



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

**The White Hijab in Dispute: Narratives on Contested Diversity,  
Identity and Politics of Belonging in Times of Turbulent Minangkabau**  
Wibisono, Ganggas

**Citation**

Wibisono, G. (2021). *The White Hijab in Dispute: Narratives on Contested Diversity, Identity and Politics of Belonging in Times of Turbulent Minangkabau*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Leiden University  
Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology



Master's Thesis

**The White Hijab in Dispute: Narratives on Contested Diversity, Identity  
and Politics of Belonging in Times of Turbulent Minangkabau**

Submitted by **Ganggas Wibisono** (2692392)  
MSc in Global Ethnography

Supervisor: **Dr. Ratna Saptari**  
Second Reader: **Dr. Mark. R. Westmoreland**

24 June 2021

Leiden

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## Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been done without the help and support from several individuals and institutions. First of all, I am enormously grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Ratna Saptari, whose insights, encouragements, and continuous guidance helped me writing this thesis from the scratch. I will never forget and forever cherishes the time spent working together, directly and virtually, discussing not only thesis-related topics but also many interesting social issues. It has been a special journey. Her deep experiences, wide range of theories, and way of thinking have been influential. *Terima kasih banyak, Ibu*. I hope that the time and universe will enable us to do another collaborative work in the future.

My thanks go to the academic staff in the Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology Programme, Leiden University, for widening my horizons with their distinctive point of view. They had helped me paved the way to write this thesis. I've learned so much from them and always be grateful for the opportunity given.

I am also forever grateful to my funder: the StuNed Scholarships Programme and Constitutional Court of The Republic of Indonesia. Thanks to them, continuing my master's degree at Leiden University isn't merely a daydream. Their trust comes along with my responsibility to grow as a student and a person. I am in owe for the wonderful experiences I have here in The Netherlands. I'll do my best to strengthen my institution, to contribute to the people of The Republic of Indonesia, also towards a smoother relationship between The Netherlands and Indonesia.

I would also like to express my thanks and appreciation to the Constitutional Court of The Republic of Indonesia. Primarily, to the Secretary-General, Prof. M. Guntur Hamzah, for his supportive attitude and permission to participate in my study program. To the superiors in Pancasila and Constitutional Education Center: Imam Margono, Nanang Subekti, Santhy Kustrihardiani, Ardiansyah Salim, Bambang Sukmadi, Melati Kusuma Wardhani, and other colleagues whose altogether always encourage me to pursue my higher education. Also to Human Resources Bureau, for their tireless work to help me with the administrative and other requisitions. With them around me, I'm socially conditioned to continuously improve.

I am thankful to have supportive intellectual partners in Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, Leiden University. Particularly the "Global Ethnographers": Sanne de Leeuw, Marit Hiemstra, Victoria Vargas Pinzon, Cassidy van Arneman, Carlo Ivaldi, Yi Han, Megan Hudson, Anna, Kellie and Matthijs Verzaal. I can say that the master program has been a pleasant journey with their presence, as we jointly shared not only constructive commentaries and discourses but also mixed humane feelings of stress, joy, and happiness.

My deepest appreciation goes to all families in Indonesia, especially my mother Erna Susiati and late father Djoko Winarso. Thank you for being the best parent, and never stop believing in me. Thank you for always putting me on your highest priority and caring for me, no matter how far we've been parted. I am also grateful to have a kind-hearted mother-in-law Arnajaya and father-in-law Arman Bahar. They have always embraced me to go further. If I finally made it, that's because of all their blessings and everlasting prayers.

To my research interlocutors, I am thankful for the experiences, feelings, and meanings shared with me. It's not easy to talk about such sensitive issues with a stranger from The Netherlands. Thanks to my sister-in-law, Adita Haafizhoh, who has arranged the meeting carefully so I can interview them digitally. Also to Elsi Anismar, who has been relentlessly helping me in the search of relevant interlocutors. These narratives are far from perfection, yet their stories did enrich it.

During my stay in Leiden and The Hague, I've received much-needed help, support, and inspiration from several people. I thank Yance Arizona and his beautiful family for letting me live at their house for a while. I feel safe and comfortable from the first day in Leiden. Not only the room, but they also provided me with other facilities so I can study comfortably. I've also learned a lot from them on how to adapt and live well in the Netherlands. I also recognize Syahril Siddik for his insightful views regarding the thesis project and other important issues. Thank you to all members of the Indonesian Students Association (PPI) Leiden (especially Harbara Digdaya Haq) for being my brother-and-sister-in-arms, a reliable source of information, and good friends to share the up and downs of a master's life. Also to Revi Soekatno, for his cordiality has provided me the much-needed family house in The Hague. It was due to him I can fully focus on my study. I owe all of them a debt of gratitude.

This study is dedicated to my other half and beloved wife Hatika Al Shafa and my sweet daughter, Sabina Manaar Azzahra. Both of them are my truest motivations to work beyond my best and accomplish this study. Their presence has accompanied and fueled me throughout the whole thesis journey. This project wouldn't be accomplished if it's without them. Their love and supports mean the world to me.

Last but not least, I exonerate all these persons from any deficiencies in this study and take full responsibility within me.

Leiden, June 2021

GW

## ABSTRACT

This narrative depicts in chronological order the process and dynamics regarding the hijab affair in Indonesia. Started as a rejection to wear hijab by a schoolgirl in Padang, West Sumatra, it has become a nationwide debate concerning many intertwined socio-cultural, legal, religious, and political issues. The citizens suddenly concerned and debating multiculturalism, democracy, human rights, tolerance, until the need to respect distinct ethnic identity. Using the '*following the metaphor*' approach and digital ethnography method, it tells how the contested interpretation of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity) principle by several actors representing Minangkabau against the central government and other external forces. Portraying how strategic essentialism being practiced, this narrative explained that the notion of belonging can be politicized while identities being deployed. Finally, it is also shown how the meaning of the hijab for Minangkabau and the everyday life of diversity in West Sumatra.

**Keywords:** Hijab Affair, Minangkabau, Multiculturalism, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, Identity, Strategic Essentialism, Politics of Belonging, Diversity



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1. A Rejection That Breaks 15 Years of Silence: Following the Hijab Story in West Sumatra**

The story begins with a Facebook video in the Western part of Indonesia, with long and unprecedented consequences.

One schoolgirl in State Vocational High School 2 Padang (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMKN 2 Padang), West Sumatra, unconsciously opened the Pandora box of complexly intertwined cultural-socio-political-legal issues. All of this happened when the education office was working hard to eradicate three sins in the education field, consisting of intolerance, sexual violence, and bully. She alone had shown to the whole Indonesian that the work is far from being successful, yet again provoking many to question what it means to live together in a highly diverse nation.

While the country was so busy tackling the outburst of the Covid-19 pandemic, a bold rejection by the schoolgirl has awakened the giant sleeping issue of tolerance, human rights, and local values, all in a diversity framework. It started as a candid video on Facebook, and somehow, it soon went viral. Thanks to the advancement of social media, what started as a local affair could quickly grow as a nationwide issue within a night. It was a 15 minutes dialogue between the girl's father and the school's counseling teacher in the deputy principal room. State officials, intellectuals, activists, commentators, and speakers from different backgrounds are intrigued by this problem. What is actually happening?.

In reality, it is "simply" about the school uniform. The schoolgirl was reportedly being forced by the school officials to use a hijab in the school area. Yet, it is a public school, while she is a Christian believer. So, what would you do when your school forces you to use religious attributes, even if they realize you're not part of that religion?.

For Jeni Cahyani Hia, a class 10 student in Automation and Office Governance Course, the answer is clear: rejection. Even if she has to deal with problems that might come up later, there was no other choice. In the aftermath of her choice, she was called by the counseling teacher for three weeks, telling her to use the headscarf, just like all schoolgirls did at the school. Of all 23 non-Muslim schoolgirls, Jeni was the only one who says no to hijab. She then

reported the situation to her parents. And, of course, they weren't happy. The father, Elianu Hia, went to the school to discuss the unwanted.

The Facebook video was live-streamed on 21 January 2021. It was located in one of SMKN 2 Padang's rooms, with the sound of Al-Qur'an played in the background. Jeni was there with his father. Only by seeing the camera angle can one easily guess that he recorded the video candidly. The video then showed the counseling teacher, Zakri Zaini, sitting behind a desk while holding a document. Elianu then stated his main objection, that they were non-Moslem, Christian believers, and his daughter was in a public school, not a religious-based school where hijab is obligatory. Shockingly, the case went viral on social media, even before it was entering the principal school desk: He didn't know its virality. Later, he found out that the video recording process was unbeknownst to everyone at the school, let alone having formal permission.

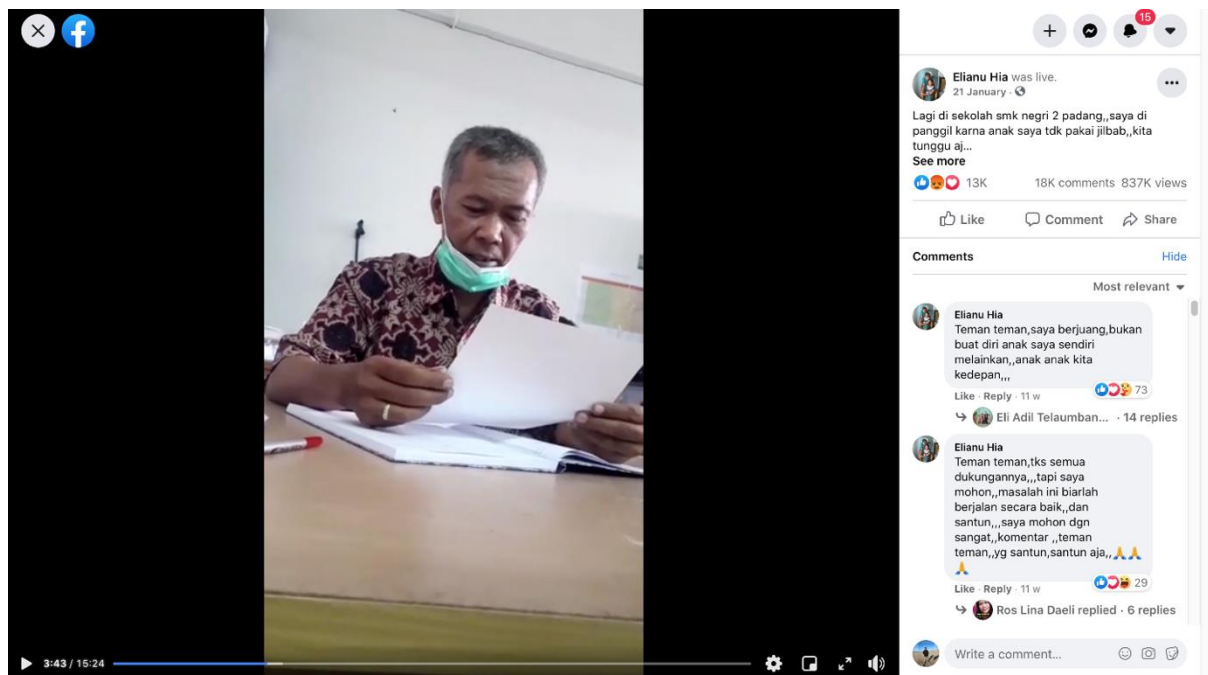


Image 1. Screenshot of The Viral Video. Retrieved from [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=3444961562268596&id=100002643583389](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=3444961562268596&id=100002643583389)

I've watched the edited version of the video from several news sites, but I still need to get the full context. To answer my curiosity, I surf into Elianu Hia's Facebook account to watch it directly. News sites only gave their readers the most important conversations of the video, while the video was 15 minutes long. The video was started with Elianu asking rhetorically about his daughter's rights (not using a hijab). He said that if his daughter using the hijab, it

would be a “deception of identity” since she is Christian. Regarding school regulation which stated the obligatory use of hijab in school, he said:

*“Some say (it was in) governor regulations, but I’ve found none on Google. I’ve also searched on Minister of Education Regulation, the Minister of Internal Affairs, none were found..... This hijab is a symbol of religion. If I (his daughter) wear a hijab, it’s like I’ve lied about my religious identity. Where are my religious rights? Human rights?” – Elianu Hia<sup>1</sup>*

Previously, the deputy principal stated that the rules were already written in school regulation, and agreement has been made between schools and parents, with each party signature as valid proof. Then it would be odd for the teachers if they see a schoolgirl without hijab to cover their hair. Yet, Elianu didn’t want to talk about it. He said that the SMKN 2 Padang is a public school, and no obligation should be applied for schoolgirls, especially if they are non-Muslim, to use hijab. Then, Elianu questioned whether the use of the hijab was only advice or an obligation? Zakri explained that it was an obligation at school because the norms were stated in school regulations and were renewed every year.

Not satisfied by the explanation, Elianu continues his objection by saying, “What’s the solution then, if Jeni wasn’t ready (to use hijab)?. What would be the school response?”. Zakri responded by saying that the school was under the supervision of the Provincial Educational Office (Dinas Pendidikan Provinsi), then gave Elianu and Jeni a statement letter to be signed. Elianu changed the angle of the camera to show its content. The statement letter was about:

1. Jeni refusal to use hijab at school;
2. That the case will be continued until a further decision from more authoritative officials.

Elianu asked to read it first. While he reads the document, Zakri stated that the school regulation would be copied and forwarded to related parties after the principal sign it. Elianu insisted on delivering this issue to Human Rights Commission for a solution. They both agreed to continue this issue, whatever the risk that might occur. After a while, Jeni and Elianu signed the document (after being revised because of Elianu’s misspelled name), shake hands with Zakri, and ended the recording. What a dramatic 15 minutes footage that was!.

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<sup>1</sup> A conversation based on a viral video uploaded by Elianu Hia on his Facebook Account (Retrieved from: [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=3444961562268596&id=100002643583389](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=3444961562268596&id=100002643583389))

Intentionally or not, the video successfully gained Elianu's Facebook friends' attention and many Indonesian netizens.<sup>2</sup> Since it was easily accessible, netizens have the freedom at their nimble fingers to like, comment, or share with their circle of friends. Just like a virus, the video has unstoppably spread. Not only becoming a heated national debate with a contrasting point of view from various figures, but it also attracts global attention. What might remain unknown for the school principal, one who should be the utmost responsible person for the situation may already be debated by some Indonesian people from any part of the world.

This virality circulated in a broader audience wildly, with many reacted emotionally. It is not surprising, though.<sup>3</sup> The video touches Indonesians hearts. Public opinion was divided among those who support or oppose the action. Those who support stand for human rights, tolerance, and unity in diversity (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*) principle, while on the other hand, there was contrasting commentary that mainly tries to uphold local wisdom, added with a regional autonomy and decentralization principle. Apart from that, a particular notion has to be to preserve Minangkabau *adat*, a whole intertwined concept of tradition, culture, law, and morality, which is strongly upheld (Benda-Beckmann & Benda-Beckmann, 2012).

Elianu was concerned about his daughter's rights. He didn't stop after the video went viral. Together with his lawyer, he sends a letter to the President of The Republic of Indonesia, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Human Rights National Commission, asking there shouldn't be any educational institution to require non-Muslim students to wear hijab or uniform based on some religion attributes.<sup>4</sup> Facing this growing public pressure, Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, Nadiem Makarim, quickly responded (on his official Instagram account) by stating that based on Article 4 verse 1 of Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, education is implemented with democratic, fair and non-discriminative, while upholding human rights, religious, cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Until 4 April 2021, the video has gained 13K reactions, with thousands commentaries and being shared 6364 times by Netizens.

<sup>3</sup> In a highly interconnected society, everyone has the power, that is to produce, access and distribute information. Breathing in the same cyberspace, power became redefined since everyone with internet access has an equivalent degree of power. Before this situation, power was always linked to more dominant forces in society, be it the kings, rulers, or other powerful groups. The field of power is always based on unequal relations. Today, with the capacity of living in the same and equal cyber arena, the power shifted gradually. Everyone with internet access can easily acquire the information, regardless of the distance. This kind of society, bounded by internet space, was called by a networked citizen. See Navarra, Giovanni (2019). *The Networked Citizen: Power, Politics, and Resistance in the Internet Age*. Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>4</sup> Hendra, Yose. (2021, January 24). Kuasa Hukum Jeni Surati Presiden Soal Aturan Berjilbab di Sekolah. <https://mediaindonesia.com/nusantara/379584/kuasa-hukum-jeni-surati-presiden-soal-aturan-berjilbab-di-sekolah>

value, and diversity.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, schools could not make regulations or recommendations to students to use specific religious clothing models as school uniforms, especially if it is not suitable with the religion or beliefs of the students. He explained that it was a form of intolerance towards diversity and has violated the laws and the values of Pancasila and diversity.

