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Decoupling Religion from Culture: A New Perspective in Managing Intercultural Communication

فصل الدين عن الثقافة: منظور جديد في إدارة التواصل بين الثقافات

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Article info:	Abstract
Article history:	Globalization has significantly increased intercultural encounters, leading to serious challenges in intercultural communication. Adapting to cultural differences while preserving religious beliefs can be particularly complex for individuals. While intercultural communicative competence offers a solid foundation for addressing these issues, it does not align with the rigid nature of religious affiliations. To this end, this paper, proposes a new perspective by decoupling religion from culture. It provides arguments establishing this distinction through theoretical perspectives and case studies of multiple cultures. Furthermore, it aims to protect religious beliefs even in the spirit of interculturality, suggesting a dual identity for each individual. According to this framework, cultural identity is deemed to be more flexible and negotiable. Religious identity, on the other hand, remains more rigid. Moreover, it advocates for embracing multiculturalism, which celebrates global diversity and fosters an inclusive environment. This approach enables individuals to uphold their religious adherence without being perceived as closed-minded, ultimately, enriching intercultural communication and mutual understanding.
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الكلمات المفتاحية:	ملخص
التعددية الثقافية	لقد أدت العولمة إلى زيادة كبيرة في اللقاءات الثقافية، مما أثار تحديات جدية في مجال التواصل بين الثقافات. إن التكيف مع الاختلافات الثقافية مع الحفاظ على المعتقدات الدينية يُعدّ من الأمور المعقدة التي يواجهها الأفراد. ورغم أن الكفاءة التواصلية بين الثقافات تقدم أساساً قوياً لمعالجة هذه التحديات، إلا أنها غالباً ما تتعارض مع الطبيعة الجامدة للانتماءات الدينية. بناءً على ذلك، يقترح هذا البحث منظوراً جديداً من خلال فصل الدين عن الثقافة. يعرض البحث حججاً لتأسيس هذا التمييز من خلال وجهات نظر نظرية ودراسات حالة من ثقافات متعددة. علاوة على ذلك، يهدف إلى حماية المعتقدات الدينية حتى في إطار التعددية الثقافية، مقترحاً هوية مزدوجة لكل فرد. وفقاً لهذا الإطار، تُعتبر الهوية الثقافية أكثر مرونة وقابلية للتفاوض، بينما تبقى الهوية الدينية أكثر ثباتاً. كما يدعو إلى تبني التعددية الثقافية التي تحتضن بالتنوع العالمي وتعزز بيئة شاملة. تتيح هذه المقاربة للأفراد الحفاظ على التزامهم الديني دون أن يُنظر إليهم على أنهم متعصبون، مما يُثري في نهاية المطاف التواصل بين الثقافات ويعزز التفاهم المتبادل.
الثقافة	
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الهوية المزدوجة.	

1. Introduction

Human beings are profoundly shaped by their societies, subconsciously internalizing the beliefs, norms, and conventions that define their identities and guide their behaviors from an early age. This complex process, where an individual becomes a product of their social environment, is encapsulated in the concept of culture. Culture represents the entirety of a group's lifestyle, including its underlying beliefs, practices, and products. Scholars (Tylor, 1871; Seelye, 1997) often dissect culture into various elements or components to better understand its facets. Common aspects include history, ideology, norms, language, traditions, customs, and symbols.

Religion is deemed to be a significant and often integral element within this cultural framework. Emile Durkheim's sociological perspective highlighted religion as a fundamental social institution that reinforces societal cohesion and moral order. According to Durkheim (1915), religion plays a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the collective conscience of a society, thereby embedding itself within the broader cultural milieu.

In today's globalized world, frequent and complex intercultural interactions often challenge established norms, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts due to differing worldviews. Hall's (1976) iceberg model illustrates that while visible aspects of culture, like traditional meals and clothing, are easier to navigate, deeper, less visible aspects such as underlying beliefs and values can cause significant tension when they clash. Byram's (1997) concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) offers a solution by emphasizing the importance of acceptance, openness, and learning about other cultures to improve interactions. ICC involves understanding and respecting cultural differences, adapting behaviors, and negotiating cultural practices to enhance mutual understanding. However, challenges arise when intercultural exchanges involve religion.

