

Editorial Note

Religion in Motion: Cohesion, Transformation, and Agency in a Global Age

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Abstract: This editorial note situates the articles in *Religious: Journal of Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 1 (2025), within broader global debates on religion, culture, and social change. It argues that religion, far from receding under secularization and globalization, continues to function as an adaptive social infrastructure. Drawing on case studies from Indonesia (Bali, Toraja, Maluku, Papua) and comparative contexts (Ghana, Rwanda, Europe, and beyond), the contributions collectively highlight five interrelated themes: religion as a framework for social cohesion and conflict resolution, the transformation and re-enchantment of sacred spaces, women's agency and visibility in religious life, religion's ambivalent role in radicalism and security, and the historical reinvention of traditions as cultural memory. By weaving together classical theories with contemporary phenomena—including digital media, commodification, and gendered visibility—this issue demonstrates the continued relevance of religion in negotiating identity, fostering peace, and sustaining plural societies in a global age.

Keywords: Cultural memory and tradition; gender and agency in religion; radicalism and resilience; religion and social change; sacred space and re-enchantment.

Abstrak: Catatan editorial ini menempatkan artikel-artikel dalam *Religious: Journal of Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 1 (2025), ke dalam perdebatan global yang lebih luas tentang agama, budaya, dan perubahan sosial. Edisi ini menegaskan bahwa agama, alih-alih surut oleh arus sekularisasi dan globalisasi, justru berfungsi sebagai infrastruktur sosial yang adaptif. Dengan mengangkat studi kasus dari Indonesia (Bali, Toraja, Maluku, Papua) serta konteks perbandingan (Ghana, Rwanda, Eropa, dan lainnya), kontribusi artikel dalam edisi ini menyoroti lima tema utama yang saling terkait: agama sebagai kerangka kohesi sosial dan resolusi konflik, transformasi dan *re-enchantment* ruang sakral, agensi serta visibilitas perempuan dalam kehidupan beragama, peran ambivalen agama dalam radikalisme dan keamanan, serta reinvensi tradisi sebagai memori kultural dalam perspektif historis. Dengan merajut teori-teori klasik dan fenomena kontemporer—termasuk media digital, komodifikasi, dan visibilitas gender—edisi ini menunjukkan relevansi agama yang berkelanjutan dalam merundingkan identitas, membangun perdamaian, dan menopang masyarakat plural di era global.

Kata Kunci: Memori budaya dan tradisi; gender dan agen dalam agama; radikalisme dan ketahanan; agama dan perubahan sosial; ruang suci dan *re-enchantment*.

1. Introduction

Religious life in the contemporary world is marked by increasingly complex and often contradictory dynamics. A Pew Research Center survey (Hackett et al., 2023) found that more than 75.8% of the world's population remains affiliated with a religion, while 24.2% are unaffiliated, underscoring the continuing significance of religion in public life. This aligns with broader scholarship showing that, despite ongoing trends of secularization—especially in the West—the majority of the world's population continues to identify with particular religious traditions (Grim, 2014; Nangia & Ruthven, 2025; Nixon, 2016). Islam and Christianity are among the fastest-growing traditions; by 2030, China is projected to become the country with the largest Christian population, while still hosting substantial Buddhist, Muslim, and folk religion communities (Gabriel-Virol, 2020; Yang, 2016). Demographic shifts are also evident in the relocation of Christianity's center of gravity—particularly Catholicism—from the Global North to the Global South, with Africa now home to the largest Christian population (Carney, 2022; Zurlo, Johnson, & Crossing, 2025). At the same time, the rise of the “nones”—those unaffiliated with any religion—has been rapid, making them the third-largest global identity group, though many retain certain beliefs or religious practices (Nangia & Ruthven, 2025; Van Tongeren, DeWall, Chen, Sibley, & Bulbulia, 2021). Alongside these shifts, nontraditional movements and new religious expressions have emerged, shaped by digital technologies and social crises (Zholdybaeva, Khussainova, Dyussenova, Karymsakova, & Nyssankuatova, 2024), with younger generations playing a pivotal role in fostering more fluid, agency-driven forms of religiosity (Cusack, 2011; Lam & Halafoff, 2024). While secularization is particularly visible in some countries, Muslim-majority regions are experiencing religious revivalism, often linked to demands for the implementation of religious law such as sharia, with significant sociopolitical implications (Hefner, 2011; Mayer, 2007). Taken together, these trends indicate that despite regional variation, most of the world's population continues to identify with religious traditions, which persistently adapt to demographic shifts, globalization, and political change (Johnson & Grim, 2013).

Building on the dynamic global religious landscape described above, the latest edition of the *Religious: Journal of Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies* is presented in Volume 9, Number 1, 2025, featuring seven original research articles authored by seventeen scholars from eleven institutions across five countries: Indonesia, Belarus, Russia, Australia, and the United Kingdom. This diversity of authorship and research context reflects the strong commitment to internationalization and interdisciplinary engagement that defines this journal. Each article not only illuminates local experiences but also contributes to broader global discourses, making this issue an intellectual mosaic that brings together perspectives from different regions and traditions. In doing so, the journal underscores its role as an inclusive scholarly platform that fosters dialogue across geographical, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries.