The statement was widely questioned by the general public, who felt that it was open to multi-interpretation. Among others, Deputy Chairman of the MUI, Anwar Abbas, expressed his confusion. The minister seemed to prohibit the school principal from making rules and regulations that obliged Muslim students to wear Muslim clothing, especially Muslim schoolgirls.<sup>6</sup> Suddenly, Nadiem's Instagram was filled with contrasting commentaries of those who supported him and others against him. Many commentaries, some of them were Minangkabau people, stating that his statement was overreacted and biased. However, this was the first phase of the central government's response toward the issue.

The central government didn't need a long time to show their grave concern with the issue. Ongoing public debate was answered with a joint decree between three ministries (Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Religion, and Ministry of Internal Affairs). It is vital to note here that since its very beginning, the decree becomes a highly contested decision and lays the basis for many conflicting stories later. To give the context, it is important to mention the Three Ministerial Joint Decree (Surat Keputusan Bersama/SKB Tiga Menteri) No. 02/KB/2021, No. 025-199 Tahun 2021, and No. 219 Tahun 2021 in details:<sup>7</sup>

1. Students, educators, and education personnel have the rights to choose whether to wear uniforms and attributes without religious specificities or uniforms and attributes with religious specificities;
2. Local governments and schools give freedom to students, educators, and education personnel to choose to wear uniforms and attributes as referred to in the FIRST Dictum;

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<sup>5</sup> Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, official Instagram account (@nadiemmakarim)

<sup>6</sup> Makdori, Y. (2021, January 29). Ucapan Mendikbud soal Jilbab SMKN 2 Padang Dianggap Multitafsir oleh MUI. liputan6.com. <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/4469549/ucapan-mendikbud-soal-jilbab-smkn-2-padang-dianggap-multitafsir-oleh-mui>

<sup>7</sup> Official Three Ministerial Joint Decree concerning Uniform and Attributes. Retrieved from: <https://setkab.go.id/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SALINAN-SKB-Mendikbud-Mendagri-Menag-CAP.pdf>

3. To protect the rights of students, educators, and education personnel as referred to in the SECOND Dictum, **local governments and schools may not oblige, order, require, advise, or prohibit** the use of uniforms and attributes with specific religious characteristics;
4. Local governments and/or school principals following their authority are obliged to revoke regulations, decisions, instructions, policies, or written appeals regarding the use of uniforms and attributes in the school environment issued by regional heads and/or school principals that contradict this Joint Decree no later than 30 (thirty) working days from the date this Joint Decree is stipulated;
5. If the local government and/or school principal do not implement the provisions in this Joint Decree, then there would be sanctions;
6. The provisions in this Joint Decree are exempted for Muslim students, educators, and education personnel in Aceh Province according to the specificity of Aceh based on the provisions of the laws and regulations regarding Aceh governance;
7. This Joint Decree will take effect from the date of stipulation.

At first, the joint decree was celebrated by many, as it seems to be the solution to tackle the recurring intolerance and discriminative act that not only happened in West Sumatra but also in many other areas. A brighter future for the educational world in a highly diverse nation is guaranteed by the central government's fair policy. It was until the Minangkabau spoke their mind and changed the whole narratives.



Image 2. The Schoolgirls in Uniform. Retrieved from: <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/campuran-banyak-pihak-kasus-siswi-non-muslim-berjilbab-selesai-secara-kekeluargaan/5751811.html>

## **1.2. The Eyes on the Screens and Dealing with Pandemic Limitations**

I was in The Hague, Netherland, when it began. It was a time when the lockdown era applied as the Covid-19 pandemic jeopardizing everyone. The entire society was shocked and had to adapt to the new and unwanted situation. Body movement, interactions, and other socialities were severely limited to prevent the virus from spreading. There were no schools, libraries, cafes, restaurants, museums, and other exciting places open. It was devastating. I knew that I couldn't take the risk of traveling back to Indonesia. Not only aware of limiting external factors but also my consciousness to keep me safe and healthy. I have no choice but to adhere to the government protocol as I won't get sick because of the Covid-19.

Admittedly, I have a deep feeling that I would navigate through the issue entirely digitally, despite any intention to do the fieldwork physically. I can't wait for a miracle and hope that the situation would be fully recovered overnight. It's just not likely. So, as the issue goes on, I make sure that I followed it meticulously by observing what's happening recently on several news sites and social media. It was the only possible thing to do. It's the practice of doing ethnography, but digitally. It would be my first time doing this. It turns out that I loved it. Digital ethnography is not only practical, and since I can work anytime and anywhere as long as I have a laptop with steady internet connections (plus a cup of strong black coffee, obviously!), it also opens up endless possibilities. There is any genesis, with people's opinions, perspectives, experiences, feelings, and hopes available, 24 hours a day. I can navigate millions of information, be it in text, images, audio, or video, which is helpful to enrich my research. In other words, this narrative would be based entirely using digital ethnography.

Thus, that's how I get to know the issue. Although West Sumatra (and Minangkabau) had always received a special "spotlight" on several news pages recently, my initial entanglement was when I was busy scrolling my Twitter timeline. I found the issue was posted by many accounts, which lead me to check on some news sites. By the time I browse, one of my Whatsapp Group was already noisy. All of a sudden, it went mad. Everyone was commenting. I was a bit late and astonished knowing the situation.

What I know for sure is that the speed of circulating discourse has reached an unprecedented level. What has started simply as a personal and local matter can be transformed into a group and national issue. In a relatively short period, it successfully caused a national turbulency, where citizens suddenly awakened and realized that the project of multiculturalism, in a highly diverse nation, still needs serious concerns.

Nevertheless, the impacts were offering more drama than the video itself. Soon after the video went viral, Indonesian netizens, the most disrespectful internet users in Southeast Asia<sup>8</sup>, were triggered by the event. Many supported Elianu's action in the name of tolerance, non-discrimination, and justice principle in the country, but at the same time, there were countless hateful commentaries geared toward him. From this viral video, at least we can gather insight into the insider view, an ordinary Minangkabau people perspective, that mainstream media has often forgotten who gave the stage mainly to some representative elites.

Another impact was enormous compared to the netizens' reaction. To my surprise, it was compounded into another intertwined issue of religion, social, cultural, political, and legal. What seemed simply as a religious issue, in reality, can't be detached from its broader socio-political and legal context. From my observation, it was never solely a purely spiritual reason. Religion might be the primary reason since the use of the hijab was part of Islamic teaching, yet it isn't sufficient to understand the bigger picture. We need to comprehend more of its social dimension. In short, the issue was acted as an abrupt wake-up call that awakened national concern, particularly on the way we can better understand the guarding "unity in diversity"<sup>9</sup> principle and balancing the uneasy relation between respecting human rights while at the same time upholding local values.

### **1.3. Paying The Price for The Prize Later: Cultural Elites, Institutions, and Arenas of Contesting Narratives**

There are so many voices on the issue, even in Minangkabau. Thus, it is essential to note that the Minangkabau aren't in a state of the joint agreement since there are people who actually support Elianu's act. Yet, one can guess Minangkabau concerns, voices, aspirations, and positionality toward the issue, from several Minangkabau representative cultural elites and institutions, such as the Governor of West Sumatra (Irwan Prayitno), Members Of The Parliament/Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat RI (Guspari Gaus), the Mayor of Pariaman (Genius Umar), The Head of Association of Minangkabau Adat Councils (*Lembaga Kerapatan Adat*

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<sup>8</sup> The Digital Civility Index (DCI) was a global report by Microsoft to explain the politeness level of internet users from all over the world when communicating on the internet. Indonesia was ranked 29th, from 32 countries being surveyed, placed the country at the lowest position for Southeast Asia region. Level of politeness of internet users in Indonesia was declined due to widespread spread of fake news or hoaxes, discrimination, hate speech, and bullying.

<sup>9</sup> Unity in Diversity, or *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, is Indonesian national motto. It was originally stated in *Kakawin Sutasoma* book by Mpu Tantular. Although still highly praised for guiding the nation, its context and meaning has been heavily contested. It is on this light I was inspired to explore the contesting interpretation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. See Aghababian, A. H. (2015). The Kakawin Sutasoma: A Look at Bhinneka Tunggal Ika and Perceptions of the Text's Religious Implications. *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse* 7 (09).



*Alam Minangkabau/LKAAM*) M. Sayuti Datuak Rajo Panghulu, The Head of Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) of West Sumatra Province (Buya Gusrizal Gazahar), until ex-mayor of Padang (Fauzi Bahar), who jointly have to voice their stance.

Yet, what seems to be the answer to the discrimination issue, actually carries new multilayered problems for Minangkabau. The decree didn't do well to satisfy each party. Conversely, it gave birth to another problem. There was rejection by Minangkabau *adat* representative, *Lembaga Kerapatan Adat Alam Minangkabau* (Minangkabau Natural Traditional Density Institution/LKAAM), saying that the decree isn't well suited and has disturbed Minangkabau society. Together with some Minangkabau cultural elites, they even challenge the decree to Supreme Court (Mahkamah Agung), stating that it violated the higher norms of Law no. 20/2003 about the National Education System (UU Sistem Pendidikan Nasional) and the 1945 Constitution. They pointed that it contradicts the 1945 Constitution Article 31 paragraph 3, which states that "The Government shall seek and implement a national education system, which increases faith and piety as well as noble morals to educate the nation's life, which is regulated by law."<sup>10</sup> Once again, Minangkabau challenged the central government's power, this time elegantly using the legal-formal democratic procedure.

Knowing that the joint decree assaulted Minangkabau's traditional value, and a lawsuit was filed by their traditional institution of LKAAM, a critical issue of essentialism and representation becomes fundamental, recognizing that particular ethnic group is deploying their identity to achieve specific goals. By this, the question of "who's representing who?" starts to be relevant since certain elites or groups that might have the right to say "we are representing Minangkabau" are navigating through many subjectivities, interests, and identities inside West Sumatra. What kind of Minangkabau value are they trying to convey? How is the power relation there? Who has the power and rights to represent them? How is the process of Minangkabau elites articulating their message, and in what objectives? How is Minangkabau being represented? In short, how Minangkabau respond to these ongoing tolerance, non-discrimination, human rights, and diversity debates? These are important question to understand them.

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<sup>10</sup> Ika, A. (2021, February 18). Lembaga Adat Sumbar Ajukan Uji Materil SKB 3 Menteri ke Mahkamah Agung. KOMPAS.Com. <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2021/02/18/18111621/lembaga-adat-sumbar-ajukan-uji-materil-skb-3-menteri-ke-mahkamah-agung>.

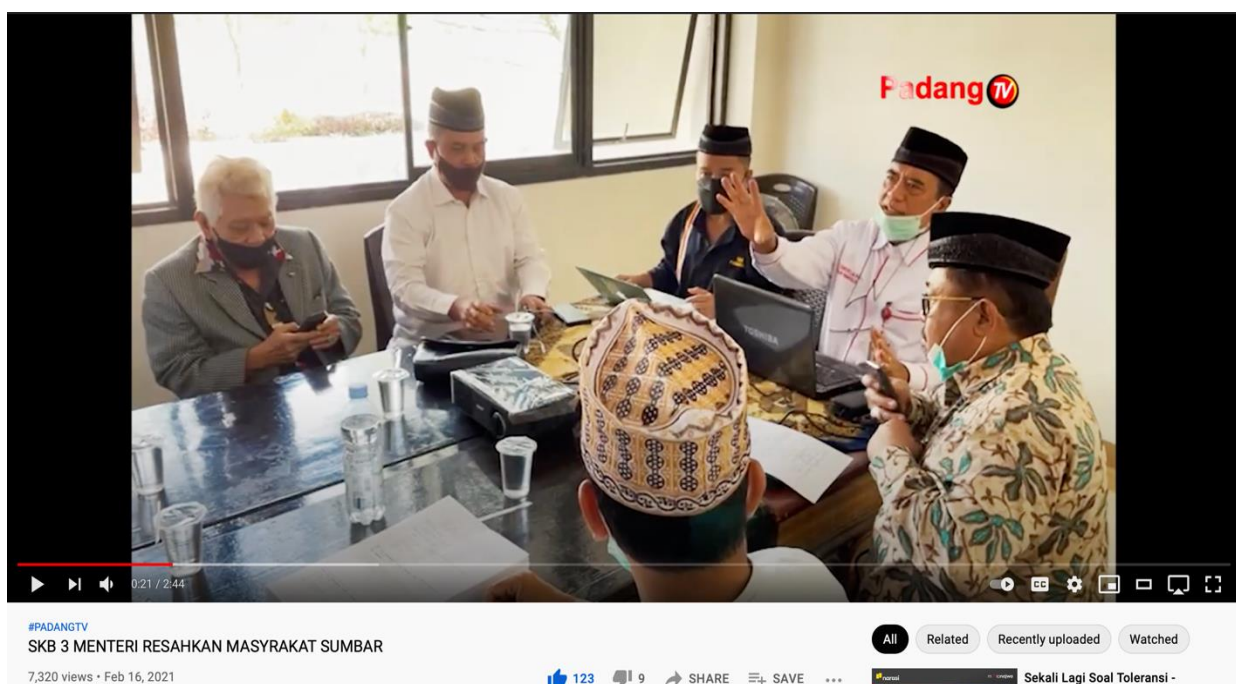


Image 3. Niniak Mamak of LKAAM discussing the Hijab affair at LKAAM Office, inside the West Sumatra Mosque Area. Retrieved from: <https://youtu.be/398VjqBgxkI>

This kind of predicament, which was doubled by the Minangkabau people's cynicism toward the central government, particularly with a lousy relationship with the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan/PDIP),<sup>11</sup> has garnered negative public judgment into West Sumatra and its people. The general opinion that Minangkabau people appear to reject much central government development agenda, such as the toll road, has become common. As in some media, they were framed as a group of anti-development people. “*We don’t need toll road. We need more farming subsidy!*” is one popular protest. My curiosity awakened, “Are they really be like that?, if yes, why?” as I need to know their rationale.

In this research, I intend to navigate toward the Minangkabau identity. It’s my positionality to “give the voice” to Minangkabau to speak their concerns. In terms of ethnic and religion, they are the majority and dominant group in West Sumatra. But, if we look at the broader national context, they might be the minority, given the lack of recognition by the others, be it the central government or the media, concerning their unique worldviews and identity. On

<sup>11</sup> It’s been a “common secret” that Minangkabau doesn’t favour PDIP which shown in PDIP failure in every electoral contestation there. See <https://tirto.id/mengapa-pdip-tak-laku-di-sumbar-sejak-dulu-bikin-megawati-bingung-f3wh>.

top of that, they frequently got the bullying among other regions, especially those that happened in the cyber world. Unconsciously, stereotypes clung to them today as intolerant<sup>12</sup>, discriminative, radical Islamist<sup>13</sup>, extremists, until the most buzzed tone recently, as not Pancasila (Tidak Pancasila)<sup>14</sup>.

The issue even reached larger audiences when being discussed at Indonesia Lawyers Club, one of Indonesia's most prestigious talk shows, after highly requested by many.<sup>15</sup> Several figures represent Minangkabau voices: Politician Fadli Zon, Governor Irwan Prayitno, Ustadz Abdul Somad, and pers figures Hasril Chaniago. Altogether, they explained that Minangkabau has an enormous contribution to Indonesia. One can see that historically, Minangkabau has influenced Indonesia, be it religious, social, political, even economic aspects. Furthermore, for them, the Minangkabau commitment toward nationalism and Pancasila isn't relevant to be questioned.

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<sup>12</sup> Before the issue of the hijab use in public school blows up, intolerance has become a major stigma toward Minangkabau due to prohibition of church construction and erasure of Bible Application in Minang language. See: <https://sejuk.org/2014/01/27/menyigi-rumah-ibadah-kaum-minoritas-di-Sumatra-barat-part-ii/> & <https://www.tempo.co/abc/5674/mengapa-tak-boleh-ada-aplikasi-alkitab-bahasa-minang-di-indonesia-yang-beragam>

<sup>13</sup> Students in Padang, West Sumatra, were vulnerable to be exposed to radicalism. See: <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-42832938>.

