JLES

JOURNAL OF LAW AND
EPISTEMIC STUDIES

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Religious Practices and Cultural Conflicts in the Indigenous Communities of Umariaçu I and II, Tabatinga-AM, Brazil

Prácticas religiosas y conflictos culturales en las comunidades de Umariaçu I y II Tabatinga-AM, Brazil

Valdenizio Leão-Santana[1] ● Anayansi Albert-Rodríguez[2] ● Naymi Madrigal-González[2]

Abstract The objective was to analyze the impact of religious practices on cultural identity and on the generation of cultural conflicts in the Ticuna indigenous communities of Umariaçu I and II, located in the municipality of Tabatinga, in the state of Amazonas, Brazil. The research was conducted using a mixed methodological approach that combined qualitative and quantitative techniques, including participant observation, structured questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews, applied to a sample of 170 inhabitants of different ages and genders. The results show a progressive weakening of the traditional cultural practices of the Ticuna people, particularly ancestral rituals, the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and collective festivities. This process is closely associated with the expansion of Christian religious institutions, especially Evangelical and Catholic denominations, whose discourses and norms tend to restrict participation in traditional rites. Such restrictions have generated identity tensions and intergenerational conflicts within the communities, with greater incidence among the younger population. It is concluded that the predominance of an externally imposed religiosity, rather than a respectful intercultural dialogue, has contributed to processes of cultural displacement and identity fragmentation. The findings highlight the need to strengthen intercultural educational strategies and public policies aimed at protecting indigenous cultural autonomy and promoting the coexistence of religious diversity without undermining ancestral traditions.

Keywords religiosity, indigenous culture, cultural conflict, identity, globalization.

Resumen El objetivo fue analizar el impacto de las prácticas religiosas en la identidad cultural y en la generación de conflictos culturales en las comunidades indígenas ticuna de Umariaçu I y II, ubicadas en el municipio de Tabatinga, estado de Amazonas, Brazil. La investigación se desarrolló bajo un enfoque metodológico mixto, combinando técnicas cualitativas y cuantitativas, entre ellas la observación participante, cuestionarios estructurados y entrevistas semiestructuradas, aplicadas a una muestra de 170 habitantes de diferentes edades y géneros. Los resultados evidencian un debilitamiento progresivo de las prácticas culturales tradicionales del pueblo ticuna, especialmente de los rituales ancestrales, la transmisión intergeneracional de saberes y las festividades colectivas. Este proceso se encuentra estrechamente asociado a la expansión de instituciones religiosas cristianas, en particular denominaciones evangélicas y católicas, cuyos discursos y normas suelen restringir la participación en ritos tradicionales. Tales restricciones han generado tensiones identitarias y conflictos intergeneracionales dentro de las comunidades, con mayor incidencia en la población joven. Se concluye que la predominancia de una religiosidad impuesta externamente, más que un diálogo intercultural respetuoso, ha contribuido a procesos de desplazamiento cultural y fragmentación identitaria. Los hallazgos resaltan la necesidad de fortalecer estrategias educativas interculturales y políticas públicas orientadas a la protección de la autonomía cultural indígena y a la convivencia de la diversidad religiosa sin menoscabo de las tradiciones ancestrales.

Palabras clave religiosidad, cultura indígena, conflicto cultural, identidad, globalización.

✉ Valdenizio Leão-Santana
vallionbio@hotmail.com

SEDUC-Amazona. Brasil

[1]SEDUC-Amazona. Brasil.
[2]Centro Universitario Municipal Trinidad. Universidad de Santi Spiritus. Cuba.

PUBLIS
EDITORIAL

Introduction

Current society is immersed in the defense of culture, in response to the process of globalization originating from hegemonic centers of power, which threatens the identities of peoples. This situation demands a humanistic education expressed through a sense of belonging rooted in the local context (Silverio & Gómez, 2019).

The study of cultural identity, beliefs, and religion among the inhabitants of indigenous communities is closely related to religious systems and is deeply shaped by culture. In this sense, material aspects are analyzed, encompassing elements ranging from sacred images to religious temples. However, it is also essential to consider the spiritual dimension in order to understand the meanings attributed to the social changes currently experienced by these communities. This research draws on theories of identity, worldview, belief systems, and religion from a cultural perspective (Pasache, 2023).

