

## **Far Away but Similar: Peaceful Coexistence Models in Indonesia and Syria**

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### **Abstract**

Successful social coexistence in countries with multiethnic and multireligious populations is rare. Scholars have used different approaches to find the theory that explains the key elements communities perform in reaching an environment of peaceful coexistence. In this regard, the previous theories give us a partial understanding of the successful peaceful existence amid rising conservatism in global scale. Drawing from Robert Putnam's social capital theory, this article argues that peaceful coexistence in Syria and Indonesia has been successful due to several factors: the historical, trust and reciprocity, social network and the nationalist sentiment. The empirical research was done by analyzing academic, analytic, and historical data, conducting interviews, and fieldwork with community members in Syria and Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Peaceful coexistence, Kampung Sawah, social capital, Northeastern Aleppo, multireligious population, multiethnic population

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Introduction

The concept of peaceful coexistence has come to light in recent years due to escalating political and religious conflicts in a good number of countries around the world. The destruction of Gaza amidst the war between Israel and Hamas, the rise of Islamist conservatism in the Muslim world, and the Russia and Ukraine war have brought skepticism that peaceful coexistence would be achieved. Scholars have looked at various peaceful coexistence models to establish peace, but conflicts persist and remain ubiquitous.

In this light, studying peaceful coexistence models in multiethnic and multireligious societies is useful for scholars to determine the best formula to establish peace. One way to create the formula is to look at what enables peaceful coexistence to prevail. This article discusses factors that contribute to peaceful coexistence in Northeastern Aleppo, Syria, and Kampung Sawah, Indonesia. Both areas are multiethnic and multireligious. In term of religious and ethnic compositions, Northeastern Aleppo is similar to other areas of Syria. The majority of people there are Sunni Muslim, but there are also sizable communities of Alawites and Christians. In term of ethnicity, besides Syrians, there are also Armenians, Kurdish, and Turkmen populations. In Indonesia, Kampung Sawah is located across several subdistricts in Jakarta's neighbour, Bekasi City: Jatiwarna, Jatimelati, Jatimurni, and Jatiranggon. Kampung Sawah also has a diverse population in regard to religion. Muslims are majority population in the area (Table 1 and Table 2).

**Table 1.** *Kampung Sawah Religious Demography. Source: [www.detik.com](http://www.detik.com) [see: <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4402474/segitiga-emas-betawi-kampung-sawah-milik-muslim-dan-kristen>]*

	Muslims	Protestants	Catholics	Hindus	Buddhists	Confucians
Jatiwarna	17,187	782	612	453	533	Nil
Jatimelati	10,112	2,240	2,098	85	192	Nil
Jatimurni	15,423	2,581	5,153	625	726	Nil
Jatiranggon	21,229	1,628	459	104	59	15

**Table 2. Places of Worship.** Note: *\*It is unclear about the individual number of either Protestant or Catholic churches.* Source: [www.detik.com](http://www.detik.com) [see: <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4402474/segitiga-emas-betawi-kampung-sawah-milik-muslim-dan-kristen>]

	Mosques	Protestant Churches	Catholic Churches	Hindu Temples (Pura)	Buddhist Temples (Vihara)	Confucian Temples (Kelenteng)
Jatiwarna	9 big mosques, 7 small mosques	Nil		Nil	Nil	Nil
Jatimelati	11 big mosques, 3 small mosques	4 churches		Nil	Nil	Nil
Jatimurni	16 big mosques, 2 small mosques	12 churches		Nil	Nil	Nil
Jatiranggon	20 big mosques, 19 small mosques	2 churches		Nil	Nil	Nil

While peaceful coexistence prevailing in ethnically or religiously homogeneous areas is quite common, peaceful coexistence in multiethnic and multireligious areas is quite rare, and hence, it deserves to be the subject of research.

Drawing from the social capital theory proposed by Robert Putnam, I will argue that long-term peaceful coexistence models in geographically distinct regions such as in Indonesia and Syria have been successful due to, among others, historical factors, locally revealed distinct pearls of wisdom or ideologies, and the sense of nationalism which is locally nurtured among the diverse communities to create a new identity.

The data used in this paper was obtained through interviews with figures who have had leading roles in shaping the Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah communities. Secondary sources have also been used to indicate historical supportive interactions. The study was conducted based on comparative historical analysis to compare two religiously different regions and to show the independent variable's method of agreement and causality throughout historical periods such as the independence era of the countries from the colonies. Finally, the study also looks at nationalist sentiment, in describing the reason for reaching a stable, peaceful coexistence. The peaceful coexistence theory could be enriched by adding other variables that might generate social coexistence between communities with diverse religious and ethnic identities.

