

SOCIAL INTERACTION AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN THE MALAY COMMUNITY OF JAMBI

Mohd Kailani¹; Abdul Halim²; Ahmad Mustaniruddin³; Zaki Mubarak⁴; Edy Kusnadi⁵

¹UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia; mohdkailani@uinjambi.ac.id

²UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia; abdulhalim@uinjambi.ac.id

³UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia; ahmad_mustaniruddin@uinjambi.ac.id

⁴UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia; zakimubarak@uinjambi.ac.id

⁵UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia; edykusnadi@uinjambi.ac.id

Article Info	Abstract
<p><i>Article History</i></p> <p>Submitted :</p> <p>Accepted :</p> <p>Published :</p> <p>Keywords: Religious Tolerance; Social Interaction; The Malay Community; Pluralism</p> <p>Author Correspondence: mohdkailani@uinjambi.ac.id</p>	<p><i>This research analyzes the patterns of social interaction and tolerance between the Malay community and the Batak ethnic group in Bagan Pete, Jambi City. Known for its pluralistic characteristics since the pre-independence era, Jambi City shows how ethnic diversity can be a positive force instead of a source of conflict. Jambi City's Bagan Pete became the focus of the research due to its high diversity driven by the presence of Jalan Lintas Timur and Alam Barajo Terminal, which attracted many migrants, especially ethnic Batak who are predominantly Christian. Through a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews with ten key informants, the research reveals the complex social dynamics between the two communities. The results show that social interactions manifest in various forms, including cooperation, conflict, competition and accommodation. Positive interactions are mainly seen in daily social and economic activities, with conflicts that arise generally minor in nature and can be resolved through constructive dialogue. Religious tolerance is a prominent aspect, shown through the Malay community's respect for different beliefs, reinforced by initiatives to develop religious understanding through study groups, Islamic schools, and Qur'anic learning. The findings have practical implications for local government policy development and community development, including the importance of interethnic interaction programs, interfaith dialogue, and strengthening the role of community leaders in maintaining social harmony.</i></p> <p>Penelitian ini menganalisis pola interaksi sosial dan toleransi antara komunitas Melayu dan kelompok etnis Batak di Bagan Pete, Kota Jambi. Dikenal dengan karakteristik pluralistiknya sejak era pra-kemerdekaan, Kota Jambi menunjukkan bagaimana keragaman etnis dapat menjadi kekuatan positif alih-alih menjadi sumber konflik. Bagan Pete Kota Jambi menjadi fokus penelitian karena tingginya keragaman yang didorong oleh keberadaan Jalan Lintas Timur dan Terminal Alam Barajo, yang menarik banyak migran, terutama etnis Batak yang mayoritas beragama Kristen. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif dengan wawancara mendalam terhadap sepuluh informan kunci, penelitian mengungkap dinamika sosial yang</p>

kompleks antara kedua komunitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa interaksi sosial terwujud dalam berbagai bentuk, mencakup kerja sama, konflik, kompetisi, dan akomodasi. Interaksi positif terutama terlihat dalam kegiatan sosial dan ekonomi sehari-hari, dengan konflik yang muncul umumnya bersifat minor dan dapat diselesaikan melalui dialog konstruktif. Toleransi beragama menjadi aspek menonjol, ditunjukkan melalui penghormatan komunitas Melayu terhadap perbedaan keyakinan, diperkuat dengan inisiatif pengembangan pemahaman agama melalui kelompok studi, sekolah Islam, dan pembelajaran Al-Qur'an. Temuan ini memiliki implikasi praktis bagi pengembangan kebijakan pemerintah daerah dan pembangunan masyarakat, termasuk pentingnya program interaksi antaretnis, dialog antaragama, dan penguatan peran tokoh masyarakat dalam menjaga harmoni sosial.

Introduction

As social beings, humans are inseparable from the presence of others. This concept has long been understood, notably by Aristotle (384-322 BCE), the ancient Greek philosopher, through the term "zoon politicon," which indicates that humans are fundamentally beings who require social interaction. This fundamental characteristic suggests that individuals cannot fulfill all their needs without the presence of others, which in turn drives social interaction among them.¹ This interaction is crucial as it establishes mutually supportive relationships and enables individuals to collaborate in meeting collective needs. Indeed, the presence of others becomes essential in human life, forming complex and dynamic social networks.²

Social interaction is the fundamental process that shapes the dynamics of social relationships.³ Social interactions typically proceed more smoothly when there are shared commonalities in language, culture, and religion among individuals. In a pluralistic social environment, this diversity can be viewed as two sides of the same coin. While diversity can serve as a source of cultural enrichment, it simultaneously holds the potential to generate division or conflict within

¹ Simon Varga, "Geordnete Gemeinschaft. Politische Autarkie Bei Aristoteles," *Polis (United Kingdom)* 39, no. 2 (2022): 303–326.