Analyses of local history play a fundamental role in recovering knowledge of past events, whether in their entirety or by specific sectors, allowing for a deeper understanding of local realities (Berríos & Tessada, 2023). Likewise, Ibarra et al. (2023) highlight the importance of understanding the history of a community or region in order to explore significant aspects of its past.

The Brazilian Amazon is home to the largest population of Ticuna indigenous people. Their history has been marked by violent invasions carried out by fishermen, rubber tappers, and loggers in the Alto Solimões region. It was only in the 1990s that these indigenous peoples obtained official recognition of the vast majority of their territories. Currently, they face the challenge of ensuring environmental and economic sustainability while maintaining the quality of their relationships with surrounding society and preserving their rich historical and cultural heritage.

The Umariaçú community is an indigenous settlement located in the rural area of the municipality of Tabatinga, Amazonas. The Ticuna nation is considered one of the largest indigenous populations in Brazil and is characterized by an isolated language in linguistic classification, spoken by practically all of its members.

The present research aims to investigate how religiosity influences the loss of culture and identity in the Umariaçú I and II communities of the municipality of Tabatinga-AM. The study is guided by the following research question: How has the expansion of Christian religions in the Ticuna communities of Umariaçú I and II generated cultural and identity conflicts that affect the transmission of ancestral knowledge?

Recent scientific literature has emphasized that the expansion of Christian religions in indigenous territories has produced profound transformations in cultural identity and social organization. Empirical studies conducted in Brazil demonstrate that evangelical conversion processes fre-quently operate as mechanisms of cultural reconfiguration, promoting the abandonment of ancestral rituals and redefining collective norms and values (Sousa dos Santos et al., 2025). These dynamics generate identity conflicts, particularly among younger generations, who experience tension between religious belonging and cultural continuity. The imposition of external religious frameworks often disrupts traditional systems of meaning, weakening intergenerational transmission of knowledge and contributing to processes of symbolic displacement within indigenous communities (Sousa dos Santos et al., 2025).

From a critical perspective, recent studies argue that contemporary evangelization in indigenous contexts reproduces historical patterns of cultural domination rooted in colonial logic. Research focusing on Amazonian indigenous groups reveals that religious conversion is frequently accompanied by the stigmatization of traditional spiritual practices, which are framed as incompatible with Christian doctrine (Oliveira Sousa, Rocha da Silva, & Rodrigues Machado, 2025). This process intensifies internal community conflicts and undermines indigenous autonomy over cultural reproduction. According to Silva de Carvalho, Oliveira da Cunha, and Souto Maior (2025), the persistence of these dynamics evidences that religious expansion continues to function as a powerful vector of cultural transformation, reinforcing identity fragmentation rather than promoting intercultural coexistence.

Methodology

The Umariaçú community is an indigenous settlement located in the rural area of the municipality of Tabatinga, in the Alto Rio Solimões region, Amazonas, Brazil. The Ticuna nation is considered one of the largest indigenous populations in the country and is characterized by an isolated language in linguistic classification, spoken by the vast majority of its members. This linguistic and cultural continuity represents a key element for understanding identity construction and cultural transmission within the community.

The community is divided into two areas, Umariaçú I and Umariaçú II. According to data from the Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health (SESAI), in 2018 Umariaçú I had an estimated population of approximately 8,400 inhabitants, while Umariaçú II had around 5,600 inhabitants. Each area has a base center of the Alto Rio Solimões Special Indigenous Health District (DSEI), linked to the Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health of the Brazilian Ministry of Health. In terms of educational infrastructure, Umariaçú I has one municipal indigenous school, while Umariaçú II has four schools at the state and municipal levels.

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, which is par-

ticularly appropriate for the study of complex sociocultural phenomena such as religiosity, identity, and cultural conflict in indigenous contexts (Creswell & Plano, 2024). Data collection instruments included participant observation, structured questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods based on percentage analysis, while qualitative data were examined through interpretative analysis of narratives and observed practices.

Data were collected directly from community residents through fieldwork, preceded by preliminary observations aimed at familiarization with the social, cultural, and religious dynamics of the research setting. The sample consisted of 170 participants, including teachers, young people, and adults of both sexes, of whom 96 were men and 74 were women. Participants were selected through non-probabilistic, intentional sampling, considering their availability and involvement in community, educational, and religious activities, a strategy commonly used in indigenous and community-based research (Smith, 2024).

