

## DYNAMICS OF INTERFAITH COMMUNICATION IN SEGREGATED COMMUNITIES

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### *Abstract*

This study aimed to analyze interfaith communication between Muslims in Aoma and Christians in Ambesakoa, focusing on whether the in-group/out-group dichotomy acted as a barrier and identifying factors that fostered mindful communication. Employing a descriptive phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Instruments included interview guides and field notes. Thematic analysis of the data revealed the following findings: Firstly, communication occurred nominally but with moderate intensity, shaped by long-term acquaintance and familial ties, and influenced by segregated living environments and individual busyness. Secondly, social interactions transcend primordial boundaries, avoiding stereotypes and prejudices, thereby promoting mindful communication. Thirdly, both communities fostered mindful interfaith communication driven by nationalism, shared family lines, and adherence to *kalosara* values. This study underscored the importance of inclusive education and cultural values in enhancing interfaith communication in segregated societies. It suggests that promoting deeper understanding and respect across religious divides can mitigate barriers created by in-group/out-group dynamics. By acknowledging and fostering these factors, societies can cultivate environments conducive to harmonious interfaith relations. This research contributes to the broader discourse on interfaith dialogue, highlighting practical strategies for promoting mutual respect and understanding in culturally diverse communities.

**Keywords:** *Communication, Segregation, Faith, Islam*

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## INTRODUCTION

Historically and culturally, the Aoma-Ambesakoa community originates from a single ethnic group, the Tolaki. However, they differ in their theological choices. The Aoma community embraces Islam as their way of life, while the Ambesakoa community chooses Christianity. This phenomenon of choosing between Islam and Christianity also occurs in other regions like Lambuya. In the Tolaki community of Lambuya, the choice between Islam and Christianity does not separate their geographical living areas (Nurjannah, 2010).

The social and cultural cohesion between Tolaki Christians and Muslims in Lambuya is not mirrored in the Tolaki Muslim and Christian communities in Wolasi. In Wolasi, ideological/theological choices impact residential choices. The Tolaki Muslim group in Aoma chooses to live in a single geographical area without mixing with their Christian ethnic siblings. Similarly, the Christian Tolaki group lives in a separate geographical area in Ambesakoa Village without mixing with their Muslim ethnic siblings (Alifuddin, 2013).

Spatial segregation based on theological choices in the Aoma-Ambesakoa community is a trigger and symbolic indication of “tension” between the two communities. These communities’ social and cultural segregation has strengthened identity culture based on each group’s ideological beliefs (Alifuddin, 2015). This condition, directly or indirectly, educates each party to become gated communities. This historical legacy has created social spaces through physical boundaries for the Aoma and Ambesakoa people. Fences as symbols of demarcation are used not only as explicit signs to define individual territorial ownership but also to categorize society based on beliefs (Visser et al., 2023).

The choice to live separately using belief markers in the Aoma-Ambesakoa community has created a distinction between insiders and outsiders. The logical consequence of this dichotomous choice is a lack of interaction and, in specific contexts, minimizes the chances of contact with disliked groups (where the in-group is more prominent than the out-group). This situation creates a high probability of prejudice-based communication between both parties. Such conditions are not conducive to creating harmonious social integration (Pasandaran, 2022). Therefore, to understand the implications of social fragmentation on communication patterns in the local community, this research aims to provide an analytical depiction of how the local community builds communication with their neighbors of different religions.

Much research on intercultural communication has been conducted by academics, one of which is Turnomo Raharjo’s study: *“Menghargai Perbedaan Kultural, Mindfulness dalam Komunikasi Antar Etnis Jawa dan Cina di Solo”* This study shows that both ethnic groups in the research area can create mindful communication situations because they have adequate intercultural communication competence, namely the ability to integrate motivation, knowledge, and skills to communicate appropriately, effectively, and satisfactorily.

The intercultural communication structure that can be constructed in the research area is multiculturalism, characterized by the ability of both groups to appreciate existing cultural differences (Rahardjo, 2005).