² Ibid.

³ Mitja D. Back, "Social Interaction Processes and Personality," *The Handbook of Personality Dynamics and Processes* (2021): 183–226.

communities.⁴ Historical records demonstrate that England has experienced prolonged conflicts with the Welsh and Scottish peoples. Similarly, in France, tensions with the Breton population continue to persist into the present day. These examples highlight the complexities that emerge from cultural and ethnic diversity, and emphasize the necessity of understanding and effective communication to foster harmony in pluralistic societies.⁵

Plurality in Indonesia has a dark historical record, as seen in areas such as Ambon, Palu, Poso, Sampit, and Banyuwangi. The diversity of ethnicities, religions, races and social groups in Indonesia inherently brings potential social vulnerabilities that require serious attention.⁶ Religion in society often presents two different sides. On the one hand, religion offers useful values and moral principles. On the other hand, religion can trigger conflicts due to different interpretations by its adherents.⁷ This shows that plurality can be a source of cultural wealth as well as a trigger for conflict if not managed properly. Data from the Setara Institute shows that there were 109 conflicts related to freedom of religion and belief, with 1,036 incidents recorded in 75% of Indonesia's provinces.⁸ A concrete example is the conflict between Muslim and Christian communities in Aceh over the construction of a church.⁹ These statistics underscore the complexity of religious life in Indonesia and the importance of building tolerance to maintain social stability in the midst of diversity.

⁴ Hilda Yani, "Harmony of Multicultural Community Interaction," *International Journal on Social Science, Economics and Art* 9, no. 3 (2019): 115–127.

⁵ Leonard A Jason, "Cultural Diversity and Conflict Resolution: Best Practices in Multicultural Societies," *Global International Journal of Innovative Research* 1, no. 1 (2023): 15–22.

⁶ Franklin Hutabarat, "Navigating Diversity: Exploring Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony in Indonesian Society," *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 3, no. 6 (2023): 6–13.

⁷ Sustanto Sustanto and Kholid Mawardi, "Inter-Religious Prejudice in A Multicultural Society," *International Journal of Social Science, Education, Communication and Economics (SINOMICS JOURNAL)* 2, no. 1 (2023): 153–160.

⁸ Ilham Dhiya Ul Haq Ramadhan and Asyif Faozi, "Facing Challenges of Discrimination Against Local Religious Beliefs in Indonesia," *Jurnal Hukum Sehasen* 9, no. 2 (2023): 439–448.

⁹ Tonny Andrian and Waharman Waharman, "MISIOLOGI KONTEKSTUAL DI INDONESIA: SOLUSI TEOLOGIS DAN SOSIAL UNTUK MASYARAKAT PLURALIS," *Manna Rafflesia* 11, no. 1 (October 29, 2024): 186–201, accessed January 16, 2025, https://journals.sttab.ac.id/index.php/man_raf/article/view/502.

The Province of Jambi is currently recognized as a safe and dynamic region, and has been notably designated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs as a reference area for religious harmony. This designation reflects Jambi's success in maintaining peaceful interfaith relations and serves as a model for other regions in Indonesia.¹⁰ Nevertheless, in reality, religious conflicts still occur with notable frequency. For instance, the National Unity and Politics Agency (Kesbangpol) of Jambi has documented several incidents involving houses of worship, as well as the arrest of three suspected terrorists in 2018.¹¹ This phenomenon creates an intriguing research subject: how the Jambi society manages harmony amid existing plurality. The Jambi community faces the challenge of maintaining religious and ethnic harmony while respecting existing differences. The efforts to create dialogue and mutual understanding between groups become crucial in maintaining social stability and preventing larger conflicts. Although Jambi has a reputation as a harmonious region, the challenges in managing plurality remain a primary concern for both the community and local government.

The significance of this research lies in its investigation of Jambi's distinctive pluralistic environment, where different religions (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism) and ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, Indian, Batak, Bugis, Arab, Sundanese and Javanese) have coexisted since pre-independence times.¹² This longstanding diversity provides an exceptional case study for understanding successful pluralistic coexistence. This research contributes to the broader discourse on religious tolerance by examining successful models of pluralistic coexistence, in contrast to previous studies that have focused on conflict areas such as Ambon, Palu, and Poso. The findings aim to provide practical insights for other diverse regions that strive to maintain social harmony amidst religious and

¹⁰ “Kerukunan Beragama Di Jambi Perlu Jadi Rujukan Di Indonesia,” accessed January 16, 2025, <https://kemenag.go.id/nasional/kerukunan-beragama-di-jambi-perlu-jadi-rujukan-di-indonesia-1qf1lo>.

¹¹ Abdul Halim and Zaki Mubarak, “Pola Konflik Agama Di Wilayah Plural: Studi Kasus Pendirian Rumah Ibadah Di Kota Jambi,” *TAJDID: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 19, no. 1 (2021): 85–109.

