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Negotiating Cultural Identity and Social Capital in a Multiethnic Marketplace: Insights from Community-Based Traders in Indonesia

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Abstract

Traditional marketplaces function not only as sites of economic exchange but also as social and cultural arenas where diverse communities negotiate identity and build relationships. This study examines how community-based traders negotiate cultural identity in a multiethnic marketplace and how such processes generate social capital for interethnic cooperation and socioeconomic resilience. An interpretive qualitative case study with ethnographic elements was conducted at Mardika Market in Ambon, Indonesia, involving traders from the Amarima Hatuhaha community and other ethnic and social groups. Data were collected through repeated observations, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and documentation and analyzed using reflexive thematic and abductive approaches. The findings demonstrate that cultural identity operates not only as a social boundary but also as a relational resource for building cross-group trust and reciprocity. Cultural values, kinship ties, shared reputations, and norms of mutual assistance provide an initial foundation for trust, which is subsequently extended through everyday practices such as information sharing, deferred payments, lending, safeguarding stalls, assistance with goods, customer referrals, and conflict negotiation. The study reveals that bonding social capital can be transformed into bridging social capital through the ongoing negotiation of cultural boundaries. It advances social capital scholarship by conceptualizing social capital as a relational capacity actively produced through culturally embedded identity negotiation.

Keywords: *Cultural Identity, Interethnic Cooperation, Multiethnic Marketplace, Social Capital, Social Resilience*

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional marketplaces are often approached primarily as economic institutions where goods, money, and information are exchanged. Yet, everyday trading rarely takes place within purely economic relationships. Markets are also social spaces in which people encounter difference, establish familiarity, assess trustworthiness, negotiate obligations, and reproduce or reshape cultural boundaries. This dimension becomes particularly significant in culturally diverse societies such as Indonesia, where ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional differences are embedded in everyday social relations. In such settings, the marketplace provides a particularly revealing social environment for understanding how people who do not necessarily share the same cultural background manage to coexist and cooperate while

simultaneously pursuing individual economic interests. Rather than simply being places where transactions occur, markets can therefore be understood as relational arenas in which economic practices are inseparable from social identity and community life.

This issue is particularly visible in Mardika Market in Ambon, Maluku, a major trading environment in Eastern Indonesia in which traders from different social, regional, and cultural backgrounds interact on a routine basis. Among these traders are members of the Amarima Hatuhaha community, including people originating from the negeri of Kailolo, Kabauw, and Hulaliu, alongside traders from other communities. The coexistence of these groups creates a social environment in which cultural identity is simultaneously maintained and encountered through everyday economic interaction. The central issue, therefore, is not simply whether traders from different backgrounds interact, but how they make such interaction possible without necessarily abandoning the cultural identities that distinguish them. Cultural identity may function as a boundary that generates a sense of belonging and solidarity within a community, yet the same identity can also become a resource for establishing relationships beyond the group. Understanding this tension is important because the capacity to live and work together across difference is closely connected to the sustainability of local economic life and the social cohesion of diverse communities.

The significance of this problem can be seen in the nature of everyday exchange itself. Economic transactions in community-based marketplaces frequently extend beyond immediate cash payments. Traders may share information about prices and customers, lend or borrow goods, allow deferred payments, protect one another's stalls, assist with loading and unloading merchandise, recommend customers, or provide support when another trader encounters difficulties. Such practices cannot be adequately explained by price mechanisms or formal contractual arrangements alone. They depend on expectations concerning trust, reciprocity, reputation, and social obligation. Social capital scholarship has long demonstrated that economic action is embedded in social relationships and that networks, norms, and trust can facilitate cooperation and reduce uncertainty (Alaslan et al., 2027; Besida, 2025; Chen et al., 2026) similarly argues that economic behavior is embedded in ongoing social relations rather than being determined exclusively by abstract market calculations. In contexts where formal institutional arrangements may not fully regulate everyday transactions, these relational resources can become particularly important for sustaining economic interaction.

The concept of social capital provides an important starting point for examining this phenomenon. (Mahamadaminovich, 2025) conceptualizes social capital as resources associated with durable networks of relationships, emphasizing that social connections can be converted into other forms of capital. (Aditya & Permatasari, 2026), from a different theoretical position, highlights the role of social structures in facilitating actions through obligations, expectations, information channels, and norms. (Nfam et al., 2025) subsequently distinguishes between bonding social capital, which reinforces relationships within relatively homogeneous groups, and bridging social capital, which connects people across social divisions. This distinction is especially useful in a multiethnic marketplace because traders

may possess strong internal networks based on kinship, shared origins, or cultural affiliation while simultaneously developing relationships with people outside their immediate community. The coexistence of these two forms of social capital suggests that community solidarity and intergroup cooperation should not necessarily be treated as opposing processes.

