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The Dynamics of Religious Identity Contestation: Insights from The Experience of Religious Diversity in Jember

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Abstract
Religious contestation is a common phenomenon that occurs in a multi religious community particularly in the context of majority-minority relations. Despite being labelled as "Desa Pancasila" (The village of Pancasila) for its success in managing religious diversity, interreligious relations in Sukoreno are not always cooperative in practice, rather, it also involves elements of competition, even contestation. Grounded in two research focuses: first, how religious identity contestation unfolds, and second, in which fields it takes place, the current study seeks to analyse religious identity contestation in a multi religious community. Employing a qualitative-descriptive research method, the current study is also framed in Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical lens. Observations and in-depth interviews were conducted with religious elites from both majority and minority groups encompassing individuals who hold both formal and informal leadership roles. The findings suggest that contestation of religious social identity did not only occur solely within the field of physical religious identity, but also occurred within the public discourse. In each arena of contestation, actors mobilize their respective capitals to attain legitimation, recognition, and domination within the religious social field.

Keywords: *contestation, legitimation, recognition, domination*

Introduction

The relation dynamics among multi religious communities at the rural communities often emerges as a compelling reality. The appeal emerges due to the religion-based communal relations that take shape through interaction, negotiation, and often lean towards competition and contestation. The diverse patterns of social relations are what make the religious realities of rural communities compelling to investigate because they can reflect broader and more complex relational patterns at the national level (Hefner, 2011)

One of the dynamic dimensions of interreligious relations is the majority-minority relations. The majority-minority relations are not solely distinguished

quantitatively by population size, but also shaped by disparities in access to various resources, power and symbolic legitimacy (Yasin, 2024).

The dynamics of majority-minority relations often manifest in more competitive forms than cooperative ones. Such a thing emerges due to the strategic attempts by each group to assert their religious identities in public discourse (Wahid, 2024). Identity assertion among religious groups does not only unfold in a conventional public discourse but has also extended to virtual spaces with the rise of social media. This emerging media plays a great role in generating fragmentation and contestation over religious authority (Saputra & Fadhli, 2020).

Broadly speaking, in the Indonesian context, the majority groups hold greater influences in shaping social norms and cultural frameworks. The minority groups, however, not only experience existential insecurity, but also struggle to preserve their group identity under majority dominance (Thaha, Idris; Ropi, Ismatu; Umam, 2024).

Domination does not only strengthen the position of the majority groups, but also to control the identity expressions of the minority groups. For this reason, the minority groups often develop strategic efforts to preserve their existence through internal solidarity or by negotiating with the majority groups (Ejobowah J, 1997).

The emergence of contestation between the majority and minority groups is frequently triggered by disparities in access to resources or social legitimacy. Contestation does not always manifest openly as it can take subtle forms such as symbolic competition or negotiation of positions within the social field (Faesol, 2023). In Sukoreno, the dynamics of contestation does not surface explicitly due to the village's branding as Desa Pancasila by the local government of Jember regency. Historically, however, there have been instances of frictions and conflicts between the Islam as the majority group with Sapta Darma as the minority. A social conflict driven by religious views is one of three most common forms of social conflict in Indonesia. The other two are intergroup conflict among communities and conflict between communities and the state (Umiarso & Asnawan, 2022).

Based on the preliminary study, the past conflicts between the two religious groups continue to act as the triggers for contestation within the community's religious social space. Therefore, the current study seeks to unveil how the escalation of religious identity contestation unfolds in everyday interactions within the community.

To date, research on the escalation of religious identity contestation between majority and minority groups remains under-explored, particularly ones focusing on the forms of contestation enacted by the Muslim majority group in relation to Sapta Darma adherents, as well as the various social fields in which contestation occurs.

While some studies may have touched on the religious social life of Sukoreno community. They have largely focused on the practice of hegemony and its implications such as in the study *Hegemoni "Agama Resmi" dan Ambiguitas Kebebasan Berkeyakinan Penghayat Sapta Darma di Jember.* Among existing works, this study presents the most relevant thematic perspective. It highlights how hegemony is enacted through the imposition of Islamic traditions on Sapta Darma adherents, deliberate limitations on their religious expressions, and the monitoring of their communal practices (Widianto, Ahmad Arif; Hasanah, 2024).

