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# A Mixed Bag: The Inter-Religious Marriage Experience in Bali

Chelsea Bhajan  
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A MIXED BAG:  
THE INTER-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE EXPERIENCE IN BALI

Chelsea Bhajan

Advisor: Professor Dr. Wayan Windia, SH, Udayana University, Denpasar

SIT Study Abroad

Indoensia: Arts, Religion and Social Change

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to investigate how marriage customs as well as the perception of religion and its role in daily and family life changes within the context of religious plurality. This study specifically focuses on the experience of interreligious marriages on the island of Bali in Indonesia. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken in both Bahasa Indonesia and English in north and south Bali and minimally in east Bali. Twenty-one respondents were garnered in seventeen interview sessions. Findings showed a variety of means of dealing with this plurality, including choosing to follow only one faith, practising aspects of several faiths together and participating in different traditions individually. Many of these experiences reflected the conditions at the time of marriage as well as the values upheld by the society. While this paper chooses to focus solely on the religious aspects of these marriages, it should be noted that religious differences also work in tandem with cultural, racial, ethnic and even caste differences. However these other aspects are not discussed at length here.

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## Introduction

The country of Indonesia is diverse in many ways including ethnicity, language, culture and religion. It is the largest archipelago in the world consisting of over 17,000 islands with a population of around 237 million. Since gaining independence in 1945, Indonesia has consistently promoted unity and nationalism amongst its vastly plural society. Although it contains the largest Muslim population in the world<sup>1</sup>, Indonesia is not an Islamic state and remains a democracy. The country's Ministry of Religious Affairs confers official status to six of the 'world' religions – Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism and Confucianism. Despite no affiliation with a particular religion, the nation is neither secular, resulting in what Atkinson has termed “a ‘civil religion’”, a theistic doctrine that legitimates the country's national enterprise”.<sup>2</sup>

Bali however creates a haven of sorts amongst Islam and Christianity. The majority of people on the island follow the Balinese Hindu tradition and had to fight to have it recognised by the government as an official *agama*<sup>3</sup> in the early days after independence. Whilst Hinduism accounts for only around 2% of Indonesia's population, it accounts for around 90% of Bali's population. However, this number is said to have decreased in Bali from previous years. This is no doubt due to the influx of Indonesians from other islands as well as people from other countries who wish to engage in job opportunities. Research and statistics on religious conversion and interreligious marriage are severely limited but it seems that with an increasingly diverse set of religions arriving in Bali, an increase in inter-religious marriages is inevitable. Due

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Dr. Iqbal Muhammad, lecture on “Coming of Islam to Indonesia”, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Gadjah Madha Univeristy, Yogyakarta, Java. As of 2010, an estimate 87.2% of Indonesia's population identified as Muslim, that is 13.1% of the world's Muslim population.

<sup>2</sup> Atkinson 1987:174

<sup>3</sup> The closest word for religion in the nation's official language, Bahasa Indonesia.



to marriage laws that only permit people of the same religion to be married, a rise in conversions is therefore also to be expected.

This paper intends to explore the issues and experiences of interreligious marriages and families in Bali. The study aims to understand how religious plurality in Indonesia, specifically Bali, has influenced perceptions of religion as well as its role in daily and family life. The paper is divided into four main sections. Section I details the experience of interreligious marriages. It discusses these individuals' perceptions of religion, marriage ceremonies, daily life and child-rearing. This section also includes information gathered from individuals raised in interreligious households on how religion was present in their childhood and how they perceive religion as a result of this environment. Section II dictates conversations about conversion in an attempt to relate the conversion experience. Section III discusses laws and impositions affecting these families such as marriage laws and requirements to identify by one of the six *agama*. Finally, Section IV aims to gain an idea of whether or not Indonesia is a tolerant place with regards to religion based on the experiences of those interviewed.

## Methodology

Primary data for this research was collected from Monday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2014 to Friday 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2014 on the island of Bali in Indonesia. Interviews came from several areas of North, South and East Bali including Singaraja, Lovina, Sangsit, Tejakula, Bedulu, Ubud, Silakarang, Tabanan, Denpasar and Karangasem Interviewees ranged in age from twenty to fifty-one allowing for intergenerational perspectives on and experiences with interreligious marriages and various religious laws and impositions.

Prospective interviewees were sourced by various homestay families as they were often friends, family, neighbours or even co-workers. They were also found via interviewees themselves who contacted other appropriate family members or friends and set up interviews. Interviews were also attained by posting on a community board for the Ubud community.

At first, since the intention was to interview couples, there was concern that the male voice would dominate the conversation and the woman's voice would be minimal at best. As a result, it was decided that an option to be interviewed individually or together would be included. However, this proved unnecessary as subsequent interviews tended to be with only women due to availability. One husband declined to be interviewed. Four couples were interviewed together, two of which consisted of Balinese men who married foreign women. One of these couples also included a woman who had converted before marriage rather than because of it. Interviewees also included one divorcee and one widow, both who had chosen not to return to their previous religions. A woman who is in what is more commonly known as an interreligious marriage was also interviewed. That is, she had not converted so she and her husband were still of different religions. Some of these individuals had children while others were expecting. I also interviewed a woman who grew up attending Christian schools but still remained a Hindu. Three individuals,

one male and two females, who were raised in interreligious marriages, were also interviewed so as to try and gain an understanding of what family life within that context may look like as well as to see how this type of environment may influence one's perception of and attitude toward religion.

Conversions included one Jewish to Hindu, two Hindu to Muslim, five Muslim to Hindu, one Hindu to Christian, three Christian to Hindu, one person who did not convert and two individuals raised by parents who had converted from Hindu to Buddhist.

Prior to being interviewed, the aim and purpose of the study was explained to participants in Bahasa Indonesia and a detailed description of how the data would be utilized was shared. Consent forms in both English and Bahasa Indonesia were distributed and signed before interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were utilised in both Bahasa Indonesia and English. Interviews ranged from around fifteen minutes to forty-five minutes and were digitally recorded.

More than often a Balinese friend who spoke fluent Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Bali, accompanied me to interviews. This was usually the person who organized the interview. There were around five interviews that I conducted by myself, without the input of a local. I believe that the presence of a local, whom the interviewee usually knew quite well, brought about more willingness for the person to be interviewed. Their trust in the local person created a safe space for them to voice their opinions and seemed to make the process less daunting for them. My interviewing alongside a local Balinese also allowed for better communication as they were often times able to elaborate on the questions further and at times, give examples of possible answers or scenarios.

## **Limitations**

My limited language abilities in Bahasa Indonesia meant that I was unable to ask for further clarification or elaboration in some instances. Also, conducting my interviews in Bahasa Indonesia and not Bahasa Bali meant that at times individuals were unable to fully comprehend what exactly I was asking. At times, they also had some difficulty conveying their opinions and perceptions in Bahasa Indonesia. This was particularly true for the older interviewees who had not grown up with Bahasa Indonesia. The formal wording of my questions also confused some of my interviewees who were not formally educated for very long. This was a flawed design on my part, influenced by my personal cultural background. I worded my questions more academically since I did not want to offend by wording questions too simply or basic, as if talking to a child. Nonetheless, these limitations were somewhat mollified by the assistance of my Balinese friends who interjected when necessary.

Other downfalls included the short period of time spent with people in various areas. This did not create an opportunity to build trust which may have led to more detailed or nuanced answers to my research questions. There was also not a lot of opportunity for participant observation as I was not able to stay with an inter-religious family.

Interviews in English tended to last longer than those in Bahasa Indonesia. Perhaps this had to do with me being able to probe further in English but I presume it also has to do with the apparent fact that Balinese individuals tend to not question a lot of their religious beliefs and traditions so they had never really given thought to many of the questions I proposed before. As one of my interviewees stated, Balinese people are very sure of themselves and their identity. They know who they are so often-times these questions seem quite silly and perhaps the answers seem obvious and rather matter-of-fact.

## Interreligious Marriages

### Perception of Religion

When asked how individuals perceived religion in general, the majority responded that all religions are good and act as the foundation for our lives. Religion helps people to manage their lives and guides them by teaching them right from wrong. Yuni of Tejakula said that she uses her religious perspective when making decisions<sup>4</sup>. Anjar of Singaraja included that “by believing in God we can be grateful for what we have now.”<sup>5</sup> Nina, originally from America, believes in one main universal positive energy force. She does not associate a specific face to it, Catholic or Hindu, but that force is what she prays to.<sup>6</sup> Komang, who identifies as an atheist or humanist, believes that religion essentially focuses on trying to make life better and tries to make sense of the world. However, he prefers the Buddhist philosophy which does not try to make sense of the world but instead teaches people to be good and how to find themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Many described all faiths as being the same. They have the same purpose which is to worship God but differ in to whom they worship, how they worship and how often they worship. Individuals described Hinduism as worshipping many gods as well as Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Waca, praying three times a day and having many ceremonies and offerings. Islam, however, was described as praying to Allah, having simpler practices and praying five times a day. Christians were differentiated by praying to only Jesus Christ. Nina described Hinduism and Roman Catholicism as being the same at their core, that is, there is the belief in a God and in doing unto your neighbor what you would have them do unto you. However, she noted that

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<sup>4</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication, 9 April 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Paraphrased from personal communication, 22 April 2014.

