



# Navigating Marginality

## Identity Construction and Resistance among GEMAPAKTI DIY

**Eikel Karunia Ginting**

Duta Wacana Christian University

eikelginting63@gmail.com

### Abstract

This study examines the identity construction of GEMAPAKTI DIY, a youth organisation for indigenous religion adherents in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, amid ongoing marginalisation. Despite constitutional recognition, indigenous religious communities face systemic discrimination due to the state's exclusionary approach. Limited access to education, employment, and public participation remains a significant challenge. Using a qualitative approach, this research employs in-depth interviews to capture members' lived experiences. Data is systematically categorised and analysed, with theoretical frameworks guiding interpretation. Informants' perspectives provide nuanced insights into identity formation. Findings show that GEMAPAKTI DIY constructs its identity through internal consolidation, social media advocacy, filmmaking, and collaboration with NGOs and academic institutions. These efforts resist structural marginalisation while fostering solidarity. Applying Manuel Castells' identity formation theory, this study identifies GEMAPAKTI DIY's work as "project identity," wherein marginalised groups redefine their presence in public discourse. This paper argues that achieving inclusive religious democracy in Indonesia requires systemic reforms, including bottom-up approaches, multicultural education, and full governmental recognition of indigenous religions. Cross-sector collaboration is essential to ensuring equal rights and fostering a participatory democracy that upholds religious freedom for all.

**Keywords:** identity construction, Indigenous religion, marginalisation, GEMAPAKTI DIY, youth activism



This work is licenced under the [Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

## Introduction

Identity serves as both a marker and a form of legitimacy, assigned either internally or externally based on status, class, or other elements that reinforce one's position or role. Identity is multilayered, influencing both self-perception and interactions with others (Widjaja et al., 2021, pp. 99–102; Ginting, 2023, pp. 29–30). In Indonesia, religion plays a fundamental role in shaping identity. Religious affiliation determines social position and group membership and influences self-actualisation within communal life (Buchari, 2014, pp. 31–35).

As a core aspect of identity, religion is susceptible to institutionalisation, either for the benefit of particular groups or as a regulatory tool for societal cohesion. Ambiguities in religious paradigms render religion vulnerable to truth claims that demarcate religious identities (Scott Appleby, 2000, pp. 9–13). For instance, some conceptualisations of religion emphasise scripture, symbols, and rituals, while others are rooted in spiritual experience or ancestral traditions (Maarif, 2018, pp. 9–13). The institutionalisation of religious meaning and definition significantly impacts the social identity of religious communities in Indonesia.

The conceptual separation of religious and belief systems has led to institutional segmentation, resulting in disparities in governance and representation. State-recognised religions fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, whereas indigenous belief systems are administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Maarif, 2018, pp. v–vii). The classification of adherents of local belief systems—referred to as *penghayat kepercayaan*—as cultural practitioners rather than religious groups places them under the Directorate General of Culture, Sub-Directorate for the Development of *Penghayat Kepercayaan*, rather than under religious governance structures (Haryono, 2023, p. 118). This distinction has tangible policy implications, limiting their participation in public religious life and reflecting broader issues in managing religious diversity in Indonesia.

For instance, while the Ministry of Religious Affairs promotes religious moderation as part of its egalitarian and democratic mandate, its programmes primarily cater to officially recognised religions. The exclusion of local belief groups from such initiatives disregards their resilience and capacity to foster interfaith harmony. Consequently, adherents of ancestral religions are marginalised in religious discourse and excluded from empowerment initiatives. This lack of representation in religious governance and policy implementation illustrates the government's failure to bridge the complexities of religious diversity in Indonesia—see TAP MPR No. IV/MPR/1973 (Bagir et al., 2011, p. 119).

Although administratively recognised as guardians of cultural heritage, local religious communities are not afforded the same legal status and rights as state-recognised religious groups. Samsul Maarif (2018, p. 25) highlights how Indonesia's restrictive definition of "religion" has relegated *penghayat kepercayaan* to the realm of cultural groups, thereby undermining their contributions to Indonesia's religious landscape. This categorisation not only limits their rights but also exposes them to persecution and delegitimisation, as they

are often regarded as heretical.

GEMAPAKTI is a youth organisation under the *Majelis Lubur Kepercayaan Indonesia* (MLKI), serving as a platform for young *penghayat kepercayaan* (indigenous belief adherents). As an extension of MLKI, GEMAPAKTI mobilises youth and fosters awareness among the next generation of local religious communities (Hasan, 2022).

GEMAPAKTI has branches across various regions, including one in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY). GEMAPAKTI DIY, comprising young *penghayat kepercayaan* in Yogyakarta, encounters numerous challenges both internally and externally. Limited facilitation and institutional support hinder its ability to mobilise members and conduct activities, creating dilemmas for young adherents of indigenous religions. Governmental neglect and inadequate education policies further impede GEMAPAKTI DIY's efforts to cultivate its identity as the inheritor of local religious traditions. This struggle is exacerbated by the structural distinction between state-recognised religions and local belief systems, restricting the organisation's empowerment and recognition (Hasan, 2022).