A notable limitation of the previous study is the absence of Social Critical Theory as its primary analysis instrument. By not employing a set of critical social theories, the previous study overlooks the essential part such as the underlying realities of religious social life. In response to the limitation of earlier study, the current study adopts Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical frameworks as its primary analytical lens. His concepts are utilised to examine how religious identity contestation unfolds.

In substance, the previous studies have not explicitly addressed religious identity contestation particularly between Muslim community and Sapta Darma adherents as representatives of majority and minority groups. In reality, within the social space of multi religious communities, frictions, rivalries, and tensions between religious groups hold significant potential to ignite conflict specifically between groups with disproportionate numbers of congregants.

Theoretically, research on religious identity contestation is crucial in detecting the latent potential for interreligious conflict, particularly in majority-minority relations. The findings may also contribute to the enrichment of interfaith dialogue theories and the development of more contextually grounded da'wah patterns. Practically, the current study can serve as a valuable reference for policy makers in formulating public policies related to social and religious affairs.

Research Method

The current research employs a qualitative descriptive method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, observations of both majority and minority groups, analysis of relevant documents, and the implementation of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Interviews and observations were conducted in two phases: the first during October-November 2023, and the second in November 2024.

The first FGD was held on October 14, 2023, under the theme "Religious Dialogue in Sukoreno". The second FGD, entitled "Religious Dialogue and Tolerance", took place on November 29, 2024. Each discussion involved the village head and staff, members of the Interfaith Harmony Forum (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama) as well as all religious elites and religious group representatives.

The key informants in the current study are the elites of each respective religious group. The term 'religious groups' in this context refers to the Muslim community as the majority group, and Sapta Darma adherents as the minority. The selection of these elites is based on the premise that they hold substantial influence within their respective groups. They are not merely ritual leaders, but also key actors who initiate social change and negotiate patterns of interaction with other communities. Their strategic position in directing transformation is closely tied to the religious authority they embody (Helmiati, 2021) (Kuswana & Pauzian, 2023).

In certain contexts, local religious elites have the capacity to act as mediators in conflict driven by religious motives (Furqon, 2021). Accordingly, it is common for members of religious communities to regard these elites as role models, not only in religious practice but also in shaping their views toward other groups. This influential role of religious figures serves as the primary rationale for selecting them as key data sources in this study (Zainuri, 2021).

Sukoreno village, located in Umbulsari Sub-District, Jember Regency was selected to be the locus of this research due to its religious diversity, encompassing adherents of Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, and an indigenous belief system Sapta Darma. The Muslim population constitutes the numerical majority, while Sapta Darma adherents represent a minority group. Beyond its demographic diversity, Sukoreno has also been officially designated as Desa Pancasila (the Village of Pancasila) by the local government of Jember Regency as an acknowledgement of its perceived capacity to preserve interreligious harmony and manage a diverse community life effectively.

Although harmony and social cohesion have long characterised rural community life and continue to endure to this day (Sumbulah et al., 2022), instances of interreligious intolerance remain a latent possibility. Such intolerance is often rooted in identity contestation, which may be exacerbated by the absence of inclusive interreligious dialogue spaces (Junaidi; Afrinaldi; Artika & Al-momani, 2024).

In order to understand the dynamics of religious identity contestation particularly among majority and minority groups, the current study adopts Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework. Religious identity contestation is unpacked using Bourdieu's central theoretical constructs of field, capital, and habitus. Religious identity contestation is significant to investigate as it reflects the concrete manifestation of identity reinforcement within each respective religious group in the context of plural society (Ahmad et al., 2022). Religious identity reinforcement shaped through social processes and religious institutions can lead to intolerant behaviour if not mediated by social maturity and inclusive religious consciousness (Jati et al., 2023) (Mardiana et al., 2020).

Research Findings and Discussions

Place of Worship as the Symbol of Contestation

Sukoreno is one of two hundred forty eight villages (248) villages located within the administrative area of Jember Regency. From an administrative standpoint, Sukoreno belongs to the Umbulsari sub-district. Sukoreno is subdivided into three hamlets, krajan lor, krajan kidul and kandangrejo. Of the three hamlets, Krajan Kidul exhibits the highest level of religious diversity.

