



**BEING A MUSLIM IN A CATHOLIC FAMILY  
AND VICE VERSA:  
Religious Education in Mixed-Faith Families  
in Flores, Eastern Indonesia**

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**Abstract:** This study explores religious education and identity formation among families within mixed-faith families in Flores, Eastern Indonesia, specifically, Muslim-Catholic families. This ethnographic research observes and holds in-depth interviews with eight mixed-faith families comprising four to eight family members. This study finds that mixed-faith families continue to carry out the process of faith education and identity formation for all their members. However, the presence of family members with different religions gives a distinctive character because there are always negotiations, adaptations, and even transformations. The form, intensity, and model of faith education between families differ depending on the context of a mixed-faith family formation, one's position and power in the family, one's way of thinking about religion, and the spiritual environment around the family. Faith education in a mixed-faith family can positively deepen faith, strengthen religious identity, increase knowledge about other religions, foster tolerance, and appreciate diversity. This can also fade away the identity and belief of the minority and even can lead to conversion. However, the bond of family love does not cause differences, fights and conversions into one meaningful conflict.

**Keywords:** Family, Mixed-Faith, Religious Identity, Religious Education, Eastern Indonesia

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## **Introduction**

STUDIES on families show that family remains the primary institution for religious education. Arweek, for instance, argues that family is the prime agent of influence in faith transmission. Parents with a solid religious stance will likely want to pass this on to their children. The family has been the place to continue

religious traditions, including within a mixed-faith family.<sup>1</sup> Baker-Sperry shows a strong relationship between religious attitudes and behaviours of parents and children.<sup>2</sup> Bader and Desmond argues that adolescence is most religious when their parents believe and practice religions.<sup>3</sup> Parents or guardians are the first and foremost responsible for faith education and forming children's religious identities.

In countries without religious education in schools, religious identity begins to be introduced at home. This might be found in the study of Teuku Zulfikar and Ermawati among Indonesian Muslim families in Australia.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, for families of minority religions in the community, religious education is mainly held at home.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it is logical to say that religion is a family heritage and has become a family religion.

However, not all families may have members of the same religion. It can occur due to mixed marriages, religious conversion, adoption, work, and migration.<sup>6</sup> Although the number is low, a

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Arweck and Eleanor Nesbitt, "Young people's Identity Formation in Mixed-faith Families: Continuity or Discontinuity of Religious Traditions?" *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 25:1, 67-87, (2010) DOI: 10.1080/13537900903416820

<sup>2</sup> L Baker-Sperry, "Passing on the faith: The Father's Role in Religious Transmission," *Sociological Focus*, 34: 185-198 (2001)

<sup>3</sup> Christopher D. Bader and Scott A. Desmont, "Do as I Say and as I Do: The Effects of Consistent Parental Beliefs and Behavior Transmission", *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 67. No. 3, pp. 313-329 (2006)

<sup>4</sup> Teuku Zulfikar and Emawati Emawati. "Islamic Education and Religiosity: Voices of the Indonesian Muslim Communities in Australia." *Ulumuna* 24.1 (2020): 24-56. <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v24i1.388>.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Therrien, Josiane LE Gall, and Francesco Cerchiaro. "Above and beyond social boundaries: Everyday life of Mixed Muslim-non-Muslim families in contemporary societies Au-delà des frontières sociales: le vécu des familles mixtes musulmanes-non-musulmanes dans les sociétés contemporaines." *Social Compass* 69.3 (2022): 263-294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686221113253>; Eduardo Terren, and Concha Carrasco. "Faith in school: immigrant families' attitudes towards education in Spain." *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 17.4 (2007): 389-406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09620210701667061>;

<sup>6</sup> Mansyur Radjab, et al, "Religious tolerance practices: A case study of a family with different religions in Toraja ethnicity south Sulawesi province, Indonesia", *International Journal of Management* 11, no.5 (2020): 1145-1154, <https://doi.org/10.34218/IJM.11.5.2020.104>; Myengkyo Seo. "Falling in love and

phenomenon of one house or family with more than one religion among its members, especially Islam and Catholicism, can be encountered in Flores, Eastern Indonesia. Flores is known as the most prominent "Catholic Island" in Indonesia, and Webb describes Flores's people as living on an island where rocks, wood, and trees are also Catholic.<sup>7</sup> Islam, the largest religion in Indonesia, is a minority in this region. These two religions have a long history of relations and complex majority-minority dynamics.

Some questions about religious education and religious identity may arise in response to a mixed Muslim-Catholic family in Flores. How do mixed-faith families carry out faith education and religious identity formation? What are the challenges, difficulties, advantages, and disadvantages that the families face? What does it mean to be a Muslim in a Catholic family or to be Catholic in a Muslim family in Flores? How does the majority-minority dynamic affect this issue?

This research uses an ethnographic approach to explore these questions. Eight mixed-faith (Muslim-Catholic) families were observed and interviewed in depth. Each family has 4-8 family members. There are families whose family heads are Islam with Catholic members and whose family heads are Catholic with Muslim members. One's position in the family, be it the family head or the homeowner, or an ordinary family member is crucial since it relates to the power dynamics in the house, which will affect the family faith and education model.