Subsequent scholarship has further complicated the understanding of social capital by emphasizing that networks can generate both opportunities and constraints. (Fu et al., 2025) notes that social capital can facilitate mutual support, enforce norms, and provide access to resources, but it can also produce exclusion and excessive demands within tightly bounded groups. (Șerban, 2023) similarly distinguishes between forms of social relationships that bind members of a community together and those that connect them to actors beyond their immediate networks. This perspective is particularly relevant to multicultural marketplaces, where strong internal ties can provide security and solidarity while cross-group relationships are necessary for access to broader information, customers, and economic opportunities. (Scardigno et al., 2022) argument concerning the strength of weak ties further demonstrates why relationships beyond close-knit networks may provide access to resources that are not available within one's immediate social circle. Thus, the social value of a marketplace cannot be assessed simply by measuring the density of relationships within a community; attention must also be given to how relationships are extended across social boundaries.

Culture adds another layer of complexity to this process. Cultural identity is not merely a collection of inherited characteristics but is continuously produced and expressed through social interaction. (Bai et al., 2026) famously shifted attention from cultural traits themselves toward the boundaries through which groups distinguish themselves from others. From this perspective, cultural difference does not automatically lead to social separation. Boundaries are maintained, interpreted, and negotiated through interaction. (Cui, 2026) likewise conceptualizes identity as relational and continuously constituted through processes of identification and social categorization. This understanding makes cultural identity particularly relevant to marketplace interactions, where individuals repeatedly encounter people whose identities may differ from their own. Language choice, forms of address, shared histories, cultural values, community reputation, and patterns of mutual assistance may all become resources through which individuals communicate who they are and how they position themselves in relation to others.

The relationship between identity and intergroup relations is also illuminated by social identity theory. (Febriyanti & Putri, 2026) demonstrate that individuals derive part of their social identity from group membership, which can generate distinctions between in-groups and out-groups. Such distinctions may influence perceptions of trust, cooperation, and social distance. Nevertheless, intergroup boundaries are not necessarily fixed. Contact and sustained interaction can create opportunities for the renegotiation of social distance, particularly when interaction is organized around shared interests and repeated forms of cooperation. In economic settings, repeated exchange can create precisely such conditions

because traders encounter one another not as abstract members of different ethnic groups but as recurring partners, competitors, neighbors, and sources of practical assistance. The relational quality of these encounters can gradually transform perceptions of difference and create forms of trust that extend beyond the boundaries of the original community.

Research on trust and interorganizational relationships reinforces this argument. (Muchtar et al., 2024), for example, shows that embedded relationships can provide firms with access to valuable resources, information, and problem-solving capacities, while also illustrating the importance of balancing embedded ties with more distant relationships. (Zhou et al., 2024) similarly emphasize trust, networks, and collective action as central components of social capital, particularly where cooperation depends on individuals' expectations regarding the behavior of others. In community settings, therefore, social capital is not simply a pre-existing stock of relationships. It is continually activated through practices of cooperation, reciprocity, and mutual recognition. This observation is especially pertinent for traders whose economic survival may depend on informal forms of assistance that are rarely captured by conventional measures of business performance.

The literature on community resilience also provides an important connection between social relationships and economic sustainability. (De Schepper et al., 2024) demonstrate that social capital can constitute a critical resource for community resilience because networks facilitate information, assistance, and collective responses to disruption. This insight is valuable for understanding traders in environments characterized by uncertainty, competition, fluctuating demand, and limited formal support. The ability to draw upon relationships can provide forms of adaptive capacity that monetary capital alone cannot guarantee. At the same time, the cultural foundations of these relationships deserve closer attention. If trust and reciprocity are embedded in culturally meaningful practices, then resilience may be shaped not only by the existence of networks but also by how cultural identities are enacted, interpreted, and negotiated within those networks.

Taken together, these studies suggest that three dimensions are particularly important for understanding social relations in a multiethnic marketplace: cultural identity, everyday interaction, and social capital. Existing scholarship has established that social capital can facilitate cooperation (Yoo & Jang, 2025), that economic relationships are embedded in social networks (Coen-Sanchez, 2026; Kostogryz, 2026), that identities are relational and maintained through boundaries (Gemar, 2023; Tatarko & Lebedeva, 2023), and that trust and networks contribute to collective resilience (Gemar, 2023; Skulsuthavong & Wang, 2025; X. Zhang, 2026). However, these strands of scholarship are often examined separately. Studies of social capital tend to focus on networks, trust, reciprocity, and collective action, whereas studies of cultural identity frequently emphasize belonging, differentiation, and boundary formation. Less attention has been given to the everyday process through which cultural identity itself becomes part of the relational work through which trust and cooperation are produced in economically diverse and socially heterogeneous marketplaces. The issue is therefore not merely whether traders possess social capital, but how culturally embedded

identities and values become translated into relationships that can cross community boundaries.

