

The Malay-Muslim Identity in Relation to Non-Muslim Public Roles: A Social Psychological Perspective

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Abstract

Malays are increasingly referring to themselves as Muslims (religious identity) rather than Malay (ethnic identity). Despite the importance of their religious identity for understanding themselves, it is also significant in intergroup relations with others in Malaysia. This study identified the components of Malay-Muslim identity, socially and social-psychologically and examined their influences on non-Muslim public roles. The impacts of Malay-Muslim identity in Malaysia were understudied and overshadowed by Malay ethnic identity. The study involved questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews. The data collected were analysed using statistical and content analysis. Four themes were explored. The results indicate that the Malay religious identity displays substantial challenge towards non-Muslims, especially when perceiving that non-Muslims should not participate in government employment and typically hold prominent positions. These responses, from the perspective of social identity, are due to strong self-identification as land owners and special positions granted by the Federal Constitution, which created differentiation or set boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Quran does not explicitly advocate for the exclusion of non-Muslims from positions of public authority. Nonetheless, Quranic verses that set boundaries between believers and non-believers are where prejudice and discrimination against non-Muslims rest. The study concludes that prejudicial acts towards non-Muslims are due to the self-identification to a special position, differentiation and comparison between Muslims and non-Muslims and that represented the main influence for the exclusion of non-Muslims in public roles. Federal Constitution, which created differentiation or boundary between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Keywords: Malay-Muslim; Non-Muslim, Public Roles, Identification, Differentiation.

1. Introduction

The progressive domination of Islam and Malay-Muslims in Malaysia threatens relations between Muslims and non-Muslims (Olivier 2020:194-211). Non-Muslims are inferior and marginalised in their own country in many ways, including in the political sphere, in terms of opportunities to enter public universities, work in the public sector, and obtain government construction projects. Essentially, a space for public participation and government employment of non-Muslims in Malaysia has been eroded tremendously since 1980. The US House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (2011:1) on inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia commented with strong negative remarks. Along with it, Malaysia's recent political development has intensified the discrimination and

marginalisation of non-Muslims in the country. The practice that non-Muslims should not hold critical public roles is no longer kept among Malay-Muslims but has become a public resolution.

Explicitly, non-Muslims have been left out, discriminated against, and marginalised (see Pietsch & Clark 2014, Kuan 2015) in public participation and government employment that emphasises Malay race and religion (Nair 1999: 60, Wade 2009: 1). The problem of inclusion and exclusion of non-Muslims in public participation and services has been dealt with from historical, sociological, constitutional, and ethnographical perspectives. However, the situation (problem) has not been studied from the perspective of socio-religious psychology. The inclusion and exclusion of non-Muslims in politics and policies are surrounded by identity and other factors (Lee 2017:2, Wade 2009). It is along this line, and therefore, this study will explore whether the discrimination against and marginalisation of non-Muslims in public offices is due to the religious factor or/and social identity factor.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

2.1 Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory was developed to explain self-perception and intergroup behaviour (Tajfel & Turner 2004). The theory seeks to explain how groups develop, how they evaluate themselves and others, and the social incentive for group membership, interaction, and conflict (Hogg 2016:6). The core idea of this theory is that social identity provides group members with a common identity through which members judge who they are, what they believe, and how they should behave in relation to their group and regarding other groups. A variety of major theories and concepts in social identity theory explain various elements of group formation as well as intragroup and intergroup behaviour. Although they each contribute to a different field of behavioural research, they function together to produce a coherent explanatory framework (Russel 2020:12).

Social identity theory propositions that a social group is a collection of persons who identify as members of the same social category, not just intellectually but also via the attachment of values and feelings (Brewer 2007:698, Deaux 1996:778). Individuals who identify with the same social category or group are motivated to distinguish their group from others in order to maintain high self-esteem or achieve self-enhancement (Deaux 1996: 778, Negy et al. 2003, Tajfel & Turner 1979, Ysseldyk et al. 2010:61). This self-categorisation or self-identification subsequently promotes a social environment consisting of an in-group and various out-groups. It should be made aware that identifying with the same religious group might enhance or gain more self-esteem and security than other identities (for example, ethnicity and national), perhaps arising from highly organised support networks (Ysseldyk, Matheson & Anisman 2010:61).

