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OTTOMAN MILLET SYSTEM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO CONTEMPORARY HOLISTIC INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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Abstract: *The issues of religious freedom and interreligious relations have been extensively debated. While the emergence of new theories and views often leads to the destruction of religious identity, in fact, tolerance and freedom lead to a strong religious identity. The Ottoman Turkish Empire, which once oversaw a third of the world's territory, presented a system that regulated existing differences. The system, named the Ottoman millet system, allegorized its people into religious communities to make it easier for religious believers to express their religious identity. The purpose of this study is to reveal the relevance of the system to the form of interreligious dialogue and harmony that occurs in the lives of religious communities. To reveal the answer fot this research question, the researcher used the content analysis method and the qualitative-phenomenological approach by looking at the object of research based on the phenomenon of how people under the Islamic rule of Ottoman Turkey as the subject of research could coexist despite coming from different nations and religions. The result found that the Ottoman millet system was implemented successfully because of the agreement of two elements in the state, namely its citizens in carrying out their obligations and the government that gave them their citizenship rights. The level of religiosity is one of the critical factors in applying this system in that era because of a deep understanding of tolerance between religious communities.*

Keywords: *Interreligious dialogue; ottoman millet system; tolerance; religious freedom.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the core principles of Islam is the importance of tolerance towards different beliefs. Freedom of religion is a principle that states that every individual has the freedom to believe and express their religious teachings (Wijayanti, 2019). This is considered an effort to form and maintain the harmony of the people so that there is a harmonious relationship and mutual respect and respect between fellow human beings, regardless of differences in beliefs. The concept of freedom in Islam is a principle that every individual has complete freedom to believe in religious teachings that they believe in without coercion from others (Wijayanti, 2019). The concept of freedom offered in Islam is based on the guidance of Muslims, namely the Qur'an. As stated in QS. Al-Baqarah verse 256.

لَاۤ اِكْرَاهَ فِى الدِّيْنِّ قَدْ تَّبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَّكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوْتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللّٰهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقٰى لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَاۤ وَاللّٰهُ سَمِيْعٌ عَلِيْمٌ

It means: *'There is no compulsion in (embracing) the religion (Islam). Indeed, the right way is clear from the wrong way. Whoever disbelieves in tagut and believes in Allah has indeed held fast to a very strong rope that will not break. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.*

In every religion, there are two seemingly contradictory tendencies. Firstly, the indoctrination tendency is that one's faith is the most correct. Secondly, the understanding at the core of every religious teaching is that every religious person must spread and do good to others, there is no coercion in religion, and the a need for mutual respect and appreciation (Albab, 2019; Maulana, Awaludin, and Fauzi, 2021). If not well understood, this can lead to conflict between religious groups. Therefore, efforts are needed to bridge the good relations between religious communities.

One of the efforts is to hold a dialogue among religions, or interreligious dialogue. History records that Christianity first promoted interreligious dialogue after World War II (Moyaert, 2019). This is considered essential to be put forward along with the increasingly globalized world climate in the religious field. With all the progress it continues to achieve, the world contributes to bringing the context of religious life into a realm that is required to be more holistic and open (Esha, 2008). But it must also hold fast to the correct and precise religious vision to not escape the truth of its teachings. In addition, religious people are also required to be aware of other religions around them.

The existence of the inter-religious dialogue is indeed considered a convincing attempt to establish religious harmony. Various theories have emerged to support tolerance and the right to religious freedom from interreligious dialogue. However, each has advantages and disadvantages that often make religious people almost lose their religious identity. One such theory is 'religious pluralism'. It is mentioned that religious pluralism is considered a solution that can overcome the conflict of misunderstanding between religious communities. In this case, the view refers to the equal value of all religions and assumes that all religions have different paths to one goal, namely God (Purwadi, 2023). This view is a concept of thought that ultimately generalizes the truth of all religious teachings. This understanding also views the relativity of truth, so there is no absolute truth, which means

there is no truth or everything is equally valid (Maulana, 2021). It is this error in thinking and perspective that ultimately results in the loss of the identity of religion itself and gives rise to new conflicts in religion.

