



## **Tongkonan Social Identity: Families Harmonization on Interfaith Marriage in Toraja**

**Muhammad Fath Mashuri<sup>1</sup>, Avin Fadilla Helmi<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> *University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia. E-mail: [fathmashuri@umm.ac.id](mailto:fathmashuri@umm.ac.id)*

<sup>2</sup> *Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. E-mail: [avinpsi@ugm.ac.id](mailto:avinpsi@ugm.ac.id)*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this article is to analyze how married couples of different faiths in Toraja harmonize their differences from the perspective of social identity. Interfaith marriage can be called a meeting of inter-social identities specifically within the context of family. It is therefore an indispensable part of the process for every interfaith marriage couple to de-categorize and re-categorize and consolidate their social identity as a couple so that they can successfully define their new family values. This research used an ethnographic approach with three interfaith families in Toraja as a unit of analysis. The results show that these married couples operationalize a dual-hierarchical identity model in an inter-family harmonization effort. Tongkonan identity is placed vertically as a collective identity, while the identity of religion as a person-based social identity is placed horizontally. Both of these have consequences for the emergence of a cross-categorized identity.*

## **1. Introduction**

Indonesia is known as a nation that respects its heterogeneity; it contains various tribes, religions and groups. However, this statement does not apply to the process of family formation through marriage. In choosing a mate, individuals tend to consider those with similar ethnic and religious backgrounds. This is because a heterogamous family raises the consequences of the formation of the extended family, which is considered risky and threatens the family's function.

In addition, fostering extended family through marriages among different religions in Indonesian society causes various challenges ranging from pre-marriage to living in one a-household as a family. The first challenge is from a theological perspective; every religion has strict rules for the implementation of religious marriage (Alatas, 2007; Nurcholis, 2010; Rubiyatmoko, 2011). The second is a juridical challenge; married couples face a state structure that does not recognize the existence of different religious

marriage processes, although Indonesian law does not expressly prohibit it. However, based on the provisions of legislation and the position of Indonesia as a non-secular country, marriage among those of different religions in Indonesia cannot be legally listed (Prasetyo, 2007; Sastra, 2011). The third challenge is psychological; interfaith marriage requires multiple tasks of the couple that include constructing interdependence and consolidating a dyadic social identity as husband and wife, as well as in their extended family.

In response, Ibad & Faturochman (2016) revealed that being an extended family based on interfaith marriage positions the couple to be able to de-categorize and re-categorize their position as a family. Theoretically, de-categorization positions each member of a different group as an independent individual. In this situation the individual seeks to differentiate and personalize the group's identity. De-categorization ultimately opens up interpersonal interaction space with other group members, while re-categorization is an attempt to restructure group categorization at a higher level. The essence of the re-categorization process is building an inclusive group as an interaction space for members of different groups (Brewer & Gaertner, 2003; Faturochman, 2015). Both processes of social identity management are assessed to help interfaith marriage couples to consolidate their religious identities and define their new family values. When interfaith married couples implement de-categorization and re-categorization in an effort to harmonize the family, they choose to act as independent partners and reduce their interdependence toward their extended family. This tends to make couples intensify the consolidation of identity and define family values as dyadic as husband and wife at the same time that they try to reduce those same tendencies towards their extended family.

This is an undesirable condition for both the family and the interfaith married couple in *Toraja*. De-categorization and re-categorization are not the ideal way to harmonize an extended family formed through interfaith marriage. The reasons are as follow; (1) marriage is the process of *siala*, or the effort to unite and marry two large families from both sides; (2) the concept of kinship in *Toraja* culture positions the couple as forever a sub-group of the extended family, along with the obligation to maintain interdependence on the existing extended family; (3) acting as an independent family through de-categorization and re-categorization will cause them to lose their collective identity as *Toraja* people (Bararuallo, 2010; Tangdilintin, 1975; Waterson, 1986).