In the context of contemporary religious studies, this issue is situated at the heart of pressing global debates on pluralism, globalization, radicalism, gender, and the commodification of religion. The articles presented here highlight how religious traditions both shape and are shaped by these dynamics: from local wisdom serving as a framework for conflict resolution in multicultural societies, to the transformation of sacred spaces into sites of tourism and cultural performance, to the ways religious identity intersects with gender and agency in public life. Taken together, these contributions demonstrate that religion continues to be a powerful and adaptive force in addressing social tensions, negotiating identity, and responding to the forces of modernization and global interconnectivity. Through this collection, the journal positions itself as an academic response to global challenges, offering critical insights and comparative perspectives that enrich ongoing scholarly conversations across disciplines and regions.

At the core of this issue lies a unifying thread: the interplay between religion, culture, and social change, which binds together a diverse range of topics into a coherent intellectual narrative. Articles on local wisdom traditions in Bali and Toraja illustrate how religious and cultural practices can foster pluralism and social harmony (Chrismastianto & Sriartha, 2025; Jamal, Wulandari, Nurhayati, & Irnawati, 2025). Other contributions, such as the studies on the Gendong Dance and the Thousand

Doors Mosque, reveal the transformation of ritual and sacred spaces into public performances and sites of tourism, reflecting the adaptation of religion within broader cultural and economic frameworks (Arbi, Herlina, Dewi, & Hanafi, 2025; Merina & Pratama, 2025). Meanwhile, the exploration of piety and agency among Hijabers mountaineers highlights the intersection of religion, gender, and resistance in contemporary Indonesian society (Mukhlisin, Mushodiq, & Maba, 2025). Together, these studies invite readers to see beyond their individual contexts, offering glimpses of how religion continues to evolve and respond to shifting social realities in both historical and contemporary settings.

This editorial note is therefore intended not merely as a summary of the articles included in this issue, but as an effort to analyze the intellectual connections and thematic continuities that emerge across them. By drawing these threads together, the editorial underscores the ways in which each contribution—though rooted in different contexts, disciplines, and methodologies—collectively advances the understanding of contemporary religious studies. The purpose of this analysis is to highlight how the findings enrich ongoing debates on pluralism, globalization, gender, radicalism, and the transformation of religious practices, thereby demonstrating the broader academic significance of this volume. In doing so, the editorial sets the stage for a deeper engagement with the substantive discussions that follow, inviting readers to consider how these studies, taken together, illuminate the dynamic relationship between religion, culture, and social change.

2. Thematic Reflections

Religion as a Framework for Social Cohesion and Conflict Resolution

The significance of these studies becomes clearer when they are situated within the wider theoretical discourse of sociology of religion. While the cases of Bali and Toraja provide rich ethnographic insights into how local wisdom traditions function in maintaining peace and harmony, their true value lies in how they exemplify broader sociological principles about the role of religion in society. By positioning these local experiences within established theoretical frameworks, we can better appreciate how religion operates not only as a spiritual practice but also as a structural force that shapes and sustains social order.

In examining the cases of Bali and Toraja, the findings resonate strongly with broader sociological theories that view religion as a fundamental force for social cohesion. Émile Durkheim (1995) in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* emphasized that religious practices and rituals serve to bind individuals into a collective moral community, reinforcing solidarity and shared identity. The *pawongan* framework in Bali (Chrismastianto & Sriartha, 2025) and the ritual consensus traditions in Toraja illustrate precisely this function (Jamal et al., 2025): religion embedded in local wisdom acts as a glue that sustains harmony in plural contexts.

The findings from Bali and Toraja also speak directly to broader debates on religious pluralism and multiculturalism in Indonesia. While pluralism in the Western context is often conceptualized through liberal frameworks of rights and equality (Eck, 2007), the Balinese principle of *pawongan* and the Toraja practice of ritual consensus illustrate forms of “indigenous pluralism” that are deeply rooted in local cultural wisdom (Chrismastianto & Sriartha, 2025; Jamal et al., 2025). These traditions show that tolerance and harmony are not only abstract ideals but are concretely enacted through communal rituals, kinship ethics, and respect for customary law. This resonates with studies highlighting that Indonesian pluralism relies heavily on the interplay between nationalism, local wisdom, and religious moderation in shaping non-violent attitudes and fostering inclusion (Syahputra & Syaltout, 2024). At the same time, scholars caution that pluralism in Indonesia is not without challenges, as structural power imbalances between majority and minority groups often hinder the realization of genuine mutual respect (Burhani, 2014; Mokorowu & Saragih, 2024). Nevertheless, by grounding interfaith harmony in lived traditions rather than solely in state policy or imported models, the Bali and Toraja cases demonstrate that local religious practices can serve as culturally resonant frameworks for sustaining pluralism in one of the world’s most diverse societies.

Another crucial dimension illuminated by the Bali and Toraja cases is the role of religion not only as a cultural marker but also as a practical mechanism for conflict resolution. Durkheim's (1995) emphasis on ritual as a source of solidarity finds contemporary resonance in peacebuilding scholarship, where religion is recognized as both a potential escalator of conflict and a vital resource for reconciliation. As Appleby (2008) argued in *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, religious communities can mobilize powerful resources for either violence or peace. More recent studies confirm that faith-based actors often provide emotional support, mobilize communities, and mediate between conflicting groups, thereby transforming radical or exclusionary messages into pathways of dialogue (Haynes, 2022; Svensson, 2016). The *pawongan* principle in Bali and the consensus-building rituals of Toraja reflect precisely these dynamics: rather than serving as static symbols of tradition, they operate as grassroots instruments of peacebuilding, fostering reconciliation in contexts of diversity and tension (Christmastianto & Sriartha, 2025; Jamal et al., 2025). In this light, Indonesian local wisdom contributes to global conversations on religion and peace, showing that indigenous traditions can embody the very principles of interfaith dialogue and nonviolent conflict resolution emphasized in broader peacebuilding literature (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009; Williams, 2023).