Additionally, Nurjannah researched “*Paralelisme Keimanan: Relasi Kesepahaman Antar Iman pada Masyarakat Lambuya*” (Madjegu & Napitupulu, 2023; Nurjannah, 2011). Nurjannah’s research aims to explain interfaith relations in the Tolaki community in Lambuya. Based on field data (Jati et al., 2022), Nurjannah states that the creation of interfaith understanding in the Tolaki community is inseparable from the historical and cultural basis of the Tolaki people. Culturally, the Tolaki ethnic group holds firmly to their cultural concept based on *kalo* values. As a historical object made of rattan in a circular shape, *Kalo* symbolizes the Tolaki people’s cultural bond. For the *Tolaki* people, *kalo* is a symbol of brotherhood and a living law that must be obeyed by every Tolaki ethnic member (Nurjannah, 2011).

Apart from the above, this research also found a cultural mechanism that lives and is maintained in the Tolaki community system. This mechanism supports the structure of social solidarity. The pillars of culture that form the basis of integration (Alhamuddin, 2018) include the attitude of yielding, awareness of being one ethnic group, kinship systems (clan), respect for traditional institutions (*kalo*), and traditional rituals. These pillars strengthen the unity and social solidarity built within the Tolaki community. These supporting pillars are functional because shared basic values support them: *kalosara* (Nurjannah, 2011).

Unlike previous studies, this research describes different realities and phenomena. This study analyzes the communication experiences of the Aoma and Ambesakoa people, who are geographically separated based on religious groups. It also explains the factors that may create mindless communication and the basic elements that can contribute to creating mindful communication in both communities.

This research offers a new perspective on understanding the dynamics of interfaith communication in segregated societies. Focusing on the real experiences of the Aoma-Ambesakoa community, it identifies factors that influence mindful and mindless communication in the context of spatial and theological segregation. Additionally, this research contributes significantly to interfaith communication literature by depicting cultural and social mechanisms that can support the creation of effective and harmonious communication in geographically and theologically separated societies. It also opens opportunities to develop more inclusive communication strategies and overcome prejudice-based communication barriers in multireligious and multicultural societies.

## COMMUNICATION AND FAITH

Communication and faith are not merely two words but two inseparable concepts. It should be noted that the study of interfaith communication emphasizes the effects of faith on communication. For religious individuals, faith is viewed as

a set of values. These values, maintained and nurtured within a community over time by its adherents, are seen as culture. Within this context, we can place interfaith communication within the realm of intercultural communication (Jati et al., 2022).

Interfaith communication is a discourse theme among two or more religious groups where values and religious information are exchanged to achieve cooperation within the framework of harmony. Interfaith communication is essentially synonymous with intercultural communication. Understanding this relationship confirms that religion is one of the groups studied in communication studies. The conclusion above is based on the view that ethnic groups have strong characteristics in maintaining norms and values. This perspective can prevent others from entering the group, foster feelings (in-group), and be open to others (out-group). As a culture, religion consists of human groups based on beliefs and faith in something sacred. This faith drives religious adherents to adhere to the teachings of its values (Sidqi & Rasidin, 2023).

People view the cultural world and communication as having a very close relationship. Religious people communicating will always be influenced or follow the culture (religious values) they have. When, with whom, and how much is communicated depends very much on the culture of the people interacting. Liliweri explains intercultural communication as the exchange of messages delivered orally, in writing, or even imaginatively between two people from different cultural backgrounds and is the distribution of messages in the form of information or entertainment that is delivered orally or in writing or other methods performed by two people from different cultural backgrounds (Liliweri, 2007).

As part of intercultural communication, interfaith communication cannot be separated from cultural factors (religious culture) inherent in the individual. Anthropologist Hall provides another effective way to observe cultural differences and similarities (values held) in perception and communication. He groups culture as high or low context, depending on what meaning comes from its scope compared to the meaning of words uttered. These characteristics manifest themselves in various ways. For example, the communication model in Asian society (high context) is sometimes vague, indirect, and implicit, whereas Western communication (low context) tends to be direct and explicit. In addition, as Lynch wrote, "communication context is low; they speak more, faster, and sometimes raise their voice intonation. Ting-Toomey has observed that differences in communication between cultures with high and low contexts are also clear in how they approach conflict. For example, in high context, cultures tend to be less open; they consider conflict dangerous in all types of communication. For them, Toomey said, "Conflict must be approached with caution" (Toomey in Liliweri, 2007). In interfaith communication, it is also essential to achieve what communicators and communicants hope for effective communication. Effective communication depends on the level of shared meaning obtained by participants who exchange messages. Fisher argued that the meaning of communication is never totally the

same for all communicators, which is to say that communication is impossible or even difficult because communication is not perfect. Therefore, to say that two people communicate effectively, both must achieve the same meaning from the message sent and received (they interpret the message in the same way) (Gudykunst, 2002).

