

## Leaving and Entering Religion: Understanding Religious Conversion in the Discourse of Religious Freedom and Human Rights in Indonesia

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### Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis problematika konversi agama dalam perdebatan universalisme dan relativisme hak asasi manusia. Konversi agama, pada satu sisi, didukung atas dasar kebebasan beragama atau berkeyakinan (KBB) yang adalah bagian dari hak asasi manusia (HAM). Namun, pada sisi yang lain, ditentang oleh doktrin dan klaim kebenaran agama. Artinya, konversi agama diakui sebagai sebuah nilai universal, yang dalam konteks tertentu menjadi relatif. Dampaknya adalah muncul berbagai macam stigma terhadap subjek konversi agama, seperti “sesat”, “kafir”, “apostasi”, “pembangkang” terhadap agama; terlebih lagi berbagai tindakan diskriminasi seperti pengucilan, ancaman, bahkan pembunuhan turut mewarnai fenomena anti-konversi. Untuk menjelaskan konversi agama dalam kaitan dengan kebebasan beragama, saya tidak berhenti pada dikotomi universalisme vis a vis relativisme HAM. Isu ini perlu dinafakurkan melampaui dikotomi tersebut agar subjeknya terhindar dari perilaku-perilaku negatif yang disebutkan di atas. Oleh karena itu, tulisan ini akan menguraikan isu konversi agama dalam tiga bagian: pertama, menelisik berbagai macam status legal yang berkaitan dengan konversi agama. Kedua, mendiskusikan pengaruh relativisme HAM terhadap kebebasan beragama. Dan, ketiga, menawarkan perspektif kebebasan beragama yang fundamental sebagai jalan untuk melampaui relativisme HAM. Metode yang digunakan dalam tulisan ini adalah studi literatur. Pada akhirnya, tulisan ini menawarkan pendekatan transformatif untuk melampaui diskursus relativisme sekaligus menegaskan martabat manusia sebagai eksistensi yang mesti dijunjung sebagai bagian integral dari KBB dan HAM. Hal tersebut signifikan karena berbagai perilaku-perilaku negatif yang dialami subjek konversi agama.

Kata Kunci: Konversi agama, Universalisme, Relativisme, Kebebasan beragama atau berkeyakinan (KBB), Hak asasi manusia (HAM)

### Abstract

This article aims to analyze the issue of religious conversion in the debate of universalism and relativism of human rights. Religious conversion, on the one hand, is justified on the basis of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) which are parts of human rights (HAM). However, on the other hand, it is opposed by religious doctrines and truth claims. In other words, religious conversion is recognized as a universal value, which in certain contexts becomes relative. The impact is that there are various kinds of stigma against the subject of religious conversion, such as “heresy”, “infidel”, “apostasy”, “dissident” against religion; moreover, various acts of discrimination such as exclusion, threats, and even murder also coloring the anti-conversion

attitude. To explain religious conversion in relation to religious freedom, I do not stop at the dichotomy of universalism vis a vis relativism of human rights. This issue needs to be interpreted beyond the dichotomy so that the subject can be protected from the negative behaviors mentioned above. Therefore, this paper will elaborate the issue of religious conversion in three parts: first, to examine the various legal statuses related to religious conversion. Second, to discuss the influence of human rights relativism on religious freedom. And, third, to offer a fundamental religious freedom perspective as a way to transcend human rights relativism. The method used in this article is a literature study. Ultimately, this paper offers a transformative approach to transcend the discourse of relativism while affirming human dignity as an existence that must be upheld as an integral part of FoRB and human rights. This is significant because of the various negative behaviors experienced by the subjects of religious conversion.

**Keyword:** *Religious conversion, Universalism, Relativism, Freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), Human rights*

## **Introduction**

Religious conversion is a global phenomenon that occurs in all religions. The practice has always existed throughout human civilization to the extent that followers of different religions have always met and interacted. In short, religious conversion is a consequence of interreligious encounters. It has various causes, whether by personal choice, or even by coercion (Bautista, 2014). In praxis, religious conversion is a complex phenomenon. Marc David Baer (2014) distinguishes it into four categories, namely acculturation, adhesion or hybridity, syncretism, and transformation. In his book, *History and Religious Conversion*, Baer describes the four categories as follows:

“Acculturation is when religious change accompanies the incorporation of a people and its territory into a conquering empire or socio-economic system. Adhesion or hybridity is when the person or group adopts new beliefs and practices alongside the old. Syncretism occurs when the convert(s) reconcile or fuse old and new beliefs and practices to create a new religious synthesis. Transformation is when converts attempt to completely replace the old with the new” (Baer, 2014).

