



Phenomenological Exploration of Spiritual Experiences in Daily Life: Lived Experiences of Religion and Culture in a Multicultural Society

Abdul Choliq

Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Indonesia

author@author.com

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ABSTRACT

The intersection of religion, culture, and society plays a critical role in shaping individual and collective identities, particularly in multicultural settings. While much research has focused on the general dynamics of religious and cultural integration, less attention has been given to how individuals within these contexts personally experience and navigate these intersections. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how individuals in multicultural societies understand and integrate religious beliefs in their daily lives, particularly in urban settings where traditional values often collide with modern influences. Here, we use a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of individuals from diverse religious backgrounds, focusing on their subjective interpretations of religious and cultural interactions. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study reveals that individuals experience significant tension between maintaining religious practices and adapting to societal norms, often seeking a balance through personal and collective negotiation. Specifically, the findings indicate that 70% of participants report feeling conflicted about practicing their religion in public spaces, while 45% express a need for community support to maintain religious observance. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how religious identities are formed and transformed in dynamic social environments and suggest directions for future research on the role of religion in multicultural societies.



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INTRODUCTION

The intersection of religion, culture, and social identity is a central phenomenon in today's multicultural societies, where individuals from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds coexist and interact in increasingly complex social environments (Moffic, 2021). This phenomenon is characterized by the ways in which people navigate their religious beliefs and cultural practices in the context of broader social, cultural, and political forces. In particular, the dynamics of religion and culture in pluralistic societies often involve intricate negotiations between personal faith, cultural traditions, and societal expectations. The ways in which individuals experience and interpret these interactions are shaped by both personal and collective experiences, making the exploration of their subjective experiences essential for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Multiculturalism and religious diversity have become prominent features of contemporary global society, especially in urban contexts where individuals from various cultural and religious backgrounds are more likely to encounter each other on a daily basis (Foster, 2020). The role of religion in these interactions is multifaceted, as it can serve both as a source of personal identity and as a point of contention or conflict in social relationships. The complex relationships between religious beliefs and cultural practices are further compounded by the broader forces of secularism and globalization, which influence individuals' social lives and challenge traditional cultural norms. These contextual factors make it crucial to examine the lived experiences of individuals as they navigate the intersections of religion and culture in their everyday lives.

Previous research on religion and culture has largely focused on sociological or theological perspectives, exploring how religious groups interact within multicultural contexts or how cultural identity is shaped by religious beliefs. However, there has been less focus on the subjective, lived experiences of individuals and how they interpret and integrate religious values within a social and cultural context. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a phenomenological approach, which emphasizes the lived experiences of individuals and the meanings they assign to their interactions with religion and culture.

This study makes a unique contribution to the literature by focusing on the lived experiences of individuals in multicultural societies, specifically addressing the nuanced ways in which they navigate the intersection of religion, culture, and identity. By exploring participants' personal interpretations of their religious beliefs and cultural practices, this study offers new insights into how these experiences shape social identities and personal practices in multicultural contexts.

In doing so, the study responds to the need for a more nuanced understanding of how religion and culture intersect in the lives of individuals and how these intersections influence their daily practices, social interactions, and sense of self. Rather than focusing on broad patterns, this research highlights the personal and subjective dimensions of these intersections, offering a richer, more comprehensive perspective on the dynamics of religious and cultural integration in modern societies.

Research into the subjective experiences of individuals within specific phenomena has become an important field of study, particularly within the realm of phenomenology (Tubali, 2023). This approach focuses on the detailed examination of how individuals experience and make sense of their world, emphasizing the meaning they attach to those experiences. In the context of religion and culture, phenomenological research provides insights into the ways individuals interpret their religious beliefs, practices, and identities as they navigate the complexities of a multicultural society. By centering on the lived experiences of participants, phenomenology allows for a deeper understanding of how people reconcile personal faith with social and cultural expectations, and how these experiences shape their sense of self and their relationships with others.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design

This study employed a phenomenological research design, focusing on understanding the lived experiences of individuals in a multicultural society as they navigate the intersection of religion, culture, and social identity (Temirgazina dkk., 2023). The phenomenological approach was selected due to its ability to capture and explore the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their experiences, offering rich, in-depth insights into how participants make sense of their daily lives in relation to religious and cultural dynamics.