The questionnaires and interviews were designed to explore perceptions regarding religious affiliation, participation in cultural practices, and the transmission of ancestral knowledge. Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality of information, and respect for cultural norms, in accordance with contemporary guidelines for research with indigenous peoples (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2024).

Results and discussion

The empirical findings reveal profound sociocultural transformations within the Ticuna indigenous communities of Umariaçú I and II, shaped by generational dynamics, religious affiliation, and the transmission of ancestral knowledge. These transformations are not isolated but are embedded in broader processes of cultural reconfiguration associated with contemporary forms of religious expansion in indigenous territories.

Figure 1 presents the age distribution of participants, showing that 65.4% are between 15 and 20 years old, 18.2% between 21 and 35, and 16.4% over 36 years of age. The predominance of young respondents is particularly significant, as youth represent a critical stage for identity construction and cultural continuity. Recent studies emphasize that indigenous youth often experience heightened identity tension due to the coexistence of ancestral worldviews and externally imposed religious and educational frameworks (Mignolo & Walsh, 2023; Walsh, 2023). In this context, identity is continuously negotiated rather than inherited linearly, making younger generations especially vulnerable to processes of cultural displacement.
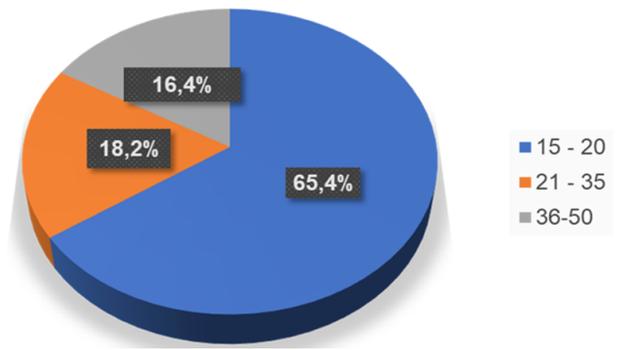

Figure 1. Age of the interviewees

Regarding educational attainment (Figure 2), 57.2% of respondents completed secondary education, 29.5% basic education, and 13.3% higher education. While access to formal education is a key factor for social inclusion, recent decolonial research highlights that dominant educational models frequently marginalize indigenous epistemologies by privileging Western-Christian knowledge systems (Walsh, 2023). This tension contributes to the weakening of oral transmission practices that have historically sustained Ticuna cultural identity.
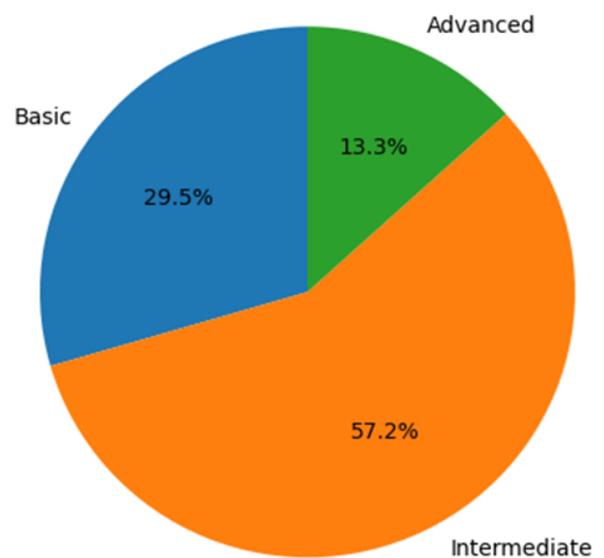

Figure 2. Level of education

Concerning territorial distribution, 24% of respondents belonged to Umariaçú I and 76% to Umariaçú II. This imbalance reflects the concentration of educational institutions and social services in Umariaçú II, which increases exposure to external religious agents. Such spatial dynamics are consistent with findings indicating that institutional density often correlates with greater cultural intervention and normative influence in indigenous territories (Quijano & Gó-

mez-Muller, 2022).

