SOCIO-CULTURAL INTERACTION AMONGST MUSLIM AND BUDDHIST PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the interaction between Muslim majorities and Buddhist minorities for the past 300 years in Kelantan. This study aims to determine the interaction patterns that exist in the sociocultural environment between the Muslim and Buddhist communities in Kelantan. These two communities have existed peacefully and harmoniously despite of the differences in religious beliefs. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were performed. Based on the findings, sociocultural interaction exists in several patterns including language, food, business, celebrations and festivities, ziyarah or visiting culture, kenduri r ceremonial feasts, gotong royong or communal work, and education. These interaction patterns give rise to a multicultural community that supports each other through cooperation, respect, visiting culture, and friendliness. Hence, to create a harmonious community, people should interact well with one another despite of the differences in religion, nationality, and country of origin. Interaction awareness campaigns organised by government and non-governmental organisations are crucial in cultivating positive interactions between people with diverse backgrounds.

Key words: interactions; believer; community; Islam; Buddhist; socioculture.

I. INTRODUCTION

Instability in today’s global community exists because there is a decline in positive interactions between individuals, especially in developed nations. An example of this decline is the ongoing conflict between Palestinians and Israelis in the occupied Gaza strip which has caused many Muslims in the region to be killed and oppressed without mercy (Nor 2010). This situation has escalated because of the provocation by non-Muslims who linked Islam to terrorism and the rejection of a peace treaty following the 2001 World Trade Centre attack (Widagdo 2011). However, such situation does not happen in Malaysia as the society is able to live harmoniously.
under one roof even though it is made up of a mixed population with different religions and socio-cultural background. In general, socioculture is the relationship between the society and the culture which encompasses lifestyle and customs etc. The umbrella term of lifestyle meanwhile encompasses socialisation, clothing, food, education, marriage, jobs, language, interaction, and other factors.

Malaysians are made up of different races and ethnicity—each with their beliefs, social systems, cultures, and values. These become the building blocks of interracial and interreligious relationships in Malaysia (Ahmad et al. 2013). This situation is very common in Kelantan, the focal point of this research. Kelantan is a multicultural and multireligious society consisting of Malays, Chinese, Indians, Siamese, and other ethnicities in which 95.2% of them are practising Islam, 0.3% are Christians, 3.8% are Buddhists, 0.2% are Hindus, and 0.5% are practising other forms of religious beliefs (Census by Department of Statistics Malaysia 2010). Even though Islam is the major religion in Kelantan, the multicultural and multireligious society exists in a harmonious and peaceful state. Winzeler (1985) stressed that ‘... the relationship between the Malays and the non-Malays in Kelantan has been relatively peaceful and easy going...’. This is clearly shown in the assimilation of Malay culture among the Chinese in Pasir Mas, Kelantan. The Chinese in the area can speak Kelantan dialect fluently (Dollah 1986). The adaptation of the Kelantanese dialect as a medium of interaction between the two races is a way of sociocultural interaction that enables the assimilation of culture in the local setting. Furthermore, the use of the Kelantanese dialect creates a sense of friendliness within the community. The assimilation of the Kelantanese dialect by the ethnic Chinese also enables them to be more accepted by the Kelantanese society despite the underlying religious differences. On a similar note, the readiness of the ethnic Chinese to accept the Kelantanese culture allows them to survive in Kelantan. Hence, the existence of different ethnic groups and different religious practices has led to the formation of sociocultural interactions between the majority and minority groups in the community. In Pasir Puteh, this interaction is vital in the development of relationships between Muslims and Buddhists as the interaction greatly influences the intercultural interaction and multireligious living in a community.