While cultural practices and norms can be adapted and accepted in the spirit of intercultural communication, religious doctrines often represent deeply held beliefs that are less flexible and more integral to an

individual's identity. This rigidity means that what is culturally accepted may sometimes clash with, or even contradict, personal religious convictions. For instance, an individual may be open to adapting cultural practices or respecting different cultural norms but may struggle with reconciling actions or practices that conflict with their religious beliefs, leading to questions such as:

Can one behave in a way that contradicts their doctrine?

Are religious compromises truly worthwhile in the context of intercultural exchanges?

Does interculturality necessitate flexibility on religious matters?

Is religion merely a part of culture, or does it represent a distinct, less malleable element?

This paper seeks to address these key questions by advocating for a clear separation between culture and religion and proposing that individuals possess dual identities: one cultural and one religious. Our primary objective is to highlight that cultural identity is flexible and subject to negotiation, reflecting the diverse and evolving nature of societal interactions. In contrast, religious identity is typically more fixed and deeply ingrained, serving as a core component of an individual's personal belief system. By distinguishing between these two forms of identity, we aim to offer a novel perspective on managing intercultural interactions seeking to protect religious beliefs while reducing potential awkwardness in intercultural encounters. This distinction aims to foster a more respectful and effective interaction across diverse cultural contexts.

2. The Concepts of Religion and Culture

Culture is a broad and encompassing concept that integrates almost every aspect of humans' life and society. In essence, it represents the ways of a people (Condon, 1973). In a more detailed sense, Tylor (1871) and Matsumoto (1996) described culture as an intricate entity that includes knowledge, customs, laws, values, morals, beliefs, and arts. These elements, which are passed down through generations, distinguish one group from another and contribute to a group's unique identity. This identity, according

to Seelye (1997), emerges from the collective mind software, which provides a framework that guides behavior and ensures that actions are consistent and meaningful within a social context. Thus, culture serves as the foundational structure within which individuals and groups operate, shaping and directing their behaviors and interactions.

Religion is often viewed as a belief in supernatural powers or forces. Durkheim (1915) articulated this idea by describing religion as encompassing elements extending far beyond the boundaries of human understanding. From a functional perspective, religion is seen as a set of rules and standards that govern social practices, which are often considered sacred. Durkheim also defined religion as a coherent system of beliefs and practices related to what is deemed sacred or forbidden. This system unifies individuals into a common moral community, through shared adherence to these beliefs and practices. Overall, religion is understood as a structured system of beliefs, values, and practices centered around what individuals regard as sacred or spiritually significant.

3. Traditional View of Religion and Culture

Historically, religion and culture have been deeply intertwined, often seen as integral components of a single, cohesive system. Durkheim emphasized the role of religion as a fundamental social institution, suggesting that religious practices and beliefs are core elements of cultural identity. According to Durkheim (1915), religion extends beyond mere belief systems to become a complex framework that shapes and sustains social order and cohesion. This traditional view illustrates that religion is embedded within the cultural fabric, significantly influencing societal norms, values, and practices. Clifford Geertz (1993), in *Religion as a Cultural System*, expanded on this by defining culture as a system of inherited conceptions expressed through symbolic forms, where religion frequently serves as a key symbol. Describing religion as a cultural system of symbols reflects the traditional belief that religious beliefs and practices are crucial for understanding cultural identity.

Scholars have viewed religion as a subset of culture, while religion is one of the many ways spirituality

is expressed. Gasimova (2008) noted that culture functions as a social mechanism maintaining acceptable forms of religiosity within specific contexts. Additionally, the relationship between culture and religion is reciprocal; religious practices influence cultural expressions, and cultural contexts enrich religious experiences (Gala & Gershevitch, 2011). By and large, religion creates and fuels culture. Hofstede (1991) concluded that the cultural myths, social rituals and symbols are but a manifestation of the community's religion "as ways of making sense of the world and finding pathways through the world" (p.8).

Likewise, Adams (1993) argued that religion cannot exist as a self-contained area, but rather drives cultural practices, providing means for individuals to manifest the purpose and meaning imparted by religion. Similarly, Rappaport (1999) in *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* highlighted the fundamental role of ritual and religious practices in cultural development. In a nutshell, religion and culture are deeply interconnected, with religion contributing to cultural systems and, conversely, cultural contexts shaping religious practices (Durkheim, 1915; Boyer, 2001).

4. Intercultural Communication Issues

In our increasingly interconnected world, opportunities for cross-cultural interactions abound. This global interconnectivity enriches our lives by bridging diverse cultures and fostering vibrant exchanges. However, these intercultural encounters often bring challenges, as differing worldviews can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. Scholars have identified several barriers to effective intercultural communication, including stereotyping, prejudice, and ethnocentrism (Samovar & Porter, 1991; Beamer & Varner, 2008; Hybels & Weaver, 2009; Patel et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2015).