## **INTERFAITH RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION**

Humans are cultural, social beings who acquire their behavior through learning. Communication is the most fundamental aspect of all human learning processes. Individuals' process to acquire communication rules (culture) begins early in life through socialization and education. Societies that uphold religious values embed cultural patterns based on these values into the nervous system, becoming part of our personality and behavior (Gudykunst, 2002). Communication theories suggest that culture and communication interact closely and dynamically. The core of culture is communication, as culture often emerges through communication. However, in turn, created cultures sometimes influence the communication styles of those within the culture.

Similarly, we can say that faith and communication for religious adherents become inherent. This means that for some religious adherents, communication is always bound by the values of faith or religious beliefs they adhere to, interacting closely and dynamically. For faith adherents, the relationship between faith and communication is reciprocal. Faith values cannot thrive without communication, and communication cannot exist without culture. Godwin C. Chu states that every cultural pattern and action involves communication. To be understood, both must be studied together. Culture cannot be understood without studying communication, and communication can only be understood by understanding the culture that supports it (Masood & Skoric, 2023; Mulyana, 2005; Visser et al., 2023).

## **BARRIERS TO INTERFAITH AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

Communication barriers, also known as communication barriers, hinder effective communication (Chaney, Lilian, 2004). An example of a cultural communication barrier is the nodding of the head, whereas in the United States, nodding indicates understanding, whereas in Japan, nodding does not mean agreement but merely indicates listening. Understanding intercultural communication, such communication barriers can be navigated. For Muslims, Jesus is a Prophet and Messenger, but for Christians, Jesus is also the Holy Spirit. The cross is sacred for Christians, but for Muslims, this symbol is perceived differently.

Interfaith communication in Indonesia's plural context becomes increasingly important due to increased mobility in interaction, economic interdependence among many people and societies, the reality of advancements in communication technology, changes in immigration patterns, and politics requiring understanding

different faith cultures. Interfaith communication emphasizes the main aspect, namely interpersonal communication between communicators and communicants from different cultural or faith backgrounds. Below are some barriers to intercultural/interfaith communication:

### **Stereotypes**

Communication difficulties arise from stereotypes, which generalize people based on limited information and form assumptions about them based on their membership in a group. In other words, stereotypes are the process of categorizing people into fixed categories or judgments about people or objects based on relevant categories rather than on their characteristics. Stereotypes can make the information we receive inaccurate. Generally, stereotypes are negative. Stereotypes are harmless if we keep them in our heads, but they become dangerous when activated in human relationships. Stereotypes can hinder or disrupt communication itself. For example, in the context of interfaith communication, Westerners may stereotype Muslims as terrorists (Adzim, 2019). Through these stereotypes, Westerners or even Indonesians may treat all Muslims as terrorists without considering individual personalities or uniqueness. Muslims, whom some Westerners perceive as terrorists, may become angry and offended, potentially leading to conflict.

Another example is the stereotype of Arabs being rude. With such perceptions, those who dislike rudeness always try to avoid communication with Batak people, resulting in ineffective and inefficient communication. Negative stereotypes about African-Negroes lead them to be treated as criminals (Samovar, 1981).

### **Alienation**

Alienation comes from the word alien, which is the basis of the word foreign. The foreign word means alone, unknown, so the word foreign means marginalized from socializing moved from others, or isolated. Alienation or alienation is a part of human life (Mulyana, 2005). Alienation is a form of experience when people experience mental degradation, that is, when someone considers himself a stranger. People who feel alien to themselves (Chaney, Lilian, 2004). He does not consider himself a subject or the center of the world, but he acts as an actor of action due to his initiative.