<sup>14</sup> When announcing the pair of Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP) supported candidates in the 2020 Regional Election, the PDIP chief of Political and Security Affairs whose also speakers of the People's Representative Council, Puan Maharani, was saying "*I hope West Sumatra become a province that really supports the Pancasila state*". Although it was open to interpretation, the statement hurts many Minangkabau since it can be interpreted that Minangkabau "isn't Pancasila enough", therefore their commitment to the nation were questioned. See: <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-54062728>

<sup>15</sup> Indonesia Lawyers Club. (2020, September 8). [Full] Sumbar Belum Pancasila? | ILC tvOne (8/9/2020) [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0v4zinnvf8.&feature=youtu.be>.



Image 4. Minangkabau Philosophy: Where The Earth Is Stepped There is the Sky to be Upheld. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dwo5rS5tKdk>

However, desired or not, these kinds of stereotypes are still there and work in everyday life. The effects were detrimental. Ordinary citizens could start exchanging harsh words online, then hating each other, merely because of simple prejudice. They didn't care about the far-distanced reality. Not only has it worsened the quality of public discourses but also resulted in prolonged stereotypes, which made it even harder to understand each other.

In this occurrence, I started to think that the general public is in dying need of a balanced explanatory narrative that doesn't prolong the imaginary distance based on prejudice and contributes to understanding the others in a diverse situation. To be critical is needed to deconstruct the logic behind those stereotypes. Then, I was captivated with the way Gayatri Spivak's way of thinking "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*", as it will give the ample spaces and voices to them who were underrepresented in the discourses, therefore need it the most, and that is the subaltern. Based on several occurrences, Minangkabau was seen as the subaltern when we're referring to their relationship with the others, mainly central government and the media, concerning their *adat* and identity. It is not only to better grasp what is the meaning of the hijab for Minangkabau but also to understand how they reconfigure their belonging, identity, and lived diversity in turbulent times.

#### 1.4. Research Question

Given the problems above, I'm intrigued to know more about how the meaning of unity in diversity (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*) was being contested by different cultural and political elites in different medium and arena. I also intrigued to know the meaning of the hijab for Minangkabau and why it matters much for them. Thus, my research question would be:

1. How are the dynamics and contested meaning of Unity in Diversity (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*) happening in Indonesia through the hijab affair in West Sumatra?
2. What are the meaning of hijab for Minangkabau?
3. How to navigate contemporary Minangkabau identity from the hijab affair in West Sumatra?

Based on the question above, I'll also try to answer these sub-questions:

1. Who are representing Minangkabau to speak on their behalf?
2. How is the dynamics of strategic essentialism by Minangkabau cultural and political elites?
3. How is the everyday life of diversity in Minangkabau?
4. What is the meaning of hijab for non-Muslim schoolgirls who wear it in school?
5. How are the non-Muslim schoolgirls' experiences, feelings, and hopes regarding hijab use in public school?

## CHAPTER 2

### INITIAL ENTANGLEMENT WITH MINANGKABAU

#### 2.1. An Outsider - Insider Perspective Through Minangkabau Identity

Why is Minangkabau being studied by so many historians and anthropologists? It's because Minangkabau is full of ambivalences. Sometimes in conflict, other times found consensus. They were very static also dynamic at the same time. They live with matrilineal principles yet still safeguarding Islamic values. How to understand that kind of society? It seems like they are obvious, yet never in reality. Many scholars have shown how thick the description would be to describe them. I'll try to add a small notion here.

Firstly, I'm not a Minangkabau person. I was born and bred in Jakarta, with Javanese blood running. I've never encountered deeply with Minangkabau people, culture, or arts before (except for their delicate foods in *Rumah Makan Padang*). Neither have I ever stand my feet on West Sumatra soil. It was until 2017 and my life path has drastically changed. Suddenly, I became a part of them. I am an "*Urang Sumando*", a son-in-law since I married a Solok woman. Although not getting the *adat* title to my name, I still expected to behave accordingly, to become "*Sumando niniak mamak*", an ideal type of son-in-law. Hence, I'm an outsider in terms of ethnicity but also considered an insider in terms of relationship and interest.

At first, I don't understand any single words they said. Yet, they convinced me to learn the Minangkabau language because it would be easy, considering its close form with Bahasa Indonesia. To this day, I'm much improved and understand many of their proverb (*petatah petitih*), which I found full of wisdom as a life guide—no wonder why many significant historical figures were coming from Minangkabau.

I still learn their language to understand their spirit and their inner soul better. I believe that language is the most important thing to know a culture beyond its audio-visual shapes. After mastering some of it, I finally feel that I'm not too distant from their worldviews. Since then, I've changed and never be the same. My interest in Minangkabau and West Sumatra landscape keeps growing steadily. Like a finely cooked rendang, Minangkabau looks so appealing to be studied. Again, no wonder why other anthropologists are never tired of learning about them.

I have to admit that much of my stock of knowledge about West Sumatra and its socio-cultural aspects came directly from my wife and her family. I've read some materials

information about Minangkabau, of course, but never too deep to master. It was only to broaden my horizons about the biggest matrilineal ethnic group in the world. But it isn't enough. The feeling was different from reading a textbook on a campus library and being told by actual Minangkabau, who lived there for years. The way the history being told, the pride, the dialects being heard, the worldview being shared, the ups and downs of living, the food being cooked, until how the way a strong-black coffee being drunk, to say the overall lived experience by Minangkabau, felt different for me. I was a stranger, and I enjoyed became one. At that moment, I've realized that I'm entering a whole other cosmos that I need to understand. I've fallen in love with West Sumatra and Minangkabau, and I need to know more about them.

## **2.2. Brief Historical Trajectories of Hijab in West Sumatra and Why It Matters for Minangkabau**

To understand why many Minangkabau rejected the much anticipated joint decree, one should grasp what the hijab means for them. I would like to navigate through a short history to give the context. Historically, Minangkabau women decently wore *baju kurung*, a traditional loose-fitting and full-length dress consisting of a blouse and a skirt. Although still loosely showing the hair, the notion of politeness was always vital for Minangkabau women. Then historical trajectories progressing toward modernity, with several cultural clashes and renegotiating with external influences, *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (*Adat* is based on Islam and Islam is based on the Book of Allah/Al-Qur'an) principle established as a *resultante* between *adat* and Islam, which firmly guiding the Minangkabau way of life (Benda-Beckmann & Benda-Beckmann, 2007). Subsequently, women started to cover the hair as it was considered as "aurat" in Islamic teaching: part of the body that should be covered. Men were also subjected to the same rule but in a different way.

Then, how about the use of hijab in Minangkabau public schools? It is vital to grasp that the use of the hijab in Indonesian public schools was dynamic throughout different regimes.<sup>16</sup> In West Sumatra, it is normal when one could see every schoolgirl in school, even on the street, wearing a hijab. Regardless of their religion, schoolgirls were "highly advised" by school officials to use hijab. Historically, it started on March 11, 2002, when Solok Regent, Gamawan

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<sup>16</sup> Before being prevalent, there was a time when hijab was prohibited. Back in 1982, the use of hijab in public school was forbade by the Minister of Education and Culture at time, Daoed Jusuf. It has triggered negative reaction from many Indonesian Moslems. It was only until 1991 the rule was ousted and schoolgirls can freely wear hijab at their school. See Said, Salim. (2016). *Menyaksikan 30 Tahun Pemerintahan Otoriter Soeharto*. Mizan Pustaka.

Fauzi, issued a 15-article regulation on Muslim attire aimed at schoolgirls and civil servants.<sup>17</sup> The rule states that every Muslim girl and woman has to wear the hijab, with sanctions and disciplinary action against those who do not adhere. It was the most critical policy to look at, as it served as the first policy related to hijab use for schoolgirls yet tends to be overlooked in today's discourses.



Image 5. Tweet from Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs of Indonesia. Retrieved from: MD, Mahfud. [@mohmahfudmd]. (2021, January 24). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/mohmahfudmd/status/1353191929169596416>.

*(Translate: Late 1970s – 1980s, students were prohibited from wearing hijab. We protested the regulation to the Department of Education and Culture. Now wearing hijab and Muslim attire is allowed and becomes a trend, indeed we can't converse the situation with obliging non-Muslim students to wear hijab at school)*

The regulation went smooth and inspired other West Sumatra regions. In 2005, the Mayor of Padang, Fauzi Bahar, issued a decree on Muslim attire states that “Muslim students at primary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools must wear Muslim/Muslimah attire; non-Muslims should adopt [long skirts for girls and long pants for boys].<sup>18</sup> It has to be the most crucial historical momentum in hijab use history for Minangkabau since the hijab use

<sup>17</sup>Human Rights Watch Report. 2021. I Wanted to Run Away: Abusive Dress Codes for Women and Girls in Indonesia. Accessed via <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/03/18/i-wanted-run-away/abusive-dress-codes-women-and-girls-indonesia>

<sup>18</sup> ibid



was so expansive. The instruction applied to every Muslim schoolgirl, even in a state-owned school.

Recently, he explained that the decree was based not solely on religious reasons, as using a hijab can be useful for many reasons: Closing the gap between the rich and poor (hijab can be used to cover the gold used in schoolgirl's ear), harmonizing the majority and minority relation (hijab will make all schoolgirls looks the same, regardless their religion, so the minority would not be seen as different), and the least unthinkable one, protecting schoolgirl from mosquito's bites.<sup>19</sup> It sounds fictional, yet it worked well in reality. It went smooth and became a usual thing to do for years to come. Everyone was getting accustomed to this "instruction." After 15 years of silence, one Christian schoolgirl rejected following three dramatic weeks of being told to use the hijab by the school teachers.

*"In the case of various policies in West Sumatra, it has gone through a long process and has been implemented for a long time. It means that it has been tested in society, and there was no problem with this. There is no need to clash with human rights, with diversity, intolerance, and other discourses. Why? Wearing the hijab and implementing the provisions of Islamic law is a human right for Muslims. Also protected by law... covering the aurat for Muslims and Muslimat is an obligation. It is clear and has been completed. Why? Because the regulations that were born in various regions have been discussed with Islamic scholars. So, there isn't any debate whether wearing the hijab is an Arabic tradition or not? The scholars have agreed on this matter, with their approval of those rules."* – Chairman of the Indonesian Ulama Council of West Sumatra, Gusrizal Gazahar.

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<sup>19</sup> Kampai, Jeka. (2021, 26 January). Eks Walkot Padang soal Aturan Jilbab untuk Siswi: Tak Ada Tempat Nyamuk Gigit. Detik.com. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5349276/eks-walkot-padang-soal-aturan-jilbab-untuk-siswi-tak-ada-tempat-nyamuk-gigit>

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORIES AND METHODS

#### 3.1. Literature Reviews

##### 3.1.1. The Headscarf Affairs

The headscarf or hijab affairs aren't a novel, considering what happened in other countries. Historically, it has been a captivating global phenomenon that needs explanation. There has been numerous articles explained the controversies in several countries, with each facing different challenges. Some European countries (France, Belgium, Australia, Holland, and Bulgaria) are having the issue with headscarves. Special notion to France which has attracted scholars to investigate the headscarf affairs, particularly France (Killian, 2003; Kastoryano, 2006; Scott, 2007; Bruck, 2008; Honicker, 2014). Although France is not the only country to worry about girls or women with headscarves since also Headscarf was not only seen as an embodiment of how the relation between state and religion, but also as a manifestation of how the state ideology works in practice. France has the experience of how the headscarf use in public schools has been highly debatable. The state policy has changed over the years, whether to accommodate or ban the use of headscarf in public space and schools. What has been agreed upon that the France is a secular state (*laicite*) isn't that simple when Islam and Muslim grows over time and start to demand for recognition over their identity.

Here, I am intrigued by Kastoryano (2006) studies in France. It is because there are comparable aspects between France and Indonesia case. For instance, both affairs started in public school. Then, the state and the public arguments to contest the use of headscarf were much related to moral principle of tolerance, individual liberty, religious freedom, and human rights. Yet, the reasons and situations behind it were in stark contrast. In France, Muslim were the minority, lived in a secular state (*laicite*) where religious symbols were forbidden in public schools. Hence, they struggled for their identity to be recognized by the state and public. While in Indonesia, Muslim are the majority and religious symbols are allowed. But, it is?

France experience has shown how different times means different policy. In 1989, the use of headscarf in public schools was allowed and considered by the State Council (Conseil d'Etat) as the freedom of pupils 'to express and manifest their religious beliefs within public institutions with respect for pluralism' (Kastoryano, 2006). The Council seeks to guard two principle: the international and national rules protecting freedom of conscience, while on the other hand, upholding the constitutional principle of the *laïcité*. Hence, religious symbols

should not be prohibited unless it was ‘*ostentatoires*’ (ostentatious) or ‘*revendicatifs*’ (expressing a demand). These “middle way” was also be the case for the Indonesian governments, who sought to answer the growing public debate considering religious attires in public schools, by issuing the three ministerial joint decree. Yet, later it becomes problematic because of several reasons which I will discuss later.

Then there was a considerable quiet moment of headscarf affairs in France. Only until 1994, when girls wearing headscarves were expelled from public school in 1994, it became a public issue once again. This time, the Minister of Education, Francois Bayrou, prohibited the wearing of the headscarf and any ostentatious religious symbols in public schools and asked for the exclusion of girls whenever they resist (Kastoryano, 2006). This also means that the headscarf should be managed on a local basis and gave teachers the power to decide. Here, the condition is a little bit different with Indonesia. With the issuance of three ministerial joint decree, the schools and teachers don’t have the power to manage and decide whether the headscarf should be used or not since it was primarily the pupils rights to choose.

What surprises me is the fact that both issues in France and Indonesia has been processed in a similar fashion. In 2003, it has made the President of France appointed a commission to solve the question of religious symbols in public schools. It was named as *Commission de réflexion sur l’application du principe de laïcité*, chaired by Bernard Stasi (a former minister), to ensure the secularism and universalism principle being upheld. Their report was on the same spirit with the three ministerial joint decree in Indonesia. I’d like to give it a full quote to depict how similar both decisions were.

*Ensures that groups or communities of any kind cannot impose on individuals a belonging or a religious identity. Laïcité protects everyone from any pressure, physical or moral, justified by a religious prescription. The defence of individual freedom against any proselytise action completes today the notion of separation and neutrality that at the core of the concept of laïcité. – (Rapport au Président de la république, 2004)*

The commission report, that no groups nor communities should impose individuals to wear religious identity, was also being the *raison d’etre* for the three ministerial joint decree. The only difference is about the agents who has imposed such religious identification into others. In West Sumatra, the point was to protect the students from schools and teachers obligation to wear hijab. Somehow, in line with French *laïcité* spirit, the governments of Indonesia interpret the Constitution and Unity in Diversity (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*) Principle

in a way that the public schools should be a neutral zone against any proselytise action by the teachers and leave the uniform preference solely to the students. In practice, both of the principle of *laïcité* and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, is translated into the neutrality of the state towards religious symbols. This neutrality equals tolerance because it assumed freedom of conscience in private sphere. That's explain the state positionality toward the issue.

Another essential point to note is the function of public schools in France which can be compared to Indonesian public schools. Historically, all public schools in France functioned as the instrument for propagating secularism and equality between girls and boys. These include a centralization of instruction, the creation of secular teachers' training schools, given the school the role of unifying the nation (Kastoryano, 2006). This condition is different in Indonesia where education can't detached itself from religion. Conversely, according to National Education System Laws, it should "increases faith and piety as well as noble morals to educate the nation's life".

### **3.1.2. Overview of Minangkabau Identity**

The thesis object is to depict contemporary Minangkabau identity politics with the broader nation-state policy. To explain such an issue requires works on literature since many intellectuals have tried to explain the Minangkabau identity, each unique with their point of view. Here, I would like to focus on how the circulating narratives of 'forced use of hijab for a schoolgirl in West Sumatra' give another notion of their identity. Also, to provide ample space and 'voice' to Minangkabau, considering their identity was often portrayed negatively by others.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, relevant literature is needed.

As the biggest matrilineal group globally, Minangkabau had become an interesting ethnic group to be studied over the years. Dating back, a French Jurist and Islamologist, Georges-Henri Bousquet (1938), said that Minangkabau was a "remarkable paradox of Sociology of Islam" as he wondered how to explain best the community who adheres to the matrilineal system, at the same time, are also firm believers of Islam. It's been commonly assumed that matrilineal and Islam contradict the law, so that relationship is not likely to happen.

A notable work on Minangkabau identity has been done by Franz and Keebet von Benda Beckmann (2007, 2012). Together, they concluded that Minangkabau's identity is ambivalent,

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<sup>20</sup> Recently, there are growing negative stereotypes toward Minangkabau as intolerant, discriminative, radical Islamist, anti-development, and are not believing Pancasila Ideology (*Tidak Pancasila*)

multilayered, full of contradictions and tensions (Benda-Beckmann & Benda-Beckmann, 2007). They pointed that historically, there were three normative orders in Minangkabau: *adat*, Islam, and state. *Adat* has acted as the oldest identity layer while superseded by other worldviews, symbolic universes, and legal orders. However, Minangkabau developed a pronounced self-understanding and cultural identity that implies an uneasy and shifting reconciliation of these normative orders.