Nonetheless, merely identifying and placing individuals into arbitrarily different social categories, even religious groups, is sufficient to generate in-group and out-group discrimination and prejudice (Jackson & Hunsberger 1999:521). In-group and out-group bias and derogation will occur even without any interaction with other group members or without any history of competition or conflict between groups (Brewer 2007:697, Deaux 1996:779). Religion is, to some extent, partly responsible for group animosity because religious groups work on the same principles as political, ethnic, or other groupings. These principles imply that a proclivity to respond to people based on their collective identity (in-group or out-group members) may be widespread among those who identify with their religious group rather than individuals' religion (Jackson & Hunsberger 1999:510). In other words, it is a differentiation between

“us” and “not” – “us” or “me” and “them” or “us” and “them”. Simply put, it is between “us” and “others”, a distinctive identification of who is “us” and who is “others” – a rule of exclusion as well as inclusion. Bias stemming from differential “us” – “others” results from upholding from out-groups (others) favours and benefits that are extended only to the in-group (us) (Brewer 1999:438, 2007:696-697, Jackson & Hunsberger 1999:511). Bias can also arise from comparison or competition, where an out-group is perceived as a threat to the integrity, interests, or identity of oneself and the in-group as a whole. The threats may have appeared in the forms of competition for positions, political representation, limited resources, promotion of values, and protection of status (Brewer 2007:697, Jackson & Hunsberger 1999:510). Through the comparison process, individuals always differentiate their group from others and place their group in the more positively valued status (Deaux 1996:790). Because of religious belief and content, religious groups are likely to make intergroup comparisons and place their own group in a higher or better position (Ysseldyk et al. 2010:60, Jackson & Hunsberger 1999:511). Stereotyping in-group members as superior and out-group members as inferior, such as infidels, immoral, and/or enemies, could serve this esteem-enhancing function (Jackson & Hunsberger 1999:511,521. See also Hugenberg & Sacco 2008, Johnson, Schaller & Mullen, 2000, Nelson 2016, Krueger & DiDonato 2008). The theoretical framework must consider the dynamic nature of religious identity. Anthony Giddens (1990:38) noted that “all human action is defined by reflexivity”. Reflexivity is a reaction to modernity where “social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information. Those reactionary practices and adjustments, thus constitutively alter and shape their character” (Giddens 1990:38). Applied to the case of Malays in Malaysia, it would be likely to believe that the Malays are also able to be reflexive, both in terms of the circumstances and process. The condition of the political environment and Islamisation inevitably require Malays to be reflexive and responsive and engage pragmatically with others either with regard to their ethnic or religious identity or ethnic and religious identities (see also Huckfeldt, Mendez & Osborn 2004).

2.2 Method

The study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the exclusion of non-Muslims from public roles with a focus on understanding socially situated meanings, behaviours, and practices from the experiences of Muslims. The study also examined Malay-Muslim practices due to their social or religious identity, considering their context/environment (Bengtsson 2016:9) and social psychological states (Krippendorff 2004:11,46). Hence, 66 students and 24 adult Muslims have taken part. This study adopted a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) of the descriptive method.

2.2.1 Data Characteristics

66 students responded, 49 females and 17 males. They comprised 50 (76%) students from the Faculty of Islamic Studies and 16 (24%) from other faculties, mainly from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and the Faculty of Built Environment (National University of Malaysia). They are all adult citizens aged 18 and above (between 19 and 26). In addition, 24 (R01-R24) working adults participated. The participants included all levels of age and academicians responded well, especially Islamic religious teachers (*ustaz* and *ustazah*). The many responses by academicians make the results more conducive and significant, especially as they involve three levels of public education: primary, secondary, and tertiary.

2.2.2 Methods of Analysis

Rather than report all the figures and items here, the study only reproduces the wording of illustrative figures and items when discussing the results. The conclusions are based on conventional statistical

analysis to test for the significance of differences between group means using the Chi-square test when discussing empirical findings. It also reports the ‘effect size’ of any differences in line with the latest statistical norms (Al Ramiah, Hewstone & Wolfer 2017:16, Cumming 2012, Hedges et al. 2023). The effect size used in this study is Cohen’s *w*. Effect size shows whether a result is not merely ‘statistically significant’, but also ‘practically significant’ or ‘substantial’ (meaningful in the real world). It also provides a way of comparing variables with different scales.

A qualitative content method is adopted for data gathered from interviews.