The first part of this article discusses the limitations in social capital and peaceful coexistence theories. It is followed with some parts that discuss factors leading to peaceful coexistence in Northeastern Aleppo, Syria, and Kampung Sawah, Indonesia: trust and reciprocity, social networks, nationalist sentiment, and the combination of historical, geography and cultural factors. The sixth part discusses Islamist conservatism as a threat to peaceful coexistence, followed by a conclusion.

## **Limitations in Social Capital and Peaceful Coexistence Theories**

The existing peaceful coexistence theory is not entirely sufficient in describing the core reasons for a peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. In this regard, Tijani Ahmed Ashimi<sup>2</sup> translates the success of diverse religious communities as being the result of social capital theory components, primarily due to the involvement of religious institutions or personalities in interfaith dialogues. Thus, Ashimi limits the emergence of successful peaceful coexistence generated between Christians and Muslims within interactions based on regional institutions or elites and

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<sup>2</sup> Ashimi 2020: p. 234.

within the scope of religion, where other subjects within the communities have been idled. Similarly, in studying what generates a stable or effective peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims, theorists have largely demonstrated an apologetical stance by revealing texts from the religious scriptures that state the peaceful notions of all religions, and at the same time the similarities between the values of Christianity and Islam.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly, religion as a factor plays a crucial role not just in terms of religious doctrines but in the context of inter-faith interactions between the Christian minority and Muslim majority in both Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah. For example, mutually conducting religious celebrations such as during Christmas or the Iftar period indicate the established local identity based on local nationalist sentiments, which foster unity.

Although defining peaceful coexistence through the scope of interfaith dialogue, there are some scholars, such as Mazi, Qadri, and Ali, who prioritize the daily interactions between Christians and Muslims and acceptance of the two religions to live in peaceful coexistence.<sup>4</sup> However, such a theory does not explain under what prerequisites the daily interactions between the Christians and the Muslims should occur, since acceptance and tolerance are not static and are prone to change based on social and political happenings. Thus, in describing the conditions of stable, peaceful coexistence between the Christian minority and Muslim majority, a consolidating factor could be needed: one that is based on nationalist sentiments, has historical basis provided for by fact (such as the Madina Pact), or a particular social or political event, such as the struggle for independence. Furthermore, in defining peaceful coexistence, Yousuf Ali acknowledges the role of power politics in nurturing conflicts but advocates for ethical and moral values to create harmony among the Abrahamic religions.<sup>5</sup> However, in fact, to reach a peaceful coexistence,

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<sup>3</sup> Nazi, Qadri, Ali 2018: pp. 165-166; Coruh 2015: pp. 143-144; Ali 2011: pp 188-190.

<sup>4</sup> Mazi, Qadri, and Ali 2018: pp. 165-166.

<sup>5</sup> Ali, 2011: pp. 188-190.

uniting factors – through the interactions of the Christians and Muslims – could generate stable, peaceful conditions, rather than waiting for wishful conditions of ethics and morality that might not be reachable for the masses. In consequence, a uniting factor with nationalist sentiments, based on the local reality and expanded by historical narratives, might bring about stable peaceful coexistence between a Christian minority and Muslim majority in multireligious and multiethnic countries.

To achieve peaceful coexistence, societies should have distinguished identities or customs upon which social cohesion may be constructed. In other words, a substantial element is required to create a harmonious reality in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies. For instance, although Aleppo has been inhabited by people with diverse ethnic and religious affiliations, the relations with the Christian Armenians in Northeastern Aleppo – as an ethnic and religious faction, and on the other hand with the Arab Muslim faction – have created its distinct identity shaped gradually as a result of continues mutual interaction. The Syrian identity is characterized by its geography, with most Syrians seeing Greater Syria (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine) ideologically as one entity and the people living within the border as Syrians.<sup>6</sup> As the head of the Armenian Evangelical Community in Syria, Haroutiun Selimian describes the uniqueness of the social fabric of the Syrian society in terms of ethnic-religious diversity that united with a shared national identity which has been essential in maintaining the unity in the existential period of the crisis in Syria<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, Kevork Bedikian, in his memoir dedicated to Aleppo, defines Aleppo as his nation and the Muslim Arabs as his brothers. Moreover, he calls the Northeastern Aleppo region Little Armenia with its churches, schools, and institutions.<sup>8</sup>

This means the social capital structure has been built upon nationalist sentiments, and the Syrian identity has been prioritized

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<sup>6</sup> Maoz 1986: p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Selimian 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Bedikian 2017: p. 24.

alongside the ethnic and religious identities. In other words, the Syrian identity has been established by the interactions between the diverse social and ethnic groups of Syria. That component has been vital to a long-lasting peaceful coexistence. Such evolutionary interaction has established a distinct identity for the Syrians that had existed within the national ideology brought forward the re-establishment of Greater Syria and gained a new shape after the establishment of the Christian Armenian community in its new environment, where they have become an active component in the Syrian nationalist struggle against foreign occupations. Furthermore, the Syrian identity has enriched itself by adding the Christian Armenians' social and political activity thanks to their nationalist stance against the expansionist foreign policy of Turkey.