Research on faith education in mixed-faith families is still lacking, especially in Indonesia, due to the perception that a family with members of the same religion is the ideal form, while the opposite is almost unthinkable socially, culturally, and especially religiously. Research shows that society and religious institutions

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changing gods: Inter-religious marriage and religious conversion in Java, Indonesia." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 41.119 (2013): 76-96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2012.750104>

<sup>7</sup> RAF Paul Webb. "The sickle and the cross: Christians and Communists in Bali, Flores, Sumba and Timor, 1965-67." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 17.1 (1986): 94-112. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463400005221>

have little or no support for mixed-faith families.<sup>8</sup> Interfaith marriage remains difficult in Indonesia. One common argument against interfaith marriages is that children who grow up in such families will become confused about their religious identities. Hence, in most cases, couples opt for religious conversion rather than having an interfaith marriage.<sup>9</sup> Mixed-faith families are, therefore, quite rare, and there is a lack of research on how faith education occurs in mixed-faith families. Thus, this research makes a significant contribution to the literature on mixed-faith families, especially Muslim-Catholic families in a predominantly Catholic area within a Muslim-majority country.

### **Muslim-Catholic Relations and the Formation of Mixed-Faith Family in Flores**

To understand the context of religious education in the Muslim-Catholic family in Flores, one needs to understand the history of these two religions in this region.

Catholicism is the most prominent religion of the Flores population, even though Islam was the first religion to enter and develop on this island. The development of Islam in some parts of Flores Island started at the same time as the early development of Islam in Java, Sumatra, and Kalimantan. Just like on other islands,

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<sup>8</sup> Noryamin Aini, Ariane Utomo, and Peter McDonald. "Interreligious marriage in Indonesia." *Journal of Religion and Demography* 6.1 (2019): 189-214. <https://doi.org/10.1163/2589742X-00601005>; Yohanes S. Lon "Problems Faced by Catholic Partners in Inter-religious Marriage in Flores, South-east Indonesia." *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Education, Humanities, Health and Agriculture, ICEHHA 2021, 3-4 June 2021, Ruteng, Flores, Indonesia*. 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4108/eai.3-6-2021.2310731>; Mohamad Abdun Nasir. "Religion, law, and identity: contending authorities on interfaith marriage in Lombok, Indonesia." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 31.2 (2020): 131-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2020.1773618>

<sup>9</sup> Romli Muhammad, et al. "Legal Consideration of Legal Conversion in Different Religious Marriage in Indonesia." *Russian Journal of Agricultural and Socio Economic sciences (RJOAS)* 12.108 (2020): 89-98. DOI <https://doi.org/10.18551/rjoas.2020-12.11>; Shinta Dewi Rismawati, "Choosing One Religion and Getting Married: The Meaning and Legal Culture of Interfaith Marriages Couples in Purbo Pekalongan, Indonesia." *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)* 8.11 (2019): 869-883. <https://doi.org/10.21275/ART20202752>

Islam initially developed in Flores in the coastal areas before spreading to the highlands.<sup>10</sup> Aside from active evangelization, the religion developed due to marriage. Marriage established close relations between Muslims and the local community. The Sultan of Bima previously forbade Muslims in the West Flores region from interacting with locals because he believed it would be detrimental to their religion, which slowed down the effort to promote Islam there.<sup>11</sup> However, the power of Bima, an Islamic-based sultanate, impacted the influence and development of Islam in this region.

The arrival of Portuguese missionaries in Flores in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, followed by other Dutch and European missionaries, had stopped the spread of Islam in Flores. Islam only began to spread considerably again in Flores in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the improvement of the transport system and connectivity of the economic activities across islands in Indonesia. Many people from Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Lombok, and Sulawesi have come and settled in Flores till today. They trade, set up restaurants and home industries, and have jobs as civil servants and private workers. Many become successful and have a higher economic and social status among the locals, often hiring Catholic maids or becoming supervisors to Catholic staff. With this, the Muslim-Catholic interaction occurs in various events and contexts.

For many years, Catholic schools were the only option for schooling in Flores. In line with the government's policy and support of Islamic religion and education, Islamic schools and boarding schools have flourished in Flores in the last decade, including in rural areas. As a result, many Muslim families prefer to send their children to public or Islamic schools. The number of Muslim studying in Catholic schools has decreased drastically.