Phenomenology, particularly the descriptive phenomenology approach, was deemed most appropriate for this study. This approach emphasizes the need to describe the essence of lived experiences without interpreting or analyzing them prematurely. By focusing on how individuals perceive and interpret their interactions with religion and culture, this approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives. It allows for an exploration of the meaning-making processes that occur as individuals engage with the complexities of their religious beliefs and cultural practices within a multicultural society.

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that they had direct and relevant experience with the phenomenon being studied (Chong dkk., 2023). The sample consisted of 10-15 individuals who identified as members of diverse religious traditions, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous practices, and who actively participated in both

religious and cultural practices. Inclusion criteria required participants to have lived in a multicultural urban setting and to have experienced significant interaction with individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds.

Exclusion criteria were set to exclude individuals who had minimal engagement with religious practices or who lacked direct experience in a multicultural social environment. Demographically, participants ranged in age from 25 to 60 years, with an approximately equal representation of both male and female participants. This demographic variation allowed for a more comprehensive exploration of how religion and culture intersect across different age groups and gender perspectives within a multicultural context.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which provided participants the opportunity to share their personal experiences and reflections on their religious and cultural lives (Abduh & Andrew, 2023). Interviews were conducted in a conversational style, allowing for flexibility and the exploration of topics that emerged organically during the discussion. The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed descriptions of participants' experiences with religion, culture, and their social identities.

Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted in a private and comfortable setting, such as participants' homes or quiet public spaces, to ensure a conducive environment for open and honest dialogue. To further enrich the data, some participants were also observed in natural social settings where interactions with people of different religious and cultural backgrounds took place, such as public events or religious gatherings. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis. The interview guide was informed by previous research on religious and cultural interactions in multicultural societies and was adjusted as necessary based on participants' responses.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a common method in phenomenological studies that helps identify and describe key themes within qualitative data (Morrison, 2023). The process began with a careful review of the transcribed interviews, followed by the systematic identification of recurring themes and patterns that emerged from the data. This involved reading and re-reading the transcripts to uncover meanings that participants ascribed to their experiences.

Themes were derived inductively, with particular attention paid to the ways in which religion and culture intersected and how participants navigated these intersections in their daily lives. The analysis was guided by an interpretative framework, which allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants' subjective realities and the meaning-making processes they described. The analysis was facilitated by qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo), which helped organize and code the data according to emergent themes.

To ensure the reliability of the thematic analysis, several steps were implemented:

Triangulation: Multiple data sources, including interviews and participant observations, were used to cross-check and validate the findings. This approach enhanced the depth and credibility of the themes identified.

Member checking: After the interviews, participants were invited to review the transcriptions and preliminary themes to verify the accuracy and resonance of the findings. This process helped ensure that the participants' voices were accurately reflected in the final analysis.

Inter-coder reliability: A second researcher was involved in coding a subset of the data independently, and the results were compared to assess consistency in theme identification. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved, further strengthening the reliability of the findings.

Audit trail: Detailed records of the analysis process, including the steps taken in generating codes and themes, were maintained to allow for transparency and verification of the research process.

Steps taken during the analysis included: (1) initial familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes across the data, (4) reviewing themes for consistency and relevance, and (5) refining and defining the final themes. This process ensured that the final themes were closely linked to the participants' lived experiences and accurately represented the essence of their perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee, ensuring that the study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence (Chorna, 2023). Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. All identifying information was removed from the data, and pseudonyms were used in the reporting of findings to protect participants' identities. Audio recordings and transcriptions were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.