This perspective is particularly important in the Indonesian context. Indonesia's extraordinary cultural diversity makes everyday coexistence across social boundaries a routine feature of community life, yet the mechanisms through which such coexistence becomes economically productive and socially sustainable remain insufficiently understood at the micro level. A marketplace such as Mardika offers an empirical setting in which these mechanisms can be observed directly because traders repeatedly encounter difference while sharing the same economic space. Within this setting, identity may initially operate as a source of bonding through kinship, shared origin, community reputation, and common cultural values. However, repeated interaction can also create opportunities for these culturally embedded resources to be extended beyond the community. Trust can emerge from repeated encounters; reciprocity can develop through practical assistance; and networks can expand through information exchange, customer referrals, lending arrangements, and cooperation in responding to everyday difficulties. In this process, the boundary that distinguishes one community from another does not necessarily disappear. Rather, it may become more permeable and socially productive.

The present study develops this line of inquiry by examining how community-based traders negotiate cultural identity through everyday marketplace interactions and how such negotiation is connected to the emergence of social capital across group boundaries. The empirical focus on Amarima Hatuhaha traders and their interactions with traders from other backgrounds allows the analysis to move beyond the simple identification of bonding and bridging social capital toward the relational process connecting them. What matters is not only that traders have networks or that they trust one another, but how cultural values, reputation, identity, and everyday practices make trust and reciprocity possible in the first place. In this sense, culturally embedded identity is approached as a relational resource rather than a static marker of group membership. The analysis consequently draws attention to the movement from cultural boundary to social connection, and from internal solidarity toward interethnic cooperation.

The study therefore aims to analyze how community-based traders negotiate their cultural identities in everyday interactions within a multiethnic marketplace, how trust, reciprocity, and social networks emerge through these negotiations, and how the resulting forms of social capital facilitate interethnic cooperation and contribute to traders' social and economic resilience. By bringing cultural identity and social capital into a single process-oriented analysis, the study seeks to show how economic coexistence across cultural difference is practically accomplished in everyday life. Such an understanding is relevant not only to scholarship on identity, social capital, and interethnic relations but also to community-based development and marketplace governance. Recognizing culturally embedded relationships as resources for cooperation can provide a foundation for more inclusive approaches to market development that do not treat cultural diversity merely as a potential

source of fragmentation, but as a social resource that can contribute to sustainable economic activity, social cohesion, and community resilience.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed an interpretive qualitative approach to understand how cultural identity is negotiated and transformed into social capital through everyday interactions among community-based traders in a multiethnic marketplace. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study was concerned not with measuring predetermined variables, but with understanding meanings, experiences, relationships, and social practices as they are experienced by the actors themselves (Mansur et al., 2026; Tauseef & Jamal, 2025). In particular, the study sought to examine how traders interpret cultural differences, establish trust, exchange reciprocal support, and develop cooperation across ethnic and community boundaries. Such processes are often embedded in routine interactions and cannot be adequately captured through numerical indicators alone. The interpretive orientation therefore allowed the researchers to understand the marketplace as a lived social arena in which identity, habitus, and different forms of capital are continuously negotiated (Arribas & Martín, 2024; O'Donovan et al., 2024).

The research was conducted at Pasar Mardika in Ambon City, Maluku, because the marketplace provides a socially and culturally diverse setting in which economic transactions occur alongside sustained interpersonal interaction. The site was particularly relevant because members of the Amarima Hatuhaha community from Negeri Kailolo, Kabauw, and Hulaliu actively engage in trading activities, including the sale of spices and other local commodities, while interacting regularly with traders from Buton, Java, and Ambonese sub-ethnic communities. This setting made it possible to observe directly how cultural identities are maintained, expressed, adjusted, and negotiated within relationships characterized simultaneously by competition and cooperation. The selection of the site was therefore purposive, based on its capacity to illuminate the relationship between cultural identity, social interaction, and social capital rather than on its statistical representativeness.

Participants were selected purposively according to their direct involvement in the social and economic processes under investigation (Hall et al., 2024; M.K. Ramadhan, 2023). The study involved approximately 25–30 informants, comprising Amarima Hatuhaha traders from Kailolo, Kabauw, and Hulaliu, traders from other ethnic or sub-ethnic backgrounds, market managers or market-related personnel, and selected community leaders or other actors familiar with intergroup relations in the marketplace. Amarima Hatuhaha traders were prioritized because they constituted the central community examined in the study, while traders from other backgrounds were included to provide relational perspectives on cross-cultural interaction. Market personnel and community leaders were involved because they could provide contextual information concerning market organization, social norms, and broader patterns of cooperation and conflict. The final number of participants was determined by information power and thematic sufficiency rather than by statistical

calculation (Hall et al., 2024).

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and documentation. Repeated observation was conducted to understand naturally occurring interactions, including trading practices, assistance between traders, information sharing, credit or deferred payment arrangements, protection of stalls, customer referrals, and responses to competition or market-related problems. Semi-structured interviews provided space for participants to explain their experiences and interpretations in their own words, while informal conversations helped capture spontaneous reflections that might not emerge during formal interviews. Documentation, including photographs, field notes, and relevant institutional or community documents, was used to preserve contextual evidence and support interpretation. Data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively, allowing emerging findings to guide subsequent observations and interviews (Runcieman, 2022).