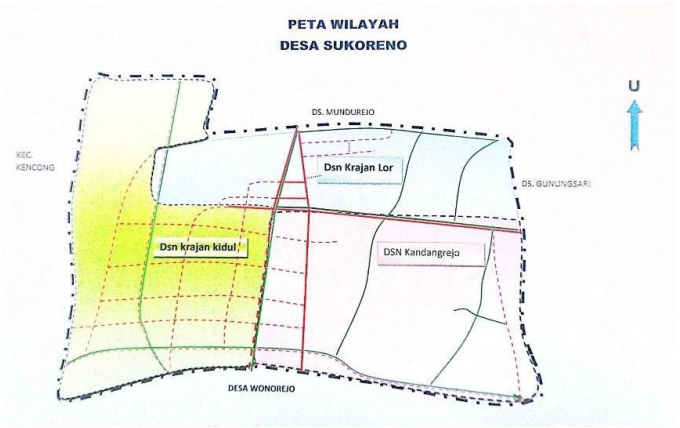


Figure 1: Map of Sukoreno Village

According to the 2023 population records of Sukoreno village, Kandangrejo is home to 2.602 residents, Krajan Lor to 1.863 residents, and Krajan Kidul to 4.459 residents. In total, Sukoreno has a population of 8.924 people. Of these, 8.126 identify as Muslims, 551 as Hindus, 177 as Catholics, 54 as Christians, and 16 as adherents of Sapta Darma.

The majority of Sukoreno village's population resides in Krajan Kidul. In this area, the residential pattern is distributed across six neighbourhood alleys. Generally, each alley is inhibited by Muslim residents. However, non-Muslim religious groups are concentrated in specific alleys. For instance, Hindu residents are spread across alley 1, 2 and 5. Christians reside in alley 2, Catholics are found in alley 2 as well while Sapta Darma adherents live in alley 5.

The distribution of places of worship corresponds closely with the residential patterns of the population. As the majority group, Islam has the highest number of mosques and prayer halls (*musholla*), which are spread relatively evenly across all alleys. In contrast, places of worship for Hindus, Christians,

Catholics, and Sapta Darma adherents are located only in specific alleys that align with the residential concentration of their respective communities.

The place of worship for Sapta Darma adherents is located in alley 5, approximately fifty meters east of the Muslim public cemetery situated in alley 4. Adjacent to the eastern side of the cemetery stands a *musholla*. The distance between the Sapta Darma *sanggar* (worship hall) and the musholla is separated only by the road dividing alley 4 and 5, placing two religious sites in near direct opposition to one another.

The *sanggar* of Sapta Darma stands firmly on a plot of land measuring approximately 50x50 meters. This *sanggar* is adorned with a symbolic statue of Semar placed at the pearl of the building. Facing east, the Semar statue stands at an elevation of roughly 20 meters above the ground level. The *sanggar* is also enclosed by a solid two-meter-high perimeter fence, fully sealed on all sides. The only access point is a front entrance made of lightweight steel.

Due to its elevated position, the Semar statue appears striking and majestic, remaining visible even from a considerable distance. The *sanggar* of Sapta Darma is equipped with a small, portable loudspeaker, allowing sound to be directed flexibly in any direction. Religious activities within the *sanggar* typically take place on Thursday and Saturday nights, consisting of communal prayers and prostration rituals.

In contrast, the musholla is physically smaller, measuring approximately 7x7 meters, and lacks any form of enclosing fence. As is typical of most musholla, it includes an ablution area (located to the north) and a toilet facility to the south. The musholla is equipped with a permanent loudspeaker, positioned in a direction that almost directly faces the *sanggar* of Sapta Darma. As a result, during religious events such as monthly *khotmil Qur'an*, congregational *Magrib* prayer, or other Islamic activities, the sound is audibly projected into the *sanggar*.

Both places of worships were constructed within a relatively short time span of each other. Following the completion of the *sanggar* of Sapta Darma, the musholla was built shortly after on the initiative of local Islamic religious figures. According to SH, a local Islamic religious figure, the musholla was deliberately established in close proximity to the *sanggar* due to growing concerns among Muslim elites.