Catholicism has a long history in Flores, initially introduced by Portuguese missionaries in the east of the island from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Dutch and other European missionaries continued

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<sup>10</sup> Karel Steenbrink, "Dutch colonial containment of Islam in Manggarai, West-Flores, in favour of Catholicism, 1907-1942." *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land-en volkenkunde/Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 169.1 (2013): 104-128. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-12340024>

<sup>11</sup> Willem Philippus Coolhaas, *Bijdrage tot de kennis van het Manggaraische volk, West Flores*. 1942.

the mission by spreading the religion to the island's west. As a result, at the beginning of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, more than half of the population of Flores Island, who initially adopted paganism and Islam, converted to Catholicism. It happened through the Catholic Church's mission to improve the standard of living rather than focusing solely on evangelization by developing modern infrastructures and providing education or training. In addition, the colonial government also supported European missionaries in the years leading up to and immediately following independence. The Indonesian government did not have significant development programs in eastern Indonesia until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Not surprisingly, studies show that Catholicism is one of the defining identities of the people in Flores; being a Flores is synonymous with being a Catholic.<sup>12</sup>

With the long history of Islam and Catholicism in Flores, the interaction between Muslims and Catholics has been observed for centuries. One of the most common forms of interaction is through an interfaith marriage. In the past, interreligious marriage was not perceived as a significant issue. Legalizing marriage was done through the state, thus, religious differences posed no obstacles to interfaith marriages. However, interfaith marriage became difficult and almost impossible as the government handed over the matter of marriage legalization to religious institutions. As a result, conversion to the spouse's religion becomes the easiest option. Women are more likely to be subjected to religious conversion than men, mainly due to the patriarchal system, which prioritizes men as the heads of the family and defines their faith as the family identity.<sup>13</sup> As conversion is more common, it is difficult to find cases of interfaith marriages between Muslim and Catholic

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<sup>12</sup> Sabine Zurschmitten, "Regulating succession: The challenge to secure the future of long-term Catholic development cooperation in Western Flores, Eastern Indonesia." *Churches, mission and development in the post-colonial Era* (2019): 111-134.

<sup>13</sup> Fransiska Widyawati, "When Love And Faith Collide: Women's Conversion to Husband's Religion in Flores." *Journal Of Indonesian Islam* 14.2 (2020): 335-358. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2020.14.2.335-358>; Muhammad Ansor and Yaser Amri. *Beyond pious critical agency: Women, interfaith marriage and religious conversion in Aceh*. Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2016. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v1i2.368>

families here in Flores today. The Ruteng Diocese has only granted less than eight dispensations for Catholic-Islam interreligious marriage in the past decade. Meanwhile, KUA (the Religious Affairs Office), which only caters to Muslim marriages, does not keep this data.

Apart from marriage, a family with Muslim-Catholic members also occurs because of the tight-knit clan system of "family accommodation". The Flores people are obedient to customs and uphold kinship relations. Family relationships can even transcend other ties. Tule's study shows that the traditional house of the ancestral village is also a unifier for those with different religions.<sup>14</sup> When referring to family, most Flores people refer to an extended family or clan rather than a marital family. People uphold unity, solidarity, and communalism, sometimes even ignoring individual interests in the interests of the extended family. It is what allows one house to have Muslim-Catholic members.

### One Family Two Religions: The Respondents' Family

This section describes eight respondents from mixed-faith families and their backgrounds. Their real names have been changed to maintain their privacy.

Family 1 has a Muslim mother named Anita as the head of the family. She is a widow with three sons. Anita's spouse was a devoted Javanese Muslim. Both of them worked for the government. Anita was a Catholic who converted to Islam when marrying her husband. She embraced Islam and became more religious over time. She diligently performs daily prayers, fasts, and other Islamic laws. Since marriage, she has chosen to wear a hijab to testify to her religious identity. Since getting married and owning a house decades ago, the couple has been very open to supporting and raising Catholic children from Anita's village. As a

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<sup>14</sup> Philipus Tule. "The indigenous Muslim minority group in Ma'undai (keo) of central Flores: Between the house of Islam and the house of culture." *Antropologi Indonesia* (2014). <https://doi.org/10.7454/ai.v0i56.3340>; Eriko Aoki. "Longing for the House of God, Dwelling in the House of the Ancestors: Local Belief and Christianity, and Islam among the Kéo of Central Flores." (2006): 353-355. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30030410>; Philipus Tule. "Wacana identitas Muslim pribumi NTT." (2020). <https://doi.org/10.14203/press.253>

result, Catholics and Muslims have lived in their house for a long time.

At the time of this research, there were seven members in Anita's house: Anita, her daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren. They are all Muslims. Three other members are Catholics: Anita's niece and nephew, who are students (Avi, Agus), and Anita's younger sister (Anggi), unmarried. Apart from these seven people, one of Anita's sons, Amin, lives near her house. Amin sometimes visited Anita's house to give Islamic education to his nephews. During his visit, he also often discusses Islam with Agus, his Catholic cousin, which sometimes leads to arguments.

Family 2 is the Benjamins. He is a community and Catholic religious leader. His family's economic status is well-established because his wife is a civil servant. They have a child in high school and another child in elementary school. Two nieces and nephews stay with them because they go to school in the city, a Catholic boy and a Muslim girl named Bunga. Hence, there are 5 Catholics and 1 Muslim in his house. Bunga, the Muslim one, was born and raised in Jakarta. She attended a public school from elementary to high school and was educated in a strict Islamic environment without Catholic friends. Bunga's mother was Benjamin's sister-in-law from Flores. Bunga's mother was a Catholic but converted to Islam when she married a young man from Jakarta. When Bunga graduated from high school in Jakarta, she chose to study in Flores. Thus, she lives with his uncle's family. She is the only Muslim in the family and is distinctive in her hijab.