Data were analyzed thematically through an interpretive and abductive process involving familiarization with the data, coding, development of categories, identification of recurring patterns, and construction of themes (Bouzina & Yunus, 2025). The interpretation was informed by the concepts of habitus, arena, and capital (Afdhal & Titing, 2024), while particular attention was given to how bonding relationships within the Amarima Hatuhaha community could extend toward bridging relationships with other traders. Triangulation was conducted across data sources, methods, and participant perspectives. Observational findings were compared with interview accounts and documentary evidence, while statements from Amarima Hatuhaha traders were examined alongside accounts from other traders, market personnel, and community actors. This process strengthened the credibility and interpretive consistency of the findings (Günbey & Karakütük, 2024). The study was bounded by Pasar Mardika and by the selected communities and trader groups; consequently, its findings are contextually grounded rather than universally generalizable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Marketplace as a Space for Everyday Identity Negotiation

Pasar Mardika is not simply a site where commodities are exchanged; it is a social arena in which cultural identities become visible through everyday encounters. Traders from the Amarima Hatuhaha community, particularly those from Kailolo, Kabauw, and Hulaliu, interact routinely with traders from Buton, Java, and Ambonese sub-ethnic communities. Observation of trading activities indicates that these encounters involve more than economic calculation. Traders negotiate ways of speaking, forms of address, patterns of assistance, and expectations of appropriate conduct while maintaining their respective cultural identities. In this sense, identity operates relationally: it is preserved within the community but adjusted in response to social situations and relationships with others. This finding is consistent with (Walker et al., 2023) argument that ethnic identity is maintained through interaction and boundary-making rather than through cultural isolation, (Y. Zhang, 2024) emphasizes that

identity is continuously produced through social relationships. The marketplace therefore becomes an everyday arena in which cultural difference is acknowledged without necessarily becoming a source of social distance.

Pasar Mardika is not simply an economic site where commodities are exchanged; it is a relational space in which cultural identities are continuously encountered, interpreted, and negotiated through everyday interaction. The presence of Amarima Hatuhaha traders from Kailolo, Kabauw, and Hulaliu alongside traders from Buton, Java, and Ambonese sub-ethnic communities creates a social environment in which difference is part of ordinary commercial life. Repeated observation indicates that traders do not enter these encounters as culturally neutral actors. Their ways of speaking, forms of address, patterns of assistance, and expectations concerning appropriate conduct are shaped by cultural backgrounds and prior social experiences. Yet these identities are not expressed in isolation. They are adjusted according to the particular relationship and situation in which interaction occurs. Identity, therefore, operates relationally: traders retain a sense of belonging to their respective communities while developing practical ways of interacting with people who do not share the same cultural background. This interpretation is consistent with scholarship that views identity as produced through social interaction and boundary-making rather than through cultural isolation.

The empirical importance of this process lies in the distinction between maintaining identity and maintaining social distance. In the Mardika setting, cultural boundaries remain meaningful, but they do not necessarily prevent sustained interaction. Traders may continue to recognize differences in origin, community affiliation, language, or cultural practice while simultaneously developing familiarity through repeated economic encounters. This is particularly significant because the marketplace requires a degree of practical accommodation: traders must communicate, negotiate transactions, exchange information, and respond to everyday needs despite differences in social background. The marketplace consequently creates what can be understood as a practical space of negotiated coexistence, where cultural identity provides a point of orientation but interaction determines how that identity is enacted in relation to others. Research on Mardika likewise identifies the market as a space of social interaction extending across community and religious boundaries, rather than functioning solely as an economic institution.

The observations also suggest that identity negotiation is embedded in ordinary rather than exceptional practices. It does not necessarily occur through explicit discussions about ethnicity or culture. Instead, it becomes visible through the ways traders establish familiarity, decide how to communicate, respond to requests, and determine the degree of assistance they are willing to provide. Such practices gradually transform strangers or occasional trading partners into socially recognizable actors. This process is important for understanding how trust can emerge across cultural boundaries. A trader's identity may initially provide a basis for recognition within an existing community network, but repeated interaction allows others to evaluate the person's reliability through actual conduct. Identity thus becomes connected

to reputation, while reputation becomes a basis for further interaction.

This finding also complicates the assumption that strong community identity necessarily produces social closure. Recent research on the Amarima Hatuhaha community at Pasar Mardika shows that cultural and customary values continue to shape economic life while adapting to the demands of an urban marketplace. In the present study, this adaptability is particularly relevant because cultural identity does not disappear when traders enter a heterogeneous economic environment. Instead, it provides a social foundation from which wider relationships can be developed. The analytical significance of Pasar Mardika therefore lies in showing that cultural difference and intergroup cooperation are not inherently contradictory. What matters is the interactional process through which boundaries are maintained, interpreted, and made permeable enough to permit cooperation.