In terms of diversity and religion, there has been a group known as *ahlu dzimmah,* since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. This group is a group of non-Muslims who live under Islamic rule. In addition, this group also continued during the Ottoman Turkish caliphate, which was a leading dynasty located in the Eastern Mediterranean (Gara, 2017). When the Sultanate was the most prominent Islamic power that historically managed to control the territorial coverage of three continents, Europe, the Arabian Peninsula, and Africa, the vast scope of government was challenging for the Ottoman Turks. The people who lived in the three regions were of different ethnicities and religions. This is because the Turkish system of government is based on the Islamic system of government, which regulates the rights and obligations of non-Muslims living within the Ottoman sovereignty, called the 'Ottoman Millet System'. This system existed because of the limitations of applying Islamic law to non-Muslims (Hakim, 2020). By retaining their rights and discharging their prescribed obligations, they are authorized to govern society with their laws and institutions. In these areas, Islam is indeed a dynasty and has the right to rule. However, in some countries in continental Europe, Islam is still a minority and dominated by Christians (Gara, 2017). So far, this system has been well appreciated by the religious communities of its time, because it has succeeded in presenting mutual respect and realizing justice between religious communities.

This paper will analyze the Ottoman Millet system that was implemented during the reign of Ottoman Turkey so that inter-religious tolerance can run harmoniously. It also examined the factors that brought the state of the Sultanate at that time to the phenomenon of peaceful citizens despite living in different religions and nations. Then, the results will be relevant to the form of interreligious dialogue that has developed in this era, which was initially a formal forum between religious leaders to become a simple daily interactions between religious communities.

RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research used is library research, where researchers aim to explain the formulation of the problem by collecting qualitative data sourced from library literature such as books, journals, and other scientific works (Nursapiah, 2020). The research was conducted by collecting data and analyzing and interpreting it to create a scientific idea. Then, research through these literature sources helps researchers in developing existing theoretical frameworks. The approach used by researchers is a phenomenological religious approach. This approach is a method used by researchers to understand a person's religion and study it neutrally, including the study of other people's religious experiences (Erricker, 2002). Through this method, the researchers analyze written texts, such as scientific journals, books, and others that discuss related matters.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ottoman Millet System and Contemporary Interreligious Dialogue

1. The Definition and The History of the Ottoman Millet System

Etymologically, the term millet is taken from the Arabic *millah,* which has the root word *māla-yamīlu,* meaning to oblique (Marzuki, 2017). Terminologically, this term can sometimes be equated with the term *dīn*. The difference in the character of these two terms is that the term millet cannot stand alone and must be followed by another word to know its exact meaning. The term millet is often interpreted as the name of a group of people who form a particular group. Elsewhere, Quraish Shihab in Tafsir al-Misbah argues that the term refers to the meaning of 'a set of teachings'(Shihab, 2009). Meanwhile, during Ottoman Turkish rule, this term referred to the designation of all components of society that were similar in several aspects, such as common origin, common land of residence, as well as similarities in terms of history, traditions, and language (Marzuki, 2017).

If understood literally, *millah* also has the same meaning as the word 'nation' that appeared in the Western world in modern times. When examined, the concept of this term has sociological meaning and political value but still contains the value of religiosity (Rahman and Fitriana, 2021). Because of the nature, value, and content of this term, the Ottoman government was able to organize its multi-ethnic and multi-religious government. If we look at the history of the implementation of this system, we should also look at how the Ottoman Empire was formed. This dynasty was a sultanate formed by merging two kingdoms with different cultural and religious characteristics. The Byzantine Empire was based on Christianity, while the Seljuk Sultanate adhered to Islamic law (Fanani, 2011). It was through these two kingdoms that the Ottoman Empire was formed.

After the establishment of this dynasty and many victories over the conquests carried out, the government began to initiate a system to organize its society, which consisted of social and cultural diversity. The system was designed as an effort to maintain religious harmony and harmony in the era of Ottoman rule. This system was also sought as a solution so that every religious believer could stick to their religion, have the freedom to express their religious teachings and maintain the culture that had been inherited (Rahman and Fitriana, 2021). This Ottoman millet system worked by legalizing each group belonging to its millet community to govern aspects of social and religious life while remaining subservient to Ottoman Turkish rule.