Figure 3 shows religious affiliation, indicating that 44.5% of respondents belong to the Order of the Crusaders (OC-CAE), 36.3% identify as Evangelical, 16.2% as Catholic, and 3% did not respond. These data confirm the strong presence of Christian religiosity within the communities. Field observations identified ten churches across Umariaçú I and II, exceeding the number of educational institutions, particularly in Umariaçú I. Recent empirical research in the Brazilian Amazon demonstrates that the spatial and symbolic predominance of churches reinforces their role as agents of moral regulation and cultural normalization (Sousa dos Santos et al., 2025; Oliveira et al., 2025).
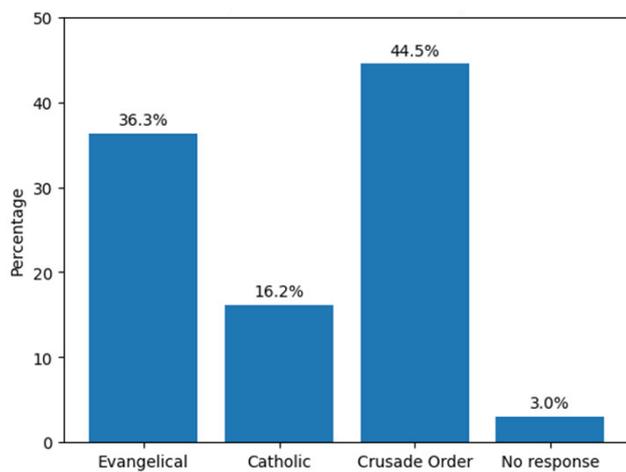

Figure 4. Cultural Events Held in the Community

Figure 3. Religious affiliation.

Although many religious leaders are themselves Ticuna, the doctrinal frameworks they promote are largely based on external religious epistemologies that frequently conflict with indigenous cosmologies. Contemporary studies argue that this internalization of externally imposed belief systems contributes to symbolic domination by reshaping cultural meanings from within the community itself (Quijano & Gómez-Muller, 2022).

Figure 4 illustrates the frequency of cultural events within the communities. While 64.7% of respondents reported that such events are held, 25.3% indicated they occur only occasionally, and 7.5% stated that they do not take place. This decline in regular cultural festivities signals a weakening of collective practices that traditionally function as spaces for socialization, non-formal education, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. Recent literature emphasizes that the erosion of ritual practices is a key indicator of cultural fragilization in indigenous contexts affected by religious expansion (Oliveira et al., 2025).
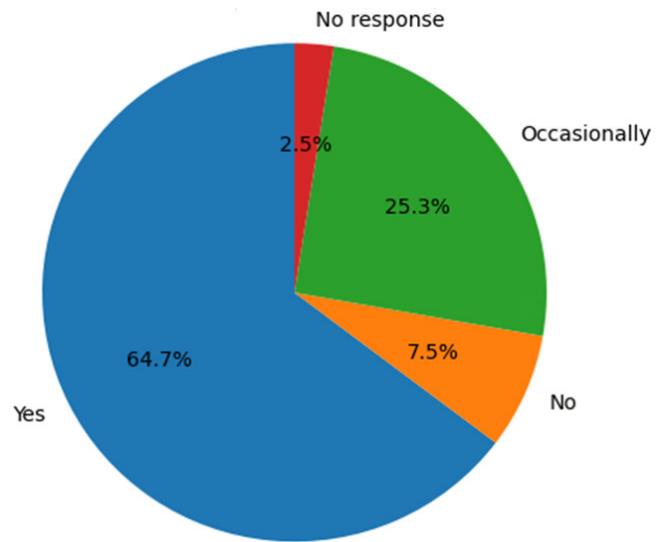
When asked whether they transmit cultural traditions to their children, only 45% responded affirmatively, while 13% stated they do not, 12% reported doing so occasionally, and 30% did not respond. This high rate of non-response may reflect uncertainty or internalized stigma toward traditional practices. Recent studies suggest that religious discourses that frame ancestral rituals as incompatible with Christian morality contribute to the silencing of cultural transmission within families (Sousa dos Santos et al., 2025).

Similarly, 65% of respondents acknowledged receiving ancestral knowledge from their parents, while 18% denied such transmission and 14% reported it occurs sporadically. These findings point to an emerging intergenerational rupture, particularly affecting younger members of the community. As noted by Walsh (2023), the gradual devaluation of indigenous epistemologies often leads to epistemic subordination, undermining cultural continuity without the need for explicit coercion.

One of the most critical findings is presented in Figure 5, where 69.2% of respondents stated that their religion prohibits the transmission of their culture. This result highlights the regulatory role of religious norms over cultural practices. Although Brazilian constitutional law guarantees indigenous peoples the right to maintain their customs and traditions, recent research demonstrates that such rights are frequently undermined by informal religious governance structures operating within communities (Pereira & Moraes, 2025).

