

Article

Religious Diversity in Lombok: Peaceful Coexistence or Minorities at Risk?

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Abstract: Ethnic Sasak Sunni Muslims make up the overwhelming majority on the Indonesian island of Lombok. Balinese Hindus, who have cultural similarities with the Muslim Sasaks, make up 3%. They have a long history on the island. In 1960, a small group of Ahmadi Muslims settled in Lombok. The article explains how the Sunni majority has related to the two minority groups—seen in the light of the Indonesian national motto “Unity in diversity”. Sunnis act differently in these matters. The cordial relationship between many Sunnis and Balinese Hindus, exemplified by the common joint rituals, is contrasted with the Sunnis’ rejection of the members of the Ahmadiyya movement. The object of analysis is how to understand and explain the varying kinds of relationships among the relevant groups. The analysis is methodologically based on historical, cultural, psychological, and sociological perspectives and theories. Why do Sasak Sunnis in Lombok have more negative feelings toward the Ahmadis compared to the Hindus, even though the dogmatic differences are greater regarding the Hindus? The article also discusses possible ways of mitigating the conflicts.

Keywords: Lombok; Sasak; Ahmadiyya; Balinese Hindus; religious tolerance; social identity theory; social dominance theory



Citation: Budiwanti, Erni, and Levi Geir Eidhamar. 2024. Religious Diversity in Lombok: Peaceful Coexistence or Minorities at Risk? *Religions* 15: 1544. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121544>

Academic Editor: Aje Carlbom

Received: 16 November 2024

Revised: 27 November 2024

Accepted: 27 November 2024

Published: 18 December 2024



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1. Introduction

The first part of this article depicts the diversity of Muslims in Lombok and analyzes their relationship with Ahmadis and Hindus, respectively. It focuses on the current situation, as well as events of the recent past.

Based on this presentation, the second part raises research questions that are primarily analyzed based on theories within sociology and psychology. How may one understand and explain the possible tensions among the groups? How to understand possible differences in power structure? Why do many Sunni Muslims seem to have more negative feelings toward the Ahmadis compared to the Hindus when the dogmatic differences are far greater when it comes to the latter group? The article will also discuss intellectual humility and perspective-taking as possible ways to mitigate the conflicts.

The relationship between Sunni Muslims and Ahmadis has been highlighted in previous research (Burhani 2019). The relationship between Sunni Muslims and Hindus of Balinese origin is discussed by several academic works (Harnish 2006; Budiwanti 2014; Telle 2014; Gottowik 2019; Mackowiak 2022). This is nevertheless the first time Sunni Muslims’ relationships with Ahmadis and Hindus are analytically compared. It is also the first time that the tensions among the groups are analyzed based on this spectrum of sociological and psychological theories.

2. The Island of Lombok

Lombok is an island in the West Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia. It forms part of the chain of the Lesser Sunda Islands, with the Lombok Strait separating it from Bali to the

west and the Alas Strait between it and Sumbawa to the east. The provincial capital and largest city on the island is Mataram.

Lombok is quite similar to Bali in size and density and shares some cultural heritage with this neighboring island in the West. However, it is administratively part of West Nusa Tenggara along with the larger and more sparsely populated island of Sumbawa to the east. Lombok is surrounded by a number of smaller islands locally called Gili.

There is a lack of employment opportunities in Lombok due to a low degree of industrialization and sole reliability on the tourism industry. At the countryside, a large proportion is employed in the agricultural sector. The island had almost four million inhabitants in 2024.

The dominant ethnic group of Lombok is the Sasak, who constitute about 90% of the island's inhabitants. Most Sasaks adhere to traditional Sunni Islam, while a minority follow a local tradition named Wetu Telu. Although having a Muslim identity, the Wetu Telus have preserved a combination of Islam and ancestral belief.

In around 1750, Lombok was partly conquered by the Balinese. The Hindu Balinese mainly controlled West Lombok and did not completely subjugate Central and East Lombok. Though the Hindu Balinese had tried to penetrate the center, the nobles and their followers fought back and forced them to retreat.

In West Lombok, relations were more harmonious, and intermarriages occurred to some extent. The Balinese rulers withdrew around 1894 after the Dutch defeated them and assumed control of Lombok. Today, Hindus of a Balinese background constitute a minority of less than 3% of the Lombok population. They mostly live in West Lombok.

The first few Sunni Muslims in Lombok converted to Ahmadiyya in the 1960s. According to Ahmadiyya's own numbers, there were around 2000 Ahmadees all over Lombok in 2023. They primarily live in the area of Mataram and West Lombok. Some of them also live in the East and North of Lombok.

Some time ago, 405 Ahmadis lived in a refugee camp in the capital city of Mataram. This number is now reduced to 125. The declining number is because several Ahmadis have built or bought new houses outside this refugee site. Those remaining in the camp are financially incapable of building or buying a new house.

3. Challenging the Indonesian Ideal of Unity in Diversity

The nation-state of Indonesia is built on the ideal of social unity as well as safeguarding the mosaic of ethnic-religious diversity. The national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity) is the core value directed toward integrating all members of the nation-state while also maintaining the uniqueness of the country's citizens who are divided based on ethnic, religious, lingual, and cultural differences. This motto constitutes a utopical goal of ethnic and religious harmony, which is impossible to reach with perfection. At the same time, this goal establishes an ambition citizens of Indonesia may constantly try to reach as well as possible.

The expression of the ethnic diversity of the archipelago in external symbols or outward appearances is very apparent, especially when Indonesian Independence Day is celebrated at the Merdeka Palace, where the president and the ministers and their spouses wear ethnic apparel from 38 provinces. The display of ethnic apparel is also apparent during wedding ceremonies when the married couple wears traditional clothing from their region of origin.