In general, interaction is a form of reciprocal relationship that happens consciously or subconsciously. This creates an active and reactive relationship that allows mutual understanding to be established. Interaction is also defined as an act where individuals build relationships with one another (Poloma 1987). Besides that, interaction also carries a broad meaning depending on how someone interprets and analyses its meaning based on the need of an individual on interaction (Wang et al. 2010). With this, it can be concluded that interaction is the act of speaking with others and understanding their speech through reciprocation (Adamolekun 2012). Based on this statement, it can be understood that from an epistemological perspective, interaction carries a similar meaning to the connection or cooperation between one another. Hence, interaction can happen with anyone regardless of the place, age, rank, lineage, and background. In short, this is how sociocultural interaction happens.

The sociocultural connotation originates from two words, each with their own definitions. In Kamus Bahasa Indonesia, “social” means everything that is related to society or societal activities. whereas “culture” comes from the word Sanskrit which means ideas, thoughts, and common sense. Culture is defined as the actions taken by individuals based on their ideals or common sense, both of which can be associated with emotions and love. Ritzer et al. (1992) explained culture as complex ideas created and accepted by a group of people in order for them to function as a society. When combined, socioculture represents man-made ideals and common sense when living in a society (Kasmansyah 1999).

According to Eppink (2011), socioculture is created from individual ideals and values that exist in a society. This interpretation is different from the one proposed by Burnett. Burnett suggested that socioculture can be understood as information gathered from interpersonal relationships and how people communicate. Even though both interpretations are different, both theories share the same perspective as they proposed that society is built upon its members’ thinking and relationship. Based on this, socioculture can also be interpreted as the lifestyle or civilisation of a society. This stems from the willingness and drive of a society to build a fulfilled and developed life for the society members.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative method is used to understand the sociocultural aspects of this study and to explore the processes in utilising a qualitative research (Aupers et al. 2017; Darusalam & Sufean 2018). Semi-structured interview was used in which interview questions were predetermined but additional questions can be asked during the interview sessions to get a more in-depth idea of the topic (Darusalam & Sufean 2018). In this method, the
researcher interviewed the respondents face-to-face and collect the necessary data needed for the study (Creswell 2012).

**Respondents**

Purposive sampling was used in this study (Creswell 2012) to collect the necessary and appropriate data in this qualitative study. Respondents of this study included Resident Administrator of Semerak, Pasir Puteh Kelantan, Headman of Ketereh Tugal division, Senior Imam Bandar Ibrahim Mosque Pasir Puteh, Head Monk, Chief Assistant District Chief (Development) Land and District Officer Pasir Puteh, and Secretary of Pasir Puteh Buddhist Community.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Authorisation letters were sent out to obtain the approval for the study and to serve as an early notice so that respondents could prepare for the interview. The respondents’ must be mentally and physically healthy so that they were able to answer the questions well. The data on sociocultural interaction between the Muslims and Buddhists in Pasir Puteh were categorised into the aspects of language, food, business, celebrations and festivals, *ziarah* or visiting culture, *gotong royong* or communal work, and education. Findings received from the interview were coded and grouped to identify the relevant data (Graff 2014).

**Materials**

**Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 shows the research steps in determining the interaction patterns that exist within the Muslim and Buddhist communities in Pasir Puteh. This can serve as a platform for other communities that are facing internal and external conflicts due to differences in terms of religion, ethnicity, and social culture.
III. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Population

Muslims and Buddhists make up the majority of the population in PasirPuteh. There are 113,191 people living in PasirPuteh, comprising of both citizens and non-citizens. It is estimated that Malays make up 97.75% of the population (110, 642), followed by Chinese with 0.71% (808), Indians with 0.02% (17), and others with 0.77% (870) (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2010). With an overwhelmingly high population of 97.75%, Malays are the dominant population in PasirPuteh and most Malays are Muslims.