In the examination of data (content analysis), all transcripts and responses were coded, categorised and thematised. Due to the human nature, coding errors cannot be eliminated entirely. However, they can be minimised.

3. Results and Discussion

In Malaysia, Malay-Muslim identity is tied closely to politics (Malay Muslim hegemony) and the Federal Constitution (Article 160). However, the data analysis reveals that Malay-Muslim identity is manifested through these individualities: (land) owner and *ummah* and nationality. The three main individualities can be subdivided into six elements (themes): land, public office, principles, public life, plural society, and public roles of the Malay-Muslims in relation to non-Muslim public roles in Malaysia. Four main elements and themes of Malay-Muslim identity in relation to non-Muslim public roles were explored from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. These are summarised as follows:

3.1 Malay Land (*Tanah Melayu*)

The Federation of Malaysia gained its independence in 1963. Before it was named the Federation of Malaysia, it was formerly called the Federation of Malaya, which was comprised of Peninsula Malaya, including Singapore, but not Sabah and Sarawak. The Federation was in its current state in 1965 after the expulsion of Singapore. Nevertheless, the creation of the Federation of Malaysia has never dismissed the issue of “who belongs to the nation” (Mauzy 2006:45). This is an unsolved problem in the minds of Malaysians, especially the Malays. At least 35 per cent of the participants do not agree that Malaysia is owned by Malaysians. To the Malays, the land or the country is the Malays’ (Abdul Ghani & Awang 2017:73): “This is the land of Malay” (R02, R03). According to them, this fact is undeniable and should not be questioned historically:

History proves that Malaysia is the land that belonged to Malay (R14; translated).

From a historical point of view, Malays perceive themselves as the owners and landlords of the Federation of Malaysia. Based on a similar history, the Malay intellectuals and academicians argue for the special position (see Muslim, Samian & Nizah 2012:449-450). In this regard, the Malays are not ready to share the ownership (public office) with immigrants (Chinese and Indians):

The special rights of the Malays have been agreed upon by the previous leaders, which have been given to the Malays as collateral and substitute to the willingness of the Malay people in the Malay land to accept the Indian and Chinese ethnic groups to share life in the Malay land together. It was made in the 1948 Malay Federation Constitution when the independence negotiations were to be carried out (R21; translated).

This means non-Malays *only share life in the Malay land, not ownership*. With the ownership boundaries firmly established, the emphasis turned to differentiating “us” versus “not us”. The public services or the special positions, as laid in Article 153 of the Federal Constitution, are the rights and sole properties of the landlord. The landlord or owner has all the rights to decide, share, or alter any provisions made prior

to the independence. It is very reasonable for the Malays to demand that the top positions in the government services and senior ministers be reserved for Malay (-Muslim) only (R14). Mauzy (2016) calls this the Malay nationalism. Mauzy (2016:50) points out that “a key feature of Malay nationalism was its highly developed sense of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and its keen sense of purpose in defending everything considered Malay.” To the Malays, the “them” or “not us” were the non-Malays, primarily the Chinese. In another respect, the Malays were continuously reminded by their elites that, unlike the Chinese or Indians, they had no other homeland and that the Malays were the legal “sons of the soil” of the Malaysian Federation. No matter how long the Chinese and Indians had been there, the “others” or “not us” were always immigrants because they could always “go home”, whereas the Malays had nowhere else to go. This argument added to the sense of ownership of the land. Ownership of the land was firmly instilled with the thought that if the Malays lost control of their “homeland”, they would become racially extinct and “homeless” (Mauzy 2016:). Hence, Zakaria (1989:354) contends that the new generations of Malaysia have never really realised the tacitly agreed provisions by the forefathers of independence (Ishak 1999:72), which is to recognise Malay dominance (supremacy). On the same issue, Ishak claims that this is the foundation of Malaysia’s plural society and the basis of the Malaysian consociationalism (a stable democratic system built on power sharing between various social groups that exist in societies that are deeply divided) polity (1999:72). In addition, Ishak further claims that Malaysia’s plural society pre- and post-independence are still subjected to Malay nationalism (2002:107), and the Malay political hegemony clearly notices it.