In intercultural communication settings, individuals often approach interactions with the assumption that their way of doing things is the correct or standard method. This mindset, which can lead to significant barriers in communication, reflects a broader tendency to view one's own cultural practices as superior while

evaluating other cultures through this narrow lens. This perspective, as articulated by William Graham Sumner (1906), involves regarding one's own cultural group as the central point of reference and assessing other cultures relative to it. Hofstede et al. (2010) likened this attitude to egocentrism, where one's own cultural norms are seen as the benchmark, making other cultures seem inferior. Such a worldview, shaped by extensive exposure to a single culture, often leads to conflicts, as deeply held values, beliefs, and assumptions are more prone to clash than more superficial aspects of culture (Hall, 1976).

To address these challenges, scholars advocated developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which involves acquiring knowledge, fostering awareness, and cultivating positive attitudes such as openness and acceptance of differences (Byram, 1997; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Bennett, 1986; Deardorff, 2006). Some went a step further asking for abolishing the borders between the self and other by upgrading to a third place culture (Kramsch, 1993) which involves negotiating meaning and adapting communication styles to achieve successful interactions, effectively creating a universal culture where individuals integrate multiple cultural influences into their identities.

While this multicultural approach is beneficial for engaging with cultural diversity, it can be more challenging to apply to religion. Unlike culture, which is often flexible and open to adaptation, religious beliefs are typically more rigid and resistant to change, making intercultural communication around religious issues more complex.

5. The Deculturalization of Religion

Recently, there has been a notable shift in perspectives regarding the relationship between religion and culture, often referred to as the "deculturalization of religion" (Roy, 2008, p.1). This shift reflects how globalization, modernity, and secularization have contributed to the increasing separation of religious practices from their cultural contexts. The processes of modernization and global communication have led to a reconfiguration of religious practices and beliefs. As societies become more globalized, traditional cultural expressions of religion are often replaced or modified

by more universal, and sometimes more radical, interpretations. Secularization, with its emphasis on the separation of religion from public life, has also played a significant role in this detachment. As a result, religion is increasingly perceived as divorced from its cultural roots. It, thus, exists more as an independent entity focused on spiritual or doctrinal aspects, rather than as a practice deeply intertwined with cultural traditions. This phenomenon is explored in Roy's (2015) influential work, *The Disconnect Between Religion and Culture*, which examines how these forces contribute to the erosion of traditional links between religion and culture. Similarly, Joshua Rey Ramos (2018) aligns with Roy's perspective, arguing that religion today is increasingly detached from its cultural dimensions. Herck & Drigo (2019) also discussed this separation, introducing the concept of "pure religion" which refers to a form of religion stripped of its cultural contexts and viewed purely in spiritual or doctrinal terms.

6. Establishing the Distinction between Religion and Culture

Religion and culture are two fundamental aspects of identity that often intersect yet operate independently. The following arguments, drawn from real-world examples across various societies, aim to highlight the distinction between these two notions. By examining these arguments, a clearer understanding of each aspect's function is achieved. This analysis seeks to redefine the concepts of culture and religion and to shape a new perspective, which is crucial for effectively managing intercultural communication.

6.1. Stability of Religion vs. Fluidity of Culture

Culture, on the one hand, is ever evolving; it is never static. Over time, cultures undergo gradual changes as certain elements are discarded, adapted, or integrated with new items within the conventional social system. These transformations can result from internal factors, such as societal crises (Haviland et al., 2011), or external factors, including peaceful or violent contact with other cultures through mechanisms like trade or invasion (Andreatta & Ferraro, 2013). While the pace of cultural change varies across different societies, it has accelerated in recent times notably

due to globalization (Haviland et al., 2011; Andreatta & Ferraro, 2013; Rangriz & Harati, 2017).

Religion, by contrast, tends to exhibit greater stability. Despite occasional minor adjustments influenced by social factors, the core aspects of religion, including its fundamental beliefs, values, principles, and practices, typically remain consistent. Deeply-held religious beliefs are often reluctant to alteration, unlike surface-level cultural elements such as art and material products, which are more susceptible to transformation (Liu et al., 2015).

