

Patterns of Associative Social Interaction in Constructing Social Harmony: A Study of the Towani Tolotang Bugis People in Sulawesi, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: *This article elaborates on the pattern of associative social interaction common among members of the Bugis community in Indonesia, specifically those who belong to the Bugis Towani Tolotang. The phenomenological method was chosen as the method of inquiry for this study. This method's primary utility is in its capacity to shed light on the natural behaviors, interactions, and senses of self-identity shared by the Bugis community. This research finds out that the Bugis Towani Tolotang of Indonesian people is cohesively integrated through an associative relationship pattern. The pattern entails a robust cooperative relationship in various social, cultural, and religious domains. In the cultural realm of communication, they collaborate based on historical values; in the social realm, they construct cooperative ties based on kinship; and in the religious realm of their lives, they are very tolerant of differences in belief.*

KEYWORDS: *Bugis, Inter-Cultural Communication, Social Interaction, Harmony, Towani Tolotang*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The inclination of humans to reside in groups, ranging from small to large groups, is a characteristic of their social nature (Bungin, 2006: 43). In order to meet their life necessities, humans engage in adaptation processes (AloLiliweri, 2004: 35). According to Comte's perspective, human beings are inherently dynamic and tend to progress continuously towards change, specifically in the realm of social dynamics (Bungin, 2006: 43). According to Bungin's theory, human tendencies are subject to evolutionary changes through social processes.[1] These changes will lead to systems and social institutions emerging as individuals, groups, and communities interact and communicate[2], [3].

The study of social dynamics is crucial to understanding human existence, as it involves the ongoing and dynamic interplay of relationships that individuals form. Scholars maintained that two distinct relationship patterns emerge as a result of social interaction processes. These patterns are characterized as associative interactions, which foster unity, and dissociative interactions, which can lead to hostility, division, and even conflict. The present study will exclusively concentrate on examining associative connections that promote a more dynamic, tolerant, and harmonious pattern of social interaction.

The present research is centered on the social interaction patterns established by the Bugis[4]–[6] of the Towani Tolotang[7] community residing in the SidenrengRappang district to foster social harmony within a predominantly Muslim community. Towani Tolotang is a religious system that is indigenous to the Bugis tribal community located in the South Sulawesi region. Additionally, it is also used as a designation for this particular community. As mentioned earlier, the collective's nomenclature and corresponding religious affiliation can be traced back to their relocation from Wajo to SidenrengRappang, which King AddatuangSidenreng II established in 1666[8]. Subsequently, the Towani Tolotang's designation has evolved into both a communal entity and a religious belief system.

Throughout history, the dynamic between Towani Tolotang and the neighboring community, particularly the Muslim community, has fluctuated and reached a nadir marked by religious discord and the lack of state recognition of religious freedoms[9]–[11]. Presently, the relationship has been reconstructed and emerged as a benchmark for depicting religious temperance in Indonesia. From an intercultural communication standpoint, the interactions established between individuals can exhibit dynamic and harmonious nuances within their relationship. Cultural and religious disparities do not impede or hinder social interaction and engagement in diverse communal endeavors. Their cooperative partnership's observable and dynamic nature is evident in their collaborative efforts to assist one another, even in the face of challenges arising from cultural and religious disparities. They engage in constructive dialogue to develop practical solutions to these issues. While the current state of their relationship appears to be amicable, a scholar suggests that there exist underlying tensions that may

resurface unpredictably[12]. The sustainability of harmonious relationships amidst differences is limited to a temporary period, as underlying conflicts arising from such differences are likely to manifest themselves distinctly at some point during the relationship. Therefore, this research exists to investigate phenomenologically the social factors that make their connection harmonious despite the conflicting and often intolerable ideologies they face. The author uses Jonathan Turner's theory of social interaction [1], Associative Social contact (SoerjonoSoekanto, 2012: 61), as a point of departure for his own interpretation of the phenomenon[13]. This idea will shed light on how the Towani Tolotang community has successfully engaged with its neighbors.

II. METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study pertains to the associative social interaction patterns exhibited by the Towani Tolotang group and the neighboring Muslim community. The harmonious nature of their relationship can be attributed to the diverse forms of associative interaction they have established. The phenomenological approach is a methodology employed to examine the phenomenon of the interconnection between Towani Tolotang and the neighboring populace, with a particular focus on the Muslim community. Keith Brooks posits that phenomenology is an approach employed in communication science, including intercultural communication, that aims to investigate and uncover diverse social symptoms that arise from social processes[14]—This approach endeavors to comprehensively comprehend various situations or social realities of culturally distinct groups of individuals. When viewed through the lens of intercultural communication, the approach strives to explicate the phenomena experienced by research participants, such as perceptions, behavior, interactions, and self-identity, in their entirety. These phenomena are then depicted in the form of descriptive narratives based on the naturally observed context[15]. The present study employs a phenomenological approach to elucidate the facts, symptoms, and events that transpire during the interaction and communication between the Towani Tolotang and Muslim communities in their joint efforts to foster harmonious relationships[16]. The study was carried out through field research in Amparita, located in the SidenrengRappang District of the South Sulawesi Province in Indonesia. To obtain robust data, the researcher spent an amount of three months conducting research activities through various methods such as surveys, observations, in-depth interviews, and direct observations[17]–[21].

III. DISCUSSION

In a community organization that is held together by shared norms, values, and traditions, the members desire a sense of community to realize a sense of safety, serenity, and harmony in their daily lives[22]. On the other hand, it has been established that not all members of any distinct community group are capable of producing harmony and a life characterized by harmony; instead, the majority prefer to live in disharmony[9]–[11], [23]. One of the reasons that cause disharmonious relationships frequently occur is because of differences that the community itself cannot translate as a dynamic. When able to manage it effectively, it will require a more dynamic, harmonic, and civilized order of community life. One of the reasons that cause disharmonious relationships frequently occur is because of differences that the community itself cannot translate as a dynamic.

Diversity is an inevitable aspect of any given society. Differences among individuals can result in various issues that may cause a community to become more exclusive and self-centered, potentially leading to social conflict. Amidst the recent prevalence of social conflicts, various factors, such as cultural and religious disparities, have been identified as key contributors. The Towani Tolotang community, along with neighboring communities, including those of the Muslim faith, have successfully established an environment of amicability, acceptance, and concord in their social interactions, despite being cognizant of their contrasting backgrounds that could potentially lead to discord and even hostilities. The presence of cultural and religious disparities does not pose a hindrance to the establishment of dynamic and harmonious interpersonal connections. Scholars have identified an associative social interaction pattern that emphasizes the significance of togetherness, living in harmony, and mutual respect[7], [9], [10], [23]–[26]. This pattern is based on a process of interaction that involves mutual awareness. The research identified various forms and patterns of associative social interaction through field searches involving observations and interviews.

Cooperation

First, a collaborative effort is consistently observed within the community. Cooperation is a type of social interaction that arises from shared goals and interests[27]. The achievement of cooperation is facilitated by mutual assistance and understanding of each other's activities[28]. This ongoing effort towards cooperation serves as a driving force toward unification[29]. As a species characterized by sociality, humans possess an innate inclination towards interaction, communal living, and collaborative efforts in the pursuit of their needs and wants. The data from the field shows that collaboration is imperative not solely for the attainment of necessities and aspirations but also for the promotion of camaraderie and a sense of fraternity, the cultivation

and nurturing of social cohesion, and the development of empathy towards others. These factors ultimately contribute to a life characterized by unity, tranquility, and concord [11], [16], [23], [26].

Their cooperation is not based on the need and desire to be with each other but on a high sense of family or kinship. As an informant's statement stated, "Towani Tolotang with the people in Amparita, especially those who are Muslim, still have kinship relations, he continued to give an example of himself and his husband, whose relatives are many Muslims, according to him that he is a Tolotang person, but his grandmother's relatives are Muslim, and so is his husband who has many Muslim relatives" (IS, female-50-years, 2022).

The Towani Tolotang Community in Amparita recognizes kinship as a significant institution that regulates their attitudes and conduct in fostering amicable associations. Kinship is a fundamental principle that governs social interactions among this group. Evidently, their interactions are characterized by a familial or fraternal dynamic, mutual respect, and a clear understanding of hierarchical positions. The younger members of the group are able to position themselves as younger siblings or children, while the older members understand and appreciate the younger ones. It creates a harmonious atmosphere in all their interactions. Consequently, this establishment facilitates connections and collaboration across multiple domains of individuals' societal existence.