3.2 Special Position (Rights) and non-Muslim Public Roles

The respondents refer to Article 153 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia in supporting the demands that only Malay-Muslims should fill the prominent positions within the government and only Malay-Muslims should be appointed to the top positions within the government. According to them, Article 153 grants special rights and privileges to Malays for such demands:

The Malaysian Constitution states Islam as the official religion, Malay as the national language, and the special rights of the Malays. So, in my view, this demand was made to guarantee the position of the Malays and Islam (R17, translated)

Another view is that the rally is not to demand public office only. After reading several articles, he believes that the assembly aims to maintain the rights of Malays at the federal government level (R01). Compatibly, the demands were made to defend and protect Malay-Muslims’ rights in this nation (R16, R20). Though this is not entirely true, but still, one argues that:

The demand is one of the agreements that prioritise the rights of the Malay people. But now we can see that the top people are only from other races. This is because, in Malaysia, the main religion is Islam and the Malays. It happened because of the protection of the rights of *bumiputera* (R12, translated).

Not only from worrying about the current political development in the country, such demands were made to safeguard their position and future in this country (R20). Also, they make such demands to ensure that the privileges given to the Malays are not lost (R23). If Malay-Muslims do not make the demands, they will lose their heritage. Elementally, Muslims must oversee the nation (R20).

Undoubtedly, the exclusion of non-Muslims in prominent and top public offices has little to do with religion. Although Islam is repeatedly mentioned above, Article 153 does not spell a single word on Islam. On the other hand, as one reads closely, Article 153 never mentions granting special rights or privileges to the Malays and natives (Kim 2010:271-276). It states only a “special position” and ensures a reasonable proportion of public service reserved for Malays and natives. Article 153 also never states that the

prominent and top positions shall belong to Malay-Muslims. However, it has now turned to guaranteeing and protecting Islam and Malays' special rights and privileges. Article 153 of the Constitution defines that the Malays' special position is limited to reserving acceptable quotas in three sectors: public services, educational institutions, and commercial licenses.

Consequently, the current ubiquitous racial discrimination in practically every aspect of our national life essentially violates the Constitution. Racial discrimination, for example, happens in the recruitment and promotion of personnel in publicly-funded organisations, resulting in the latter becoming practically mono-racial (particularly in their upper strata). The civil service, the police, the army, and various semi- and quasi-government organisations are among these bodies (Kim 2010:275).

The continuation of the special position of Malays as a privileged group and the increment in percentage in administration will develop negative views against non-Malays as discriminated groups. Correspondently, the discriminated groups in relation to the privileged group might be taken as an "us" and "not-us" dichotomy. Hall (1997, p. 230) suggests that "otherness" or "not us" is defined by "difference" due to its strong attraction (in this case, special rights/privileges). The "difference" is created by depicting people who are racially and ethnically distinct from the majority population, which eventually leads to symbolic boundaries, that is, "us" and "not us" or "us" and "other". In this assessment, "difference" is essentially for the successful construction of the "not us" (Wan Mohd Ghazali 2016:281-284). As a result of generalising or projecting typical ethnic group characteristics to the superior national category, the more group members perceive their in-group as comparatively archetypal, the more negative attitudes toward out-groups become (Verkuyten & Khan 2012:133). Likewise, as Al Ramiah et al. (2017:10) argue, "When ethnicity is socially defining and politically relevant, as is the case in Malaysia, the result can be negative generalised perceptions of out-groups ('not us') compared with positive views of in-group ('us')." Malay in Malaysia is undoubtedly recognised as the prototypical or distinctive identity for them (in-group identity or "us"). Therefore, the attitudes towards non-Malay (out-group or "not us") become negative (discriminatory).

3.3 Possible Principles (Reasons why Non-Muslims Should Not Hold Important Public Offices)

59% of participants claim that the teaching of Islam suggests only Muslims should hold important government positions. On the other hand, the same percentage also suggests that they are unaware of any policy prohibiting non-Muslims from co-administrating a country with Muslims. Those who agree that non-Muslims should not hold important government positions learned it from the ideas of teachers, lecturers and Imams (45%). But there are also a good number of Muslims due to self-understanding (self-learning) (26%). Political endeavour (41%), the bureaucracy of government (30%), and ethnocracy also played a significant influence on non-Muslims not embracing essential positions in government services. Responding on whether Islam or the Quran provide sufficient evidence to exclude non-Muslims from holding public offices, the answers given by the 7 (out of 66) participants and 4 (out of 24) respondents are Quranic verses, such as 3:28, 110; 4:138-139, 144; 5:51; 60:1 and are encompassed as below:

Let not the believers take for friends or helpers Unbelievers rather than believers: if any do that, in nothing will there be help from Allah: except by way of precaution, that ye may Guard yourselves from them. But Allah cautions you (To remember) Himself; for the final goal is to Allah. (Quran 3:28 – version of Yusuf Ali)

Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them: among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors. (Quran 3: 110 – version of Yusuf Ali)

To the Hypocrites give the glad tidings that there is for them (but) a grievous penalty: - Yea, to those who take for friends unbelievers rather than believers: is it honour they seek among them? Nay, all honour is with Allah. (Quran 4:138-139 – version of Yusuf Ali)

O ye who believe! Take not for friends unbelievers rather than believers: Do ye wish to offer Allah an open proof against yourselves? (Quran 4:144 – version of Yusuf Ali)

O ye who believe! take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily Allah guideth not a people unjust. (Quran 5:51 – version of Yusuf Ali)

The Quranic message, as shown from the verses above, seems to suggest that Muslims should not associate or cooperate with non-Muslims. The message also seems to suggest that Muslims are not encouraged to make friends with non-Muslims. As noted, it does imply that Muslims and non-Muslims should not work together for any government. Strictly, this phenomenon has not happened at any age in Islamic history and is practically impossible. Muslims do make friends and take helpers who are non-Muslims, for example, in schools, workplaces, markets, *et cetera*. This happens every way and every time in a plural society, typically in Malaysia. Therefore, it cannot present a strong case from the Quran to not include non-Muslims from playing any essential public roles.

Therefore, the study indicates that the exclusion of non-Muslims in public roles is very minimally related to sacred texts *per se*. As noted, the verses talk about two things: (1) Muslims must be just. It is Allah's command, and (2) Muslims are not limited to acting fairly to Muslims only. It is also to everyone. The very reason for the command is that Allah created humankind from a single (pair) of a male and a female (49:13) without partiality. Hence, living in Malaysia, a plural society, Muslims also lean towards unity, stability, harmony, and the economy of the country rather than who should not be included in government employment. They also perceive non-Muslims' skills, expertise, and contributions as treasures of this country.

3.4 Public Life (Communal Living)

Admitting that Malaysia is not a mono-cultural society and Muslims and non-Muslims live in one community (R17, R20, R23), most informants stress that all humanity is equal before Allah. Living in a plural society, the informants emphasise Islamic values of justice and fairness, and regardless of one's faith, all people must be treated impartially (R10, R17, R18, R19, R20, R23).

There are three Quranic verses which the respondents unceasingly mention: 5:8, 49:13, and 65:2. Below are the verses from Yusuf Ali's translation:

O ye who believe! stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do. (Quran 5:8)

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (Quran 49:13)

Thus when they fulfil their term appointed, either take them back on equitable terms or part with them on equitable terms; and take for witness two persons from among you, endued with justice, and establish the evidence (as) before Allah. Such is the admonition given to him who believes in Allah and the Last Day. And for those who fear Allah, He (ever) prepares a way out. (Quran 65:2)

In addition, Respondent 19 feels uncomfortable if non-Muslims were to be excluded from playing any part of public roles:

I will feel uncomfortable. This is because the self-importance of our country's leaders is still high. If the leaders understand the concept of Islamic leadership, which is very fair and just as the Prophet Muhammad led all Medina people of multiple races and religions. (translated)

Consequently, non-Muslims holding important public services will not be an issue even if it is a Muslim-majority country. No one should be discriminated against or excluded because of his race and faith.

Above and beyond, many of them sincerely appreciate non-Muslims' skills, expertise, and significant contribution to the nation. According to them, we are granted our skills and expertise, which should be used for our country's advances. Malaysia is a multiracial country, and it should be governed by whoever is suitable, including non-Muslims (R24, translated). Not only are skill and expertise appreciated, but the opinions and voices of non-Muslims must also be heard closely and taken into account (R17). Meanwhile, Respondent 22, an *ustazah* unaffectedly pens:

In governing this multiracial and multireligious country, there is no denying that non-Muslims also have better expertise in certain fields. Therefore, administrative positions should also be given to non-Muslims so that they can give their thoughts and opinions as long as they do not touch any sensitivities in the Islamic religion, especially for matters related to faith and *sharia*. This is intended to work together towards the peace and progress of the country. (translated)

Another respondent stresses the racial unity. As an *ustaz*, he sees:

Racial unity plays an important role in strengthening the national economy by involving all races in activities. Suppose we are divided or quarrel with each other. In that case, this peaceful and harmonious country will be backward, and disputes will cause economic instability that affects the country (R18, translated).