Recently, discussions on Minangkabau identity are mostly inward-looking. There were abundant studies focused primarily on Minangkabau identity dynamic and their local politics, especially on the relationship between *adat*, Islam, and Nagari. A point of view was unsatisfactory enough to answer the seemingly public curiosity “Why are Minangkabau seems to be in a state of conflictual relationship with the state?”. The situation urgently craved a different positionality, which I would like to present in this respect. What is needed is the duality of positionality: to stand as ‘insider’ and think as ‘outsider.’

What Bousquet (1938), Taufik Abdullah (1966), Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (2007), Jeffrey Hadler (2008), and other Minangkabau intellectuals have done all these years are to stand as an insider, to give a ‘thick description’ on Minangkabauness. Of course, they paved the way for us to understand the complex and intertwined Minangkabau identity. However, recent phenomena of the forced use of hijabs on public schools have ‘opened the door’ and somehow urged us to see the Minangkabau from ‘outside.’

We can’t use the same position merely because it has failed to describe the broader Minangkabau issue: How is the ethnic and power relationships within the different group on the same West Sumatra soil?; How is the actual relation between majority and minority?; How is the practice of tolerance toward minorities?; and How are their interpretation of local values toward broader unity in diversity (*Bhinneka tunggal ika*)?. These all questions are needed to give a supplementary explanation to answer the general public’s negative assumption towards contemporary Minangkabau identity.

My fieldwork has found that I need to see the ethnic relation not only in the real world but also in the digital space. Although some Minangkabau elites blatantly defend the situation by saying that tolerance was always there, and Minangkabau are highly tolerant, the discriminative act of forcing the use of hijabs in public schools happened to disclose the *status quo*. It acts as the “tip of an iceberg” to show another problematic identity and diversity issue. It is justified in the digital realm where many peoples harshly intimidate Elianu Hia, the father

of a schoolgirl who has rejected the use of hijab on a public school, on his Facebook account after his video went viral. One might wonder where the tolerance and non-discriminative principle is when he was heavily criticized, attacked, and intimidated by his fellow Minangkabau, only by fighting his daughter's fundamental religious rights and not using the hijab.

### **3.2. Theoretical Framework**

To help me navigate through the narratives, I would like to think within these theoretical framework and concepts. This is also a way to understand the meaning of hijab for Minangkabau, why they rejected the joint decree, who represents them and in what way they collectively voiced their positionality.

#### **3.2.1. Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism, as a theory or practice, is a highly debated notion by intellectuals and politicians. There were many disbelief and dissatisfaction among different groups, making Western politicians even declared “the death of multiculturalism”. However, as globalization continue to exist, multiculturalism is still there and influencing nation-states to adjust its policies toward respecting diversity. In the context of diverse nation like Indonesia, multiculturalism is being uphold with *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* principle. Here, I would like to use Modood (2013) notion of models of multiculturalism to depict the contested interpretation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and diversity. He emphasized that there are two models of multiculturalism which he called with cosmopolitan and communitarian multiculturalism. The first embrace individuals distinct beliefs and cultural preferences, although still living together under fairly conventional moral boundaries. Here, individual rights are being respected by the community. Meanwhile, the latter is a more collectivist model which not only acknowledged individuals but also tries to accommodate group rights and respecting intra-group diversity. In this sense, communitarian multiculturalism seeks beyond individual rights to find ways of dealing with diversity.

In addition to multiculturalism, another issue he stressed is how the dynamics of essentialism. He refers to Baumann (1996) by saying that people in multiethnic locations sometimes speak as if everybody belonged to one or another ethnic group, constituted by their participation in uniform customs and practices with co-ethnics. Yet, at the same time, they also acknowledge and appreciate the fact that internal diversity exist. This essentialism notion is

what I would like to inquire later to understand how Minangkabau elites portraying Minangkabau as one and unified ethnic group.

### **3.2.2. Identity and Politics of Belonging**

I'd like to think within these inseparable framework of identity and politics of belonging to better understand the Minangkabau better. Here, identities are defined as narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not) (Martin, 1995). For Yuval-Davis (2006) , these narratives can be individual or collective, shift and change, be contested and multiple. It also can relate to three different times: to relate to the past, to explain the present, and function as a projection of a future trajectory.

On the other hand, the politics of belonging defined as 'the dirty work of boundary maintenance' (Crowley, 1999). It concerned with the boundaries of the political community of belonging: The boundaries that separate the world population into 'us' and 'them'. Politics of belonging comprises of a specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular way (Yuval-Davis, 2006). It seems to me that it is about potentially meeting other people and specify their positionality, whether part of 'us' or 'them'.

### **3.2.3. Strategic Essentialism**

The concept of strategic essentialism is vital to grasp how Minangkabau respond to the external force that seems to endanger their *adat* and identity. It is assumed that ethnic groups are consisted of many sub-groups with different voice and interests. Given the situation, the questions then how is the process of Minangkabau people voicing their truest identities and aspirations to the others, mainly the state? How is the image of Minangkabau identities being represented? Who have the rights and legitimation to represents and to speak for them? What identities are portrayed and in what arena? These are the questions that I'd like to investigate with the framework of strategic essentialism.

Essentialism presupposes that a group or a category of objects/people share some defining features exclusive to the members (Eide, 2010). One important thing to note is that it can be a conscious act despite partial appropriation of an essentialism imposed by others (the elite) for group interest. However, strategic essentialism originally started when Gayatri C. Spivak discusses the experiences of the Subaltern Studies Group, to rewrite the history of India with a perspective from below, while deconstruct the imperial narratives. She reads the work

of the Subaltern Studies Group, then, as “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak, 1985/1996: 214). The concept of strategic essentialism entails that members of groups, while being highly differentiated internally, may engage in an essentializing and to some extent a standardizing of their public image, thus advancing their group identity in a simplified, collectivized way to achieve certain objectives (Eide, 2010).

#### **3.2.4. The Rise of Local Identity**

Thomas Hylland Erikson (2013) has exciting findings of the rise of local identity. He pointed that it has to do with the globalization process by saying that “truly global processes affect the conditions of people living in particular localities, creating new opportunities and new forms of vulnerability.” The same notion was given by Ien Ang (2013) in “Beyond Unity in Diversity: Cosmopolitanizing Identities in a Globalizing World.” When we become global or connected toward the global world, we will need to show the unique local identities to the world in ourselves or others.

On a similar tone, Ahmad Najib Burhani's (2020) books titled “Dilema Minoritas” (*Minority Dilemma*) give the notion of marginalized feelings. He said that globalization had created the feeling of marginalization and exclusion for certain groups who aren't ready to compete in the global world or those who feel that access is limited. These feelings of marginalization and fear towards foreign influence create the exclusive or antipathy toward the different others. They think that the various others are a threat to the values, identities, and harmony of society. These kinds of literature helped me to analyze how Minangkabau local identity being discussed, portrayed, and formed as a whole when facing the global process of globalization.

#### **3.2.5. The Politics of Dignity and Politics of Resentment**

Another vital piece of literature on identity politics is Francis Fukuyama's (2018) “*Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*.” In his newer book, Fukuyama showed that identity politics has been the main driver for contemporary politics and joined the hard-fought economic struggles between the left and right that characterized the 20<sup>th</sup>-century political world. He argues that the liberal democracies had not fully solved the problem of thymos: The part of the soul that craves recognition of dignity.

*“Modern liberal democracies promise and largely deliver a minimal degree of equal respect, embodied in individual rights, the rule of law, and the franchise. What this does*



*not guarantee is that people in a democracy will be equally respected in practice, particularly members of groups with a history of marginalization. Entire countries can feel disrespected, which has powered aggressive nationalism, as can religious believers who feel their faith is denigrated. Isothymia will therefore continue to drive demands for equal recognition, which are unlikely to ever be completely fulfilled.” (p. 9)*

The idea, recognition of dignity might relate to what Minangkabau situation today. Having a history of extensively producing influential political, intellectuals, religious, and cultural leaders during colonial, independence, and the first government era has made them feel a special collective feeling of prominent position in Indonesia. However, the situation changed, and there is a deep and widespread sense of frustration in Minangkabau of losing it during the New Order era (Abdullah, 1995; Bahar & Tadjoeeddin, 2004). The question then, is the same feeling of frustration engrained until today? How is Minangkabau feeling toward this situation today? How to link the sense of nostalgic greatness with the growing need for dignity and identity recognition?.

To sum up, I would like to analyze the Minangkabau needs for recognition by other groups, be it the minority, the state, or the broader Indonesian public.

### **3.2.6. Situated Identities**

Situated identities holds the theory that individuals take on different roles in different social and cultural settings, so that a person’s behavior pattern may shift radically according to the situation and the others with whom he or she is interacting (Alexander & Wiley, 1981). This concept is used to understand the reasons behind non-muslim students preference to wear hijab in public schools at West Sumatra.

## **3.3. Research Methods**

### **3.3.1. Other Ways of Knowing in Times of Pandemic Limitations: Revisiting Fieldwork Through Digital Ethnography**

At one time, the issue has become a trending topic in social media. From its very start, the case captured public attention with its controversy. However, it’s a common thing about virality: the faster it went viral, the sooner it will end. Knowing that the issue went viral in a night, I was prepared that it would be finished in no time. No continuous debate and discussion should be held, as the joint decree seemed to be the answer. However, that’s only my

assumption, and it's not backed up by reality. The problem is still there, snowballing into a much more serious matter.

Ideally, my physical fieldwork would be directly observing schoolgirls and the environment in West Sumatra to sense, feel, and comprehend the situation. By following the school environment, I might get to know not only the socialities but also lived diversity there. I can meet and ask about hijab use for ordinary schoolgirls there, mainly non-Muslim, who wear hijab in their daily school life. It is crucial since there was not enough attention given to them as the most affected parties of implementing school regulation, societal culture and *adat*, and the joint decree. How are they supposed to respond? Given the momentum, what options are they considering: to remove the hijab or continue using it? What would be the consequence? Is it possible for them to be honest with society and themselves?

Apart from that, I might interview some related school officials to know how rules were being applied and culture being socialized. This way, I will obtain much insight as it will lead to another factual information, which wasn't written in the media. Yet, since the limitation of the Covid-19 pandemic still applies, I can't do physical fieldwork in West Sumatra. I need to know that "another way of knowing" is possible, that the phenomena itself can be approached through another method, and that is through digital ethnography. I had no choice but to do this to get into the field, even though it would be my first time. This way, as long as I have an internet connection, the possibility is endless.

One crucial issue is how to immerse in the digital world in a constructive way toward the story. As Geertz (1988) pointed out, the ethnographer as author and storyteller is very much at the heart of the act of storytelling. Yet, observing the phenomenon digitally would be a limitless thing to do. What and who should I listen to? What kind of voices and opinions matter? How to demarcate the research boundary? Or simply, how we do the narratives? I need to know how I can transform my fieldwork listening process into a written story. Ethnographic storytelling can be a compelling task, yet to do it digitally requires epistemological reformulation. In physical fieldwork, one can directly go into the field, observe what is happening, meet real people, and interact in social settings. Meanwhile, the activities in the digital world can last 24 hours a day. The internet is never sleeping, and there are millions of information created within an hour.

However, to observe the activities on the internet and do a prolonged immersion is still needed. It is also vital to note that participation is an important aspect of a knowledge

generation process. To do that, Hine (2015) has pointed that the notion of prolonged immersion needs to be rearticulated due to the difficulty for the ethnographer to live for an extended period in and around the internet to observe activities that happened. In addition, she suggested to “encompass the experience of mediated forms of engagement and to involve connections rather than assuming physical co-presence in geographic space.” Following that, I would look at the connections between any occurrence on the internet to follow the conflicting story of hijab use in West Sumatra. This way, I’m following what Marcus (1995) has stated as “follow the metaphor” modes of construction. It opens up the opportunity for me to delineate the boundary, at the same time, ensure that the connections between each party would be reflected in my observation.

After following the metaphor of the hijab use in West Sumatra, particularly for Minangkabau, I would like to do a remote qualitative interview with some non-Muslim schoolgirls. This way, the mixed method of following the metaphor first and doing an open-ended interview later would open up the possibility to gain deeper insight for narratives later.

### **3.3.2. Surfing the Sea of Discourses Digitally: Contested Voices in Facebook, News Sites and Youtube with Spaces to Everyday Life of Non-Moslem Schoolgirls**

First of all, I need to know what was happened in Elianu’s Facebook account. Then I surfed into his account and noticed contrasting opinions. It has to be done to get the context since his Facebook account was the main arena where it all started snowballing into a national issue. There, I found that Elianu Hia intentionally showed his video (a conversation with the school's vice-principal) to his friends and eventually to the broader public by making it live on Facebook. Soon after he uploaded the video, he instantly received many responses from his Facebook friends. Some supported his bravery, while the others were condemning him with harsh words.

To date, the video is still there, and one can quickly see how the ordinary Minangkabau responded to the situation differently. Although there were supports for Elianu, the other voice can’t be unseen. Much more of them were there to criticized and bully his move. There are many reasons behind these harsh commentaries, with much of them attacked him by stating that both Elianu and Jeni Hia need to adapt and maintained local values and traditions in Minangkabau (*Dima Bumi dipijak, disitu langik dijunjuang/Where any earth is stepped, there is sky to be upheld*), even though it is in public school.

After seeing the much-heated debates on Elianu Hia's Facebook account, I'm intrigued to know how the broader public says on this matter. Then, I learned the narratives surrounding the situation by reading, watching, and observing some news sites, national television, and Youtube dialogue covering the issue. The issue became a national issue for months. People were suddenly eager to talk, once again, about diversity, multiculturalism, and tolerance issue in Indonesia. It was discussed on several national news television (i.e., Metro TV,<sup>21</sup> CNN,<sup>22</sup> Kompas TV<sup>23</sup>) where several figures representing each opinion explained the situation. Also, many dialogues were held in Youtube accounts (Republika,<sup>24</sup> Kabar Sejuk, Padang TV) trying to explain the situation clearly. These dialogue events on Youtube were my source of data as it not only showing contested interpretations of diversity but also how Minangkabau's identity is portrayed by several cultural elites representing them.

Soon after I did previous work, I realized that I need to gain more insight directly from Elianu and Jeni Hia. Especially Jeni Hia, who rejected the use of hijab even though all of her 22 non-Muslim friends in the same school seemingly agree to use the veil. To do that, I've opened my Facebook account and added Elianu Hia as a friend. Later, I've messaged him about my concern and waited for an answer. After a while, he responded to my message. To my surprise, he refused to do it and preferred not to talk anymore. It was over for him, meaning no chance for me to discuss this issue directly.

Respecting this rejection, I moved on to another way of knowing. I've interviewed two non-Muslim schoolgirls on 1 Solok Senior High School (*Sekolah Menengah Atas/SMAN 1 Solok*), the best Senior High School in Solok City, West Sumatra. This time, I am lucky since they both agree to become my research interlocutors. They aren't ordinary schoolgirls. They might not enough to act as "the sample of a bigger population" of non-Muslim schoolgirls in West Sumatra yet can give us an image about them who silently preferred to use hijab in a public school. This situation intrigued me to dig deeper to get their experience, views, and reason firsthand.

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<sup>21</sup> Metro TV. 2021. "Aturan Siswi Berjilbab di Padang Sudah Berlaku 15 Tahun". 24 January 2021, News Dialogue 14:24. <https://www.metrotvnews.com/play/NOBClelw-aturan-siswi-berjilbab-di-padang-sudah-berlaku-15-tahun>.

<sup>22</sup> CNN Indonesia. 2021. "Paksa Siswi Non Muslim Berjilbab, Gubernur Sumbar: Sekolah Khilaf". News Dialogue, 24 January 2021 16:08. <https://youtu.be/g4Lxi8H9AC4>.

<sup>23</sup> Kompas TV. 2021. "Apa Solusi untuk Siswi Non-Muslim Diminta Berjilbab Oleh Sekolah? Ini Selengkapnya". 25 January 2021, News Dialogue 14:05. [https://youtu.be/uqt\\_iCakDpM](https://youtu.be/uqt_iCakDpM).