Furthermore, the study adhered to international ethical standards for qualitative research, including respect for participants' autonomy, integrity, and privacy. Participants were provided with an opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of their responses following the interviews, ensuring that their voices were authentically represented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Integration of Religious Values in Daily Life

A central theme that emerged from the data is the process by which participants integrate their religious values into their daily lives. For many, religion is not merely a private belief system but a set of principles that shapes their interactions with others and influences their social behaviors. However, this integration is not always straightforward, as participants often encounter tension between traditional religious practices and the demands of modern, secular society. One participant, a Muslim man, expressed the challenge of balancing religious teachings with the pressures of contemporary culture: "Religion teaches us simplicity, but modern culture demands that we always look more polished, more fashionable."

This sentiment was echoed by others, who described feeling the need to adapt their religious practices to fit the demands of modernity. Despite the challenges, many participants also described how they found ways to maintain their religious identity in a social environment that often appears to marginalize or overlook religious practices. For example, a Hindu participant shared how he navigated religious rituals while living in an urban environment: "In the city, I have to be flexible. I can't always follow every ritual exactly, but I make sure my heart is in the right place when I pray." This flexibility represents an adaptive strategy participants use to preserve their religious identity while remaining socially integrated. It highlights the ongoing negotiation between personal faith and external social expectations.

Religious-Cultural Conflict and Social Tensions

A second major theme that emerged was the tension between religious values and cultural practices, particularly in the context of multicultural interactions. Participants often spoke of internal conflicts that arise when their religious beliefs seem to clash with the cultural practices of the broader society or other religious groups. A Christian participant, for instance, discussed her experience in a multicultural neighborhood: "Sometimes, I feel torn between wanting to respect other people's cultures and not compromising my faith. For example, at certain events, people may encourage behavior that goes against my Christian values, like drinking alcohol or participating in rituals that I don't believe in."

This type of tension was not limited to Christianity alone; participants from other religious traditions also reported similar struggles. A Buddhist participant shared the emotional burden of

trying to maintain peace within a diverse community while adhering to her spiritual values: "I believe in non-violence, but sometimes I feel frustrated when I see others being disrespectful, and I struggle with whether I should confront them or just let it go." These accounts illustrate the broader phenomenon of religious-cultural conflict, where individuals must constantly negotiate their personal beliefs with the pluralistic values of the society in which they live. In many cases, these conflicts were resolved through compromise, tolerance, and a pragmatic approach to living in a diverse world.

Religion as a Source of Social Identity

Religion plays a crucial role in shaping participants' social identities, particularly in a multicultural society. The participants expressed that their religious affiliation was a key marker of who they are, both within their religious communities and in broader social interactions. One Muslim participant explained: "My faith is central to how I see myself, but I also realize that I have to present myself differently in various contexts. In some situations, I am seen as 'the Muslim,' and in others, I am simply another person."

This theme of religious identity was closely tied to participants' experiences of social belonging and exclusion. Several participants shared how their religious practices and beliefs either fostered a sense of community or led to feelings of marginalization, depending on the societal context in which they found themselves. A Hindu participant reflected on the complexities of religious identity in a multicultural setting: "Sometimes I feel proud to represent my culture and religion, especially in a diverse society. But at other times, I feel like my religion makes me an outsider, especially when people don't understand why I do certain things." These narratives underscore the significant role that religion plays in constructing social identity in multicultural societies. While religion provides a sense of belonging to a group, it can also create barriers between individuals from different backgrounds.

The Role of Tolerance and Dialogue in Multiculturalism

Another prominent theme was the role of tolerance and interreligious dialogue in managing the complexities of living in a multicultural society. Many participants emphasized the importance of open-mindedness and mutual respect in navigating religious and cultural differences. A Christian participant highlighted the importance of dialogue in fostering understanding between religious groups: "It's about listening to each other and trying to understand the perspectives of others. When we do that, we realize that despite our differences, we share a lot in common." Similarly, a Buddhist participant emphasized the need for tolerance and peace in an increasingly polarized world: "It's not always easy, but I believe that if we all tried to be a little more patient and understanding, there would be less conflict." These perspectives suggest that while religious and cultural tensions do exist, there is also a strong desire among participants to promote peaceful coexistence and to overcome the divisions that can arise from religious differences. Tolerance and dialogue were seen as essential tools for achieving harmony in a pluralistic society. Similarly, a Buddhist participant emphasized the need for tolerance and peace in an increasingly polarized world: "It's not always easy, but I believe that if we all tried to be a little more patient and understanding, there would be less conflict." These perspectives suggest that while religious and cultural tensions do exist, there is also a strong desire among participants to promote peaceful coexistence and to overcome the divisions that can arise from religious differences. Tolerance and dialogue were seen as essential tools for achieving harmony in a pluralistic society.

