

# Multiple Religious Belonging among Congregation Members of the United Indonesian Jewish Community and Sha'ar Hashamayim Synagogue

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## Abstract

This research aimed to elaborate on the Indonesian Jewish community, represented by The United Indonesian Jewish Community led by Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge and Sha'ar Hashamayim Synagogue under the spiritual guidance of Rabbi Yaakov Baruch. This research followed the theoretical framework of multiple religious belonging (MRB), pioneered by Catherine Cornille (1961–). This research combined primary data from in-depth interviews conducted offline and online with congregation members of both communities, as well as an extensive literature review. This research commenced its analysis by considering the conflicting religious identities of Indonesian Jews within their Indonesian identity card (Kartu Tanda Penduduk, abbreviated KTP in Bahasa Indonesia), which eventually investigated the identity of Indonesian Jews. This research concluded that MRB's scientific schema, consisting of elements of Cultural Belonging, Family Belonging, Situational Belonging, Believing without Belonging, and Asymmetrical Belonging, may not fit entirely to the theological concern of Indonesian Jews, yet some of its elements may fit into a more secular, lower, context of 'Civil' Identity. The ambiguity of the existence of Indonesian Jews prevails because they are Jewish, practising Jewish rituals, and firmly committed to Jewish tradition, yet cannot conceal their Jewish identity fully in their KTP. Further investigation concerning their level of religiosity and how their Jewishness is practiced may invite further research.

**Keywords:** Catherine Cornille; Jews; Judaism; Multiple Religious Belonging



## INTRODUCTION

In multi-religious and cultural Indonesians, there are Indonesian Jews currently living and practising their faith in the country, and they have to deal with many challenges in their lives due to their identity. It is due to several obstacles: First of all, topics on Jews, Judaism, Zionism, and the State of Israel must be intricately intertwined with the highly delicate geopolitical situation in the Middle East, regardless of the prevailing circumstances. Despite the worldwide community's growing ability to discern the parallels and distinctions between these concepts, the negative stigma associated with them remains entrenched and cannot be easily eradicated (Taylor, 1972; Yadgar, 2017). Furthermore, it is vital to recognise the extensive propagation of grand conspiracy ideas inside Indonesian society over the past few decades, which are intricately intertwined with the fervour surrounding Indonesian politics throughout history and the present (Hadler, 2004; Reid, 2010).

Moreover, researchers of Religious Studies in Indonesia find the study of Judaism less appealing due to the prevalence of bias and controversies surrounding it. It is not uncommon to encounter the belief that Hebrew and the doctrines of Judaism are frequently linked to a worldwide conspiracy aimed at Jewish domination (Bruinessen, 1994). Nonetheless, there are varying perspectives among Muslim intellectuals when it comes to Judaism (Ali, 2010). This stigmatisation has led to a scarcity of peer-reviewed publications on Judaism, particularly in the Indonesian context, as locating an individual proficient in deciphering ancient Jewish writings proves to be a formidable challenge. These complex realities, both locally and globally, can serve as a comparative lens to deepen our understanding and engagement with Judaism, which is an unavoidable aspect of our world.

Although many Indonesians do not realise there are many Indonesian Jews currently living and practising their faith in the country, Those communities have been under several academic discussions; Burhanuddin et al. (2022) specifically examined the historical aspects and dynamics of the Eits Chaim Indonesia organisation, Indonesian Jewish association founded by Elisheva Wiriaatmadja (Burhanudin, Agung, & Muchariman, 2022). Arlie et al. (2021), on the other hand, examined the United Indonesian Jewish Community (UIJC), a Reformed Jewish Group with 180 members scattered in the Archipelago within the context of cross-cultural communication (Arlie, Susanto, & Salman, 2021). Rachman (2022) offers a broader historical perspective on Indonesian Judaism to supplement her findings (Rachman, 2022), and Aryani's (2022) study focused on analysing the interplay between religious and state identity within the Sa'ar Hashamayim Synagogue community, highlighting the presence of various psychological complexities in how individuals within this community identify themselves both as Jews and as members of the Indonesian nation (Aryani, 2022). The most prominent work, published by Epafras and Kowner (2023), concluded that the last decade of development of the struggle of both Indonesian Jews implies a new form of 're-actualisation' of Jewishness after years of historical establishment from the Colonial age up to today. Their work forecasted that those fragmented factions of Jewish groups would be able to successfully merge into a sustainable community that asserted its own identity in the coming years (Epafras, 2012; Epafras & Kowner, 2023). Overall, the publications presented here comprehensively explore the Jewish presence in Indonesia, encompassing various research methodologies and perspectives on these Jewish communities with typical historical observations and then examining the pre- and post-independence period's political context.