<sup>24</sup> REPUBLIKA Official. 2021. "Isu Jilbab di Sumatra Barat Sekadar Pengalihan Isu?" News Dialogue, 26 January 2021 15:09. <https://youtu.be/13g7BkILrEs>.

In short, to answer my research focus on contesting interpretation of diversity and contemporary Minangkabau identity, I did the qualitative method with the digital ethnography approach by observing and following the circulating narratives that happened on different modes of communication. The next chapter would be consisting of observations. First, the contrasting opinion of the hijab use in West Sumatra public school happened in its initial source, Elianu's Facebook account. Second, the contested interpretations of diversity and Minangkabau identity that occur on several news sites and Youtube, where the issue was much discussed. Third, the everyday life of two non-Muslim schoolgirls in SMAN 1 Solok, West Sumatra, to depicts their experience and way of navigating the situation. Finally, how the disputes was answered with decisive decision by the Supreme Court and how Minangkabau and general public reaction towards it.

## CHAPTER 4

### MINANGKABAU VS THE WORLD: DIVIDED VOICES BETWEEN TOLERANCE AND IDENTITY

The video that was originated in the digital world opened the door to public discourse. Social media could serve as the public sphere for discourse contestation. With the advancement in information technology, the public sphere has transformed into its digital one, where ordinary citizens can participate in a deliberative discussion voicing their opinion and perspectives regarding such issues. If that is the case, what's actually being debated?

Given this situation, I'm intrigued to dig deeper into what ordinary netizens say on this issue through navigating Elianu Hia's Facebook account.<sup>25</sup> Its commentary column can show us the public divided opinion: One who supports Elianu's act, and the other who against. Many nationalists Indonesian have supports fully Elianu's bravery, for the discrimination shouldn't be conducted anywhere. Yet, also many of them were having a contrasting point. Elianu got harsh and intimidated digitally on his Facebook account. For one moment, he even updated his Facebook status by saying "*I Believe God is my fortress, even though much pressure that I'm facing today.*"

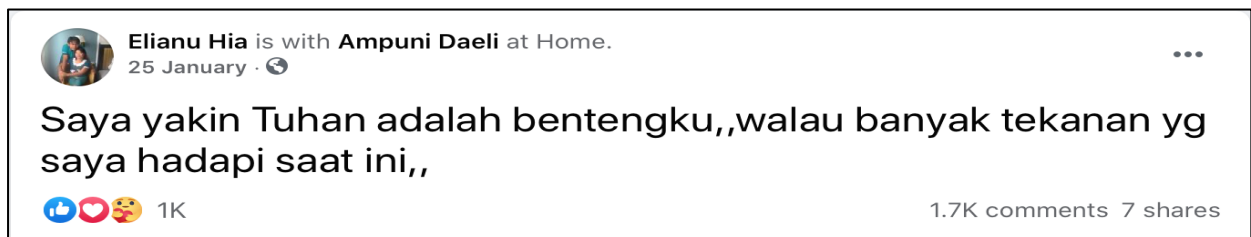


Image 6. Elianu Hia's Facebook Status. Retrieved from:  
[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=3455256477905771&id=100002643583389](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=3455256477905771&id=100002643583389)

This status also went viral, with many supported his action. However, there were contrasting opinions. Among many, the table below tries to depict notable example:

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<sup>25</sup> Elianu Hia's Facebook account. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/elianu.hia>

**The Hijab Attire Narratives in West Sumatra Public School (Based on Elianu Hia's Facebook)**

No	Pro	Contra
1	<p><i>“Namanya sekolah negeri, semua agama berhak, bukan milik satu agama. Ikuti peraturan pemerintah, bukan ikut aturan nenek moyang”</i></p> <p>Translated as: (It is a public school, all religions have the right not to belong to one religion. Follow the government regulations, not the ancestor)</p>	<p><i>“Dimano bumi dipijak, disitu langit dijunjuang”</i> (Where the earth was stepped on, there was a sky upheld).</p> <p>Translated as: (People, regardless of their background, should accept and adapt to local wisdom (<i>kearifan lokal</i>) that applies to everyone)</p>
2	<p><i>Semangat pak Elianu Hia. Siapa pun kamu. Apa pun agamamu. Di belahan Indonesia mana pun kamu berada. Kalau kamu mengalami perlakuan intoleran dan diskriminatif, jangan diam. Bersuaralah. Jangan karena ketakutanmu, sikap intoleran dan diskriminatif orang lain jadi dianggap sebagai biasa dan lumrah.</i></p> <p>Translated as: (Keep the spirit, Mr. Elianu Hia. Whoever you are. Whatever your religion. Wherever you are in Indonesia, if you experience intolerant and discriminatory treatment, don't be silent. Be loud. We don't want because of your fear, intolerant and discriminatory attitude toward others is considered as usual and normal)</p>	<p><i>“Aturan berjilbab itu Perda sudah dari dulu Pak. Kalau begini bapak sengaja jadi provokator nih. Gara-gara Bapak semua masyarakat Minang jadi gerah, ntar beneran diusir lho Pak!”</i></p> <p>Translated as: (The hijab rule is in the local regulations already. If this is the case, you (Elianu Hia) seem to be deliberately become a provocateur. Because of you, Minangkabau society became tense. You could really be expelled, sir!)</p>
3	<p><i>“Bapak Elianu Hia adalah seorang ayah yang sangat berani dan gigih memperjuangkan hak asasi anak gadisnya untuk tidak</i></p>	<p><i>Gara-gara lu semua sekolah negeri ini dicabut pakaian atribut agama tau lu. Gue tau lu mau Islam ini hancur kan</i></p> <p>Translated as:</p>

**The Hijab Attire Narratives in West Sumatra Public School (Based on Elianu Hia's Facebook)**

No	Pro	Contra
	<p><i>memakai hijab di sebuah sekolah negeri di kota Padang, karena agamanya memang tidak mewajibkannya.</i></p> <p>Translated as: (Elianu Hia is a fearless and persistent father to fight for his daughter human rights to not wearing hijab in a public school in Padang City because his religion does not require it)</p>	<p>(Thanks to you, religion attribute on school uniform revoked on all public schools in the country. I know you want to destroy Islam, right?)</p>
4	<p><i>“Berkat keberanian dan kegigihan beliau menguak radikalisme yang sudah terstruktur dalam dunia pendidikan Indonesia, akhirnya Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan pun turun tangan untuk membersihkan radikalisme.”</i></p> <p>Translated as: (Thanks to the courage and persistence of him to disclose radicalism which was structured in the Indonesian Education field, finally the Ministry of Education and Culture intervened to eradicate radicalism)</p>	<p><i>“Kalian minoritas tak punya otak, dikasih toleransi oleh mayoritas malah mencak-mencak. Ini sudah dimusyawarahkan, mengikuti suara terbanyak, gak mungkin mengikuti suara terendah”</i></p> <p>Translated as: (You minority don't have a brain, given tolerance by the majority but still have that anger. All of this has been discussed, and following the majority voice, we can't follow the minority voice)</p>
5	<p><i>“Sekolah negeri bukan madrasah”</i></p> <p>Translated as: (A public school isn't an Islamic-based school)</p>	<p><i>“Ini ya orangnya yang membuat orang Padang dihina, udah tinggal di Padang sekarang membuat malu orang sana”</i></p> <p>Translated as: (This is the person who made Padang people insulted, already living in Padang yet now has embarrassed the whole society there)</p>



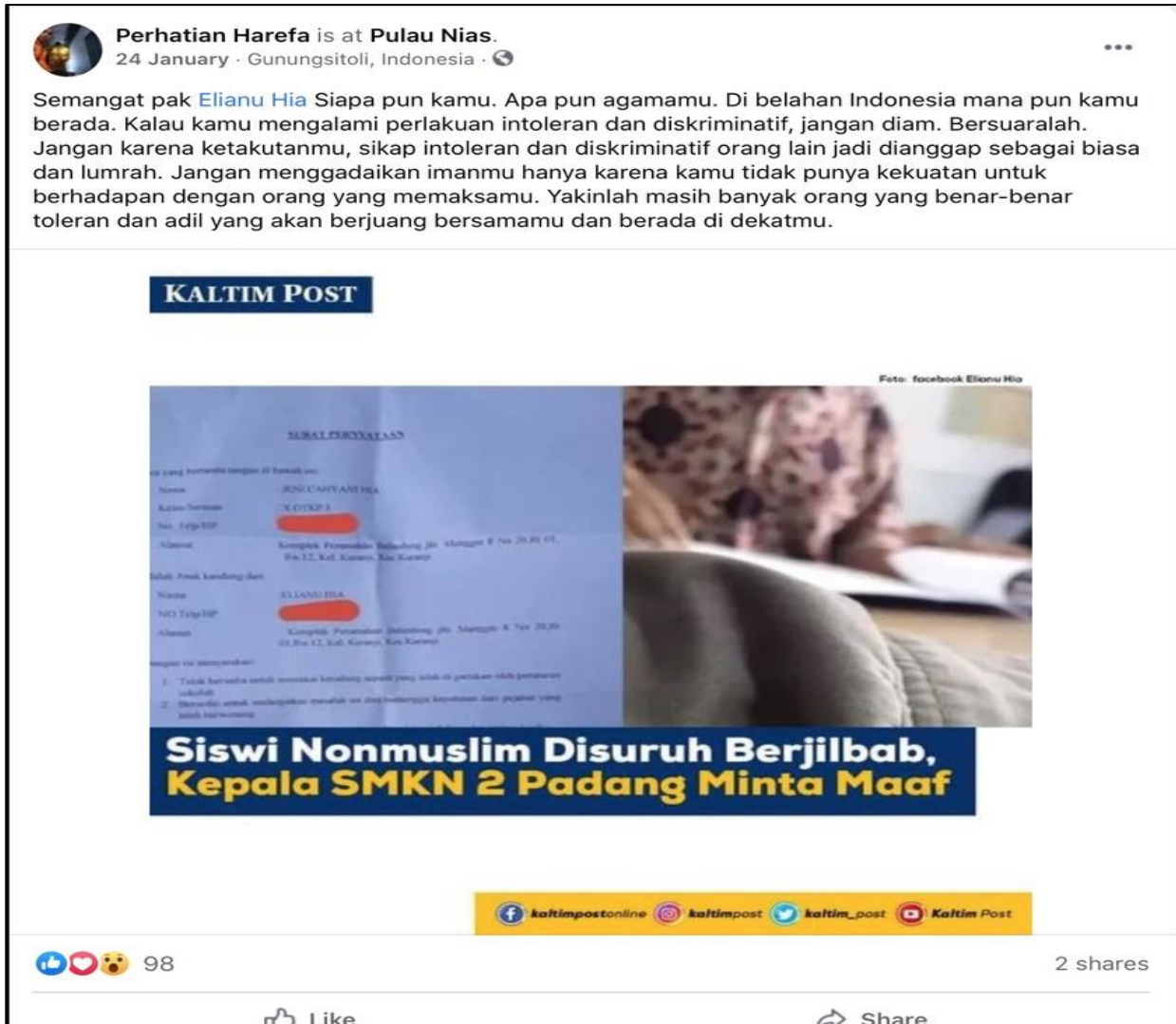


Image 7. Screenshot of Netizen Facebook Post Supported Elianu Hia. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/perhatian.harefa.9/posts/423718738954612>

Those kinds of commentaries need to be viewed with an interpretive paradigm as it opens up the possibility to understand their voices better. We can't see it merely as a little Facebook commentary, since many of them care enough to comment, but as a symbolic practice of representing Minangkabau collective identities. However discriminative it might sound, they were defending their local wisdom since hijab (as part of Islamic teaching) was always linked to their identity as Minangkabau. These also lay the basis for local processes that gradually clash with the state policy later.

Having said that, Minangkabau also needs to be recognized as having local wisdom by the others, be it the state, media, or general public. That's why the two notions of "*Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*" and "*Dimano Bumi dipijak, disitu langit dijunjuang*" were among the top words being used to demand others recognition toward their philosophy.

As a distinct ethnic group, they always adhere to Islamic law, *adat*, culture, and tradition that they have had for centuries. As Franz and Keebet von Benda Beckmann (2007) have explained in the past, Minangkabau has three grand normative orders (Islam, *adat*, and the state), which became their primary source of identification. By using the interpretive paradigm and giving the spaces to the subaltern positionality, we can better understand their identities, philosophies, and worldviews, then understand why any school should apply those normative grounds into its learning curriculum, regardless of its public-school status.

Thanks to Elianu's viral video, the broader public pressure the central government to act accordingly and end the discriminative act. The central government then issued quickly the three Ministerial Joint Decree, which clearly stated that all public schools around the country couldn't oblige, advise or prohibit the students from using uniform with specific religious attires. Therefore, ensuring the rights to the students (and also school officials) to choose their own uniform, whether it's linked to their religion or not.

However, there was an irritable feeling among Minangkabau since the issue started. The virality has skipped the importance of genuine Minangkabau democratic culture of deliberative discussion (*musyawarah mufakat*). For them, Elianu shouldn't make the case went viral (although he didn't have any intention)<sup>26</sup> and found the solution simply with dialogue until an agreement has been met. Thus, no need to record the video and making it viral. Let alone using a lawyer to forward the issue to the number one person in the republic, Joko Widodo.

What seemed like a simple school uniform issue, in reality, can act as a gateway to see how multiculturalism and diversity work in contemporary Indonesia. Apart from West Sumatra, there were other cases when public schools forced its schoolgirl to use the hijab. It usually happened in a region where Muslims were the majority of the population, and its values were upheld culturally. However, other public schools also have the same discriminatory regulation by entirely prohibiting the use of hijab.<sup>27</sup> This time, the discrimination happened when Moslem being the minority.

From the facts above, many analysts have stressed the problem of majoritarianism in some regions.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of the religion, the majority tends to discriminate against the other

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<sup>26</sup> Padang TV. 2021. Pengakuan Elianu Hia, Orang Tua Siswa Yang Saat Ini Viral Karena Permasalahan Berjilbab. News, 26 January 2021 5:05. <https://youtu.be/gyP5q0S-UdA>.

<sup>27</sup> FSGI Ungkap SKB 3 Menteri Soal Seragam Sekolah Masih Menimbulkan Misinformasi. (2021, February 9). Merdeka.com. <https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/fsgi-ungkap-skb-3-menteri-soal-seragam-sekolah-masih-menimbulkan-misinformasi.html>

<sup>28</sup> Rap/hp. (2021, January 25). Tata Kelola Kebhinekaan untuk Hapus Intoleransi di Sekolah. Tempo. <https://www.tempo.co/dw/4207/tata-kelola-kebhinekaan-untuk-hapus-intoleransi-di-sekolah>

by using the language of local wisdom and cultural values. What is interesting is that the notion of diversity wasn't interpreted exclusively but was constantly being challenged. As for Minangkabau, diversity also mean that other people need to respect their *adat*/tradition which was based on Islam (*Adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*). It was never a problem to educate their children to use uniforms according to their *adat* and religion. For them, the hijab acted as a sign of a faithful person, and the school must do its job.<sup>29</sup> A school can't be separated from *adat* and Islam, even if it's a public one.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note such a firm principle in Indonesia, Unity in Diversity (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika), that always have been undisputed as the nation principle, in today's reality, becomes a big "question mark" and leaving people questioned once again their commitment to not only stand tall to uphold the tolerance principle but also to appreciate the taken for granted diversity. All of this eye-opening situation started with the single act of hijab rejection at a public school.

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<sup>29</sup> Agriesta, D. (2021, January 23). Soal Siswi Non-Muslim di SMKN 2 Wajib Pakai Jilbab, Ini Tanggapan Mantan Wali Kota Padang. KOMPAS.Com. <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2021/01/23/16533041/soal-siswi-non-muslim-di-smkn-2-wajib-pakai-jilbab-ini-tanggapan-mantan-wali>

**CHAPTER 5**  
**DISPUTING THE UNDISPUTED:**  
**CONTESTING INTERPRETATIONS OF BHINNEKA TUNGGAL IKA**

**5.1. Have You Ever Tried Standing on Minangkabau Shoes?**

The first time I've heard the issue, I think of it in the simplest way: Every sane person could agree that public schools should be public in their truest sense. Hence it should not force religion-based attire on its students, especially those who were not believers of the religion. It was almost so easy; it makes you sound lunatic if you try to problematize it. But then I realized, after numerous discussions with my wife, a Minangkabau woman herself, that in Minangkabau, things were viewed differently.