The Indonesian experience of peacebuilding extends beyond Bali and Toraja, with Maluku and Papua offering further insights into how religion and tradition intersect with conflict resolution. In Maluku, which endured severe interreligious violence between Muslims and Christians after the fall of Suharto in 1998, peacebuilding initiatives have drawn heavily on traditional practices such as the *Pukul Sapu* ceremony in Morela and the *sasi* ritual in Niwelehu, alongside sustained interreligious dialogue that has often proven more effective than state-led reconciliation programs (Al Qurtuby, 2016; Bräuchler, 2015; Sienkiewicz, 2022). Papua presents a different but equally complex case, where prolonged state violence has given rise to grassroots movements like the "Papua Land of Peace" framework, supported by customary law and non-state policing that help maintain order despite structural oppression (Boege, 2010; Hernawan, 2017). These cases reveal a common reliance on tradition and religion as resources for grassroots reconciliation while also underscoring the challenges posed by social inequality in Maluku and ongoing state violence in Papua (Rüland, von Lübke, Baumann, Bacani, & Pariela, 2019). Together, they demonstrate that Indonesian peacebuilding is deeply rooted in indigenous and religiously infused practices, which function not merely as cultural symbols but as practical mechanisms for restoring trust, healing divisions, and sustaining fragile coexistence.

The Indonesian experiences in Bali and Toraja find important parallels in global contexts where religion and tradition serve as vital instruments of peacebuilding. In Ghana, traditional religious rituals such as the *Dɔɔ* festival and customary mechanisms rooted in Akan philosophy are employed to mediate communal conflicts, offering culturally resonant alternatives to adversarial legal systems and underscoring the importance of indigenous frameworks for reconciliation (Appiah-Thompson, 2020; Beneventi, 2019; Tweneboah & Richards, 2022). Similarly, in post-genocide Rwanda, Christian churches have played a central role in fostering reconciliation through a shift from a "theology of genocide" to a "theology of reconciliation," emphasizing forgiveness, communal healing, and institutional reform, while Muslim communities have also emerged as unexpected agents of protection and dialogue (Carney, 2015; Kubai, 2007; Schliesser, 2018). These cases demonstrate that the integration of religious values and traditional practices into peacebuilding is not unique to Indonesia but part of a wider global phenomenon. By situating Bali's *pawongan* and Toraja's ritual consensus within this comparative lens, it becomes clear that local traditions in Indonesia contribute meaningfully to the cross-cultural discourse on religion, reconciliation, and social transformation, affirming their relevance in both national and international arenas.

Taken together, the articles in this issue demonstrate that religion, far from being a relic of the past or merely a source of division, continues to serve as a vital resource for building peace, fostering reconciliation, and sustaining plural societies. From Bali and Toraja to the wider global parallels in Maluku, Papua, Ghana, and Rwanda, the studies collectively affirm that rituals, local wisdom, and religious institutions possess the capacity to transform conflict, generate solidarity, and nurture coexistence across lines of difference. By foregrounding these diverse yet interconnected experiences,

this volume enriches the broader discourse on religion as a source of peace, underscoring its enduring relevance for both scholarly debates and practical efforts in addressing the complexities of contemporary social life.

Transformation of Sacred Spaces and Ritual Practices

The transformation of sacred spaces and ritual practices can best be understood within the broader theoretical discourse on the fluidity of the sacred. Mircea Eliade (1959) argued in *The Sacred and the Profane* that religious space is never neutral; it is set apart, charged with symbolic meaning, and oriented toward transcendence. Yet, as Chidester and Linenthal (1995) remind us in *American Sacred Space*, such spaces are not static but rather subject to continuous redefinition, negotiation, and appropriation within shifting social, political, and economic contexts. As they note, “sacred space is inevitably contested space, a site of negotiated contests over the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols... its ownership will always be at stake. In this respect, a sacred space is not merely discovered, or founded, or constructed; it is claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interests” (Chidester & Edward Tabor Linenthal, 1995, p. 15). This perspective underscores that sacredness is not simply given but is socially produced and vulnerable to both sacralization and desacralization. Within this theoretical frame, the Indonesian cases of the Thousand Doors Mosque in Tangerang and the Gendong Dance in the Akit community illustrate how sacred sites and rituals, while historically rooted in religious meaning, are reinterpreted and repurposed in response to the pressures of tourism, performance, and cultural hybridity, thereby demonstrating the adaptability of the sacred to modern realities.

The Indonesian cases of the Thousand Doors Mosque in Tangerang and the Gendong Dance of the Akit community provide compelling illustrations of how sacred traditions are transformed within contemporary cultural and economic frameworks. The Thousand Doors Mosque, once functioning primarily as a space of devotion, has increasingly become a religious tourism destination, negotiating between its spiritual significance and its commodified role within the tourism economy (Merina & Pratama, 2025). Similarly, the Gendong Dance, originally rooted in ritual practices of the Akit people, has been reinterpreted as a public cultural performance, reflecting processes of hybridity and ritual re-signification that blur the boundaries between the sacred and the secular (Arbi et al., 2025). These examples suggest that what may appear as “commercialization” of religion is more accurately understood as a redefinition of sacred meaning—where rituals and sacred spaces are adapted to new social contexts without necessarily losing their symbolic or spiritual power.