Contrary to the meaning of nation, this system divides its people based on religion (Stanton, Ramsamy, Seybolt, and Elliott, 2012). Despite the differences, this system helped the government understand its subjects and the function and nature of the relationship between the Ottoman government and these religious communities. Through this, the term was officially used to refer to non-Muslim communities under Ottoman rule.

2. Contemporary Interreligious Dialogue

Historically, religion has played a significant role in human social relations. Therefore, interreligious dialogue has a broader meaning than just that. The term extends to its meaning as 'relationship' or 'exchange' (Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas, 2013). Here, dialogue is used as a medium for forming inter-religious relations, as well as the dynamics obtained between the relations of religious minorities and the majority group (Maulana et al., 2023). Furthermore, it takes shape via the active participation of religious communities in fostering cooperation to uphold public order. Interreligious discourse necessitates mutual openness, wherein each participant is willing to accept, listen, give, and even receive from one another. (King, 2010). Interreligious dialogue is now seen differently, as it is no longer seen as a mere exchange of viewpoints between religious leaders, taking place in a formal gathering when each denomination sends its representatives to debate a religious topic, as it now more on every connection in life, ranging from the most minute encounters like those involving individuals of different religious beliefs such as neighbors, schoolmates, colleagues, and others, which can be considered a manifestation of modern interfaith discourse aimed at maintaining social harmony. It is evident that Interreligious Dialogue necessitates mutual openness to facilitate acceptance, attentive listening, reciprocal giving, and even receiving between all parties involved (King, 2010). Through engaging in these daily activities, individuals form connections and encounter inquiries that will be resolved through their interactions. Ultimately, individuals who share the same faith will make an effort to comprehend and appreciate the distinctions among themselves. They may effectively preserve a harmonious environment that embraces diversity by achieving this understanding.

Dialogue in a religious context occurs because of differences in the traditions and teachings of one religion to another. In this era, interreligious dialogue has evolved from a formal form to a complex interaction through the direct experience of religious adherents (Maulana, 2024). Ochs (1950-), argued that dialogue can only happen if tradition chooses the right place. According to him, there are two options for conducting interreligious dialogue: either to provide the right environment or to stop comparing them because, without comparison, this activity is impossible and has no good reason to be carried out. On the other hand, comparison should not be attempted, as the actualization of contextual religious experience should be prioritized. (Cheetham et al., 2013). In addition, it also should be understood that Interreligious Dialogue exists as a reflection of the ideals of modern religious communities in presenting equal respect for fellow religious believers and in terms of tolerance (Cheetham et al., 2013).

Each religion is affiliated or bound to its religious community with different traditions. Even so, it is not always bound to a religious problem or issue solely related to reason but also at a level related to ethical, political, and social issues in general (Körs, Weisse, and Willaime, 2020). Each of them will argue from different perspectives depending on the teachings of their respective religions. In the social sphere, this is indeed different but still in line, and it makes religious believers play a role on two different sides at once. Apart from being religious believers who practice their religious

customs and teachings, religious believers also play an important role in the state order, namely as citizens of civil society.

In recent decades, the form of Interreligious Dialogue has changed with globalization. Dialogue in the form of meetings of religious leaders in forums has changed to meetings of religious believers in public spaces that prioritize aesthetics over intellectual exchange. This suggests that religious believers focus their dialogue more on 'dialogue of life' (Körs et al., 2020). This form of dialogue occurs based on everyday activities that provide a platform for dialogue, such as small talk with neighbors, interactions in public places, and work that requires engagement and interaction.

This kind of dialogue is not aimed at gaining knowledge and finding solutions to a theme as is the case with dialogue in the format of an intellectual forum, but rather at creating better relations between religious communities and gaining insight into how followers of other religions carry out their daily lives as followers of a religion. This is because wherever people of different religions live in the same neighborhood, it is possible to learn from each other (Körs et al., 2020). This allows for interaction as a form of everyday encounters that occur and are experienced by them. Unlike dialogue in an intellectual forum, dialogue in life does not have a specific theme that is raised because this dialogue purely occurs without any promise or bond of meeting time. This kind of dialogue also does not aim to reach an agreement. This kind of dialogue focuses on the openness and willingness of religious believers to engage in the same project. Although religious beliefs do not play a role in this dialogue, it is not to the exclusion of them, but rather an expected effect and not the purpose of the dialogue or meeting (Körs et al., 2020).