However, actions and consequences have become their master and must always be obeyed. Alienation can be said to concern personal relations with their work, with the goods they consume, with other people, and even with themselves. Alienation - a feeling of helplessness and isolation - in the sense of social science may have been initiated by Karl Marx, who considered that the source of alienation lay in how society was produced. The division of labor in society has thrown the

proletariat into the level of alienation at the peak, looting all qualities and possessions (especially tools of production). This dehumanizing process has occurred in capitalist societies and has shrunk the humanistic characteristics of proletarians into mere profit-making tools.

### *Uncertainty*

Uncertainty is the basic cause of communication failure in intergroup situations. There are two causes of closely related misinterpretations; experts see this as a difference in cognitive uncertainty and anxiety that is emotional. The continuation of communication depends on how people are willing to empathize and how they intend to reduce uncertainty in communication. Suppose one of the communication participants is able and willing to continue the communication. In that case, he must try to enter the communication level of other people who are invited to communicate, where each person who communicates must try to reach a point of understanding (convergence) so that an effective communication stage is achieved.

Nevertheless, if not, he will stop the communication (divergence) or it can be said that communication becomes ineffective. Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese created the uncertainty reduction theory or initial interaction theory in 1975. Their goal in constructing this theory is to explain how communication is used to reduce uncertainty between strangers bound in their conversations together (West & Turner, 2007).

Berger and Calabrese believe that when strangers first meet, they initially enhance their ability to predict and remove feelings from their communication experiences (Halwati & Alfi, 2022). Predictions can be interpreted as the ability to forecast behavior choices that may be chosen from possible options available to oneself or the partner in the relationship. Explanation is used to interpret the meaning of past actions from a relationship. Predictions and explanations are the two initial concepts of the two main sub-processes of uncertainty reduction.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study adopted an interpretive paradigm (emic perspective), aiming to understand phenomena from the internal perspective of the Aoma-Ambesakoa community. The phenomenological approach assumes that life-world experiences are directly lived and interpreted by the community (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with Islamic and Christian religious leaders, traditional and community figures, local government representatives, and relevant stakeholders (Bevan, 2014). Naturalistic observations of community communication behaviors and scrutiny of pertinent documents were also conducted (Vagle, 2018). Continuous analysis involved coding findings based on participant contexts and perspectives, following analytical procedures by Miles

and Huberman, alongside von Eckartsberg's phenomenological method. Steps included problem identification, data reduction through classification, data analysis for explication and interpretation, and concluding relevant to research objectives. This phenomenological approach is crucial for studying interfaith communication in the segregative Aoma-Ambesakoa community, providing insights into how spatial and theological segregation influences communication patterns and how communities overcome these barriers to foster mindful communication.

## DISCUSSION

### Interfaith Communication Experience

As expressed by the interviewees, the communication experience between the Muslim community of Aoma and the Christian community of Ambesakoa occurs with regular intensity. The segregated living environment influences This ordinary communication situation, limiting opportunities for high-intensity communication. However, a few individuals among the informants have relatively intense relationships and communication. Besides segregation, another factor contributing to the lack of communication between the neighboring village residents is their work commitments. For example, Anwar mentioned,

*"Many people in Ambesakoa village are my friends, we've been friends for a long time, so we often communicate. But we rarely visit each other because we're busy with our own work"* (Anwar).

This brief description highlights that their individual activities constrain their communication intensity. In the past, they often interacted with their friends from the neighboring village while still in school, but work commitments now make their meetings and interactions rare. Ganda expressed a similar sentiment:

*"I usually don't, but sometimes I communicate with people in Ambesakoa village, but not very often. It happened before, but not anymore, maybe because we're busy with our own work"* (Ganda).

The interactions between the Muslim Aoma and the Christian Ambesakoa during their encounters are normal. This is because many have known each other for a long time, even since childhood, and some are still related. Communication between the two communities occurs spontaneously, often at traditional ceremonies or public places. Their informal communication during these meetings somewhat dispels the perception of a strict divide between the Muslim Aoma and the Christian Ambesakoa. Although they build verbal communication when they meet, they rarely visit each other, even missing out on holiday visits. For instance, Syamsir stated,



*“No, I never go to their houses on Christmas” (Syamsir).*

Similarly, a Christian informant, Bende, mentioned,  
*“I rarely visit neighbors, and it seems the same during Eid, and people from the neighboring village never visit my house on Christmas” (Bende).*