¹² Nurul Fadhilah, “Dinamika Identitas Budaya Dalam Masyarakat Multikultural: Sebuah Studi Kasus Di Kota Jambi,” *Socious Journal* 1, no. 2 (April 29, 2024): 12–16.

ethnic differences.

Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to examine patterns of religious tolerance in Jambi Province. The selection of informants was carried out purposively by considering specific criteria, namely residents who have lived for at least 10 years in the research area, are actively involved in community activities, represent Malay and Batak ethnic groups, have diverse religious backgrounds, and hold leadership roles in religious or community organizations. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews lasting around 60-90 minutes for each informant, direct observation of community interactions, and analysis of local government documents.

To ensure data credibility, this study applied various triangulation strategies, including comparison of data from various collection methods, cross-checking information from various informants, observation at different times and occasions, and verification of interpretations with informants. The data analysis process was conducted systematically through three stages. First, the data reduction stage involved transcribing the interviews verbatim and coding important statements. Second, the data presentation stage involved developing thematic networks and mapping relationships between themes. Third, the conclusion drawing stage which included identifying cross-case patterns and refining themes through peer review.

The themes in this study were developed through an iterative process of coding and categorization, with particular attention to patterns of social interaction, manifestations of religious tolerance, and conflict resolution mechanisms. The entire analysis process was documented through detailed memos and audit trails to enhance the reliability of the research. This approach enables a deep understanding of the dynamics of religious tolerance in the context of a pluralistic society in Jambi Province.

Result and Discussion

The Relationship Between Social Interaction and Religious Tolerance

Social interaction and religious tolerance are two fundamental, interconnected elements in the life of a pluralistic society. In the context of Indonesia, which is rich in cultural and religious diversity, social interaction serves as a bridge connecting individuals from various belief backgrounds. The more intense and positive the social interactions among different religious communities, the higher the level of tolerance that develops among them. This is due to the fact that through interaction, individuals can better understand, appreciate, and accept the differences in beliefs that exist around them.¹³

Social interaction serves as a medium for building a deeper understanding and appreciation of the values upheld by different religions. For instance, in community activities such as gotong royong, which involve various religious groups, individuals from diverse backgrounds can contribute and collaborate towards a common goal. Through this process, they not only learn about each other's practices and traditions but also discover shared universal human values, such as empathy, justice, and compassion.¹⁴ Another example is when the community celebrates national holidays together, such as Independence Day, where all elements of society, regardless of religious differences, gather to celebrate unity and togetherness. Events like this create a space for dialogue and cultural exchange that enrich individual life experiences and strengthen interfaith relationships.¹⁵

Religious tolerance that is cultivated through social interaction creates a conducive climate for higher-quality interactions. When a community possesses a

¹³ Totok Wahyu Abadi et al., "The Mediating Role of Communication in Fostering Religious Tolerance within a Diverse Society," *journal.uinsgd.ac.id* TW Abadi, AR Zetira, ARU Balahmar, KD Longani Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama dan Lintas Budaya, 2024 • *journal.uinsgd.ac.id* (2024), accessed January 17, 2025, <https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/Religious/article/view/25543>.

¹⁴ Engku Ahmad Zaki Engku Alwi and Zuriati Binti Mohd Rashid, "Cross Religious and Social Interaction: A Case Study of Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong, Pasir Mas, Kelantan," *Asian Social Science* 7, no. 8 (2011): 112–123.

¹⁵ Mewana Mewana, Ranti Nazmi, and Azwar Azwar, "HARMONISASI ANTAR UMAT BERAGAMA DALAM MEMPERKOKOH PERSATUAN DAN KESATUAN BANGSA," *Bhineka Tunggal Ika: Kajian Teori dan Praktik Pendidikan PKn* 9, no. 1 (May 31, 2022): 47–52.

tolerant attitude, its members tend to be more open in engaging with adherents of other religions. This openness fosters a positive cycle where tolerance encourages better interactions, and these improved interactions further reinforce tolerance.¹⁶ For example, in several regions of Indonesia, there is a tradition of mutual visits among followers of different religions during major celebrations. When Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr, they often invite neighbors from other faiths to share food and celebrate together. This practice not only strengthens social relationships but also helps to eliminate any prejudices and stereotypes that may have existed previously.¹⁷

However, despite the numerous opportunities to build tolerance through social interaction, challenges remain. Prejudices and negative stereotypes often hinder individuals from engaging in deeper interactions. For instance, some people may hold misconceptions about the teachings of other religions, which can lead to distrust and tension. Additionally, a lack of understanding about other faiths can also serve as a barrier. Many individuals do not have the opportunity to learn about other religions firsthand, relying instead on information that may be inaccurate or biased. External influences, such as negative news or propaganda that spreads hatred, can also trigger conflicts and exacerbate interfaith relations.¹⁸

To address these challenges, a comprehensive and sustainable approach is necessary. Ongoing interfaith dialogue should be encouraged to create a space for the exchange of thoughts and experiences. Social activities that involve various religious groups, such as cultural festivals or charitable events, can serve as effective platforms for strengthening interfaith relationships.¹⁹

The active role of religious leaders and community members in promoting tolerance cannot be overlooked. Religious leaders can serve as role models in

¹⁶ Wahyu Abadi et al., “The Mediating Role of Communication in Fostering Religious Tolerance within a Diverse Society.”