Considering Judaism as an 'unrecognised' religion in Indonesia, alongside Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism (BBC, 2023; Dedi, 2023; Yusufpati, 2023), it is noteworthy that these materials furtherly support the prevailing preconceptions in the media regarding Indonesian Jews, who, as descendants of Jews or converts to Judaism, adhere to Jewish principles yet are unable to display their Jewish identity openly. It is then interesting to elaborate further on the identity of Indonesian Jews from a cutting-edge perspective, although the Ministry of Religion has stated that individuals are not prohibited from practising their religious beliefs and rituals, regardless of their faith (Armenia, 2016; Kemenag, 2019), this ambiguity of existence conforms to some assumptions possibly to be comprehended further in the context of a scholarly project.

Accordingly, this presented article aimed to elaborate on the Indonesian Jews, represented mainly by the United Indonesian Jewish Community (UIJC) and Synagogue Sa'ar Hashamayim under the Multiple Religious Belonging (MRB) theoretical framework (Clooney, 2010; Cornille, 2013; Knitter, 2013). This framework, which is a part of Comparative Theology, seems suitable to look at these communities closer, assuming that those Indonesian Jews -either descendants or converts- are practising Jewish rituals, reading the Torah, present in Shabbat, yet cannot conceal their identity extensively as part of Indonesians. The question is due to the fact that they cannot state 'Judaism' in their Indonesian Identity Card (Kartu Tanda Penduduk) as a religious affiliation but have to choose another option from six recognised or 'official' religions. In practical terms, this study was conducted using the six types of MRB variables introduced by Catherine Cornille (1961-) in a chapter titled "Multiple Religious Belonging" in the comprehensive work edited by David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas. (Cornille, 2013).

Along with MRB theoretical framework, this research employs in-depth interviews (Luhmann, 2022) with UIJC and Sa'ar Hashamayim congregation members to collect data related to Cornille's MRB variables. The interviews are conducted both offline and online concerning the situation and willingness of the members; UIJC, which seems quite exclusive, only offers an option for research through online dialogue. Sa'ar Hashamayim, on the other hand, opened their hand for direct visits and on-site observation (Harvey, 2022). Finally, this research will attempt to answer the following research question: "How possibly does the Multiple Religious Belonging (MRB) theoretical framework observe and then be implemented within Indonesian Jews affiliated to the United Indonesian Jews Community and Synagogue Sa'ar Hashamayim?"

## **EXPLORING INDONESIAN JUDAISM**

### **United Indonesian Jewish Community (UIJC)**

The organisation was founded by Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge, a German Jewish descendant (Sumandoyo & Pramisti, 2016), with the intention of reconnecting with the Jewish identity. Over time, he acknowledged the request from Indonesian citizens of Dutch and German Jewish descent to establish a community for Indonesian Jews (Rachman, 2022). Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge's concerns, particularly regarding the individuals who had not yet converted to Judaism due to their affiliation with non-Jewish religions, motivated him to search for a Jewish congregation capable of supporting and enhancing the development of the Indonesian Jewish community. While on his journey, Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge engaged in dialogue and collaboration with several global Jewish groups from Hong Kong, Australia, the USA, Israel, and many others. The United Indonesian Jewish Community (UIJC) was established on October 28, 2010, and currently comprises 180 members located in

various regions of Indonesia (R. B. M. Verbrugge, personal communication, November 28, 2023). The name United Indonesian Jewish Community symbolises the independence of community members to engage in their Judaic religious traditions regardless of the denomination -Orthodox, Conservative (Masorti), Progressive (Reformed), Reconstructionist, Renewal, and Secular-Humanist-without hindrance in one united, cross-ideological Indonesian Jewish group (R. B. M. Verbrugge, personal communication, November 28, 2023).

UIJC got an umbrella from Judaism World Organization in 2014 after Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge took part in a conference organised by the Union of Progressive Judaism. From here, an intense supervision process is carried out upon UIJC by Conservative and Reformed Rabbis from UPJ periodically every year, then once every two years. This process is intended to standardise Jewish members exclusively through certification throughout 2 years of education to return to the Jewish faith and traditions (R. B. M. Verbrugge, personal communication, November 28, 2023).

### **Sa'ar Hashamayim Synagogue**

Sa'ar Hasamayim (שער השמים) Synagogue, also known as the 'Gate of Heaven', is a Jewish community situated in Rerewokan, West Tondano, Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi. This Synagogue was initially the residence of Leo Elias Van Beugen (1940-2011), the descendant of Elias Van Beugen (1878-1935), which was later acquired and reconstructed in 2003 by J. P. Van Der Stoop, officially commenced its operations as a synagogue on September 17, 2004, corresponding to 2 Tishrei 5765 in the Jewish calendar. The Synagogue is led by Rabbi Yaakov Baruch, the fourth descendant of the Van Beugen family, making him the grandson-nephew of Leo Elias Van Beugen (R. Y. Baruch, personal communication, December 16, 2023).