The Significance of The Ottoman Millet System to Contemporary Interreligious Dialogue

1. The Concept of Religious Freedom in the Ottoman Millet System and the Social Conditions of Religious Communities.

The Turkish Sultanate is a large sultanate with a diverse society of various ethnicities, races, and even religions. Therefore, an effort was needed to maintain the unity of the country. The Ottoman government eventually implemented a system that regulated the right to freedom of religion and to express the teachings and culture of each of its people. This system is considered the pre-modern era's preeminent theory of religious plurality operating under the legality of Ottoman rule, where minorities were given the right to organize their social and religious regulations (Barkey and Gavrilis, 2016).

This system began to operate institutionally right after the conquest of Istanbul by Sultan Muhammad Al-Fatih. There, he appointed an Orthodox patriarch to give him the right of autonomy in organizing his society internally (Rahman and Fitriana, 2021). This is done to maintain the unique identity of each nation. In this case, the government also supports existing developments in all aspects of each country's recognized economic, religious, linguistic, legal, and cultural aspects.

This system in its application has a unique concept where in each religious community that is formed, a religious leader will be appointed as the community administrator. Those appointed have the obligation to function as a bridge between the community members and the central government management. As already explained, they are given special autonomy rights to organize the social, educational, religious, and population fields. In addition, as in the areas of social and individual security, finance, and the military remained entirely in the hands of the Ottoman Turkish central government (Rahman and Fitriana, 2021). Despite being granted autonomy to manage their religious communities, each nation or 'millet' group still had juridical limitations. In addition, to ensure the continuity of freedom in expressing their respective religions and guarantee the protection of property and life, the Ottoman Turkish Sultanate, the central government requires the payment of special taxes on condition that they comply with government regulations (Gara, 2017).

In this system, each individual is not judged based on the individual's subject, but as a member of their religious community. In outward relations, Islamic law remains the governing principle, but the government gives full rights to the inward affairs of society. In this system, divisions were made into religious compartments, such as the Armenian community united with the Ancient Assyrian community, as both belonged to the same school of Monophism (Özcoşar, 2003)

In its application, this system refers to the *ahlu dzimmah* system that was applied to non-Muslims during the Prophet's time. Similar to the Ottoman millet system, every community is required to pay *jizyah* or tax. This is deliberately done to guarantee security, comfort, and ease of interaction. In addition, this is also applied as a guarantee of the safety of life and the preservation of property, as well as the granting of freedom in carrying out their respective religious teachings (Ghozali and Nugroho, 2020).

Jizyah is often equated with *zakat*, which is an obligation that every Muslim must pay. However, it should be noted that *jizyah* is imposed not solely for the benefit of a particular community, but rather as a form of minority participation in realizing a common interest that all circles and layers of society will later feel. This method is also known as a way of functionally integrating minorities without making them liberal (Fujinami, 2021).

In this system, each community and individual is given certain obligations. Meanwhile, in some matters, such as property, kinship matters, or internal community matters, they are still given the right to organize themselves in accordance with the laws and regulations that apply to their respective religious teachings (Gara, 2018). This system worked well and made the Ottoman Turkish Empire tolerant of the non-Muslim communities under its rule.

Although the Sultanate was based on Islamic law and had a vast territory, this did not mean that the entire region's population was Muslim. However, of the entire millet, the largest percentage of the overall population was Muslim, totaling 75%, while a quarter was divided into the Armenian millet which included Apostolics, Catholics, and Protestants. Then the Orthodox millet which consists of Greeks, Arabs, and Bulgarians,

and lastly the Jewish millet (Ágoston and Masters, 2009). This system has been in place for a long time and is well implemented so that religious communities can coexist while maintaining their respective religious and cultural identities.

In implementing the system, there are at least three classification models: assimilation, integration, and segregation (Rahman and Fitriana, 2021). The assimilation model in the Ottoman millet is used to adjust two cultures by minorities to fit into the group. This model does not mean abandoning one's cultural identity, but it is up to each group to decide whether to accept the other group's culture (Hanfstingl, Arzenšek, Apschner, and Gölly, 2022).

