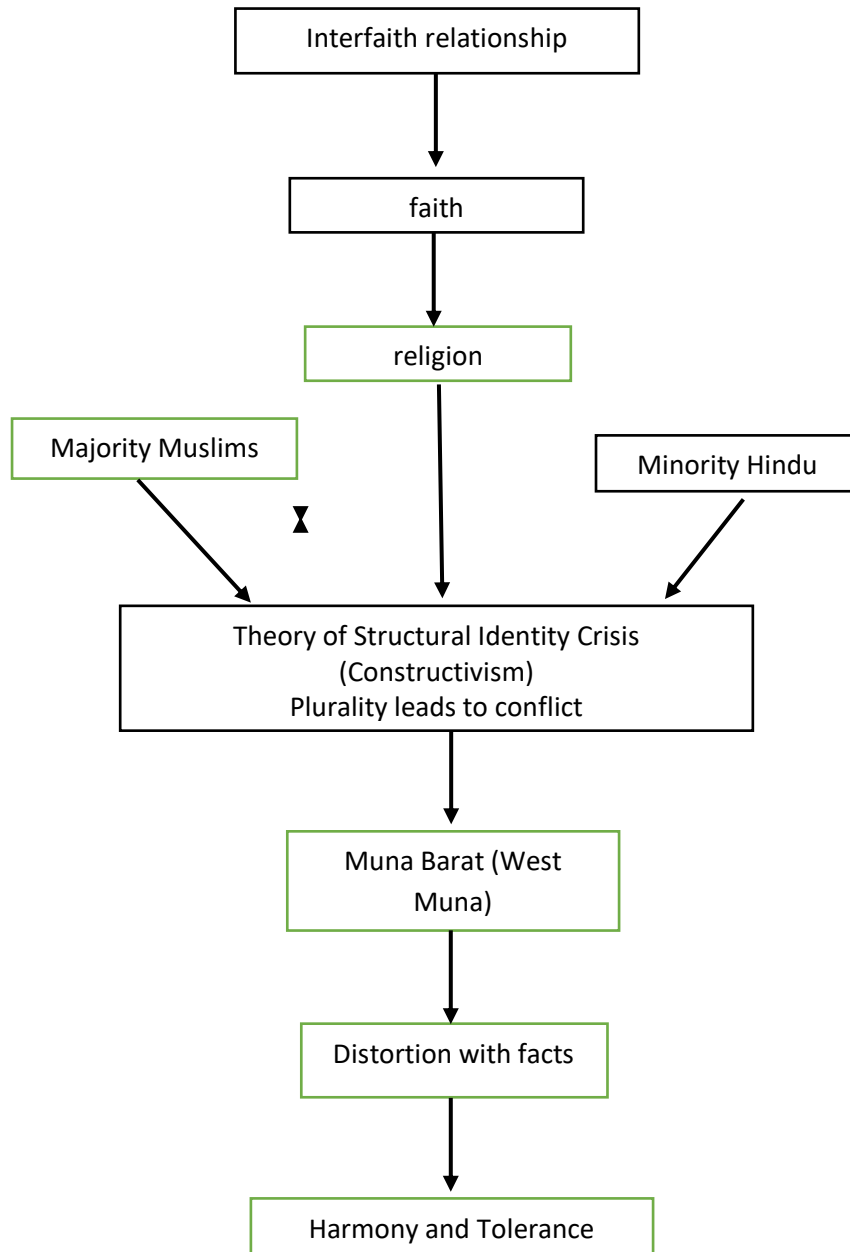

Picture 1. Hindus guarding Ied al-Fitr prayers (document by Kadek Resana 2023)