¹⁷ Nasriandi Nasriandi, Hadi Pajarianto, and Makmur Makmur, “One World, Many Religions: The Local Wisdom Value and Social Religious Organizations in Strengthening Tolerance,” *Al-Qalam* 29, no. 1 (2023): 112.

¹⁸ Sustanto and Mawardi, “Inter-Religious Prejudice in A Multicultural Society.”

¹⁹ Mahmoud Vaezi, “Constructive Dialogue and Its Effect on Interreligious Tolerance,” *Research Aspects in Arts and Social Studies Vol. 5* (January 23, 2023): 27–44.

fostering mutual respect and understanding among followers of different faiths. They hold significant influence in shaping public perceptions and can leverage their positions to disseminate messages of peace and tolerance.²⁰ In this context, collaboration between the government, civil society organizations, and religious communities is crucial for creating an environment that supports positive social interactions. Such partnerships can facilitate the development of policies and initiatives that promote inclusivity and understanding among diverse groups.

Thus, the relationship between social interaction and religious tolerance is reciprocal and dynamic. Both elements reinforce each other and serve as an essential foundation for creating a harmonious community life. In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, it is vital to continue promoting positive social interactions and fostering attitudes of tolerance among different religious groups in everyday life. By nurturing good relationships among adherents of various faiths, we can not only create a peaceful society but also build a better future for generations to come.

Cooperation and Conflict in the Social Interaction of Malay and Batak Communities in Jambi

Social interactions between the Malay and Batak communities in Jambi illustrate the complexity of inter-ethnic relations that involve various forms of interaction, ranging from cooperation to conflict. The presence of the Batak community in Jambi is inseparable from the construction of the East Cross Road that connects Jambi City with South Sumatra and Riau.²¹ This infrastructure not only opened up access to transportation but also created attractive economic opportunities for the Batak community to settle and develop various businesses along the route.

In the early phase, the interaction between the two ethnic groups was

²⁰ Aqilah Nur Aini Wibowo and Sufyanto Sufyanto, "Fostering Tolerance and Unity in Diverse Communities through Mosque-Community Relations," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Studies* 12, no. 2 (May 4, 2024).

²¹ Observasi, 2021

characterized by harmonious cooperation through various social institutions. Active participation in joint activities such as the celebration of national holidays, mutual cooperation in the construction of public facilities, and village meetings became a forum for interaction that strengthened the relationship between the two communities. This collaboration not only strengthens interpersonal relationships but also creates a deeper sense of community.²² However, the rapid development of Jambi City, especially with the emergence of new housing complexes, has presented new social dynamics. The influx of new social and cultural values brought by the Batak community into neighborhoods previously dominated by rural Malay communities creates the potential for friction. This situation is complicated by economic disparities, where the Batak community, which is increasingly established in various businesses, is confronted with the Malay community, which is still struggling economically.²³

Economic competition between the two groups began to emerge as new business opportunities opened up along Jalan Lintas Timur. The Malay community, which had previously relied on the agricultural sector, began to enter the entrepreneurial arena, while the Batak community also expanded their businesses in locations purchased from the Malay community. While this competition has the potential to create tension, it has also encouraged both groups to improve the quality of their products and services.

The strengthening of group identity among the Batak community, reflected in the formation of youth and student communities and the tendency to participate in sports activities separately, indicates a shift from previously more inclusive to more exclusive patterns of interaction. However, the Batak community's awareness of their position as migrants encourages them to take a more conciliatory stance and exercise restraint in situations that could potentially lead to conflict.²⁴

²² Diane Butler, "Enlivening Cultural Environments through Sharing and Gotong Royong (Mutual Cooperation)," *Heritage of Nusantara: International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage* 5, no. 1 (March 20, 2017): 1–22.