Figure 6 addresses perceptions of the role of churches within the community. While 57.5% of respondents viewed the church's role positively—often citing moral guidance and restrictions on alcohol consumption—32.8% perceived it negatively due to limitations on participation in traditional rituals such as the Rito da Moça Nova. This ambivalence

reflects a complex negotiation between perceived social benefits and cultural loss. Contemporary studies argue that this duality is characteristic of religious pluralism in indigenous contexts, where coexistence often masks asymmetrical power relations rather than fostering genuine intercultural dialogue (Campusano, 2024).
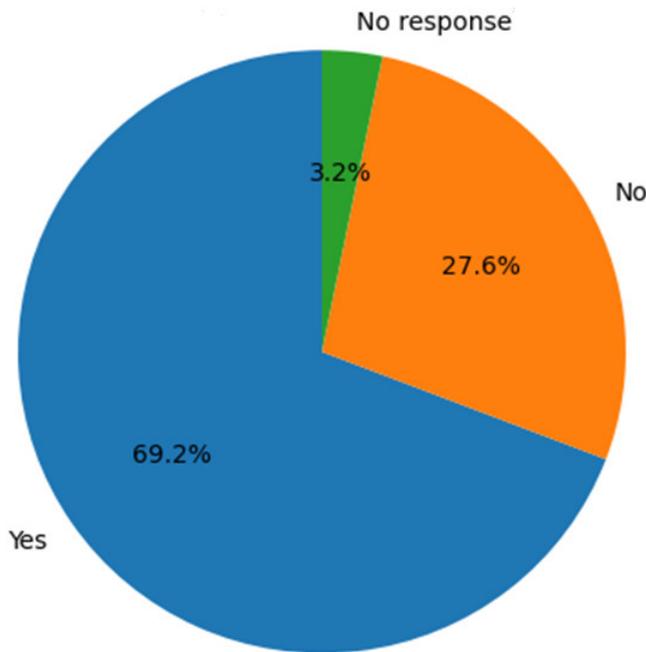

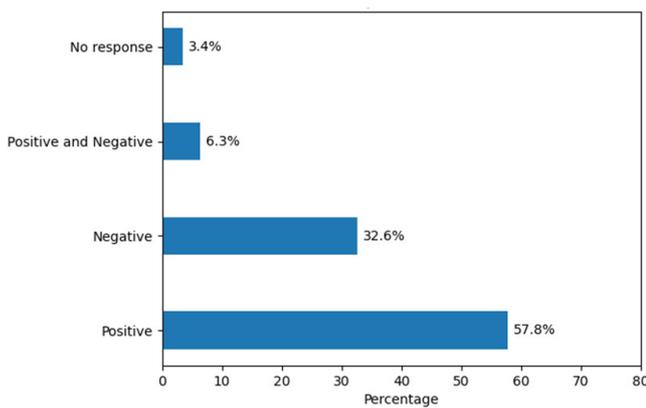**Figure 5.** Their Religion Prohibits the Transmission of Their Culture

Figure 6. Do churches have a positive or negative role in the indigenous community?

Overall, the results indicate that the expansion of Christian religiosity in the Ticuna communities of Umariaçú I and II has contributed to processes of cultural reconfiguration marked by identity tension, intergenerational conflict, and symbolic displacement. Rather than promoting cultural coexistence, religious expansion has frequently reinforced

colonial patterns of cultural domination, emphasizing conversion over dialogue. These findings reinforce recent calls for the implementation of intercultural public policies and educational strategies that recognize indigenous epistemologies, protect cultural autonomy, and promote respectful engagement between religious diversity and ancestral traditions (Walsh, 2023; United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2024)

Conclusions

The findings demonstrate that the expansion of Christian religiosity in the Ticuna communities of Umariaçú I and II has played a decisive role in reshaping cultural identities, weakening intergenerational transmission of ancestral knowledge, and generating persistent identity tensions, particularly among younger generations. While religious institutions are perceived by some community members as sources of moral guidance and social order, their normative frameworks frequently restrict traditional rituals and cultural practices, contributing to symbolic displacement and cultural fragmentation. These dynamics reveal that religious coexistence has not occurred under conditions of intercultural equality, but rather through asymmetrical power relations that reproduce colonial patterns of cultural domination. The study underscores the urgency of implementing intercultural public policies and educational strategies that recognize and value indigenous epistemologies, protect cultural autonomy, and promote respectful dialogue between religious diversity and ancestral traditions, as essential conditions for safeguarding cultural continuity and social cohesion in indigenous territories.