From this perspective, the marketplace should be understood as an arena in which identity is both reproduced and transformed. Traders reproduce cultural belonging through their continuing attachment to community-based values and relationships, while simultaneously transforming the practical meaning of those identities through encounters with others. This process provides the foundation for the next analytical step in the study: understanding how culturally embedded identity can generate trust, reciprocity, and eventually forms of social capital that extend beyond the immediate community. Cultural identity therefore matters not because it eliminates difference, but because it provides social resources that can be activated within relationships across difference.

Cultural Values, Reputation, and Kinship as Foundations of Trust

The negotiation of identity is closely connected to the formation of initial trust. Among Amarima Hatuhaha traders, kinship, shared cultural background, reputation, and community affiliation provide an important basis for deciding whom to approach, assist, or rely upon in commercial situations. These relationships create an initial layer of confidence because traders possess prior knowledge about one another through family, community, or shared social networks. Such trust does not mean that all relationships are automatically harmonious; rather, it reduces uncertainty when traders enter into repeated economic interactions. From the perspective of social capital, these culturally embedded relationships constitute resources that can facilitate cooperation and access to support (Yingyu & Shinya, 2025). The findings also suggest that reputation extends beyond individual economic performance. A trader's conduct may reflect upon his or her family and community, making honesty, reliability, and reciprocity socially meaningful. Trust is therefore simultaneously personal, relational, and culturally embedded.

The role of kinship becomes particularly visible when traders encounter situations that require assistance beyond the immediate commercial transaction. Shared community connections can make it easier to ask for information, seek temporary assistance, or establish cooperation because the relationship is supported by a broader sense of social obligation. However, kinship should not be understood as a guarantee of trust. Trust develops through the repeated confirmation of expected conduct. A trader may initially be approached because

of a shared background, but continued cooperation depends on whether that person demonstrates reliability, reciprocity, and respect for the expectations governing everyday interaction. In this sense, cultural identity provides an entry point into a relationship, while everyday conduct determines whether that relationship becomes dependable.

Reputation is therefore an important mechanism through which trust is maintained. In a closely connected trading environment, individual conduct can have consequences beyond a single transaction because traders are embedded in overlapping family, community, and social networks. Honesty, responsibility, willingness to help, and the ability to maintain commitments contribute to how a trader is perceived by others. Conversely, conduct that violates shared expectations may weaken confidence and affect future interaction. Reputation consequently operates as an informal form of social accountability. It encourages traders to consider not only immediate economic interests but also the longer-term relational consequences of their actions.

The findings thus indicate that trust in the marketplace is neither purely personal nor simply a consequence of ethnic or cultural similarity. It is produced through the interaction between culturally grounded relationships and repeated everyday experience. Amarima Hatuhaha traders can draw upon kinship and community affiliation as an initial relational resource, but these resources acquire practical value when they are reinforced through consistent interaction. This helps explain why strong cultural identification does not necessarily lead to social closure. Instead, relationships rooted in shared identity can provide a foundation from which wider forms of cooperation become possible. Trust consequently functions as a bridge between cultural identity and social capital: it transforms existing social relationships into practical resources that can support cooperation within the broader multiethnic marketplace.

From Everyday Reciprocity to Cross-Group Social Capital

Initial trust becomes more significant when it is reinforced through repeated reciprocal practices. Field observations identified everyday forms of assistance such as exchanging market information, lending or borrowing goods, allowing deferred payment, helping to protect stalls, assisting with loading and unloading, referring customers, and sharing information about prices and market conditions. Although these practices may appear ordinary, their repetition gradually produces expectations of mutual support. (Y. Zhang, 2024) concept of embeddedness helps explain why economic actions in the marketplace cannot be separated from social relationships, while (Walker et al., 2023) emphasize trust, networks, and reciprocity as important foundations of collective action. Importantly, reciprocity was not restricted to members of the same cultural community. Repeated interaction enabled relationships initially based on practical economic needs to develop into broader interpersonal networks. Social capital thus emerged through practice rather than existing only as a pre-established community asset.

What is particularly important in the findings is that reciprocity was not confined to relationships among Amarima Hatuhaha traders. The marketplace created repeated

opportunities for traders from different cultural backgrounds to encounter one another and develop practical forms of cooperation. A trader might initially interact with another trader because of an immediate economic need, such as obtaining information about prices, borrowing goods, or receiving assistance with a temporary shortage. Over time, however, the repeated experience of receiving and returning assistance changed the character of the relationship. The other trader was no longer perceived only as a commercial counterpart but increasingly as someone whose reliability had been demonstrated through previous interaction. Trust was therefore extended through experience rather than assumed solely from cultural similarity.

This development is significant for understanding how social capital emerges in a multiethnic marketplace. Social capital should not be treated simply as a resource that communities possess before entering the marketplace. The findings indicate that it can also be produced through ordinary practices of cooperation. Each act of assistance creates an opportunity to confirm reliability, while repeated reciprocity strengthens expectations of future cooperation. In this process, information, practical assistance, and economic support become embedded within interpersonal relationships. As Walker et al. (2023) emphasize, trust, networks, and reciprocity provide important foundations for collective action, but in the context of Pasar Mardika these elements are built incrementally through everyday interaction.