As markers of identity, the displayed ethnic costumes at ceremonial occasions and the use of vernacular for daily conversation are factors that can enhance the preservation of cultural uniqueness. However, it is not enough to express plurality by relying only on a motto or the demonstration of ethnic apparel. It is likely to be more difficult to shape and develop unity rather than to keep the diversity alone. This is because the motto of "Unity in diversity" does not automatically guarantee that the Indonesians' awareness of simultaneously balancing these two requirements will immediately develop.

Indonesia takes great pride in its diversity through the expression of external symbols and outer appearances. This is very important because, as cultural markers, their presence in ceremonial events fosters the spirit of diversity and the uniqueness of each regional and ethnic identity. These external features also increase the sense of preserved traditional legacies instilled by the country's forebears. However, to what extent is the celebration of diversity and identity also manifested in relation to the other? In other words, how is the appreciation of and respect for plurality also expressed in the way Indonesians relate to people with different religions and ethnicities?

In many cases, hatred of religious others is expressed by destroying places of worship, including church bombings, mosque burnings, and the destruction of temples and monasteries. These acts provide evidence of the difficulties of maintaining both plurality and unity. Furthermore, a series of inter-ethnoreligious clashes and violence, such as those happening in Aceh-Singkil (Zain 2019), Tanjung Balai-North Sumatra (Hartanta 2017), Maluku (Al Qurtuby 2015), Poso (Schulze 2017; Aragon 2001), and Papua (Noor 2016), further demonstrate the vulnerability of theological differences embedded in heterogeneity. Regarding this, Pedersen (2016, p. 387) stipulates the following: "The project of nationalism was highly successful in creating a shared sense of national identity. But Indonesia also experiences inter-group tensions, with areas and periods of high tensed conflict, often involving religion".

Religious conflicts in a heterogeneous society like Indonesia involve not only people with divergent religious backgrounds but also those of the same religion with different understandings. Examples include syncretic Muslims who maintain ancestral customs besides Islam vis-à-vis puritan Muslims who are more fundamental in their actions. The local, traditional *abangan* Muslims vis-à-vis the normative *santri* (see Geertz 1960) and the syncretistic *Wetu Telu* vis-à-vis the normative *Waktu Lima* (Cedderoth 1981; Budiwanti 2000, 2001, 2005) further represent the split and polarization of religious ideologies within the Indonesian Muslim world.

The development of various schools and factions demonstrates the plurality of Muslims. Sunni adherents are the largest and most dominant group in Indonesia, followed by minority groups, like Ahmadiyya, Shia, and followers of local religions. The plurality of Islam in Indonesia is also evident in the development of various schools, such as Sunni groups, the dominant majority with the most adherents in Indonesia, and dissident groups that constitute minorities, such as Ahmadiyya, Shia, and followers of local religions.

The division of majority and minority further marks the complexity of relationships among Indonesian Muslims. In the face of the majority and dominant religious group, some religious minorities experience marginalization and discrimination and are thus exempted from their basic rights. It is not surprising to discover that the relationship between the two sides is often characterized by tension and conflict. Due to their determination to express and practice their faith, religious minorities are often threatened, intimidated, and persecuted. This case underlines the reason why academic discourses and articles on religious minorities, such as Ahmadiyya and Shia, are often dominated by a troubling depiction (Yosarie 2021; Hamdi 2011; Pamungkas 2017, 2018, 2019; Burhani 2014). Those who are most concerned with the fate of minorities usually consider promoting and defending equity and equality to be compulsory.

Apart from the depressing feature of religious minorities, however, some minority groups in Indonesia do maintain a level of harmony with the majority (Harnish 2006).

This study focuses on two types of minorities: those who experience pressures because of persecution and those who maintain a relatively peaceful coexistence with the majority of ethnic Muslims. Regarding the first group, we focus on the relationships among the minority dissident Islamic movement, the Ahmadis, and the mainstream Sunni Muslims in Lombok. For the second group, we concentrate on the relationships between the Hindu Balinese and the majority Muslim Sasaks.

4. Muslims' Multifaces: Syncretists Vis-à-Vis Puritanists, Sunnis Vis-à-Vis Ahmadiis

The official recognition of religious plurality in Indonesia is limited to six major religions: Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Judaism and native religions are excluded, as well as dissidents considered to be deviant and apostate. Native religions with their ancestral inherited belief were established long before the arrival of Islam. The juxtaposition of and mixture between ancestral faith and Islam produces religious syncretization. The Wetu Telu in Lombok (see [Cedderoth 1981](#)) and Islam Abangan in Java ([Geertz 1960](#)) are some examples of such syncretic religions in Indonesia. The current Wetu Telu population today has decreased to around 10,000, mainly living in North Lombok.

Early Islamization was marked by the unclear boundary between Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs codified into local customary tradition. [van Dijk \(1984\)](#) states the following: "When Islam spread in Indonesia, it was encountered by a complex social structure and deeply rooted beliefs. Islam became an official religion of the communities, but it did not prove easy to shift the old beliefs and habits." ([van Dijk 1984](#), p 7).

Although the universal basic principles written in the Quran and Hadith do not differ from those of Islam elsewhere, the domestication of Islam into a specific sociocultural setting contributes significantly to the cultural plurality of Muslims in Indonesia. Islamization in Indonesia was not merely a process of adopting external values; rather, Islam was adapted to local cultural values. Islam became the religion of specific communities that influenced and were influenced by the culture of that local community. Differences in interpreting and domesticating Islam into local social structure and culture contribute to the diversity of Indonesian Islam. "Islam in Indonesia has interacted since the beginning with the local context to produce a wide variety in social, political and religious life. Islamic unity as well as local diversity are well demonstrated in Indonesia, and these have helped to provide the dynamics of Islamic and Indonesian history." ([Ricklefs 2001](#), p. 39).