When individuals become newcomers in a host culture, they inevitably undergo stages of adaptation that transform their cultural experience. These phases include the *honeymoon* stage, characterized by joy and hope upon arrival in a new environment; the *crisis* stage, marked by frustration and difficulties in forming social relationships; the *recovery* stage, where language acquisition and cultural learning enable smoother interaction; and the *adjustment* stage, when self-control, adaptation, and enjoyment of the local culture are achieved. Culture shock can also occur upon returning from a host culture, a phenomenon Sam Porter (2000) describes as involving ambivalence, re-entry, and resocialization (Yuda, 2018). In West Muna, however, cultural dynamics remain harmonious despite its multicultural and multi-religious composition, particularly because it is a transmigration area. Indeed, West Muna has proven to be even more multicultural than Muna Induk, yet the people have successfully adapted and synergized across cultural and religious boundaries.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu et al., 1992) helps explain this process of adaptation. *Habitus* refers to the internalization of social values through a subtle yet powerful process that shapes not only thought but also physical practices (Yuda, 2018). To act within a social arena, individuals require different forms of capital—economic (material wealth), cultural (knowledge, skills, experience), social (networks), and symbolic (social recognition). When appropriately aligned with the arena, these forms of capital foster distinction, identity, and even social superiority. For instance, in the educational arena, cultural capital such as knowledge and perseverance is more valuable than economic wealth. In this sense, social behavior, including communication styles and public presentations, reflects a dynamic process of internalization adjusted to context and orientation. Dialectical theory further underlines that social relations are not always stable or consistent but are shaped by negotiation and adaptation (West & Turner, 2007).

Government representatives reinforce this perspective, highlighting the harmonious state of interfaith relations in West Muna. Hasrul (2023), a Service Analyst at the West Muna Regency DPMPTSP, emphasized that interfaith relations remain peaceful and tolerant, evidenced by the freedom to worship and the absence of religiously motivated conflicts. This harmony is supported by strong community awareness of tolerance, respect for differences, and the active role of both government institutions and religious leaders in fostering solidarity. From a gender perspective, Yulianti (2023) noted that Muslims respect the cultural uniqueness of Hindu traditions, such as the *ogoh-ogoh* festival, which Muslims often attend as spectators. Similarly, Hindu respondents affirmed that Muslims also join Hindu celebrations as a gesture of solidarity. These practices extend to the economic sphere, where Muslims and Hindus maintain mutually beneficial exchanges, particularly in agriculture and trade.

From the Hindu community, Rasmiati (2023), daughter of Hindu leader I Nyoman Tana, also affirmed that interfaith relations in West Muna are tolerant and respectful. She highlighted that she has never witnessed socio-religious conflict in the region, as economic cooperation and cultural exchange have consistently sustained harmony. Most fruits consumed by the local population—such as rambutan, oranges, and durian—come from Balinese Hindu farmers, further strengthening interdependence. Interfaith harmony is also visible spatially, as temples, churches, mosques, and monasteries are located in close proximity, particularly in SP 2 Village. Mutual participation in religious festivities is common: Hindus help organize *takbiran* processions during Eid, while Muslims take part in the *ogoh-ogoh* ritual during Nyepi. This synergy demonstrates that shared vision, self-control, cooperation, and mutual support can transform plurality into solidarity, with collective identity becoming a foundation for long-term harmony.

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Source: Authors' analysis

Thus, the creation of harmony and alignment within the framework of collective identity requires a shared vision, self-control, emotional maturity, and a willingness to collaborate and support one another. In this context, harmony is not merely the absence of conflict but a manifestation of solidarity, while plurality itself can be transformed into a constructive social identity.

Plurality as Harmony - Deconstructing the Structural Identity Crisis in West Muna

This study reveals a compelling counter-narrative to conventional theories of multicultural conflict, demonstrating how West Muna's diverse ethnic and

religious landscape has evolved into a harmonious plural society. Through the lens of social constructivism and the Theory of Structural Identity Crisis, our findings challenge the assumption that cultural diversity inevitably leads to social fragmentation or conflict. The findings from West Muna fundamentally challenge traditional applications of the Theory of Structural Identity Crisis. While this theory typically predicts that competing identity structures within a society lead to tension and conflict, our data demonstrates an alternative trajectory where multiple identity structures can coexist and mutually reinforce social stability. This divergence suggests that the theory's predictive power may be culturally and contextually bounded, requiring modification when applied to societies with strong integrative cultural frameworks.