The movement from everyday reciprocity to cross-group social capital also demonstrates that economic difference and cultural difference do not necessarily prevent cooperation. Traders do not have to abandon their cultural identities in order to establish relationships with others. Instead, cooperation develops around shared practical experiences and accumulated confidence. What begins as a limited exchange can gradually expand into a wider network of mutual assistance, connecting traders beyond the boundaries of their immediate community. Social capital consequently emerges as a relational achievement: it is continually reproduced through interaction, tested through practice, and extended when reciprocal relationships prove dependable. In this sense, the marketplace becomes a setting where existing community-based trust can be transformed into broader forms of social connection and intergroup cooperation.

From Bonding to Bridging: Negotiating Cultural Boundaries

A particularly important pattern concerns the movement from bonding relationships within the Amarima Hatuhaha community toward bridging relationships with traders from different backgrounds. Bonding social capital provides security, identity, and mutual support among people who share cultural or kinship ties, but its significance becomes greater when these internal networks are connected to external relationships. In Pasar Mardika, repeated economic encounters created opportunities for traders to cross cultural boundaries without abandoning their own identities. Cooperation could emerge even when traders remained conscious of differences in origin, language, customary practices, or community affiliation. The boundary was therefore not simply erased; it was negotiated. This finding extends

conventional understandings of social capital by showing that bonding capital can become a starting point for bridging when everyday interaction creates trust across social boundaries. Cultural difference, under these circumstances, becomes something that traders learn to manage rather than something that necessarily prevents cooperation.

The transition from bonding to bridging did not occur through a single moment of deliberate decision. It developed gradually as traders encountered one another in recurring situations where practical cooperation became necessary. A trader who initially relied primarily on members of the same community could increasingly interact with traders from other backgrounds when market conditions required information, assistance, or coordination. Through these encounters, social relationships expanded beyond the boundaries of kinship and community affiliation. The important point is that the expansion of relationships did not require the weakening of internal solidarity. Instead, the security provided by existing community ties could give traders a relational foundation from which they could engage more confidently with people outside their immediate networks.

The findings also indicate that bridging relationships are sustained through the recognition of difference rather than through the expectation that everyone should become culturally similar. Traders could maintain particular ways of speaking, patterns of social interaction, customary expectations, and community affiliations while simultaneously developing practical relationships with others. This produces a form of social interaction in which difference remains visible but becomes manageable within everyday cooperation. The ability to recognize another trader as culturally different while still treating that person as a reliable social and economic partner is central to the formation of bridging relationships.

Such relationships also appear to become stronger when cooperation extends beyond immediate economic necessity. Repeated assistance, the exchange of information, customer referrals, and willingness to respond to everyday difficulties create familiarity that gradually changes the meaning of intergroup interaction. Traders become known through their conduct rather than being understood only through their ethnic or community background. This does not eliminate cultural identity, but it introduces another basis for evaluating social relationships: personal reliability demonstrated through repeated encounters.

From this perspective, bridging social capital in Pasar Mardika should not be understood simply as the creation of connections between otherwise separate groups. It involves an ongoing process of negotiating how difference can coexist with cooperation. The marketplace provides the social conditions for this process because traders repeatedly encounter one another under circumstances that make mutual adjustment practically meaningful. Bonding relationships remain important as sources of identity and support, while bridging relationships expand the range of people from whom information, assistance, and cooperation can be accessed. The relationship between the two is therefore complementary rather than oppositional. Strong internal ties can coexist with outward-looking relationships when everyday interaction provides sufficient opportunities for trust to develop. In this way, cultural boundaries become relational boundaries that can be crossed, negotiated, and

redrawn through sustained social practice.

Cultural Identity as a Relational Resource

These patterns suggest that cultural identity should be understood not merely as a symbolic boundary but also as a relational resource. Cultural affiliation provides traders with an initial repertoire of values, expectations, reputational knowledge, and social connections that can be activated in economic interaction. In (Günbey & Karakütük, 2024) terms, social relationships become meaningful resources when they can be mobilized within a particular social arena. At the same time, identity does not function automatically as capital. Its value depends on how traders negotiate it in concrete relationships. The marketplace demonstrates that cultural identity can support both inward cohesion and outward engagement. This interpretation brings cultural identity and social capital into a closer analytical relationship: identity provides the social foundation from which trust may develop, while repeated interaction determines whether that identity becomes a bridge toward broader networks.

The findings indicate that the relational value of cultural identity becomes visible through what traders are able to do with their social connections rather than through identity itself. Shared cultural affiliation may make certain relationships easier to initiate because traders recognize familiar values, social expectations, or reputational histories. However, the practical usefulness of these connections depends on their activation in everyday situations. Information can be exchanged, assistance can be requested, and cooperation can be organized because social relationships provide channels through which such resources circulate. Cultural identity therefore has a practical dimension: it can shape access to people, information, assistance, and forms of mutual support that may not be available through formal economic arrangements alone.