Internally, GEMAPAKTI DIY members experience an identity crisis due to the lack of governmental recognition, making access to education and employment difficult. Consequently, many young adherents disengage from organisational activities. The absence of equitable access and empowerment programmes further limits members' ability to develop and explore their potential.

Despite these challenges, GEMAPAKTI DIY actively consolidates its identity and asserts its presence by participating in empowerment initiatives led by NGOs such as *LKiS* (Institute for Islamic Studies) and *SRILI* (Srikandi Lintas Iman). Additionally, the organisation builds internal and external networks with local religious groups and institutions across Yogyakarta (Interview with Dhayu Murti, 2024).

Although the government has granted formal legal recognition, policy implementation continues to restrict the access and participation of indigenous belief communities in education, employment, and public spaces. Therefore, this study examines GEMAPAKTI DIY as a case study of a youth-led indigenous belief organisation working to strengthen its communal existence and consolidate its identity. In the face of adversity, GEMAPAKTI DIY demonstrates how indigenous youth assert their identity through collective action. This research is significant in analysing the strategies adopted by GEMAPAKTI DIY in navigating unsupportive grassroots policy implementation. Additionally, it explores how the organisation consolidates youth participation to build resilience against systemic marginalisation.

This study focuses on the identity construction process within GEMAPAKTI DIY, aiming to understand the dynamics that sustain its existence as a platform for the regeneration of indigenous belief communities in Yogyakarta. Accordingly, this research seeks to address the following question: *How does GEMAPAKTI DIY construct a peaceful identity amidst the marginalisation it faces?*

To answer this, the study employs Manuel Castells' framework of identity construction. Castells posits that identity formation occurs through dominant institutions, societal

structures, and key social actors. Identity is crucial as it provides meaning for both individuals and groups, shaping self-definition and the perception of others. Furthermore, identity serves as a lens through which social relations are understood, contributing to the development of a primary identity—a foundational framework for self-perception and social engagement in networked societies.

Castells categorises the formation of individual or group identity into three forms: (1) legitimised identity, which is shaped by dominant institutions to consolidate and justify power; (2) resistance identity, which emerges from individuals or groups who are marginalised or stigmatised, serving as a response to dominant structures; and (3) project identity, which is constructed by social actors seeking to redefine social structures, thereby creating a new identity. These three processes form recurring patterns in society, generating meaning and continuously evolving conceptions of identity.

This theoretical framework underpins the analysis of the identity formation process within GEMAPAKTI DIY, a youth organisation of *penghayat kepercayaan*. Castells' concept will be examined in dialogue with the GEMAPAKTI DIY context to explore the ongoing identity formation model and the strategies employed by its young members in response to marginalisation.

This study employs a qualitative methodology, utilising in-depth interviews to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of GEMAPAKTI DIY members. The collected data will be described, classified, and interpreted to develop analytical insights. The analysis will be guided by theoretical frameworks to address the study's research objectives (Creswell, 2017).

Interviews will be conducted with three GEMAPAKTI DIY administrators to provide a general overview of the organisation and identify key challenges and obstacles. These individuals have been selected as informants due to their leadership roles and foundational involvement in the organisation. Through these interviews, the study will explore the activities and programmes undertaken by GEMAPAKTI DIY while examining the dynamics of identity construction among its members as they strive to assert their existence as adherents of *kepercayaan*.

## Challenges Faced by GEMAPAKTI DIY Amidst Marginalisation

GEMAPAKTI DIY (*Young Generation of Penghayat Kepercayaan* in Yogyakarta) emerged in response to the lack of leadership regeneration and empowerment among young adherents of indigenous belief systems in Yogyakarta. Initially established as the *Youth Forum of Penghayat Kepercayaan* by LKiS in 2019, the organisation sought to serve as a platform for consolidating youth engagement across indigenous belief communities. In 2021, the forum received administrative recognition from the Directorate of *Kepercayaan terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* (KMA) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*), officially becoming part of the *Majelis Luhur Kepercayaan Indonesia* (MLKI). However, this administrative recognition did not translate into equitable access

to funding, education, or policy participation, ultimately reflecting a pattern of structural exclusion of this community (Interview with Dhayu Murti, 2024; Hasan, 2022).

Manuel Castells emphasises that recognition granted to previously marginalised groups often remains symbolic, as the state continues to exercise control over the boundaries of their participation. In the case of GEMAPAKTI DIY, the identity of this community is formally acknowledged but remains subject to state management, without substantive reforms that would enable them to function independently. This illustrates that, despite official recognition, *Penghayat Kepercayaan* remain within a system that acknowledges their existence but fails to fully empower them (Castells, 2020, pp. 148–157).

One of the primary challenges faced by GEMAPAKTI DIY is the lack of access to facilities and resources necessary to sustain its programmes. Policies implemented by the Directorate of KMA adopt a top-down approach, limiting the community's agency in shaping policies that directly affect them. Programmes must align with *Kemendikbudristek*'s work plans, despite the fact that the governance of this community aligns more closely with religious affairs than with education. Wijanarto and Sirait et al. highlight that internal discrepancies within government institutions—particularly the classification of *Penghayat Kepercayaan* as either a cultural or religious entity—have hindered the development of more progressive and equitable policies. As a result, programmes intended to empower this community often reflect institutional agendas rather than the actual needs of the community (Wijanarto, 2018, pp. 193–197; Sirait et al., 2015, pp. 34–35).