Muslim communities, especially those that maintain their customary beliefs, often become the target of the purification movement, which calls them to return to the original teaching of the Quran and Hadith. They also urge them to overlook the ancestral beliefs, especially the ones that contravene Islam.

Studies conducted by Wazir-Jahan Karim in Malaysia ([Karim 1992](#)) also found that syncretic Muslims were strongly challenged by the puritans practicing a more fundamental belief of Islam, less tolerant of local-traditional values seen as incompatible with Islam. The orthodoxization movement in Indonesia aims to cleanse elements of traditional ancestral belief embedded in the *adat* (local customary law or tradition) contradicting Islam.

Regarding this movement, [Hefner \(1985\)](#) writes that they claim that custom is created by humans and cannot surpass Islam, whose teaching is based on the divine revelation. Hefner's study of the Tengger people in East Java emphasizes the following: "For orthodox Muslims, *adat* has a lower position than religion since human's creation cannot go beyond God's revelation" ([Hefner 1985](#), p. 51).

This historical overview illustrates that orthodox Sunni Muslims have met internal challenges for centuries. The strategy has then been trying to purify and help deviant groups into the seemed right form of Islam. These groups have nevertheless been accepted as Muslims, despite their supposed flaws. This differs radically from the way orthodox Sunni Muslims have related to Ahmadiyya.

5. Ahmadiyya: A Persecuted Muslim Minority

The diversity of Indonesian Muslims is marked not only by a mixture of Islam with local variants but also by differences in interpreting the teachings on the finality of the prophet. These differences have separated most of the Sunni followers from Ahmadiyya followers. The first group believes in the finality of Muhammad, meaning that there is no messenger of Allah after Muhammad as mentioned in the Quran 23:34. He is considered to be the closing of the prophets as stated in the Quran 33:40. However, Ahmadis believe that the door of prophecy remains open, meaning there is another prophet after Muhammad.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is believed to be the silhouette or shadow of the Prophet Muhammad (*nabi dzili*) who does not bring a new sharia but rather follows and spreads the sharia teaching, as revealed to Muhammad, and then to the current ummah.

As a result, the Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) announced a *fatwa* (edict) claiming that Ahmadiyya's teaching is misleading and misguiding. The local government of Lombok later followed up by official letters issued by local governments stating the heresy of Ahmadiyya (Nasution 2008; Sajari 2015).

In Lombok, there are local Sunni Muslim religious leaders titled *Tuan Guru*. They have many followers and lead Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), with thousands of pupils (*santri*). *Tuan Gurus* are very charismatic figures who have large authority, are central to local governance, and are socially and politically influential.

Some of them are moderate and preach tolerance towards Ahmadiyya. A *Tuan Guru* named TGH Subki Sasaki from West Lombok is often invited by Ahmadiyya to deliver a sermon in their yearly organizational meeting. But generally, the *Tuan Gurus* work for purification of Islamic doctrine and practice with the main goal of changing traditional customs (*adat*) that are not based on normative Islam and, thus, urging a call to return to the original teaching of Islam as taught in the Qur'an and hadith.

Several of the *Tuan Gurus* are recruited to join Councils of Ulama at different levels. There, they have played a leading role in supporting the enforcement of the edict (*fatwa*) on the heresy of Ahmadiyya that was issued by the central Council of Ulama in Jakarta in 1980 and 2005 (MUI Digital 2023; Majelis Ulama Indonesia 2005). This means that several of the *Tuan Guru* in Lombok have played and still play an important role in the Sunni suppression of Ahmadiyya.

One of the fatal consequences of dispersing Ahmadiyya's heresy, legitimized by Ulama's *fatwa*, is a series of violent acts, ending with the expulsion of Ahmadis from their residential settlement. They are forced to stay in the refugee area for an unlimited time. Until today, there has been no real action regarding the plan to relocate them to a permanent settlement after their houses were destroyed and abandoned during the riot of anti-Ahmadiyya movements. Ahmadiyya followers have been holding refugee status since 2016, living at a dormitory in Mataram, Lombok's capital city. This shelter has become a safe place for the Ahmadis and aims to prevent the recurrence of an open physical conflict in the land of origin.

The expulsion of religious minorities from their homes shows that truth claim is extended into geographical settings. Physical space is religiously interpreted. A radical section of the Sunni mainstream monopolizes territory based on religious belief, refusing to share a living space with those considered to be heretical and apostate. Sunnis are concerned that if Ahmadiyya members are allowed to stay in the neighborhood, they may eventually gain more influence and followers. Due to this concern, they try to protect the environment from being infiltrated by Ahmadiyya teachings. The Sunnis are reluctant to allow the Ahmadis to return to their homes before they repent by embracing what they regard to be the true teaching of Islam (Hicks 2014).

The dilemma of religious pluralism arises not only because of different interpretations of teachings between mainstream and dissident Muslims. It is also due to the mainstream group forcing the dissidents to follow what they believe themselves. They extend their truth claim by not allowing the latter to return home unless they convert to true Islam. The persecution continues when the truth claim is developed further into spatial claim. The powerlessness of religious minorities to the claim of religious ideology and living space has simultaneously marked their loss in maintaining their fundamental rights as Indonesian citizens. Radical Sunni members have controlled public spaces based on their truth claim. The closure and destruction of Ahmadis' houses of worship (Mariani 2013) provide further evidence of their domination over public space.

The dynamics of pluralism in Indonesia are characterized by the mainstream's control of spatial territory in the name of belief. The consequence of truth and spatial monopolies

is that their need for maintaining a residence and place of worship with all socioreligious activities inside is restricted and banned.

Habermas (1984) depicts public space as a domain in social life where the citizens of the countries transform their public opinion into public interest. All matters and problems they face together are expressed and manifested into collective concerns and needs, exempting the state's pressure and constraints.