At the same time, treating cultural identity as a relational resource requires avoiding an overly deterministic interpretation. Not every relationship among people who share the same cultural background produces trust, just as cultural difference does not necessarily prevent cooperation. What matters is how identity is interpreted and enacted within particular relationships. Traders continuously evaluate whether others are reliable, responsive, and willing to reciprocate. Identity may create familiarity, but repeated conduct gives that familiarity substantive meaning. This distinction is important because it places agency with the traders themselves. They are not simply carrying predetermined cultural characteristics into the marketplace; they actively negotiate which aspects of identity become relevant in particular encounters.

The marketplace consequently provides a setting in which identity can be simultaneously maintained and transformed through interaction. Amarima Hatuhaha traders can retain strong connections to their community while developing relationships with traders outside that community. Their cultural identity remains meaningful as a source of belonging, yet its relational significance expands when it becomes connected to broader networks of interaction. This process suggests that identity is not exhausted by the boundary it

establishes. Under particular social conditions, the same identity that strengthens internal cohesion can also provide confidence, reputation, and relational resources for engaging beyond the group.

What emerges, therefore, is a more dynamic relationship between cultural identity and social capital. Identity constitutes part of the social conditions from which relationships begin, but social capital develops through the actual use and reproduction of those relationships. Trust, reciprocity, and mutual assistance give practical substance to social connections, while repeated interaction can extend their reach beyond the original community. Cultural identity is consequently better understood as a relational capacity than as a fixed social asset. Its significance lies in its ability to organize expectations, sustain belonging, and facilitate interaction while remaining open to new relationships. In Pasar Mardika, this makes cultural identity relevant not because it removes social difference, but because it provides traders with resources for navigating that difference and turning everyday encounters into durable social connections.

Social Capital as a Mechanism of Interethnic Cooperation and Socioeconomic Resilience

The accumulation of trust, reciprocity, and networks has consequences beyond individual relationships. Social capital enables traders to access information, obtain practical assistance, manage uncertainty, and respond collectively to everyday market challenges. In this respect, cooperation across cultural boundaries contributes to the capacity of traders and communities to sustain their economic activities under changing conditions. (Bouzina & Yunus, 2025) argue that social capital is an important component of community resilience because networks facilitate access to information, resources, and collective support. The findings from Pasar Mardika similarly indicate that social relationships can function as informal mechanisms of economic security. Rather than relying exclusively on formal institutions, traders draw upon interpersonal networks to solve practical problems and maintain continuity in their livelihoods. Socioeconomic resilience is therefore partly produced through the capacity to sustain relationships across cultural differences.

The practical significance of these relationships becomes visible when traders encounter circumstances that cannot be managed efficiently through individual resources alone. Access to information about prices, customers, suppliers, or changing market conditions can reduce uncertainty and help traders make more informed decisions. Similarly, assistance with goods, loading and unloading, stall protection, or temporary financial arrangements can provide immediate support when ordinary trading activities are disrupted. These forms of assistance may not constitute formal economic protection, yet they provide traders with relational resources that can be activated when needed. Resilience in this context is therefore not simply an individual's capacity to absorb economic difficulties. It is also a social capacity developed through relationships that allow traders to draw upon one another's knowledge, experience, and practical support.

An important dimension of this process is the informal character of cooperation. Traders do not necessarily need formal agreements before providing assistance to one

another. Previous interactions create expectations about who can be approached and what forms of support may reasonably be requested. The willingness to help is reinforced when assistance is reciprocated over time, creating a pattern in which cooperation becomes embedded in everyday market relations. Such relationships can be particularly valuable during uncertain situations because they provide alternatives to purely individual responses. The market consequently operates not only through formal economic exchange but also through informal relational mechanisms that help traders adapt to changing circumstances.

The interethnic dimension of these relationships is equally important. When trust and reciprocity extend beyond the Amarima Hatuhaha community, the available social resources become broader than those provided by internal networks alone. Connections with traders from different backgrounds expand access to information, practical assistance, and opportunities for cooperation. This does not mean that cultural boundaries disappear. Rather, resilience is strengthened when traders can maintain their community-based relationships while simultaneously drawing upon wider networks. The ability to move between these different relational spaces provides greater flexibility in responding to everyday challenges.

Socioeconomic resilience in Pasar Mardika can therefore be understood as a relational process. It is produced through the continued capacity to maintain trust, activate reciprocal support, and extend networks across cultural boundaries. The significance of social capital lies not simply in the existence of relationships, but in their capacity to be mobilized when traders face uncertainty or practical difficulties. In this sense, everyday cooperation becomes part of the infrastructure through which livelihoods are sustained. Interethnic relationships are not merely a consequence of marketplace diversity; they can become an important resource through which traders collectively navigate the economic uncertainties of everyday life.