In this context, the process of de-categorization and re-categorization is a potential risk factor for maintaining a relational bond with the extended family in interfaith marriage couple. Harmonization of interfaith married couples which later became central to inter-social identity in family life, positions each family member to prioritize the diversity of their identity negotiations. Successful negotiation of identity as extended family, whether it is dyadic between couples or extended family becomes the cause of enduring inter-family harmonization efforts by interfaith married couples. Some of the ways interfaith married couples can relate to this are implementing multi-identity models in family life, such as de-categorization and re-categorization, mutual differentiation, and multiple identity models which then have consequences for cross-

categorization identity (Brewer & Gaertner, 2003; Faturochman, 2015; Hewstone et al, 2002; Hogg et al, 2004; Ibad & Faturochman, 2016; Rubin & Hewstone, 2004).

This research attempts to build an inter-family harmonization analysis on interfaith married couples in *Toraja*. The variety of their harmonization efforts especially as they negotiate social identity, is expected to contribute to the construction of harmony, a peaceful culture, and the successful management of the extended family.

## 2. Method

This research uses an ethnography approach. Ethnography is like a strategy or style in research that provides space for researchers to explore cultural aspects inherent in society to interpret a social reality (Brewer, 2000; Murchison, 2010). In this research, we also mapped harmonization efforts by interfaith married couples contextually on ethnic Toraja. The main focus of the research in this study is how they manage social identity as they form an extended family through interfaith marriage, as well as how cultural aspects are involved.

In general, an ethnographic approach emphasizes participatory observation methods to observe the material phenomena of people's lives over the long term. This research used a cognitive anthropology approach. This perspective emphasizes that ethnographic research does not always necessarily take a long time because the use of ethnographic interviews allows for more exploring, describing, and organizing the knowledge and experience of informants about their culture (Spradley, 2006). Participatory observation and tracking of cultural documents remains a tool for data retrieval, but ethnographic interviews are the most important method used in this study. This study was conducted over 59 days by positioning the researcher as an insider. The researchers integrated various methods, including ethnographic interviews used as primary data, as well as participatory observation and tracing of cultural documents as secondary data.

The study was located in *Tana Toraja* District, South Sulawesi province. *Toraja* not only refers to the naming of an area, but also characterizes one ethnicity residing in the province of South Sulawesi. The naming of ethnic *Toraja* comes from the word '*To Riajang*' (people living in the upper country or mountains) in the northern part of the province of South Sulawesi. The frequent interfaith marriage phenomenon in Toraja and the complexity of cultural challenges experienced by extended families are the reason why researchers make it a scientific study. Three families were unit of analysis for this study.

## 3. Results and Discussion

- **The Three Families**

Before describing the results of the study, researchers need to describe the three families who became unit of analysis for this study. First is the *Sangmane's* family who

has been married for 57 years. The husband is Muslim, while his wife and four children are Catholic. The second is the *Mawattang's* family, who has been married for 38 years. The religious composition of the *Mawattang's* family is very heterogeneous. The wife is Catholic, while her husband is *Aluk Todolo*, which is a local religion that existed before Abraham's religion was developed in *Toraja*. They have ten children; four are Catholic; three are Muslims, and three are Protestant. She revealed that the religion chosen by her children depended on whom the child was closest to and who they played with. Therefore, the religion composition in her extended family also varies.

Last is the *Matanning's* family; they have been married for 11 years. The wife is a Muslim, while her husband is Catholic. She has two children, and she and her husband chose Islam as their children's religion. Therefore, She is responsible for the task of introducing religious teachings to the children. But She revealed that she still wants her children to be free to embrace another religion if they want to. This is because the bilateral kinship system prevailing in *Toraja* does not impose certain obligations on family members to follow either the father's religion or the mother's religion. Therefore, she believes that her children have the right to choose a religion they consider good when they grow up.