In Habermas's view (Supartiningsih 2017), a healthy public space reflects an emancipative and participatory society that is exempted from domination and coercion. Every person enjoys an equal opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. The key element in public space is face-to-face interaction and dialogue among individuals to create public opinion and common interests.

A strong public space, according to Habermas, is needed to achieve democracy whereby the principles of justice, diversity, freedom of expression, equality, and solidarity work. In a pluralistic society, public space should ideally be inclusive in the sense that it does not only accommodate individuals with various cultural and religious attributes and backgrounds, but it also becomes a space where the freedom to express one's identity is guaranteed. It is expected that the freedom to express diverse identities in the public space within a plural society will generate tolerance and harmony. And this kind of situation will eventually evolve into a democratic atmosphere. A public space marks equal access and opportunity for each identity to be fully expressed (Supartiningsih 2017).

Maintaining a specific place of worship and worshipping activities among the Ahmadis has separated them from the non-Ahmadis. Ahmadis have their own imam (prayer leader) so that they do not have to pray behind the non-Ahmadis' imam. This order comes from Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and is then passed on to the first khalifah up to the most recent one.

The Ahmadis' tradition of endogamous marriage—marrying only other members of the group—has made the religious gap even wider. The practice of keeping marriage within the group and refusing to marry outsiders is seen as a way to protect the purity of Ahmadiyya teachings. Sunnis are allowed to marry other Muslims, but not to marry Ahmadis. Assimilation is unlikely to happen in an environment with an exclusive religious congregation, as well as marriage preference.

By maintaining an exclusive living space and separating themselves from other religious communities, Ahmadis are an easy target for mass attacks. In 2018, during the fasting month, an Ahmadi residential complex in East Lombok was brutally attacked (Wahab and Fakhruddin 2019). This was the second occurrence of such an attack since 2004 when a Ahmadiyya housing complex in Lingsar subdistrict of West Lombok was destroyed.

The inability to bridge theological differences, which ultimately leads to violence and the expulsion of the Ahmadis, raise human rights issues and the fragility of Indonesia's nation building. Since 2006, the Ahmadis have lived in refugee sites with limited sanitation and small, cramped rooms. Up until now, the regional government has not set forth a clear policy on relocation. The local government does not compensate the victims for their ruined houses and other belongings damaged during the riots. In 2022, large amounts were spent to build an international motor-racing circuit in Central Lombok, while the fate and citizenship rights of the Ahmadi refugees were ignored.

The social and ideological resistance of minority dissidents, such as Ahmadiyya, is manifested in the denial of civil rights. These include the right to return to one's homeland, safely without enduring a mass attack, to choose a safe place to live, and to build and maintain a house of worship. The denial of these rights is strengthened further by the traditions of the Ahmadis, who, as mentioned above, are more likely to keep their house of worship separate from the majority of Sunni Muslims. Though both groups are Muslims, regarding worshipping activities, they are unlikely to mingle with the non-Ahmadis who make up the majority of the Muslim population in Lombok. The intrareligious relationship is marked by a mutually exclusive neighborhood and place of worship.

6. The Relationship Between Muslim Sasaks and Balinese Hindus

Interreligious relationships can generate tolerance and promote a peaceful coexistence. This is exemplified by the Balinese Hindu and the majority of Sasak Muslims who maintain shared sacred sites according to their respective beliefs, called Kemaliq, located in the Lingsar subdistrict of West Lombok. The spring water in Kemaliq is considered sacred by both groups, and the water continues to flow even in the dry season. Both groups use the same sacred prayer altar, which is adjacent to the spring. Here both groups pray and pay homage, led by their ritual leaders. Sasak Muslims believe that Wali Abdul Malik was the founder of the spring at Kemaliq. This Wali (saint) is believed to be a religious proselytizer who came from Java to Lombok in order to Islamize the locals. Originally he was a pupil of one of the nine saints known for converting people throughout Java in the 14th century. According to a local legend, the spring is the legacy of Wali Abdul Malik, who struck his stick onto the ground. The water began to flow and continues to do so, even during the dry season.

As for the Hindu Balinese, the Kemaliq spring symbolizes Bethara Vishnu, the god of water, which represents fertility and prosperity.

Every year, Balinese Hindus and Sasak Muslims perform a ritual of so called rice cake war (*Perang Topat*) at Kemaliq by using rice cakes (*topat*) as weapons. Throwing the rice cakes between the two sides is the core of the event, which is meant to convey a message of peace over an enmity experienced between the two parties in the past.

In around the 18th century, the Balinese Kingdom controlled and occupied most of the territory of West Lombok. The Balinese occupation rose to rebellion, headed by the religious leader titled Tuan Guru. When the Dutch took control of Lombok after defeating the Balinese, there was no more animosity between the Balinese and the Sasak.

Since then, both participate in the joint ritual of the rice cake war reminiscing about the past. The rice cake (*topat*) stands in for the weapons used in the war and does not cause injury. The symbolic rice cake war is repeated annually with the hope of preventing another real war.

The sign of mutual tolerance in this symbolic war is an animal that is sacrificed and consumed by both groups. The Balinese Hindu community abstains from eating beef because, according to their belief, the cow is a sacred animal. The Sasak Muslims cannot eat pork. In order to honor the food taboos of each group, the parties negotiated the sacrifice of buffalo.

In addition to the Kemaliq spring, both the Sasak and the Balinese Hindus share the sacred tombs of two *walis* (Muslims saints), respectively, the tomb of Papuq Medane in North Lombok and the tomb of Pancor Wali Denek in West Lombok. Although some of the orthodox Muslims are against the non-Muslims' pilgrimage to attribute the saints (*wali*), the two tombs continue to be flooded by Muslim and non-Muslim pilgrims from inside and outside Lombok.