The *Sanggar* of Sapta Darma is located near a Muslim residential area consisting of approximately 16 households. The spacious compound of the *sanggar* is accessible to the public, and local residents, including children who are allowed to enter and play within its grounds. This open access has raised concerns among some members of the Muslim community, particularly regarding the potential spread of Sapta Darma teachings to nearby residents, especially to children.

Consequently, led by Islamic religious figures, the Muslim community initiated the construction of a musholla in close proximity to the *sanggar*. The availability of a *waqf* (Islamic endowment) land near the Sapta Darma site was

utilised to establish this place of worship, which was intended as a form of a safeguarding the Islamic community's *aqidah* (creed).

The physical space inhabited by these two religious communities may be understood as a symbolic arena in which groups compete to assert their identities (Bourdieu, 1986). This arena serves as a site of struggle where actors vie for dominance, legitimacy, and recognition. Alley 4 and 5 which were defined by the presence of both the *sanggar* of Sapta Darma and the Muslim's musholla constitute a religious social arena. Within this space, the Muslim majority deploys religious symbols to reinforce its influence, while the Sapta Darma minority strives to maintain its existence and visibility (Yusuf et al., 2021).

The deliberate construction of the musholla near the *sanggar* represents a response from the majority group to maintain authority within the village's religious social arena. The two buildings, positioned almost directly opposite each other, function not merely as places of worship. Through the establishment of the musholla, the Muslim community does more than assert its presence as the majority. This condition symbolically and physically delineates boundaries within the minority group. This spatial arrangement constitutes a form of contestation aimed at securing control over the field through symbolic dominance and spatial positioning. Such control is made possible by the power and authority inherently held by the majority group (Muttaqin, 2021).

The *Sanggar* of Sapta Darma, with its larger physical structure and the prominent Semar statue, visually asserts the identity of the minority group. In contrast, the musholla, equipped with a loudspeaker directed almost precisely toward the *sanggar*, represents another form of symbolic domination enacted by the majority group. These spatial and sensory strategies reflect the different modes through which both groups affirm their presence within the contested religious field.

The loudspeaker embodies the symbolic dimension of the contestation between the two religious groups. Within the framework of symbolic power theory, this act may be understood as a form of spatial domination enacted by the majority group to assert its presence and influence. This assertion of existence is rooted in the construction of social identity, which begins with processes of self- and group- identification. These processes inevitably give rise to a "we" versus "they" polarization, shaping how each group perceives and positions itself within a particular social space (Etika, 2020).

At this point, religion emerges as on of the most potent elements in shaping social identity, an element often laden with sensitivity. This is largely due to the doctrinal foundations within each religion or belief system, which typically uphold the conviction that their own faith is the absolute truth, superior to others. Under certain circumstances, such theological exclusivism can trigger contestation among religious groups, particularly in the dynamics between majority and minority groups (Aulia Rahmawati, 2020).

Domination, recognition and, legitimation are the core objectives sought in the competitive process within a field, and to attain them, capital is essential. According to Bourdieu, capital exists in four forms: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic (Fitriyanto, 2024). When these forms of capital accumulate within a group or individual and are strategically mobilised, the likelihood of winning a contestation significantly increases (Tessa et al., 2021). In this context, the musholla functions as a symbol of Islam's presence as the dominant normative force, strategically positioned to limit the influence of the Sapta Darma minority.

The symbolic capital of the Muslim community is further reinforced by the fact that musholla was constructed on *waqf* land. This use of *waqf* land is not merely a matter of practicality, but it also carries moral and religious legitimacy that exceeds that of a minority group, whose house of worship stands on privately-owned land.

On the other hand, the *sanggar* of Sapta Darma, with its grand and expansive architecture, represents the symbolic capital of the minority group, which actively seeks to affirm existence. The presence of the *sanggar* poses a symbolic challenge to the majority group, as it potentially draws the attention of the surrounding community, including children. This visibility has sparked concerns among the majority about the perceived "spread of teachings" associated with the minority faith.

This concern emerges from the religious habitus of the Muslim community in Sukoreno, which is shaped by a collective belief in the necessity of safeguarding *aqidah Islamiyah* (Islamic creed). As a vital element of Muslim religiosity, *aqidah* becomes the foundation for strategic actions, most notably, the construction of the musholla as a symbolic fortress of faith. The fear that the *sanggar* may serve as a medium for disseminating Sapta Darma teachings reflects the majority's habitus, wherein religion is regarded as a collective identity that must be defended against perceived external threats (Badrun et al., 2023).