Face-to-face meetings or communication between the two communities generally occur during traditional ceremonies such as weddings, circumcisions, or funerals. Yahya mentioned,

*“I rarely visit neighbors from the other village, except for funerals or weddings if we are invited” (Yahya).*

Ali conveyed a similar sentiment:

*“We usually visit each other during weddings or funerals in the neighboring village. We visit during times of grief or weddings, but never on Christmas” (Ali).*

In their communication, the topics they discuss include general topics encountered in daily life. Ali stated,

*“When we meet, we talk about village situations, children’s lives, and other things on our minds. We avoid discussing beliefs because it’s a personal matter with God, and we try to avoid any offense, so we never talk about religion” (Ali).*

Enggomo, from the Christian community, expressed a similar view:

*“When we meet, we talk about work, children, and various other things, also about our friends. We discuss family matters if asked. We never discuss religion because in Indonesia, with many religions, the government guarantees religious freedom as long as we don’t insult each other. So, even though we have different religions, there are no problems because we are all Indonesians and respect each other” (Enggomo).*

Based on the interview descriptions regarding the topics of discussion when the two communities meet, it can be concluded that their conversations are simple and situational. However, they agree to avoid discussing religion, considering it a sensitive issue and understanding that belief and faith are individual and community rights. Thus, no one can be forced to adopt a particular belief. General topics like their living environment, children’s education, and future, and daily work are chosen when interacting. In every interaction, the informants felt no awkwardness or suspicion. This is because they have known each other for a long time, and their conversations revolve around social issues faced in daily life. In conclusion, nothing is exclusive except for private individual matters (like belief issues). Mutual respect is the key to their peaceful coexistence.

In interactions at certain events, informants admitted they no longer feel suspicious because they consider people from the neighboring village as family,

sometimes even helping each other. The Christian community in Ambesakoa acknowledged never experiencing unpleasant treatment despite being a minority. They strongly opposed and condemned incidents like the burning of houses of worship, considering them inhumane. This sentiment was expressed by an informant (who wants to be anonymized):

*“I never feel any other feelings, everything is normal because we are like family. I never feel suspicious when expressing something, it’s just normal”* (Informant 1).

### ***Issue of Cultural/Religious Identity Recognition***

The analysis of responses regarding the factors and causes of social/religious conflicts indicates that political issues and provocations from groups unhappy with peaceful situations often trigger social conflicts. Other views suggest that interreligious riots stem from social jealousy. Equal relationships and mutual respect built by both communities play a significant role in minimizing conflict opportunities. An informant (who wants to be anonymized) said,

*“We’ve lived here for a long time, so differences are no longer an issue...”* (Informant 2).

Another informant (who wants to be anonymized) similarly emphasized, *“Even though we have different religions, we recognize each other’s existence, and many of us are actually related”* (Informant 3).

The interviews and observations showed that the social atmosphere between the two communities in different religious villages no longer emphasizes religious background differences. The equal interaction pattern is evident in social life, especially in cultural or traditional ceremonies. Therefore, the social interactions or communication between the two groups no longer recognize primordial boundaries. According to the informants, this has evolved through their shared history and culture.

### **The factor of Social Distance**

Interviews with informants revealed that social jealousy between the two communities does not occur. This may be due to their shared ethnicity, Tolaki, and their similar socio-economic levels, eliminating economic disparity. Most residents in both villages work as artisans, small entrepreneurs, or farmers, relying on agricultural produce. A small number work as civil servants. This choice of work means there is no significant economic disparity, maintaining a conducive atmosphere and reducing the potential for social jealousy as a tool for provocation. It is well known that social unrest often arises from economic disparities, causing social jealousy and political interests provoked by external parties.

According to Dahrendorf, social conflict is inherently potential and actual, eventually leading to social change. This is based on four key reasons: (1) Every society is subject to change; (2) Every society experiences social conflict; (3) Every element in society contributes to change; and (4) Every society faces resistance from some members.

In the case of Aoma and Ambesakoa, despite living segregated, they understand each other's characteristics, preventing conflict involving violence. There is a strong understanding that religion or belief, as a basis for horizontal differences, can lead to destructive conflicts if not wisely addressed. However, religious differences are not critical because religion is considered a personal responsibility and a right to choose. This understanding helps prevent conflicts based on religious differences.