Subsequently, the renovated facility was furnished with the Indonesian Holocaust Museum, which officially opened on January 27, 2022, in observance of Holocaust Remembrance Day. The inauguration ceremony was graced by the presence of the German Ambassador to Indonesia, Ina Lepel, the Deputy Governor of North Sulawesi, Steaven Kandouw, as well as the Regent and Deputy Minahasa Regent, Royke Octavian Roring and Robby Dondokambey (R. Y. Baruch, personal communication, December 16, 2023; [Mais, 2022](#); [Mandey & Arief, 2022](#)). Since its establishment in 2004, this Synagogue has had multiple name changes. It was initially known as Beth HaShem (בית השם), which translates to "House of God," from 2004 to 2008. Then, it was called Ohel Yaakov (אוהל יעקב), meaning "Jacob's Tent," from 2008 to 2011. Finally, it has been known as Sa'ar HaShamayim since 2011 (R. Y. Baruch, personal communication, December 16, 2023).

Sa'ar Hashmayim is the only one practicing Orthodox Judaism legally authorised In Indonesia. This Synagogue belongs to the West Sephardic community, which follows the Spanish and Portuguese traditions and practices Orthodoxy as its primary denomination (R. Y. Baruch, personal communication, December 16, 2023; [Utama, 2022](#)) and currently serves as a community with a congregation of around 20 individuals from diverse origins. They frequently observe Shabbat traditions and other significant Jewish festivals like Sukkot, Hanukkah, Yom Kippur, and Rosh Hasanah (R. Y. Baruch, personal communication, December 16, 2023). Commencing at the beginning of 2021, this Synagogue was overseen by three worldwide Rabbis, specifically Rabbi Moshe Otero (Darkei Israel), Rabbi Maikel Habib (Torah VeAhava), and Rabbi Sjimon René den Hollander (Congregation Searith Israel, New York). In addition, the Sa'ar Hashamayim Synagogue also received assistance from several global

Sephardi Jewish communities, including those in the Netherlands, New York, and London.

## **INDONESIAN JEWS IN THE LIGHT OF MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING**

Multiple Religious Belonging' (MRB), also known as 'Multiple Religious Identities' or 'Hybrid Religious Identities' is a concept that an individual can connect to or be a part of multiple religious traditions. This phenomenon primarily manifests in regions with religious groups that embrace a more permissive approach, particularly in Asia, encompassing Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. However, researchers have recently initiated discussions on this topic within the framework of other religions, including Islam, Judaism, and Christianity ([Cornille, 2002, 2003](#)). The rise of religious hybridity in the Western world, as asserted by [Oostveen \(2019\)](#), has consequently made the concept of separating belonging from religion more critical in these environments ([Oostveen, 2019](#)).

In the specific case of Jews, MRB is historically traced to diverse causes. In the context of Jewish-Christian relations, for example, a duality of belonging is undeniably linked to the sharing theological root of Jewish-Christian traditions, built upon acknowledging that Christianity relies on revelations from ancient Judaism and is based on the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people ([Feldmeier, 2017](#)). Of course, Jewish texts, known as the Tanakh (תנ"ך), make up a significant portion of the Christian Bible ([Maulana, 2023, p. 10](#)); The Church, as such, is required to remember that Jews received the Old Testament revelation through the ancient covenant created by God in his incomprehensible love ([Feldmeier, 2017, p. 84](#)). In America recently, a conversation concerning Jewish and Christian theological boundaries resulted in the emergence of 'Messianic Judaism', a

congregation committed to the Evangelical Church yet following Jewish practices (Kaell, 2015). Although indeed controversial (Cohn-Sherbok, 2000, p. 182), Messianic Judaism displays, to some degree, a question of belonging between Judaism and Christianity.

In a broader context, it is apparent that there is a chance for a Jew to carry out a 'double belonging' by illuminating some of the non-Jewish practices, resulting in an inevitability that understanding the patterns of one religion can enhance strength in another faith group. A Jew, as observed recently by Grant (2017), can do "both Jewish and Christian things" (Grant, 2017, p. 5). On the other hand, Diller's (2016) case may exemplify that conversely, a non-Jew may reflect and adopt non-conflicting beliefs and practices with their own so that they may be deeply engrossed in religious practices. However, there will be moments of silence on the conceptual-religious conflicts among those multiple religions even while active (Diller, 2016). They can be affiliated to multiple religious identities; nevertheless, it is constantly a barrier that cannot be penetrated -believing in the salvation of Christ, for instance. The phenomenon of dual belonging in Judaism, as shown by Diller, also implies the influence of social circumstances and the needs of daily life rather than prolonged theological and spiritual reflection (McEntee, 2017).