The Chinese are considered as the minority community in PasirPuteh, accounting to only 0.7% of the total population. According to the Secretary of PasirPuteh Buddhist Community, among the Chinese in PasirPuteh, there are 130 families or an estimated 260 people who are practising Buddhism (Loo 2015). Indians make up 0.06% of the population. Based on the researcher’s observations, Indian is the smallest ethnic group in PasirPuteh as the remaining population are not categorised into other ethnicities in the 2010 statistics. According to the Head Monk and the Chairman of Development and Safety Committee of KampungKetik (PJKKKP), there are also a small numbers of Siamese living in few locations in PasirPuteh, namely Bukit Yong, Semerak, Seligi, and Bukit TokCik, Nara Village. According to Ehrap (2015) and Ehma (2015), the Siamese population in Semerak was around 500. Collectively, they estimated there were around 3000 practising Buddhists of Chinese and Siamese who resided in PasirPuteh in 2015. However, the exact number of Buddhist practitioners in Bukit Yong, Seligi, and Bukit TokCik, Nara Village was unknown (Ehrap 2015).

According to Ismail (1995), the history of the existence of Buddhism in Semerak can be traced to Thailand, especially to the time when migration of Thais took place to strengthen the position of Sultan Muhammad I of Kelantan against the attacks of Terengganu. In return, Sultan Muhammad I had promised to make payment to Siam once every three years for the assistance. From then onwards, the Siamese’s arrival has continued to influence various aspects in the state of Kelantan, one of which being the spread of Buddhism with the arrival of Buddhists (Zakaria 2006). This is proven with the discovery of a Buddha artefact in Ketik Sungai Buloh, Semerak that was dated 300 years-old (Mohamad 1999). In addition, there are also claims that the Siamese who resided in Semerak migrated from Laos to Kelantan many years ago. A number of Siamese villages have been erected in the outskirts of Kelantan since hundreds of years ago (Ismail 1996). In short, the migration factor created a platform for the Siamese to build a community in Kelantan, including PasirPuteh.

According to the Semerak district state officer (Jusoh 2015), the Siamese community living in Kelantan currently has the right to own land and be recognised as a resident of the state because they can be directly linked to their ancestors who lived in Kelantan hundreds of years before them. Therefore, the state government has to protect the rights of the Siamese community based on the terms and conditions set by the PasirPuteh Land and District Office. On a similar note, even though Buddhists are the minority community, they also deserve the same rights and privileges from the government.

In the religious context, Ehrap (2015) stated that the majority of PasirPuteh Siamese community practise Threvada Buddhism while the Chinese followed the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. Some Buddhists visit wat (Siamese temple) while others prefer Chinese temples. In terms of followers, the PasirPuteh Buddhist community is dominated by Siamese compared to Chinese. As for the Muslim community, there are 64 mosques in both small and big areas of PasirPuteh to support the religious activities in the district. According to Harun (2015), mosques act as a place to worship and to perform other religious activities. For Buddhists, there are three wats including one in Cherang Ruku, Sannaksong (a small building which acts as a stop for bikkhu (monks) when visiting a wat), another one in Bukit Yong, and the third one being the Thi Pak Song (a small place of worship, especially for bikkhu to stay) in Bukit TokCik, Nara Village PasirPuteh.

The total population in PasirPuteh was 113,191, consisting of Malaysians and non-Malaysians. Based on the report in 2010, there were about 110,642 (97.72%) Malays, 808 (0.71%) Chinese, 17 (0.015%) Indians, and 870 (0.77%) of other ethnicities (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2010). Table 1 below shows the total population in Kelantan according to ethnicity and district/area in 2010.

<p>| TABLE 1. Total Population According to Ethnicity and District/Area, 2010 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District/Area</th>
<th>Malaysians</th>
<th>Non-Malaysians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Based on Table 1, Malays dominated other ethnicities in PasirPuteh, making up 97.72% of the total population, followed by 0.77% of other ethnicities. However, the researcher is unable to determine the types of ethnicities grouped under this group. Based on the observation of the researcher, Siamese would be one of the ethnicities under this category. Chinese came third with 0.71% of the population followed by Indians (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2010).