This distinction becomes evident when examining historical and contemporary contexts. For example, when comparing an Arab person from the time of the Prophet Muhammad to a modern-day individual in the Middle East, it is apparent that while the core religious practices and beliefs of Islam have remained consistent, cultural practices have undergone significant changes. Daily life, language, and social customs have evolved considerably. This enduring constancy of religious faith contrasts with the frequent and often rapid changes in cultural practices. A similar pattern is observable in Christianity; while the religious core remains unchanged, the cultural expressions associated with it, such as language, rituals, and social norms, have varied greatly across different historical periods and regions. Thus, while cultural practices are subject to ongoing change and adaptation, religious beliefs often maintain a more enduring consistency across time and place.

6.2. Secularization and Cultural Identity

While culture often defines the way of life for a people, and religion's influence on lifestyle and practices has significantly diminished in many societies, it is crucial to recognize the necessity of separating cultural and religious identities. Secularization is a crucial factor driving this shift, progressively reducing the role of religion in various aspects of public and private life. This process of secularization fundamentally involves the separation of religion from state affairs, ensuring that government and religious institutions operate independently (Philips, 2011). This shift does not necessarily lead to a completely non-religious society, but it does change the way religion influences

everyday life.

In the United States, for instance, the First Amendment guarantees both a secular government and religious freedom (Roy, 2015). Although this constitutional framework allows for religious practice, secularization has led to a decrease in the role of religion in public policy and societal norms. Despite a significant number of religious individuals, the broader societal framework operates increasingly on secular principles, illustrating how religion's influence on public and cultural life is diminished by secularization. Similarly, in many European countries, the influence of the church has become increasingly marginal in social and public spheres. Religious institutions, which once played central roles in social and cultural life, are now experiencing reduced visibility and influence (Roy, 2015). This trend reflects a broader pattern across Europe, where secular values are becoming more prevalent, and religious practices are often confined to private or ceremonial contexts.

In Muslim-majority countries, where adherence to religious laws and principles is traditionally strong, secularization is also making inroads. For instance, Turkey represents a notable case where secularization efforts are being pursued as part of broader modernization strategies. Although Turkey remains a country with a significant Muslim population, its ongoing transition towards a more secular public life illustrates how secularization can intersect with deeply rooted religious traditions (Toprak, 2005).

Closely related, another argument that underscores the distinction between religion and culture is the presence of atheists, who lack religious affiliations, which raises questions about cultural acceptance. Knowing that more than 1.2 billion people around the globe hold no religion (the American Pew Research Center, 2017), if atheism is viewed as a deviation from cultural norms in religious societies, it may infringe upon individual rights and freedoms. To protect everyone's freedom and ensure a respectful and inclusive society, it is essential to distinguish between cultural and religious identities. This separation helps accommodate diverse beliefs and practices while maintaining cultural coherence, demonstrating

the necessity of redefining the relationship between religion and culture in a secular context.

6.3. Religious Conversion and Cultural Continuity

The separation of religion from culture becomes evident through the lens of religious conversion and diverse religious adherence within the same culture. Individuals who convert to a new religion often continue to participate in their original cultural practices, highlighting the autonomy of religion from culture. For example, a Spanish individual who converts to Buddhism still retains aspects of Spanish cultural identity; he is likely to continue to celebrate traditional Spanish festivals and adhere to cultural customs and makes part of the Spanish cultural group though practicing a religion that is non-native to his culture.

Traditionally, religion was closely intertwined with cultural identity, with individuals typically inheriting the religious practices of their parents and community. This connection was particularly strong in societies where religion was a cornerstone of cultural identity. However, in today's globalized world, access to a vast array of religious information through mass media has empowered individuals to explore and choose religious beliefs that are not necessarily aligned with their cultural heritage. This shift highlights the increasing independence of religious choices from cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, in multicultural societies such as India, the coexistence of multiple religions within the same cultural framework further illustrates this separation. India is home to a diverse array of religious practices, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Jainism. Despite the presence of these varied religions, individuals from different religious backgrounds, such as Indian Hindus and Indian Christians, share a common Indian cultural framework. For example, Indian festivals and cultural practices, such as Diwali, are celebrated across religious boundaries, underscoring the continuity of cultural identity despite differing religious affiliations.