Beyond structural marginalisation, GEMAPAKTI DIY also faces various forms of social discrimination, including bullying, stigmatisation as deviant or syncretic, and the absence of indigenous belief educators in schools. Maarif argues that such stigma is not merely a product of societal perception but rather a consequence of state policies that implicitly differentiate between officially recognised religions and indigenous belief systems. The government's decision to place *Penghayat Kepercayaan* under *Kemendikbudristek* instead of the Ministry of Religious Affairs further entrenches their exclusion from formal religious domains. This exclusion is reinforced at the societal level through discriminatory practices, ultimately marginalising *Penghayat Kepercayaan* from religious discourse and institutional support (Maarif, 2018, pp. 112–115).

This situation has led to the emergence of adaptive identity strategies, where many GEMAPAKTI DIY members opt for dual religious identities—officially registering under a state-recognised religion to avoid discrimination while privately adhering to their ancestral beliefs (Interview with Dhayu Murti, 2024). Castells describes this phenomenon as adaptive identity formation within networked societies, where marginalised groups develop flexible strategies to navigate exclusionary systems. However, this adaptation also results in reduced participation among younger generations in organisations like GEMAPAKTI DIY, as social and administrative pressures discourage them from openly identifying as *Penghayat Kepercayaan* (Castells, 2020, pp. 70–71; Bagir et al., 2011, pp. 35–40).

On a broader level, the marginalisation experienced by GEMAPAKTI DIY not only highlights issues of administrative exclusion but also underscores a fundamental deficit in

religious democracy in Indonesia. Bagir et al. (2011) argue that policies lacking participatory frameworks exacerbate social segregation, further restricting public space for belief communities. The state continues to uphold a dichotomy between officially recognised religions and *Penghayat Kepercayaan*, reinforcing public perceptions that groups outside state-sanctioned religions are either illegitimate or deviant (Maarif & Asfinawati, 2022, pp. 2–5). Consequently, GEMAPAKTI DIY faces a dual challenge: while legally recognised as an organisation, it remains marginalised in terms of access to religious rights and resources.

This condition has three major consequences. First, there is a decline in trust towards the state, as the community perceives existing policies as merely symbolic, lacking substantive protection of their rights. Second, social segregation intensifies, as *Penghayat Kepercayaan* communities become increasingly reclusive due to the absence of legal safeguards and equitable access. Third, there is the potential for social resistance, either through identity movements such as those led by GEMAPAKTI DIY or through legal challenges advocating for religious rights. Castells warns that when dominated groups are denied equal participation, they are likely to develop resistance identities, which can generate societal tensions (Sen, 2013, pp. 44–48; Zeinudin & Novita, 2016, pp. 228–229; Ginting, 2023, pp. 34–35).

Thus, this analysis reaffirms that the legitimacy granted to GEMAPAKTI DIY does not signify genuine empowerment but rather functions as an institutional control mechanism that perpetuates their dependence on an exclusionary system. The state must transition from a top-down governance model to a participatory empowerment approach, in which indigenous belief communities are actively involved in shaping policies that affect their existence. Without such reforms, the marginalisation experienced by GEMAPAKTI DIY will persist, further reinforcing social stigma and weakening Indonesia's aspirations for an inclusive religious democracy (Castells, 2020, pp. 68–70; Taylor, 2015, pp. 6–8).

## **Inspiration from GEMAPAKTI DIY: Rebuilding a Resilient Identity**

The marginalisation experienced by young *penghayat kepercayaan* is an unavoidable consequence of Indonesia's problematic governance of religiosity and indigenous belief systems. Hefner (2021, pp. 8–11) argues that the institutionalisation of religion and belief in Indonesia remains heavily influenced by the perspective of the majority religion, neglecting the diverse realities of religious and belief communities. Similarly, Satrio Dwi Haryono's research on indigenous religions in Central Java (2020–2021) highlights that government regulations continue to pose challenges in various regions, as they legitimise policies without adequately considering the values upheld by *penghayat kepercayaan* communities (Haryono, 2023, pp. 129–132).

Amidst these regulatory injustices and disparities in access to facilities, GEMAPAKTI DIY actively engages in strengthening identity representation in public spaces. According to available information, GEMAPAKTI DIY envisions fostering a young generation of

*penghayat kepercayaan* who uphold noble values and contribute to cultural development (GEMAPAKTI DIY, 2021). To achieve this, the organisation conducts internal consolidation efforts, including the provision of a monthly safe space for its young members. These gatherings serve as platforms for sharing personal experiences of marginalisation in public spaces. Through these discussions, members find solidarity, mutual support, and collective solutions (Interview with Baskoro Waskitho Husodo, 2024). Additionally, GEMAPAKTI DIY functions as a grassroots representative body, voicing community concerns to the government through MLKI. By facilitating identity reinforcement, GEMAPAKTI DIY plays a pivotal role in uniting *penghayat kepercayaan* across various associations while instilling a sense of pride in their religious identity (Interview with Dhayu Murti, 2024).