The Indonesian cases of the Thousand Doors Mosque and the Gendong Dance resonate with George Ritzer’s (1999) notion of the “*cathedrals of consumption*”—spaces designed to enchant visitors through religious-like qualities that sustain participation in consumer practices. As Ritzer explains, “*The new means of consumption can be seen as ‘cathedrals of consumption’—that is, they are structured, often successfully, to have an enchanted, sometimes even sacred, religious character. To attract consumers, such cathedrals of consumption need to offer, or at least appear to offer, increasingly magical, fantastic, and enchanted settings in which to consume*” (Ritzer, 2009, pp. 7–8). Within this framework, the Thousand Doors Mosque, reconstituted as a religious tourism site, and the Gendong Dance, transformed into a cultural performance, exemplify how sacred practices and spaces are redefined through processes of commodification. Far from eliminating sacrality, these transformations illustrate how religious symbols are re-enchanted within consumer logics, simultaneously preserving their spiritual aura while adapting to the demands of tourism, spectacle, and economic exchange.

The integration of religious practices and sacred sites into the logic of consumerism illustrates a global pattern in which faith traditions adapt to, and are reshaped by, the demands of tourism, spectacle, and market forces. As Izberk-Bilgin and Belk (2025) argue, the global spread of marketization transforms religion through processes of detraditionalization and deterritorialization, producing new forms of religious visibility in public and consumer domains. This shift is evident in the emergence of a “religious consumer society,” where believers engage in religious “shopping” and institutions respond with branding and marketing strategies to compete in crowded spiritual markets (Stolz &

Usunier, 2019). Religious tourism further magnifies this dynamic, as sacred sites increasingly function as nodes of economic exchange, balancing spiritual sanctity with commercial viability (Au-Yong-oliveira, Bampoori, & Grassos, 2024; Woodward, 2004). Yet, such transformations are not without tension: the commercialization of sacred places risks undermining their devotional depth even as it secures resources for their preservation (Zhu, 2020). The Indonesian cases of the Thousand Doors Mosque and the Gendong Dance, therefore, mirror these global trends, exemplifying how the sacred is continually redefined through negotiations between authenticity, heritage, and consumer culture.

The global patterns of religious commodification and transformation are not confined to Indonesia but resonate across diverse contexts such as Spain and India. The Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, for instance, exemplifies how a sacred space functions simultaneously as a basilica and one of the most visited tourist sites in Europe, embodying both liturgical significance and economic utility through cultural tourism (Crippa, 2011; Marine-Roig, 2016). Similarly, Varanasi in India represents a living sacred city where ritual life along the Ganga coexists with a thriving economy of religious tourism, crafts, and cultural industries, making it both a spiritual magnet and an economic hub (Das, K. Chowdhary, Mishra, & Aditi, 2024; Shashwat, Gautam, & Shashwat, 2025). When compared with the Thousand Doors Mosque and the Gendong Dance, these cases reveal a global trend: sacredness is not eroded but continually renegotiated within the pressures of market logics, tourism demands, and heritage discourses. The persistence of sacrality, even as it is reframed through commodification, suggests that contemporary religion operates in dynamic tension—preserving symbolic meaning while embracing economic and cultural exchange.

The transformations of sacred spaces and rituals, as illustrated in the cases of the Thousand Doors Mosque and the Gendong Dance, reveal the remarkable flexibility of religion in responding to globalization and market forces. Rather than disappearing or being reduced to mere commodities, these practices undergo mutation: shifting from exclusive acts of worship or communal rites into mediums that simultaneously embody cultural identity, economic value, and spiritual meaning. This process underscores that religion is not static but dynamic—constantly negotiating the boundaries between tradition and modernity, between sacredness and the profane, between devotion and consumption. The articles in this issue demonstrate that the study of religion is crucial for unpacking these complexities, showing how traditions are preserved even as they are transformed, and how rituals retain meaning while becoming part of cultural industries and tourism. In this sense, the issue invites readers to see religion not only as a system of belief but also as a field where meaning, identity, and economy are deeply intertwined in the contemporary world.

Religion, Gender, and Agency

In contemporary religious studies, women's agency is increasingly understood beyond the binary of resistance versus subordination. Lara Deeb (2006), in *An Enchanted Modern*, shows that public Islams in Lebanon can be imagined as "various modernities ... as enchanted in the Weberian sense, and as compatible with and potentially even dependent on pieties" (p. 5), with "a dual emphasis on both material and spiritual progress ... [shaping] quotidian expressions and experiences of piety" (p. 6). Similarly, Saba Mahmood (2005), in *Politics of Piety*, argues that "it is impossible to understand the political agency of the movement without a proper grasp of its ethical agency" (p. 35), urging scholars to view devotion and embodied practices as forms of agency. These insights resonate with the case of Indonesia's Hijabers mountaineers, where the hijab becomes not only a marker of piety but also a form of agency and resistance in spaces traditionally dominated by male or secular identities (Mukhlisin et al., 2025). Their practices exemplify how Muslim women actively redefine religious identity in public life, embodying both moral consciousness and modern visibility.

The Hijabers mountaineers exemplify the theoretical insights of Saba Mahmood and Lara Deeb on women's religiosity and agency. Following Mahmood's (2005) argument in *Politics of Piety* that women's agency cannot be reduced to resistance against patriarchy but must be understood as an ethical self-formation cultivated through embodied religious practice (p. 35), the act of wearing the hijab while climbing mountains demonstrates a deliberate cultivation of piety in spaces not

conventionally associated with religiosity. At the same time, Deeb's (2006) notion of the "*enchanted modern*" highlights that Muslim women in Lebanon negotiated modernity through a dual commitment to material progress and spiritual devotion (pp. 5–6). The Hijabers mountaineers similarly embody this negotiation: they engage with modern leisure culture—mountaineering as sport and recreation—while simultaneously reaffirming their spiritual identities through veiling and collective rituals. In this way, their practices cannot be read as either capitulation to modern consumerist leisure or mere resistance to secular norms; instead, they illustrate how piety, identity, and resistance are dynamically intertwined in redefining the boundaries of Muslim women's presence in public life.