Next is the integration model. This model is the process of uniting two or more separate and distinct elements into a unified whole. In the Ottoman millet system, this model was used to promote individual equality and their existence in society (Ergashev and Farxodjonova, 2020). The third model is the segregation model, which divides the population based on the religion practiced in a demographic area (Alifuddin and Amir, 2022). In this system, the segregation model forms a traditional society accompanied by differences that exist but still do not hamper the lives of other communities and continue the existence of society while maintaining compliance with the dominant element. The difference between the two models is that the integration model unites the entire population without distinction under one Ottoman Turkish government, while the segregation model divides each population within the Ottoman Turkish government into several regions based on its nation and religion, which are then given limited rights that have been agreed upon. In general, the millet system gave non-Muslims semi-independent status in administration and complete autonomy in religious matters.

2. Theory of Religious Freedom

With its broad scope today, religion leaves many traces of problems that have often been debated throughout the ages. One issue currently being discussed among religious leaders is the right to freedom of religion. The many differences in understanding between religious leaders and political elites confuse the practice and understanding of society in interpreting the word freedom more. This often causes an atmosphere of life and relationships that tend to be tense and hot between religious communities. Freedom of religion is defined as the essence of a condition for the achievement of social justice for all people. Freedom of religion is also said to be a guarantee for every individual to have the right to carry out their beliefs in living life in accordance with the guidance of their religion (Junior, 2019). In addition, the right to freedom of religion is also considered to have a relationship with several social aspects, such as personal human destiny, freedoms listed in Human Rights, and the basis of tolerance in social life.

In this regard, there are two dimensions of religious freedom. First, it is known as the internal freedom dimension *(forum internum)*. This dimension is a dimension in which every human being is given the freedom to believe or embrace a particular religion in accordance with their wishes, although it does not necessarily provide them with the right to broadcast their religion in the public sphere. This type of right is never restricted

even by the state and receives full and unconditional protection (Junior, 2019). Second, the dimension of internal freedom (*forum externum*). This dimension states that everyone's freedom of religion is never limited by anything except two preconditions, namely the restrictions set by the law and the need to present a conducive atmosphere while maintaining the fundamental rights of others (Junior, 2019). In both dimensions, the internal dimension symbolizes an individual's freedom, while the external dimension is where individuals can identify with other religious individuals (Roberts, 2019).

There are several theories that address the right to religious freedom because there are two different but inseparable sides. One is the theory of the relationship between religion and the state. There are several typologies of the relationship between religion and the state. The classic typology that is widely discussed today is the theocratic state, where religion and the state are united and go hand in hand. Theocracy means a government ruled by God (Cliteur and Ellian, 2020). Meanwhile, in contrast to the previous typology, there is the concept of a secular state, where religion and the state are separated and run in their realms. This concept is assumed to be a concept that can allow people to live together with the assumption that religion can divide them so that each individual is not identified according to their religion (Cliteur and Ellian, 2020). This concept is agreed upon by scholars and is considered the most in line with Islam's relationship between religion and state. This concept is called the concept of *tamyīz*. Former Egyptian Mufti Ali Jumu'ah argues that the concepts of a secular state and theocracy are entirely unknown in Islam. The secular concept that separates religion from the state is not recognized because it has deconstructed the role of religion, while the concept of theocracy is utterly unjustified because it considers the leader as God's representative on earth and has full authority over anyone. The concept of the *tamyīz* state is deemed to be in accordance with Islam because the system of this concept sorts and re-selects the relationship between religion and the state so that it is not wholly separated like secularism and not completely united like theocracy (Sadzali, 2020).

Theoretically, the relationship between religion and the state has four possibilities: first, the state uses religion for political purposes (state); second, religion controls political society (state); third, there is a separation between religion and the state; fourth, there is a pattern of separation and cooperation between the state and religion. In Islam itself, the state and religion cannot be separated; they are two identical things, different but inseparable. It is said to be inseparable because every behavior and attitude of a Muslim must be in accordance with the commands of Allah, including in the life state of society (Rasyidin, 2020). Religion is the foundation and guidance in running life and becomes the social and state life culture.