GEMAPAKTI DIY also functions as a communal space that fosters integration among members from different *penghayat kepercayaan* associations. The organisation cultivates strong interpersonal bonds by promoting mutual understanding and emotional support, allowing members to share experiences and collectively navigate their challenges. Meetings within the GEMAPAKTI forum reinforce a sense of collective responsibility among young *penghayat kepercayaan*, construct meaning as believers, and serve as a bridge between the community and government in addressing discrimination. The key challenges encountered by GEMAPAKTI DIY include structural legitimacy issues within governmental frameworks and the pervasive social stigma surrounding *penghayat kepercayaan*. Through its forums, the organisation nurtures a communal character that collectively seeks social transformation. Thus, GEMAPAKTI DIY exemplifies the role and actualisation of marginalised individuals asserting their presence despite systemic discrimination (Castells, 2020, pp. 67–69; Sutanto, 2018, p. 166).

The governance of religious and belief diversity necessitates a redefined narrative and reinterpretation within the public sphere. By reinforcing its internal strength, GEMAPAKTI DIY raises awareness among its members, affirming their equal rights as citizens to practise their beliefs despite societal marginalisation. The organisation provides a platform for young individuals to reflect on their identity, fortify their sense of self as *penghayat kepercayaan*, and dispel fear or inferiority regarding their beliefs. The hierarchical social structures that perpetuate exclusion are actively challenged through GEMAPAKTI DIY, which strengthens both the identity and internal cohesion of indigenous belief adherents in Yogyakarta. This reinforcement enables members to develop a resilient identity and contribute to a more open and inclusive public discourse, particularly through education and the promotion of *penghayat kepercayaan* traditions in public spaces (Lawler, 2014, pp. 29–33; Abdillah & Izah, 2022, p. 145).

## **GEMAPAKTI DIY and Digital Identity Promotion**

The development of GEMAPAKTI DIY is facilitated through identity promotion on social media and the production of documentary films. According to Baskoro, social media serves as a medium for introducing GEMAPAKTI DIY and the various *penghayat keper-*

*cayaan* communities within it. By leveraging social media, GEMAPAKTI DIY seeks to challenge societal stigma and strengthen its internal network of adherents. Instagram, in particular, is utilised as a platform to showcase organisational activities, highlight the identities of different belief associations, and establish connections with other organisations. This digital outreach enables GEMAPAKTI DIY to enhance its visibility and gain public recognition (Interview with Baskoro Waskitho Husodo, 2024).

In addition to social media engagement, GEMAPAKTI DIY collaborates with *LKiS* in the production of documentary films available on YouTube, such as *Aku Siswa Penghayat* (Yayasan LKiS, 2020) and *Pernikahan Penghayat Kepercayaan Sapta Dharma* (Yayasan LKiS, 2022). These films depict the dynamics and challenges faced by *penghayat kepercayaan* adherents in public spaces. The documentary format serves as an innovative promotional tool, showcasing the existence of belief communities, their struggles, and their diverse affiliations. By employing both documentary filmmaking and social media, GEMAPAKTI DIY effectively challenges stigma, ensuring that the identity of *penghayat kepercayaan* is not only acknowledged but also granted representation and equitable rights in social life. The advancement of digital technology provides a strategic avenue for GEMAPAKTI DIY to strengthen and actualise its identity within the public sphere.

An analysis of GEMAPAKTI DIY's strategies reveals a concerted effort to promote and introduce *penghayat kepercayaan* to a broader audience while adapting to contemporary developments. According to Castells, such movements emerge in response to systemic injustices, fostering an awareness that drives the reconstruction of identities legitimised by the state. Social media promotion, in this context, represents a deconstruction of hierarchical structures traditionally dominated by government authority. The utilisation of digital platforms and filmmaking reflects an adaptive expression of belief that embraces global developments. Technology is harnessed as a tool for strengthening identity, facilitating the dissemination of lived experiences and previously marginalised indigenous religious traditions (Castells, 2020, pp. 11–14; Sofjan et al., 2019, pp. 70–75).

The strategic use of social media not only serves as a promotional mechanism but also contributes to the reconstruction of the public perception of indigenous religions, which are often misrepresented as insular, archaic, and incompatible with modernity. Social media plays a crucial role in dismantling the “epistemic bubble” that perceives belief communities as non-religious, deviant, or syncretic. The identity constructed by GEMAPAKTI DIY's youth challenges these assumptions and transforms hierarchical authority, shifting identity formation from a government-driven legitimacy project to one rooted in the awareness of its adherents. Traditionally, hierarchical structures have reinforced top-down control; however, through social media and other creative strategies, indigenous religious communities demonstrate their adaptability to modernity while preserving their traditions. This approach allows them to assert their identity without facing marginalisation. The persistent exclusion of *penghayat kepercayaan* stems largely from public perceptions that position them as fundamentally different from state-recognised religions (Epafras et al., 2019, pp. 224–226; Castells, 2020, pp. 65–66; Sholakodin, 2021, pp. 182–185).