Catholicism is much more closed and exclusive and described Hinduism as being “much more accepting than Catholicism on a daily basis.” She cited the example of how Catholics are the only ones allowed to receive the host in a Catholic church but anyone can go to a Hindu temple and pray and receive holy water.<sup>8</sup> Hannah, who is originally from England, spoke of Judaism and Hinduism, listing a similar focus on community and an unforced obligation to pray unless Hasidic Jew.<sup>9</sup> Aries, who grew up with Confucianism, Buddhism and Balinese Hinduism described the three religions as being similar and compatible because Buddhism and Confucianism in Bali have been influenced by Balinese tradition.<sup>10</sup> One interviewee cited that she does not receive as much enlightenment from the Hindu priest as she did when she used to attend church every Sunday when she was single.<sup>11</sup> Komang, from Denpasar, has been exposed to a myriad of religions including Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Christianity (Methodist) and was able to offer a more nuanced view of each religion. He explained that except for Buddhism, these religions tend to be didactic. They all have creation stories and a doctrine given to followers which tell them what to do to live happy and to be happy. Buddhism on the other hand is more of a study or philosophy and while it has five precepts, there is more room for a Buddhist to mould how they follow the practice. Confucianism and Balinese Hinduism have a strong practice in ancestor worship. He emphasized that Abrahamic faiths differed in who their prophets were but also focused on the concept of “man being unclean”. He also described these faiths, except Buddhism, as utilising guilt, especially Confucianism.

These perceptions of religion reflect the significance and pervasiveness of religious life in Bali. Most people cannot conceive of a life without religion because it is integral to how they

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<sup>8</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication, 21 April 2014

<sup>10</sup> Paraphrased from personal communication, 23 April 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Paraphrased from personal communication, 12 April 2014.

live their daily lives. It is not only a means of guidance, but also a form of education, protection and giving gratitude. The overall way in which individuals differentiated between religions reiterated the view that all religions are the same and have the same purpose since only the surface aspects were mentioned. A few individuals however were able to differentiate more thoroughly, describing aspects that resonated with them. The aspects of religion that these individuals chose to focus on revealed what they wanted or needed in a religion. Nina, for example, appreciated a more welcoming and inclusive atmosphere whilst Komang preferred a religion or philosophy that taught him how to live well but allowed him to figure out things on his own. He did not appreciate religions that were stricter in how followers must adhere to practices.

### **Marriage Ceremony**

The individuals interviewed met their spouses in a variety of ways. Some were introduced by friends while others met at their place of work, usually in a region they were not originally from. People met in Surabaya, Batam, Badung, Papua, Gianyar and Kuta. One couple met in a church and two couples were musicians in the same group. All individuals declared that they got married because of love, compatibility or because they were destined to be together except for one who got married because she became pregnant. Pastor Cristofel from Lovina said that when he first met his wife God told him that she was his wife.<sup>12</sup>

Most of the respondents did not experience any conflicts between each other or their families or friends before marriage. Hannah's parents are even considering converting to Hinduism because they plan on moving to Bali and would like to become a part of the

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<sup>12</sup> Personal communication, 12 April 2014.

community.<sup>13</sup> However, four women ran away to Bali with their spouses and eloped. They explained that their parents did not agree with the marriage at first but once they had children, their parents gradually came to support the union. Aries explained that her parents eloped not because their families did not support the marriage but rather because it was a cheaper process and they did not wish to burden either of their families financially.<sup>14</sup> Three interviewees also described receiving support from one partner's family but not the other's.

Nine marriage ceremonies employed only one religious tradition. Two employed both Hindu and Muslim tradition. These couples first held the traditional Balinese Hindu ceremony called *mepamit* at the woman's house before the marriage. At this time, the woman said goodbye to her ancestors in the family temple and informed them that she was not going to be part of the family anymore. Four couples had two wedding ceremonies in different places. Three had both a wedding in Java in the Islamic tradition followed by a wedding in Bali using the Hindu tradition. The other couple got married in the United States first in a non-denominational ceremony that employed aspects of both Balinese and American culture such as traditional wedding attire. Eight years later, they moved to Bali and had a wedding in the Hindu faith. At this time, both daughter and mother underwent the *Widhi Widani* ceremony to convert to Hinduism. Several others converted at the time of their Hindu wedding as well. The majority of families did not disagree about how the wedding ceremony should be except for one that eventually conceded to the husband's family. Three did not disagree but instead had conditions that a second ceremony in the Islamic tradition must be carried out or that the Hindu *mepamit* ceremony must be carried out first. Conflicts were resolved by having discussions between the two families.

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<sup>13</sup> Personal communication, 21 April 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication, 23 April 2014



One of the questions posed was “How important was it for you to have your religion represented in the wedding?” However, this question seemed to be interpreted as addressing religion in general as opposed to their initial religion, that is, not their spouse’s religion. Nonetheless, people’s responses indicated that religion was an important aspect of the wedding because it made it legal in the eyes of religion. Made Sudita indicated that it was not important for him to have his religion represented in the wedding in America because he knew that they would have a Hindu one in Bali.<sup>15</sup> Tuti Herawati, who also had two separate ceremonies, said that both religions are important and needed to be applied to the marriage.

The fact that several interviewees included both religious traditions in their wedding ceremonies indicates somewhat of a willingness to compromise. It also demonstrates respect toward the practices of both families. However, the number of elopements indicates a preference for same religion marriages since interviewees mentioned their parents not wanting them to leave the religion. While certainly not uncommon, it seems as though inter-religious marriage still incites concern amongst families, perhaps moreso because one party is expected to convert. It would be interesting to see reactions to inter-religious marriages if conversion was not necessary.

## **Daily Life**

The majority of individuals indicated that they believe in and practise only one religious tradition in their daily life. Putu Rika of Desa Sangsit gave examples of Islamic practices such as praying five times a day, fasting, *zakat*<sup>16</sup> and *Makah*<sup>17</sup>.<sup>18</sup> A few individuals however, do retain minimal traditions from their previous faith. One woman from Tejakula said that she still carries

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<sup>15</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014

<sup>16</sup> One of the five pillars of Islam that requires followers to donate a portion of their earnings to charity

<sup>17</sup> One of the five pillars of Islam stating a pilgrimage to Mecca.

<sup>18</sup> Personal communication, 15 April 2014.

out *selamatan*<sup>19</sup> on the occasion of someone's birthday.<sup>20</sup> Murtiningsih from Karangasem returns to Java to celebrate *Eid ul Fitr* with her family and also continues to use the Muslim greeting that asks for safety in whatever is being done.<sup>21</sup> Ibu Ayu described *Sajen* in Islam which is an offering done when parents pass away and likened it to a similar practice she does now called *Soda* in Hinduism.<sup>22</sup> Mujiati still has not converted to Hinduism and so continues to engage in Muslim practices at her home such as the five prayers a day.<sup>23</sup> While Hannah has converted to Hinduism and participates in ceremonies and various traditions she admitted that she still cannot convince herself to believe in God. However, she does believe in *karma*<sup>24</sup> and the balance of energies.<sup>25</sup> Although Buddhist, Aries also believes in karma and in giving thanks to one's ancestors.<sup>26</sup>

Religion is said to play a variety of roles in the daily lives of those interviewed. Several described it as being important and influential in their day-to-day lives. Some said that religion helps to bring them closer to God, strengthen their beliefs and better their lives. Ibu Ayu uses religion to ask for the safety of her children while Yuni uses it for guidance.<sup>27</sup> Anjar believes that religion allows him do positive things and better work.<sup>28</sup> Hannah and I Ketut Wijana said that religion is especially present in their lives because they live in a village and have responsibilities to the community.<sup>29</sup> Komang described the only purpose of religion in his life as a connection to

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<sup>19</sup> A gathering to congratulate and pray for happiness, prosperity and good luck.

<sup>20</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014

<sup>21</sup> Personal communication, 25 April 2014

<sup>22</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014

<sup>23</sup> Personal communication, 14 April 2014

<sup>24</sup> The Hindu belief that "what goes around comes around" that is, if you do good then good will come to you.