Family 3 is Choki family. He is a Catholic who lives with his wife and six children. Choki's wife is a religious individual, while Choki calls himself a faithful Catholic who is an anti-Church. He describes himself as believing in the teachings of Jesus but is against the Church as a religious institution. Choki diligently reads the Bible and prays at home as he dislikes attending church. He likes to teach his family essential Catholic teachings. He often criticizes the Church and calls himself an empowerment activist.

One of his daughters, Cindy, married Chandra who is a Muslim. They are the only interfaith marriage couple to have received a bishop's dispensation in a decade in the Ruteng Diocese in the past decade. From the beginning, Choki did not mind his

daughter dating a Muslim. He thought neither Chandra nor Cindy should convert to each other's religion. However, Chandra's parents were against the interfaith marriage. Chandra's parents and some Islamic religious leaders from MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council) delegates also visited Choki's house, asking Cindy to convert to Islam following her husband. However, Cindy and her parents refused. Eventually, despite going through several conflicts with Chandra's family, Cindy and Chandra successfully had an interfaith marriage in a Catholic church.

Chandra is the only Muslim in Choki family. He supports Chandra in being loyal to Islamic teachings. However, just as Choki is very critical of the Church and Catholicism, he teaches his family, including Chandra, to be critical of Catholicism. He places great emphasis on love, honesty, justice, and kindness. Chandra feels very loved in the family and has a good impression of Catholicism, primarily because of the attitude displayed by his in-laws.

In contrast, he still faces criticism from his parents and his extended family (Muslims) for marrying a Catholic. Every time he visits his family, he gets criticized for not being able to convert his wife. On Christmas 2021, Chandra expressed a desire to convert to Catholicism. Surprisingly, Choki's family and his wife disapproved of his conversion and asked him to reconsider. At the point of the interview, Chandra is still a Muslim.

Family 4 is Diana family. She is the only Catholic in her family. Her husband and children are Muslims. Diana's husband, Deny, is a Muslim from Java with a strong Islamic tradition. When Deny dated Diana, their parents disagreed. Diana's family wanted Deny to convert and vice versa. Finally, Deny's family forced her to convert to Islam and marry in Islamic tradition. However, Diana has never practised Muslim teachings since the beginning and continues to identify herself as a Catholic. They have been married for more than 20 years.

Family 5 is Eko family. Eko is a well-known restaurant owner in his city. He and his wife are from Java and have lived in Flores for almost 16 years to open a business. They have three children and are a devout Muslim family. Due to their growing business, they asked two Catholic women (Esi and Eni) to work and live

with them. Esi and Eni are not related to them by blood but have stayed with them for a long time and are considered family. Esi and Eni come from low-income families in a rural village and have low levels of education, being only junior high school graduates.

Family 6 is the family of Firman. He is a clothing store owner from Padang, Sumatra. They are a devout Islamic family with three children. They have a Catholic maid (Fira) from the village living with them.

Besides those six mixed-faith families, this research also interviews two families who used to have members of different religions but later became one due to conversion. Family 7 is the family of Gandi, a devout Flores Catholic. His wife, Gina, was a Muslim. However, to be able to marry in a religious ceremony, Gina was forced to convert administratively to Catholicism. Even though she converted to Catholicism, her husband supported her worship of Islam and never forced his wife to follow Catholic prayers. Gina even prayed for her child at birth and recited the Koran to the baby. She also prayed for them in Islam even though her son was baptized Catholic. According to Gina, it was due to her husband's kindness and understanding of Islam that she became interested in Catholicism. She asked to go to Church and in neighbourhood prayer groups. After being married for more than seven years, she has fully embraced Catholicism and no longer prays and teaches her children in Islam.

Family 8 is Hilman family, has a similar story to family 7. Hilman is a devout Muslim and the son of an Islamic figure. He married Hany, a Catholic woman who converted to Islam. Despite converting to Islam, Hany initially maintained her Catholic prayers and did not study Islam. Her mother-in-law and husband were understanding and never forced her to follow Islamic prayers. Due to their support and love, she became touched by Islam. She gradually learned Islam, started praying and practising Islamic teachings and accepted Islam as her identity.

### **Faith Education Model in Mixed-faith Families**

How do these mixed-faith families develop and perform faith education in their families? Faith education and spiritual identity

formation in a family occur through many ways and models, as described below.

### *Faith Basic Education*

The families in this study agreed that parents are responsible for teaching their children the fundamental aspects of religion. The central teachings, for example, relate to the creed, who is Allah, his attributes, who is his Prophet, the Holy Scriptures, heaven, hell, and the pillars of faith and religion. In particular, between Islam and Christianity, there are similarities regarding Allah's oneness, but Allah's nature is entirely different. Similarly, there are many similarities regarding prophets, but the views of the Prophet Isa (Jesus Christ) and Prophet Muhammad, are very different.