References

Berríos, A., & Tessada, V. (2023). Percepciones sobre el uso del patrimonio como recurso educativo entre docentes de Historia, Geografía y Ciencias Sociales de la Región del Maule. *Revista De Estudios Y Experiencias En Educación*, *22*(49), 177–193. https://doi.org/10.21703/rexe. v22i49.1709

Campusano, A. M. (2024). *Conflict resolution through interreligious dialogue in a multicultural landscape: A case study in India's mosaic society* [Master's thesis, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, College of Islamic Studies].

Creswell, J. W., & Plano, V. L. (2024). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. https://surl.li/xrfnkq

Fausto, C. (2000). *Os índios antes do Brasil*. Jorge Zahar Editor.

Ibarra, J., Albarrán, F., Lobos, M., Conteras, G., Mardones, M., Stevens, S., Mesa, S,. & Vida, M. (2023). Valoración del Sentido de pertenencia, resiliencia y comunicación y habitantes de una zona costera. *South Florida*

Journal of Development, 4(2), 1089-1104. https://doi.org/10.46932/sfjdv4n3-006

Pasache, L. A. (2023). La formación de la identidad en la educación infantil 2022 [Undergraduate thesis, Escuela de Educación Superior Pedagógica Pública Piura]. https://repositorio.eespppiura.edu.pe/handle/EESPPPIURA/36

Quijano, O., & Gómez-Muller, A. (2022). Colonialidad cultural, identidad y resistencias indígenas en América Latina. *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, (82), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.7440/res82.2022.01

Silverio, J. G., & Gómez, G. C. (2019). Vínculo entre la universidad y los medios de comunicación en el tratamiento de la problemática racial en Cuba. *Debates por la Historia*, *7*(1), 13-33. https://www.redalyc.org/journal/6557/655769218002/html/

Smith, L. T. (2024). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (3rd ed.). Zed Books. https://surl.li/gamtvl

Sousa dos Santos, N., Souto de Sousa Júnior, F., Fogueira Neto, J. M., Oliveira Sousa, D., Rocha da Silva, A., Rodrigues Machado, J., Silva de Carvalho, A., Oliveira da Cunha, D., Souto Maior, F., & Belinassi, R. (2025). A cruz que apaga os rastros ancestrais: A conversão evangélica e o desfiguramento da identidade indígena no Brasil. *Revista Aracê*, 7(2), 9747–9776. https://doi.org/10.56238/arev7n2-298

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. (2024). *Guidelines on ethical research involving Indigenous Peoples*. United Nations. https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/publications

Walsh, C. (2023). *Interculturalidad crítica y decolonialidad: Re-existencias y horizontes civilizatorios*. Ediciones Abya-Yala. https://surl.lu/gtdqeq

Mohyeddin, Z. (s. f.). *Cultural identity in a globalized world: Navigating tradition and modernity*. National Academy of Performing Arts. https://doi.org/10.71465/fhsr202

Ruslan, I. & Irham, M. (2022). The role of cultural literacy and peace education in harmonization of religious communities. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research, 13*(3), 174-204. Retrieved January 18, 2026 from https://www.learntechlib.org/p/222941/.

Mazya, T. M., Ridho, K., & Irfani, A. (2024). *Religious and cultural diversity in Indonesia: Dynamics of acceptance and conflict in a multidimensional perspective. International Journal of Current Science Research and Review, 7*(7), 4932–4945. https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/V7-i7-32

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Author contributions

Valdenizio Leão-Santana, Anayansi Albert-Rodríguez & Naymi Madrigal-González: Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, supervision, validation, visualization, drafting the original manuscript and writing, review, and editing.

Data availability statement

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Statement on the use of AI

The authors acknowledge the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies to improve the readability and clarity of the article.

Disclaimer/Editor's note

The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual authors and contributors and not of *Journal of Law and Epistemic Studies*.

Journal of Law and Epistemic Studies and/or the editors disclaim any responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products mentioned in the content.

PUBLIS
EDITORIAL