²³ Observasi, 2021

²⁴ Wawancara Peneliti dengan Siti Aminah, 4 Agustus 2021

But interestingly, despite the potential for conflict and competition, the presence of the Batak community has made a positive contribution to the Malay community, especially in the development of new skills and professions related to workshop and transportation. Prior to the arrival of the Batak community, many Malays were not familiar with motor vehicle repair equipment and techniques. The hospitality of the Batak community and the spirit of tolerance shown helped create a more harmonious atmosphere. This attitude, coupled with an awareness of their position as migrants, allowed for accommodation that enabled the two groups to coexist despite their different cultural and economic backgrounds.²⁵

Social Interaction Dynamics of Malay and Batak Communities in Jambi: Between Competition and Accommodation

Social interaction between the Malay and Batak communities in Jambi shows complex dynamics, including interrelated aspects of competition and accommodation. Competition between the two ethnic groups was not very prominent at first, mainly due to differences in the types of work that were engaged in. The Malay community generally works as farmers and office employees, while the Batak community is more involved in entrepreneurship. However, the construction of Jalan Lintas Timur in Jambi City has opened up new opportunities for the Malay community to develop various businesses. They are not only renting out properties but also starting to operate businesses directly, moving away from dependence on the agricultural sector. On the other hand, some members of the Batak community began to set up businesses in locations purchased from the Malay community. This situation created competition between the two ethnic groups in attracting customers.²⁶

While this competition has the potential to create tension, it also serves as a catalyst for both ethnic groups to improve the quality of their products and services,

²⁵ Nurul Meili Fanny et al., “HARMONY BETWEEN JAVANESE , SUNDANESE , AND BATAK ETHNICS IN BABUSSALAM VILLAGE , MARBAU SUB-DISTRICT , NORTH LABUHAN BATU REGENCY KECAMATAN MARBAU KABUPATEN LABUHAN BATU UTARA” 3, no. 2 (2022): 89–34.

²⁶ Wawancara Peneliti dengan Bapak Asio, 5 Agustus 2021

and drive innovation in their respective businesses. In this context, both groups have maintained good relations and mutual respect, ensuring that the competition is healthy and constructive. While there are occasional gaps and conflicts in social interactions between the two groups, these situations usually lead to accommodation.²⁷

An important factor facilitating accommodation is the Batak community's awareness of their position as migrants in the region. This awareness encourages them to take a defeatist attitude and restraint in situations that have the potential to cause conflict with the Malay community. The hospitality of the Batak community and the spirit of tolerance shown helped to create a more harmonious atmosphere, where both groups could respect each other and interact without causing tension. This accommodation process is reinforced by various joint activities involving both communities, such as celebrations of national holidays, mutual cooperation in the construction of public facilities, and village meetings. Active participation in these activities helps to strengthen social relations and create a deeper sense of community, transcending differences in cultural and economic backgrounds.²⁸

The experience of social interaction between the Malay and Batak communities in Jambi shows that competition and accommodation can go hand in hand in a plural society. Despite challenges and potential conflicts, the ability of both groups to develop adaptation and accommodation mechanisms allows for stronger social cohesion.²⁹ This is a valuable lesson on how pluralistic societies can maintain social harmony while still driving economic and social progress for all parties involved.

²⁷ Observasi, 2021

²⁸ Fanny et al., "HARMONY BETWEEN JAVANESE , SUNDANESE , AND BATAK ETHNICS IN BABUSSALAM VILLAGE , MARBAU SUB-DISTRICT , NORTH LABUHAN BATU REGENCY KECAMATAN MARBAU KABUPATEN LABUHAN BATU UTARA."

²⁹ Nurul Fadhillah, "Dinamika Identitas Budaya Dalam Masyarakat Multikultural: Sebuah Studi Kasus Di Kota Jambi."

Social Interaction of the Malay Community in Jambi: An Analysis

An analysis of the patterns of social interaction between Malay and Batak communities in Jambi reveals the complexity of social dynamics that go beyond simple categorization. Although theoretically social interaction can be classified into four main forms - cooperation, competition, conflict and accommodation - empirical findings show that its manifestation in the field is much more dynamic and does not always follow a linear pattern. An in-depth analysis of the growing social tolerance between the two communities indicates that this process is the result of organic interactions formed through various social arenas.

The significance of interaction spaces such as markets, work environments, and mutual cooperation activities are important catalysts in the formation of tolerance. Furthermore, modernization has created new arenas for social interaction through neighborhood security systems, arisan, and technological collaboration, which enriches the dimensions of social tolerance.³⁰

The research identified three critical phases in the evolution of inter-community relations. The first phase was marked by social harmony characterized by intensive cooperation and strong reciprocity. The second phase showed a shift in dynamics along with the demographic growth of the Batak community, which resulted in the phenomenon of social clustering and created social distance with the Malay community. This phase is characterized by the emergence of tensions related to differences in cultural values and generational issues. The third phase displays a complex pattern of adaptation, where both communities develop constructive competition mechanisms in various sectors of life.