In Anita family, Ani and her daughter-in-law give simple explanations to their grandchildren and young children about the One God, the True God, the Prophet Muhammad as the messenger of Allah, the Quran as the Holy Book, and the existence of prophets. Others, and images of heaven and hell. As for the adults, two Catholic students and Mrs Ani's son often discuss and argue about the differences and similarities in teaching. Since they are family and mature, the argument is not flawed because it will end well. With that, they are even more challenged to get to know the teachings of faith well and be able to account for or explain them to others.

In Benjamin family, Benjamin, his wife and his teenage son are the ones who explain the central teachings about the Catholic faith to Bunga, a Muslim female student, who often asks about this. She asked because she did not understand or wanted to know, and it could also be in the context of his schoolwork.

In Choki family, faith teachings are often the material for him to invite Chandra to discuss the similarities and differences in religious teachings. The thing is the same between Diana's mother and her husband. They often discuss and argue about similarities and differences in beliefs. Interestingly, both of them also explain their respective versions to their children, who have attended Catholic schools since childhood.

In the families of Eko and Firman, parents (Muslims) teach the basics of the faith to their young children and teenagers. With their

Catholic helpers, they hardly ever talk about the subject of the faith. Sometimes there are questions between employers and servants regarding religion, but they do not end up in a serious debate. The distance in their relationship and educational background makes them not included in the "theological dialogue". The situation is somewhat different from the Gandi and Hilman families, where their spouses converted to their husband's religion. Because their spouses have high education and adequate religious understanding, theological discussions often occur. They agreed that there was a debate, but the more it made them more aware of the teachings of other religions.

### **Home/Family Worship**

Faith education and identity formation mainly occur in a family through worship and praying together. Parents or older people usually show their children how to pray, read and memorize Scriptures, and teach worship procedures. The prayer procedure is the most distinctive identity of each religion.<sup>15</sup> Numerous homes double as community worship spaces, fostering religious identity and faith-based education.

Family 1-8 state that family and community prayers are performed with different intensities in their homes. According to them, the existence of varying prayer procedures becomes their external religious identity within the family.

In Family 1, Anita, her daughter-in-law, and her grandchildren rarely pray together. Praying together only occurs during a special celebration, such as her grandchildren's *aqiqah*. Anita, the child's mother, and the uncle teach their grandchildren Islamic prayers and laws. To deepen his Islamic knowledge and

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<sup>15</sup> Vivienne Mountain, "Prayer is a positive activity for children—a report on recent research." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 10.3 (2005): 291-305. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13644360500347573> ; L. Marks, Sacred Practices in Highly Religious Families: Christian, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslim Perspectives. *Family Process*, 43(2), 217-231, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2004.04302007.x> . Joe M. Chelladurai, David C. Dollahite, and Loren D. Marks. ""The family that prays together...": Relational processes associated with regular family prayer." *Journal of Family Psychology* 32.7 (2018): 849. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000432>

worship, his parents sent him and his sister to a private Qur'anic teacher in the afternoon. Their two Catholic nieces and nephews pray in their rooms. When asked, they are amazed by Anita's persistence in performing the five daily prayers and worship procedures. Without a word, they see it as their aunt's way of educating them in faith. Moreover, the aunt and Muslim family members always remind them to go to Church or worship in the neighbourhood. They often advise them if they neglect or are late for Church. Anita's granddaughter attends a Catholic elementary school and receives lessons on Catholicism. Therefore, she was familiar with Catholic prayers. If she has homework, she asks his two Catholic cousins.

Family 2 (Benjamin-Catholic) always prays together before eating and sometimes before bed. Bunga, as a Muslim, prays in silence. She does not have an opportunity to lead the prayer. Benjamin's house is also often a place of worship for the Catholic community. Bunga helps prepare food and drink for guests. Because of the habit of praying together, Bunga has memorized Catholic prayers. Moreover, she studies at a Catholic campus, joins a PAK/CRE (*Pendidikan Agama Katolik* - Catholic Religious Education), and listens to Catholic prayers. According to Bunga, she initially felt strange and struggled with Catholic prayers. Over time she is happy and gets used to it. In particular, she said that she feels her life is safe and protected because the Benjamin's family always prays for her to be healthy, safe, diligent, and blessed.

She prays in her room. By living in the house of a Catholic, her prayer procedures are not disturbed at all. On the other hand, she is more diligent in praying because she is ashamed of a Catholic family that is so active in praying. The Benjamin's family often reminds her not to forget to pray. While fasting, they support him by providing food for *suhoor* and *iftar*. The Benjamin's children sometimes ask what she was praying for and other Islamic matters, including what they watched on TV or YouTube.

In family 3, Choki family, the habit of praying together is also made, although not every day. There are also occasional prayers involving many Catholics. As previously mentioned, Choki is critical of Catholicism but diligent in praying, reading the Bible,

and giving sermons at home. He encourages Chandra, his Muslim son-in-law, to pray Catholic prayers without coercion. When Catholic family members pray at home, Chandra also prays with them. All are educated in freedom. Chandra admits to performing Islamic prayer but is only sometimes on time. Chandra rarely goes to the mosque during Friday Prayer. During Islamic Holidays or fasting, Choki slightly forces himself to fast and go to the mosque. On special holidays such as Christmas and Easter, he takes his wife to Church even though he is a passive participant.