In that sense, the religious conversions discussed in this paper relate to the transformation category, namely conversions that completely replace old beliefs with new ones. Ryan T. Cragun and Joseph H. Hammer call this category as “switchers”, which means a person who leaves a religion and joins another religion (Cragun & Hammer, 2011: 152).

Religious conversion is part of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and is inseparable from human rights. The right to convert can be considered a non-derogable right that is legally protected by international decrees. For instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which was ratified into *Deklarasi Universal Hak Asasi Manusia* (DUHAM), and the International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights (ICCPR) which was ratified into Law of

the Republic of Indonesia Number 12 of 2005 regarding the Ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (*Kovenan Internasional Tentang Hak-Hak Sipil dan Politik*).

Despite being universally recognized and protected, in a particular context, FoRB (especially religious conversion) is “a particular controversial right” (Bielefeldt, 2013). If we explore the history of the Indonesian Constitution’s draft, there is ambiguity regarding the article that has been considered as a guarantor of religious freedom. Article 29 (2), the 1945 Constitution—which is supposed to guarantee freedom of religion or belief—was born from the context of the rejection of religious conversion. The previous formulation of article 29 (2) was “The state guarantees the freedom of every citizen to embrace another religion and practice it according to their own beliefs” (*Negara menjamin kemerdekaan tiap-tiap warga negara untuk memeluk agama lain dan menjalankannya menurut kepercayaannya sendiri*). This formulation, according to one of the Islamic group (*Santri* group), legalizes the practice of religious conversion that is contrary to the Islamic teachings. Therefore it was changed to “The state guarantees the freedom of everyone to embrace their respective religions and to worship according to their religion and beliefs” (*Negara menjamin kemerdekaan setiap orang memeluk agamanya masing-masing dan untuk beribadat menurut agamanya dan kepercayaannya itu*). It is this latest formulation that is maintained to this day. In other words, Indonesia has historically resisted religious conversion (Maarif, 2017).

In the socio-cultural context, anti-conversion attitudes are not just social stigma, but escalate into acts of violence that threaten individual rights to life, such as persecution, ostracism, discrimination, and even murder. This is the reason why the issue of religious conversion is significant to discuss because of the various negative experiences experienced by its subjects (Hardiman, 2011), especially in the category of “transformation” or “switchers” as described earlier. In social relations, religious conversion tends to be problematic when confronted with conflicting religious theological claims (truth claims). Leaving a religion is perceived as a sin and a form of disobedience to God. Those who leave a religion are often stigmatized as “heretics”, “infidels”, “apostates”, and even “dissidents” against religion. The stigma, in some contexts, leads to negative behaviors that discriminate and subordinate the subjects of conversion (Elizabeth, 2013). This phenomenon seems to emphasize that human rights and religious belief are mutually exclusive.

In *Problematizing Religious Freedom* (2011), Arvind Sharma explains the relationship between human rights and religious belief. The tendency is that religious freedom is determined by religious belief. This means religious freedom is defined as the extent to which religious

belief is interpreted. The challenges are when religious conversion is not allowed by religious belief, then religious conversion directly becomes behavior that violates the norms of belief. For Sharma, this is not a big problem when the conversion occurs between religions whose teachings can still be said to be similar. For instance, Protestantism and Catholicism. In Protestantism, marrying a Catholic does not have much impact on social stigma because the beliefs are not much different (they both are the same tradition: Christianity). However, if a Christian marries a Muslim and converts to Islam, he or she will be stigmatized, and *vice versa*. That is why Sharma believes that the concept of religious freedom cannot be separated from the concept or belief of religion itself (Sharma, 2011: 17). In this perspective, the essence of freedom seems to be narrowed down in a subjective paradigm. Freedom of religion is the extent to which a person believes in his religion. This behaviour assumes that freedom should not conflict with religious belief.

The issue of religious conversion has been discussed in several previous studies. For instance, conversion in the perspective of *Mualaf* (Ridwan, 2017; Tarni et al., 2022), semiotic (Lobodally, 2021), psychology (Hamali, 2012; Hidayat, 2018), marriage (Moerika, 2008), consequences of conversion (Basuki, 2013), and others. Based on the literature review, it is found that there is not enough studies that address religious conversion from the perspective of religious freedom and human rights. Therefore, this study is significant to offer academic justification from the perspective of religious freedom and human rights for the subjects of conversion who often experience discrimination. The discourse on religious conversion needs to be navigated in order to touch the most fundamental thing, namely religious freedom, because religious conversion is an integral part of religious freedom that cannot be restricted by anyone, including religion itself. This is possible only if respect for human dignity transcends the fundamental barriers of religion (Lindholm, 2010).