In this regard, the nationalist sentiment has been in favor of the Christian Armenians and the Muslim Arabs in parallel. Putnam has described this as a beneficial condition. The relations become firm or more promising when there is not only mutual reciprocity but also a cooperation based on trust or a corporation that nurtures trust.<sup>9</sup> As an example, when reciprocity, honesty, and nationalist factors emerge, the peaceful coexistence model produces an outcome, where Christian Armenians and Muslim Arabs have breakfast together in Northeastern Aleppo, in a peaceful and pleasant atmosphere in comparison to the unended war in the country.<sup>10</sup>

Putnam's social capital theory indicates that it is possible to achieve social coexistence if communities can be engaged through mutual support, cooperation, trust, and institutional effectiveness. Thus, to understand the intensity of the friendship between Christian Armenians and Muslim Arabs, the social capital approach emphasizes the essence combinations of reciprocity, social capital, and trustworthiness<sup>11</sup> applied in the relation of the two ethnically and religiously different communities in

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<sup>9</sup> Putnam 2000: pp. 143-144.

<sup>10</sup> Bedikian 2017: p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> Putnam 2000: pp. 18-19.

Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah. Undoubtedly, it is unimaginable to have peaceful coexistence without the mentioned variables of social capital that Putnam has revealed; I regard the social capital theory as a determinative role in reaching a peaceful coexistence with the mutually constructed nationalist sentiments the diverse identities have been established together. In other words, locally established nationalist sentiments have been a significant factor in generating mutual trust, reciprocity, and willingness to formulate social networks, establishing environments enriched with peaceful coexistence models.

Nevertheless, local national sentiments should be seen as distinct from the national identity theory designed by Fukuyama,<sup>12</sup> which tends to integrate diverse identities within a top-down national ideology and advocates assimilation within one primary national ideology. At variance with Putnam and Fukuyama, Putnam's social capital theory does not mention any boundary between interethnic or interreligious communities. Fukuyama's national identity theory prioritizes a state-national identity as a tool to achieve peaceful coexistence; a local identity with nationalist sentiments brings religious or ethnically diverse communities into a stable, peaceful coexistence that theorists have not mentioned in theorizing social cohesion.

### **Trust and Reciprocity Factors in Peaceful Coexistence**

An element of social capital that is essential for having peaceful coexistence is the institute of trust that emerges not only by historical interaction, and shared identity per se, but also through the institution of trust, which could be achieved and maintained by the notion of doing favors for the other faction. Societies which possess a model of peaceful coexistence, such as in Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah, have achieved a level of trust that sits as an affirmative component of social

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<sup>12</sup> Fukuyama 2018: p. 22.



capital, which strengthens the established peaceful coexistence after the historical factors and the distinct identities have already been shaped. Putnam highlights the importance of trust in social capital as it transforms the community into a stronger position.<sup>13</sup>

Building trust is one of the most essential duties in social interactions, especially in communities with diverse ethnic and religious affiliations. Trust as a social capital component could transform society to a peaceful coexistence level, but tolerance and pluralist sentiments do not possess such a mechanism, as both tolerance and pluralism are merely based on acceptance rather than performance. Thus, peaceful coexistence has been established among the societies of Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah based on the established trust driven by the interactions with historical factors and by creating a distinct identity that gives meaning to the established communities. So although the people of Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah are different in terms of mentality and values, trust has strengthened their communities.

In the case of Northeastern Aleppo, mutual trust between Christian Armenians and Muslim Arabs is due to the historical factors mentioned earlier, as well as the result of the daily interactions of the two factions. Since the establishment of the Armenian communities in Syria particularly in Northeastern Aleppo in 1940s, the Christian Armenian community put its trust in the Muslim Arabs after they accepted their arrival in Syria following the Armenian genocide. It is worth mentioning that Sharif Mecca in that period issued a decree to the Muslim world, requesting the Muslims to treat the Christian Armenians as their brothers and treat them as they treat the members of their own families.<sup>14</sup> Thus, such an act nurtured trust and has been acknowledged by the Christian Armenians as reciprocity, strengthening the relations between the Christian Armenians and the Muslim Arabs ever since.

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<sup>13</sup> Putnam 2000: p. 145.

<sup>14</sup> Sasounian 2015: p. 11.