**Religion Composition**

Table 2 shows the religion composition of the Kelantan population. Kelantan is made up of different ethnic groups including Malays, Chinese, Indians, Siamese, and others. Islam is the religion with the most followers with 95.2% of the population being Muslims. Buddhism is practised by 3.8% of society there. Christians make up 0.3% of the population while Hinduism is practised by 0.2% of the population and other religions are practised by 0.5% of the population (Census of Department of Statistics Malaysia 2010). Table 2 shows the breakdown of the religion composition in Kelantan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia Census (2010)

As high as 95.2% of Kelantanese adhere to the teachings of Islam, followed by Buddhism (3.2%). Based on this census, the composition is quite similar to PasirPuteh. Out of the total 113,191 people in PasirPuteh, there are 110,642 (97.75%) Malays, 808 (0.71%) Chinese, 17 (0.02%) Indians, and 870 (0.77%) people of other ethnicities (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2010). This goes to show that the local population is predominantly Malay Muslims (97.75%), followed by Chinese and people of other ethnicities who practise Buddhism. As no accurate data can be obtained from relevant sources, the researcher estimated that there are about 1,678 people or 1.48% of the local population that practise Buddhism. The religious beliefs of Indians were undetermined however according to Ehma (2015), there were 5 Indians who married Siamese who practised Buddhism.

**The Form of Interaction between Muslims and Buddhists in PasirPuteh**

The community in PasirPuteh consists of Malays, Chinese, Siamese, and other ethnicities, each with their own identities and backgrounds. The sociocultural values are sub-consciously cultivated through years of exposure from a young age. The youngsters are instilled with the values of teamwork, cooperation, realisation of the people around them, greeting people in an age-appropriate manner such as *makcik* and *kek we* for older ladies. The sociocultural impacts can be reflected through traditional education, letter-writing, architecture, traditional
performances, traditional games, *silat* (traditional Malay martial art), and customs. Socioculture unites society which might have been divided through long history, political expansion, developing economy, language, literature, and religion (Salleh 1986). Even though Muslims make up the majority population in Pasir Puteh, minorities are supported and thus the harmonious atmosphere in the district is preserved. The different interaction patterns between Muslims and Buddhists in Pasir Puteh can be observed through the following aspects:

**Language**

Language acts as the medium of daily conversations and communication. Each community uses language differently. The functions of language are different for every community and these functions are expressed differently (Meer 2019). Language acts as a reflection of the attitude of the speakers and norms of the community. Furthermore, social aspects also influence the speaker’s attitude (Mahali 2006). For the community of Pasir Puteh, *Bahasa Melayu* or the Malay language which is the Kelantanese dialect was used as a communication tool. The use of the Kelantanese dialect shows that the local people are able to adapt to the social context of the community, especially in terms of language. The use of this common dialect creates an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness among the local population, thus further strengthening the relationships within the community.

For example, even though the Siamese minority originated from Thailand, they are only able to speak minimal and the informal version of Siamese language. This is because most of the local Siamese who are literate received education in Malayan schools (Dollah 1986). According to Ehrap (2015), the Siamese people would use the Siamese language when communicating with one another, but when there is a Malay present in the same social setting, they will switch and use *Bahasa Melayu* as the medium of conversation. Similarly, the Chinese will communicate in their mother tongue with other Chinese but when communicating with Malays, the Kelantanese Malay dialect is preferred. Because of the closer relationship with the Malays, they are able to master the Kelantanese Malay and speak an impeccable version of it.

The Buddhists community adapted themselves well within the Muslim majority. Apart from using the local Kelantanese dialect with ease, some of the Buddhist community also practise local traditions (Taib et al. 1980). The use of a common language is a form of respect that exists in the Muslim and Buddhist communities and it is very useful in deterring any suspicions that might arise due to the different religious beliefs. The adjustment in the language used when interacting with people of different ethnicities is a sign of respect towards those who do not understand Chinese or Thai language. This sense of respect can avoid prejudice and strengthen the interaction between Muslims and Buddhists, thus solidifying the intercultural relationships.