By using a literature research methodology, this article will explore the issue of religious conversion in three parts: first, to examine the various legal statuses related to religious conversion. Second, to discuss the influence of human rights relativism on religious freedom. And, third, to offer a fundamental religious freedom perspective as a way to transcend human rights relativism.

Ultimately, this study shows that the challenge of religious freedom comes from religion itself. Religions tend to recognize inward conversion, but reject outward conversion. This behavior is reinforced by the theological truth claim that leaving a religion is a form of defiance. Conversely, conversion into a religion - from the perspective of the religion of purpose - is salvation and such behavior is justified by theological narratives. In addition, this

study also elaborates on the dichotomy of universalism and relativism of human rights, and offers a synthesis to transcend the dichotomy to present a non-discriminatory narrative towards the subjects of religious conversion.

### **The Implementation of FoRB and the Opportunities of Religious Conversion**

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is historically a fairly old issue (see Evans, 2010). This issue is always occurred throughout human civilization. In this regard, the value of FoRB is then reflected in the freedom of religious conversion; religious conversion is a manifestation of FoRB. Although it has been opposed throughout the history of religions, however, religious conversion can never be avoided. The dynamics of religious conversion have ups and downs in the religious sphere. However, in legal consensus, religious conversion is recognized and protected in several documents, such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and International Covenant of Civic and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Citing UDHR, article 18:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”.

FoRB emphasized the importance of manifesting religious freedom in implementing religious conversion, termed “freedom to change religion or belief”. Accordingly, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 18 (1):

“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching”.

The ICCPR uses the term “to have” or “to adopt” a religion which means having or adopting a certain religion is freedom. In addition, Article 18 (2) also guarantees that, in principle, both UDHR and ICCPR—although in different formulations—emphasize individual freedom over religion. In other words, religion “should” be an individual choice that is decided in a plenary manner without any coercion from any party. In this context, religious conversion must also be interpreted as an inseparable part of religious freedom and human rights. This means that religious freedom is legally—even through covenants—universally recognized. This is a significant opportunity for the FoRB. These values are then ratified in different country contexts. This shows the recognition of religious rights and freedoms.

The implementation of FoRB in the context of different countries is certainly different. Several opportunities for Indonesia in implementing FoRB include: First, Indonesia is a plural country with diverse religions. This means that Indonesia is a state that accommodates more than one religions, although, in quantity, Islam is the majority. In this perspective, pluralism must be seen as a necessity and religious conversion is a consequence of religious pluralism. This means that religious pluralism and its consequences cannot be intervened by human beings (Titaley, 2013). Although some records of early independence political religion show discrimination and subordination for certain religious groups, Indonesia's integrity as a pluralistic country must continue to be strived for.

Second, the failure of the Islamic political agenda through "the seven words" in the Jakarta charter shows that from the beginning, Indonesia did not want to become a religious state, particularly an Islamic state. This showed that the political interests of religion in Indonesia began even before the proclamation of independence. The political consolidation of religion and identity is openly echoed by groups who seek divinity and Islamic law as the foundation of the state. "Divinity by carrying out Islamic Sharia for its adherents" (*Ketuhanan dengan menjalankan syariat Islam bagi para pemeluknya*) is the formula for the first precepts of Pancasila which was finally replaced in the last seconds before the proclamation. The refusal of several non-Islamic figures who incidentally came from eastern Indonesia showed their rejection of the religious state. It must be acknowledged that Indonesia is not a religious state.

Third, democracy is a system that allows the implementation of religious freedom. It can be said that the agreed democracy as a political system recognizes the freedom of individuals who are responsible. The basic idea is individual freedom accompanied by attitude (Yekrianus, 2021: 70). This means that through democracy, the values of freedom should be protected as part of freedom itself. Spinoza, for instance, expresses democracy as a system that has opportunities for the manifestation of religious freedom. Although in the Indonesian context, certain interests seem to restrain freedom.