An Integrative Model of Identity Negotiation and Social Capital Formation

Taken together, the findings indicate a process in which cultural identity provides an initial social orientation, everyday interaction creates opportunities for negotiation, and repeated reciprocal practices gradually generate trust and wider networks. These networks connect bonding social capital within the Amarima Hatuhaha community to bridging social capital across ethnic and sub-ethnic boundaries. This model complements established perspectives on social capital by emphasizing its relational and processual formation. Rather than treating social capital as something simply inherited from community membership, the findings show how it can be produced and expanded through everyday negotiations of identity in an economically competitive but socially interdependent marketplace. Pasar Mardika consequently illustrates how cultural identity can become a productive social resource when difference is negotiated through repeated interaction, mutual recognition, and practical cooperation.

The integrative model developed from these findings can be understood as a sequence of mutually reinforcing processes rather than as a linear movement from identity to cooperation. Cultural identity provides an initial framework through which traders interpret social relationships, but the subsequent quality of interaction determines whether

that framework becomes a basis for trust. Shared identity may facilitate familiarity and recognition, while repeated encounters provide opportunities to evaluate the conduct of others. When interactions are experienced as reliable and reciprocal, expectations of cooperation become stronger. In this way, identity, interaction, and trust are analytically distinct but empirically interconnected. The significance of cultural identity emerges through what happens in relationships rather than through identity as an isolated social category.

The model also demonstrates why everyday practices deserve analytical attention. Activities such as sharing information, assisting with goods, protecting stalls, referring customers, or accommodating temporary difficulties may appear too ordinary to constitute significant forms of social organization. Yet their repeated occurrence creates relational continuity. Traders develop knowledge about one another, learn whom they can approach, and establish expectations about appropriate responses to particular situations. These accumulated experiences gradually reduce social uncertainty and make cooperation more predictable. Social capital is therefore produced through the accumulation of relatively small interactions whose significance becomes visible only when considered collectively.

Another important dimension of the model concerns the relationship between bonding and bridging. Internal community networks remain important because they provide identity, familiarity, and mutual support. However, these networks do not represent the endpoint of social capital formation. Their wider significance emerges when traders are able to extend relational practices beyond the boundaries of their immediate community. Bridging does not require the abandonment of bonding ties; rather, it develops alongside them. Traders can remain strongly connected to their own cultural networks while establishing dependable relationships with people from other backgrounds. This coexistence challenges an interpretation of cultural identity as necessarily producing social closure.

The model consequently positions Pasar Mardika as a relational environment in which difference is continuously managed through practice. Cultural boundaries remain meaningful because traders retain awareness of their origins, affiliations, and social identities. At the same time, these boundaries become permeable through repeated interaction and reciprocal cooperation. What connects traders across difference is not the disappearance of cultural distinctions but the development of practical forms of mutual recognition. A trader becomes known not only through community affiliation but also through demonstrated conduct, reliability, and willingness to participate in reciprocal relationships.

This process has broader implications for understanding socioeconomic resilience. The capacity of traders to respond to uncertainty is partly dependent on the breadth and reliability of their social networks. When relationships extend across cultural boundaries, traders gain access to a wider range of information, assistance, and practical support. Resilience is therefore not located exclusively within individuals or communities; it is also embedded in the relational infrastructure that connects them. The findings suggest that the durability of marketplace life depends partly on this capacity to transform everyday interaction into networks that can be mobilized when circumstances require collective or

mutual responses.

Ultimately, the integrative model identifies cultural identity, interaction, trust, reciprocity, social capital, and resilience as interconnected dimensions of an ongoing social process. Cultural identity establishes an initial orientation, interaction tests and reshapes relationships, reciprocity consolidates trust, and expanding networks create possibilities for cooperation beyond immediate community boundaries. The resulting social capital is neither static nor automatically inherited. It is continually reproduced through everyday practice. This is the central analytical significance of the findings: in a multiethnic marketplace, social cohesion does not depend on cultural uniformity, but on the capacity of socially differentiated actors to develop workable and trustworthy relationships while retaining meaningful collective identities.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that cultural identity among community-based traders in Pasar Mardika is not only a marker of collective belonging but also a relational resource that can be activated and reshaped through everyday interaction. The experience of Amarima Hatuhaha traders from Kailolo, Kabauw, and Hulaliu shows that shared cultural values, kinship, reputation, and community ties provide an initial basis for trust, while repeated exchanges with traders from different ethnic and sub-ethnic backgrounds gradually extend these relationships through reciprocity, information sharing, mutual assistance, and practical cooperation. In this process, cultural boundaries are not simply removed but negotiated in ways that allow bonding relationships within the community to develop into bridging relationships across groups. The study therefore suggests that social capital in a multiethnic marketplace is not merely an inherited outcome of existing social networks; it is also produced through the everyday negotiation of identity and sustained through repeated interaction. This relational process enables cultural difference to coexist with economic interdependence and contributes to traders' capacity to manage uncertainty, maintain social relationships, and sustain their livelihoods. By placing cultural identity within the process of social capital formation, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of how interethnic cooperation can emerge from ordinary economic encounters in a culturally diverse marketplace. The findings remain contextually grounded in Pasar Mardika and should therefore be understood as an interpretation of how identity, trust, reciprocity, and cooperation are connected within this particular social and economic setting.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and

reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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