<sup>25</sup> Personal communication, 21 April 2014

<sup>26</sup> Personal communication, 23 April 2014

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014

<sup>28</sup> Personal communication, 9 April 2014

<sup>29</sup> Personal communication, 21 April 2014

his family since the only time he sees some of them is when he attends a specific religious occasion.<sup>30</sup>

### **Child-rearing**

Many individuals revealed that their children were raised or are being raised in only one religious tradition, usually Hindu or Islam. Even in situations where one partner may still celebrate special holy days from their previous religion, their children do not take part. This was the case with Murtiningsih who would still return to Java to celebrate Eid ul Fitr with her family but her daughter never participated.<sup>31</sup> Tuti Herawati from Bedulu said that while her children were raised in the Hindu tradition only, they often ask about Muslim traditions, such as *sholat*, when in Java.<sup>32</sup> One woman said that she draws from and adapts the enlightenment she received about life in church, to teach her children, who are raised in the Hindu faith.<sup>33</sup> Dian Harini also raises her children in the Hindu faith only but said that they often celebrate Christmas with her family.<sup>34</sup> The two self-identified *Bali wives*<sup>35</sup> who were interviewed, Nina and Hannah, explained that their children would be raised in the Hindu tradition but would be exposed to Western holidays, such as Christmas. However, these holidays would usually be devoid of any religious significance.<sup>36</sup> Nina told of how her daughter had already been exposed to holidays like Thanksgiving since she had spent the first few years of her life in America. Anjar and Diah said

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<sup>30</sup> Personal communication, 22 April 2014

<sup>31</sup> Personal communication, 25 April 2014

<sup>32</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014

<sup>33</sup> Personal communication, 12 April 2014

<sup>34</sup> Personal communication, 13 April 2014

<sup>35</sup> Foreign women who marry Balinese men and now live in Bali call themselves Bali wives.

<sup>36</sup> Personal communication, 20 & 21 April 2014

that when they do have children, they will be raised in the Islamic religion and teaching however, they will be exposed to aspects of both Islam and Hinduism so as to respect his wife's family.<sup>37</sup>

Aries and Komang, who both grew up in interreligious marriages, described being exposed to several religions in their daily and family lives. Aries, whose mother converted from Hinduism to Buddhism when she got married, practised Hinduism, Confucianism and Buddhism. While she was educated in the teachings of Buddhism from the seventh grade in school, at home, her family practiced aspects of Hinduism and Confucianism such as ancestor worship. Since her mother was familiar with the Hindu tradition, they would still do offerings, although not as intensely as other Balinese Hindus, and they would celebrate *Nyepi* and *Galungan*. Aries, who is married to a Buddhist and is currently pregnant, said that she would also expose her child to aspects of the three traditions. They would learn Buddhism at school, practise Confucianism and small aspects of Hinduism at home and experience and understand Hinduism from their environment.<sup>38</sup> Komang, whose mother also converted from Hinduism to Buddhism upon marriage, grew up being exposed to the same three traditions. He explained that Buddhism, at the time, was merely a mask for Confucianism which was not yet recognised by the government and was often associated with Communists. He divulged that many Chinese Indonesians would claim to be Buddhist because firstly, there were not many Buddhists to criticise how they carried out the practice and secondly, there was not much involved with Buddhism besides having an altar with a statue. So, he received schooling in Buddhism because that was what appeared on his identification card. At home, he mostly practiced Confucianism which consisted of ancestor worship and praying to gods such as the Sky God and the Earth God. There would be an altar

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<sup>37</sup> Personal communication, 9 April 2014

<sup>38</sup> Paraphrased from personal communication, 23 April 2014

with photos of his ancestors and a pot for incense and they would pray to them on the new moon and full moon, thanking them for their sacrifices. Hinduism was present in his life in the sense that he attended *odalans* at his mother's family's temple. Having attended a Methodist boarding school in Singapore, he has also been exposed to Methodist Christian teachings and told of how he would be asked to say grace some times which he found strange seeing as he was Buddhist. He described the experience as "having to fake Methodism". Although not married yet, Komang said that he would raise his children neither with religion nor without it. "I would give them pretty much an overview of everything and say this is what it boils down to. It's up to you if you believe or not."<sup>39</sup> Rien, who also grew up in an interreligious marriage but was raised only in the Hindu faith, said that her children's religious education will depend on the religion of her husband.<sup>40</sup>

It seems as though, generally, parents who were initially from separate religions, choose to raise their children in one faith for fear of confusing them by doing otherwise. They wish to give their children a solid religious foundation and bring them up in a harmonious household. The issue of burdening them with too many social and religious obligations may also be a concern and reason for this decision. However, non-Hindu children living in Bali will no doubt be exposed to and become familiar with the Hindu traditions and practices, simply because it pervades the environment. Households that consist of Chinese descendants tend to have a more complicated history and often practise both Confucianism and Buddhism, as was the case with Aries and Komang.

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<sup>39</sup> Personal communication, 22 April 2014

<sup>40</sup> Personal communication, 25 April 2014

It is surprising that there is such emphasis on children being raised in one religion, even to the point of only being educated in the practices of their specific religion in school, when this variety of religions is so readily available and accessible. The fact that children do not learn about the religious practices and beliefs of their classmates and peers is strange to me especially when the government is constantly promoting unity and tolerance. However, as I have discussed later in Section IV tolerance does not necessarily imply understanding nor acceptance.

### **Influence on Children**

Three individuals who were raised in interreligious marriages were interviewed to see how this environment may have influenced their perception of religion. Komang insisted that this environment has made him more “skeptical” of religion. His time abroad in the UK has also allowed him to experience a life not dominated by religion and has allowed him to form his own ideas.<sup>41</sup> Aries stated that she does not believe being raised in an interreligious marriage influenced her perception of religion however she believes in different aspects of various religions although she is Buddhist.<sup>42</sup> This may very well have been a product of her Balinese environment rather than specifically the inter-religious marriage environment. Rien believes that her environment has moulded her perception of religion such that it is significantly different from her fellow Balinese peers. She often expresses her discontent with her religion whereas her peers would never complain or question about why they do things the way they do.<sup>43</sup>

Individuals raised in an inter-religious household seem more open-minded and accepting of other religions and of the plural society of Indonesia. They are also more willing to engage in

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<sup>41</sup> Personal communication, 22 April 2014

<sup>42</sup> Personal communication, 23 April 2014

<sup>43</sup> Paraphrased from personal communication, 25 April 2014.

multiple traditions, marry someone of a different religion and expose their future children to aspects of more than one religion. The presence of many religions does not threaten their beliefs. Their perceptions of religion are also less strict and more nuanced. It seems as though their exposure to many religions has allowed them to create an idea of religion best suited to them. Increased familiarity and knowledge of other religions tends to develop more independent and critical thinking within these individuals. They do not merely take religion at face-value and are not opposed to questioning and exploring further.

## The Conversion Experience

It is hard to say whether or not there is some sort of unwritten rule or norm for how conversions are decided within an inter-religious marriage in Bali. Does the woman always convert to the man's religion? Do conversions tend to follow the more dominant religion on the specific island that they live? Does the person who "practises less" convert? Within all of my interviews, the women were the ones who converted in marriage. Perhaps this is a reflection of the patrilocal society that exists in Bali, however it should be noted that there are rare instances where the men convert such as in the cases of a *nyentana* marriage.<sup>44</sup>

Whether the women I interviewed claimed to have struggled with the conversion or not, many of them justified their conversion by stating that they had to follow their husband's religion. Putu Rika stated:

*"My parents had no problem about this. This is not a problem because I am a daughter in my family. My parents gave me the freedom to choose. You have chosen that man, so you have to respect him as your husband. You have to follow and obey what your husband says. That's what my parents teach me about life, I have to respect my husband and also my parents. Also because I am a girl, when I have husband, he has to be the number one."*<sup>45</sup>

Even the two women whom I interviewed who were raised in inter-religious marriages shared similar sentiments. Aries, who is already married, discussed how growing up her mother taught her that she must follow her husband's religion.<sup>46</sup> Rien, a university student, revealed that she would like to marry someone Christian specifically so she could convert and follow his

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<sup>44</sup> Nyentana marriage occurs when a family has no male heirs and so one of the daughter, usually the oldest, remains in the compound and must find a husband willing to 'marry in' to her family.

<sup>45</sup> Personal communication, 15 April 2014

<sup>46</sup> Personal communication, 23 April 2014



religion.<sup>47</sup> The dominance of this patrilocal sentiment was specifically highlighted by interviews with the two *Bali wives*, Hannah and Nina who dictated a lack of choice in the matter. When asked why she converted Hannah responded:

*“I wasn’t really given a chance or given an option. It was like, you follow your husband into the religion and the community and all of that and I said okay. It doesn’t make that much difference to me.”*

Hannah also told of how she had to agree to become Hindu during her engagement.<sup>48</sup> Nina explained that “there was no decision” when it came to deciding who was going to convert since she was very much a non-practising Catholic. “It’s really expected and I always kind of knew it was part of the deal coming here.”<sup>49</sup>

Several interviewees cited that their parents agreed with the conversion and gave them the freedom to choose. This certainly presents a curious dichotomy where a daughter is given the freedom to choose her religion, that is, to leave the religion she was born and raised in, but then is told that she must follow the religion of her husband. It seems more of an illusion of freedom or a ‘restrictive freedom’. One exception to this was Debora, who grew up in a Christian orphanage but was allowed to go home and pray in the Hindu way. Since she was not raised by her Hindu family, they were very open about her wanting to convert to Christianity and gave her the freedom to choose what religion she wanted to be when she was teenager.<sup>50</sup>

Some individuals expressed their parents’ thinking of them as a daughter was linked to their religion. Aries mentioned that her mother encouraged her to marry into a religion that she

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<sup>47</sup> Personal communication, 25 April 2014

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication, 21 April 2014

<sup>49</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014

<sup>50</sup> Personal communication, 12 April 2014

had already been exposed to (Hinduism, Buddhism or Confucianism) so that they would not “lose her”.<sup>51</sup> Yuni, a divorcee who chose to remain Hindu instead of converting back to her original religion of Islam, had run away from Java and eloped with her ex-husband in Bali because she was pregnant. She explained that she didn’t want to make her parents sad by telling them that she was now Hindu. “I want them to see me as “Yuni”, as their daughter, not see what religion I believe in.”<sup>52</sup> While daughters usually marry out of their families in Bali, it appears as though marrying out into a family of a different religion creates an even more intensified feeling of disconnection. When not bound together by the same religion and the same community, familial relations become quite unattached.