Conversely, the global reach of major religions also demonstrates how religious identity can unify individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Christianity, with approximately 2.4 billion adherents (Wasserman, 2024), and Islam, with nearly 2 billion followers (Ibid), illustrate how a single religious belief can transcend and unify diverse cultural contexts. Individuals from disparate cultural settings, such as Europeans, Africans, and Asians, may all adhere to Christianity or Islam while expressing their faith through culturally distinct practices and traditions. This global spread of religion highlights that while cultural practices evolve and adapt, religious affiliations can bridge diverse cultures, reinforcing the concept that religion and culture, though intersecting, operate as separate elements of identity.

6.4. Contradictions between Cultural Practices and Religious Beliefs

Cultural practices often diverge significantly from religious beliefs, highlighting a clear distinction between the two domains. In many societies, traditional customs and rituals can stand in stark contrast to the underlying religious doctrines. A prominent example is the celebration of 'Yennayer' in Algeria, which marks the beginning of the year according to the agrarian calendar. Celebrated on January 12th, Yennayer represents a deep-seated cultural tradition, symbolizing pride in one's identity and continuity across generations. However, this festival conflicts with Islamic teachings, which traditionally recognize only the two Eids as legitimate celebrations, categorizing other celebrations like Yennayer as 'bidaa' (innovation). This clash illustrates how cultural practices can persist even when they contradict religious norms.

A comparable example is seen in the realm of euthanasia. While most Abrahamic religions, including Christianity and Islam, prohibit euthanasia, considering it contrary to divine will as outlined in the Bible and the Quran, some countries like the United States, Luxembourg, and Belgium have legalized it. This discrepancy between religious prohibitions and cultural practices in these countries illustrates the separation between religious doctrines and societal norms.

The question raised here is: amidst the distinction and contradiction between cultural practices and religious

beliefs, which rules should individuals adhere to? Often, people may conform to cultural norms at the expense of their religious principles, leading to potential conflicts between personal faith and societal expectations. However, it is crucial to recognize that religious doctrines, which are viewed as sacred and divine, should take precedence over cultural practices. Culture, being a human construct, is subject to change and adaptation, whereas religion represents a set of timeless principles that are considered more sacred.

For instance, in Arab countries, greetings can vary culturally, ranging from hugging in North African countries to robbing noses in the Middle East. In intercultural settings, such as when interacting with Americans or Europeans, Muslims might adjust their greeting style to include shaking hands, which is culturally acceptable in those contexts. However, bowing, as practiced in many Asian cultures, is not permissible for Muslims due to religious prohibitions against bowing to anyone other than God. Similarly, the traditional Indian dress, known as the “sari”, has gained much popularity worldwide among individuals from various cultures, reflecting admiration for Indian cultural aesthetics. However, performing religious rituals like the ‘Saptapadi,’ a Hindu wedding ritual involving seven circles around a fire, or engaging in worship of Hindu deities such as “Krishna” or “Puja”, would not align with the beliefs of those outside the Hindu faith. These examples illustrate that while cultural practices can be embraced or adapted, adherence to religious principles remains paramount when conflicts arise between cultural and religious expectations.

6.5. The Impact of Globalization on Religious and Cultural Identity

Globalization has significantly influenced how individuals navigate their cultural and religious identities, particularly through increased intercultural communication and interaction. As people from diverse backgrounds connect more frequently, they develop greater intercultural communicative competence, which involves understanding, engaging with, and adapting to different cultural norms and practices. This process often leads individuals to reach

the stages of adaptability or acculturation, where they become multicultural in their cultural identities. This means they can appreciate and integrate aspects from multiple cultures, enriching their personal worldview and identity.

For instance, a person who works in a global environment may adopt diverse cultural practices from their colleagues, such as celebrating various international holidays or enjoying different cuisines. They might also learn multiple languages or appreciate art and traditions from different cultures, reflecting their expanded cultural repertoire. This multiculturalism allows individuals to enjoy and embrace a broad range of cultural experiences and identities.

However, when it comes to religious affiliation, the scenario is different. Unlike cultural identities, which can be fluid and diverse, religious affiliation tends to be singular and exclusive. A person cannot be simultaneously recognized as Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist, as each religion has distinct doctrines, practices, and beliefs that are often mutually exclusive. Religious identity is generally fixed and cannot be integrated in the same way that cultural elements can. For example, a person may follow the teachings of one religion, such as Christianity, and engage with its community and rituals, but they cannot simultaneously adhere to the doctrines of Buddhism, which has different beliefs and practices about spirituality, life, and the afterlife.