The ritual of paying homage to the sacred tomb (*ziarah makam*), especially the two tombs mentioned above, is a tradition of honoring saints (*waliullah*) carried out by Sasak Muslims and Balinese Hindus alike. They take turns praying and expressing their wishes at these sacred sites according to their beliefs. Muslims usually come on Fridays and during the important events on the Islamic lunar calendar, such as Maulud, Hajji, a day before fasting, and at the end of fasting month (Idh), whereas Balinese Hindus typically come at a random time.

The early stage of conversion was strongly marked by contextualizing Islam into a local cultural symbolism and cosmology. Embedded in this stage is the development of venerated attributes attached to the Wali as a transmitter of God's blessings. He is a spiritual medium who accelerates one's prayer to the almighty God. These spiritual attributes are pinpointed to highlight a distinctive cultural variance of Sasak Muslims in Lombok.

Sharing space, time, and figures in a ritualized atmosphere between Balinese Hindus and Sasak Muslims reinforces the assumption of (Mahar 2003, p. 3) that "human existence is embedded in space and time, and our social life lies in the interchange of symbolic forms

of where we live". One form of symbolic exchange is to show a mutually peaceful attitude and tolerance in the sense that no group claims that it has the right to use a sacred site over the other. Each religious group equally maintains its religious identity without necessarily claiming that it has more rights than other groups in using the sacred sites.

7. Sunni Sasak's Relationship with Balinese Hindus and Ahmadis in Cultural and Historical Perspectives

As a minority, the Hindu Balinese enjoy freedom of worship, even in a location venerated by the Sasak Muslims, as mentioned above. In contrast, the Ahmadis have limited freedom of worship, as described above.

The difference is partly because the Balinese share historical links with the Sasaks. As the former colonial master, their two-century reign was compulsively accepted in some areas of Lombok, especially by people in West Lombok. Moreover, after being overthrown by the Dutch, most of the Balinese did not return to Bali but continued to live in Lombok. Despite losing their political grip and privileges under Dutch colonial rule and becoming the minority in Lombok, the royal descendants, army, and followers consider Lombok their homeland. Nearly all of them preferred to stay in Lombok rather than sail back to their native land in Bali.

The intermarriage descendants of Balinese and Sasaks are called the Balok (Bali Lombok), which means people of Lombok with Balinese origin. Some subdistricts in North Lombok possess a high number of cross-ethnoreligious marriages and the Balok descendants. The historical ties between the Balinese and the Sasaks led to the following wave of Balinese migration after the volcano Mount Agung in Bali erupted in 1963. These Balinese migrants were seeking refuge in Lombok as a safe haven with agriculturally promising features. Additional Balinese voluntary migrations have occurred in later years, increasing the Balinese communities in Lombok.

Unlike the Balinese, the Sasak have no shared feeling of history and identity with the Ahmadis. Though the latter are Muslims and ethnically the same, they are considered to be outsiders, complete strangers. Ahmadis maintain their own structure of leadership, which is unrecognized by the Sasak Muslims in general. This structure includes Imam Mahdi, the Caliph as a global leader, and national and local leaders. The Ahmadis believe that Mirza Gulam Ahmad is a promised messiah and prophet, while for the Sasak, he is an alien figure who is theologically problematic. In the Sasaks' view, Ahmadis have developed a new theological branch within Islam that contravenes Islam itself.

Unlike the Ahmadis, Sasak Sunnis seem to have no theological problems with the Hindus. They believe that Hinduism and Islam belong to completely different religious categories. The difference between the two religions has already—historically and theologically—been embedded from the beginning (since they were born) and thus is not worth disputing. Consequently, to a large extent, they both show respect for each other's beliefs.

Furthermore, Ahmadis are judged as being completely alienated from the Sasak traditional culture, the everyday life of which is highly ritualized. For the Sasaks, every stage of the life cycle is to be ceremonialized, starting with birth, then marriage, and finally death and after death. There are several rituals from the ceremony of haircutting and naming the baby (*ngurising*) and a ritual marking the completion of reading the chapters of the Quran (*namatang*) to post-death rituals on the 9th, 40th, 100th, and 1000th day after death.

The Ahmadis do not adopt or take part in these ritual traditions. Consequently, though they live in Lombok, they are separated from the public cultural life of the Sasaks in general. This separation is aggravated by the theological differences regarding the prophetic role of Mirza Gulam Ahmad.

8. Interreligious Relations Analyzed Based on Theories Within Sociology of Religion

So far, this article has described and partly analyzed the relationship between the Sunni Muslim majority in Lombok and the local Hindus and Ahmadis, respectively. This presentation raises research issues related to intergroup tensions in general, as well as intergroup power relations and intergroup preferences in particular.

A main sociological question deals with the reason and background for conflicts between religious groups. Are the driving forces primarily socioeconomical and political or doctrinal and religious?

In Northern Ireland, a conflict between Catholics and Protestants has been going on for generations. In Yemen, the Houthi movement, mainly belonging to the Zaydi branch of Shia, has been in a war with the Sunni-based government since 2014. Most sociologists would agree that these conflicts are not primarily doctrinal, but rather socio-economical, cultural, and political.

In Brazil, the conflict between politically leftwing and rightwing factions within the Catholic Church may serve as a similar example. Inspired by the Second Vatican council and Marxian analysis, Catholic theologians developed the Latin American liberation theology. At the opposite end of the scale, the Ultra-Catholic movement of Father Paulo Ricardo, by some named Christofacism, has been vocal the last years. Paulo Ricardo has played an important role in promoting popular endorsement for the previous Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro. Even though the conflict theologically may be based on dogmatical differences, the socioeconomical and political differences may be regarded as the main driving forces of the conflict (Py 2021).