Those who claimed to have struggled with their religious conversion spoke of feelings of confusion and a period of time where they did not feel as though they had converted. Nina related that despite her knowledge and familiarity with Balinese Hinduism, she was a little nervous about converting explaining that “It’s a really big choice to change your religion for somebody.”<sup>53</sup> Dian, on the other hand, said although she struggled with the conversion, it did not affect her as much because of her familiarity with Hinduism.<sup>54</sup> A few individuals described difficulties because they did not know how to pray, make offerings or carry out other rituals. There is a lot to learn and the communal and social responsibilities that accompany some of these faiths, such as Hinduism and Confucianism, create a set of expectations and obligations that can be overwhelming for newcomers. Even one woman, a Hindu who grew up primarily

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<sup>51</sup> Personal communication, 23 April 2014

<sup>52</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014

<sup>53</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014

<sup>54</sup> Personal communication, 13 April 2014

practising the Christian faith, admitted that she still does not understand much about Hinduism but continues to follow her husband's faith.<sup>55</sup>

One interviewee from Tejakula said how she was confused and thought twice about the conversion but finally became sure about it because "all religions are the same, just the way they pray are different."<sup>56</sup> Murtiningsih said that after the marriage ceremony she felt like she had gone insane. "I lost my mind. I didn't know what I was doing."<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, Debora, who converted from Hinduism to Christianity before she got married, stated that after converting she felt sure about her belief.<sup>58</sup> Yuni's story of how she gradually came to accept Hinduism in her heart was particularly interesting:

*"When we arrived in Bali, we got married using the Hindu tradition ceremony. They made a ceremony for me to convert to Hindu but in my heart I still didn't feel that I was Hindu. But then, after my 7 months of pregnancy, my husband still did the prayer based on Hindu ritual, but I myself still didn't believe in Hindu religion, but they had already made Hindu ritual for my 3 months pregnancy. And after the 7 months of my pregnancy I was confused about what religion my baby should follow when my baby is born. And then, I asked for guidance from my late father, he came to me through my dream. I asked about what I should do about this, should I follow Hinduism or should we believe in different religions, but then how about my kid, wouldn't my kid be confused about that? In my dream my father said that no matter what religion you believed in, they were all the same, at the end the purpose was all the same. A couple days later I was thinking about that dream. My husband was usually at home and did the offerings, but at that time my husband was not at home for three days. And every day there was always an Ibu who brought "canang" (offerings) to our home. My feelings started changing at that time. I started praying. And from that time on little by little I started to believe in Hindu."*

Even now, after their divorce, Yuni has chosen to remain in the Hindu faith and tradition despite others' expectation for her to return to the Islam faith. She now feels connected to Hinduism in

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<sup>55</sup> Personal communication, 12 April 2014

<sup>56</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014

<sup>57</sup> Personal communication, 25 April 2014

<sup>58</sup> Personal communication, 12 April 2014

her heart and believes that she gets good guidance from the faith. She continues to do Hindu prayer in the family and public temples and receives support from her ex-husband's family.<sup>59</sup>

Many women seemed to overcome this struggle of conflicting emotions by reasoning that they had to “unite the relationship by following only one religion” and that this sacrifice was “all for the children”. Husbands seemed to feel happy about their wives' conversion. Anjar told of how happy he felt because his wife wanted to be the same religion as him. She converted not just because of the stipulations of marriage law but also because having the same religion was important to them.<sup>60</sup> Made Sudita said that it felt good to him. He did not feel nervous about Nina becoming a Hindu. He expounded that “she does a good job. She comes and joins at the temples and at ceremonies and that make me feel great.”<sup>61</sup> Although some wives denoted no problem with the conversion, I am curious to know if the husbands of those that did struggle ever considered the sacrifice of their wives during conversion and whether or not they would have been just as willing to convert. A few women did receive assistance and teaching in their new faith from their husbands however, indicating some support and understanding of the changes these women faced.

In the course of trying to determine some kind of trend in how conversions took place, interviewees shared their interpretations. Komang, an individual raised in an interreligious marriage explained that in his experience, “If one of the two people getting married is Muslim then the other person converts to Islam by default and if not, then they convert to the religion of the man.”<sup>62</sup> This held true in the case of Anjar, a Muslim man from Java and Diah, a Balinese

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<sup>59</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014

<sup>60</sup> Personal communication, 9 April 2014

<sup>61</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014

<sup>62</sup> Personal communication, 22 April 2014

Hindu woman. Diah converted to Islam even though they lived in Bali where Hinduism is the most dominant religion. However, of the six Muslim women from various parts of Java whom I interviewed, all but one had converted to Hinduism. Mujiati explained that a conversion ceremony had not yet been held for her, the implication here being that eventually she would have to become a Hindu. She went on to say that had she and her husband gotten married in Java, he would have converted to Islam.<sup>63</sup> Murtiningsih told of how she first asked her husband to convert to her religion but he did not want to be Muslim so instead she had to follow her husband. “I married my husband so I have to be Hindu like him.”<sup>64</sup> Even Tuti Herwati who got married to her husband in Badung first before coming to Bali, converted to Hinduism. So, perhaps Komang’s suggestion about conversion to Islam only holds true when the man is the one who is Muslim. Again, it seems as though there is truly no hard and fast rule and it depends on the situation.

Mujiati’s story detailing her reluctance to convert from Islam to Hinduism was particularly compelling. She is from Tuban, east Java but met her husband while working in Surabaya. They were both previously married. She claims that when her husband, “Kentong”, a Balinese man, was in Surabaya, he was Muslim because he had a Muslim wife at the time. She expanded that she fell in love with him because he was kind and was also Muslim but when he returned to Bali he converted back to Hindu. She explained that she has not yet converted to Hindu because she does not like the concept of cremation. She prefers to be buried but cremation is the Hindu way. She once prayed in the family temple but did not feel comfortable. Mujiati continues to observe the Islamic tradition at home, “sincerely thinking I really want to convert to

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<sup>63</sup> Personal communication, 14 April 2014

<sup>64</sup> Personal communication, 25 April 2014

Hinduism but probably not this year, maybe in the coming years.” She still feels uncomfortable observing and practising the Hindu traditions. Mujiati explicated her struggle with conversion further saying,

*“...Based on what the “Kyai” says, the best religion is Islam, that’s why I am afraid to convert to Hinduism. I am Muslim, if I convert to Hindu that means I am “murtad” (apostasy) I will get “Laknat” (cursed) from Allah. Allah will not forgive me. That’s what the Kyai says. No matter how big our sin is, Allah will forgive, but if we do “murtad”, that’s such a big sin that Allah will not forgive.”<sup>65</sup>*

It is interesting to me, this constant assertion that a family must follow only one religion for there to be unity and harmony among them. Putu Rika claimed that “it is impossible to follow two religions in one family”.<sup>66</sup> The assertion is interesting because it sits side by side with this perception that all religions are the same, that we all pray to the same God and that all religions serve the same purpose. If at the core all religions are the same, why then would it be hard to grow up in a family that practiced two different ones? This stance possibly has more to do with the social responsibilities accorded to each of the major ‘recognised’ religions in the archipelago, especially when talking about Balinese Hinduism and its incredible interwovenness with community, social duty and everyday life. Perhaps if one were to follow two religions most heartily, there would be no time for much of anything else.

However, if we parallel these ideas of what promotes unity and harmony within the family household with the ideas of what promote them within the state, we see quite a conflict of interest. Within family life, many have preached to me the need for everyone to follow one religion, even within an inter-religious marriage. More than often it seems, children are only brought up knowing one of the two religions, not even celebrating big holy events of the other

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<sup>65</sup> Personal communication, 14 April 2014

<sup>66</sup> Personal communication, 15 April 2014

religion. To me, this conflicts with the religious harmony effort put forth by the state in *Pancasila*<sup>67</sup> and even the country's motto. The motto reads "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika", Unity in Diversity, however this diversity seems to be shut out at the front door. Religious tolerance, *tolerasi*, does not imply acceptance. Instead, this finding supports a view of Indonesia as a country possessing incredible diversity but that this diversity is kept in separate isolated pockets. Each island has its own image. Although this is changing in recent times with the flow of people from island-to-island especially with the introduction of the *Transmigrasi*<sup>68</sup> program, I am still uncertain as to whether there exists yet an image for an Indonesian citizen.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Further discussed in Section III

<sup>68</sup> The Indonesian transmigration program

<sup>69</sup> This interpretation is certainly moulded by my cultural background that consists of the melting pot culture of Trinidad and Tobago where everyone celebrates and learns about all religions and those who do refrain from celebrating are an anomaly.