In family 4, Diana is the only Catholic with an Islamic ID card. She always prays Catholic. She never went to Church again but attended Catholic prayers in the neighbourhood if specially invited (during family funerals or weddings). She feels ashamed to participate in Church because her ID card states she is a Muslim. She teaches Catholic values and prayers to her Muslim children. Their children attend Catholic Elementary Schools and join Catholic Religious Education). When studying at a public high school, her son chose PAK because he was used to it from a young age and considered it easier to learn. Her children also participate in Catholic religious activities in the neighbourhood. Her husband performs Islamic prayers and worships, sometimes diligent but lazy at other times. He does not forbid his wife to pray Catholic and educate his Muslim children on Catholic values. Their children learn Islamic prayer and education while studying outside Flores in an Islamic environment.

Family 5-6 (Eko and Firman), Muslim employers with Catholic members have different feels. Their relationship is not blood ties but master and servant. Hence there is a kind of barrier between them. In this relationship, they tend to give less attention to religious or faith development than those who are not family members. They neither forbid nor encourage them to go to Church. However, maids are not free to leave the house, including worship in the neighbourhood or the Church. If they have a lot of work, they still work on Sundays. They also see their employers praying and worshipping according to Islamic procedures.

For families 7-8, whose wives convert to their husband's religions, as previously mentioned, prayer together within the marital family and extended family is officially performed

according to the husband's faith. However, they are not forced to convert beliefs and can pray in their way in their private rooms. Slowly they learn to pray and follow the prayer according to their husband's religion. They claim blessings of the two traditions give them spiritual wealth.

### Religious Symbols at Home

Families usually place religious symbols and sacred objects in their homes. These objects function as symbols of identity, worship facilities, sources of strength, and markers of holy areas in one house. Parents usually use these religious and cultural symbols as a means of religious education. Catholics, especially in Flores, are familiar with sacred objects at home, such as crosses, statues of Jesus, Mother Mary, St. Joseph, the Holy Family, pictures and paintings of Jesus, saints, rosaries, scriptures, prayer books, scapulars, and several other religious objects. Although these objects are only worship tools, many studies show they are also glorified in Catholic theology.<sup>16</sup> It is different from Islam which forbids statues or images of the Prophet Muhammad. However, some calligraphies or photos of mosques in Mecca, Medina, or other sacred places, are often placed at homes as identity markers. Besides these objects, there are also the Qur'an, worship books, tasbih (Islamic prayer beads), and worship materials (prayer mats, *mukena* [women's unique clothing for prayer]).

In this research, there are sacred objects in the homes of dominant-Catholic families. They claim to feel safe in the presence of these objects. This feeling is also taught to all family members. Furthermore, they use these objects as tools of faith education. Bunga, the only Muslim in Benjamin family, was initially shocked by all these things. Being raised in an Islamic family made her not get used to them. She felt uncomfortable and, simultaneously,

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<sup>16</sup> Anna-Karina, Hermkens, "Rosaries and Statues: Mediating Divine Intervention in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea." *Religions* 12.6 (2021): 376. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060376>; Meredith B McGuire, *Lived religion: Faith and practice in everyday life*. Oxford University Press, 2008. William A Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, theology, and worship in dialogue*. Baker Academic, 2001.

afraid because she was surrounded by something "holy". She felt like she was being watched by these things, making her anxious about her religion. She then asked what they were, what they did, why they were there, the story behind them, and other questions. Family members explain them all to her. Gradually she feels familiar, gains new knowledge, and understands Catholicism with its symbols. She is grateful because she can get things other Muslim friends do not get. Since then, she has felt comfortable and no longer feels like these objects are watching her. On the other hand, she also has the Qur'an and some distinctive objects such as *mukena*, prayer rugs, and prayer beads. She also has an opportunity to explain to family members the meaning and function of these objects.

Chandra, the only Muslim in Choki family, does not feel strange about spiritual objects since his family raised him in a predominantly Catholic environment. Since childhood, he has seen these objects in the homes of neighbours, friends, and schools. He feels normal when he marries his Catholic wife and lives in his father-in-law's house. As time went on, he became more and more respectful of these objects. He even began to believe that these objects shelter him and give him a sense of security.

Anita, as a Muslim family head, Islamic symbols appear in the calligraphy and pictures of the mosque, besides the prayer materials. For her two Catholic nieces, it's not an alien since it often appears on TV. However, they also ask about it and get additional knowledge. Anita and her family do not forbid her nieces to have Catholic spiritual objects, but they can only be seen in their bedroom and not in the public area of the house. His grandson often asked about statues and spiritual things in their rooms. Here there is an exchange of knowledge.

In Diana family, the only Catholic, she places all the Catholic symbols, such as statues, the Bible, and a rosary, in her room. Her Muslim husband didn't mind at all. However, those objects are not available in the living or family room or areas that are open to others. It is a deal between her and her husband because, socially and religiously, her family is Islam. Her children, educated in Catholic schools and living in Catholic environments, are also

accustomed to Catholic symbols. Diana is also used to Islam symbols and sacred religious objects belonging to her husband and children. They see this diversity as an advantage. They said there is no confusion about faith and religion regarding this matter.