On this matter, Vazgen Boyadjian, a Christian Armenian from Northeastern Aleppo, emphasizes that the Armenians have always appreciated the humanistic act of the Muslim Arabs of Syria for saving the lives of the Armenians and hosting the Christian Armenian community in Syria. Moreover, Boyadjian stresses the elders have constantly reminded the younger generations to consider the Muslim Arabs as their brothers and be thankful to them for hosting the Christian Armenians on Syrian soil and providing them with Syrian citizenship.<sup>15</sup> Hence, trust has been shaped between the Christian Armenians and Muslim Arabs due to their mutual struggle against the Ottomans, the humanistic approach of Feisal, the Sharif of Mecca, towards the Christian Armenians, and the support to the Syrian and Arab cause by the Christian Armenians.

Furthermore, the Christian Armenians gained the trust of Muslim Arabs through daily interactions, establish churches, schools, and institutions in Northeastern Aleppo while developing the business and medical sectors. For instance, the first hotel with regional and global acknowledgment was established by an Armenian, and the first hospital was considered one of the advanced hospitals in the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> Such developments built trust among the Muslim Arabs, and sending their children to learn business at the offices of the Christian Armenians has become a common practice.<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, the female sports college in Aleppo appointed a Christian Armenian male coach. The appointment of a Christian Armenian male coach to a female sports college indicates the trust towards the Christian Armenian community. Furthermore, Boyadjian emphasizes that the trust of Muslim Arabs towards Christian Armenians is so high Muslim men even used to leave their wives in Christian Armenians' workplaces at prayer time by trusting the Christian Armenian shop or office owners. Boyadjian also stresses the existence of such trust due to the Christian Armenians'

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<sup>15</sup> Phone interview with Vazgen Boyadjian on 15 July 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Reisian 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Toranian 2018: p. 45.

positive attitudes, which the Muslim Arabs appreciate. Furthermore, Sargis Degirmenjian reveals that the Christian Armenians distributed medications to all Syrians when there was a medication deficit during the Syrian Crisis. At the same time, the Christian Armenians and the Muslim Arabs were constantly delivering water to their regions when there were water shortages.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the peaceful coexistence model in Northeastern Aleppo has been maintained due to the trust and reciprocity between the Christian Armenians and the Muslim Arabs of Northeastern Aleppo, and a combination with the nationalist sentiments that both communities have gradually nurtured together.

In Kampung Sawah, trust and reciprocity have been shaped in parallel with local Betawi tradition, which resulted in nurturing a peaceful coexistence. For instance, as a gesture of unity, Christians and Muslims attend and help each other at ceremonies<sup>19</sup> as an act of solidarity and a duty that family members perform. Conversely, defining the uniqueness of Kampung Sawah in terms of a peaceful coexistence model merely from the point of plural society and as an example of tolerance<sup>20</sup> minimizes the acknowledgment of the rich experience of mutual reciprocity and trusted which the people of Kampung Sawah have built.

In this regard, it is essential to define the humanistic attitudes of both Christians and Muslims in Kampung Sawah, which goes beyond tolerance or the notion of pluralism. It is rooted in the local Betawi tradition of accepting others not just as residents in the region, but as part of the family. In other words, accepting all humans as family members creates an obligation for reciprocity and building trust among the people of Kampung Sawah. Moreover, receiving the whole population as family members nurtures the notion that reciprocity could also be generalized in Putnam's terms, implying that assistance could be provided without asking for a return in social capital.<sup>21</sup> In sum, reciprocity is an essential element in

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<sup>18</sup> Phone interview with Sargis Degirmenjian on 22 June 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Elkarimah 2020: p. 59.

<sup>20</sup> Noorbani, Diah & Halimatusa 2022: p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> Putnam 2000: p. 18.

social capital on establishing peaceful coexistence, as doing a favor to the other is not considered an action to receive benefit. Still, every individual must help other family members.

For instance, the Priest of St Servatius emphasizes that we are all creations of God, so in that sense, the awareness of humanism is alive in Kampung Sawah. Furthermore, he has mentioned that dividing factions between the majority and majority are meant to differentiate humans from each other, an idea which is alien to the people of Kampung Sawah.<sup>22</sup> In parallel, Muqorrobin al Azizi, the president of the boarding school of al Azizi, has mentioned the oneness of the human beings on earth as God has given the sun and the rain without differentiating the ethnicities and the religion of the people. Moreover, he prioritizes the activities held in his school for both Christian and Muslim youth, discussing topics about faith, life, nation, and society. Furthermore, al Azizi describes that in Kampung Sawah, reciprocity has reached such a level that Christians have helped him renovate his house and joined in the construction of the al Azizi boarding school.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the peaceful coexistence model established in Kampung Sawah has been nurtured due to the firm relations between the Christian and Muslim populations based on the feeling of self-belonging as a nationalist sentiment. It means the reciprocity provided to the others is an action for strengthening the nationalist unity, in parallel to humanism, which resulted in a stable, peaceful coexistence in Kampung Sawah.