From a broader theoretical perspective, the Hijabers mountaineers resonate with international debates on religion, gender, and public life. Mahmood's (2005) framework of *embodied practices* underscores that women's agency is cultivated through disciplined acts of piety rather than merely opposing patriarchy, while Deeb (2006) demonstrates how female religiosity in urban Lebanon is continually renegotiated in relation to modernity and public visibility. Extending these discussions, Göle (2014) illustrates how Muslim women in Europe who wear the hijab are caught in a *double-bind* between secular claims of emancipation and religious discourses of tradition, with their bodies becoming the contested site of competing political projects (p. 39). This tension over visibility, also reflected in wider debates about the hijab as a "cosmo-political" issue (p. 14) and the minaret as a "structural metonym of Muslim identity" (p. 73), resonates with the case of the Hijabers mountaineers in Indonesia, who navigate similar dynamics of public scrutiny. By wearing the hijab while engaging in mountaineering—a sphere historically coded as masculine and secular—they transform visibility into a site of empowerment, reframing piety as both an ethical discipline and a public assertion of identity. In this way, their practices extend Göle's insights beyond Europe, demonstrating how the politics of visibility and embodiment plays out in diverse global contexts, including leisure and outdoor culture in Muslim-majority societies.

The experience of the Hijabers mountaineers in Indonesia also resonates with the struggles of Muslim women athletes on the global stage who have fought for the right to wear hijab in international competitions. From FIFA's former ban on headscarves to the recent debates surrounding the 2024 Paris Olympics, women athletes have consistently confronted institutional and cultural barriers that target their bodies as contested sites of secular authority and religious tradition (Hamzeh, 2015; Karakuş, 2025; Prouse, 2015). Yet, as in the case of Jordanian footballers who successfully lobbied to overturn FIFA's restrictions, the insistence on competing while veiled demonstrates a powerful assertion of piety, identity, and agency within arenas historically dominated by secular norms. Placed alongside the Hijabers mountaineers, these cases affirm that women's religious agency is not confined to domestic or ritual spaces but extends into domains of leisure, sport, and global public life. Together, they show that Muslim women are redefining visibility and participation in ways that both challenge and reshape the boundaries of modernity, tradition, and gender across diverse contexts.

Taken together, these discussions highlight that religion cannot be reduced to a patriarchal instrument of control but must also be recognized as a source of strength, identity, and agency for women. The Hijabers mountaineers, along with global cases of Muslim women athletes, demonstrate how embodied religiosity reshapes public participation and redefines the boundaries of gender in contemporary societies. For religious studies, this underscores the importance of treating gender not as a peripheral concern but as an integral analytical variable that illuminates how faith traditions are lived, contested, and transformed. As such, this theme opens a broader conversation that naturally leads us to the next pressing issue explored in this volume: the role of religion in confronting radicalism and fundamentalism within diverse socio-political contexts.

Religion, Radicalism, and Security

Religious radicalism has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the twenty-first century, manifesting in phenomena such as ISIS, lone-wolf terrorism, and the rapid spread of online radicalization. Olivier Roy (2004), in *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, argues that contemporary forms of radicalism are less the product of traditional political struggles in the Muslim

world than of processes of deterritorialization and identity crisis brought about by migration and globalization. As he explains, “The spread of a radical and militant neofundamentalism has developed in parallel with... the deterritorialisation through migration of a huge proportion of the Muslim population” (Roy, 2004, p. 2), creating a context in which “the Muslim ummah... has to be thought of in abstract or imaginary terms” (p. 19). Complementing this macro-level perspective, Marc Sageman (2004), in *Understanding Terror Networks*, shows that recruitment into jihadist movements often occurs through preexisting social bonds rather than ideological indoctrination: “Social bonds are the critical element in this process and precede ideological commitment” (p. 135), with 68 percent of fighters in his sample joining through clusters of friends and 14 percent through kinship ties (p. 112). Together, these insights underscore that religious studies must move beyond theological analysis of radical doctrines to interrogate the social, cultural, and networked conditions under which radicalism flourishes—conditions that also provide critical entry points for strategies of deradicalization and resilience-building.

In the Indonesian context, Sony Kristiantoro’s (2025) study highlights the significance of community-based strategies in addressing the threats of fundamentalism, radicalism, and terrorism. Rather than relying solely on punitive or security-oriented measures, local actors such as religious leaders, moderate Islamic organizations, and interfaith communities have emphasized dialogue, education, and cultural engagement as preventive tools. These initiatives reflect a conviction that deradicalization is most effective when rooted in local wisdom and lived religious practices, enabling communities themselves to become agents of resilience. Such approaches resonate strongly with the national policy framework of Religious Moderation promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, which underscores tolerance, balance, and respect for diversity as key principles in safeguarding social harmony. By foregrounding grassroots agency, Kristiantoro’s work demonstrates that religion, far from being a driver of conflict, can serve as a critical resource for countering extremism and nurturing civic peace.