In the case of Towani Tolotang, the fundamental basis of kinship is the family unit, as we can see in many other Bugis people [4], [30]. It is established through the union of marriage, which subsequently results in the birth of progeny. As the offspring matures, a social group is formed, which progresses from a rudimentary level to a more intricate level, as noted by Meiyani in her study on the Kinship System of the Bugis People in South Sulawesi. Fores asserts that kinship is a social construct encompassing multiple families linked through consanguinity or matrimonial ties, as documented in Meiyani's work on the Kinship System of the Bugis in South Sulawesi. The perspectives mentioned suggest that no justification exists for the division or severance of kinship relationships between Towani Tolotang and the Muslim community in Amparita, thereby indicating a shared sentiment. The enduring adherence to the principles of *sipakataui*, *sipakalebbi* [31], and *sipakainge* in the verbal communication slogan known as *pada idi* is a natural phenomenon that persists within these two communities.

The Towani Tolotang community exhibits robust kinship ties that serve not only as a cohesive force but also as a means of mitigating and ameliorating various interpersonal disputes. In the context of kinship, the term *pada idi* is utilized to refer to individuals who are still considered relatives. The term *pada idi* is a commonly utilized expression within the Amparita community and the broader Bugis community. The term *pada idi* is a commonly used expression within the Bugis community to denote various types of relationships, such as friendships, companionships, and familial ties. Notably, the term does not have any discernible psychological impact on its users and is utilized as a conventional linguistic marker among members of this cultural group. However, there are variations in specific circumstances, particularly in Amparita. The term *pada idi* holds significance beyond its communicative function, as it carries psychological implications that impact communal behavior, particularly in the realm of conflict resolution. The pattern of cooperation is recognized as a fundamental aspect of associative social interaction. The Towani Tolotang community can establish amicable relations with neighboring communities, particularly those of the Islamic faith, through various modes of collaboration within the present framework.

First, there has been mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*). *Gotong royong* is one of the patterns of cooperation built by the Amparita community, where they carry out these actions voluntarily based on awareness and a sense of brotherhood. For them, this form of cooperation is an activity carried out based on awareness as a community group and as a member of a religious group. As a community group, they realize that *gotong royong* aims to facilitate a job so that it becomes easy and light. As a religious group, *gotong royong* will foster togetherness, solidarity, and close brotherhood despite different beliefs and religions.

The culture of cooperation in the form of *gotong royong* by the Amparita community is manifested in several forms, such as participation in helping to build houses (*mappatetong bola*) to moving houses (*mappalette' bola*). These two activities show their solidarity in working together as well as a form of kinship [30]. In the process of these activities, each is mobilized by themselves without having to be invited individually. Towani Tolotang people will be mobilized quickly when the leader or Uwata invites them, and the same goes for Muslim people even though they do not have a central figure like Towani Tolotang. However, the moment of Friday prayers is the right time to mobilize the community by announcing after Friday prayers. Sometimes even the activities of the Towani Tolotang people are also announced at the mosque.

Drawing upon insights from multiple informants, cooperative activities are motivated by values and principles extending beyond kinship ties. Specifically, a local wisdom framework underscores the importance of engaging in cooperative relationships that transcend any perceived differences, including those related to religion and belief. The notion of value is conveyed through a message. The philosophy of 'message' (*paseng*) is a guiding principle for individuals engaging in cooperative activities, whereby they willingly participate through a communal system of "Falling to uphold each other, drifting away with the current of each other,

warning each other" (*Rebbasipatokkong, malisiparappe, malilusipakainge*)[32]. This philosophical perspective entails the proposition of mutual assistance in navigating diverse challenges, refraining from abandoning one another and avoiding the intentional search for others' faults to cause their downfall. As members of the human community, we must prompt one another in the face of errors. An informant (WK, male-50-years old) highlights in a statement that the residents of Amparita engage in diverse social activities, including religious ones, where they mutually contribute to one another. The philosophy of "*Rebbasipatokkong, malisiparappe, malilusipakainge*" fosters a strong bond within our relationships, promoting a heightened sense of brotherhood and mutual respect, as expressed by an informant (L.K, a 50-year-old-male). The leader of Towani Tolotang has proposed a philosophical perspective that serves as an ethical and moral basis for interpersonal conduct (WK, male, 50 years old). This perspective emphasizes respecting others and avoiding derogatory or harmful behavior. Instead, individuals should strive to support, assist, and collaborate with one another. The aforementioned statement explicates the essence of the definition of the message (*paseng*) in the context of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*).