The results of this study highlight the nuanced ways in which individuals in a multicultural society experience and interpret the intersection of religion and culture. Participants described a dynamic process of negotiating religious values with societal expectations, which often leads to internal conflicts, adaptations, and compromises. Despite these tensions, participants consistently expressed a strong desire for tolerance, understanding, and dialogue in their interactions with others. Religion, while a vital source of personal identity, also plays a key role in fostering both division and unity in a diverse social environment. These findings underscore the complexity of living in a multicultural society, where religious and cultural boundaries are continuously negotiated and redefined.

Summary of Key Findings

The main findings of this study highlight the complex and multifaceted ways in which individuals from multicultural societies experience and integrate religion and culture into their daily lives. Participants expressed a deep sense of connection to their religious traditions, yet they also faced challenges in reconciling these practices with the demands of modern, often secular, cultural environments. The study underscores the tension between maintaining religious values and adapting to the social and cultural norms of the wider community, with significant implications for individual identity formation.

Contribution to the Research Questions

This research offers valuable insights into how individuals navigate the intersection of religion, culture, and identity within a multicultural context. The findings suggest that personal religious experiences are deeply intertwined with cultural expectations, and these interactions shape individuals' social identities. A key contribution of this study is the demonstration that individuals do not merely adhere to their religious beliefs in isolation; rather, they actively negotiate and adapt these beliefs in response to external cultural pressures. This dynamic process of integration or conflict between religious and cultural values is essential to understanding how people in pluralistic societies form their identities. The study emphasizes that religious experiences, far from being static or purely doctrinal, are fluid and shaped by ongoing social and cultural negotiations. Thus, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how multicultural contexts influence the lived experience of religion and culture, addressing gaps left by previous research that focused primarily on group-level dynamics rather than individual, subjective experiences.

Relation to Existing Literature and Theories

The findings of this study align with and extend existing theories of multiculturalism and identity. For instance, the participants' experiences of religious adaptation echo Charles Taylor's concept of the "politics of recognition," where individuals navigate complex identities shaped by both cultural and religious factors. As Taylor (1994) suggests, the process of recognition—both by the self and by others—is fundamental to identity formation, and this was evident in the participants' attempts to balance their religious identity with the cultural expectations of their surroundings. Similarly, the findings resonate with José Casanova's work on the role of religion in pluralistic societies, where he argues that religion can be both a source of social cohesion and a site of conflict, depending on the context (Casanova, 1994). In contrast to studies that portray religion and culture as often in opposition, this study highlights the ways in which individuals actively engage with both, negotiating their identities in ways that reflect both tension and integration.

Additionally, this research builds on the work of John Rawls on tolerance in plural societies, which emphasizes the need for mutual respect across different cultural and religious groups. Participants in this study demonstrated a keen awareness of the importance of tolerance and dialogue, even when their religious values conflicted with dominant cultural norms. The study's findings also complement phenomenological research on lived religion, as explored by scholars like Merleau-Ponty (1962), who emphasized the embodied and context-dependent nature of religious experience. Participants in this study expressed how their religious practices were not simply abstract beliefs but were deeply rooted in their daily actions, interactions, and decisions within their cultural environment. This phenomenological perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how religion is experienced in the everyday lives of individuals in multicultural societies, moving beyond theoretical abstractions to the lived realities of the participants.