## Social Networks in Peaceful Coexistence

One of the essential components in social capital theory is the ability to create interactive social networks among the different factions of the society.<sup>24</sup> Interaction is essential in developing relations between ethnically and socially diverse communities to create a peaceful

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<sup>22</sup> In-person interview with Priest Johannes Wartaja at St Servatius Church on June 10, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> In-person interview with al Azizi in al Azizi boarding school in June 10, 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Putnam 2000: p. 17.

coexistence model that only tolerance and pluralism can achieve. It is worth mentioning that peaceful coexistence needs action and is repetitive in nature. In this regard, the established communities of Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah have developed a tradition where people constantly meet and interact to advance their communities' relations. For instance, In Northeastern Aleppo, Christian Armenians and Muslim Arabs invite each other to wedding ceremonies and join religious celebrations.

If such events strengthen personal relations, one of the most significant components takes place in the center of the Christian quarter in Northeastern Aleppo. Organized by the Christian Armenian Nor Sherount Cultural Institution, people from all factions and religious and government representatives gather around the Christmas tree and celebrate together the New Year.<sup>25</sup> This event takes place every year, based on the intention to invite Muslim Arabs to celebrate the New Year with Christian Armenians.

Similarly, Kampung Sawah has a tradition in which Christians and Muslims prepare food together during the annual Eid al-Adha festival to bring communities together in a festive atmosphere.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, al Azizi, the president of the boarding school, highlights the yearly contribution of the St Servatius church during Eid al-Adha in sending meat to the boarding school students. Adon Jamaludin stresses the success of Kampung Sawah in establishing an advanced communication mechanism.<sup>27</sup> Such interactions are products of established unities that have local dynamics entailed with nationalist sentiments. Therefore, networking is essential to establishing peaceful coexistence through social capital between diverse ethnic and religious affiliations to establish closer relations and join in festive events.

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<sup>25</sup> Al Manar, New Year in Aleppo, Al Manar 10, December, 2017, <https://www.almanar.com.lb/3048406>, <https://sputnikarabic.ae/20181223/سوريا-حلب-شجرة-عيد-1037724432-الميلاد.html>.

<sup>26</sup> In-person interview with Priest Johannes Wartaja at St Servatius Church on June 10, 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Jamaludin 2018: p. 234.

## Nationalist Sentiment and Peaceful Coexistence

The distinct established identities of the peoples of Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah have been integrated into the nationalist state agendas promoted by both Syria and Indonesia since independence. It is worth mentioning that the two chosen countries are different from each other not only geographically but also politically. Syria has a centralized political system, whereas Indonesia is democratic. Nevertheless, the nationalist agenda shows similarities, particularly during the colonial periods, and both prioritized the struggle for independence and the establishment of a sovereign nation.

In this regard, I argue that the presented peaceful coexistence models are not merely cases of pluralist regions that live in isolation but cases who have allied their identity with the nationalist identity promoted by the states in both cases. Rowan Williams defines pluralism as a method to bring society into a decentralized form with initiative and capacity relevant to understanding civil society.<sup>28</sup> For example, Syria has generated Syrian nationalism since its independence. That concept aligns with the reality shaped in Northeastern Syria, which implies Syria for all Syrians. Degirmenjian has mentioned that the Syrian government has constantly generated events to which all peoples from Aleppo have been invited, such as the cultural events where intellectuals, political figures, religious authorities, and community representatives from all factions have been invited.<sup>29</sup>

Recently, the Archbishop of the Armenian Orthodox Ashekian and his delegation were invited to an exhibition organized by the Ministry of Industry of Aleppo.<sup>30</sup> In terms of Kampung Sawah, the nationalist sentiment does exist as well. For example, al Azizi notes the importance of

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<sup>28</sup> Williams 2010: p. 243.

<sup>29</sup> Phone interview with Sargis Degirmenjian on June 22, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Kantsasar editorial 2023.

unity and accepting each other as Indonesians. Al Azizi's argument is based on the notion that multiethnic and multireligious Indonesia needs a nationalist ideology that unites the country, as has been achieved in Kampung Sawah, to guarantee Indonesia's survival.<sup>31</sup> Hence, the position al Azizi has presented is aligned with the nationalist ideology of Pancasila, which refers to unity among all with diverse ethnicities and religious affiliations.<sup>32</sup> In sum, the peaceful coexistence models generated in Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah indicate their distinctive capabilities in nurturing distinct identities through social capital elements and, simultaneously, their eligibility to correlate these local identities with the nationalist identities of states.