## Religious Laws and Impositions

### 1974 Marriage Law

The process of marriage in Indonesia is governed by the 1974 Marriage Law and applies to all citizens regardless of religion. According to the Library of Congress, before this law was passed, there existed separate laws governing European and Chinese Indonesians as well as Christian Indonesians. The Muslim population was also made to follow *adat*<sup>70</sup> law and *Syariah*<sup>71</sup> law. The 1974 Marriage Law attempted to bring about uniformity in the country's legal system as well as the enhancement of the position of women. The history of the 1974 Marriage Law consists of uncertainty regarding whether there should be one law for all religions or separate laws governing each religion. There was also strong opposition on polygamy restrictions as well as interreligious marriage allowances. As such, the amended state that was enacted on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1974, excludes the provision specifically allowing mixed religion marriages.

The law has been interpreted in different ways and as such has garnered much debate. Article 2(1) states that “a marriage is legitimate, if it has been performed according to the laws of the respective religions and beliefs of the parties concerned.” Furthermore, “the marriage ceremony shall be performed according to the laws of the respective religion and faith.” Every marriage must be “registered according to the regulations of the legislation in force.”<sup>72</sup> Non-Muslim marriages must be registered with the Civil Registry Office following the religious ceremony while Muslim marriages must be registered with the local Office of Religious Affairs. These laws have been interpreted as forbidding two people of different religions from marrying

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<sup>70</sup> Meaning ‘customary’ or traditional

<sup>71</sup> Islamic law. Also spelt in different ways

<sup>72</sup> Buchanan, K. 2010



one another since the marriage ceremony would have to be in accordance with a recognised religion for it to be registered and in most cases at least one of the parties will adhere to a religion that does not allow a person to marry someone of a different faith. However, as the 1974 Marriage Law does not explicitly forbid or allow marriage between people of different religions, there is considerable debate regarding its interpretation and application. There seems to exist a “legal vacuum” creating a grey area.<sup>73</sup>

In practice, inter-religious marriages do take place. However, due to the complexities surrounding the marriage law, to ensure that the marriage is able to be registered, individuals usually convert to their partner’s religion before marriage. Some individuals also choose to marry overseas and then register the marriage under Indonesian law within one year of the couple’s return.

Interviews conducted attempted to gain an understanding of the marriage law concerning inter-faith marriages as well as garner opinions and feelings toward it. Of the seventeen interviews conducted, when asked how people felt about the law allowing only people of the same religion to get married, eight people supported the law while five did not. One individual was 50:50 on the issue and the rest declined to comment. Those who agreed with the law cited that it was necessary for both parties to have the same views before they could arrange the marriage ceremony. Pastor Cristofel stated “In my opinion, that is good because that is like the foundation to create a harmonious household. If there are more than one religion in a family that will affect the life of the family itself.”<sup>74</sup> Dian admitted that she did not know much about the law but supported it in order to not make a family follow two religions. Although she knows

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<sup>73</sup> Buchanan, K. 2010

<sup>74</sup> Personal communication, 12 April 2014

some families who do follow two religions, she believes it is necessary to make a husband and wife dedicate themselves toward one religion only<sup>75</sup>. One woman from Tejakula felt that the law was right and would ensure there is no confusion and problems that may result<sup>76</sup> while one woman from Karangasem claimed that it allowed parents to be more focused when educating their children.<sup>77</sup>

One woman was fifty-fifty on the issue but explicated

*“...for me if there’s a couple who follows different religions and they love each other, that’s not a problem for me. That’s even a good thing especially because we are in Indonesia whose people follow different religions. Just like my husband’s big family, we have relatives who are Buddhist, Muslims and Christians. It is beautiful because we try to understand each other and to adapt with other religious traditions.”*

The people who did not support the law disagreed with it because they believe that people have different religions and “you cannot force what you believe on other people.” Aries Pratiwi expanded that “religion is not a determination for marriage, tradition is okay but not the religion.”<sup>78</sup> Komang vehemently held that he was against it “with every fibre of his being”.<sup>79</sup> Hannah Black asserted that while many countries probably had the same law at one point in time and many probably still do, the law seemed ridiculous and outdated in modern-day Indonesia where there is so much interaction between people of different beliefs. Mixed marriages are inevitable and the law clearly needs revising.<sup>80</sup>

When asked why they thought the law existed, several pointed to the need to manage and regulate religion so as to avoid conflicts. Ibu Ayu said that it has been the rule for a long time

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<sup>75</sup> Personal communication, 13 April 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Personal communication, 25 April 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Personal communication, 23 April 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014.

<sup>80</sup> Paraphrased from personal communication, 21 April 2014.

and that Indonesians must obey both the customary and national laws.<sup>81</sup> Nina Torcivia suggested that it was a way of keeping the strong sense of community intact.

*“I know for Bali specifically, if you had husbands and wives and one of them didn’t want to be Hindu, it kind of puts a chink in the community. I guess it would kind of upset it so that you have one person who just never goes to ceremonies because, I mean they could, but if you’re not technically Hindu, you’re not really required to do it.... I guess it kind of disconnects the community feeling. So in a way, who knows, maybe that law was put in place to keep that going.”<sup>82</sup>*

On the other hand Komang suggested that it was a way to keep the Muslims in power since a lot of the people behind the law were from the Islamic political parties.<sup>83</sup> Aries also believed that there were political motivations behind the law.<sup>84</sup>

Individuals were also asked how they felt with regards to people who refused to marry someone of a different religion. Overall, the majority of respondents said that it is their right and their choice and one is not to get involved with those matters. One individual suggested that marrying someone of a different religion may make them unhappy later on because they would not feel harmonious and not be able to share their religious practices with their spouse.<sup>85</sup> Hence, they avoid this type of marriage. Others suggested that it may be because they have a solid belief in their religion and do not wish to convert. While Yuni believes that it is up to couple she also stated that this was the “old thinking of people in the past.”<sup>86</sup> Ibu Ayu explicated further:

*“Sometimes it’s about someone’s egoism...People are sometimes less experienced and have not broadened their knowledge. I don’t mean to offend, but for Balinese people they hope that they can get married with someone whose religion is the same or with someone*

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<sup>81</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014.

<sup>83</sup> Personal communication, 22 April 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Personal communication, 23 April 2014.

<sup>85</sup> Personal communication, 12 April 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014.

*who is still the relative of the family because in Bali, if we have a son we don't want them to marry out.*"<sup>87</sup>

Two interviewees claimed that if they love the other person this would not cause problems.

Hannah Black elaborated,

*"I know there are a lot of places, there a lot of religions and a lot of pressure put on people so I think if they refuse to for family reasons then I can definitely understand, if their family is going to alienate them. But if it's because they think that it's wrong in the eyes of religion, then I think that's crazy. I think God will accept if they love someone and if they're loved back then I don't see why any God wouldn't accept that."*

Her husband, I Ketut Wijana, added that this type of thinking may be more common for people who are more fanatic about religion and who think that another person's religion may destroy their beliefs.<sup>88</sup> Komang also claimed that individuals who would not even consider marrying outside their religion or even race, unless it was for practical reasons, were "massive bigots"<sup>89</sup>.

## **The Six Religions**

When Indonesia emerged as an independent nation, it became an expressly religious nation without claiming any particular faith. This was the result of a compromise between those who wished for a Muslim state and those who opposed this idea. Atkinson<sup>90</sup> calls the result a "civil religion". *Ketuhana* or The Belief in The One and Only God, is the first of the five pillars or principles documented in the preamble to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and is said to inspire the following four principles, Nationalism, Humanism, Democracy and Social Justice. These five pillars, called *Pancasila*, were coined by Sukarno as he looked to the

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<sup>87</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014.

<sup>88</sup> Personal communication, 21 April 2014.

<sup>89</sup> Personal communication, 22 April 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Atkinson 1987:174

common and shared values of the different islands and provinces to unite the people. *Ketuhanan* is further supported by Article 29 (1) of the Indonesian Constitution which reads “The state shall be based upon the belief in the one and only God.” It should be noted that the word used for God in the original document was *Tuhan* or Lord rather than Allah as an effort to compromise.<sup>91</sup>

The country of Indonesia officially recognizes only six “world” religions or *agama* – Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism and most recently, Confucianism. While Article 29 (2) of the Constitution declares that “The State guarantees all person the freedom of worship, each according to his/her own religion or belief” Indonesian citizens are still required by the government to identify by one of the six religions recognized by the State. This religion appears on identification cards, passports and also has to be filled in on forms such as medical documents. “Legally identity card applications are now acceptable when the "religion" section is left blank; however, members of some groups reported that they sometimes faced obstacles.”<sup>92</sup> These obstacles often manifest themselves in an inability to find work. These problems may also follow into the education system, where, based on the religion on their identity cards, children are ushered into a religious studies class educating them on the practices and beliefs of their specifically claimed faith.