Therefore, language plays a very important role in interaction. Very often, the use of language is influenced by the community’s knowledge in using the language as a form of communication. This is known as sociolinguistic competency. The situational use of language enables the need for interaction to be achieved. This can help improve interaction flow and eliminate any interaction issues (Mahali 2006). In the case of Pasir Puteh, the context of interaction is well understood by the Muslim and Buddhist communities. The Buddhist community uses *Bahasa Melayu* as the medium of interaction when interacting with Malays but they speak in Chinese and Thai languages when communicating among themselves. This is a form of adaptation to the environment that the Muslim and Buddhist communities are located in.

**Food**

Regardless of ethnicity and religion, rice is the staple food for all the population of Pasir Puteh including Malays, Chinese, and Siamese. Rice is usually eaten during lunch and dinner, and for some families, during breakfast as well. For lunch and dinner, rice is often accompanied by either raw or cooked vegetables, served with a local sauce called *budu*, *sambal*, soy sauce, salted fish, and on some occasions, fish and meat. The cooking methods and food menu for Muslims and Buddhists do not differ that much. The only difference is that Muslims do not consume pork (Dollah 1986). Another form of adaptation was how the Chinese community had grown to like food which are spiced, peppery, and fatty food even though previously they were used to eating watery, non-spiced food. This shows that they have beaten the stigma of Chinese liking only soup-based dishes (Ahmad et al. 2011). By sharing a common interest in the food, this can enhance the relationship between people of different religions especially at the workplace and during festive activities.

However, Mahayana Buddhists are different with Theravada Buddhists in that most of them are vegans and consumed their dishes with rice (Ehrap 2015). The vegan way of life is dependent on the religion stream (Nath 2010) and in line with the Buddha’s teachings (Eight Noble Truths). They are vegans because they believe in the sanctity of life and do not condone the killing of animals for food such as meat and fish.
According Hashim (2015), non-Muslims who are in the food business typically hire Malay cooks to fulfill the needs of the Muslim customers. Hence, Malays can also be seen eating at restaurants operated by Chinese. The understanding of halal and haram in terms of food shown by non-Muslims indirectly creates an interaction between the majority Muslims and minority Chinese from the perspective of food. To create harmony, the sensitivity of other religions must be taken care of and respected. Muslims are sensitive about their food and this has to be understood by people of other religions. Tolerance and respect have to be practised by everyone, regardless of their religion.

Although Muslims are able to eat in the non-Muslim-operated restaurants that adhere to the food preparation criteria, they should still be wary. For example, if the non-Muslim-owned restaurant is serving haram food, Muslims should avoid going to the premise even though the premise is located within a Muslim-dominated community. As Muslims, it is their obligation to identify which restaurant is halal before deciding to eat at the restaurant. This is vital to improve tolerance and respect towards the privacy of other religions.

Business

Business interaction is crucial in building a good relationship and ethics between business owners and customers. Good relationship is the basis of trust that forms the backbone of any business (Martinez 2019). This can be seen in the business ventures of Muslim and Buddhist communities in PasirPuteh in which they share similar business ventures such as selling food, vegetables, clothes, operating mechanics shops, and others. This shows a good interaction in business. Therefore, Muslims and Buddhists are performing business transactions together, be it in buying or selling food, necessities, operating salon, and others. This shows they are co-dependent on one another to survive. Business transaction is actually a basic societal activity that takes place without having to involve any sensitive religious issues. Amicable relationships are built from this activity and the sellers often address themselves with friendly and informal terms such as ‘mek’ and ‘awang’, which are synonymous and popular within the Kelantanese society. This is also true for how they name the shops, for example ‘mek yam’s shop’ or ‘awang’s shop’. These names are used by people of different ethnicities and religion in PasirPuteh. The intimate friendships that resulted from the business dealings between Muslims and Buddhists helped to create a stronger bond within the community. It is also a norm for the local population to address the ethnic Chinese or Siam with a Malay name. For example, the Siam name ‘Eajum’ is adapted to ‘Eapi’ and ‘Che Umar’. This strengthens the relationship between Muslims and Buddhists (Hassan 2015). This friendly name-calling is not only common within the population of PasirPuteh, but also in Kelantan as a whole.