- **The Dynamics of Interfaith Marriage Families Harmonization**

The results of this study indicate that extended family in *Toraja* is not taboo. One of the informants even revealed that there is no single family in *Toraja* who follows only one religion. Pluralism in family life is a condition that cannot be denied. Based on the researcher's observations, extended families formed through interfaith marriage can be seen in large numbers and are easily found in every village, and even in almost every hamlet region in *Toraja*. They do not position the extended family status as something that can threaten the functioning of the family. The following informant's narrative helps to explain:

*We are used to it. It is common to associate with families of different religions or there are family members who plan to marry people of different religions. If indeed it has become a life choice, then please.... Currently my two brothers and I are Muslims, following my dad. But that does not limits our relationship to my mom's family, which they are Catholic. Since we were small, dad and mom always teach us to keeping good relationship and not to distinguish the two families, regardless of the religion they profess. One example is when I am obliged to attend the event from my mom's family, they always accepted us. My grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins always received us warmly and appreciate the religion we believe in. For example, my mom's family rewards us for slaughtering animals according to Islamic teachings-or they separate the types of food that is forbidden in Islam.*

In this section, the researchers present the dynamics of family harmonization within interfaith marriages, ranging from pre-marriage to marriage as an extended family. The portraits were then mapped to three main themes in this study, namely: (1) *ma'parampo*: an initial process toward marriage; (2) inter-family relations and social construction in religion: believing in God without reviling, embracing religion without coercion; and (3) managing diversity and family conflict.

1. *Ma'parampo: An Early Process towards Marriage*

*Ma'parampo* in Indonesian is almost the same as the engagement process. The difference lies in the involvement of the extended families of both sides, as well as the customary and local leaders who mediate the procession of *ma'parampo*. In general, the whole process of marriage in Toraja must apply the *ma'parampo* process, whether the marriage is between those of fellow or different religions. However, the implementation of *ma'parampo* for the marriage of an interfaith couple lasts longer because there are various things that must be discussed and agreed upon by all parties involved in the process.

The first step is to agree on a meeting point about the wedding process. There are two options that the family can choose from: first, one of the parties is willing to implement a marriage contract or covenant with the process from one of the religions. If no party is willing to make the first choice, then they must agree to the marriage process using *ma'parampo*; this will continue with the wedding party. One of the three informer couples in this study only held *ma'parampo*:

*We are only married to the customary process (ma'parampo), because at that time no one agreed that the marriage was held by the process of one religion, so the family decided to marry only with custom process.*

Second, the interfaith couple agrees to a statement of intention for how they will run the household, maintain relationships with all family members from both sides, support each other in the process of worship, and exhibit mutual respect in religious and family life.

*Then we promised in front of the family to take good care of our household. Religious differences will not cause us to divorce, because we have agreed to accept it. We promise that we are ready to keep family harmony. Our promise was witnessed by the whole family. And. .... some things about how we have certain attitude in marriage are also discussed in ma'parampo. As does not prohibit couples to worship, we should support each other's partner to worship in accordance with his religion, appreciate the belief of the couple if there is food that is forbidden to eat. Since pork is forbidden in Islam, it must be emphasized that the couple or their family should not be given pork. We have promised that these things cannot be an excuse to quarrel.*

Third, families have the obligation to carry out the process of coaching children in the household and monitoring whether they are optimally performing family functions. The Toraja customary council will act as a mediator when there is a problem that cannot be resolved by the couple and the two families. One thing that is emphasized in the *ma'parampo* process is the agreement to always seek the way of kindness over all problems in domestic life.

*After ma'parampo, the family keeps checking the situation of married couples. Are they okay in the household or there is a problem? Thank goodness if the problem can be solved together, but if not.....then there should be a discussion with two families to look for problem solving.*

*Ma'parampo* as an early step in the process of marriage shows how closely the *Toraja* community is bonded to their cultural values. For interfaith couples, the *ma'parampo* process is a harmonization effort that must be done from the beginning. This is because the *ma'parampo* process provides an inter-family consolidation space and religious identity. *Ma'parampo* serves as a household entrance for married interfaith couples.

## 2. *Inter-Family Relations and Social Construction in Religion: Believing in God without Reviling, Embracing Religion without Coercion*

Believing in God without reviling and embracing religion without coercion is the correct way to describe harmonization efforts made by extended family for married interfaith couples in *Toraja*. Religion is assumed to be a personal matter, not a social affair. Fellow family members are not entitled to provide judgment on others' beliefs. They remain capable of maintaining personal beliefs without dominating other family members: they maintain their relationships with family members, and they reduce prejudice in their relationships.