He continues:

The unity among people of multiple races in this country is unique and has special features. In order to maintain harmony in this country, the duties and responsibilities of governing the country must be given according to the expertise and needs of certain parts (R18, translated).

Regarding the unity and prosperity of the country, Respondent 20 adds that since Malaysia is a multiracial nation, she thought that only Malay-Muslims occupying prominent and top positions in government is unrealistic (impractical). However, if this demand were to become a reality, it would have a negative impact because non-Muslims also play a significant role in the growth of the public sector, especially in the economy. It also demonstrates how difficult it is to foster neighbourhood cohesion, which will impact the entire country. Respondent 15 makes it very clear that she prefers our country to be governed by various races with an open heart without any racism (R15, translated). Respondent 23 enhances the view that the country will not develop strongly without including all races in official roles because not everyone has expertise. They need each other to share expertise, share knowledge and views. A country governed by various races will form unity among races, respect each other despite different religions and be open to exchanging opinions (R23, translated).

In sum, although some Muslims would see racialism and religious superiority as natural and acceptable in Islam, others will advocate Islamic values such as justice, fairness and equality as a counter-response. This group of Muslims living in a plural society do not for the split of "us" and "not us" or "us" and "them", but drawing "us" and "them" closer and nearer, most probably can be called as "us" and "we". The awareness resonates well with the view by Mohaghegh Damad (2020:S50) that everyone is equal and

should be appreciated. There should not be a distinction between believers and non-believers, where it is the root of conflicts (49). They uphold the Islamic values of justice, fairness, and equality. They also acknowledge the role that non-Muslims play in public services of Malaysia, especially non-Muslims' skill and expertise. They set no boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims, Malays or non-Malays in this community and nation. The issue is whether they are the leading voice heard and followed.

4. Key Findings

The study found that there is a strong differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims in three themes, namely land, special position, and laws. It could be said that Muslims used land, special positions, and Quranic verses (those applicable) to set boundaries between them and non-Muslims. The Malay-Muslims enjoy privileges and special positions as land owners via the provisions of the Federal Constitution and ethnic nationalism. The Malay-Muslims withholding from non-Muslims favours and benefits that are extended only to them are the reasons for discrimination against non-Muslims.

Islam or, more specifically, a few Quranic verses provided by the informants seem to advocate a division between believer and non-believer or "us" and "them". Despite calling for justice and acting equally (Quran 5:8, 49:13 and 65:2), more verses are likely to set boundaries between believers and non-believers (Quran 3:28, 31:10; 4:138-139, 144; 5:51 and 60:1). The negative perceptions of non-Muslims are embellished by the calling that Muslims should not make friends and take helpers who are non-believers. Simply put, this is the manifestation of exciting "us" – "them" distinction, where prejudice and discrimination of non-Muslims are inescapable.

Notwithstanding all the adverse responses, respondents called to give opportunities to non-Muslims to manage the country together with Muslims. The calling is raised on the plural society's unity, stability, and harmony. Muslims and non-Muslims who live communally should progress and prosper together. However, one must recognise that on intergroup bias, minor variations in the expression of prejudice as a function of religious orientation are not of concern to the intergroup perspective because the view on intergroup bias does not imply that all members of a group exhibit the same views and same levels, but instead prejudice against out-groups arises from intergroup relations rather than personal choice (Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999:519). People with strong self-esteem will generally act in a personal capacity when they have and can succeed without support from the group. However, no matter what one does, their fate is tied to group membership, and they will act collectively (Reicher 2004:931).

5 Conclusion

This study concludes that the socio-religious identity's psychological reaction is more than religious teachings, and the dimensions involved are strong self-identification as land owner, special position, and differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims. These are the effects of social identity and group categorisation on the "prejudice-religion relationships" (Batson & Stocks 2005:423). Hence, this study contributes to a broader knowledge concerning Islam (Muslim identity) from a social psychology perspective.

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The authors declare that they have jointly contributed towards the development of this article.

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Disclaimer

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