Based on the findings of Ehrap (2015), most of the Chinese are in Kelantan are business operators while Siamese are mostly involved in agriculture. The Malays are either business owners, involved in agriculture or work for other people. Ethnicities and religions do not influence the type of business a person wants to venture in. However, any pork and alcohol-related business are almost non-existent in PasirPuteh. This shows the business interaction that exists between the majority Muslims and minority Chinese and Siamese in the area, especially in the way the different ethnicities and religious groups respect and tolerate each other. The sense of understanding, respect, and tolerance is practised consciously by non-Muslims without any force or coercion from the Muslim majority and the main reason behind the harmonious community that exists in PasirPuteh.

Festivals and Celebrations

There are many festivals and celebrations for the different religions in Malaysia. These festivals and celebrations can be divided into three categories which are social, religion, and tradition. Social celebrations and festivals have undergone multiple adaptations and changes. These adaptations and changes are situational and dependent on the society that celebrates them. Hari Raya Puasa, Chinese New Year, and other festivities are examples of social celebrations that are originally religious and traditional in nature. Social celebrations for the festivities are joyful events because it consists of visitsto the homes of those who celebrate, the exchange of greetings, and sharing of food and drinks (Zakaria 2005).

The Muslim and Buddhist community in PasirPuteh have multiple lively celebrations. The Muslim community celebrates Hari Raya Puasa by serving traditional dishes such as asketupatpalas, tapai, ketupatnasi, lemang, and a variety of kuih-muih. These dishes are made for guests such as neighbours, friends, students, and important guests who have been invited formally to visit their houses. However, for the Islam and Buddhist community, those who come and celebrate are usually neighbours close to the host. This kind of celebration exists in villages with a long-standing history of close bond, for example in Lembah Village, Semerak. Besides close neighbours, close friends are also invited to join in the festivities at the homes of the host. Buddhist students who are close

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with their teachers would visit their teachers during Hari Raya. However, the older generations will not visit the host’s residence unless they have been formally invited (Ehrap 2015). Formally invited guests usually included important figures in the Muslim and Buddhist community such as the Head Monk and committee members. According to Ibrahim (2015), the Malay population would also celebrate Chinese New Year with the Buddhist community to strengthen the bond with the Buddhist community. Food, drinks, and gifts in the form of hampers are distributed during the celebration. The Buddhist community who celebrate Chinese New Year will prepare food such as kuih-muih and other Chinese delicacies for guests who visit them and specifically halal food for Muslim guests. This shows that people in Pasir Puteh respect each other.

Festival-based programmes organised by either Muslim or Buddhist community are held on a yearly basis. Such programmes can take the form of dinners, traditional sports, games, and lucky draws. Both communities participate in these activities and this positive relationship leads to a harmonious society in Pasir Puteh. The teamwork between these two communities in ensuring the success of the programme show that they are able to cooperate with each other despite their differences in religious beliefs. Without the teamwork and commitment shown by these two communities, the programme will not be a success.

Programmes or activities (Brennan 2001) like dikirbarat, tarianmak Yong, and wayangkulit (Ehma 2015) often receive great response from the community. They will watch or even participate in the shows. This subconsciously creates an interaction between the Muslims and Buddhists. In relation to this, Muslims will attend any form of celebrations or cultural and art events organised by Buddhists as long as they do not include any religious elements. This means that such invitations involve only race-based celebrations and festivities and do not involve celebrations revolving around Buddhist religious elements.