Cornille (2013) categorises MRB into various divisions: Cultural Belonging, Family belonging, Occasional Belonging, Believing without Belonging, and Asymmetrical Belonging. The initial categories consist of two natural models derived from socio-cultural factors, while human preferences or demands determine the remaining classifications (Cornille, 2013). This section will analyse both the possibilities and impossibilities of implementing MRB among Indonesian Jews, specifically examining two communities: The United Indonesian Jewish Community (UIJC) and the Synagogue Congregation of Sa'ar Hashamayim. The primary data source was

obtained through In-Depth Interviews and Open-Ended Questions with members of the Sa'ar Hashamayim Synagogue and UIJC congregation (Luhmann, 2022). This study was conducted to visit two communities (Harvey, 2022), with the restriction that direct observation of the communities was only allowed by Rabbi Yaakov Baruch (Sa'ar Hashamayim), while Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge (UIJC) did not grant permission for research visits. The questions posed to both communities were identical, as they adhered to the same Catherine Cornille's MRB formula (Cornille, 2013). Following guidelines of Research Ethics outlined in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in The Study of Religion*, each respondent was given the opportunity, at the start of the interview, to provide explicit consent for using their name as a source.

Due to a significant portion of respondents desiring to maintain their Jewish identity undisclosed, most interviews will be identified anonymously using initials (e.g., AA), while others agree to be identified by their full names (e.g., Fulan). There are 28 respondents in total, including Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge and Rabbi Yaakov Baruch, who are prominent source persons. This part, as has been commenced with a general inquiry into MRB, will then be followed by an analysis concerning Cornille's classification of MRB and its relevance to Indonesian Jews.

### **Cultural Belonging**

Cultural Belonging refers to a dual religious ownership paradigm frequently observed with a person's cultural identity. Individuals may adopt distinct religious affiliations due to the diverse religions within a given society, contributing to the overall cultural framework they belong to (Cornille, 2013, p. 324). In China, Cultural Belonging is asserted by religious elements often consisting of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism (Hassan, 1976; Madsen, 2010), and various syncretic Chinese religions (Xinping, 2014), while Japan is

predominantly influenced by Buddhism-Shintoism syncretism through the Shinbutsu-Shugo model (Tamura, 2000).

Cornille's observations highlight that religions possessing a cultural essence can fulfil specific worldly requirements or enhance aesthetic significance during ceremonial occasions, implying that the unique arrangement of religious services within the framework of Cultural Belonging is dictated by the culture itself, or in simpler terms, is demonstrated by how a specific religion adjusts to the local cultural setting (Cornille, 2013, p. 324).

Notably, most Jews in both communities resided in Indonesia, which is obviously a non-Jewish area. Soenarjo, a member of UIJC, disclosed that he resides in a diverse neighbourhood that practices Hinduism and Christianity (S. Soenarjo, personal communication, November 28, 2023). YO and Shmuel David, also from UIJC, are from Manado and Ambon. They also determined that they are predominantly surrounded by Muslim and Christian populations (S. David, personal communication, November 28, 2023; Y. O., Personal communication, November 28, 2023.). The congregation of the Sa'ar Hashamayim Synagogue is indistinguishable. RR, who resides in Bitung, North Sulawesi, likewise resides in a neighbourhood that is not primarily Jewish (R. R., Personal communication, December 16, 2023.); similar to E, who hails from Amurang in North Sulawesi (Y. S., personal communication, December 27, 2023.).

It is intriguing to discover that within two distinct Judaic communities with different denominations -Reformed and Orthodox-, organisation members reside in the same region, specifically North Sulawesi, suggesting the possibility of differing religious interpretations of Judaism. As an illustration, during the Shabbat ceremony, Rabbi Yaakov Baruch rigorously refrains from utilising electronics, engaging in cooking activities, or driving, as per the regulations of Shabbat in Judaism. As a spokesperson for the

Orthodox community, the Sa'ar Hashamayim Synagogue's religious conduct is fitting, particularly given that the congregation members are residents of North Sulawesi who have convenient access to affordable worship services. Meanwhile, Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge has allowed the use of technological access for online Shabbat at UIJC, as its congregation members are located in different regions of Indonesia. This permission, he claimed, is based on the principle of Pikuach Nefesh (פיקוח נפש) in Halakha (Jewish Law), which emphasises the importance of saving human lives. In this scenario, rather than nullifying Shabbat due to the failure to meet the required Minyan or the minimum number of ritual members, Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge ingeniously devised a solution that allowed the congregation of 180 individuals to convene and engage in collective prayer despite the significant geographical constraints they faced monthly. For the remaining weeks of the month, the community members are left to keep Shabbat individually in their residences (R. Y. Baruch, personal communication, December 16, 2023; R. B. M. Verbrugge, personal communication, November 28, 2023).