This distinction demonstrates how globalization affects cultural and religious identities differently. While globalization fosters a multicultural approach to cultural practices and identities, it does not allow for the same level of overlap or integration in religious affiliations. Religion remains a more rigid aspect of identity, constrained by its own set of principles and beliefs, whereas cultural identities can be more fluid and accommodating of diverse influences.

7. Suggesting a Dual Identity: A New Perspective

In the realm of intercultural communication, conflicts often arise due to cultural differences, and when these involve religious differences, the challenges can become even more acute. Given these issues, there is

a pressing need to reconsider the conventional view that integrates religion within the broader cultural framework. This paper aims to conceptualize religion and culture differently. Culture is the sum of habits, practices, norms, and products created by community members, and it is often prone to alteration through contact with other communities or due to social and institutional circumstances. Religion, on the other hand, is a system of beliefs and rituals that connects individuals, regardless of their cultural affiliation, to a broader, often transcendent reality.

This work proposes a novel perspective that distinguishes religion from culture to manage intercultural communication more effectively. Under this framework, we suggest a dual identity approach in which a person possesses a cultural identity that is dynamic and subject to change, while their religious identity remains fixed and less flexible. In intercultural communication, cultural aspects are negotiable, and individuals are encouraged to broaden their perspectives, thereby enjoying the world's cultural diversity. Conversely, religious beliefs are non-negotiable, allowing individuals to resist change and preserve their religious identity without being labeled as closed-minded or racist. It is worth noting that this paper by no means denies the relationship between religion and culture and the fact that they do influence each other.

8. Implications

Establishing a distinction between religion and culture along with proposing a dual identity seeks to encourage:

8.1. Developing intercultural communication strategies: By recognizing the distinction between religion and culture, individuals and organizations can develop more effective communication strategies. Understanding that cultural practices are adaptable while religious beliefs are more rigid helps in tailoring communication approaches that respect both cultural fluidity and religious rigidity.

8.2 Inclusive policies: in intercultural settings, mainly economic and business settings, stakeholders can set policies that accommodate diverse cultural practices without infringing upon religious beliefs.

For example, workplace diversity policies can be crafted to respect religious practices (such as prayer times and religious celebrations) which creates a safe environment for individuals to express their identities fully without facing discrimination or exclusion.

8.3 Tailoring educational programs: Educational programs should emphasize the distinction between culture and religion to foster a deeper understanding of how cultural practices can be flexible while religious beliefs remain more fixed. By integrating this knowledge, students and professionals alike can learn to engage in intercultural interactions with greater respect, recognizing the fluidity of cultural norms and the inviolability of religious convictions.

8.4 Preserving Religious beliefs: Individuals must have the autonomy to preserve their religious beliefs without being labeled as intolerant or discriminatory in intercultural settings. This respect for religious identity allows individuals to stay true to their convictions while participating in diverse cultural environments, fostering a more inclusive and understanding atmosphere where faith and cultural differences are both valued.

8.5 Respecting converts and secular individuals: The choices of individuals who convert to a new religion or identify as secular must be respected, and their right to personal beliefs is to be recognized. Despite these choices, they should continue to be treated as integral members of their community or culture.

8.6 Openness to multiculturalism: Making a clear distinction between culture and religion encourages individuals to embrace multiculturalism with confidence, as they understand that cultural practices can evolve without compromising core religious beliefs. This clarity reduces fear of conflicting with religious principles, fostering a more inclusive environment where diversity is celebrated and intercultural interactions are more open and effective.

9. Conclusion

In today's increasingly interconnected world, intercultural communication is more crucial than ever before as people from diverse backgrounds interact and exchange ideas. This globalized landscape

fosters greater understanding but also presents significant challenges, particularly when it comes to balancing diverse cultural practices with deeply held religious beliefs. The rise of multiculturalism has amplified the need to address these issues with sensitivity and respect. This paper introduces a novel perspective by differentiating between religion and culture. It argues that while culture is inherently fluid and adaptable, reflecting the evolving norms and practices of societies, religion tends to be more rigid, embodying core beliefs and practices that are often resistant to change. By proposing a dual identity, this framework seeks to protect individuals' religious freedoms while allowing for the dynamic nature of cultural practices. This approach not only accommodates but also respects the intersection of cultural and religious identities, offering a balanced perspective in intercultural interactions. The implications discussed provide actionable strategies for improving intercultural communication, including the development of inclusive policies, the tailoring of educational programs, and the respectful treatment of converts and secular individuals. By adopting this new perspective, we can better understand and manage modern intercultural engagements, fostering a more inclusive and understanding global community.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest

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