According to Leonard Epafras, the use of social media as a medium for reinforcing religious expression and belief enables the construction of educational and resistance narratives in response to public ignorance. Promotion based on education through social media becomes an instrument of resistance against the exclusivity of public spaces. GEMAPAKTI DIY demonstrates an effort to reconstruct identity by leveraging social media to establish networks among its members, who belong to various indigenous religious communities with distinct historical roots and teachings. Social media thus functions as a digital space for democracy and advocacy, allowing both the general public and the government to recognise and understand GEMAPAKTI DIY more comprehensively (Postill & Epafras, 2018, pp. 117–118).

Internally, social media fosters egalitarian connectivity, expanding the meaning and function of social space. The diversity among GEMAPAKTI DIY members, each of whom adheres to a distinct belief system, is bridged through Instagram. Castells reinforces this perspective through the concept of “net” (referring to information technology networks, such as social media) and “self” (self-identity), which maintain a dialectical relationship that facilitates mutual understanding. Social media serves as a platform for networked communities to introduce and exchange their identities (Castells, 2000, p. 6). Additionally, it acts as a medium to engage inactive young members, encouraging them to participate in promoting their belief identities in a more engaging and informative manner. This dynamic significantly contributes to democratic engagement in the digital sphere.

According to Dhayu Murti and Baskoro, GEMAPAKTI DIY collaborates with various institutions to empower its members and strengthen external networks. Partnerships with organisations such as *LKiS* and other institutions in Yogyakarta facilitate training sessions aimed at character development and member empowerment. Furthermore, GEMAPAKTI DIY supports members engaged in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) by fostering external networks. The organisation has collaborated with the *Regional Development Bank (BPD) DIY* to enhance members’ entrepreneurial skills, enabling them to develop their businesses more effectively. These training sessions serve as a mechanism for redistributing resources and fostering economic self-sufficiency among members. Through these initiatives, GEMAPAKTI DIY strengthens the identity of *penghayat kepercayaan*, ensuring that members are equipped to expand their socio-economic capabilities.

GEMAPAKTI DIY engages in multiple strategies to construct community identity, focusing on the reinforcement of harmonious values and the strengthening of both external and internal networks. In the face of structural marginalisation—such as unequal access to education and civil registration issues—as well as cultural marginalisation, including negative stigma and bullying against *penghayat kepercayaan*, GEMAPAKTI DIY serves as a crucial platform for the empowerment and development of its members. This marginalisation is countered through identity reconstruction, wherein members utilise their available resources to assert their collective goals and achievements. This shared awareness reinforces their identity as a young generation of *penghayat kepercayaan* and facilitates the promotion of their religious identity. The collective movement established by GEMAPAKTI DIY

functions as both a form of protection and affirmative action, positioning its members as proactive agents in their own self-development as young *penghayat kepercayaan* (Abdillah & Izah, 2022, pp. 145–147; Castells, 2020, pp. 72–74; Sukirno, 2019, p. 139).

## **Living Democracy: Rethinking the Existence of Indigenous Religions for Freedom of Religion and Belief**

The issue of religious democracy and belief systems in Indonesia remains a complex and contentious matter. While Indonesia upholds democratic principles, the governance of indigenous belief groups continues to face significant challenges due to the limited application of democratic values, primarily resulting from a top-down institutionalisation model. The management of religious and belief diversity is often shaped by specific interest groups or institutions without adequately considering the plurality of religious identities. Hefner emphasises that Indonesia's diverse societal roots necessitate a democratic governance model that accommodates multiple perspectives. However, prevailing democratic practices frequently favour the majority, reinforcing the exclusivity of dominant religious identities. Ideally, as outlined in the constitution and foundational state principles, religious differences should be managed based on the principle of equality through social and political collaboration. Unfortunately, recognition and acceptance of diversity have not been accompanied by the necessary paradigm shifts and structural reforms to ensure equal treatment of all citizens. Consequently, minority groups continue to experience discrimination due to the logic of majoritarianism-based segregation (Hefner, 2019; Hefner, 2021, pp. 6–10).

Institutional intervention in the lives of indigenous belief practitioners has fostered a paradigm of separation, reinforcing negative social stigmas both within society and among government officials. Maarif explains that the differentiation between religion and belief systems is rooted in a colonial paradigm that perceives them as two distinct entities (Maarif, 2018, pp. 11–15). The classification of groups as officially recognised religions versus those excluded from such recognition reflects the politicisation of religion, shaped by colonial-era frameworks. The Christian theological model underpinning this classification has contributed to a binary definition of religion, distinguishing between “us” and “them,” mirroring historical distinctions between Christianity and groups deemed heretical (e.g., paganism). This differentiation is not only theological but also anthropological, influencing rituals, worship, and conceptions of divinity (Smith, 1998, pp. 270–275). Nye further argues that contemporary definitions of religion are increasingly inadequate in capturing the complexities of modern belief systems, which are often deeply intertwined with culture. In many cultural contexts, divinity is understood in diverse and fluid ways. The dominant definition of religion, however, continues to restrict and regulate belief systems, demonstrating that religious governance remains undemocratic and has yet to fully embrace the plurality of religious experiences (Nye, 2008, pp. 16–17).