Appleby (2000) reminds us that religion has an inherently ambivalent character. “*Rather than a direct translation of the ‘mind of God’ into human action, religion is a far more ambiguous enterprise, containing within itself the authority to kill and to heal, to unleash savagery, or to bless humankind with healing and wholeness*” (p. 29). In other words, religion can serve as a justification for violence while also functioning as a source of reconciliation and peace. In the realm of global politics, religion can no longer be viewed as merely a private matter. Toft, Philpott, and Shah (2011) emphasize: “*Like religion itself, religious actors are generally not territorially bound, but transnational. Today, they frequently spill across the boundaries of states in membership and organization... Religion fits neither model, existing both within and across states*” (p. 24). This perspective underscores that religion is a key actor in world politics, including matters of security.

The European context provides a concrete illustration of the transformation of radicalism. Kepel (2017) observes that after 2005, Salafism increasingly recruited marginalized Muslim youth in the French banlieues, “*recruiting above all among marginalized youth*” (p. 5). Moreover, the digital revolution has given a new generation unique tools to express and disseminate their values “*through YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter*” (pp. 21–22). Radicalism in Europe has thus grown out of internal urban social dynamics, reinforced by global digital media. Within this framework, Indonesia offers an alternative model. Community-based strategies driven by moderate Islamic organizations, religious leaders, and interfaith forums emphasize dialogue, education, and cultural engagement. These efforts align with the Religious Moderation policy of Indonesia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs and demonstrate that religion, when cultivated through local wisdom, can function as a source of social resilience. In this sense, the Indonesian experience enriches global discourse by showing how religion can be positioned not as a threat but as a critical asset for peacebuilding.

From a comparative perspective, the Indonesian experience resonates with broader global patterns in which religion functions as both a site of vulnerability and a resource for resilience. In Nigeria, local *ulama* have played a pivotal role in deradicalization efforts against Boko Haram, countering extremist narratives with doctrinal authority, mobilizing communities for peace, and engaging through faith-based organizations despite significant security and socio-economic challenges (Ishaku, Aksit, & Maza,

2021; Olojo, 2017; Sambo & Sule, 2024). Similarly, in Egypt, Al-Azhar has emerged as a central institution in combating extremism through a combination of fatwas denouncing radical ideologies and educational initiatives that emphasize moderation, reinforced by international interfaith collaborations (Barak, 2022; Lashkhia, 2019; Mohamed, 2024). Together, these cases underscore that local and national religious authorities are not merely symbolic actors but active agents in shaping security landscapes, demonstrating that effective counter-radicalism strategies must be rooted in theological legitimacy, grassroots engagement, and institutional reform.

In Europe, community policing initiatives increasingly recognize mosques as crucial partners in preventing radicalization and building trust between Muslim communities and state authorities. Studies show that mosques serve not only as religious centers but also as nodes of social capital, where cooperation with police can foster proactive engagement against extremism (Klausen, 2009; Sevinc & Guler, 2016). The UK's Prevent strategy, for instance, has sought to institutionalize such partnerships, while mosque communities in Germany, especially those affiliated with DITIB, demonstrate how religious spaces operate within complex local and transnational political contexts (Öcal & Gökarkırsel, 2022). Yet challenges persist: patriarchal structures, mistrust of law enforcement, and reluctance to confront sensitive issues like gender violence can hinder effective collaboration (Idriss, 2020). Despite these tensions, the European experience underscores that community policing involving mosques offers a promising model of security governance rooted in dialogue, trust, and shared responsibility rather than coercion.

When placed side by side, the European, Nigerian, and Egyptian cases highlight a global pattern in which religion—often framed as a risk factor in radicalization—also proves to be a vital source of social resilience. Much like mosques in Europe that serve as partners in community policing or Al-Azhar's educational and theological leadership in Egypt, Indonesia's grassroots strategies driven by religious leaders, moderate Islamic organizations, and interfaith forums demonstrate how faith-based authority can be mobilized for peacebuilding. The Indonesian experience in particular, through its emphasis on dialogue, cultural engagement, and the Religious Moderation policy, shows that religion need not be securitized as a threat but can instead be cultivated as an indispensable civic resource. This convergence across contexts affirms that effective counter-radicalism requires not only state intervention but also the proactive engagement of religious communities, positioning religion as a cornerstone of social cohesion in the face of global insecurity.

In closing, it is crucial to emphasize that religion should not be reduced merely to a potential security threat but must also be recognized as a powerful resource for cultivating peace and resilience. The discussions in this section highlight that grassroots religious actors, theological authorities, and interfaith networks all contribute to building inclusive security frameworks that go beyond coercive approaches. In doing so, this article opens an important academic space for integrating security studies with the study of religions, showing how faith traditions intersect with the pressing challenges of radicalism and violence. This reflection also prepares the ground for the next theme, which shifts the focus from religion and security to *myth, ritual, and cultural transmission*, as explored in cases such as agrarian mythologies and the re-signification of the Gendong Dance.

Historical and Comparative Perspectives

Religion cannot be fully understood if confined only to its contemporary manifestations; it must also be examined within the *longue durée* of history. As Mircea Eliade (1959) observed in *The Sacred and the Profane*, myths and rituals are not mere remnants of the past but frameworks through which societies continually sacralize time, space, and human existence. From a historical and comparative perspective, religious traditions have consistently shaped systems of meaning, stabilized societies, and legitimized political authority across civilizations. Clifford Geertz (1973) similarly emphasized that religion functions as a cultural system, transmitting symbolic knowledge that organizes social life and political order. Agrarian myths, fertility rituals, and institutionalized practices reveal that religion has always been more than private devotion—it is a cultural force that binds communities, negotiates power, and sustains collective identity. By situating current debates within this deeper historical arc,

scholars of religion can illuminate enduring patterns of adaptation, negotiation, and transformation that continue to define religious life today.