Contradicting these examples, the conflict between traditional Christian churches and the Jehovah's Witnesses may mainly be characterized as doctrinal. It scarcely has socioeconomic, cultural, or political dimensions. The relationship between Sunnis and Ahmadis in Lombok, to a certain degree, has some socioeconomic and political dimensions. But like the Jehovah's Witnesses, the driving force of the condemnation of Ahmadis is clearly dogmatical and religious-based.

The sociologist of religion Jose Casanova has analyzed the relationship between religious majorities and minorities from a human rights perspective. He points out that deviant religious movements played a crucial role in the first codification of the Bills of Rights of the American colonies and postcolonial states. This is part of a general trend where minorities may use human rights as a means of fighting discrimination (Casanova 2006, p. 24). Historically, and partly present, a dominant religious majority may oppose equal rights to minor religious groups, being regarded as opponents. Casanova illustrates this phenomenon by the development within the Catholic Church. In 1791, pope Pius VI declared the French Declaration of the Rights of man as a direct attack on the Catholic Church. Similarly, in 1864, Pius IX declared the principle of human rights as irreconcilable with the Catholic Church. A century later, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration of Religious Freedom introduced a radical turn on the matter. In his long papacy, John Paul II practically and theoretically defended the inalienable right of the human person to freedom of conscience (Casanova 2006, pp. 24–25).

A similar development may be seen in parts of the Islamic world. The Sunni Ulama is more decentralized than the hierarchical Catholic Church. Hence, the development may vary among different religious groups and geographical areas. The Sunni Muslim authorities of Lombok seemingly do regard respecting the freedom of conscience of the Ahmadiyya as a religious duty. According to Peter Berger, secularization may lead to increased cooperation between different, but related, religious groups (Berger 1967).

When these groups enjoy large support and good conditions, this surplus may be used to compete. When secularization generates stricter conditions for religion, there are fewer resources for conflict, and one has the tendency to seek cooperation. In the opposite case, when sacralization occurs, it thus may imply increasing opportunities for dogmatic division. That is the situation for Lombok, where normative Sunni Islam has an increasingly stronger position. Norway, where 3.5% of the population belong to Muslim

religious communities, this may serve as a contrast. Although the relationship between Sunni Muslims and Ahmadis is not cordial, they formally cooperate as members of the Norwegian interreligious organization STL (STL 2024).

9. Interreligious Relations Analyzed Based on Theories Within Social Psychology

Three theories of social psychology may shed light on these research issues. The first theory is social identity theory (SIT), proposed by [Tajfel and Turner \(1979\)](#). According to SIT, humans categorize themselves and others in order to understand their social environment. We use social categories, like gender, nationality, religion, profession, and so on, and then, we identify ourselves with different in-groups that we belong to. A Sasak Sunni woman, then, regards Sasaks, Sunnis, and women as her in-groups and considers Balinese, Hindus, and men to be out-groups. In this case, the identity of Sasak and Sunni may be more important than gender. Friendship may also define group identity. Friends are perceived as belonging to one's in-group, while strangers belong to the out-group.

Psychologically, identity plays a basic role for the individual. It provides self-esteem and a sense of fulfillment. This also applies to the individual's social identity as it is described here.

The sense of belonging forms emotional and social bindings within the in-group. Having a common religion, ethnicity, or nationality promotes a sense of togetherness among the group members. Belonging to the Sasak Sunni or Ahmadiyya community generates a strong in-group feeling. This contrasts the "othering" of the out-groups through a conscious separation between "us" and "them".

According to SIT, humans may tend to experience a rivalry relationship with different out-groups. To strengthen their self-esteem, in-group members view themselves in a positive light, while negative stereotypes and stigmas may be attributed to the out-groups. In a fatwa of the Council of the Indonesian Ulama (MUI), Ahmadiyya was declared to be a movement that is heretical, misguided, and outside of Islam. Seen from the perspective of Ahmadiyya, this damning monopolization of truth may serve as an example of a stigma.

There is a tendency to exaggerate similarities within the in- and out-groups while at the same time exaggerating differences between the groups. This dynamic may become strong when the group division is based on religion, whereby the disagreements often apply to deep existential questions. Seen from the outside, the similarities between Sunnis and Ahmadiyas are greater than their differences. Even so, both groups put more emphasis on the main issue that separates them, namely whether the possible prophetic status of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad infringes on the finality of Muhammad's prophethood ([Eidhamar 2018](#); [Eidhamar 2021](#); [Purohit 2016](#); [Turner et al. 1979](#)).

The theory may also shed light on Sunni Muslims' and Ahmadis' experiences of group identity. According to SIT, mutual fear between the groups may easily create rivalry and hostility. One group might find the other to be threatening, as both groups are genuinely convinced that they possess the correct interpretation of the same divinely revealed holy Quran, as well as the Hadith literature. Both perceive themselves as representing the true Islam and thus having the identity of true Muslims. Regarding this perspective, Hindus might be seen as less threatening since they do not claim to represent the true Islam.

In extreme cases, mutual fear and rivalry may provoke group members to attack the opponent's churches, mosques, temples, and monasteries, as mentioned above. The ideas expressed in SIT may also explain the occurrence of ethnoreligious clashes and violence (page 2).

The second theory shedding light on our research is the social dominance theory (SDT), proposed by [Sidanius and Pratto \(1999\)](#). Sidanius and Pratto created SDT based on SIT. According to SDT, all human societies form group-based hierarchies. The hierarchies may be based on categories, like age, gender, and other arbitrary factors. Arbitrary factors can include race, ethnicity, or religion ([Eidhamar 2018](#); [Sidanius and Pratto 2012](#)). According to [Pratto et al. \(2006, p. 272\)](#) SDT argues that intergroup oppression, discrimination,

and prejudice are the means by which human societies organize themselves as group-based hierarchies.

In Lombok, the Sunni Muslims constitute a large majority and possess a social power, which puts them on a hierarchical level above the other religious minorities.