### Historical, Geography and Cultural Factors in Shaping Peaceful Coexistence

Historical factors emphasize that societies become tolerant and gain pluralist notions when the regions are of civilizational or strategic importance. Thus, civilizations have developed by interacting with other civilizations, and strategic significance attracts others to integrate into new regions. In this sense, both Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah are in different geographic locations and have complex multi-ethnic and multi-religious environments.

Although the intention is not to present a historical analysis of the selected countries, it is essential to understand the evolutionary patterns of peaceful coexistence, the pillar on which social capital is constructed. In short, observing the geographic location is vital to grasp the relations between the people living in the selected locations. For example, as Philip Mansel mentioned, Aleppo city, "...is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world".<sup>33</sup> It has long been a thriving center for multi-

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<sup>31</sup> In-person interview with al Azizi in al Azizi boarding school in June 10, 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Hefner 2001: p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> Mansel 2016, Kindle edition, loc.111 of 4401.

ethnic and multi-religious residents.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, historically, the Kampung Sawah area has been an important trade route, and the socio-cultural interaction has blossomed affected by the previous civilizations,<sup>35</sup> where diverse ethnicities and Islam and Christianity have interacted.<sup>36</sup> Thus, tolerance and pluralist sentiments emerge among people of different ethnic and religious affiliations living together in the exact location. Nevertheless, peaceful coexistence can be achieved not only by accepting the other per se but also through mutual interactions through a firmly constructed social landscape.

As such, the Christian Armenians in Syria, generally and in Aleppo particularly, have added to their ethnic-religious identity the Syrian identity and have participated in the independence struggle against French rule.<sup>37</sup> For example, in a demonstration of appreciation, a high-ranking Syrian military official thanked the Armenians for participating in the demonstrations against the French with their Arab brothers.<sup>38</sup> It is worth mentioning historical interactions between Christian Armenians and Muslim Arabs against the Ottoman Empire, which strengthened the relations between the two factions and contributed to the creation of the Syrian identity on the Syrian territory in the future. Hovhannisyan mentions Christian Armenian and Muslim Arab meetings in Syria, where the Armenians thanked the Arabs for their kind attitude towards the Armenians located in Syria, and the Arabs replied with applause.<sup>39</sup> Hence, such mutual sympathy is a social capital element that indicates not only tolerance or living in a pluralist environment but a concrete action that implies mutual appreciation and cooperation that generates mutual identity and peaceful cooperation.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 929 of 4401.

<sup>35</sup> Reid 2015: pp. 1173-175.

<sup>36</sup> Elkarimah 2020: p. 57, Vol.1, No.2, 57.

<sup>37</sup> Fishenkjian 2018: p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Ilib, 45.

<sup>39</sup> Hovhannisyan 2005: pp. 139-140.



Moreover, although the Christian Armenians have been situated in Northeastern Aleppo, its location is not isolated from the city when it comes to interactions with its people. The community is considered part of the united society that acknowledges itself as Syrians, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliations. Christian Armenian community in Northeastern Syria was not isolated or formed ghettos such the Jewish communities were in the United States and Europe. As Putnam mentions, a social capital network could be established by accepting one another and engaging in activities that integrate mutual support and cooperation.<sup>40</sup> Thus, peaceful coexistence can be revealed by cooperation among the societies. When an ideology is based on nationalist sentiments, it turns into strengthened cooperation with identity and meaning. It is worth mentioning as well that the Christian Armenian and Muslim Arab interaction is a unique phenomenon where the Armenians have obtained the Syrian identity, without ignoring the Christian Armenian identity but being presented as Syrian Armenians. The approach of the Muslim Arabs is extraordinary as well, in accepting the Christian Armenians' identity to function on the Syrian land where full rights have been given to the Christian Armenians.<sup>41</sup> So, the integrated faction in the broader society can be achieved by the actions taken through the social capital approach to avoid being isolated or localized.

Although Kampung Sawah is geographically dissimilar to Northeastern Aleppo but identical in its formation as a multiethnic and multireligious entity, it has also generated its local reality, built upon the Betawi wisdom and tradition. This wisdom and tradition have helped establish a custom that promotes social and religious harmony between Muslims and Christians. This wisdom sees that Muslims and Christians are part of one family and are socially united. In this regard, Priest Johannes Wartaja of St. Servatius in Kampung Sawah has mentioned that the Betawi custom has been incorporated into the notion that all are a family and have

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<sup>40</sup> Putnam 2000: pp. 18-19.