This strategy also illustrates how the collective habitus of the majority shapes practical decisions such as utilising *waqf* land to construct a musholla in a strategically significant location. In this context, the decision is not merely pragmatic, but it is deeply embedded with symbolic value, revealing the underlying hierarchy in the relationship between majority-minority groups (Yasin, 2024).

The proximity of the musholla and the *sanggar* reflects a competition over space and representation within the village's religious social field. The musholla, equipped with a loudspeaker directed toward the *sanggar*, functions as a medium through which the majority reinforces its dominance via auditory expression. This dynamic reveals that the religious majority, as the holder of symbolic authority, exercises control over both physical space (through the musholla's location) and symbolic space (through sound projection) in an effort to counterbalance or restrict the influence of the minority group (Ridwan; Hanan, Djayadi; Anwar, 2023).

In many cases, such forms of symbolic domination can provoke tension, even if not explicitly expressed. The contestation between the majority and minority groups essentially reflects efforts to reinforce each group's identity. When intensified, this dynamic has the potential to undermine mutual trust and give rise to intolerant behaviours (Zulkifli et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, the *sanggar* of Sapta Darma, open to the wider community and occupying a spacious area, serves as a strategic means through which the minority group seeks to extend its influence within society. This contestation reveals that both groups are not merely preserving their respective identities, but are also actively engaging in strategic maneuvers to shape and contest the village's religious social space.

The proximity of these places of worship also reflects how majority and minority groups adopt different approaches to articulating their group identities. Minority groups often assert their presence through striking physical representations as a means to reinforce their existence amid majority dominance. In contrast, majority groups tend to leverage more flexible resources to reaffirm their control over the religious social space. This constellation of majority-minority relations continues to shape the dynamics of interreligious interactions in Indonesia (Thaha, Idris; Ropi, Ismatu; Umam, 2024).

The establishment of the Sapta Darma and Muslim's place of worship, constructed in close spatial and temporal proximity, mirrors the dynamics of competition between majority and minority groups within the village's religious social field. This competition reveals that the surface level harmony often conceals deeper layers of tension. Such tension originates from perspectives held toward other religious groups, which constitute a critical pillar in the construction of communal harmony. An objective understanding of religious others can only emerge through ongoing processes of dialogue and dialectical engagement (Abdullah, 2020) (Zainuri, 2021).

FGD as The Arena of Contestation

As previously mentioned, this study conducted two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in different years. In both FGDs, the dominance of narratives by the majority group over the minority was distinctly observable. This discursive contestation vividly illustrates how the struggle for recognition and legitimacy constitutes an inevitable dynamic within multicultural communities. The majority consistently strives to maintain its hegemonic position, while the minority persistently negotiates for visibility and acknowledgement within the same social space (Fitriyanto, 2024).

The first FGD, held on October 14, 2023, was attended by village officials and religious leaders representing Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Sapta Darma. The religious figures were seated in a single row extending from east to west, facing the participants positioned on the northern side of the venue. Each figure was then given a turn to deliver a formal greeting or address on behalf of their respective religious group.

The first address was delivered by SH, the Islamic religious figure, who was seated at the easternmost end of the row. In his speech, SH spoke extensively about the religious life in Sukoreno and the social roles he has played within the community. He also briefly mentioned the presence of other religions in the village. Notably, whenever referring to other religious groups, SH would turn his head and directly name the religious figures seated beside him, beginning with the Christian figure to his immediate left, followed by the Hindu leader seated next to them.

A different tone emerged, however, when SH referred to Sapta Darma. Without turning his body or making eye contact, SH firmly stated, "*Sapta Darma, according to the MInister of Religious Affairs, is considered a cultural tradition, not a religion*." Upon hearing this, IS, the Sapta Darma figure and leader seated at the westernmost end, exhibited a discernible shift in facial expression marked by visible discomfort with a noticeable reddening of the face.

Although IS was wearing a mask, the shock and disappointment in his eyes were unmistakable. He lowered his gaze and refrained from making eye contact with the other participants of the interfaith forum.