The differentiation paradigm within Indonesian society shapes how religious commu-

nities distinguish between state-recognised religions and those that are not. However, Indonesia's ethnic and indigenous belief diversity inherently does not adhere to this rigid separation between religion and belief systems. The definition of religion should not be constrained by colonial constructs that marginalise indigenous traditions. The continued distinction between religion and indigenous belief systems illustrates how government policies remain influenced by colonial-era paradigms. *Pancasila*, as Indonesia's foundational state philosophy, particularly its first principle—"Belief in the One Supreme God"—offers a deconstructive narrative aimed at dismantling the institutional distinction between state-recognised religions and other spiritual traditions. Ideally, every individual should be regarded as equal in their right to worship according to their respective traditions (Maarif, 2018, pp. 87–88).

The dynamics of religious democracy and belief systems in Indonesia, as reflected in the case of GEMAPAKTI DIY, reveal that despite governmental regulations recognising indigenous belief practitioners, discrimination persists in terms of redistributive and representative rights. This is particularly evident in the governance of youth organisations within indigenous belief communities. Such discrimination arises from definitional discrepancies concerning institutional responsibility, which ultimately exclude indigenous belief practitioners from the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The government continues to uphold a paradigm that fails to fully accommodate the needs and rights of belief-based organisations. This reflects an excessive degree of structural control that disregards the aspirations of ancestral religious adherents, particularly the younger generation, thereby marginalising their rights and representation in the development of indigenous religious communities (Bagir et al., 2014, pp. 4–8; Bagir et al., 2011, p. 129).

According to Bernard, this situation exemplifies the conditions faced by religious minority groups in Indonesia as a consequence of the politicisation of religious identity. Such politicisation undermines the essence of religious freedom in Indonesia. The government frequently employs a top-down approach that inadequately considers societal diversity, thereby neglecting the rights of individuals and groups with different beliefs. To achieve genuine democracy, it is imperative that the government actively listens to and incorporates the aspirations of all communities, including indigenous belief practitioners. The governance of religious diversity should extend beyond formal regulations and instead prioritise respect for and recognition of existing differences. All citizens should be afforded equal opportunities to express their beliefs without fear of discrimination or social stigma. Moreover, structural and paradigmatic reforms are essential in establishing a more inclusive and responsive framework that adequately addresses the needs of all groups. Strengthening dialogue and collaboration between the government and indigenous religious groups is expected to foster a more democratic and harmonious environment, where individuals can live and thrive according to their beliefs. This process is not solely about formal recognition but also about cultivating deeper societal acceptance and understanding of Indonesia's diverse social fabric (Adeney-Risakotta, 2018, pp. 210–217).

To uphold the rights of every individual within Indonesia's religious democracy, trans-

formative efforts that prioritise freedom with dignity are essential. Reflections from the GEMAPAKTI DIY experience highlight the necessity of a paradigm shift and government restructuring in managing individual freedoms. The government should function as a mediator between differing societal paradigms, fostering dynamic legitimacy rather than enforcing separation through restrictive policies. Based on Dennis C. Mueller's concept of legitimacy, a fundamental aspect of governance is the creation of a legitimacy framework that is broadly acceptable and inclusive (Parvin & Bagheri, 2020, pp. 462–465; Mueller, 2013, pp. 13–15). Policies should reflect societal values, ensuring that legitimacy is established within a genuinely inclusive democratic framework.

Mueller and Bader share a similar perspective with Manuel Castells' concept of the network society, which emphasises the importance of public participation in policymaking. In the context of religious democracy, Castells underscores the necessity of adopting a more inclusive and diverse political outlook. Addressing marginalisation must extend beyond rigid political decisions and institutional frameworks. A more participatory and inclusive democracy ensures that freedom of religion and belief is not merely a legal provision but an integral component of broader public discourse. When religious and belief-related issues are approached with sensitivity to inequality and a commitment to inclusivity, the resulting policies are better positioned to reflect the needs and aspirations of all societal groups. This represents the essence of a dynamic democracy, in which religious freedom is safeguarded and supported through just and equitable policies.

Furthermore, such forms of mobilisation highlight the crucial role of public participation in political processes beyond formal institutional structures. When citizens actively engage in shaping policies through social movements and collective action, they not only strengthen democracy but also expand opportunities for political engagement. This is particularly relevant within the framework of religious democracy, where these issues are often overlooked in formal political representation. Collective mobilisation plays a pivotal role in reinforcing religious democracy by introducing new issues into public discourse, fostering broader civic participation, and ensuring that policies uphold principles of justice and inclusivity. Ultimately, such participatory engagement helps create a society in which religious freedom is both respected and protected, allowing individuals to contribute meaningfully to political processes in an equitable manner (Castells, 2020, pp. 328–332).