<sup>41</sup> Bedikian 2017: p. 106; pp. 38-39; p. 112.

branches like a tree, with Christians and Muslims considering each other as part of one family.

The priests have also noted that mutual coexistence has been possible by having the notion of one humanity and one God and constantly interacting and learning from each other.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the distinct identity of Kampung Sawah, known as the Betawi custom, has initiated a sense of family belonging, combined with an uninterrupted activity of mutual sharing and cooperation between the Christians and the Muslims. Furthermore, the Christmas celebration of the Christians wearing traditional Betawi clothes<sup>43</sup> indicates the essentiality of their identity during a Christian event.

Al Azizi believes that the established brotherhood between the Christians and the Muslims in Kampung Sawah is the reason for peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, he stresses that his school welcomes Christians to interfaith dialogues to guarantee an atmosphere of constant interaction.<sup>44</sup> Thus, such a peaceful coexistence model would not have been possible merely by showing tolerance or accepting the plural image of Kampung Sawah. Similarly, the priest of St Servatius advises the use of the word harmony instead of tolerance, as harmony means to take action; this supports the identity of Kampung Sawah as one united group. On the contrary, Muhammad Agus Noorbani and Halimatusa Diah, concerning Kampung Sawah, describe Kampung Sawah as an example of a plural society that has led to tolerance.<sup>45</sup> Thus, social capital components such as the Betawi custom as an identity and the cooperation and sharing between different community groups are the guarantors for a long-term peaceful coexistence model.

Moreover, the majority-minority issue has been central in studying countries with diverse ethnic and religious diversities. Thomas Michel emphasized that political and economic influences benefit the majority, as

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<sup>42</sup> In-person interview with Priest Johannes Wartaja at St Servatius Church on June 10, 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Noorbani, Diah & Halimatusa 2022, 56.

<sup>44</sup> In-person interview with al Azizi in al Azizi boarding school in June 10, 2023.

<sup>45</sup> Noorbani, Diah & Halimatusa 2022: p. 52.

the minority in power relations will always depend on the majority. Furthermore, he has noted that the rejection of majority-minority understanding by the people of the Middle East is merely a theoretical equality before the law.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, the social capital participants, on the path of establishing peaceful coexistence, emphasize distinct identity as a uniting factor, rather than pointing at ethnic and religious identities or accepting the power norms of the majority-minority concept. Likewise, the Priest of St Servatius Johanes has noted that in Kampung Sawah, there is no community understanding of majority and minority. Instead, the religious authorities and the population simply consider each other as humans.<sup>47</sup> Al Azizi mentions the same idea of oneness of the people of Kampung Sawah when he said that nature is given to all human beings without distinction.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Kevork Bedikian calls the Muslim Arabs, which are the majority in Syria, brothers to the Christian Armenians. Thus, in both Kampung Sawah and Northeastern Aleppo, the majority-minority concept has been eliminated by prioritizing the humanistic element that accepts ethnically and religiously diverse populations as equal without distinction.

## Conservatism as a Threat to Peaceful Coexistence

Symbols are exciting phenomena in studying peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. For instance, seeing churches and mosques side by side in Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah is common. Although such closeness for religious centers indicates the tolerant level of the Christian and Muslim populations, this should not be accepted as a sign of peaceful coexistence. What strengthens the relations between Christians and Muslims in Northeastern Syria and Kampung Sawah is the threat of rising conservatism and extremism. No doubt, the effect of conservatism and related extremism has varied in Syria and

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<sup>46</sup> Michel 2007: p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> In-person interview with Priest Johannes Wartaja at St Servatius Church on June 10, 2023.

<sup>48</sup> In-person interview with al Azizi in al Azizi boarding school in June 10, 2023.

Indonesia. Still, conservatism and extremism affect mainly regions where peaceful coexistence has been established. It is worth mentioning that the conservatism threat has become more apparent due to the foreign interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Second, a demand by marginalized groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood to come to power and declare states based on *shariah* has transformed the Middle East into a war zone.

Regarding demands and capabilities, conservatism and extremism vary in Syria and Indonesia. But overall, the existence of the threat is undeniable. Thus, if conservatism led to an amended conflict in Syria, then conservatism endangers the concept of social cohesion in Indonesia. Furthermore, Indonesia has an extremism factor that hit tourism locations with terror acts that could not have reached such a level without the rise of conservatism. Lastly, the compounds of religious symbols are not convincing that peaceful coexistence could be maintained and conservatism suspended.