Analysis of responses regarding their views on the recent burning of houses of worship indicates that such events outside their area do not affect their views and attitudes towards their religiously different neighbors. Generally, both communities consider actions like the burning of houses of worship, as seen in Tolikara, Singkil, and other areas, as provocations contradictory to the spirit of religion itself. This also indicates that the local community has a strong defense against potential conflict caused by external sources.

In conclusion, solidarity is the key to mitigating conflicts for the two village communities. This means both communities can build intercultural communication elegantly and with mutual understanding. Thus, religious diversity, as an empirical fact of their historical coexistence, does not result in social division in Wolasi.

## **Building Interfaith Communication**

### ***The Aoma-Ambesakoa Community***

In the context of interfaith communication, which serves as a medium for equal interfaith interaction, it seems both communities have created a third culture, the "local genius" of the local society. The local genius of *kalosara* has guided the vision of both communities to abide by traditional norms (*ketolakian*). This view is evident from the responses of most informants to the question: "*If you cannot unite in faith, what do you think is effective in uniting you with your neighboring village of a different belief?*"

The variety of answers to the question is as follows:

*"As Indonesian citizens, we are all Indonesians despite our differences, we are still one. We learned about 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika' (Unity in Diversity) in school. So, even if we have different religions, we shouldn't be enemies, we should respect each other because that's the best. Living in different villages has been the way our parents were, so we can keep it that way, but I think it's not a problem. Like I said before, even though we have different religions, we are still one nation, Indonesia, so we must*

*respect each other. Especially here, Pa, Tolaki people highly respect traditions, so if any Tolaki people fight, they must obey the adat (custom) leader” (Informants).*

The unification of attitudes based on the adat norms as stated by all informants, means that the culture or tradition of Tolaki plays a significant role in building understanding despite differences in belief between Aoma and Ambesakoa people. Based on this traditional vision, they respect each other's differences in belief. Because communication at the citizen level aims to create brotherhood and respect for each group's existence, it cannot be standardized (Rahardjo, 2005). The situation in Aoma and Ambesakoa is strengthened by the views expressed by community leaders from both sides. The situation in Aoma and Ambesakoa is known in communication theory as a salad bowl or tossed salad. This perspective suggests that everyone from different groups maintains their cultural vision while striving to respect and adapt to each other (Alifuddin, Alhamuddin, Rosadi, et al., 2021). However, this does not mean their belief culture is reduced to syncretism. Adapting in the context of these two communities is a sincere effort by each party to understand the differences, realizing the importance of building understanding to avoid unwanted conflicts (Masood & Skoric, 2023).

Thus, what unites is the vision of unity to avoid conflict, or in other words, their religion is not united. Each adheres to their respective religions, inherited from their ancestors, each with its own characteristics. This also means that the harmonious communication between the two belief groups has led them to weave tolerance, allowing them to live peacefully and harmoniously together.

Based on the above reality, from the perspective proposed by Kleden, the communication between the two segregated groups based on belief shows a “cross-fertilization.” Cross-fertilization in the context of these two communities is indigenous, created by the traditions of the Tolaki people adhered to by both communities. In reality, each party remains aware of their differing belief identities. However, this diversity has been accepted as “destiny” and a dynamic of communication in social interactions throughout history.

The tolerant attitude among citizens maintained in the communication process marks that in the Aoma-Ambesakoa area, there is a society built on multicultural values. Multiculturalism, as in the case of Aoma-Ambesakoa, can be interpreted as a multiple cultural/belief identity manifested within a single national context (Michael Payne, 1996). From another perspective, the case of Aoma-Ambesakoa can be understood as the recognition and promotion of cultural/belief diversity, where the community respects and strives to protect various cultural/belief variations while focusing on the unequal relationship between minority and majority belief adherents. The portrait of Aoma-Ambesakoa can be seen as a miniature of Indonesia, empirically containing a Muslim majority and a Christian minority living together harmoniously, resulting in social integration amid cultural and belief diversity (Alifuddin, Alhamuddin, & Nurjannah, 2021).