According to SDT, the dominant group usually defends its position through hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing ideologies. For example, older ones might use their life experience to argue for their superiority over young ones.

The hierarchy-enhancing ideology of the Sunni Muslims toward the Hindu minority may be their perceived true monotheistic faith versus a *jahiliyya* kind of polytheistic belief. Their ideology is marked by a multitude of Hindu gods, goddesses, ancestral spirits, guardian spirits, and spirits residing in different parts of nature.

Some Hindus and Sasaks have kinship relationships, including intermarriage, though this is somewhat rare. Additionally, Hindus were the rulers, and Sasak were their subjects. They are tied by a patron–client relationship from the past. Many inherited Hindu lands are still tilled by the Sasak (Gerdin 1982; Hägerdal 1995). The hierarchical relationship remains intact in some places, in the sense of a mutually beneficial connection.

Sunni Muslims seem to use a variety of hierarchy-enhancing ideologies toward the Ahmadis. The main point is the Ahmadi's perceived twisting of the true core belief of Islam. Metaphorically speaking, Sunnis accuse Ahmadi's of building a new house within the house of universal Islam. The local legitimizing of the hierarchy is rooted in the universal Sunni condemnation of Ahmadiyya. The Lombok Ulama follows the MUI and is loyal to the World Muslim League and other international Sunni authorities (Muhammad 2011). Internationally, Sunnis claim to represent the continuous true understanding of Islam, from the time of the Prophet Muhammad through the four right-lead caliphs up to today. By contrast, Ahmadiyya was invented by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad about 140 years ago. While Sunnis may pretend to be seen as ideologically superior, Ahmadiyya is described as inferior with labels, such as *blasphemous* and *heretic*. Sunnites claim that they hold the correct understanding of the Quran and blame and judge the Ahmadi's for twisting the true teaching of the holy Quran by recognizing Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet and Masih Mau'ud. The Sunnis in Lombok, therefore, forcefully pressure the Ahmadi's to return to what they regard as the true teaching of Islam. Ahmadi's are being exempted from many civil rights, such as a safe house for worship. If they move out of their seclusion (refugee site), no one can guarantee that they will not be attacked or persecuted.

The Sunnis may further claim that their status as true Muslims is proved by the Sunnis representing the overwhelming majority of Muslims, both locally and internationally. By contrast, the Ahmadi's represent about 1% of the Muslims internationally, and this percentage is far lower in Lombok and Indonesia.

The blasphemy law of 2010 (Undang Undang Penodaan Agama) protects the core religious teachings of the majority. The law can thus lead to the risk of criminalizing the teachings and behaviors of religious minorities. This well-intended protection of the religious majority may cause the perceived deviant minorities to become increasingly vulnerable to discriminatory criminal prosecution (Lindsey and Butt 2016). The Sunni majority may use its legally ascribed dogmatic superiority as a hierarchy-enhancing ideology toward the Ahmadi's.

Inferior groups generally oppose the oppression with hierarchy-attenuating legitimizing ideologies, like socialism, feminism, or egalitarianism. With this as a weapon, they may try to fight for a change in asymmetric power relations.

Even if Ahmadi's are persecuted, they do not fight back with violence. In this way, they show through their practice of nonviolence that they are champions of peace and tolerance. They consciously display better morals by repaying violent attacks with kindness and evil with goodness. The persecution and imbalanced contest between the oppressing majority and the oppressed minority is fought by human relief missions in all the countries where Ahmadiyya followers exist. They have long promoted a movement of "Love for all, hatred

for none” and have actively engaged in a global humanitarian movement called Humanity First ([HumanityFirst 2024](#)).

This article documents that Muslims in Lombok relate more positively to local Hindus than to Ahmadis. At first glance, this might seem surprising. Hindus, with their polytheistic beliefs, completely contradict and oppose the basic monotheistic doctrine of Islam. Thus, one might suppose that Hinduism represents the very worst deviation form of religion seen with Muslim eyes. The situation seems to be the opposite regarding the Ahmadis. Although they differ from traditional Islam on a few important doctrinal points, they nevertheless agree with most of the doctrines within traditional Sunni Islam, including the Sunni body of Hadith. How, then, can one explain that the Sunni Muslims in Lombok, both through attitude and behavior, are far more negative toward Ahmadis than Hindus?

Historical and cultural explanations are already mentioned ([Harnish 2006](#)). To shed further light on the issue, we apply a third social psychological theory, called the Source Model of Group Threat (SMGT), proposed by [Greenaway and Cruwys \(2019\)](#).

The model distinguishes between the threats originating from outside and inside one’s in-group. The threat coming from other groups is called the *intergroup threat*. It occurs when people perceive that members of another group pose a risk to the in-group. This kind of threat highlights perceived similarities among fellow in-group members and enlarges the perceived differences toward out-groups.

The threat arising from within is called the *intragroup threat*. It occurs when people perceive that members of their in-group pose a risk to the in-group. Contrasting the intergroup threat, the intragroup threat highlights perceived differences among fellow ingroup members.

According to SMGT, these two kinds of threats have opposing effects. The intergroup threat causes the attacked group to gather in solidarity, fighting the external threat. The motto is “We’ve got to beat them”. This means that the intergroup threat strengthens the internal group identity. In contrast, the intragroup threat challenges the internal identity, unity, and harmony. Therefore, the intragroup threat is regarded as more dangerous and serious than the intergroup threat. This may well explain why Sunni Muslims regard the threat from Ahmadis to be more dangerous than the threat from the Hindus.

10. Intellectual Humility and Perspective-Taking as a Means of Mitigating Religious Conflicts

Since the time of Socrates, intellectual humility has been considered a fundamental intellectual virtue ([Jowett 2020](#)). Cameron R. Hopkin et al. define the term as “a recognition of the fallibility of one’s own views and an openness to changing those views when warranted” ([Hopkin et al. 2014](#), p. 50).