Meanwhile, in families where Catholics are servants, they keep Catholic objects in their rooms for personal use. The employer is not angry and does not care too much. They also learn about Muslim worship materials from their employers and become more aware of them. Gandhi family, whose wife was originally Muslim and has converted to Catholicism, shared Catholic and Islamic religious symbols. When Gandhi's wife adopted Catholicism of her own accord, they kept Islam worship materials, prayer books, and the Koran. Sometimes she reads them. According to her, she feels to have a dual power because of these two religions. The same thing happened with Hany, who was originally Catholic, converted to Islam, and then adopted Islam of her own accord. She still has the rosary and the Bible, even though she no longer uses them to worship.

### **Learn from the Kitchen and Dining Table**

The family and the house are closely related to the kitchen and dining table. The warmest family togetherness usually happens when eating together. Many families use mealtimes to share moral and religious messages. Indeed, many families today have different eating habits due to mobilization and working hours. Moreover, a traditional family's kitchen is no longer the only food source. Food stalls or restaurants have replaced many kitchens at home, which have become a new lifestyle for modern society.

When Catholics and Islam talk about food, the most sensitive thing is the difference in beliefs regarding halal and haram food. More explicitly, Islam is very concerned about the issue of consuming pork or meats that are not slaughtered and prepared according to Islamic procedures. It is also a sensitive issue in Flores. Previous research has shown pork is the most popular menu, a "must-have food" item among Catholic families. Almost all Catholic families raise pigs. They also sell pork publicly,

available in all markets, and it is effortless to find pork stalls. The pig symbolizes cultural identity because it is the dominant animal for traditional ritual sacrifices. Pig in Flores has many terms according to their functions.<sup>17</sup> It is nearly impossible for a Catholic family not to consume or prepare pork at home. Further, chickens, goats, or cows sold by Catholics in the market are slaughtered without Islamic procedures.

How do mixed-faith families deal with this sensitive issue? Benjamin family admitted that their habit of providing pork at home had not changed much, although Bunga (his Muslim nephew) lived with them. They still prepare pork at home. At first, they were hesitant, but they explained their custom to the Muslim family member. They forbid her to consume it and prepare other menus for her. Benjamin told his family not to force Bunga to consume pork. However, she refused to speak. She asked not to be questioned about this. On a different occasion, Benjamin said that until now, Bunga still does not consume pork. However, she is used to pork-based food. She participated in the preparation and did not bother with different menus and utensils contaminated with pork.

A member of Choki family, Chandra, a Muslim son-in-law, also continues to cook and eat pork. Initially, they provided another menu for Chandra. However, as explained earlier, Choki is a person who is critical of his religion. He also challenged Chandra with a question about the reasons for not eating Pork. He explained Catholic teaching regarding forbidden/contaminated food, mentioning a text that says what goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean', but what comes out of his mouth (words or heart) is what makes him 'unclean'. Since Chandra likes to criticize and rationalize the teachings of his religion, he also invites his son-in-law to be rational with his Islamic faith. Then, Chandra influences Choki and begins acting like his father-in-law,

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<sup>17</sup> Fransiska Widyawati, "The Tradition of Woni: Models of Adaptations of Manggarai Catholics in encounters with Muslims." *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-agama* 10.2 (2020): 252-277. <https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v10i2.1455>; Yohanes S. Lom, and Fransiska Widyawati. "Food and local social harmony: Pork, communal dining, and muslim-Christian relations in Flores, Indonesia." *Studia Islamika* 26.3 (2019): 445-474. <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v26i3.9917>

who is sensible and permissive to religious teachings. Moreover, from the beginning, Chandra was not a very devout Islam like his parents. Even though he is still a Muslim, Chandra has joined in eating pork. According to him, there was guilt at first, but over time he became used to it and was ignorant. Besides that, he even wanted to convert to Catholicism, but his in-laws and wife told him to reconsider.

Firman and his family are Catholic. Then, his wife converted to Catholicism due to marriage. About seven years into their early marriage, even though Firman's wife has an ID as a Catholic, they do not provide pork because Firman respects his wife. Moreover, his wife, as the one who shops and cooks, will not choose to buy pork because she still adopts Islam. Firman will eat pork outside the house, such as at his parent's house or a party. Only in the seventh year, after his wife said she accepted the Catholic, did they sometimes eat pork at home.

To honour Diana's husband, she does not serve pork at her house. Until now, she only eats pork at her parents' house. At a public party, where many people are present, she does not eat pork, even though there are no Muslims, since the public knows that on her ID card, she is a Muslim, especially if there are Muslims at the party.

Hilman has a different experience. All his family members are all Muslims and consequently, they do not eat pork. However, they know that Hany, who converted from Catholicism to Islam, still eats pork when she returns to his parent's house or his Catholic relative. Her in-laws once forbade it, especially when breastfeeding her child (their grandson). According to them, breast milk should not be contaminated with pork. Nevertheless, she still consumed it secretly in the early days of the marriage. But now she has stopped eating pork. She also taught her children not to consume pork when visiting their Catholic family's house. Pork was never available for Bunga family and two Muslim employers. The family also forbids Catholic members from bringing pork into their houses. They can only eat it in another home or another restaurant.