To establish an inclusive citizenship framework, the indigenisation of democracy must be pursued through the development of an inclusive education system. Religious and belief education should incorporate multiple perspectives to foster mutual understanding and shared aspirations. James Banks, a scholar of multicultural education, emphasises the importance of incorporating multicultural education as a means of fostering inclusive democracy. Managing religious and belief diversity requires integration and active engagement with collective aspirations. Additionally, Banks highlights the significance of social contribution and activism in multicultural education, arguing that holistic engagement is essential to advocating for the rights of marginalised groups without reinforcing narrow perspectives (Banks, 2010, pp. 238–245; Akinyoade, 2011, pp. 14–17).

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that while indigenous religions have been officially recognised, the implementation of policies and the redistribution of rights continue to encounter significant obstacles and discrimination. Research on GEMAPAKTI DIY reveals that government legitimacy often operates through a dominant approach, where policies tend to marginalise young *penghayat kepercayaan* who seek to develop their communities through self-initiated programmes. As a youth organisation representing indigenous religious groups in Yogyakarta, GEMAPAKTI DIY experiences state intervention through a top-down policy framework in programme management. This approach results in restricted access to resources, facilities, and representation for young members, particularly given the organisation's diverse composition of belief groups with distinct objectives. Consequently, GEMAPAKTI DIY members face both personal and structural challenges, including negative stigma and difficulties in obtaining equal opportunities in education and employment.

Through an analysis of identity construction, GEMAPAKTI DIY exhibits resistance against marginalisation by actively cultivating a positive identity through various strategies. To address these challenges, the organisation strengthens both internal and external relationships to consolidate its community. Internally, GEMAPAKTI DIY conducts educational and empowerment initiatives in collaboration with NGOs such as *LKiS* and *SRILI*, aiming to enhance member capacity and ensure the regeneration of *penghayat kepercayaan* leaders. Additionally, the organisation engages in identity reinforcement by leveraging social media and filmmaking as a means of identity actualisation through technological platforms. These collaborative efforts reflect a grassroots democratic movement that prioritises cross-sector cooperation.

From the perspective of Manuel Castells, GEMAPAKTI DIY's initiatives constitute a form of project identity, representing resistance against dominant structural identities. The organisation's persistence in capacity-building and empowerment underscores the necessity for government policies that go beyond mere constitutional recognition and actively support young indigenous belief adherents. This highlights the urgency of transforming state policies to adopt a more inclusive approach, integrating multicultural education and cross-sector collaboration to promote participatory and dignified democracy. The government must ensure equitable platforms for *penghayat kepercayaan* by facilitating financial support, educational access, and empowerment programmes that enable them to take pride in their religious identity and fully engage in GEMAPAKTI DIY's initiatives.

GEMAPAKTI DIY's internal and external identity-building efforts illustrate how marginalised groups assert their existence in response to government institutionalism. This study affirms that religious and belief democracy in Indonesia requires a fundamental transformation in diversity management—moving away from a top-down paradigm and embracing collaborative, bottom-up approaches that uphold human dignity beyond formal recognition. A more participatory, inclusive, and equitable governance model is essential, one that respects local traditions and actively involves *penghayat kepercayaan* in efforts

to foster peace and challenge the social stigma frequently imposed upon indigenous belief communities. By upholding democratic principles, ensuring policy neutrality, and formulating inclusive policies, Indonesia can strengthen its democratic framework and dismantle ingrained cultural paradigms of differentiation, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and participatory environment for all religious and belief communities.

## Acknowledgements

The author expresses sincere gratitude to GEMAPAKTI DIY (*Generasi Muda Penghayat Kepercayaan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta*) for granting permission to conduct research on the challenges they face, which has contributed to the development of this academic article. In particular, the author extends appreciation to Dhayu Murti and Baskoro Waskitho Husodo for their invaluable role as informants and for providing essential data for this research. The author is also deeply grateful to Duta Wacana Christian University (UKDW) for its support in facilitating this research. Finally, special thanks are extended to the reviewers and the journal *Indigenous Southeast Asian and Ethnic Studies (ISEAES)* for the opportunity to publish this article, with the aim of contributing to scholarly discourse and academic advancement.

## Declaration of Interest Statement

I hereby declare that all information and data collected for this paper have been obtained with the informed consent of the participants and in full compliance with ethical research standards. I take full responsibility for the data analysis and the content of this paper, ensuring that there are no institutional affiliations that could give rise to conflicts of interest. Furthermore, I confirm that I have no competing financial interests or personal affiliations with any individuals or organisations that could influence the objectivity of this study. The purpose of this research is solely to advance academic knowledge and scholarship, rather than to shape public perceptions of the organisations or groups discussed herein.

## References

Abdillah, A. N., & Izah, S. A. (2022). Dinamika hubungan antara agama lokal, agama resmi, dan negara. *Mukaddimah: Jurnal Studi Islam*, 7(1), 132–150. <https://doi.org/10.14421/mjsi.71.2966>

Adeney-Risakotta, B. T. (2018). *Living in a sacred cosmos: Indonesia and the future of Islam*. Yale University Southeast Asia Studies.

Bader, V. (2003). Religious diversity and democratic institutional pluralism. *Political Theory*, 31(2), 265–294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591702251012>

Bagir, Z. A., Ahnaf, M. I., Tahun, M., & Asyhari, B. (2012). *Laporan tahunan hidup keberagaman*

*di Indonesia* (S. Cholil, Ed.). Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies.