Furthermore, Article 28I (3) of the Constitution specifically denotes that “The cultural identities and rights of traditional communities shall be respected in accordance with the development of times and civilisations.” However, as discussed by Atkinson in her essay titled “The Construction of a Minority Religion”, the imposition of this requirement has caused members of traditional societies in more isolated regions of the country to begin to redefine their

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<sup>91</sup> Boland, B.J. 1971:36.

<sup>92</sup> <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/171653.pdf>

religious practices to meet the standards of *agama*. Balinese Hinduism undertook this same transformation, a process deemed “internal conversion” by Geertz<sup>93</sup>. Religious authorities adjusted practices so that members followed one God and also followed from a religious text, before they could appeal to the government and eventually have the religion recognised. This is not surprising when persons without *agama* raise suspicions of harbouring Communist sentiments and being disloyal to the nation. They are also judged as having less intellect and being “morally backward”. Atkinson sums up the discussion saying

“The concept of religion is central to one in Indonesian nationalism. Religious freedom is guaranteed to all Indonesian citizens who subscribe to an officially sanctioned faith. Indigenous systems of ritual and cosmology are, with several notable exceptions, denied the status of a religion.”<sup>94</sup>

When conducting interviews, respondents were asked how they felt about the government requiring them to claim one of the six recognised religions. The vast majority of informants agreed that this requirement is a good thing since it encourages people to focus on only one religion. Some described that they are proud of this imposition because it demonstrates citizens’ right to choose as well as illustrates the plural society that exists in Indonesia. A few others were unsure how they feel about it saying “that’s how it is” while for one couple the requirement does not bother them. Hannah, an English woman, declared that it was a shock to her when she first arrived in Bali and believes that it is outdated, especially since if she had not gotten married and converted she would have been unable to claim Judaism as it is not one of the recognised religions. Her husband believes that there are people trying to remove this requirement.<sup>95</sup> Ariès Pratiwi shared that she thinks the law is not necessary. “You’re good because of you, not because

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<sup>93</sup> Geertz, C. 1973

<sup>94</sup> Atkinson 1987: 178

<sup>95</sup> Personal communication, 21 April 2014.

of religion.”<sup>96</sup> Komang, a 23 year old male who has spent extensive time in Australia, Singapore and the UK as well as having grown up in Bali, is adamant that they should not impose this requirement on citizens because he is unable to claim himself as Atheist. He also believes that the imposition marginalises people and is specifically racist with regards to Judaism.<sup>97</sup>

When asked why they thought this requirement existed many responded that it is simply how it has been for a long time or that the majority of people of Indonesia believe in these six religions. Hannah suggested that it was because the Indonesian government “likes to classify people”. Anjar from Singaraja believes that it is “necessary so we do not fool around with religion”.<sup>98</sup> Nina from the United States of America, lended a different perspective of why religion was so attached to a person’s identity in Indonesia.

*“...In the U.S there’s a very clear division and you never mix the two [religion and state] but here obviously it’s a very grey area. They do want you to choose... Here they list your religion for everything. It’s a part of who you are. It’s an indicator of where you’re from. Just like a Balinese name indicates your caste and whether you’re male/female and where you could be from. You’re religion is a part of that little piece here. It’s a part of what makes you you. So I don’t really know why they do all that but I definitely know that it’s one and the same here. It’s not like a separate entity.”*

Referring to the *Ketuhana* principle of *Pancasila*, Komang said that he thought it was “originally used to bring people together but that currently it was tearing people apart because everyone thinks that their God is the best.” He continued that Indonesia was founded by a lot of religious people who could not conceive of a life without religion.

Informants were also asked why they thought only six religions were recognised. Again, responses included that those were the religions practiced by the majority of people in Indonesia

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<sup>96</sup> Personal communication, 23 April 2014.

<sup>97</sup> Personal communication, 22 April 2014.

<sup>98</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014.

or the only six religions that existed in Indonesia. Pastor Cristofel did elaborate further however saying that if other minority religions wanted to be recognised he believed that it would not be a problem.<sup>99</sup> Komang also informed that it was originally only five religions that were recognised and that Confucianism was only recently included because of pressure from Chinese Indonesians.

The last question asked respondents how they felt about being able to be identified by their religion. Ten individuals described their feelings as “senang sekali”, very happy and “bagus”, great. They believed that this indicates that they are fulfilling the obligations of their religion and representing the religion well. It is a reflection of their good deeds and also means that they have received good religious education. Putu Rika stated that she is happy because she “can have more friends and gain more knowledge.”<sup>100</sup> Yuni from Tejakula felt particularly special about it since many people thought she would return to Islam after her divorce but she continues to follow the Hindu faith and people noticing that makes her happy.<sup>101</sup> Again, Nina had some insightful input drawing from her experience with Westerners.

*“The thing that I can say from my perspective, I kind of know this because of him and his family and after being here for so long, Balinese people very much know who they are. There’s no question. There’s no seeking. I think right now there is a very large portion of people in America or in the West in general whether it’s Australia or Europe or wherever, who come here seeking something... especially Ubud, which to me is so funny because most of them don’t know many Balinese people. Balinese people find it’s very comical in a way because they know who they are... Balinese Hinduism is embedded in who you are and your identity. You’d never think of not being that. Unless you’re really a black sheep and you’re really outside the box which is very unusual. And even people who live abroad who are from Bali, the point is always to come home someday. It’s laughable that anybody would ever say, “Would you change your religion?” God no. That’s who I am if you’re Balinese. So for me, I try to respect that... But I think here it’s*

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<sup>99</sup> Personal communication, 12 April 2014.

<sup>100</sup> Personal communication, 15 April 2014

<sup>101</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014



*like well of course I am Hindu and I'm very very Hindu. There's no question. Like that's how it would be for the people from Bali.*"<sup>102</sup>

A few respondents, however, were not as happy about being able to be identified by their religion. One does not like it, one thinks it is unnecessary and can perpetuate stigmas and one thinks it can lead to prejudices. A widow from Tejakula described that at first she felt weird about it (perhaps after conversion) but eventually grew accustomed.<sup>103</sup> Mujiati however, who has not yet converted to Hinduism, was sad about this and questioned what had become of her life in Bali.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014.

<sup>104</sup> Personal communication, 14 April 2014.

## Indonesia: A Tolerant Place?

Informants were asked how they felt about people of another religion and overwhelmingly people responded saying that they respect and tolerate them. The plurality of Indonesia is beautiful and so people are accepting. Ibu Ayu claimed:

*“I feel like brothers and sisters toward other people whose religions are different. I have travelled a lot during my life and have been surrounded by many people who have different religions, so I feel comfortable about it. I never differentiate them.”*

Individuals also expressed that they had no problem with people of different religions as long as they did not bother or harm anyone else.

When asked if respondents had ever experienced discrimination based on their religion either individually or as a couple, all except for three individuals declared that they had not. Ibu Ayu said that while she had not experienced individual discrimination, she and her husband have as a couple but she does not care as long as these people don't disturb them and they do not disturb these people.<sup>105</sup> Tuti Herawati of Bedulu said that she experienced discrimination after she converted for marriage and was unable to make offerings.<sup>106</sup> Komang, who identifies as an Atheist, said that he experiences a lot of discrimination from his Chinese family who find it rude that he does not pray. He said that they often assume he is worshipping the devil and because of their staunch belief in the power of *baliangs*<sup>107</sup>, believe that he must be doing black magic. This idea is further supported by the fact that he does not eat meat which is a practice *baliangs* follow as a means of saving up their energy.<sup>108</sup> Three individuals identified that while they had not

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<sup>105</sup> Personal communication, 16 April 2014.

<sup>106</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014.

<sup>107</sup> A *balian* is a traditional Balinese healer.

<sup>108</sup> Paraphrased from personal communication, 22 April 2014.

experienced religious discrimination, they had experienced issues with race. These individuals consisted of two women of European and American origin as well as one Chinese descendant. Hannah indicated that while Indonesia was generally tolerant, people here tend to not understand people who are different from them, that is someone outside of their religion or race. She suggested that it may be an education issue and that with more knowledge and exposure, more understanding would follow.<sup>109</sup>

With regards to whether individuals perceived Indonesia as a tolerant place with regards to religion, the vast majority said yes but clarified that Bali was especially more tolerant because of the influx of researchers and tourists. Made Sudita even cited the country's motto, *Bhinneka Tunngal Ika*, saying that it meant all the religions had a good relationship with one another.<sup>110</sup> Some respondents did however point to the rising number of radical believers in the nation. Komang spoke of the Front Pembela Islam (FPI) or Islamic Defenders Front and their want to instate Syariah law in all of Indonesia and spread Islam to the entire nation. He also mentioned their political influence as they are associated with the Islamic political parties, mono-religious parties he believes should not exist.<sup>111</sup> Aries declared that it really depends on where in Indonesia you are citing that her experiences in Bali and Yogyakarta had demonstrated tolerance. She also elaborated that non-Hindus who grew up in Bali were especially tolerant of other religions.<sup>112</sup>

In a lecture on the Coming of Islam to Indonesia, Professor Dr. Iqbal Muhammad of Universitas Gadjah Madha in Yogyakarta, Java discussed radicalism in Indonesia.<sup>113</sup> He explained that there is an increased flow of Indonesians to the Middle East and Egypt for the

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<sup>109</sup> Paraphrased from personal communication 21 April 2014.