Building on major theoretical perspectives, Mircea Eliade (1954) argued that agrarian myths and fertility rituals function as symbolic reenactments of cosmogonic time, linking human labor and seasonal cycles to the rhythms of the cosmos. He emphasized that “the symbolisms and cults of Mother Earth, of human and agricultural fertility, of the sacrality of woman, and the like, could not develop and constitute a complex religious system except through the discovery of agriculture” (Eliade, 1959, p. 17). Moreover, Eliade stressed that both nomadic and agrarian societies “live in a sacralized cosmos,” situating themselves in a meaningful cosmic order that unites human activity with the cycles of nature. In this sense, agrarian myths and fertility rites are not mere folklore, but mechanisms through which communities ritually anchor social stability in transcendent meaning. Complementing this perspective, Clifford Geertz (1973)v(1973) in *Religion as a Cultural System* conceptualized religion as a “system of symbols” that works to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in people by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence. Taken together, these frameworks underscore that myths and rituals are not peripheral embellishments of religious life, but central mechanisms through which collective meaning is produced, transmitted, and legitimated.

The comparative study of agrarian mythologies in Adyghe and Anatolia (Kagazezhev, 2025) illustrates how fertility myths operated as symbolic media of cultural transmission across the Eurasian world. In these traditions, narratives of agricultural cycles, fertility deities, and ritual sacrifices did more than ensure bountiful harvests; they provided a trans-civilizational language through which communities articulated their relationship to the land, the cosmos, and each other. The persistence of shared symbols—such as the maternal earth figure or the seasonal death and rebirth of vegetation—underscores that agrarian myths were not isolated local stories but vehicles of continuity that traveled, adapted, and integrated into diverse cultural settings. By tracing these symbolic resonances across Adyghe and Anatolian contexts, Kagazezhev demonstrates that myth served as a conduit of both religious meaning and intercultural connection, revealing how ancient societies negotiated identity, stability, and legitimacy through a shared cosmological framework.

In the context of ancient China, religious institutions evolved as compensatory mechanisms designed to preserve social stability amid political upheavals and cultural transformations (Barakhvostov, 2025). Rather than functioning as rigid, monolithic systems, these institutions reflected a dynamic process of syncretism in which Confucian ethics, Daoist cosmology, and Buddhist soteriology were woven together into a coherent framework for moral regulation and communal order. This blending not only legitimized political authority but also provided a reservoir of symbolic resources for addressing crises, managing dissent, and guiding ethical life. The adaptive capacity of Chinese religious institutions thus exemplifies how religion historically operated as both a stabilizing force and a field of negotiation, where multiple traditions were synthesized to sustain cohesion across a vast and diverse society.

These historical perspectives resonate strongly with modern contexts, where myths and rituals are continually reconstructed to serve new cultural, political, and economic purposes. Fertility rituals that once mediated agrarian cycles are now often reimagined as performances within cultural tourism, functioning both as heritage attractions and as markers of communal identity. Similarly, the syncretic flexibility evident in ancient China finds parallels in how modern nation-states appropriate religious and ritual traditions to bolster national identity, promote social cohesion, or project soft power globally. In this sense, the persistence and reinvention of myth and ritual underscore that their relevance is not confined to the distant past: they remain active instruments through which societies negotiate belonging, memory, and legitimacy in an era of globalization and cultural commodification.

From a global theoretical perspective, Mircea Eliade (1959) emphasized that myth is not merely a narrative of the past but a cosmic pattern continually reactivated through ritual. He argued that archaic societies sought to “abolish history” by ritually re-enacting primordial events, thereby aligning human life with an eternal, sacred order. This perspective suggests that myths function as enduring templates for collective meaning, repeatedly invoked across cultures and epochs to ground social stability in

transcendent truth. Seen through this lens, the agrarian myths of Adyghe and Anatolia or the syncretic religious institutions of ancient China are not isolated phenomena but part of a broader human impulse to sacralize time and space through recurring symbolic structures. In connecting the local to the universal, Eliade's framework underscores the relevance of historical case studies for contemporary debates on how ritualized memory and symbolic transmission sustain communities in a globalized world.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's seminal work *The Invention of Tradition* underscores that traditions often perceived as ancient are, in fact, modern constructions designed to serve particular social purposes. As Hobsbawm observes, "'Traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 1). He defines "invented tradition" as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1983, p. 1). Such traditions, he argues, generally function in three overlapping ways: "establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities; establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority; and inculcating beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour" (1983, p. 9). This framework highlights that traditions are not static inheritances but dynamic instruments through which societies negotiate identity, legitimacy, and continuity.

Jan Assmann's theorization of cultural memory underscores how religion and ritual function as long-term vehicles of identity and continuity. As he explains, "The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image" (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 132). This cultivation depends on mechanisms of preservation: "Without the possibility of written storage, human memory is the only means of preserving the knowledge that consolidates the identity of a group" (Assmann, 2011, p. 40). Ritual performance, particularly festivals, becomes a crucial medium for such preservation, not simply by separating the sacred from the profane but by structuring social time itself: "The original function of the festival was purely to structure time, not to separate the routine from the sacred" (Assmann, 2011, p. 43). Taken together, these insights illuminate how cultural memory embeds religious symbols and rituals into the temporal and textual fabric of society, ensuring their transmission across generations as anchors of collective identity.