This research shows that conflicts do not always have a negative impact, but rather act as a catalyst in the development of more sophisticated conflict resolution mechanisms and the formation of more mature tolerance. This finding underscores the importance of understanding social tolerance not as a static condition, but as a

³⁰ NZ Ilieva, "Tolerance as a Voice in the Intercultural Dialogue of Humanity," *8th International e-Conference on Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences: Conference Proceedings* (2022): 135–142, accessed January 31, 2025, <https://centerprode.com/conferences/8IeCSHSS/coas.e-conf.08.10135i.pdf>.

dynamic process that continues to evolve. The capacity of both communities to transform potential conflicts into opportunities for tolerance development reflects a significant level of social maturity. This provides a new perspective in understanding how plural societies can manage differences while maintaining social cohesion. The theoretical implications of these findings suggest that classical models of social interaction need to be enriched with an understanding of the contemporary dynamics that influence the formation of tolerance in plural societies. Furthermore, this research confirms that the success of social tolerance depends not only on the institutional framework, but also on the community's capacity to develop adaptive mechanisms in the face of social change.

Religious Tolerance in the Malay Community of Jambi

Humans, as social beings (*zoon politicon*), possess an inherent nature to live within a heterogeneous societal environment. The diversity in human life necessitates an attitude of acceptance and appreciation for every existing difference. This is crucial considering that humans cannot live in isolation and always require interaction with others. In the context of community life, individuals must be able to coexist peacefully by prioritizing mutual respect, honor, and acceptance. These attitudes are essential given the variety present in various aspects of life, such as culture, ethnicity, religion, and differing modes of expression.³¹

The Malay community, as the majority group and the original inhabitants of the Jambi region, possesses a profound understanding of the realities of diversity within society, including in the religious context. This awareness has developed because Jambi City has long been recognized as an open and pluralistic area. The open and plural characteristics of Jambi City have shaped the perspective of the Malay community in addressing differences. The understanding of social and religious diversity has been deeply ingrained in the Malay society of Jambi for a long time, enabling them to respect and accept these differences as

³¹ Linda R. Tropp, "Adaptation to Diversity: Individual and Societal Processes," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 116, no. 25 (2019): 12131–12133.

integral to communal life. This is further supported by the testimony of an informant named Zulfahri, a 67-year-old educator, as follows:

“Saya sudah sejak tahun 1987 tinggal di sini. Artinya, saya sudah tinggal di Jambi ini jauh sebelum Jalan Lintas Timur ini dibangun dan berkembang pesat seperti sekarang ini. Sampai hari ini, tidak pernah ada masalah dari hubungan orang-orang Melayu dan suku Batak di sini. Meskipun orang-orang Melayu mayoritas muslim dan orang-orang Batak yang banyak Kristen, kami tetap hidup harmonis berdampingan. Kami tahu bahwa Kota Jambi ini sudah sejak dulu ya beragam orangnya. Jadi bagi kami tidak ada soal agamanya apa, sukunya apa, selagi tidak mengganggu kehidupan sosial masyarakat sini”.³²

The interview excerpt with Putri Wati (60 years old) further reinforces the depiction of social harmony that exists within the Jambi community. The informant's experience, having lived in Jambi since 1995, provides valuable insight into how the Malay community approaches diversity. As a trader and a member of the Malay community, Putri Wati exhibits an openness that reflects the deeply rooted values of tolerance within Jambi society. The presence of Batak individuals, who are predominantly Christian, is not viewed as a problem but rather accepted as part of the city's long-standing diversity. What is particularly interesting about this testimony is the concrete example of harmonious neighborly relations. Despite having close neighbors from the Batak ethnic group who work in a vehicle workshop on Lintas Timur, they are able to live together in peace and harmony. This demonstrates that tolerance is not merely a discourse but is genuinely practiced in everyday life.

Both testimonies, from Zulfahri and Putri Wati, illustrate that Jambi City has successfully established an inclusive model of community life, where ethnic and religious differences do not hinder the creation of a harmonious existence. Openness and acceptance of diversity have become deeply rooted characteristics within the identity of Jambi City.

The testimony from Siti, a 50-year-old homemaker, further reinforces the portrayal of the strong-rooted tolerance within the Jambi community. Her experience of living in Jambi since 1982 provides a valuable long-term

³² Wawancara Peneliti dengan Zulfahri, 4 Agustus 2021

perspective on the social dynamics of the region. Siti's nearly four decades of residing near Lintas Timur Jambi demonstrate consistent harmony in social relations between the Malay community and immigrants, particularly from the Batak ethnic group. What is particularly noteworthy about her testimony is the absence of disharmony in social interactions between the two groups. Siti's statements also affirm that the community in this area has successfully built an inclusive social life, where all members can coexist regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds. This indicates that the tolerance developed is not merely a passive attitude of "allowing differences to exist," but rather an active acceptance that facilitates positive social interactions.