Bagir, Z. A., Dwipayana, A. G. A., Rahayu, M., Sutanto, T., & Wajid, F. (2011). *Pluralisme kewargaan: Arah baru politik keragaman di Indonesia*. CRCS UGM.

Bagir, Z. A., Hefner, R. W., & Ali-Fauzi, I. (2014). *Mengelola keragaman dan kebebasan beragama di Indonesia: Sejarah, teori dan advokasi*.

Banks, J. B., & McGee, C. A. (2010). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (7th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Buchari, S. A. (2014). *Kebangkitan etnis menuju politik identitas* (A. Bainus, Ed.). Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.

Castells, M. (2000). Globalisation, identity and the state. *Social Dynamics*, 26(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533950008458682>

Creswell, J. W. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Pustaka Pelajar.

Epafras, L. C., Kaunang, H. P., & Asri, S. (2019). Religious blasphemy and monitory society in Indonesian digital age. *Jurnal Kawistara*, 9(2), 220. <https://doi.org/10.22146/KAWISTARA.41169>

Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian academy. *AlterNative*, 14(3), 218–227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118785382>

GEMAPAKTI DIY. (2021). *Program kerja GEMAPAKTI 2021–2024*.

Ginting, E. (2023). R-20 dan ambivalensi agama: Tantangan dalam merekonstruksi identitas agama. *BONAFIDE: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristen*, 4(1), 21–42. <https://doi.org/10.46558/bonafide.v4i1.162>

Haryono, S. D. (2023). Potret kelam moderasi beragama: Kondisi pendidikan penghayat kepercayaan di Jawa Tengah tahun 2020–2021. *Academic Journal of Islamic Principles and Philosophy*, 4(1), 115–133.

Hasan, A. Al. (2022). Gema Pakti berjuang untuk regenerasi penghayat kepercayaan. *Persmaporos.com*. <https://persmaporos.com/gema-pakti-berjuang-untuk-regenerasi-penghayat-kepercayaan/>

Hefner, R. W. (2019). Agama leluhur dan kemajuan besar demokrasi Indonesia. *CRCs UGM*. <https://crcs.ugm.ac.id/agama-leluhur-dan-kemajuan-besar-demokrasi-indonesia/>

Hefner, R. W. (2021). Islam and institutional religious freedom in Indonesia. *Religions*, 12(6). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060415>

Kusuma, J. H., & Susilo, S. (2020). Intercultural and religious sensitivity among young Indonesian interfaith groups. *Religions*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/REL11010026>

Maarif, S. (2018). *Pasang surut rekognisi agama leluhur dalam politik agama di Indonesia*. CRCs (Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies).

Maarif, S., & Asfinawati. (2022). Second essay toward a (more) inclusive FORB: A framework for the advocacy for the rights of indigenous people. *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology*,

6(2), 205–212. <https://doi.org/10.1558/isit.24947>

Maarif, S., Mubarok, H., Sahroni, L. F., & Roessusita, D. (2019). *Merangkul penghayat kepercayaan melalui advokasi inklusi sosial: Belajar dari pengalaman pendampingan*. CRCS UGM.

Nye, M. (2008). *Religion: The basics* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Castell, M. (2020). *The power of identity: The information age: Economy, society and culture*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003011590-1>

Mueller, D. C. (2013). The state and religion. *Review of Social Economy*, 71(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00346764.2012.681115>

Parvin, K., & Bagheri, M. T. (2020). The establishment and continuation of religious democratic system, manifestation of divine legitimacy and people's acceptance. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(2), 461–468. <https://doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.02.88>

Postill, J., & Epafras, L. C. (2018). Indonesian religion as a hybrid media space: Social dramas in a contested realm. *Asiascape: Digital Asia*, 5(1–2), 100–123. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340086>

Appleby, S. (2000). *The ambivalence of the sacred: Religion, violence, and reconciliation*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Sen, A. (2013). *The illusion of destiny*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Smith, J. Z. (1998). Religion, religions, religious. *Indiana University*.

Lawler, S. (2014). *Identity: Sociological perspective* (2nd ed.). Polity Press. <http://journal.um-sura-baya.ac.id/index.php/JKM/article/view/2203>

Taylor, S. (2015). Identity construction. *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463.wbisci099>

Widjaja, P. S., Wibowo, D. P. A., & Geovasky, I. (2021). Politik identitas dan religiusitas perda-maian berbasis Pancasila di ruang publik. *Gema Teologika: Jurnal Fakultas Theologia UKDW*, 6. <https://journal-theo.ukdw.ac.id/index.php/gemateologika/article/view/658/348>

Wijanarto. (2018). Mengurai masalah pemakaman publik untuk Sapta Darma di Brebes. In *Praktik pengelolaan keragaman di Indonesia: Kontestasi dan koeksistensi* (p. 332). CRCS (Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies).

Yayasan LKiS. (2020). *Aku siswa penghayat*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcbp10nmTL0>

Yayasan LKiS. (2022). *Pernikahan penghayat kepercayaan Sapta Darma*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tq97SWqmqWg>