### *Mindlessness and Mindfulness in Interfaith Communication in Aoma and Ambesakoa*

The interview results with several informants show that mindlessness in the context of communication between the two communities is minimal, if not nonexistent. Generally, informants view each other as a family despite differing faith backgrounds. For example, Anwar stated:

*“We have had our own attitudes since long ago, and it’s not a problem now because it’s a matter of personal choice. We can’t force or be forced. We have different understandings but are still family, and tradition unites us” (Anwar).*

Amril says the same:

*“As Indonesian citizens, we are all Indonesians despite our differences, we are still one. We learned in school about ‘Bhinneka Tunggal Ika.’ So, even if we have different religions, we shouldn’t be enemies, we should respect each other because that’s the best. Living in different villages has been the way our parents were, so we can keep it that way, but I think it’s not a problem. Like I said before, even though we have different religions, we are still one nation, Indonesia, so we must respect each other. Especially here, Pa, Tolaki people highly respect traditions, so if any Tolaki people fight, they must obey the adat leader” (Amril)*

The descriptions from the interviews with the two informants, as well as others, show that the relationship between Aoma and Ambesakoa people is more than just a moral code regarding behavior. For them, blood relations, ethnicity, and tradition make them one despite their differences. For the Tolaki people here, differences in faith do not lead them to view others as objects or, in Burber’s perspective, the I-It relation. This type (*I-It*) is a communication model that places others as objects to be used or manipulated, leading to a loss of mutual understanding. Consequently, dishonesty and insincerity become the chosen approaches to maintaining appearances (Alifuddin et al., 2022). The *I-It* relation, in theory, is called mindlessness, where each individual and group lacks awareness about the reality of differences due to different cultural (read: faith) backgrounds (Bertens, 2002).

Therefore, analyzing the informants’ statements from the interviews, in many cases, the communication relationships in the two segregated communities show the creation of a mindful communication atmosphere. Mindfulness starts from inter-individual communication relations and viewing relationships within the I-Thou framework. This perspective respects others as subjects, seeing others as creations of God with their own pluses and minuses. Thus, it becomes necessary for each individual to treat others more than just as a means to an end. This principle emphasizes that we experience relationships as others do, achievable only through dialogue. Dialogue is not just communication between different parties

but an effort to understand, appreciate and respect differences. In other words, dialogue is an effort to reduce what sharpens differences and focus on what aligns them in understanding, creating a concept of parallel beliefs among two or three different communities (Rahardjo, 2005).

Practically, mutual understanding relations will only occur with dialogue. Dialogue, as Burber prescribes, requires communication to be based on self-disclosure. This theoretical approach, grounded in humanistic psychology, emphasizes honest communication. This approach teaches that communication aims to achieve understanding through sincere and genuine communication. Conversely, misunderstanding and dissatisfaction arise from dishonest relationships, a lack of alignment between actions and feelings, limited feedback, and hindered self-disclosure.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and analysis of field data, the communication between the Muslim Aoma people and the Christian Ambesakoa people occurs commonly but with the usual intensity. This is mainly because many residents have known each other since childhood, with some even being part of the same family. Their segregated residential settings influence the usual intensity of communication, which does not allow frequent interaction. Additionally, their busy work schedules limit the opportunities for high-intensity communication. Typically, face-to-face meetings occur during traditional ceremonies such as weddings, circumcision celebrations, and funerals.

Despite the segregation, interaction patterns between the two religious communities show that religious background differences are no longer emphasized. Equal interaction patterns are evident during social and cultural events, demonstrating that the interaction between the two groups does not involve stereotypes or prejudices. Thus, the atmosphere of mindlessness is essentially nonexistent. The community members can create a mindful interfaith communication atmosphere due to a nationalist spirit instilled through education and shared genetic ties, as both communities are within the same family line. Another positive factor is the Tolaki vision, which always refers to the values of kalosara.

This research has important implications for the development of interfaith communication in segregated societies. It highlights the importance of nationalism education in schools to build mindful communication and reduce prejudice between religious groups. Cultural values like kalosara can be a strong foundation for creating harmony in social interactions despite religious differences.

The research recommends that the government and community leaders strengthen nationalism education and local cultural values in formal and informal education curricula. Additionally, initiatives should be created to foster more inclusive social interactions between religious groups. Joint activities, such as

cultural events, sports, and community projects, can enhance a sense of togetherness and social solidarity.

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