Thus, we must acknowledge that Indonesia is a country that recognizes religious diversity. And one of the consequences of religious diversity is religious conversion. So, ideally, religious conversion needs to be protected as part of religious freedom. This should not be denied, because religious encounters will cause religious conversion. In this regard, Spinoza, explained by Sirilus Yekrianus, has a strong enough idea to show the importance of implementing religious diversity. Spinoza emphasises that authoritative and discriminatory attitudes should not stretch the image of freedom. This means that the freedom of human being should not be oppressed and restrained, especially concerning private rights such as freedom

of religion (Yekrianus, 2021: 74). Spinoza's idea can be used as an argument to strengthen the reason that religious conversion is religious freedom.

In Indonesia, it is quite different. The differences need to be divided into two categories: legal and social. Legally, religious freedom is recognized by the Constitution. It has been explained in the previous chapter that freedom of religion is contained in the 1945 Constitution and several related laws. The problem is the implementation. This is what I call in the second category, social. The implementation of religious freedom is not as written in the Constitution or as discussed in the ideals of academics. In the context of grassroots people, the implementation deals with the values held by the community, including religious values and norms (this will be discussed in the next chapter on the challenges of religious conversion). But in principle, this phenomenon proves that humans are dynamic creatures. It is not static on just one value. Thus, it is important to see the reality of religious conversion as part of freedom of religion or belief.

### **Religious Relativism: The Challenges of Freedom of Religion or Belief**

Azyumardi Azra, in *Kebebasan Beragama atau Berkeyakinan*, emphasizes that the discourse on religious freedom as part of human rights is no longer substantially debated. This means that, in substance, it is universally recognized. The challenge is more related to actualising religious freedom (Azra, 2010: xv), legally and socially. In the previous discussion, I have explained the dynamics and importance of religious conversion as the implementation of religious freedom. In this section, I will explain the challenges of religious conversion. Although theoretically, FoRB is important in a democratic country, its practice does not necessarily go as desired.

Religious relativism is a paradigm that continues to take root contextually, even though ontologically, it is an interpretation of religious doctrines and teachings. Philip L. Quinn, in the book *Relativism and Religion*, emphasizes that "Religious Relativism argues that at least one, and probably more than one, world religion is correct and that the correctness of a religion is relative to the world-view of its community of adherents" (Quinn, 1995: 35). In line with Quinn, Xiaorong Li—in cultural analysis—refers to it as "normative cultural relativism" (Li, 2006: 55), which means the moral standard of whether or not a norm is judged according to its cultural standards.

To understand religious relativism concerning religious conversion, we need to understand two models of religious conversion: "outward conversion" and "inward conversion" (Tylor, 1999: 35-39). Outward conversion is leaving and switching to another

religion; in contrast, inward conversion is accepting a new religion and becoming a part of it. In this case, outward conversion is the most problematic. The religion left behind claims that the practice is a form of apostasy and a denial of the truth of its religion. This relates to the subjective nature of truth claims. The subject of outward conversion in Christianity would be called a “lost sheep”; in Islam would be called an apostate. In contrast, inward conversion is regarded as the way to salvation.

Lewis R. Rambo, in his book *Understanding Religious Conversion*, discusses two approaches to religious conversion: normative and descriptive (Rambo, 1993: 6). Normative relates to religious expectations of conversion; on the contrary, descriptive is more directed to the aspects of praxis. In this perspective, Rambo tends to look at inward conversion. For instance, conversion is considered a “confession of sin” by conservative Christians or in Islam as *mualaf* (someone who convert to Islam). Islam and Christianity even have special rites to accept individuals who make conversions. For instance, baptism in Christianity and *shahadat* in Islam.

According to David A. Snow and Richard Machalek, there are three indicators in explaining conversion: membership status, demonstration events, and rhetorical patterns (Snow & Machalek, 1984: 6). In membership status, conversion means a change of it. However, membership status is inseparable from demonstration events. Snow and Machalek describe it as an inseparable part of the confirmation rituals. In accepting new religious members, a confirmation ritual will usually be carried out. Christianity calls it baptism. In the end, religious conversion requires rhetorical patterns, that is, a rhetorical awareness of why an individual converts. These indicators are an old method that most often appears in religious conversion. That is, converting to Christianity or Islam will be considered good behaviour, even to the point of being flattered. On the other hand, if you convert from Islam or Christianity, you will be considered an infidel, sinner, etc. All of these phenomena are called religious truth claims.