*Each person has their own view of the concept of deity and the rule of religious law. But it is quite a personal thing for the believers. Connection and ukhuwah among fellow believers are two things that we should care for. Approach your distant relatives and build a quality relationship with your close relatives. Well.....that's what makes me really enjoy life in Toraja.*

Every family member has the right to make religious choices as a way of life to the good without intervention from any party. All religions will lead to goodness; the difference is in the way of believing and the way of god. Acquiring the independence to affirm one's religious choices tend to occur as children enter adolescence.

*Ahh it's ok, every religion's aim is to bring our lives in order not to fall apart, to make life better. Religion is not a compulsion but a choice of belief. Nor can we force religion on others, even our own children. The child is ours, but if I die then he himself will live his life, he himself will be responsible for the beliefs he chooses.*

Believing in God without reviling, embracing religion without coercion, and being together in family plurality is well represented during religious festivities. These moments are important in the effort to establish inter-family relationships. While they do not have to wait for a certain moment to establish family connections the attention to the moment is seen as an effort to maintain the collective identity.

Whether it is Christmas or Eid, every celebration is considered a holiday for all family members. This is because, from the family's perspective the essence of the holiday or feast day is a time to embody social worship rather than ritual worship. Therefore, all members of the family feel it necessary to show their involvement, give each other gifts, and pray for good for one another even when they have different religious beliefs. This is a form of tolerance and affection for their families.

*The relationship between families of different religions, whether those in the structure of their families have different members of the religion as well as those who hold interfaith*

*marriage is like a mosque and church, that many seen in Toraja. It is facing each other... or it is side by side, and among them a separate street. This means that regardless of the circumstances of families or households that have religious differences in Toraja, they are....one family, and live side by side forever. The distance is only because of different beliefs, but the good values for the family no longer recognize the mosque or church (no longer about Islam or Christianity) personally, but our goodness is united in the same way.*

### 3. *Managing Diversity and Family Conflict.*

Certain issues accompany extended family efforts to manage diversity and conflict as a family. The first is the position of religion in the marriage. Religion is assumed to be a personal matter, not a social affair. But they try to teach the good values that exist in every religion, and this makes the position of religion semi-privatized instead of fully privatized. The privatization of religion arises during situations of interpersonal conflict; that is, it is forbidden for religious beliefs to be included during times of conflict, as this would be regarded as debilitating the marriage relationship.

Second, privatizing religion allows positive reciprocity between individuals who need each other's support. When religion is kept as into a personal matter, it allows individuals to give each other increased attention and support in the process of ritual worship. The extended family is then also positioned to remind and support each other in their duty and obedience to religion.

Third third aspect of individualized religion is the ability to stay open and maintain a connection and engagement with all family members and their interests. This reduces the exclusivity in inter-family relationships. Moreover, it allows them to be more assertive and emphasizes constructive patterns of confrontation in solving problems, both interpersonally and within the family context.

The fourth issue is how to manage social obligations, which describes the need to care for the parents and provide *baku bantu* (mutual assistance) to all family members. The benevolence of being able to fulfill that obligation is very important.

*Iyanna dikua to kena'wak (someone is considered good) when he is handy to give assistance to his family. Ke bu'dak sengna (if he has a lot of money) he gives material assistance to his family who are deprived. If he doesn't have financial ability, he gives his time and energy for the benefit of the family. There is one important thing, namely.....iyanna dikua to kena'wak ke masannang atinna urus to matuanna (someone is good when he happily take care of his parents), matuamo to matuanna (especially if his parents are elderly).*

In addition, conserving food is an important part of the family's social obligation to each other. "Eating pork or not eating pork" creates a marked difference between religious identities in marriage besides the concept of divinity and the practice of worship. Islam forbids the consumption of pork. Families appreciate and follow rule, even extending it to apply to the smallest aspects such as the separation of cutlery and cookware used for pork.

- ***Tongkonan* Social Identity as a Way of Harmonization**

The results of this study indicate that mixing religious identities as an extended family formed through interfaith marriage teaches individuals to coexist, teach model benevolent behavior and observance of religion, and understand each other's personal space about certain religious aspects that cannot be applied to all individually and personally they live and believe in their religion, but when it comes to fostering relationships in family life, religious observance is a common affair.