Within the context of Cultural Belonging, religiosity is not a prominent component of the prevailing belief system in the culture where communities reside. Consequently, they not only belong to a religious minority, but they also possess a religious perspective that contradicts the prevailing cultural paradigm. There is no known manifestation of Judaism in an Indonesian form, similar to the adaptations observed in six major religions interacting with Indonesian culture (Nasir, 2019; Panuntun & Susanta, 2021). Based on the findings from data analysis using various sources, it has been determined that the concept of MRB, specifically concerning Cultural Belonging, does not apply to the Indonesian Jewish community.

## **Family Belonging**

Family Belonging typically arises from a union between a father and mother of different religious backgrounds, resulting in their children embracing two distinct religious ideologies as they grow up. While children can adopt one religious tradition primarily, it is more common for them to identify as belonging to two distinct religious traditions (Cornille, 2013, p. 324). Intermarriage between individuals of different ethnic backgrounds, as observed, might pose difficulties for parents, particularly in receiving negative prejudice in identifying their children's identity. This issue has been explored in earlier studies (Caballero, Edwards, & Puthussery, 2008; Fishman, 2004).

Regardless of whether parents have mixed religious backgrounds or are not initially Jewish, individuals from both communities opt for Judaism due to their discovery of their mother's Jewish ancestry. Both Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge and Rabbi Yaakov Baruch were born to parents who were not formally associated with Judaism but later embraced the faith after discovering indications of their Jewish heritage. Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge was born to a Muslim father. Similarly, Rabbi Yaakov Baruch's grandmother married a Muslim man, and his mother followed the Muslim faith. Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge acquired knowledge of his Jewish heritage through his grandfather, while Rabbi Yaakov Baruch similarly recognised his Jewish lineage through his grandmother (R. Y. Baruch, personal communication, December 16, 2023; R. B. M. Verbrugge, personal communication, November 28, 2023). The existence of mixed marriages among families of Jewish ancestry allowed the two Indonesian Jewish individuals to reclaim their Jewish identity, and despite their parents not being officially associated with Judaism, they were still considered part of a Jewish family (R. Y. Baruch, personal communication, December 16, 2023; R. B. M. Verbrugge, personal communication, November 28, 2023).

Cornille conceptualises this pattern, although his literature provides examples resulting from parental influence (Cornille, 2013, p. 326); however, when examining the case of the Indonesian Jewish community, it appears to be distinct in that they are genetically connected to Judaism, where later they decided to adopt a different religious identity. At the very least, we can observe a significant familial aspect in acknowledging a specific religious identity derived from previously mixed ones.

Several members expressed similar perspectives as well. For instance, Soenarjo, from UIJC, was born to a father who practiced Taoism and a mother who followed Christianity. He embraced Judaism with a profound inner conviction that it would provide him spiritual solace. "I followed my heart's call", he said (S. Soenarjo, personal communication, November 28, 2023). Sarah Louis, also from UIJC, is the daughter of a Catholic father who decided to convert to Judaism "To return to my Jewish roots" (S. Louis, personal communication, November 28, 2023.). Once again, we observe instances where a family with a diverse religious background, as long as it is connected to Judaism, allows the child to select their religious preferences, as proposed by Cornille, notably if they successfully traced their Jewish lineage.

### **Situational Belonging**

According to Cornille, the concept of MRB on some occasions, is determined by an individual's choice to prioritise the effectiveness of specific religious rituals outside their beliefs (Cornille, 2013, p. 326). Recently, there was an interesting finding regarding the growing interest in Shamans (Dukun) in Indonesia, which was studied by Schlehe (2019) in describing that Indonesian paranormals often represent certain religious and cultural traditions ranging from Islam, China, West, and of course, Indigenous ones such as the Javanese or Abangan model (Schlehe, 2019). Even though Schlehe and Cornille do

not meet on a theoretical level, it can be understood that sometimes a religious individual seeks answers to the problems that befall him from sources that do not come from his religious tradition, and this is where Occasional Belonging finds its space as a form of manifestation of dual religious identity. Elsewhere, we can also find several sacred places that symbolise interfaith meetings as those places are believed to solve their personal or life issues regardless of faith affiliations, such as in Lombok (Gottowik, 2019) and Tamilnadu (Waghorne, 1999). Holy places, in short, occasionally provide a representation of existence that does not only belong exclusively to one religion but also to two or even multi-religions. Cornille notes that a person's identification with a different religious tradition, practice, or perhaps even place of ritual usually lasts as long as the problem is present, although if later the teachings of the Ustadz or Priest become a solution, the dual ownership may last longer (Cornille, 2013, p. 326).