## Moral, Ethics, Love, and Family Teachings

In contrast to worship, laws, and religious symbols that are unique between religions, teachings on morals, ethics, behaviour, and love have similarities because they are relatively universal. Indeed, there are particular ethics and morals related to religion, but there are universal values that intersect. This aspect of humanity is the most substantial bridge that brings together different faiths. When there are differences in teachings, society and universal values will be the best link between religions.<sup>18</sup>

In this research, all respondents and their families agree with this. Apart from praying time, everyone feels forgetful of their different religions. They are one. They found a unifying meeting point in ethics, morals, and human values. For this reason, they remind each other and encourage everyone to respect human values, courtesy, discipline, different religions, honesty, fairness, and tolerance. Respondents admitted that religious differences do not prevent them from performing religious and moral education in their homes. Family ties are also the primary reason they support, liven up, and respect each other. Love and family ties transcend differences. When differences lead to quarrels or conflicts, they see brotherhood and love as aspects that bind them tightly. This reality supports Tule's research which looks at kinship and family ties in Flores beyond religious differences.<sup>19</sup>

All those involved in this research admit that the presence of other family members in their homes made them compete to become better human beings. They also acknowledge that living together under the same roof changes their initially rigid and conservative perspective towards other religions. They gain more knowledge about other faiths and become more appreciative and

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<sup>18</sup> Sokip. "Character building in islamic society: A case study of Muslim families in tulungagung, East Java, Indonesia." *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 10.2, 2019, pp. 224-242. <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/216573/>; Mukaddas Otajonovna Karimova, Aziza Rakhimovna Saidullaeva. "Pedagogical Basis of the Use of Universal and National Values In The Spiritual And Moral Education Of Children In The Family". *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology* 17, no. 7 (November 6, 2020): 8547-8555. Accessed September 28, 2022. <https://www.archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/view/3637>.

<sup>19</sup> Tule, *Ibid*.

respectful from the emotional side. Muslims and Catholics defend each other when there are opposing views from people/societies.

## Models of Faith Education in Mixed-religion Families

The ethnographic data presented in this research finds that faith education in mixed-faith religion occurs in several models.

First, regarding the method and content of faith education and religious identity, there are similarities between families with the same religion and those with diverse beliefs. They apply faith education through worship, religious rituals, religious symbols, morals, and ethics. However, in a mixed-faith family, the content is about the knowledge and practice of one religion and two religions. Different rituals, worship, and religious symbols emphasize their distinct religious identities. Differences make them more critical and capable of establishing interfaith communication between religions.

Second, regarding the position and power of religious adherents in the family, the spiritual education model will depend on the religion embraced by the family head. Suppose the family head or the owner of the house is a Catholic. In that case, by utilizing the education, religious, and moral nuances as references are according to Catholicism and vice versa. Regarding functional-material and master-worker relations, attention to education and faith expression for the minority is low. Here we can see that we cannot separate religion from power, hegemony, and gender issues.

Third, regarding education and one's perspective on religion, a family with high-educated members, especially the family head, tends to be open-minded and critical of religion. This will also reflect the family's model when implementing faith education. However, the lack of concern for religious matters from the family head also reflects the family's low regard for the quality of education.

Fourth, different members in the family will make each member negotiate, adapt, and even transform knowledge and behaviour in the family. Families become more adaptive to changes and differences in religious teachings and arrange their

religious behaviour and education to live harmoniously in one family.

Fifth, it is undeniable that differences in religious teachings can erode someone's quality in performing their religion, such as being lazy to pray, unable to worship because of their obligation to work, or doing what their religion forbids (such as eating Pork). In addition, living together in different religions as one family can encourage conversion or potential conversion to other faiths both administratively and by their own decisions. However, the family does not see religious conversions as controversial compared to how the public usually considers this phenomenon.

Sixth, although there are differences in religion, religious education, worship, and religious teachings, there are always similarities, especially in universal instructions concerning ethics and morals. Those are the unifier above all differences. This research also proves that love and trust are the strongest bonds and binders to unite families. Differences never lead to conflict, hatred, and division, as is common in society. In other words, the interfaith conflict will never occur if everyone can love other people as they love their families.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that faith education and religious identity formation in mixed-faith families also occur. No one pattern applies to all families. The form, intensity, and model between one family and another differ. This research has a significant contribution in the context of Indonesian plurality, especially the perception that families with members of the same religion are an ideal form, while mixed-faith families are still perceived as having problems socially, culturally, and especially religiously.

This research aims to encourage similar research in different contexts. Since the writer conducted this research in Flores, which has a majority Catholic population, Catholicism greatly influences family education, even in predominantly Muslim families. Finally, this research does not aim to answer whether the model of education, negotiation, adaptation, and transformation found in

mixed-faith families also occurs in other areas, for example, in Muslim-majority regions.

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