In the socio-cultural study, each *Toraja* person has a family identity that is represented in a traditional *Tongkonan* house. *Tongkonan* homes function not only as a place to live, but also as a place for unity, where inter-family relationships are nurtured and maintained, and where all family members are protected (Bararuallo, 2010; Tangdilintin, 1975; Waterson, 1986). This is important because one social construction of *Toraja* society mentions that they are from one common ancestral entity, indicating their obligation to care for family with *Tongkonan* identities. Therefore, regardless of the religion they embrace as an extended family, the *Tongkonan* obligation to maintain family relationships is especially important. This means that one's *Tongkonan* identity act as a unifying tool for each individual in the family.

From a historical point of view, the inclusion of Abrahamic Religion on a personal level has made individuals in *Toraja* society embrace religion independently. This impacts the variety of religious compositions in *Tongkonan* families and in a more specific context, in extended families (Tangdilintin, 1975). An interfaith marriage also increases the degree of variation in religious identity at the nuclear family level. This makes them accustomed to living a plural family life. They have simultaneous multiple identities; namely, the collective *Tongkonan* family identity and the individual's religious identity.

In their study of social identity perspectives, Hogg & Abrams (1998) asserted that no single individual has only a single identity. This condition also applies to married interfaith couples in *Toraja*. But specifically, the variety of social identity they have is in the same contestation room: the family. They are not only faced with the demands of maintaining a positive identity of religion in the family, but also with being able to identify themselves with the *Tongkonan* identity that has become part of their self-concept.

With its cultural values that remain inherent in *Toraja* society to date, *Tongkonan* presents an obligation for individuals to trust and honor their ancestors and parents, and show respect for others. This is a form of preservation of an entity in which they collectively believe. This is the basic identity for married interfaith couples in *Toraja*.

They categorize and socially identify with the *Tongkonan* identity, which results in in-group similarities and serves as a collective identity for them. Religion, which historically enters and develops in *Toraja* through a personal approach, is used as a



secondary identity. Married interfaith couples then categorize and identify religion as a person-based social identity that is observed mainly at the individual level.

These conditions have consequences for the dual identities possessed by married interfaith couples in *Toraja*. With regard to inter-family relations, they impose such identities in a hierarchical manner, where *Tongkonan's* collective identity is positioned at a higher level than an individual's religious and personal social identity. Operationalization of hybrid identity models that apply contextually also become an important part of their relationship process. At an individual level, then the prevailing identity is the religion. However, in the context of inter-family relations, *Tongkonan* identity imposes.

Socio-structurally, the *Tongkonan* family identity, which is permeable to interfaith marriage is also one of the causes of harmonious extended families in *Toraja*. Permeability refers to the socio-structural characteristics that allow individuals with different social identities to positively relate to each other. In this case, the boundaries between groups are liquid. A permeable social identity provides a subjective belief by each member of the group to act as an independent individual within a social system. However, this does not necessarily make the individual lose the identity of the main group (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). On one hand, this provides space for inclusiveness as a pluralistic family, while on the other hand it also allows family members to differentiate among religious identities operating on an individual level.

Married interfaith couples in *Toraja* also conduct identity de-categorization and re-categorization as a manifestation of the need for differentiation and inclusiveness in family and religion. De-categorization requires group members to recognize individual differences and personalized needs, while re-categorization allows individuals to restructure the group categorization inclusively at a higher level (Hogg, et al, 2004, Faturachman, 2015). This is in contrast to previous research conducted by Ibad & Faturachman (2016), where married interfaith couples de-categorize and re-categorize to form independent new families. De-categorization and re-categorization undertaken by married interfaith couples in *Toraja* does not seek segregation in inter-family relationships. Rather the process of social identity management is more directed at individual efforts to permit a diversity of social identities (religion and family) in different portions and spaces. De-categorization as a differentiation requirement applies in individual religious life, while re-categorization as a need for inclusiveness is applied from *Tongkonan's* collective identity in family life.