Following this framework, some Judaism congregation members may identify with one or two spiritual principles that they believe align with the teachings of Judaism. Notably, there was a lack of consensus among the community members who provided data on this matter, as they all experienced a sense of spiritual fulfilment as Jews and adhered to Jewish doctrines. without ever perceiving any action potential based on the teachings of other religions.

It is interesting to add this finding to the Sa'ar Hashamayim congregation, which underwent a conversion from Christianity, specifically R, E, and Y. According to the Occasional Belonging theory, what has occurred in Sa'ar Hashamayi is precisely the opposite; R and E, for example, asserted that they have embraced or adopted Judaism due to their recognition of the essence of the teachings found in the Old Testament (Tanakh). R, a self-proclaimed Christian Priest and University Lecturer with expertise in Hebrew, dedicated a decade to studying Judaism before ultimately choosing to adopt it as his present

faith despite his official identification card (KTP) still listing Christianity as his religion (R. R., personal communication, December 16, 2023.).

While YS did not specify his reason for choosing to convert to Judaism, E, a government official, has become increasingly acquainted with Judaism since his conversion more than ten years ago. He has been studying Judaism since 1997, and despite practising Judaism since 2000, E formally converted to Judaism in 2011. "The teachings were highly compatible with my needs and preferences," he stated. An intriguing aspect of E is that, due to his current government position, he attends Church not for religious devotion but to fulfil formal invitations in his Official capacity. His ID Card, moreover, still indicates his religious affiliation as a Christian (E. E., personal communication, December 16, 2023.; Y. S., personal communication, December 27, 2023.).

It can be considered that those individuals recognised that Judaism had a religious foundation similar to and distinct from their Christian tradition, and this realisation later served as a motivation for their religious conversion from Christianity to Judaism. Consequently, rather than investigating their sense of belonging in certain situations as Jews, they experience a sense of belonging in those situations while still identifying as Christians. Within this framework, the concept of Multiple Belonging ultimately results in religious conversion, as the original religious dedication is relinquished in favour of a new sense of identity. Individuals then may develop such a strong identification with the beliefs and practices of a foreign religion that the tradition itself gains a normative significance (Cornille, 2003).

### **Believing Without Belonging**

In the fourth principle of MRB, Believing without Belonging, a religious individual does not feel affiliated with two or three religions. Instead, they independently form and choose various spiritual

teachings and practices (Cornille, 2013, p. 327). In Davie's (1990, 1997) studies, Believing without Belonging arose due to a widespread lack of faith in religious institutions, particularly the Church, which was prevalent among the urban population (Davie, 1990, 1997). Despite a significant decline in affiliation with religious institutions, the Church no longer holds sway over policy-making in essential domains, nor does it dictate public or private moral choices.

In relation to this, it seems that the Indonesian Jewish community, including both UIJC and Sa'ar Hashamayim, does not conform to this element. This theoretical concept posits that rather than feeling affiliated with multiple religions, a religious individual actively selects and adopts various religious beliefs and practices for themselves (Cornille, 2013, p. 327). Through careful observations and extensive interactions with religious leaders and congregations, it became evident that both communities exhibit a profound dedication to Judaism as their way of life and belief system. Attending the Synagogue, observing rituals and reading the Torah, reciting the Siddur, striving to consume Kosher food in daily life, wearing Tefillin, and maintaining gender segregation during worship are emblematic of Jewish identity, which is steadfastly upheld. Contrary to several observations suggesting that Believing without Belonging is a form of 'religion without forms' (Tromp, Pless, & Houtman, 2020), Indonesian Judaism appears robust, substantial, and vibrant.

### **Asymmetrical Belonging**

The fifth element of Cornille's version of MRB is Asymmetrical Belonging. As a culmination of the idea, Asymmetrical Belonging affirms the possibility of those who feel affiliated with a particular belief system while also identifying themselves with another religious identity (Cornille, 2013, p. 327). As mentioned above, neither the UIJC nor Sa'ar Hashamayim congregations consider the existence of theological sources other than Judaism. They are Jews and practice

Jewish teachings, both those of truly Jewish descent and those who have converted sincerely to Judaism; they do not affirm other theological symbols, such as the Cross, or Images of any kind; they only read Torah and Siddur during daily worship, and then strongly demonstrate their religious identity as Jews (Clooney, 2004; Knitter, 2013). This finding practically annule Kamsma's finding, who noted that there was an identification of Messianic Judaism in the Jewish community in Manado, which was considered to have had a significant influence on the construction of Jewish identity in the Archipelago (Kamsma, 2010a, 2010b). Kamsma's suggestion seems not very valid because the religious identity of Indonesian Jews, especially those who reside in North Sulawesi, has been embedded since birth (R. Y. Baruch, personal communication, December 16, 2023).