This infidel and sinful stigma are a form of social stigmatization against individuals who carry out religious conversions. Borrowing Charles Kimball’s theory in his book *When Religion Becomes Evil* (2008), truth claiming has a massive influence on perspectives and even affects individual actions. The most dangerous consequences are when the subject of conversion experiences discrimination, subordination, persecution, and even murder. Some cases that have occurred in Indonesia, for example, Suparno-a student of the Indonesian Baptist



Theological College (STBI)-who was killed for apostatizing;<sup>1</sup> a singer who was persecuted by her parents for changing her religion;<sup>2</sup> even a famous actress, Asmirandah, who was blasphemed for converting to Islam.<sup>3</sup>

The above cases are likened to an “iceberg” phenomenon. There are many more similar cases that do not surface. Discrimination, subordination, and even persecution against conversion subjects are actions based on the theological presupposition that their religion is the only true, so leaving it is a very serious mistake. This paradigm is certainly rooted in hegemony, and reinforced by truth claims. According to Gramsci, “Hegemony rests on the ability of a dominant class to form a consensual relationship with subaltern classes through various social and cultural channels” (Worth, 2009: 20). Although Gramsci talks a lot about hegemony from a socio-political perspective, his ideas also have other dimensions, including religion. This means that hegemony is not a single dimension but can merge in a multi-dimensional context. Correspondingly, hegemony is closely related to domination. The domination is meant to lead the way of thinking, behaving, and how to judge society (Fauziyah & Nasionalita, 2018). Religion as a social entity strongly influences leading thinking, behaving, and judging in society or, in theological terms, it is called doctrine.

Religious truth claims do not require logical proof; in other words, they are axiomatic or postulate. It is enough to believe, or in religious terms, it is called “faith”. Therefore, religious truth-claiming cannot be equated with the truth of science that can be proven epistemologically. According to Tore Lindholm, truth-claiming is one of the dilemmas of religious freedom. He states, truth claiming is related to the assumption that religious adherents who adhere to their religion are the truth and faith and/or a certain way of life is the way to the life to come (Lindholm, 2010: 103). For instance, in Christianity, the doctrine of “Jesus as the only way and salvation” is crucial to the Christian’s faith. “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6) becomes one of the legitimacy of the exclusivist. This means that when leaving Christianity, it is believed that he will lose his status as children of God who will later

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<sup>1</sup> “Omega Suparno, Calon Pendeta Tewas Dibunuh” <https://www.kompasiana.com/jappy/551b6ad6a333118d23b66000/omega-suparno-calon-pendeta-tewas-terbunuh> (Accessed on December 20, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> “Ditentang Pindah ke Kristen, Nania Idol Ungkap Sampai Dianiaya Ibu” <https://www.suara.com/entertainment/2021/11/15/143248/ditentang-pindah-kristen-nania-idol-ungkap-sampai-dianiaya-ibu> (Accessed on December 20, 2023). “Beberkan Perjalanannya Pindah Agama, Lidya Nursaid Sempat Dapat Ancaman Pembunuhan” <https://jogja.suara.com/read/2022/03/18/142412/beberkan-perjalanannya-pindah-agama-lidya-nursaid-semapat-dapat-ancaman-pembunuhan> (Accessed on December 20, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> “Asmirandah Tak Kecewa Dikutuk dan Banyak Masalah Saat Pindah Agama” <https://www.hops.id/hot/pr-2942113580/asmirandah-tak-kecewa-dikutuk-dan-banyak-masalah-saat-pindah-agama?page=1> (Accessed on December 20, 2023).

be with the Father in heaven (the afterlife). In Islam, someone who leave Islam will be considered an apostate, and the subject will be sentenced to death (HR Bukhari: 3017; Nasai: 4059). In addition, if a person dies in disbelief (apostasy), his deeds will be in vain in this world and hereafter (Surah Al Baqarah: 217). These textual documents are then interpreted according to their respective contextual perspectives. In this regard, claims about religious truth are ideas that exist and lived by religious people. Even though, in certain perspectives, truth-claiming is considered exclusivism, it must still be respected because it is a part of *forum internum*.

### **Beyond Religious Relativism: Religious Conversion in the Discourse of Religious Freedom and Human Rights**

Religious rights are non-derogable rights that cannot be reduced and restricted. The right is called an “inalienable right”—the right that inherent in every human being (Siregar & Sakharina, 2019), which should not be restricted by anyone, including religion itself. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that all people have the right to freedom of religion, including the right to change their religion.