In Syria, due to the well-established peaceful coexistence model in Northeastern Aleppo, it has been possible to maintain harmonious relations even during war. Such conservative and extremist tendencies have not been seen in Syria before. Thus, with the emergence of the uprisings in Syria for economic and political reforms, the conservatives imposed their agenda and turned the rebellion into an armed conflict by endangering the social formation of Syrian diversity.<sup>49</sup>

The implication here is not meant to analyze the Syrian Crisis but to point out the critical nuance that kept Syria from a civil war. The well-established peaceful coexistence model in Northeastern Aleppo has maintained its distinct identity during the whole period of the war between the Syrian Army and the Islamists. The Christian Armenians had no political misunderstandings or clashes over religious ideologies or territorial demands. Instead, the Christian Armenians and the Muslim Arabs of Northeastern Aleppo have jointly defended their territories from the

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<sup>49</sup> Kostanian 2023: pp. 7-8.

attacks of the armed Islamist groups and rescued wounded people or moved the dead bodies from the streets.<sup>50</sup>

Hence, the notion of saving the distinct identity of conservative Islamists has brought the Christian Armenians and the Muslim Arabs to another level of cooperation: to save the lives of the people, the city, and the country in general. Furthermore, the Syrian Army has defended areas such as Northeastern Aleppo from attacks of the armed Islamists, which is an indication of an ideologically allied population and an army. Putnam's idea that social capital entails mutual obligation and responsibility during action<sup>51</sup> between community factions comes to stress that peaceful coexistence needs performance and merely tolerant and pluralist sentiments are not sufficient to define a case where Christian Armenians and Muslim Arabs struggle against conflict.

Although the Indonesian case differs from the Syrian case, the rise of conservatism is ideologically and tactically seen as a danger to the distinct identity of Kampung Sawah. It is undeniable that Southeast Asia did not face a wave of uprising; it is safer than the Middle East, and the rise of conservatism is based on ideological factors. Extremism could be evaluated as less harmful in comparison with the Syrian war in terms of its seasonal terror acts in tourist locations. Nevertheless, the rise of conservatism threatens the social fabric of Kampung Sawah for two reasons. First, conservatism is being imported to Kampung Sawah from outside. Second, religious schools are being established close to Kampung Sawah with conservative and extremist ideologies.<sup>52</sup> It means that Kampung Sawah has been taken under consideration as a target to influence by imposing ideas that contradict the distinct identity of Kampung Sawah.

Furthermore, an intolerant attitude emerged in Bekasi city, rejecting the establishment of a church after gaining approval from the state,<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Phone interview with Sargis Degirmenjian on June 22, 2023.

<sup>51</sup> Putnam 2000: p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> In-person interview with Priest Johannes Wartaja at St Servatius Church on June 10, 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Noorbani, Diah and Halimatusa 2022: p. 55.

implying that conservative notions exist in the region that endanger the harmonious life of the people of Kampung Sawah. Presenting Christians as newcomers and irrelevant to Betawi culture<sup>54</sup> is not only a sign of intolerance but also an expression of rejection of others and an affirmation of exceptionalism.

Hence, the distinct identity the Kampung Sawah people have established is a defensive measure for maintaining a peaceful coexistence model that merely tolerance and pluralist sentiments cannot afford due to the absence of action. Also, the recognition by the state of Kampung Sawah as a successful model shows the alignment of the identity of Kampung Sawah with the nationalist identity of the state. Finally, the rising conservatism and targeting of Kampung Sawah, as well as the solid ideological structure of Kampung Sawah, show the essentiality of distinct identity in maintaining peaceful coexistence.

## Conclusion

The article reveals the possibility of establishing a peaceful coexistence model by comparing countries with geographic, political, and environmental differences. Drawing from social capital theory by Robert Putnam, this article explains factors that contribute to peaceful coexistence in Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah. Trust, among others, is considered one of the most essential elements of social capital in establishing, developing, and maintaining a successful model of peaceful coexistence. Additionally, social networking benefits the peaceful coexistence model by creating an atmosphere where community factions can interact. To have thriving social capital in such conditions of multiethnic and multireligious entities, adding nationalist sentiments strengthens the community's identity. It simultaneously creates a bridge between the community and the state.

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<sup>54</sup> Jamaludin 2018: p. 228.

The distinct identity and state nationalist agenda are essential in combating conservatism and extremism. For this reason, the majority-minority classification is missing in the psyche of the social capital actors in prioritizing shared identities and to spread the notion of looking at others from the perspective of human beings with uniting ideologies that address belonging. It is worth adding that tolerance and pluralism alone cannot describe successful peaceful coexistence cases, such as Northeastern Aleppo and Kampung Sawah. The two cases in Syria and Indonesia could be seen as models for establishing peaceful coexistence mechanisms in totally unassociated countries regarding geographic location and political construction. Nevertheless, they are identical in pursuing a peaceful coexistence.

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