She said if I looked at the news carefully, Minangkabau wasn't trying to defend the force use of hijab. They admitted that it was wrong and non-Muslim schoolgirls should not wear the hijab on any occasion. This fact tends to be overlooked by the public. While this might have to do with confirmation bias,<sup>30</sup> several Minangkabau figures voiced this. First, the school principal has apologized and said that it was the school's fault.<sup>31</sup> The Education Department Head, Adib Alfikri, has investigated to make sure the case will not happen again while ensuring no provincial regulation obliges non-Muslim to wear the hijab.<sup>32</sup> In a similar line, the Head of Communication and Information Office for West Sumatra, Jasman Rizal, also stated that the Provincial Government has never made a single regulation that obliges non-Muslim students to dress in Muslim attire at school.<sup>33</sup>

Minangkabau political representatives also responded. Among them, West Sumatra Parliament members, Maigus Nasir, pointed that the school regulation was clearly wrong and violated the laws. Hence, non-Muslim students should be able to wear the uniform without

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<sup>30</sup> The seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs, expectations, or a hypothesis in hand. See Nickerson, R. (1998). Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises. *Review of General Psychology*, 2, 175–220.

<sup>31</sup> Kampai, J. (2021, January 23). Kasus Siswi Nonmuslim Pakai Jilbab, Kepala SMK Negeri 2 Padang Minta Maaf. Detik.com. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5345362/kasus-siswi-nonmuslim-pakai-jilbab-kepala-smk-negeri-2-padang-minta-maaf>

<sup>32</sup> Sastra, Y. (2021, January 23). Disdik Sumbar: Tidak Ada Aturan Provinsi Siswa Non-Muslim Wajib Berjilbab. Kompas.id. <https://www.kompas.id/baca/nusantara/2021/01/23/disdik-sumbar-tidak-ada-aturan-provinsi-siswa-nonmuslim-wajib-berjilbab/>

<sup>33</sup> Indonesia, C. (2021, January 24). Kemendagri Minta Pemda Sumbar Cek Aturan Paksa Siswa Berhijab. nasional. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20210124102212-20-597663/kemendagri-minta-pemda-sumbar-cek-aturan-paksa-siswa-berhijab>

hijab.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the Governor of West Sumatra, Irwan Prayitno, openly admitted that the force use of hijab to non-Muslim in SMKN 2 Padang was a fault and should never happen again.<sup>35</sup> If they agreed that there shouldn't be any forced use of hijab in school, what's actually the problem for Minangkabau? Why are they rejecting the joint decree while many others celebrated it?.

From this point, I've realized that if I want to understand, I have to "empty the glass" first and willing to "stand on their shoes" to know the whole "panorama" from their point of view. And it wouldn't be a convenient job to do, knowing that there's a thin line between standing for anti-discrimination toward the minority, which was the guiding principle behind many human rights activists' reasoning, and anti-discrimination toward local wisdom as the aspiration from Minangkabau. Of course, both should be protected at all costs if we genuinely want to continue respecting diversity.

## **5.2. There Should be no Discrimination: Looking through the Government Perspective**

Looking at the government's perspective, it was always a straightforward notion that every school should respect diversity, especially each student's religion. Besides, the 1945 Constitution is guaranteeing the constitutional rights of every citizen, including freedom of religion. Therefore, no need to regulate and force the uniform based on religion, no matter how much the believers. Majoritarianism shouldn't prevail in Indonesia, and minorities should be protected at all costs. The schools are the starting point for this issue. Align with this spirit, Commissioner of Indonesian Child Protection Commission, Retno Listyarti, commented that schools should strengthen the values of diversity and unity while upholding human rights.<sup>36</sup>

On a virtual national dialogue, The Minister of Religion, Yaquut Cholil Qoumas, has said that the government doesn't want discrimination based on majoritarianism to happen in other regions. According to him, today, societies live in a 'global village' where people are interrelated. He stressed that one act of discrimination in some places could lead to other discrimination in other areas.<sup>37</sup> By this logic, the government should stop the "chain of

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<sup>34</sup> Sastra, Y. (2021b, January 28). Belajar dari Pengalaman SMK 2 Padang. Kompas.id.

<https://www.kompas.id/baca/dikbud/2021/01/29/belajar-dari-pengalaman-smk-2-padang/>

<sup>35</sup> CNN Indonesia. 2021. "Paksa Siswi Non Muslim Berjilbab, Gubernur Sumbar: Sekolah Khilaf". 24 Jan 2021, News Videos 16:08. <https://youtu.be/g4Lxi8H9AC4>.

<sup>36</sup> Sastra, Y. (2021b, January 28). Belajar dari Pengalaman SMK 2 Padang. Kompas.id.

<https://www.kompas.id/baca/dikbud/2021/01/29/belajar-dari-pengalaman-smk-2-padang/>

<sup>37</sup> Kabar Sejuk. 2021. "Dialog Nasional SKB 3 Menteri tentang Seragam Sekolah | KABAR SEJUK". 19 March 2021, Live National Dialogue 1:47:15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQJ-cusyVvI&t=78s>.

discrimination” by reacting quickly with more precise regulation. Later, still at the same event, The Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, also pointed that the decree is not a new thing. It is only a way to emphasize the existence of higher norms of Pancasila Ideology, 1945 Constitution, and Laws. People shouldn’t be shocked because “the game” has always been this way, and the government is just re-emphasizing the notion.<sup>38</sup> The government’s intention was simple and makes sense: to protect the rights of every student, while guarding the principle of tolerance, non-discrimination, and diversity, in every public schools: the institution that embodies the national ideology.



Image 8. Screenshot of Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim explaining the joint decree in a national dialogue on Youtube. Retrieved from: <https://youtu.be/UQJ-cusyVvI>

### 5.3. Giving the Spaces to Minangkabau Voices: The Dynamic of Strategic Essentialism in Practice

Months of observing the issue, I never thought that this personal issue has continued and gradually become a heated national debate. It all seems unbelievable. Once again, this was a sign of the power of social media we should never forget. There was never such thing as a “private room” when everything is posted online. The boundary between internal and external is so blurred, one dialogue between a father and a teacher has triggered millions of people to question themselves and take a stance.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*

Responded to the central government act of issuing the joint decree, many Minangkabau sees the joint decree as problematic, be it culturally, politically, or legally. Special attention was put on verse 3 that states, “In order to protect the rights of students, educators, and education personnel as referred to in the second Dictum, local governments and schools may not oblige, order, require, advise, or prohibit the use of uniforms and attributes with specific religious characteristics.” Minangkabau was having no problem with other verses. It’s only about these words in verses 3, that regional governments and schools “can’t oblige or advise students,” that became their central objection towards the joint decree. For them, it violates intertwined religio-socio-cultural norms that has lived there for yeears. In other words, although guaranteeing fundamental human rights, the joint decree wasn’t respecting the local wisdom enough, particularly to Minangkabau *adat*. It is around these heated discourses several Minangkabau elites has spoken and try to portray Minangkabau as one unified and homogenized ethnic group, which is a strategic essentialism in practice to defend their identity.

One of the most outspoken figures to the issue was Genius Umar, the Mayor of Pariaman, part of West Sumatra Province. Among other regional heads in Indonesia whose region would be affected by the joint decree, he was the one who quickly responded to represent his people’s voices. Blatantly, he rejected the joint decree on several occasions, which has triggered public opinion towards a more intolerant Minangkabau. On a dialogue with tvOne, he stressed the local wisdom and that this decree was not suitable to be applied to his city.

*“Pariaman is already having its norms and local wisdom on how children should be dressed. Although there was no regional regulation (Peraturan Daerah) stating this, non-written norms applied to every child there. For non-Muslim children, there was never an obligatory rule for them to use Muslim attire. It has been there for a long time... I think it would bear new problems so that the established structure would change. People were getting used to this situation, they are accepting the others, but they have their norms to regulate their attire. I think this joint decree isn’t necessary. I also point out to the central government to see the local wisdom each region has. We live in a regional autonomy era, Laws no 23, that the central government acknowledges the local wisdom of each region. So, please, pay attention to local wisdom. Don’t try to regulate all things, such as the attire issue. That was such correction I’ve said (to central government).”<sup>39</sup> - Genius Umar.*

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<sup>39</sup> tvOne. 2021. “Tolak SKB 3 Menteri, Walikota Pariaman Genius Umar Ngotot Jaga Norma Daerah | tvOne”. 18 Feb 2021, News Talk 6:34. <https://youtu.be/SdPxpYw2vD8>.



Image 9. Screenshot of Genius Umar Rejection Toward the Joint Decree on a Dialogue with the tvOne. Retrieved from: <https://youtu.be/SdPxpYw2vD8>

While the statement that no one in his city, Pariaman, has forced non-Muslim to use the hijab and everything was harmonious might seem essentialistic and can be a source of new debate, the notion that diversity should also respect local wisdom is crucial to understand Minangkabau voices and positionality towards the issue. Because to this date, it seemed that it hadn't been the primary concern by the government, with the focus on respecting fundamental human rights, mainly individual religious rights. The interpretation of respecting the *Bhinneka*, those who are different, can be viewed differently by each party. While the government sees it in terms of religion that the individual minority should be treated equally, Umar (and might be other regional heads) demands for acknowledgement to treat local wisdom uniquely, that local wisdom should be safeguarded, maintained, and preserved, while at the same time still guarding individual religious rights.

It's on this matter Modood (2013) notion of cosmopolitan and communitarian multiculturalism should be located. The governments and many supporters of the joint decree seemed to interpret *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* within cosmopolitan multiculturalism in mind, that respected and guarantees individual rights, therefore no one should be discriminated in every public school. This notion emphasized individuals and minority, which in this occasion is Jeni Hia and other non-Muslims schoolgirls, to be able to choose their uniform and preferences



based on their rights which is respected by the state and community. Conversely, Umar voiced his rejection based on his understanding about *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* communitarian multiculturalism that accommodates not only individual rights but also group rights. He, as an elite who represent Minangkabau in national media, demands that the governments should be fair, not only in relation with Minangkabau but also every distinct ethnic group that have their own local wisdom and way of life, even long before the Republic of Indonesia existed.

He also thinks that this joint decree was overgeneralized and treated each region with the same treatment, which is not a fair act. For him, there's no need for such a joint decree between three ministries to address this simple issue. His suggestion was for the Ministry of Education and Culture to send a cautionary letter to the Governor of West Sumatra, who then reprimand the school principal. He believes that the bureaucratic procedure would do best to solve the problem, without needing for such a fuss.

Apart from that socio-political reasoning, Umar was also stating the educational reason behind his rejection. He said that education was also meant to be a character-building process influenced by its surroundings, particularly religion. If a society was primarily Muslim, then it should be based on Islamic characteristics. The same principle happens in other regions when influenced by other religions; the students should be educated with adherence to that religion. He also pointed that it was part of his people's aspirations that needs to be addressed to the central government. He said that he was chosen by the people to lead them to uphold the value. Later, he also noted that the central government needs to seriously involve each region when making a policy, mainly when it affected them, so the people's aspirations and its policy input would be ready to be implemented<sup>40</sup>. This way, such a premature decision wouldn't be issued before a considerable attention given concerning each region situation.

Other figures which showed attention regarding the issue were Fauzi Bahar, the Mayor of Padang for ten years, serving from 2004 – 2014. Many referred to a policy started in his tenure when looking for a legal explanation behind exponential hijab use for schoolgirls in Padang. At first, it was merely some advice before transformed into a Mayor Instruction No.451.442/BINSOS-iii/2005 titled *“Implementing the Requirement that Teenagers Recite the Quran in the Morning, Anti-Lottery/Drugs, and Islamic Attire for Muslim/Muslimah Students at Primary Schools, Junior High Schools, and Senior High Schools in Padang.”* The notion that schoolgirls should use hijab stated in Article 10, that “Muslim students at primary schools,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid

Islamic madrasah, junior high schools, and senior high schools must wear Muslim/Muslimah attire; non-Muslims should adopt [long skirts for girls and long pants for boys].”<sup>41</sup> Yet, some schools interpret that as an obligation, no matter student’s religion.<sup>42</sup>

Bahar was spoken many times in the national media to explain the reason behind his policy. When asked about his comments regarding the joint decree, he boldly questioned the Minister of Education and Culture regarding the meaning of “education.” He stated that the minister seems to confuse the difference between education and science by saying:

*“What we do here is education. (By declaring the joint decree), he (Minister of Education and Culture) is prohibiting education. Is he the Minister of Education or Sciences?! Educating can’t be done solely with advice. Does he even understand education?! Secondly, we rather uphold the culture. The Laws guarantee. If the Minangkabau culture of baju kurung and selendang be removed, what kind of country would we be? Instead, is it where the Bhinneka (diversity) is located. What doesn’t make sense is when the teachers who advise the students to be good are given punishment. It isn’t logical for me. What kind of teacher wants to harm, bad for their students? The teacher is a father, a mother in school. The character-building process is in the school. When the teacher regulates them, the regulation is prohibited (by the central government). I don’t understand it.”*<sup>43</sup> – Fauzi Bahar.

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<sup>41</sup> Human Rights Watch Report. (2021). “I Wanted to Run Away” Abusive Dress Codes for Women and Girls in Indonesia”. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/03/18/i-wanted-run-away/abusive-dress-codes-women-and-girls-indonesia>

<sup>42</sup> Briantika, A., Apinino, R., & Briantika, A. (2021, January 26). Rombak Peraturan Diskriminatif Wajib Jilbab di Sekolah Sumbar. *tirto.id*. <https://tirto.id/rombak-peraturan-diskriminatif-wajib-jilbab-di-sekolah-sumbar-f9CC>

<sup>43</sup> PADANG TV. 2021. “SKB 3 Menteri Resahkan Masyarakat Sumbar”. 16 February 2021. News, 2:44. <https://youtu.be/398VjqBgxkI>.



Image 10. Fauzi Bahar explained why the joint decree isn't needed in West Sumatra.  
Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/398VjqBgxkI>

Again, we can see the pattern here. It is about two contesting interpretations regarding the Bhinneka. The central government, backed by human rights activists, intellectuals, religious figures, and the general public, respecting diversity as a means to uphold the principle of tolerance and non-discrimination towards the different others in a diverse country: A pure demand to uphold the cosmopolitan multiculturalism principle. There is nothing wrong with this conception, and Minangkabau fully accepted it. Yet, for Minangkabau, respecting diversity can't stop with tolerance towards those who are different, particularly the minority, but it also means to uphold local wisdom, values, and tradition, which is more of a communitarian multiculturalism. It is around these conflicting interpretation of Bhinneka, diversity and multiculturalism the debate happened between the governments and Minangkabau.

The question then, what's being the reason behind the communitarian Minangkabau, then rejecting the joint decree? A special attention has to do with its verses 3 since it violates the lived values of Minangkabau society: To educate and guide their childrens (anak kemenakan) to behave under Islamic values and *adat*. The sentence "Local governments and schools may not oblige, order, require, advise, or prohibit the use of uniforms and attributes with specific religious characteristics" was seen as dangerous since schools can't do anything if their Muslim schoolgirls prefer not to use the hijab. They don't want this to happen since the school was seen as an effective place to educate their children about Islamic values, their source of

identification. It seems that this spirit was the main reason behind the Minangkabau rejection of the joint decree.

Another objection argument for Minangkabau was the governmental act of homogenizing, which treat each region with the same treatment by issuing the joint decree to all areas. The joint decree was seen as a “top-down” policy logic that was in a clash with the “bottom-up” local, cultural mechanisms that should uphold democratization for Minangkabau. As Ashforth’s (2005) study has shown, insensitivity to such localized cultural understandings often derails democratization. It was seen as not only insensitive toward each region but also disrespecting the local processes mechanism. The issue happened in a Vocational High School, which is under the supervision of the provincial government. Besides, several related regional bodies were actually handling the problem. Yet, with issuing of the joint decree, the government has skipped the process and violates the principle of decentralization and regional autonomy.

*“The central government always talks about Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. Diversity. However, this joint decree actually eliminates that diversity... It opens the space for students to dress free, which is not following local and religious teachings”<sup>44</sup> – Fauzi Bahar.*

For Minangkabau, schools aren’t just regular schools, even if it’s a public one. Schools can’t be detached from its more significant influential environment of family, tribes, and *adat*, a whole Minangkabau World (*Alam Minangkabau*), as well as a place to cultivate student’s behavior towards religiosity and modesty. This way, the hijab can’t be seemed simply as usual linings to cover schoolgirl’s hair for religious reasons per se. At the societal level, it has a deep web of meanings as it can symbolize the people. A fabric of their identity and a representation of their existence in a globalized times.