This also implies the principle of openness to doubt. Some may interpret their religious faith tradition as requiring an absolute obligation of belief. That also implies a ban on doubting the dogmas of one’s religion—or even one’s interpretation of these dogmas. This seems to contrast the ideal of intellectual humility. Does one then become more closed-minded the more religiously devoted one becomes ([Spiegel 2012](#))?

The research literature on this issue sheds light on the above depiction. [Krumrei-Mancuso and Rouse \(2016](#), pp. 209–210) assert that fear of doubt can be rooted in a lack of security in one’s convictions and that intellectual humility reflects the ability to balance one’s secure convictions with openness to alternative information. When one is confident in one’s belief, one also has the courage to face whatever challenges that belief.

Philosopher of religion Michael S. Jones distinguishes between two types of certainty—psychological and apodictic. What Jones calls *psychological certainty* is a subjective belief that the individual chooses to believe. Examples of such convictions may be the belief in a deity or life after death—or a rejection of such a belief. Even though a conviction may be extremely strong, in principle, there is always a possibility that it is wrong.

The opposite is the concept of apodictic certainty. Apodictic certainty denotes objective truths that are universally agreed upon. The statement $1 + 1 = 2$ may serve as an example (Jones 2015).

The problem arises if one fails to make this distinction. If one holds one's religious convictions with apodictic certainty instead of psychological certainty, this is an example of rigid certainty (Eidhamar 2021, pp. 8–10). This is the opposite of intellectual humility. If one claims such a rigid certainty, it may cause hostility and a lack of dialogue between opposing or competing religious groups, like Sunni Muslims and Ahmadis. If each of the parts managed to combine their solid conviction with intellectual humility, the conflict might have been less severe. Sunni Muslims and Hindus do not compete within the same religious field, and possible rigid certainties may cause fewer problems in their relationship.

Perspective-taking might also help to mitigate conflicts. This is defined as the ability to view a situation from another's point of view (Decety 2005; Eidhamar 2021; Vescio et al. 2003).

When relating to people of other faiths, one needs the willingness and ability to see both one's own and the opponent's conviction through the eyes of the opponent. All humans gain better insight if they can see their convictions through the eyes of those who think differently.

Regarding religious conflict, intellectual humility and the ability of both parties to take the other's perspective could be a decisive tool in softening the conflict (Eidhamar 2021, p. 9; Spiegel 2012, p. 28). This is the case for groups connected to completely different traditions, like Hindus versus Sunni Muslims and Ahmadis. But it may be just as important for groups connected to the same tradition, like Sunni Muslims and Ahmadis.

Perspective-taking and intellectual humility do not mean giving up one's convictions or agreeing with the other. But they might lead to acknowledging a disagreement with mutual respect.

11. Concluding Remarks

The Sasak Muslims are relatively more tolerant toward people who follow different religions, especially the Hindu Balinese. They share historical, cultural, and spatial identities. Their ancestors were residents of Lombok who had once been ruled by a king from South Bali. They both enrich Lombok's cultural diversity and thus promote the development of the multiethnic tourism of this island.

Lombok Balinese Hindus are guaranteed equal access and opportunities to use public spaces to strengthen their religious and cultural identities. They are allowed to maintain large temples inherited by the Balinese king, which have become tourism icons in Lombok. This is not to mention when they celebrate their Balinese Hindu events, like *Nyepi* (the day of seclusion).

The Sasaks also allow the Balinese Hindus to pay homage to and pray at sacred sites associated with venerated Islamic figures. Both groups create an annually shared ritual in the symbolic war of rice cakes (*Perang Topat*) to reenact the history of enmity and hostility to keep peace and harmony in the present.

Public spaces should ideally be developed into an atmosphere where every person or group has equal access and opportunities to manage different kinds of potential resources. Public space is expected to produce the value of freedom of expression, justice, and equality. It accommodates a variety of people expressing varied cultural attributes, creating a mutually strengthening social relationship and cohesion among different people.

The history of conflict in Lombok among its main ethno-religious groups, the Sasak Muslims and Balinese Hindus, has been all but erased by unprecedented tolerance and harmony. It is a valuable lesson to the rest of Indonesia, which is experiencing a rise in religious and ethnic violence and intolerance.

It is undeniable that in other areas of Lombok, the relationship between Balinese Hindus and Sasak Muslims is marked by conflict and tension (see Telle 2014). This shows that the majority–minority relationship in a plural society is very dynamic. The dynamics

of inter- and intrareligious relationships occur along the continuum of integration and conflict. One replaces the other at different times, places, and issues.

The ideas expressed in SIT shed light on intergroup tensions in general, while SDT explains the power relations. Sunni Sasaks may use the perceived truth of their monotheistic faith as a hierarchy-enhancing ideology toward the Hindus.

The relationship between the Sasak Sunnis and the Ahmadis is marked by obvious tension and conflict. This is because, unlike the Balinese Hindus, the Sasak Sunnis do not share historical and cultural identities with the Ahmadis. The former sees the latter as forming a new stream within Islam, which is against basic Islamic teaching. For the former, the latter's theological claim on the prophetic and messianic role of Mirza Gulam Ahmad is not taught in the Quran and Hadith, and this is seen as the most contentious problem.

Adding to these historical and theological explanations, the Source Model of Group Threat may help to explain why Sunni Sasaks tolerate Hindus more than they tolerate the Ahmadis. While the intergroup threat causes one's own group to gather in solidarity, the intragroup threat challenges the internal identity, unity, and harmony. This psychological theory sheds light on why Sunni Sasaks regard the threat from Ahmadis to be more dangerous than the threat from the Hindus.

Author Contributions: Methodology, L.G.E.; writing—original draft preparation, L.G.E. and E.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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