<sup>110</sup> Personal communication, 20 April 2014.

<sup>111</sup> Paraphrased from personal communication, 22 April 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Personal communication, 23 April 2014.

<sup>113</sup> March 24, 2014.

purpose of study. Here, they are exposed to more puritan and radical forms of Islam as well as the leaders associated with them. Professor Dr. Muhammad did however emphasise that radicalism is not only imported but is also indigenous. He described radicalism in Indonesia as not being a homogenous single entity. There are varieties of radical groups including apolitical groups that focus on purification of faith and are intolerant of local culture and minority religion as well as radical political Islamists who promote intolerance and legitimate smaller scale violence and extensive application of Syariah within the existing political system. There are also non-violent as well as violent extreme political Islamists that promote the establishment of an Islamic state. He admitted that although most of Indonesia remains moderate, radicals are gaining significant membership.

Whilst individuals generally had not experienced any forms of discrimination or had experienced mild forms in Bali, it is no secret that religious discrimination and prejudice exists in Indonesia. This is primarily highlighted by the Ahmadiyah followers who have constantly been targets especially in Aceh where Syariah law has been instated and violent attacks regularly ensue. Religious discrimination also occurs in cases where one does not identify by a recognised *agama* or chooses to identify as agnostic or atheist, seemingly foreign concepts in Indonesia. Whether due to its prominence as a tourist destination or its predominantly Hindu population, Bali has proven to be a safe haven from severe religious prejudice, even after the Bali bombs of 2002 and 2005. Furthermore, the interviews conducted depict that tolerance merely means being able to live together and not disturb one another. Tolerance of religion does not indicate a familiarity with other practices nor an understanding of them. The ability to allow different religions to exist and reside within the same place does however suggest not only a respect for practices that are different but also respect of the freedom for other to practise differently.

## Conclusion

During my brief time travelling around Bali, searching for and conducting interviews, I have gathered many findings which have allowed me to draw several conclusions. However, first and foremost, it has been apparent that inter-religious marriage and conversions for the purpose of such marriages, are far from uncommon in Bali. This is especially telling since this research did not venture into west Bali which is well-known for its inter-religious unions. Love evidently knows no boundaries, not even religion. Respondents' willingness to engage in conversation and relate their experiences revealed that inter-religious marriages had become a less sensitive issue. These marriages are no longer rare and are no longer considered taboo. Nonetheless, this does not mean that they are whole-heartedly welcome by all families. There seems to still exist a reluctance for parents to allow their children to marry someone of another religion. Regarding daughters specifically, this is often equated with "losing" the child because not only does she marry out of the family, she also leaves the family religion through conversion. Often times, this family disagreement results in the couple eloping.

One encounters a variety of experiences and issues in inter-religious marriages and households. Findings showed a variety of means of dealing with this household plurality, including choosing to follow only one faith, practising aspects of several faiths together and participating in different traditions individually. *Pinda agama* or changing religions, as conversion is called in Bali, introduces a different set of difficulties for the spouse involved. Individuals have to deal with leaving behind not only their family but also the religion they grew up practising. Many face a period of confusion and disorientation but over time, as they learn and grow accustomed to the practices of their new religion, they soon accept it in their hearts.

Religious laws and impositions that affect inter-religious couples reveal conflicting ideals upheld and promoted by the government. Unity through diversity is often touted however people of different religions are unable to unite in love as there are no allowances for such declared in the marriage law. Likewise in the home, diversity is shut out at the door and one religion only is often followed by inter-religious families and used to raise their children. Diversity is a source of great pride yet inter-mingling is less accepted. The Constitution demands respect for indigenous traditions and peoples however official status is only conferred to six majority religions in the state. Identifying as an unrecognised religion or as having no religion is seen as being backwards and creates suspicion of disloyalty to the nation. While people readily declare the religious tolerance of Indonesia, education in all religions is not practised and so there is limited knowledge and understanding of the various beliefs. This results in a tolerance that does not necessarily imply acceptance.

It should be noted that often times inter-related aspects other than inter-religious played a role in these relationships. They tended to also be inter-ethnic or inter-racial which led to an inter-cultural aspect due to them being from different islands in the archipelago or even different countries. Inter-caste and inter-political issues also presented themselves. Thus, religion was not the sole force driving in these experiences. These multitude of aspects however, further represent the inter-mingling that is increasingly occurring amongst the diversity of Bali and Indonesia on the whole. Differences that were previously viewed as divisions and barriers are gradually being dissolved allowing a more vivid representation of *Bhinneka Tunngal Ika*, Unity in Diversity to shine through.

## **Recommendations for Further Study**

There were many other directions and focuses that this project could have taken. The process of conducting interviews and researching a variety of secondary sources has brought about many new interests and produced even more research questions. Section II of this paper discussed the conversion experience and made mention of the ‘illusion of freedom’ where women are portrayed as free to leave the family and change their religion however they are, at the same time, told that they must follow their husband’s religion. A closer look at this illusion of freedom and it’s relation to Balinese society may yield intriguing results. A more detailed look at the experience of individuals raised in an interreligious married would also add more depth to what was briefly covered in this paper. A study focusing on the religious experience and religious education in schools would complement studies on citizen education in Indonesia. Perhaps a comparison of what it means to be Balinese and what defines an Indonesian may lend insight into issues pertaining to unity and nationalism amongst diversity. Furthermore, what is the experience of non-Hindus or mixed individuals in Bali? How do they fit into the typical description of Balinese identity? Whilst this paper focused primarily on inter-religious marriages, one may also choose to focus on inter-ethnic, inter-racial or inter-cultural unions and issues as well. A work focused on the experience of Bali wives would also yield an exciting project.

### **Contacts**

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## Appendix I

### Interview Questions

#### Background Information

- 1) Siapa nama ibu/bapak?
- 2) Berapa umur ibu/bapak?
- 3) Dari mana ibu/bapak? surabaya
- 4) Tinggal di mana ibu/bapak?
- 5) Apa pekerja ibu/bapak?
- 6) Apa agama ibu/bapak? Sebelum dan sesudah?

#### Life History/Marriage History

- 7) How did both of you meet and become interested in one another?  
*Bagaimana bapak dan ibu pertama kali bertemu dan menjadi tertarik satu sama lain?*
- 8) How did the difference in religion affect your relationship before you got married? Were there any conflicts or disagreements between both of you or between friends and family?  
*Bagaimana perbedaan agama mempengaruhi hubungan bapak dan ibu sebelum menikah? Apakah ada konflik dan selisih pendapat diantara bapak dan ibu atau diantara teman-teman dan keluarga?*
- 9) What made you decide to get married?
- 10) *Apa yang membuat Bapak dan Ibu memutuskan untuk menikah?*
- 11) Why did you convert? / How did you decide who was going to convert?  
*Kenapa anda pindah agama?*
- 12) How did you feel about having to convert? Was this a struggle for you?/ How do you feel about your spouse having to convert? Do you think it was necessary for you to be together or was it just because of the law?  
*Bagaimana perasaan Bapak/Ibu waktu pindah agama? Apakah itu merupakan sebuah pergulatan untuk B/I?*  
*Bagaimana perasaan B/I waktu suami/istri (husband/wife) pindah agama? Menurut B/I apakah hal itu penting dalam pernikahan atau itu hanya karena berkaitan dengan hukum saja?*
- 13) When did you get married?  
*Kapan B/I menikah?*
- 14) How long have you been married?  
*Berapa lama sudah menikah?*
- 15) Did both families support the union?  
*Apakah kedua pihak keluarga mendukung pernikahan Bapak dan Ibu?*
- 16) What traditions were included in the wedding? Did you only follow one religious tradition or did you include aspects of both in the ceremony?(Please be specific and include examples)

*Tradisi apa yang dipakai pada saat pernikahan Bapak dan Ibu? Apakah hanya memakai satu tradisi agama saja atau memakai kedua tradisi agama dalam upacaranya? Tolong jelaskan secara detail.*

- 17) How important was it for you to have your religion represented in the wedding ceremony?  
*Menurut B/I, seberapa penting peranan agama dalam upacara pernikahan Bapak dan Ibu?*
- 18) Were there any disagreements between both of you or between your families about how the ceremony should be?  
*Apakah ada selisih paham diantara Bapak dan ibu atau diantara keluarga tentang upacara apa yang harus dipakai waktu pernikahan?*
- 19) If so, how were these conflicts resolved?
- 20) *Kalau ada, apakah masalah tersebut dapat diselesaikan?*