A cross-civilizational perspective makes clear that the study of religion gains depth when myths, rituals, and institutions are examined not only within their original contexts but also in comparison across cultures. By juxtaposing agrarian fertility myths from Eurasia, syncretic institutions of ancient China, and modern reinventions of ritual in tourism or national identity projects, scholars can trace how symbolic practices travel, adapt, and persist. This comparative lens enriches our understanding of the transformations that religion undergoes in the age of globalization, showing that the negotiation of meaning, identity, and legitimacy is not unique to any one society but an enduring feature of religious life across time and space.

Taken together, these historical and comparative studies underscore that religion has always operated at the intersection of myth, ritual, and institutional formation, shaping both cultural memory and political legitimacy. Far from being confined to the past, such perspectives illuminate how contemporary religious practices continue to draw upon ancient symbolic repertoires, whether through mythic retellings, ritual adaptations, or the reinvention of traditions. By bridging the ancient and the modern, this section affirms that the negotiation of meaning, authority, and identity is an enduring feature of religious life across civilizations. This concluding reflection also provides a natural transition to the next theme, which will explore how these symbolic transmissions intersect with contemporary cultural creativity and digital mediation.

3. Closing

Bringing together the discussions in this issue, it becomes clear that religion—rather than fading under the pressures of secularization and globalization—emerges as an adaptive and vital social force.

From Bali to Toraja, from Papua to Maluku, and in comparative dialogue with contexts such as Ghana, Rwanda, and Europe, the articles collected here reveal that contemporary religiosity extends far beyond spiritual expression: it functions as social infrastructure that sustains cohesion, as sacred space continually renegotiated, as a medium of transformative gender agency, and as a resource for resilience in the face of radicalism. Across both Indonesian and global cases, this edition underscores the central thread that religion operates not merely as symbolic heritage but as a creative energy that continually adapts to social, political, and cultural change while maintaining its relevance for modern societies.

The articles on Bali and Toraja demonstrate how indigenous wisdom traditions sustain cohesion through ritual and consensus, resonating with Durkheim's claim that religion binds individuals into moral communities. These ethnographic cases, when set alongside Maluku and Papua—where ritual ceremonies and customary law mediate interfaith reconciliation—highlight religion's role as a practical mechanism for peacebuilding. Appleby's concept of the "ambivalence of the sacred" helps explain why religion can both incite and heal conflict, while the Ghanaian and Rwandan parallels affirm that ritualized practices are powerful vehicles for grassroots reconciliation across cultures. At the same time, the transformation of the Thousand Doors Mosque and the Gendong Dance illustrates the dialectic between sacredness and commodification. Following Eliade's notion of sacred space, Chidester and Linenthal's emphasis on contested ownership, and Ritzer's "cathedrals of consumption," these cases show that commodification does not necessarily erase sacrality; instead, it often produces a "re-enchantment" in which religious spaces and rituals retain symbolic meaning even as they adapt to tourism, performance, and consumer logics.

Equally compelling are the studies on gender, radicalism, and historical perspectives. The Hijabers mountaineers embody Mahmood's argument that agency is cultivated through embodied piety and Deeb's idea of an "enchanted modern," reframing leisure and public space as arenas of ethical self-formation and visibility. This negotiation of modernity and devotion finds a parallel in global debates on Muslim women's participation in sport and public life. In contrast, the articles on radicalism highlight a different dynamic: while Roy, Sageman, and Kepel situate radicalization within deterritorialization, social networks, and digital media, the Indonesian model emphasizes community-based resilience through religious moderation, grassroots leaders, and interfaith networks. Finally, the historical and comparative essays weave together Eliade's view of myth as cosmic re-enactment, Geertz's religion as a cultural system, Hobsbawm's "invention of tradition," and Assmann's theory of cultural memory. Taken together, these perspectives underscore that religious traditions are continually reinvented as cultural memory, stabilizing identity while adapting to modern functions such as heritage tourism and nation-branding.

Taken together, this issue contributes to the field of religious studies on several fronts. First, it advances inter-regional dialogue between the Global South and the Global North, showing how insights from Indonesia and comparable contexts resonate with, and enrich, broader global debates. Second, it bridges classical theory—Durkheim on cohesion, Eliade on sacred space, Geertz on cultural systems—with contemporary phenomena shaped by digital media, commodification, and gendered visibility. Third, it highlights a multi-level methodological approach that connects ethnographic accounts of ritual with policy frameworks on pluralism, moderation, and security. These contributions position the journal not only as a repository of regional knowledge but as an active interlocutor in global theoretical and methodological conversations.

At the same time, the issue has its limitations. The scope of data remains uneven across regions and community types, with a tendency toward urban case studies. Longitudinal perspectives are limited, and there is a need for deeper engagement with digital ethnography, particularly as online platforms increasingly shape religious expression. These limitations, however, open avenues for future research. Comparative South–South studies could broaden the horizon beyond Indonesia and Eurasia; digital ethnographies of sacred space could illuminate how ritual is reconfigured online; systematic evaluations of religious moderation policies could assess their real-world impact; peacebuilding scholarship could benefit from developing metrics that capture the efficacy of ritual-based

reconciliation; and studies of gender in leisure and sport could further clarify how faith reshapes participation in public life.

In closing, this editorial note emphasizes that the study of religion remains indispensable for understanding the dynamics of cohesion, identity, and transformation in the modern world. By foregrounding both its enduring resilience and its capacity for reinvention, this issue invites readers and contributors alike to see *Religious: Journal of Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies* as a hub for interdisciplinary and interregional dialogue. We extend an open invitation to scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to join this conversation, advancing a collaborative and comparative agenda that speaks to the complexities of religion in our global age.

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