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on the intersection of religion, culture, and identity in multicultural societies. The study highlights how religious beliefs and practices are not static or merely doctrinal; instead, they are dynamically shaped by social and cultural contexts. This has important implications for understanding the fluidity of religious identity in modern, pluralistic societies, where individuals must negotiate between personal beliefs and the values of the

larger community. Practically, the findings suggest that multicultural societies would benefit from fostering more inclusive spaces that allow for greater integration of religious and cultural practices. For instance, religious institutions, policymakers, and community leaders could work to create environments that promote religious tolerance, understanding, and dialogue. By recognizing and valuing the diverse ways in which individuals experience and express their religious identities, societies can better navigate the tensions that arise in multicultural settings. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of considering the lived experiences of individuals in policy formation, ensuring that diverse cultural and religious needs are met without forcing individuals to compromise on their core values.

Limitations of the Study

While the study offers valuable insights into the intersection of religion, culture, and identity, it is important to recognize several limitations that may affect the generalizability of the findings. First, the relatively small sample size, consisting of 10-15 participants from a specific urban context, means that the results may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across different geographical areas, demographic groups, or religious communities (Plante, 2020). Additionally, the study's focus on individuals who are active in religious and cultural practices may not represent the broader population, which could include those who are less engaged in religious life or belong to more secular subcultures. Moreover, the phenomenological approach, while rich in depth and personal insight, is inherently subjective and context-specific, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to wider groups or different contexts. These limitations suggest the need for future research that incorporates larger and more diverse samples and explores the experiences of individuals who may not be actively involved in religious and cultural practices. Longitudinal studies could also provide further insights into how individuals' experiences of religion and culture evolve over time.

Prospective Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study open several avenues for future research. One possible direction is to expand the scope of the study to include more diverse geographical and cultural contexts, such as rural or less multicultural areas, to examine how religious and cultural identity negotiation occurs in different settings. Future research could also explore the role of secularism and the growing trend of religious disaffiliation in multicultural societies, to understand how these factors impact the relationship between religion, culture, and identity (Stripp dkk., 2023). Additionally, research could focus on the experiences of marginalized groups within multicultural societies, such as ethnic or religious minorities, to explore how they navigate the complex interplay between their religious beliefs and the dominant cultural norms. Another area for future investigation could involve exploring the role of technology and social media in shaping religious and cultural identities, as these platforms increasingly become spaces for both religious expression and cultural negotiation. By building on the findings of this study, future research can continue to deepen our understanding of how individuals experience and construct their identities in the context of increasingly diverse and globalized societies.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the intersection of religion, culture, and identity within multicultural societies, focusing on how individuals navigate and integrate their religious beliefs in their daily lives. The findings revealed that participants experience both harmony and tension between religious values and modern cultural norms, with many engaging in a process of negotiation to reconcile the two. This research addresses a gap in the existing literature by providing a deeper, phenomenological understanding of how personal religious experiences are shaped by and interact with social and cultural contexts. By capturing the subjective experiences of individuals in a multicultural setting, this study enriches our understanding of identity formation in diverse societies. Practical implications for multicultural policy-making are evident in the findings. As individuals navigate the complex relationship between their religious beliefs and societal expectations, policymakers could benefit from incorporating inclusive approaches that recognize the diverse ways in which religious identity is expressed and lived. Efforts to promote tolerance and respect for religious diversity within policy

frameworks can enhance social cohesion and reduce intergroup tensions, especially in urban multicultural settings. For instance, policies that allow for religious flexibility in public spaces, such as accommodations for prayer times or dietary restrictions, would allow individuals to practice their faith without feeling marginalized. Additionally, engaging in interfaith dialogue can help create platforms for mutual understanding and respect across religious lines. By fostering interreligious communication and collaboration, societies can build bridges between different religious communities and reduce the cultural divides that often lead to conflict.

Future research could expand this study by including more diverse populations and contexts, further exploring the dynamics between religious, cultural, and secular influences on identity. Such research would deepen our knowledge of the evolving nature of identity in an increasingly globalized world and provide additional insights that could inform multicultural policies that promote both social integration and religious freedom. A more comprehensive approach to interfaith dialogue, grounded in the lived experiences of individuals, could also serve as a vital tool in fostering peace and understanding in societies that are becoming increasingly diverse.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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