‘Ziarah’ or Visiting

Ziarah or visiting is important in creating a strong bond between friends and relatives within certain communities (Johnson 2004). This can be seen between Muslim and Buddhist communities who visit each other and have a strong bond that existed since a long time ago (Ehrap 2015; Hashim 2015; Ibrahim 2015; Jusoh 2015). Visits usually happen between close friends, neighbours, and important people. The visiting activities also include visiting the sick or the deceased. Some of them will bring along gifts during visiting. Buddhists will serve packed water for their invited Muslims guests (Hassan 2015). This shows the interaction that exists between Muslims and Buddhists. When disasters strike, people will offer help to one another regardless of race and religion. This type of relationship enhances the love and care in the hearts of different religion followers (Liefbroer et al. 2018).

‘Kenduri’ or Ceremonial Feasts

Kenduri or ceremonial feast is a party or an event that is held in a community, for example wedding ceremonies (Johnson 2004), thanksgiving, and other ceremonies that are organised by Muslims or Buddhists. Neighbours, friends and, relatives are usually invited to make the ceremony more joyous. However, for neighbours of different religious beliefs, only those who are close with the hosts are invited. Buddhist hosts will book halal food made by Muslims for their invited Muslim friends and neighbours. Buddhists understand the sensitivity of Muslims towards the food they consume. To respect their Muslim guests, the Buddhist hosts will make special arrangements for halal food and ensure that food provided for the guests contains no haram elements. In contrast, Muslim hosts can serve any food and drinks at their ceremonies because food and drinks are not an issue for Buddhists who practise the Theravada or Mahayana teachings.

For Buddhists who organise special ceremonies at wat, only the adults or the old will be invited for those ceremonies. Food and drinks that are served for Muslim guests are usually pre-packed or pre-booked in advance. Muslim guests will bring their own cutlery and plates to the ceremony (Hassan 2015). For ceremonies at wats, the Buddhists will prepare pork as the main dish. Buddhists would typically ask the Muslims to help prepare beef-based dishes. Even though Muslims bring their own plates and cutlery, some are still uneasy towards the serving of pork during the ceremony. This shows that Muslims are sensitive towards pork. However, as a sign of respect and appreciation for being invited, the Muslims will eat the halal food that have been provided for them.

When visiting one another during ceremonies, most visitors will come without bringing gifts. However, some might bring small gifts such as sugar as a sign of appreciation. In contrast, during wedding ceremonies, the visitors will give presents in the form of money based on their affordability. The amount can range from RM5, RM10, to even RM100. This has become a culture in Muslim and Buddhist communities. Even though the guests
sometimes do not eat the food served at the ceremony, gifts are still being presented as a form of appreciation to the host on the invitation.

‘Gotong Royong’ or Communal Work

Being helpful and provide cooperation to one another can decrease the workload and burden faced by someone. The Muslim and Buddhist communities living in Lembah Village, Semerak (Harun 2015), often bergotongroyong or help one another (Jhonson 2004) in teams (Vijayalakshmi and Yamuna 2018) in certain activities such as hunting for foxes, squirrels, and pigs. Muslims would assist Buddhists in catching those animals. Ehrap(2015) explained that Siamese (Buddhists) used to rear pigs at their homes. However, when the Buddhists realized that pigs are haram for Muslims, the Siamese Buddhist decided to not rear anymore pigs to preserve their relationship with their Muslim neighbours. However, when pigs trespass the vicinities of their homes, Muslims will ask the Buddhist Siamese to help vacate the animal from the premise or to hunt for the animal as the product of the hunt is considered a food supply for the Siamese Buddhists. Similarly, if there are dead cows, Muslims will inform the Buddhists so that the cows can be used by the Buddhist as food stock (Hassan 2015).

This teamwork shows the interaction Muslims and Buddhists. However, such situation only happens in villages close to the Siamese villages. This form of cooperation that happens between Muslims and Buddhists helps the communities to be more aware of each other’s sensitivity and to foster deeper respect between them.