When it was IS' turn to speak on behalf of the Sapta Darma community, he began with a formal greeting and respectful acknowledgement. However, with a slight hoarse voice, he immediately stated: "*What we, the Sapta Darma community, long for is simply harmony, peace, tranquility, and mutual respect*." His remarks were notably brief, and he ended his speech without offering a closing salutation.

During the second FGD held on 29 November 2024, SH reiterated a particular statement several times with notable emphasis. With a firm tone, he declared: "*The key to harmony is that we, as the majority, must protect the minority. And the minority must respect the majority."* Much like in the first FGD, SH delivered a speech that was significantly longer than those of the other religious representatives.

The FGD, which was originally intended as a platform for mutual introduction and interfaith dialogue, subtly transformed into a space where each actor asserted their symbolic authority and capital. The first FGD, in particular, served as a concrete example of contestation over definition of "religion", a discourse often shaped by state authority through formal regulation (Widianto, Ahmad Arif; Hasanah, 2024). In a country like Indonesia, where religion holds significant sway in sociopolitical life, formal recognition of a belief system by the state plays a crucial role in determining its legitimacy within society (Yasin, 2024).

The formal definition of "religion" in Indonesia refers to the state-recognised belief systems as outlined in Law No. 1/PNPS/1965. Groups such as Sapta Darma, which are not listed among the official religions, often face challenges in gaining social recognition (Beatty, 1999).

SH, as the representative of the majority group, explicitly asserted his dominant position within the religious field. When speaking about the various religions in Sukoreno, his bodily gestures, particularly his act of turning only toward the representatives of Christianity and Hinduism, signaled an attempt to acknowledge their presence as equal and legitimate within the shared religious space.

The case of Sapta Darma, however, stands in stark contrast. SH's statement, that Sapta Darma is not a religion but merely a cultural tradition, constitutes an act of symbolic delegitimation. This assertion not only denies Sapta Darma recognition as a legitimate religion but also attempts to position its adherents in a subordinate status within Sukorenos's religious social field. Within the framework of contestation theory, this reflects an ongoing struggle over symbolic capital, that is the pursuit of social influence rooted in recognition and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1986).

SH's dominance in this contestation arena stems from the symbolic capital he possesses, namely his social legitimacy as an Islamic religious figure and leader in Sukoreno. His confidence in making a provocative statement can be attributed to the authority he holds, which allows him to influence the perceptions of FGD participants while reinforcing Islam's position as the dominant normative framework.

SH's reference to the MInister of Religious Affair as a source of legitimacy further illustrates how symbolic capital can be derived from state-sanctioned authority. In this instance, SH invoked institutional narratives to strengthen his claim while simultaneously undermining Sapta Darma's position in the village's religious social field. This act of delegitimation directly generated tension within the field, as evidenced by IS' emotional response.

Furthermore, SH repeatedly emphasized the superiority of the majority group over the minority as the cornerstone of existing religious harmony. This narrative reflects a deliberate attempt to naturalise a hierarchical structure of social relations where the majority assumes a dominant role as the "protector" of minority groups. Such framing reinforces the hegemonic position of the majority under the guise of maintaining peace, while implicitly subordinating minority identities.

Meanwhile, the minority is positioned as a subordinate party, expected to conform to the norms established by the majority. Although such relations may appear harmonious on the surface, they conceal latent tensions that may trigger contestation. The seeds of contestation lie buried within hegemonic relationships, entrenched in the collective consciousness of the society and normalised through cultural, social, and political mechanisms (Kaat, Thiosani; Lauterboom, 2024).

The role of majority as the protector legitimates its the symbolic authority to define the rules of engagement and social values within the community. However, this authority is not without resistance. Minority groups often challenge such legitimacy, particularly when they perceive their position in society as unequal or unrecognised. In Sukoreno, for instance, although the Sapta Darma

adherents represent a small portion of the population, they maintain a strong sense of group identity that is continually asserted through symbolic and cultural strategies. These minority communities strive not only for recognition of their existence but also for the capacity to negotiate, and even challenge, the prevailing social values dominated by the majority (Yasin, 2024).