For this reason, the discourse on religious conversion should not stop at the dichotomy of universalism vis a vis relativism, because it has the opportunity to maintain negative actions that threaten human rights. According to Budi Hardiman, human rights need to be encouraged as a universal value that should not be relativized in any context on the basis of negative experiences experienced by individuals (Hardiman, 2011). Moreover, the tendency of religious exclusivism is to take refuge behind the relativism approach: negating a universal value for subjective claims and negative actions.

Thus, what should be emphasized if we want to go beyond religious relativism? Heiner Bielefeld (2013) emphasizes that the human rights approach to religious freedom must respect the human being. This means that the existence of individuals (human being) must be protected, not religion. Respecting human beings confirms a respect for universal dignity, which is often referred to as human rights. In this perspective, religious freedom includes the rights of the religious members to change their religion (Bielefeldt, 2013: 38). Bielefeld’s approach is certainly based on the existence of human beings who cannot be separated from human rights (rights that are inherent to human being).

Discussing religious conversion as human rights needs to emphasize the central position of human being. Therefore, what should be protected is individual as the subject. In various cases, if what is protected is religion, there will be discrimination against minority groups. This is obvious in several phenomena related to religious blasphemy that easily

criminalize individuals who are considered insulting a religion (Islam) (Crouch, 2012). In this context, the majority assumption becomes the benchmark for determining the truth. Minorities will be recognized if they are in line with the majority. In the same context, religious conversion is defiance so it is very contrary to truth claims. Whereas, religious conversion is an expression of the freedom of human being that always exist as long as religion is exist.

In the other discussion, Arvind Sharma states that “the right to change a religion is widely accepted as a key component of religious freedom” (Sharma, 2011: 129). According to Sharma, religious freedom in relation to conversion can be explained in two contexts, namely freedom of conversion; and freedom to practicing another religion without conversion. In this context, Sharma wants to emphasize that “rights” is a phrase inherent to human dignity. Therefore, religious freedom will only be achieved if protection of religion is shifted to the protection of individual.

This concentration on the individual in FoRB is what Tore Lindholm often emphasizes. According to Lindholm, respect for the individual must transcend fundamental barriers of religion (Lindholm, 2010: 103), or what Heiner Bielefeldt refers to as “respecting the self-understanding” (Bielefeldt et al., 2013: 37). This means that FoRB must cover human equality, between majority and minority; conservatives and liberals; converts or re-converts, and provide guarantees from marginalized positions (Bielefeldt et al., 2013: 38). In this regard, the manifestation of religious freedom must emphasize human existence, not religion. Therefore, restricting individuals from converting is tantamount to restricting human rights.

## **Conclusion**

Freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is a fundamental notion of human rights. One of the forms is the practice of conversion. Religious conversion means converting from one religion to another freely without social pressure and stigma. Why is religious conversion important in this discussion? Universally, religious conversion is recognized as a part of religious freedom. The UDHR and ICCPR documents mention this explicitly. Freedom to convert is free will as long as it does not threaten social order and security. In this perspective, UDHR and ICCPR both recognize and uphold individual freedom.

In the Indonesian context, although freedom of religion is recognized legally, in the history of the formulation of Constitution, Indonesia has been recorded to have prevented religious conversion through the formulation of article 29 paragraph 2. Historically, this article did not escape from the influence of religious contestation and politics, which often made religious values as instruments for formulating laws.

This problem has resulted in social disparities between religious adherents. The FoRB paradigm and values are personified as values that undermine the integrity and sacredness of religious values. In this context, the principle of relativism plays a very significant role. Religions tend to reject outward conversion, but accept inward conversion. This rejection and acceptance are intertwined. This is because salvation for one religion is defiance for another. The person who leaves the religion will be considered heretic, infidel, and dissident. But when he enters another religion, he will be considered to have salvation and wisdom.

This conflicting paradigm is called relativism. The truth in one religion is a fallacy in another religion. This context is even more dangerous when the paradigm is manifested through violent acts of discrimination against the subjects of religious conversion. Those who experience various negative experiences, such as threats, expulsion, and even violence need to have their rights protected. From the human rights perspective, individual freedom of religion must be protected by the state.

Based on these negative experiences, the discourse on religious conversion needs to emphasize the existence of individuals as religious subjects. In this case, recognition of human dignity needs to go beyond the value of relativism that has the opportunity to create discrimination. Freedom of religion in this context needs to be tightened to universal values that absolutely cannot be relativized. Therefore, recognition of human dignity must go beyond the walls of religious fundamentalism, especially religious relativism.

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