The social life of the Jambi community, particularly regarding interfaith tolerance, has developed remarkably well. The Malay community, which is the largest demographic group in Jambi, possesses a deep understanding of the inevitability of ethnic and religious differences in their region. This condition is closely linked to the historical context of Jambi City as an open area that has existed long before Indonesia's independence. The strategic position of Jambi City, located in the heart of Sumatra and having direct access to the sea, has made it a meeting point for various cultures, ethnicities, and religions since ancient times. What is particularly interesting is how the values of social and religious tolerance have been passed down through generations within the Malay community of Jambi. This heritage of values serves as a guide for the community in interacting with the diverse religious and ethnic differences present. This indicates that tolerance in Jambi is not merely a forced attitude but has become an integral part of a deeply rooted cultural identity. The success of the Jambi community in maintaining this tolerance serves as a tangible example of how a society can build and sustain social harmony amidst diversity. Their historical experience in managing differences has created a model of social life that is inclusive and values diversity.

Based on the explanation provided, there is an intriguing dynamic in the attitude of the Malay community in Jambi towards the presence of the Batak community. On one hand, the Malay community demonstrates a strong sense of

tolerance, inherited from their ancestors and shaped by the characteristics of Jambi City as an open and pluralistic region since ancient times. On the other hand, there remains a concern within the Malay community, particularly regarding religious aspects. This concern primarily focuses on the younger generation, who are increasingly interacting in various social activities with the predominantly Christian Batak community. This situation creates a duality in the attitudes of the Malay community in Jambi. Socially, they accept and do not have issues with the presence of the Batak "immigrants" in their environment. However, religiously, they maintain vigilance regarding the potential impact on the religious beliefs of their youth. This phenomenon illustrates the complexity of building and maintaining religious tolerance, where social acceptance and caution regarding religious matters must go hand in hand. Although social tolerance has been well established, there are still reasonable concerns as parents about the religious influences on the younger generation. This will be further elaborated in the interview excerpt with Siti Aminah, which provides a more detailed account of these dynamics:

“Secara sosial, terus terang saya tidak ada masalah dengan tetangga saya yang Batak dan beragama berbeda dengan kami. Saya tetap dapat bergaul dan saling bertegur sapa. Bahkan, secara sosial pula kami dapat saling bertransaksi dalam perdagangan. Tetapi terus terang, saya cuma kuatir dari sisi agama, apalagi saya seorang ibu yang punya beberapa anak yang masih remaja. Seperti yang lainnya, anak-anak saya tentu juga bergaul dengan teman-temannya yang suku Batak. Baik di sekolah, saat olahraga dan saat bermain. Saya cuma kuatir anak-anak saya terpengaruh dengan praktik-praktik agama teman-teman Bataknya. Apalagi sekarang kan banyak permainan dan olahraga yang melibatkan anak-anak dan remaja, mereka dapat bercampur baur”.³³

The testimony from Asio, a 56-year-old private employee, provides a deeper understanding of the concerns that Malay parents have regarding the religious development of their children. His worries do not center on the possibility of his children converting to another faith, but rather on the quality of their understanding of Islamic teachings. As a parent, Asio observes that his

³³ Wawancara Peneliti dengan Siti Aminah, 5 Agustus 2021

children engage in high levels of interaction with their Batak friends, both in school and during daily play activities. While this social interaction is a normal and positive aspect of community life, it nonetheless raises specific concerns for parents like Asio.

The phenomenon of concern within the Malay community of Jambi regarding the presence of Batak individuals can be understood through the concept of controversy. Controversy is a social process that exists between competition and opposition, characterized by uncertainty and hidden doubts towards another group. In the context of the Malay community in Jambi, this controversy manifests as unexpressed worries, particularly concerning the religious aspects of their youth. Despite these underlying concerns, such apprehensions do not hinder positive social interactions with the Batak community. The hidden mental attitudes primarily focus on religious aspects rather than outright rejection of the existence or social engagement with the Batak community.

Despite the phenomenon of concern within the Malay community of Jambi being categorized as a form of controversy, it does not translate into animosity towards their Batak neighbors. This controversy is not manifested in offensive behaviors or actions that harm outsiders. On the contrary, the Malay community of Jambi utilizes this situation as a means to strengthen their self-defense. In this context, the Malay community focuses on enhancing their understanding of Islam within the family and school environments. They recognize the importance of providing strong religious education to their children so that they can comprehend and internalize Islamic teachings effectively. In this way, they hope that their children will be better equipped to face various external influences without losing their identity and beliefs.

This defensive approach demonstrates that the Malay community of Jambi not only strives to maintain social harmony but also seeks to strengthen their religious foundations. In their daily interactions with the Batak community, they uphold values of tolerance while remaining vigilant against potential influences that may disrupt their children's religious understanding. Thus, despite the underlying concerns, the Malay community of Jambi exhibits a constructive and

proactive attitude in facing diversity. They do not allow these worries to escalate into conflict; instead, they use them as motivation to enhance religious understanding and practices among the younger generation. This reflects the social and spiritual maturity of the Malay community of Jambi as they navigate life amidst diversity.