Interaction can also be seen in teamwork and cooperation. For example, Hashim (2015) reported on how the communities of different religions united together to fight drug and pilkuda abuse cases in the villages. Due to the severity of this problem, the commitment from everyone regardless of their religious beliefs is needed to stop the spread of this plague.

However, there are also negative example of interaction between the Muslim and Buddhist communities whereby the Muslims are addicted to ‘tuaknasam’ (an intoxicating drink based from fermented coconut water that has been brewed for 3 days) which they obtained from the Siamese villages. In this instance, the Siamese Buddhists assisted the Muslims who want to purchase the drink even though the followers of Islam are not allowed to consume alcohol.

Education

Regardless of age and religion, education is a very important component of life (Sarkar & Sarkar 2019). Education can be obtained via formal and informal avenues. For Muslim and Buddhist communities in PasirPuteh, they receive their formal education from national schools, national-type schools, and religious schools. For Muslims, they have the choice to send their kids to either national schools, religious schools, or Chinese national-type schools. However, for the ethnic Buddhist Siamese, most of them send their children to national schools or Chinese national-type schools. For the ethnic Chinese, they send their children to Chinese national-type schools or national schools depending on the availability of schools near their houses. In short, everyone has the freedom to send their children to any schools of their choice, except for religious schools that are only reserved for Muslim children.

Ehrap (2015) stated that the Siamese Buddhists conduct classes for students to teach about religion and other subjects in a wat at KetikBuloh Village. The teachers are usually volunteers from the Buddhist community. Wats are also used to conduct motivational talks and seminars.

For the Buddhists children who attend national schools, they are able to mingle with Muslims students and teachers in the schools. This results in interaction between the teachers and students. They learn, eat and drink, play, get involved in sports, and even commute to school together. Ehma (2015) stated that one of the reasons behind the strong bond between Buddhist and Muslim children is because they commute to school together on the bus. This strong bond is another proof of interaction between Muslim and Buddhist children.

There are also interactions that happen amongst the students both inside and outside the school grounds. For example, Buddhist students are able to observe the Muslim students’ performing routines such as prayer recitations at various times and other spiritual activities in school. This creates an understanding between them. Learning closely together also shows that the Buddhist and Muslim students are able to adapt to one another. For example, Muslim students and teachers are careful with what they say to Buddhist students so as to not touch on
sensitive issues, especially regarding their beliefs. This ethical behaviour shows the deep and strong bond that exists amongst the Buddhist and Muslim children.

In the context of teacher-parent relationship, teachers often interact with Buddhist parents on matters regarding the children’s education, especially during Parent-Teacher Association. The commitment of parents of different religious backgrounds shows that the parents are willing to cooperate with the Muslim community. This type of interaction is vital between teachers and parents. Parents also interact with each other while waiting for their children to finish school. This creates a friendly environment between the Muslim and Buddhist parents. Greeting each other while waiting for their children shows the interaction between parents regardless of their religious beliefs.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the interaction that happens between Muslim and Buddhist communities has resulted in the existence of different interaction patterns between people of different religions. This interaction pattern allows the Buddhists minority to co-exist harmoniously and peacefully with the majority Muslim community. Their co-existence leads to various interaction patterns in the form of language, food, business, celebrations and festivals, visiting culture or ziarah, kenduri or ceremonial feasts, gotong royong or communal work, and education. The implication of these interaction patterns is that Muslims and Buddhists can respect, cooperate, be friendly, visit and greet one another regardless of race and religion. The interaction patterns formed has created a harmonious and peaceful sociocultural environment between the multicultural residents of PasirPuteh. It is recommended that government agencies and NGOs need to promote awareness about positive interaction so that people of different religions can interact better with one another to achieve global peace and harmony.

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REFERENCES

44. Footnote: This article has been published in international ‘Prosiding Seminar Antarabangsa Agama & Pembangunan ke-IX (SAAP 2016) Agama dan Perdamaian’ (Modified: Kehidupan Masyarakat Islam dan Buddha-in Malay)