As the minority group representative, IS exemplifies the limited symbolic capital possessed within the religious social discourse arena. His brief remarks reflect the minority's attempt to navigate a "safe space" amidst the symbolic pressure exerted by the dominant group. The absence of a closing salutation in his address may also be interpreted as a subtle act of symbolic resistance, an expression of discomfort within a field that fails to afford him equal recognition.

The majority's habitus within the religious social field is clearly reflected in its perception of minority groups. In this case, as represented by SH, Sapta Darma is not regarded as a "formal" religion, and therefore, its position is perceived as inferior to that of officially recognised faiths. SH's remarks illustrate a majority habitus shaped by the conviction that the dominant religion holds full legitimacy to define the normative structure of society. This disposition, internalised and reproduced through institutional recognition, reinforces symbolic hierarchies and sustains the unequal distribution of legitimacy across religious identities.

On the other hand, IS' habitus as a representative of the minority reflects a defensive and adaptive disposition. His emotional tone and restrained body language signal the precarious position of minority actors who often navigate interactions with calculated caution to avoid escalating tensions. IS' repsonse embodies an acute awareness of the asymmetrical social structure, prompting a moderated plea for recognition framed in the language of harmony and mutual respect. Such expressions reveal the constrained agency of minority actors within a field dominated by the symbolic power of the majority.

The FGDs in Sukoreno revealed that majority-minority relations within the religious discussion forum were laden with symbolic tensions. Islam, as the dominant group, mobilised its symbolic capital to maintain hegemony, while Sapta Darma, as a marginalised minority, struggled to gain recognition under constant conditions. These interactions laid bare that beneath the surface of visible harmony lies a complex dynamic of contestation which reflects the ongoing negotiation of power and legitimacy within a multicultural society.

In order to cultivate mutual understanding and respect for differences, as well as to establish entry points for fostering interreligious dialogue and harmony, tolerance becomes a non-negotiable foundational element (Qoumas et al., 2024). Religious harmony demands inclusivity and the recognition of differences, including those of minority or belief groups. Without substantive acknowledgement from the majority, harmony risks devolving into a superficial peace where latent tensions remain simmering beneath the surface (Asrawijaya, 2022) (Beatty, 1999).

The two FGDs held in Sukoreno revealed a recurring and undeniable patter: the contestation of religious identity is indeed a tangible and persistent reality. The dynamics between majority and minority groups in religious contexts are often rooted in struggles over identity, recognition, and symbolic power. The FGDs presented a fragment of that religious reality, illustrating how both groups engage in complex interactions and strategic competition within specific social fields.

High-level and intense competition may foster a social atmosphere rife with prejudice and suspicion, potentially sowing the seeds of intergroup conflict. Within such contexts, religious leaders as holders of symbolic and spiritual authority play a crucial role in moderating the rhythm of interfaith relations to restore and sustain harmony (Khairil Musthafa et al., 2023).

Although there exists a shared aspiration among religious communities to live in peace and harmony, in practice, this ideal is often confronted with a more complex and fragmented reality. The process of fostering interreligious harmony is far from simple, as it requires sustained communal efforts that go beyond mere conceptual understanding. It necessitates tangible, exemplary actions particularly from religious elites who serve as moral and social role models (Dewi & Ansori, 2023). This challenge becomes even more pronounced in the Indonesian context, where the high level of religious and ethnic pluralism renders certain regions especially vulnerable to tensions, often ignited by identity-based contestations (Qodir & Sight, 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, religious identity contestation between majority and minority groups in Sukoreno unfolds not only in the domain of physical religious spaces but also within public discursive arenas. In each episode of contestation, actors from both the majority and minority groups strategically mobilise their available forms of capital. The ultimate objective of such contestation is the pursuit of legitimacy, recognition, and religious-social domination.

As a reference framework for managing religious-social life, the findings of this study can serve as a substantive recommendation for policymakers, as representatives of the state, to be more tangibly present within the lived realities of interreligious communities. Concrete state involvement is essential in ensuring a sense of security and comfort particularly for religious minority groups. The current study is limited in scope as it primarily focuses on the dynamics between two religious groups. Therefore, this limitation may serve as a stepping stone for future researchers to construct a more holistic and comprehensive mapping of religious-social life in Sukoreno, encompassing the broader spectrum of religious diversity.

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