In addition to being viewed from the perspective of the relationship between religion and the state, the right to freedom is also considered from the scope of majorities and minorities. The term 'minority' is controversial due to its connotations that may sound pejorative. The term is popularly used in a demographic sense to designate a group smaller than the overall population in terms of ethnicity, race, and religion (Cheetham et al., 2013). This is not a simple matter as it involves issues of justice, equitable

distribution of public services, and balance in providing opportunities without discriminating against the composition of the population with different cultural backgrounds. The relationship between the two groups will essentially cause problems if the majority group discriminates against the minority group by prioritizing the ego of the majority group.

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, the government based on Islamic law provided rules to regulate pluralistic society as a whole. The rules were contained in a charter called the Medina Charter. The charter stipulates that non-Muslims are equal to Muslims. There is no difference in obtaining rights like Muslims in general. The obligations carried out as citizens in a region or country also get the same punishment. Muslims are free to carry out their religious commitments, and non-Muslims have full authority to carry out their respective religious obligations. Non-Muslims get the freedom to carry out their respective religious activities or rituals (Siddiqi et al., 2023).

Next is the theory of inter-religious relations. Relationships between religions can be well established if each religious adherent can understand well. Tolerance is related to the right to freedom of religion and inter-religious relations. Tolerance here is religious tolerance that concerns matters of belief in humans associated with the divine creed of each religious community. The tolerance referred to here also provides the right to freedom for every religious believer in believing and embracing the religion he has chosen. True tolerance can also be interpreted as respecting one's right to autonomy in religion (Žalec and Pavlíková, 2019). Therefore, tolerance does not mean following every teaching of other faiths but respecting and giving freedom to adherents in carrying out the commands and prohibitions of each religion.

In interpreting the word tolerant, there are two different connotations. The narrow meaning of the word tolerance is found in political thought, which means tolerance of cultural and religious differences. Indirectly, tolerance actually means indifference to others because of these differences. Meanwhile, with its deeper meaning, UNESCO defines tolerance as a moral obligation (Leirvik, 2014). Its connotation is none other than the meaning of mutual respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the cultural diversity of fellow human beings. This understanding is under the meaning chosen by some languages, such as Turkish *hoşgörü*, which defines tolerance as seeing others in the best way. As in Arabic, it is translated to the word *tasamuh*. The connotations in this language give it rich and classical meanings, such as patience and generosity (Leirvik, 2014).

3. Analysis of the Relevance of the Ottoman Millet System to the Problem of Tolerance and Religious Freedom

In a globalized society, religious diversity makes interfaith relations increasingly complex. The differences that characterize each religion's traditions, rituals, beliefs, and understandings are often a source of conflict (Purwadi, 2023). Therefore, interreligious dialogue is vital in reducing and preventing unintended conflicts. In addition, freedom of religion is the right of every religious believer. Freedom of religion is defined as the

absence of coercion on one's mind in expressing what one believes and conscience (Hapsin, 2017). Thus, it is clear that everyone has the right to freedom in observing the commands and avoiding the prohibitions of their religion.

In this social plurality, a concept of order is needed to present a form of true peace between religious communities. Dialogue is considered as one of them. There are many definitions of interreligious dialogue, one of which is a process that has been developed involving individuals and groups to explore religious and social issues (Cornille, 2013). The dialogue here is both a formal interaction involving religious forums and a non-formal one involving unsure individuals. Interactions during dialogue allow individuals to gain information about other religions and can simultaneously educate them about the religious differences around them.

This has an impact on the form of tolerance that is realized with the correct understanding of it because the wrong form of tolerance will cause chaos and clashes in each religious adherent in holding their religious principles and identity. Tolerance means respecting other religious adherents' rituals, culture, and customs without going beyond their own cultural or religious patterns, which can open up the possibility of other people's beliefs filling the void of their religious truth. Thus, it does not undermine one's religious identity but strengthens it with these dialogical activities (Moyaert, 2011).

In the Ottoman millet system, the status of nations was classified into their respective religions. The Ottoman Empire, which once ruled a third of the world, made its territories culturally diverse. This is undoubtedly a challenge, considering that the Ottoman government system was based on Islamic religious law. With the arrival of the Ottoman millet system, this can be overcome. This system did not force or restrict the population under Ottoman rule to worship according to their beliefs. In this system, although people were organized into religious communities called millets, the inequality between Muslims and non-Muslims was eliminated in favor of Ottoman citizenship. This history became the basis of legitimacy and shared identity for the Ottoman nation(Ágoston and Masters, 2009).