From a constructivist perspective, the Muna community has successfully negotiated what Berger and Luckmann (1966) termed the "social construction of reality" by creating shared meaning systems that transcend ethnic boundaries. The honorific systems—Laode/Waode for Muna, Andi/Karaeng for Bugis, and Bli for Balinese—function not as markers of separation but as complementary elements within a broader identity matrix. This represents a sophisticated form of what we might call "constructive pluralism," where difference is celebrated as a source of strength rather than division.

Our findings suggest that a structural identity crisis need not be inherently destructive. In West Muna, what might appear as competing identity structures have been reframed through local philosophical frameworks into complementary social roles. The Muna philosophy's hierarchical prioritization—tradition over body, territory over tradition, religion over territory—provides a stable foundation that allows other cultural groups to find their place within this framework without surrendering their distinct identities.

The concepts of *falia* (forbidden acts disrupting harmony) and *sumanga* (ancestral anger) function as powerful social regulatory mechanisms that transcend ethnic boundaries. These beliefs create what anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) called "communitas"—a sense of community that exists beyond formal social structures. By making interethnic conflict spiritually dangerous, these concepts transform diversity from a potential source of tension into a sacred responsibility for collective harmony. In line with this, the *kabasa* tradition of verbal gratitude serves multiple functions that extend far beyond its apparent religious purpose. As a communicative practice, it creates regular opportunities for inter-ethnic interaction while reinforcing shared values of gratitude and ancestral respect. This represents what sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1974) called the "ethnography of communication"—the study of how communication patterns shape and reflect social relationships. The *kabasa* tradition functions as a form of "cultural maintenance" that prevents the erosion of social bonds while simultaneously creating space for new cultural elements to be integrated. This suggests that

successful multicultural societies require active cultural practices that regularly reinforce shared values while celebrating diversity.

The interfaith dynamics in West Muna represent a form of social innovation that deserves broader theoretical attention. The mutual participation in religious festivals, such as Muslims attending *ogoh-ogoh* celebrations, Hindus facilitating *takbiran* processions, indicates a level of religious literacy and respect that goes beyond mere tolerance. This suggests what theologian Diana Eck (2001) termed "pluralism" as distinct from diversity: "the energetic engagement with diversity" that leads to mutual understanding and common ground.

This study demonstrates that the Theory of Structural Identity Crisis, while valuable for understanding many multicultural contexts, requires significant modification when applied to societies with strong integrative cultural frameworks. West Muna represents a case where structural identity differences have been transformed from potential sources of conflict into complementary elements of a resilient plural society. The key insight from West Muna is that plurality need not lead to conflict when communities develop philosophical frameworks that can accommodate difference within unity, create systems of functional complementarity, and maintain regular practices that reinforce shared values while celebrating diversity. This represents not the absence of identity but the construction of a superordinate identity that encompasses rather than erases ethnic and religious differences.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the creation of harmony and alignment in interfaith relations depends on the development of a collective identity. Building harmony among religious communities is neither a simple nor an automatic process; rather, it requires continuous effort to achieve a shared vision and mission in nurturing civilization and culture.

West Muna serves as a compelling example of a multicultural regency that accommodates diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. Compared to Muna Induk or Raha City, West Muna is even more multi-ethnic and multicultural, largely due to its history as a transmigration area for Balinese, Bugis, and Javanese communities. Over time, these groups have assimilated with the local population, establishing strong bonds of interdependence. The Balinese, predominantly Hindu, occupy a vital position in the community because they contribute significantly to the region's agricultural and livestock production. This reciprocal relationship has played an essential role in preventing socio-political conflict, ensuring stability and cohesion.

At the core of West Muna's collective identity is the preservation of ancestral culture and territorial integrity, which are regarded as fundamental to maintaining

security, comfort, and social order. Solidarity and pluralistic awareness have become the foundation for sustaining interfaith relations, fostering a cosmopolitan ethos that minimizes social friction even in times of political contestation. Prominent figures from each religious community also contribute by engaging in dialogue and representation, ensuring that development in West Muna serves the interests of all groups rather than being confined to narrow ethnic or religious boundaries.

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