In an interview with Maya Astria, a 45-year-old farmer, it was revealed how the Malay community of Jambi positively applies forms of controversy. Maya explained that despite concerns regarding interactions with the Batak people, the Malay community does not allow these feelings to lead to hatred or conflict. Instead, they utilize these concerns as motivation to strengthen religious understanding within families and the community. This proactive approach highlights their commitment to fostering a harmonious coexistence while maintaining their cultural and religious identity.

“Sebagai muslim, tentu saya tetap juga kuatir dengan agama anak-anak saya karena mereka ya bergaul dengan teman-temannya yang Batak. Jangan-jangan anak-anak saya nanti jauh dari agama yang kami anut. Begitu kadang-kadang muncul dalam pikiran saya dan keluarga kami. Tetapi saya tentu tidak benci dengan tetangga saya yang Batak itu. Karena itu hak mereka mau tinggal dan berusaha di mana saja, termasuk di Jambi ini. Agar rasa kuatir saya tidak terjadi, maka saya menyekolahkan anak-anak saya di sekolah Islam sekitar sini. Di samping itu, sore hari anak-anak saya juga ikut mengaji di guru agama yang ada di wilayah ini. Inilah cara kami agar anak-anak saya tetap dengan agamanya dan memiliki pemahaman yang benar tentang Islam”.³⁴

Similar views were expressed by other informants, Saipul, aged 42, and Andika, aged 35. Both of whom work as motorcycle taxi drivers and construction laborers, acknowledged that the community in Jambi is indeed rich in diversity, both in terms of religion and ethnicity. As parents, they share the same concerns regarding the potential negative influences on their children's understanding of religion due to associating with peers of different faiths. To address these concerns, Saipul and Andika regularly invite their families to attend religious gatherings at nearby mosques and prayer halls. They are committed to

³⁴ Wawancara Peneliti dengan Maya Astria, 5 Agustus 2021

participating in various religious activities organized within their community. Through these efforts, they hope to provide their children with a stronger understanding of their faith, thereby protecting them from possible misconceptions about Islamic teachings that may arise from diverse social interactions.

Si'am, a 40-year-old mechanic who has lived in Jambi since 1998, also expressed his views regarding the concerns felt by the Malay community in Jambi about the presence of Batak people in their vicinity. For Si'am, these concerns do not translate into hatred toward their Batak neighbors. He believes that everyone has the right to live anywhere in this country, including in Jambi. The most important thing for Si'am is to ensure that his children remain grounded in Islamic values, the faith that has been embraced by his family for generations. To achieve this, he ensures that his children regularly participate in Quranic recitation activities at a nearby teacher's house, even though they attend public school. Through this approach, Si'am hopes that his children will gain a good understanding of Islam and develop a strong grasp of their religious teachings, even as they socialize with friends from the Batak ethnicity.

The approach taken by Si'am reflects a positive and constructive attitude in facing diversity. He does not allow his concerns to lead to negative sentiments; instead, he uses them as motivation to strengthen the religious foundation within his family. By involving his children in religious activities, Si'am strives to ensure that they have a solid grounding to navigate the various influences from a diverse social environment. Through Si'am's perspective, it is evident that the Malay community in Jambi is working to create harmony amidst diversity while maintaining the religious values they uphold. This serves as a tangible example of how concerns can be managed positively, thereby not only protecting religious identity but also strengthening social relationships within a pluralistic society.

Conclusion

Research on social interaction patterns in Malay communities in Jambi Province reveals interesting dynamics in diversity management. Through various

forms of interaction such as cooperation, competition, and accommodation, the Malay community has demonstrated the ability to build social harmony while still maintaining their religious identity. Despite concerns about the religious education of the younger generation amidst pluralism, this community has managed to develop a balanced approach through religious education initiatives, study groups, and active participation in religious activities.

The success of the tolerance model in Jambi provides valuable lessons that can be adapted by other regions. However, to maintain and strengthen this achievement, more systematic policy support from the local government is needed. The development of interfaith communication forums and sustainable intercultural dialogue programs are strategic steps that need to be prioritized. Such forums can serve as a forum to bring together various stakeholders, from community leaders to the younger generation, in a constructive dialog that strengthens mutual understanding.

The experience in Jambi shows that strengthening religious identity does not have to conflict with an inclusive attitude towards diversity. This model offers a new perspective in developing religious tolerance that accommodates local distinctiveness. For the future, further studies are needed to explore the effectiveness of various approaches in building tolerance, especially in the context of educating the younger generation in plural societies. Jambi's success in managing diversity provides optimism that social harmony in a plural society is not just an ideal, but a goal that can be achieved through joint commitment and the right approach. By adapting the lessons learned from the Jambi model to the local context of each region, as well as the right policy support, Indonesian society can continue to build and strengthen tolerance in the midst of existing diversity.

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