In this system, every religious believer is given the freedom to maintain their religious identity. This creates a harmonious and peaceful life among religious communities. Freedom of worship is given to non-Muslims without any pressure to change their religion (Rahman and Friatna, 2021). Although non-Muslims were a minority in some areas, this did not indicate a discriminatory attitude in the system. In this regard, the Ottomans maintained personal rights for every non-Muslim, regardless of cultural or religious status. However, non-Muslims were still granted *dzimmi* status which was legally used in non-Muslim governments.

During the Ottoman Empire, which controlled one-third of the earth's territory, a secondary legal structure was established for non-Muslim communities. This was so that each community could maintain its culture. Under this system, each religious community was entitled to autonomy in self-managing areas such as education, judiciary, civil society, religious affairs, and so on. Under the leadership of a designated religious leader, the community conducted its own internal affairs, and the community

representative or designated leader was then responsible to the Ottoman government for the community (Rahman and Friatna, 2021). With the system in place during the Ottoman era, the dialogue of life went hand in hand with the established system. The society, which was divided into Muslim and other religions, was able to carry it out well, creating an atmosphere that was relevant to bringing about the desired goals of each religion, namely harmonization and tranquillity. Religious minorities who were members of several societies classified in their respective religions were able to comply with all government systems in force within the Ottoman Empire.

It is a system with a complex *modus vivendi,* which is an agreement between two or more parties to a dispute. It can be said that the procedural model established was unique in that the Ottoman government governed its territory and society by considering the religious and ethnic groups governed and how the state apparatus could also be organized and managed this system well in an effort to face the challenges of diversity (Tanasă, 2021). With the classification presented by this system, each religion was still able to maintain its own beliefs, religion, culture, and broader administrative autonomy. Each group could freely exercise its rights while fulfilling its obligations as a stateless society under Ottoman rule (Tanasă, 2021). The rights and responsibilities they acquire can ultimately maintain their long-established ethnic and linguistic characteristics.

In governing its multi-religious subjects, the Ottoman Turks maintained their governmental identity based on Islamic law. By adhering to Islamic law, the Ottoman Empire treated non-Muslims not as individuals but as members of religious communities within their millet system. In line with this, the Ottoman government granted various rights, ranging from individual rights to community rights. The right to freedom in expressing one's religion was no exception. Under Ottoman rule, each religious community or millet could easily preserve the religious traditions they had practiced and maintained all these years. Each millet group with its supreme cleric had the mandate to govern its community according to religious laws and traditions (Özcoşar, 2003). With this policy, each individual, in particular, can maintain their own religious identity.

The millet system that was implemented during the Ottoman Empire was a system that was considered good and successfully organized its society in social diversity. This system has lasted for six centuries and is so good that many social observers are interested in this system (Upton-Ward, 2002). In addition to the system phenomenon, religious people, despite different beliefs, mingle in their neighborhood and encounter in markets, shops, and public places. The relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is not only limited to geographical relationships but also social relationships. The interrelated coexistence, such as buying and selling goods, lending and borrowing, grows the social relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims (Upton-Ward, 2002).

Although it lasted for a long time, it eventually declined due to social friction and Western influences that fuelled the spirit of nationalism that arose due to the French Revolution. The Western provocation took the form of minority uprisings within the

Ottoman system. These movements were guided by Western influences that injected loyalty to the country of origin with a high sense of nationalism in order to realize the ideals of establishing a state (Rahman and Friatna, 2021).

This form of system implementation illustrates how tolerance between religious communities can be well established. It is limited to obedience to the government that oversees it and the social environment around it. Each religious community knows very well how to address the existing differences while still adhering to their respective teachings. It differs from the efforts to create harmony in this era. There are several concepts developed by contemporary Muslim thinkers, one of which is religious pluralism. This thought is considered the proper method for addressing differences in beliefs because it is based on a foundation that requires religious people to abandon their beliefs. However, this clearly presents a new conflict with it. This concept makes religious people close themselves and gives birth to concepts of Islamic law that tend to be discriminatory against non-Muslims (Zarkasyi et al., 2022).