One of the dynamics at play here is the 'Dual Identity' issue. Although it may not pose an obstacle in a theological setting, it presents several problems regarding civil registration. The overwhelming majority of respondents identified their religion as 'Christian' in their KTP, with only one individual specifying 'Catholic', while the Sa'ar Hashamayim congregation identifies itself as 'Christian' or 'Muslim' on its ID card. According to Made Surya and Soenarjo from UIJC, administrative reasons were a significant factor in the decision, as it was also advice from the Head of Rukun Tetangga (RT) or the Neighborhood Association (S. Soenarjo, personal communication, November 28, 2023; M. Surya, personal communication, November 28, 2023.). On the other hand, David expressed that he had no alternative but to write 'Christian' in his religion column (S. David, personal communication, November 28, 2023); So if there is an option to specify the Jewish faith, he will likely indicate Jews/Judaism in the religion field. The occurrences of E and R in Sa'ar Hashamayim also appear to be evident, as R stated that his KTP was transitioning towards embracing the concept of 'Belief in One

Almighty God' or Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa which purportedly resembled Judaism more than Christianity (E. E., personal communication, December 16, 2023; R. R., personal communication, December 16, 2023.). D wrote Christianity in his KTP due to his adherence to this ancestral faith, practised since the Dutch East Indies era (G. L. D., personal communication, November 28, 2023). Louis, who explicitly indicated her Catholic affiliation on her KTP, stated that she had her education in a Catholic institution from primary to secondary school (S. Louis, personal communication, November 28, 2023.). The intentions expressed by the Indonesian Jewish community to the authorities contain essential issues that should be duly acknowledged, particularly from the perspective of devout believers; despite their informal nature, there has been an effort to display publicly their religious identity as Jews in their KTP.

Other explanations may be pretty intricate, as Jewish identity involves various factors currently unfolding in Indonesia, including persisting stigma and a significant level of sensitivity. M, for example, asserted that he wrote about Christianity to ensure his personal and group safety (D. M., personal communication, November 28, 2023). This condition is related to what has been shown recently: a cohort of young individuals reportedly instilled fear and intimidation at the Sa'ar Hashamayim Synagogue on late Friday, December 15, 2023, by shouting 'Hail Hitler' in front of the Synagogue. The surveillance footage has been reported to the authorities. "The individuals appear to be Minahasan." Rabbi Yaakov stated. Identifying themselves as Jews then is challenging not only in terms of Civil registration but also in the public context.

## **DISCUSSING FEASIBILITY AND INFEASIBILITY OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES OF INDONESIAN JEWS**

A comprehensive examination of the correlation between MRB and civil identity, as mentioned in the KTP, can be conducted by thoroughly analysing the role of religious identity in Indonesian society and considering its structural and cultural significance within the state. The execution of the national movement is inevitable unless it relies on the association and control of specific religious institutions, which purportedly possess significant influence in rallying society (Herdiansah, Husin, & Hendra, 2018; Romli, 2019). In the Indonesian setting, religious identity is intricately intertwined and integral to a national character (Nilan & Wibawanto, 2023).

The discussion surrounding the correlation between the placement of religion on the KTP has progressed, particularly concerning groups of Penghayat -those are affiliated with Indonesian Indigenous Religious Groups- believers who, as per various confessions, have encountered discrimination in various public domains such as employment, education, or healthcare due to their inability to include their religious identity in the Religion section of their ID card (Arif, 2017). Several recent scholarly evaluations have effectively captured this phenomenon from different angles, mostly outlining service methods considered inferior for Penghayat (Bidayaturrohmah, 2023; Rohmawati, 2020). Subsequently, this intricate situation prompted several endeavours to be undertaken from a cultural perspective, such as implementing the Religious Harmony Forum (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama/ FKUB) to address potential disputes and foster a sense of national understanding as advocated by Interfaith Leaders (Hasanah, Widiyanto, & Purwasih, 2021). Later, the government ultimately determined that individuals who had faith in a higher power could express their belief by stating 'Belief in Almighty God' (Kepercayaan

pada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa) as a means to seek access to public services (Kemdikbudristek, 2023). This directive is derived from the findings of Decision Number 97/PUU-XIV/2016 of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia and claimed has been based on various perspectives and aligns with Indonesia's religious and national ideological frameworks, aiming to safeguard the rights of minorities and promote religious freedom (Guyanie & Baskoro, 2021; Maslul, 2020).