#### Daily and Family Life

- 21) What are your religious beliefs currently?  
*Apa kepercayaan dan agama B/I saat ini?*
- 22) What traditions and ceremonies do you observe?  
*Tradisi dan upacara apa yang B/I jalankan sekarang?*
- 23) To whom do you pray and how often?  
*Kepada siapa B/I berdoa dan seberapa sering?*
- 24) What is the role of religion in your daily life?  
*Apa peranan agama dalam kehidupan sehari-hari B/I?*
- 25) Do you feel connected to your religion? If yes, how? If no, why not?  
*Apakah B/I merasa sesuai dengan agama B/I saat ini? jika ya, kenapa? Jika tidak, kenapa?*
- 26) What traditions of your initial religion do you still practise, if any?  
*Jika ada, tradisi apa yang masih B/I terapkan dari agama B/I sebelumnya?*
- 27) What beliefs from your initial religion do you still hold, if any?  
*Jika ada, kepercayaan apa yang masih B/I percaya dari agama B/I sebelumnya?*
- 28) Do you have any children?  
*B/I punya anak?*
- 29) What religious tradition were they raised in? Were they exposed to aspects of both religions?  
*Mereka besar dalam tradisi agama apa? Apakah mereka diperkenalkan pada kedua aspek agama?*
- 30) What are the differences between both religions?  
*Apa perbedaan antara kedua agama?*
- 31) What are the similarities between both religions?  
*Apa persamaan antara kedua agama?*
- 32) \*\*\*\*After the divorce, did you convert back to your initial religion? Why or why not?  
*Setelah bercerai, apakah B/I kembali menganut agama B/I yang dulu? Kenapa?*

## Experience and Perception of Religion

- 1) What are your thoughts on religion in general? How do you perceive religion?  
*Bagaimana pendapat B/I tentang agama secara umum? Bagaimana perasaan B/I terhadap agama B/I sekarang?*
- 2) How would you describe your feelings toward people of a different religion?  
*Bagaimana perasaan B/I terhadap orang-orang yang berbeda agama?*
- 3) Have you ever experienced discrimination because of your religion?  
*Apakah B/I pernah mengalami diskriminasi karena agama B/I?*
- 4) Have your parents ever experienced discrimination as a couple?  
*Apakah orang lain pernah mendiskriminasi B/I sebagai pasangan?*
- 5) Would you say that Indonesia is a tolerant place with regards to religion? Why? And Bali?  
*Apakah anda ingin mengatakan bahwa Indonesia adalah negara yang bertoleransi terhadap agama?*
- 6) What do you think about people who refuse to marry someone of another religion?  
*Bagaimana pendapat B/I tentang orang-orang yang menolak untuk menikah dengan pasangan yang beda agama?*

## Laws and State Impositions

- 1) How do you feel about the law that allows only people of the same religion to get married? / Could you tell me about the law that allows only people of the same religion to get married?  
*Bagaimana menurut B/I tentang hukum yang hanya membolehkan pernikahan dalam satu agama?*
- 2) Why do you think this law exists?  
*Menurut B/I, kenapa hukum ini dibuat?*
- 3) Do you think this law necessary? Do you support this law?  
*Apakah menurut B/I hukum ini perlu? Apakah B/I mendukung peraturan ini?*
- 4) How do you feel about the government requiring citizens to claim one of the six recognised religions?  
*Bagaimana perasaan B/I tentang pemerintah yang mewajibkan warga negaranya untuk mempercayai satu dari enam agama yang diakui di Indonesia?*
- 5) In your opinion, what is the purpose of this requirement? Do you think this requirement is necessary?  
*Menurut B/I, apa tujuan dari kewajiban (mempercayai satu dari enam agama) tersebut? Apakah ini perlu menurut B/I?*
- 6) Why do you think only six religions are recognized?  
*Menurut B/I, kenapa hanya 6 agama saja yang diakui oleh negara?*
- 7) How do you feel about being able to be identified by your religion?  
*Bagaimana perasaan B/I tentang bisa dikenalnya B/I melalui agama B/I?*

## Appendix II

### Questions for Individual Raised in an Interreligious Marriage

#### Background Information

- 1) Siapa nama ibu/bapak?
- 2) Berapa umur ibu/bapak?
- 3) Dari mana ibu/bapak? surabaya
- 4) Tinggal di mana ibu/bapak?
- 5) Apa pekerja ibu/bapak?
- 6) Apa agama anda, ibu dan bapak?

#### Daily and Family Life

- 1) What religion/s were you raised in? Were you exposed to aspects of both religions?
- 2) In what ways was religion present in your life growing up?
- 3) Do you think growing up in an interreligious marriage has influenced your perception of religion? How so?
- 4) In what ways would you say this environment has benefitted you?
- 5) How do you think your perception of religion differs from that of other Balinese?
- 6) Would you be open to an interreligious marriage?
- 7) What are your religious beliefs currently?  
*Apa kepercayaan dan agama B/I saat ini?*
- 8) What traditions and ceremonies do you observe?  
*Tradisi dan upacara apa yang B/I jalankan sekarang?*
- 9) To whom do you pray and how often?  
*Kepada siapa B/I berdoa dan seberapa sering?*
- 10) What is the role of religion in your daily life?  
*Apa peranan agama dalam kehidupan sehari-hari B/I?*
- 11) Do you feel connected to both religions or just one? How so? Why?  
*Apakah B/I merasa sesuai dengan kedua agama B/I saat ini atau satu saja? Bagaimana? Kenapa?*
- 12) What traditions of your mother/father's initial religion do you still practise, if any?  
*Jika ada, tradisi apa yang masih anda terapkan dari agama B/I sebelumnya?*
- 13) What beliefs from your mother/father's initial religion do you still hold, if any?  
*Jika ada, kepercayaan apa yang masih anda percaya dari agama B/I sebelumnya?*
- 14) Do you have any children?  
*B/I punya anak?*
- 15) What religious tradition were they raised in? Were they exposed to aspects of both religions?  
*Mereka besar dalam tradisi agama apa? Apakah mereka diperkenalkan pada kedua aspek agama?*
- 16) What are the differences between both religions?  
*Apa perbedaan antara kedua agama?*

17) What are the similarities between both religions?

*Apa persamaan antara kedua agama?*

### Marriage

1) Are you already married?

*Sudah menikah?*

2) When did you get married? / How long have you been married?

*Kapan B/I menikah? / Berapa lama sudah menikah?*

3) Did both families support the union?

*Apakah kedua pihak keluarga mendukung pernikahan Bapak dan Ibu?*

4) What traditions were included in the wedding? Did you only follow one religious tradition or did you include aspects of both in the ceremony?(Please be specific and include examples)

*Tradisi apa yang dipakai pada saat pernikahan Bapak dan Ibu? Apakah hanya memakai satu tradisi agama saja atau memakai kedua tradisi agama dalam upacaranya? Tolong jelaskan secara detail.*

5) How important was it for you to have your religion represented in the wedding ceremony?

*Menurut B/I, seberapa penting peranan agama dalam upacara pernikahan Bapak dan Ibu?*

6) Were there any disagreements between both of you or between your families about how the ceremony should be?

*Apakah ada selisih paham diantara Bapak dan ibu atau diantara keluarga tentang upacara apa yang harus dipakai waktu pernikahan?*

7) If so, how were these conflicts resolved?

*Kalau ada, apakah masalah tersebut dapat diselesaikan?*

### Experience and Perception of Religion

1) What are your thoughts on religion in general? How do you perceive religion?

*Bagaimana pendapat B/I tentang agama secara umum? Bagaimana perasaan B/I terhadap agama B/I sekarang?*

2) How would you describe your feelings toward people of a different religion?

*Bagaimana perasaan B/I terhadap orang-orang yang berbeda agama?*

3) Have you ever experienced discrimination because of your religion?

*Apakah B/I pernah mengalami diskriminasi karena agama B/I?*

4) Have your parents ever experienced discrimination as a couple?

*Apakah orang lain pernah mendiskriminasi B/I sebagai pasangan?*

5) Would you say that Indonesia is a tolerant place with regards to religion? Why? And Bali?

*Apakah anda ingin mengatakan bahwa Indonesia adalah negara yang bertoleransi terhadap agama?*

6) What do you think about people who refuse to marry someone of another religion?

*Bagaimana pendapat B/I tentang orang-orang yang menolak untuk menikah dengan pasangan yang beda agama?*

#### Laws and State Impositions

- 1) How do you feel about the law that allows only people of the same religion to get married? / Could you tell me about the law that allows only people of the same religion to get married?  
*Bagaimana menurut B/I tentang hukum yang hanya membolehkan pernikahan dalam satu agama?*
- 2) Why do you think this law exists?  
*Menurut B/I, kenapa hukum ini dibuat?*
- 3) Do you think this law necessary? Do you support this law?  
*Apakah menurut B/I hukum ini perlu? Apakah B/I mendukung peraturan ini?*
- 4) How do you feel about the government requiring citizens to claim one of the six recognised religions?  
*Bagaimana perasaan B/I tentang pemerintah yang mewajibkan warga negaranya untuk mempercayai satu dari enam agama yang diakui di Indonesia?*
- 5) In your opinion, what is the purpose of this requirement? Do you think this requirement is necessary?  
*Menurut B/I, apa tujuan dari kewajiban (mempercayai satu dari enam agama) tersebut? Apakah ini perlu menurut B/I?*
- 6) Why do you think only six religions are recognized?  
*Menurut B/I, kenapa hanya 6 agama saja yang diakui oleh negara?*
- 7) How do you feel about being able to be identified by your religion?  
*Bagaimana perasaan B/I tentang bisa dikenalnya B/I melalui agama B/I?*