The results show that religious identity is essentially impermeable that is, religion is a personal matter rather than a social affair. Individuals believe in their own religion without pressuring other family members into the same beliefs. However, there is an interesting point in this study: there is no salient social comparison when they de-categorize. Family members who de-categorize religious identities seek to redefine their religious values which then impacts the status quo of the religions in which they believe. They do not show other family members that a particular religion is the best religion. This is possible because when they establish relationships it is not at the

individual level, but is based on achieving change in the status of better groups that have the collective identity of the *Tongkonan* family. They attain this believing that every religion brings life to the path of goodness, and that good values can be taught inclusively in family life. Furthermore, the process of embracing (i.e. categorizing and socially identifying with) any religious identity can occur independently and openly for all family members without any intervention. This is what facilitates the process of re-categorization of family members from a religious identity to a collective identity.

As described, the management of social identity emphasizes the intention of "unity in diversity" rather than highlighting the degree of exclusivity in social identity that leads to in-group favoritism. This is what Brewer and Gaertner (2003) called the success of identity categorization crosses. Contextually, the image of a categorization crossing identity according to the result of this research is as follows: (1) married interfaith actors have dual loyalty, meaning they emphasize and define themselves on a single group identity, but they also still socially identify with an individual-level religious identity, as well as with the *Tongkonan* identity at the inter-family relationship level; (2) *Tongkonan's* identity opens space for members of different religious families to enter into in-group sections, this reduces the circumstances that create negative perceptions and discrimination among family members; and (3) the maintenance of interpersonal interactions between family members in *Tongkonan* identity does not impose family member restrictions on individual mobility in the various religious identities they believe.

The cultural value placed on *Tongkonan* identity presents the understanding that they have the same history and a collective identity. It also affirms that being a Toraja means being ready to maintain unity, foster and maintain relationships between families, and provide protection to all family members. Therefore, the management of the extended family's social identity is an absolute thing implemented by all family members. The existence of variations in religious identity within the family which occur as a consequence of interfaith marriage is not a reason to affirm boundaries or present segregation in inter-family relationships. This is because they are able to relate to all family members positively, and it is an indication of the maintenance of a collective identity. The genuine harmony created does not disrupt relationships; that is, they are able to accept and appreciate existing differences, have the desire to grow together in goodness and peace, and maintain sustainable relationships (Huang, 2016; Konishi, et al, 2009; Leung, et al., 2011).

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study shows that family harmonization efforts by married interfaith couples in Toraja are supported by the socio-structural context of *Tongkonan* identity that is permeable to interfaith marriage. This makes it easy for couples to consolidate identity and construct interdependence in family life. Certainly, these conditions cannot be generalized to other cultural groups that tend to keep family exclusivity toward similar model marriages. Therefore, re-examining the management of social identity, cultural values, and interdependence models applicable to cultural groups

are some issues that need to be considered by other researchers who want to study a similar theme within different cultural contexts.

In addition, this research was done in the context of a society where the majority are Christians. In this regard, the researcher considers that the management of social identity will reveal different conditions when Islam, Hinduism, or other religions are in the position of the demographic majority. This should also be considered by other researchers.

Furthermore, the pre-marriage period is crucial for prospective interfaith couples to reflect their readiness to their families about the marital life they are planning to lead. Married interfaith couples need to realize that love is not the determining factor for lasting marital relationships. Being part of an extended family through interfaith marriage requires the advance consolidation of religious and family identity. The status of social identity is considered an important part of the relationship. Having a double identity status (religion and family) through interfaith marriage also has the consequence of requiring multiple tasks from the couple to construct interdependence in the nuclear family and the extended family while maintaining the positive identity of each religion.

Maintaining the segregation of the extended family is not ideal. Married interfaith couples should realize that no matter how much a family resists their marriage, the family important role long precedes the new love for a significant other. Therefore, openness in the relationship, maintaining connectedness, and having the willingness to engage in the interests of the two extended families in the same amount are important to pursue. It is precisely through these actions that exclusivity can be reduced. This way, the inter-family relationship in the marriage room can speak of "our parents" instead "my parents and your parents".

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