Another influential figure who responded was Gusrizal Gazahar. A chairman of the Indonesian Ulama Council of West Sumatra himself, he was part of Tungku Tigo Sajarangan, a unit of leadership in Minangkabau consisting of Niniak Mamak (Customs), Alim Ulama (Religion), and Cadiak Pandai (Intellect). Usually called Buya Gusrizal, he was furious with the problem-solving mechanism concerning the issue. He didn’t understand why this simple

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<sup>44</sup> Triyoga, H., & Mardiansyah, A. (2021, February 17). Tolak SKB 3 Menteri, Fauzi Bahar Kritik Keras Nadiem Makarim. viva.com. [https://www.viva.co.id/berita/nasional/1349050-tolak-skb-3-menteri-fauzi-bahar-kritik-keras-nadiem-makarim?page=all&utm\\_medium=all-page](https://www.viva.co.id/berita/nasional/1349050-tolak-skb-3-menteri-fauzi-bahar-kritik-keras-nadiem-makarim?page=all&utm_medium=all-page)

case, which can be solved at school internally, went far until the broader public, reaching the Ministerial desk, even the President.

He also questioned why the girl's parent was using a lawyer to solve the problem at school. In Minangkabau, deliberative discussion (musyawarah mufakat) and the consensus was a highly regarded mechanism. A legal – formal tool was used if the situation is too complex and no agreement was achieved. In other words, why bother using a lawyer and forward the case when you can discuss it the first time?.

After a meeting with the school principal, he found no enforcement to wear the hijab for non-Muslim schoolgirls. Hence, no framing of “forced use of hijab” is needed. It might sound odd, but Jeni and her parents were having an agreement to follow the school’s code of conduct, that is to use the hijab before the school began. So, legally speaking, what was seen in the media as enforcement to wear the hijab wasn’t actually enforcement if they stick to the rules and agreement between them. However, of course, it leaves a big question mark for any school out there. It was a bizarre regulation to ask non-Muslim students to wear the hijab at school. I’m not blaming both of them because it was a clear discriminative act towards non-Muslim students, and there should be no place for discrimination. Yet, it’s still confusing why the agreement has been met for the first time.



Image 11. Buya Gusrizal Gazahar Explaining the Hijab Affair Live on Padang TV. Retrieved from: <https://youtu.be/DJCCzfwDHPo>

After some discussion with the school officials, Buya Gusrizal feels the case has been framed by certain powerful groups, making West Sumatra a bullying object of intolerant and anti-diversity group. He then laments the Minister of Education, Nadiem Makarim, who responded to the case quickly but not correctly. He even invites Nadiem to discuss human rights, diversity, and character-building, directly in West Sumatra. He continues:

*“Remember, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is different but still one, not homogenizing and eliminating differences. For the people of West Sumatra, the majority of whom are Minangkabau, covering their aurat is part of their wisdom and adat based on the Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah principle. In this case, the Minangkabau people are also implementing their wisdom. So, if this is considered a conflict with Bhinneka, I want to ask first, what does Bhinneka mean? Should traditions, because they are based on the Kitabullah, be erased? If this is the case, it means that the people who behave in this way will certainly be faced with the principle of the Minangkabau. Covering the aurat is part of the Shari'a, and the Shari'a is the basis of the adat in Minangkabau. Therefore what has been regulated is by religious guidance, local wisdom, protected by existing regulations. I underline that there are no regional regulations that bind non-Muslims. Let alone those rules. Even Islamic law does not bind non-Muslims (in case of obligatory covering the aurat)”<sup>45</sup> – Gusrizal Gazahar.*

The central language regarding these debates is also about Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. Minangkabau elites have shown that the interpretation of Bhinneka is so open and the people are in dying need of such an official interpretations that will do justice to all. Because at this point, it seems to me that the nation are in confusion to define what is Bhinneka, or diversity, and how to implement it within the proper framework of multiculturalism. The ideal situation would be to ensure individuals and minority rights, acknowledging differences while at the same time also respecting lived local wisdoms of ethnic groups. In other words, to search for a new notion that answer the tension between cosmopolitan and communitarian multiculturalism.

Another interesting notion is about the affirmation of Minangkabau identity to set the boundaries between those who are true people of Minangkabau and those who are not. This politics of belonging is making much more clearer with hijab affair as it steadily grows and become the source for their identification to speak about who they are and who they are not.

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<sup>45</sup> Padang TV. 2021. [LIVE] : Dialog Detak Sore - Isu Jilbab di SMKN 2 Padang Diframing?. Senin, 25 Januari 2021. News Dialogue, 25:46. <https://youtu.be/DJCCzfwDHPo>.

The boundaries and signification is set clear for women of Minangkabau, that they are the one who use hijab in their everyday life since it has constructed as an objective symbol of not only adhering Islam and *adat*, but also a sign of a true Minangkabau women. Besides, the hijab also acts as religious boundaries between Muslim and Non-Muslim since it only regulates Muslim women, and never of them non-Muslim. For Buya Gusrizal, he didn't mind the others business, therefore no acts of enforcement should take place towards non-Muslim and non-Minangkabau women.

Still at the same event, Buya Gusrizal pointed that he won't allow any parties to make a policy that would affect a detaching process of aurat cover, or hijab, for every Minangkabau's children. He would gather all Ulama, Niniak Mamak, Bundo Kanduang, and other influential elites in society to face the issue together. For him, what has been a demarcation in Bhinneka, that West Sumatra, with its unique local wisdom, should be recognized as part of national culture, so no other parties should eliminate this situation. It is also to note that the hijab use wasn't a minor issue in grassroots everyday life and has been treated with serious manner in West Sumatera. The hijab and the schoolgirls belongs to the bigger Minangkabau society and no other force, politics or power should change this situation. In other words, it's about their identity as a distinct ethnic group.

What these Minangkabau elites have done can be seen as a strategic essentialism in practice. They speak to the media and the others, explaining what is the truest identity of Minangkabau, while at the same time represent the people grievances and uniting them as one and unified group. This essentialism is considered strategic since they have common goals of rejecting the joint decree to be applied for their childrens. Altogether, they fight to preserve the rights guaranteed by laws and constitution to govern their childrens behavior, attitude and religiosity.

#### **5.4. On Being a Good Moslem: Understanding the Other Half of Minangkabau Identity**

To answer what's the meaning of hijab for Minangkabau, it's crucial to understand the three major normative orders. Historically, these three has always been there and define the way Minangkabau lived their life. The three grand normative orders are *adat*, Islam, and The State, which have shaped each other. Their relationships have varied historically (Abdullah, 1966; Benda-Beckmann, 1988). Among those three, *adat* was acted as the oldest layer of normative orders, although it was partially superseded by other worldviews, symbolic universes, and legal orders.

Minangkabau identity is never a fixed entity. After years of doing ethnography there, Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (2007) concluded that Minangkabau's identity was “ambivalent, multilayered, full of contradictions and tensions.” Having said that, the duality of *adat* and Islam has remained an important source of identification for most Minangkabau. Both are inseparable and expressed with the saying ‘*Adat* is founded on the *syarak*, the *syarak* is founded on the holy Koran’ (*Adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*, abbreviated as *ABSSBK*)<sup>46</sup>. These principles remained deeply ingrained until today, as Minangkabau facing contemporary challenges on their identity.

That’s why, what seemed to be simple for non-Minangkabau people, that is, to not enforce and advise the use of hijab for schoolgirls, might confuse Minangkabau. It seems to contradicts the principle of tolerance, unity in diversity (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*), and the higher regulation of Laws, 1945 Constitution, and Pancasila (Indonesian Ideology). Yet, for Minangkabau, the school has always been an important field to educate their children of *adat* and Islam. The school can’t be detached from *adat* and Islam influences. This is not to say that Minangkabau favors the Qur’an over the ‘law of the state’, since they don’t have problems with and adhere the state regulation: Never been a single voice heard from Minangkabau people to become a separatist and become independent from The Republic of Indonesia. To give an image, since the elementary years all pupils in public schools were given an added particular course named by Budaya Alam Minangkabau (*BAM/Minangkabau World Culture*) with emphasis on *adat* and Islam (Agustina, 2012). These facts alone showed that *adat* and Islam have been inside the schools for a long time. And probably will stay for many generations to come.

Having said that, hijab can’t be detached from its milieu and lived experience of Minangkabau. It was seen as a sign of good attitude of the schoolgirls and an adherence toward Islamic and *adat* teachings, which they see as important things to cultivate in schools. No public school should be free and secular enough, separating themselves from Islamic and Minangkabau values, as they view that these rights is guaranteed in Indonesian constitution. For Minangkabau, to educate students means not only as purely academic achievement process but also as a process in which certain positive character is build in everyday life, steadily towards the goals of making them as a religious and faithful person in the future.

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<sup>46</sup> “*Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*” means that Minangkabau tradition/culture were based on Islam, Islam based on Holy Koran.



## CHAPTER 6

### NON MUSLIM SCHOOLGIRLS STORIES AT THE END OF THE NARRATIVES



Image 12. Remote Interviewing with Interlocutors using Zoom.

#### 6.1. Cover the Identity, Disclose the Reality

This part would consist of the story of two non-Muslim schoolgirls in Minangkabau who have been using hijab since elementary school. Having known what's on the mind of Minangkabau cultural elites before, it's compulsory to investigate everyday life of diversity in Minangkabau, mainly through the lenses of two ordinary non-Muslim schoolgirls who were affected primarily by the discourses and policy.

At first, I planned the interview to be conducted separately and be a one by one conversation. I've assumed that I can gather much experience, feelings, and opinions if I did it in two-person dialogue, heart to heart, opening up the opportunity for each other to understand the situation better constructively. Yet, it wasn't the case. For an unknown reason, they both preferred it to be conducted together. Of course, I'm not forcing them to my plan and let them choose any way as long as they were comfortable talking with me. It turns out that it's the best way to do it because they were even braver and confident sharing the experiences when they

did it together. Nevertheless, it was a story based on a remote interview, distanced 10.510 km between The Hague and West Sumatra, with the help of Zoom Application.

Since it was a highly sensitive issue, for safety reasons, I prefer to use a fake name to cover their identity: Diana and Susan. Both are two non-Muslim schoolgirls at 1 Senior High School Solok (SMAN 1 Solok), West Sumatra. They were born and raised in Solok, although their parents are of the Batak tribe. They aren't in the same class and have a different starting point of using hijab. As a Catholic believer, Diana has been using the hijab since six grade in elementary school. Shocked, I was curious whether there were school rules concerning hijab use or any enforcement from teachers or school officials to wear it. She explained that there wasn't any school obligation or enforcement toward hijab use. It was up to the students themselves. Then, why bother wearing it?.

## **6.2. Experience and Feelings: Wearing the Hijab as Christians Students**

I was curious about their first-time experience wearing hijab. Can you imagine Non-Muslim students wearing hijab at a public school? It is their story.

Diana said that she didn't wear the hijab during her days in elementary school. No regulations, teachers, or school personnel forced her to wear a hijab. She has all the right whether to wear it or not. Until she became a sixth-grader, she realized that sooner she would become a junior high school student. With full consciousness and without enforcement, she changes her mind.

*"I started using hijab since the sixth-grader because I want to get into 1 Junior High School (SMPN 1 Solok). There, new students aren't immediately using the new uniform. So, the students have to wear elementary school uniforms first. That's why I wear long skirts and hijab because if I don't wear it will make me look different from others. Since I've changed my school uniform by using hijab" – Diana*

After five years of using the hijab as a Catholic, I asked her what kind of hijab she used. It was a white, simple, and ready-to-wear hijab, the same as the other schoolgirls wearing. No experience is needed to wear it. Interestingly, when in Junior High School, she was taught by her cousins, who are also Christian, to wear custom-made hijab. For her, a Christian wearing hijab at school wasn't a new experience because she has seen one of her family wearing it. It is a strange situation, but it is what is happening in West Sumatra.

At first, Diana didn't know that all parts of the hair should be covered. It was essential for women's *aurat* (part of the body to be covered) in Islamic teaching. She has long hair, and that wasn't covered with the hijab wholly. Seeing the hair on her back, her friends told her that hair is an *aurat* for us. She reacted accordingly. She tied her hair in two, so the hair wouldn't be shown up at the back.

And what about the parents? What are their opinions on seeing their daughter wearing a hijab? She explained that her parents have no problem and accepted it because they realized it was their daughter's willingness. Her case might be different from Jeni Hia, who rejected wearing hijab. But, in West Sumatra, the non-Muslim schoolgirls' acceptance toward hijab use was common. I realized that it was wrong since their acceptance shouldn't be taken for granted, and I'm not in a position to defend the *status quo*.

Conversely, I highly respect the rights of non-Muslim students to not wearing hijab, and they should be able to do so. These rights were guaranteed in the Indonesian constitution, and all citizens should adhere to the principle. Yet, in this matter, I was trying to depict the ongoing social fact in West Sumatra, an occurrence as it is happening. In reality, D wasn't the only non-Muslim schoolgirls to wear hijab. Meanwhile, Jeni was the only one who has the bravery and voiced her rejection. Jeni alone has opened everyone's eyes, including me, about the situation there. No wonder her case was becoming viral.

In this situation, we can understand why some Minangkabau elites explaining to some national media that there was no problem of tolerance or discrimination in West Sumatra. According to them, everything went well, and society was always in harmony, despite Human Rights Watch's (2021) findings has shown otherwise.<sup>47</sup> I'm not going to tell other discrimination issues because of the limited space. What I want to say that it was common for non-Muslim schoolgirls to wear hijab in West Sumatra public schools, and many of them realized and accepted it with full consciousness. Many commentaries explained that their preference may have been guided by individual choice and freedom of belief may be the truth. It's like a silent acceptance between them, where no one knows whether it is a pure willingness or an enforced one, which complicated with the verbal 'indifference' by Minangkabau. It is in this sense the Minangkabau elites have captured and represents the situation to the broader public. However, both of my interlocutors have explained that they wear the hijab because they

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<sup>47</sup> Human Rights Watch Report. (2021). I Wanted to Run Away: Abusive Dress Codes for Women and Girls in Indonesia. Accessed via <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/03/18/i-wanted-run-away/abusive-dress-codes-women-and-girls-indonesia>

simply don't want to look different: It isn't comfortable being the different one among hundred others schoolgirls with hijab. It is understandable.

Different story for Susan. She has been using hijab since kindergarten age, but only on Friday. That's why she rarely went to school on Friday. When I asked why, she told me that because the students mostly learn about Islam on that day, and she wasn't too comfortable. She then wears hijab since first-grader at elementary school because it was written at the school rules. Compared to Diana, who had more freedom, Susan had no choice and had to use the hijab since day one at school, from Monday until Saturday.

*"The rule is that the first time you enter the school, there's a list of attributes that have to be worn at school. The hijab was already there. So we have to use". – Susan*

The obligatory use of hijab for schoolgirls sounds odd to me. As a Jakarta city-bred man, there was no such thing as hijab obligation since elementary school. In fact, from my elementary until high school times, some fewer schoolgirls wear hijab to the school than those who weren't. The schoolgirls who wear the hijab were the minority at school. Knowing the different situations in West Sumatra has intrigued me to dig deeper to understand its culture and tradition.

Having said that, both of my interlocutors came from different elementary schools, and that has affected their hijab use. While Diana was learned from one of Solok Regency schools, Susan was at Solok city. Diana said that she was given the freedom to use the hijab or not in Solok regency, which wasn't the case for Susan. Solok city turned out to be way stricter than its neighbors in terms of hijab use at school. That's why Susan has been using it since her early days of kindergarten.

### **6.3. Socialization, Internalization and Habituation of Islamic Values at School: Understanding The Minangkabau Education by the Hijab Use**

Susan wasn't alone in using the hijab at her elementary school. She was using a hijab with her ten Christian friends. There were no questions, protests, or even rejection coming from them. It has always been like this for years, and they adapt to the situation. Susan depicted how she feels as below:

*"In elementary school, in the beginning, because I was accustomed to it, I was shy to be different from the others. So, although we also have some Christian friends, there*

*are about 10 of us, but we still wear hijab altogether. It feels like everybody will always looking at us (if we're not wearing the hijab)'' – Susan.*

We can infer from that statement that it was not just about the school regulation that matters the most but the culture and meaning of wearing the hijab. In Minangkabau, education was meant to be a place to foster the attitude toward Islamic religiosity because students were considered as *anak kemenakan* (children, niece, and nephew) that should be educated with habituation even though it should force them to behave accordingly. The obligatory use of hijab for schoolgirls then should be viewed as socialization, internalization, and habituation of Minangkabau identity. Like Fauzi Bahar has said before, it isn't education if it's without enforcement. In this context, the spirit was different from what the central government has pointed with the joint decree, that every student has the right to choose their uniform, whether linked to religious attributes or not. This spirit was seen as freeing up the education and students and emphasizing the students themselves, which is not in line with the Minangkabau way of educating students. For Minangkabau, this liberating spirit isn't liberating at all; conversely, it has endangered their local wisdom, direct or indirectly.