In essence, the pluralists' understanding of the meaning of pluralism itself is confusing. This is said because there has been a shift in the meaning of pluralism itself. From its original meaning, which states that religion is seen as a social system, it is reduced to mere human coexistence with metaphysical transcendental sacred forces as a social system. The whole confusion of understanding pluralism is increasing because it contains relativism of truth (Zarkasyi et al., 2022). Thus, it is clear that the concept promoted as an effort to bring religious harmony is considered to have failed because it presents new conflicts that are more complex and unwittingly eliminates individual religious identity.

This mindset makes pluralists seem to uphold the right to freedom of religion and belief. Cultural, customary, and religious pluralism are *sunatullah*, but they are not compatible with pluralism. This doctrine seeks to establish all similarities and differences to the point of eliminating them (Zarkasyi, 2021). However, it is clear that the sacred things in religion cannot be equated with one another, as the concept of divinity of each religion is different. If we look at the Ottoman millet system, it worked without eroding the religious identity of each of its adherents. The Ottoman imperial dynasty understood that with such vast social plurality, it could not be assimilated, and it was impossible to grant rights to non-Muslims based on group territories. Non-Muslim communities and Muslim governments negotiated treaties affirming the principles of community protection and organizational and cultural autonomy in return for taxes levied on non-Muslims.

Thus, a conducive atmosphere in interreligious relations was created during the Ottoman Empire. The problems that existed at that time are in line with the issues that develop today. Social pluralism between religious communities can trigger conflict, but religious people can achieve the expected harmony ideals with the right system and order. Because the true form of tolerance is when social communities coexist with those who have different beliefs with mutual respect without mixing their religious traditions or rituals with other religions (Fitriani, 2020).

When examined further, this system is considered irrelevant to the development and order of the existing government. In addition to its form, the difference in the level of religiosity of religious people in the Ottoman Caliphate era compared to religious people in this era is also one of the factors for the irrelevance of this system to be applied. A nation's religiosity is often the basis of its attitude and response to everything that is considered sacred (Twiss and Grelle, 1998) as well as attitudes in responding to differences and how forms of tolerance exist among humans at each of these ages.

The level of religiosity refers to how individuals respond to the diversity of differences that exist. This is also the source that gives birth to the attitude of each individual (Körs et al., 2020). This is one form of depiction of religious ethics. Religious education is essential for building respect and appreciation for the spiritual identity of other communities. This is because the differences in spirituality and religiosity of each individual can direct the right attitude toward every difference that exists (Moyaert, 2019).

However, there are some things that can be applied in inter-religious relations. Such as the relationship between the government and religious people that was formed at that time. The attitude and ethics of the government in providing rights and freedoms and how people fulfill their obligations to the state are considered successful and can be regarded as a form of true tolerance towards fellow religious believers.

CONCLUSION

Based on research that researchers conducted on the Ottoman millet system, this system can be interpreted as a system created and implemented by the Ottoman Dynasty to organize its society, which consists of various cultures, nations, and religions. However, unlike the meaning of nation, the millet divided the society into classifications according to each individual's religion. In implementing this system, a representative was appointed by the Ottoman central government to manage the internal relations of each community. In addition, this system was enforced by requiring every non-Muslim community to pay a tax or jizya as a form of guarantee for the safety of life and property, as well as a form of guarantee for freedom of religious expression.

The rights and obligations of non-Muslims in this system are then analyzed for their relevance to contemporary interreligious dialogue. The interaction between each interfaith community has become a form of dialogue, not in the strict sense, but more broadly. This kind of dialogue is commonly called 'dialogue of life'. Here, the researchers consider this system irrelevant if it is associated with the government system in this era, but that does not mean one is completely worthless. Researchers believe some things are relevant if applied in this era, such as how religious communities fulfil their obligations as citizens despite being based on different religions and how the Ottoman government can provide rights to these communities.

The obligations that are carried out as a form of guarantee for the safety of life, property, and others, as well as guarantees for freedom in expressing their respective religious forms

and characteristics, are things that can be taken as an example in realizing a form of tolerance while maintaining their religious identity, and as a form of overcoming the problem of the right to freedom of religion in the world.

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