This situation is unfolding. The affirmation of Judaism's identity mainly originated from individuals of Jewish lineage and was eventually reinforced by a few individuals who converted from other faiths. A 'Dual' Identity emerged when an Indonesian Jew, instead of indicating Judaism on his KTP, opted to specify a different religious affiliation. Therein, the Asymmetrical Belonging concept is not considered from a theological perspective but may occur in a lower social/civil context. The Jewish community is indeed experiencing the duality of civil identity, similar to what occurred to the Actors of Penghayat. Although Jews may not adhere to or actively practice the religious tenets outlined on their KTP, they still cannot register as Jewish as a national identity. In order to resolve this, some congregation members prefer to write 'Belief in One Almighty God' (Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa) in their KTP as it seems more appropriate for Jews, as shown by both leaders of Congregations (R. Y. Baruch, personal communication, December 16, 2023; R. B. M. Verbrugge, personal communication, November 28, 2023). Some members are also currently submitting an evaluation request to this category, as informed by R (R. R., personal communication, December 16, 2023.).

The idea of MRB also seems to intersect, although not explicitly, with how the Republic of Indonesia seeks to legitimise certain 'recognised' and 'unrecognised' forms of religious expression. As confirmed (Oostveen, 2018), MRB is a challenge that seeks to

deconstruct the general understanding of religious traditions. The Republic of Indonesia's efforts to 'limit' a number of recognised legal belief systems are inversely proportional to the idea of MRB; where if MRB has the potential to 'break' the religious system recognised, especially in the Western world by giving rise to non-Western religious ideas which may be 'merged' with a particular religious identity, the Republic of Indonesia limits the definition of religion as stated in on KTP only. MRB, meaning that it is realised, although not entirely, in cases where a person of religion 'A', who practices the teachings of religion 'A', but writes religion 'B' or 'C' on his KTP. The continued discussion of MRB in the context of Indonesian Judaism can finally be developed further from a 'Theological' perspective and unique 'Civil' considerations, as well as giving birth to a new religious discourse in the Indonesian context. Cornille's Asymmetrical Belonging may also be 'modified' through this finding, where there are certain conditions that theologically, religious people are firmly committed to their beliefs, but in their civil practice, they are not, or have been unable to demonstrate identity and commitment in full. The theoretical framework of MRB can ultimately be the next entry point for the study of religions in Indonesia, which, in this case, although not entirely, can gradually examine the identity and existence of Indonesian Jews.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on previous discussion, it can be concluded that Theoretical Framework of Multiple Religious Belonging (MRB) can elucidate several facets of the ambiguity surrounding the religious identity of Indonesian Jews, incorporating distinct and particular components as a novel discourse in the field of Religious Studies within the Indonesian setting. As previously mentioned, the theological identification issue was not discovered within the MRB

framework; however, the civil identity problem significantly facilitated further debate. For example, further thoughts on the religious issues in public society may explain this occurrence, which, in the Indonesian context, has led to the emergence of a new scholarly aspect within religious studies. Given Indonesia's position as a country that straddles the realms of religious and secular, it is imperative to possess a comprehensive understanding to address emerging religious phenomena effectively. The resurgence of Jews in Indonesia can manifest in unforeseen forms and models, and the presence of diverse ideologies and religious beliefs in Indonesia makes it noteworthy to examine the situation of Jews in the country. Understanding the academic perceptions concerning this issue is challenging, as it requires ongoing analysis and interpretation to develop a scholarly apprehension of these discussions from religious and political standpoints; however, undoubtedly, it can catalyse readers to delve into a deeper understanding of Antisemitism, Judaism, Zionism, and Israel. Regardless of their academic background, as shown, an increasing number of Indonesians are becoming adept in succinctly discerning the distinctions and parallels among these discourses. Undoubtedly, a thorough examination of that discussion is an entirely distinct matter.

Moreover, within the framework of Multiple Religious Belonging, it can be further explored in the following theological discussions as a component of the derived discussion of Comparative Theology. This Post-Colonial paradigm is suitable for delineating potential future religious concepts within Judaism and other prominent religions acknowledged in the Republic of Indonesia. The phenomenon of Indigenous religions, for instance, is intriguing in its potential to generate additional conjectures, assuming the probability that one or two distinctive perspectives of Indonesian-style Judaism (or maybe other religions) diverge from those prevalent in global

society. The longevity of this discourse's imagination may persist for an extended duration. Given the fervour surrounding religious concepts in Indonesia, it will likely endure, regardless of its nature.

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Conceptualization: A.M.R.M.; Data curation: A.M.R.M.; Formal analysis: A.M.R.M.; Funding acquisition: A.M.R.M.; Investigation: A.M.R.M.; Methodology: A.M.R.M.; Project administration: A.M.R.M.; Resources: A.M.R.M.; Software: A.M.R.M.; Supervision: A.M.R.M.; Validation: A.M.R.M.; Visualization: A.M.R.M.; Writing – original draft: A.M.R.M.; Writing – review & editing: A.M.R.M.

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### **Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent for this study was obtained verbally before the interviews, both offline and online.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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