The habituation use of hijab even continues outside the school. Diana was shy to put off her hijab outside her school, although no school rules applied. She will wait until she got home, then removing the hijab from her head. She doesn't want to look different from other schoolgirls and respecting the culture of Minangkabau. Furthermore, she would continue using it and confusing others her true religion, at least from the outside.

Then I asked about their school situation today, particularly after the joint decree being issued. How many non-Muslim schoolgirls are there? How many of them are using hijab? Diana said that at least seven non-Muslim schoolgirls were in the same grade as them (class XI). All of them were wearing hijab. Diana even noted that all schoolgirls at the school are using hijab until today, regardless of religion. In a given situation, you can imagine the social pressure these schoolgirls face if they said no to hijab. These situated identification have smoothly pressurized schoolgirls to conform accordingly.

Susan then explained that the school already has the data of its students since the beginning. It would be the basis to regulates students' uniforms, be it boys and girls, even for the non-Muslim. Susan had her hijab directly from school as a uniform package. However, both of my interlocutors accepted this situation because they have heard and known the school

rules and culture before entering it. Their parents were also already knowing the consequences if they decided to register their daughters to public school, that is, to wear hijab.

At their school, the hijab wasn't limited to the schoolgirls only. A new civic education (*Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan/PKn*) teacher who recently moved to the school from Medan is a Christian, but she is using a hijab too. On one occasion, she explained that the school principal actually allowed her not to use the hijab, yet he said, "*Would you want to look different to others when you're not using the hijab?*" Hearing this, she then chooses to wear a hijab. The situation at the school is highly related to conformity. Schoolgirls, teachers, and school officials, simply don't want to look different from others. You can actually not using the hijab, but you can't bear the feeling of being the only one deviating from the norms. It isn't comfortable and not an easy thing to do. That's why wearing a hijab can be the symbol of harmony in Minangkabau. The dominant culture of Islam hegemonizes every aspect of life, especially women's body since it was acted as an apparent sign of identity.

My interlocutors told me that they have to wear hijab whenever they encounter school matters, be it offline or online. They will use the hijab when they go to school. Or, they realized that they would see their teachers, no need to meet them directly, even if it is mediated online meetings through Zoom Application. However, in times of online learning, the duality of identity was made visible as the hijab is used in a different situation. For instance, when the teacher isn't asking the students to activate the camera, Diana will not use the hijab. She will leave her hair open as she studies. But, she will use it immediately whenever the teacher asked the students to activate the camera. She never told anyone about her dual identity.

Learning from my interlocutors, I think of identity as an "on/off button" when one could use interchangeably, depending on the situation being faced. It's a situated identity being played in different context, to present oneself to others, based on one definition of the situation. She can acts as a Muslim momentarily, at her front stage and required socially, while removing her true identity as a Christian at her back stage, her truest self. It is not limited to Diana because there were countless cases of people "turning on" different identities to achieve certain goals. Her case only shows a small portion of how identity is so flexible, even though it is about a sensitive issue of faith and religion.

The process of socialization, internalization, and habituation of hijab use as Islamic teaching can be seen directly from the school banner, which says "*Muslim attires area*" (*Kawasan Busana Muslim*). Again, it is not a novelty in West Sumatra, particularly its public

schools. I was a little bit surprised hearing this the first time because there is none of this banner in Jakarta's public schools. Although not too big, this banner can be interpreted as the obligatory use of hijab in school areas. It is a signifier of Islamic values in practice because it guides all related parties inside the school to behave accordingly.

Both of my interlocutors might have been using hijab for a long time. Yet, I want to know what's on their mind. Did they ever think about why they have to use hijab at school, even though they are Christian? Did they ever think of bravely putting off the hijab at school or coming to school without the hijab? For Diana, she never thinks about it. But never in an extreme way, like removing it at school. She prefers to wear a hijab rather than to look different. From this statement, I'm firm enough that the social pressure was real, and nothing they can do about it except to adapt and respect the local wisdom. As Minangkabau has always said, "*Dimano Bumi dipijak, design langik dijunjuang*" or '*Where the earth is stepped, there is a sky to be upheld.*'"

Then, Diana told me her reason for continuing education at 1 Senior High School (SMAN 1), Solok. She said that actually she didn't want to continue her education there. She plans to study at Don Bosco High School, a private catholic based high school in Padang, where her older brother schooled. But her mother didn't allow her because she is a girl and preferred her to continue her high school education nearby their home. Then she registered to Del Toba Samosir Excellent High School (SMA Unggul Del Toba Samosir) at North Sumatra, but she failed the test. She had no choice but to continue her education at SMAN 1 Solok. For a similar reason, Susan continued her school life at SMAN 1 Solok because she didn't get permission from her mother to live outside her home. Besides, her older brother was also a student at the school.

#### **6.4. Diversity from the Lens of Minority in West Sumatra**

Having heard any of this information, I still haven't enough. I asked my interlocutors about their experiences in quotidian life outside school. Did they ever experience discrimination, bully or any lousy treatment due to not using the hijab? To which Diana replied by saying that she never have that unwanted experience. Yet, she told me about getting religion-related jokes from her childhood friends saying, "*Oi Christian, you eat the pork!*" (*Orang Kristen makan babi!*) but she didn't take it seriously. Although it sounded like joking and nothing wrong on the surface, because of course, Christian could eat the pork while Muslim couldn't, it can be a sign of bullying toward the Christian from Moslem, considering how the

dominant culture of Islam worked through its social practice in day to day settings. Yet, she didn't take it personally and even told me with a smile! For her, it was an important moment of everyday diversity and how the relationship is going between Muslim and Non-Muslim in West Sumatera.

In addition, Susan said that not all Muslim women in their neighborhood are using hijab, so it's a different norm being upheld compared to the school. They both are being accepted by society as they are: Christians who aren't wearing hijab. People have no problem with that and treating them the same as equal citizens. It's different with the school area where Islamic values are highly socialized. In their everyday life outside school, the others are well acknowledged and respected their preferences, and no serious multiculturalism and discrimination issue arose.

The question then, why are public schools any different from their outside environment? Why the public schools have to regulate their schoolgirls to wear hijab?

It might have to do with the meaning of elementary and middle-level education for children in Minangkabau. Primary and secondary students are seen as still not having a fixed identity, and that's everyone's job, particularly schools, to make sure their identity is in line with Islamic and Minangkabau values. Speaking about the issue in Padang TV, Chief of Minangkabau Bundo Kanduang, Prof. Puti Reno Raudhah Thaib, tried to explain why the school has to advise the students to wear Islamic attire. Previously, she emphasized that Bundo Kanduang is an organization whose primary function is to preserve the Minangkabau local wisdom within the community and not others. She said that early education in Minangkabau couldn't be detached from the socialization and internalization of Islamic and Minangkabau values.

*"In line with Minangkabau education, starting from the family and the tribal family, they implement Islamic values to the children of tribal members with habituation since their early age. So, actually it isn't enforced. Parents, although the children were not advised or recommended by the school, parents will always teach their children an education that is following religious teachings which they embrace. So, actually there's no problem..... Especially in the world of primary and secondary education, it is about people who do not yet have an identity (jati diri). So, we need to be careful to educate them so they don't get confused. The basic cultivation of their character is cultivated from primary and secondary education, starting from their own homes". – Bundo Kanduang, Prof. Puti Reno Raudhah Thaib*





Image 13: Bundo Kandung Explaining Minangkabau Philosophy and Identity. Retrieved from: <https://youtu.be/uZZRaftmBI>

## 6.5. The Answer to the Debates: How The Supreme Court Entering the Arena

I still remember vividly the moment I shocked in disbelief when reading the online news. It was a warm and nice Friday morning, May 7<sup>th</sup> 2021, when I'm on a rush to the mosque to do Friday Prayer. It's also a Ramadhan month where Muslim were fasting. At first, I didn't believe my eyes. Maybe I've misread it. It turns out I'm not. I'm not wrong. And it's not a regular news, because once again, it has sparked nationwide controversy. It has been viral within a day.

It was about the Supreme Court (Mahkamah Agung Republik Indonesia) decision regarding the joint decree. Yes, the Supreme Court finally entering the arena by issuing a decision to answer the long heated issue. Not too long after being challenged by *Lembaga Kerapatan Adat Alam Minangkabau* (LKAAM), a representative defender of Minangkabau *adat*, the decree was considered invalid and having no legal binding consequences.<sup>48</sup> What can be more favourable for Minangkabau?

Again, numerous commentaries coming from competing parties. Personally, it's really interesting to see how the ongoing debate of multiculturalism and education happening in Indonesia. Many jokingly said that when other countries busy preparing their pupils to be

<sup>48</sup> D. (2021b, May 7). MA Perintahkan 3 Menteri Cabut SKB Soal Seragam Sekolah. news. <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20210507162412-4-244171/ma-perintahkan-3-menteri-cabut-skb-soal-seragam-sekolah>

prepared for future competitiveness and other technological advancement challenges, Indonesia is still struggling with how to wear the uniform to school. Sometimes, jokes can convey social facts better than any theories.

How a single hijab can cause nationwide turbulency is beyond my belief. Public opinion on public sphere, especially that digital one of social media, went wild. They were fueled with new debates and being divided. Many opposing and condemn the decision, saying that it was proceed without enough hearing and discussions with related parties and experts. They are afraid that the forced use of hijab and other affair will occurs again in schools. They believe that the joint decree should be the answer to tackle discrimination and cultivating diversity. Admittedly, it didn't take a long time for the Supreme Court to finally issued the decision since registered. It was considered a quick decision, realizing that how will not only affect millions of pupils, but also teachers and school officials across the country. However, what makes the public questioning its decision is more to the fact that the decision itself isn't accessible publicly. Until the day I write this, the general public can't satisfy their curiosity since no official decision being publicly accessed. We can only guess the Supreme Court reasoning behind their decision. Many publicly voiced, asked to read the decision but still no change of the situation. We can only be satisfied by reading its slightest part via news articles. In times where transparency and accessibility reigns, it was surely a pity.

For some who are savoring the decision, it's the sign of not only Minangkabau victory over the state but also Islam value against secularism. Since the joint decree was silently seen as having its secular and western bias toward school arrangement, with its high emphasize on human rights and leave the hijab to every individual schoolgirl's preference, its void status can be seen as the continuity of Islamic and conservative values. In a condition where trust toward the government is a scarcity, every central top-down approach policy can be seen as endanger local values and decentralization spirit.

Yet, for Minangkabau, they seemed to not to care about it. Afterall, the decision favors them, meaning that the situation was back to the previous era. It's a *status quo* where regional governments, schools and teachers in West Sumatera can do their usual business. The Muslim schoolgirls can continue wearing hijab. No sanction given if the schools regulate or the teachers advised their Muslim schoolgirls to wear hijab. The Supreme Court has the final words, while Minangkabau has the widest smiles.

*“We are grateful, this is a truly meaningful Ramadan gift. There is still justice in this country. We salute the judiciary, the Supreme Court, which has upheld the justice. This is the basis for us to maintain the philosophy of 'adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah. Long before this Republic existed, Minang girls were wearing brackets. Wear a hijab. So, it can't be generalized to the SKB of three Ministers” – Fauzi Bahar.*<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, Datuak M. Sayuti Rajo Penghulu, Chief of *Lembaga Kerapatan Adat Alam Minangkabau* (LKAAM), were happy knowing the decision. He, together with other *niniak mamak*, were the group who filed the case to The Supreme Court. Actually, no one has thought that they will win the battle, even the Minangkabau themselves. Since they were acted alone representing Minangkabau, the only ethnic group who bravely challenged the joint decree, among other that would be affected, their movement was seen as irrelevant. Nevertheless, they admitted from the start that they are confident with the battle.

*"From the start, we believed that we would win this case. We believe that there is still justice in this country, through God's representatives in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court is the place for God's representatives,"* LKAAM chairman, Datuak M. Sayuti Rajo Penghulu.<sup>50</sup>



Image 14. The Chairman of LKAAM, Datuak M. Sayuti Rajo Penghulu. Retrieved from: <https://forumsumbar.com/berita/10177/ketua-lkaam-sumbar-imbau-masyarakat-sukseskan-pilkada-serentak-2020/>

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<sup>49</sup> Kampai, J. (2021, May 7). Eks Walkot Padang: Putusan MA soal SKB Seragam Sekolah Jadi Kado Ramadhan. detiknews. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5561837/eks-walkot-padang-putusan-ma-soal-skb-seragam-sekolah-jadi-kado-ramadhan>.

<sup>50</sup> ibid

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUSION**

The narratives start with a rejection, grows with contestation, and ends with a decision. The hijab affair in Padang, West Sumatra has shown us how contemporary multiculturalism debates in Indonesia has been filled with different and contesting interpretation process, while placing several actors and institutions battling for each interest. After a long time of verbal indifference, the undisputed multiculturalism principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is in precarity, facing questions that flocks at once, rendering citizens question its meaning. These narratives is a way to show how every parties, particularly the central government, should pay respect to not only individual differences but also ethnic identity and group differences. Realizing that each ethnicity is having their own identity to be upheld, an ethnic sensitive in mind, will lead to a better policy making towards respecting difference, so that difference is not only interpreted as respecting religious difference but also acknowledging cultural difference. The failure to do so will endanger the continuity of distinct culture, local wisdom, and way of life of diverse ethnic groups which guarded and preserved under the unifying concept of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.

As I have shown earlier, a confusion toward respecting the difference is happened since there was no deliberative dialogue to solve the problems. The central governments way, by issuing the three ministerial joint decree without involving Minangkabau people, has seen as a reactive policy and without a proper assessment. The contested interpretation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* started primarily due to a top-down discourses, started in Jakarta as epicentrum of power, leaving each region with no choices except to implement what has being agreed on. West Sumatra then framed as a discriminative place, for fundamentalist people, and another derogatory image being portrayed in national discourses. From this situation only, one can clearly guess how the power relationship between regional and central government, in relation with democratization and decentralization agenda.

Another crucial notion is how to acknowledge differences in a multicultural society. In order to make an inclusive policy, by accommodating the needs of individuals and groups, isn't equal with treating all regions with the same treatment. My research has shown that each ethnic groups deserved to be treated according to their unique identity. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* means to accepts the difference, preserving its continuity while at the same time respecting the rights of each groups to live within lived norms and values.

The hijab affair also acted as a way Minangkabau speak to the world about their identity. Wearing hijab is their identity in practice as women should adhere to grand normative orders of Islam and adat. This can't be stopped by external forces, no matter how small it is, as hijab is seen as not only used as religious reasons but also to preserve cultural norms. Hijab is a fabric of their identity since both Islam and adat is making visible through its uses, therefore guaranteeing it doesn't lose its values. This is a grey area where many non-Minangkabau person failed to understand because hijab was seen only as Islamic attributes.

Minangkabau identity was also being formed with this hijab affair. I'm not sure how it's being changed, empowered, or weakened, but it surely has affirmed their distinct Minangkabauness. The cultural and political elites have spoken on behalf of Minangkabau and represent them against the central government, a strategic essentialism in practice by putting aside their internal differences and portraying them as one unified ethnic group with common voice of grievances. This way, thanks to the hijab virality, Minangkabau identity and philosophy has travelled far beyond its locality, showing them who Minangkabau really is to every citizen.

The politics of belonging also played an important role in a way how the discourses has set the boundaries between a Minangkabau and non-Minangkabau. The hijab is always belongs to every Minangkabau women, since it's viewed as not only Islamic attributes but also cultural identities, those who aren't wearing it can be considered as not a part of true Minangkabau. It might be doesn't matter if a Minangkabau woman choose not to wear it, but the imagined categories of being a part of "us" or "them" works in everyday life as a cultural mechanism to defend itself. This is also the case for my research interlocutors since both chooses to assimilate themselves with a temporary, interchangeable, and situated identities, only to asserting the feelings to belongs to a bigger group.

Finally, these narratives don't have an intention to narrate and depict the whole contemporary identity of Minangkabau. That would be an impossible works to do, realizing how the time-space limitations. This only points to show how Indonesian multiculturalism is still in a state of highly debated concept, while in practice ethnic identity demanding a more recognition toward their distinct identities. Thanks to the hijab affair, Indonesians are opening their eyes and willing to discuss their *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* principle once again, suddenly realizes that the work of respecting others and differences is a never ending process.

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