Second, the community acknowledges the importance of help-each-other's (*tolongmenolong*) culture. Cultural and religious differences in the Towani Tolotang are not the main thing for them not doing various activities together, such as helping each other. The harmony between them is reflected in their habits that like to help each other among residents even though they have different religious beliefs. In their view, religion is interpreted not only as a rite of worship to the creator alone but also as a phenomenon in various social activities that function to unite humans in a social system, including the components of the community in it. Prayers, fasting, zakat, hajj for Muslims or annual rituals in *Perrinyameng*, 'pilgrimage' to ancestral graves, and *mappenrenanre* for Towani Tolotang people, for them all forms of rituals are the privacy rights of each religion and should not interfere with each other, and even in a celebration of certain worship services they work together to make these activities successful, such as the implementation of Eid prayers for Muslims and rituals carried out in *Perrinyameng* for Towani Tolotang followers[26]. They understand the limits of religious tolerance. It is the reason why they are very open and willingly assist anyone among them who needs help.

Moreover, for the Towani Tolotang people, helping each other reflects their adherence to the values of their respective religious teachings. Muslims believe that helping each other is one of the religious commands to extend a helping hand to one another. The Towani Tolotang people also believe it is a command from the Supreme God (*DewataSeuwae*).

Several pieces of evidence in the field research show that these two groups are very strong in the tradition of helping each other regardless of beliefs or religions, such as helping each other if there is a wedding event (*situnrungeng*), there is a death, helping in the fields during the rice planting season, even voluntarily donating material assistance when there are residents who experience disasters such as floods, tornadoes, fires, and others, according to an informant from the Muslim community (HH, 65 years old Islamic Religious Leader, Interview, 2022). Another interesting fact is that in certain cases, such as *suturungeng* before the wedding day, it is often gossiped about among the community and even considered not to have a sense of solidarity when not present, for example, *massarapo* (adding buildings on the right or left side of the house as the main place in the wedding ceremony, *maddawa-dawa* (preparing spices and cakes that will be used during the wedding ceremony). The consequence for those who do not attend is that when the same family matters (*hajatan*) are held, it is very likely that only a few people will attend. That is why solidarity in helping each other is still very strong.

Accommodation

The relationship between the Muslim community and the Towani Tolotang community is inseparable from the existing social processes, including the presence of conflicts that occur. However, these conflicts do not reach the level of Tribe, Religion, Race, and Intergroup (*Suku, Agama, Ras, & Antar Golongan - SARA*) conflicts. The role of Muslim and Towani Tolotang leaders on both sides can localize potential conflicts. Here are some forms of accommodation to subside the conflict that occurred, namely.

First, it is on mediation. Mediation is an effort made to resolve a conflict. Several years ago, a conflict almost tore apart the long-established peace of the Amparita community. The incident is known as the Teppo incident because it occurred in Teppo Village. Geographically, although not included in the Amparita area, Teppo is part of the Tellu Limpoe sub-district, where Amparita is the administrative center of the Tellu Limpoe sub-district. As an illustration, Teppo Village has a majority Muslim population, as well as the scene of the incident. The case began when a young man from Towani Tolotang stabbed a young man from Teppo village during a motorcycle race. Teppo villagers were unhappy that one of their own was stabbed, especially since the stabber was not of the same religion. Eventually, it became an event that was feared to be similar to the Ambon and Poso incidents, with many people from both groups fleeing to neighboring villages out of fear.

To anticipate that this case would not widen into a SARA (that is, Tribe, Religion, Race, and Intergroup (*Suku, Agama, Ras, & Antar Golongan*)) case, all elements including community leaders, especially from the two

conflicting groups, coordinated to find a solution to the problem. A value principle in their local wisdom was agreed upon as a reference for problem-solving, namely *sipakatu sipakalebbi, sipakainge*. This principle implies that human beings must respect each other, be polite, and remind each other regardless of ethnicity, religion, race, and class. However, their concerns turned into a fear of communal conflict. So, the community leaders decided to ask a third party to mediate, starting from the Tellu Limpoe sub-district government, Sidrap district government to Sidrap police, Kodim, and even Pangdam VII Wirabuana to intervene to reconcile the conflicting parties (UwaSonarto, 50-years-old, 2023).

The role of the mediator, in this case as a third party in conflict resolution mediation efforts, has a huge role. It shows that the mediation efforts initiated by the leaders of both parties by involving state elements such as the local government and military or police security forces showed very satisfying results. The intensive communication between the leaders of the two communities, which has been established for a long time, is challenging to be divided by certain cases or parties. The Teppo case and several cases that preceded it have taught the two groups of people that one of the substantial efforts that can be made to prevent conflicts from escalating into horizontal conflicts is to localize the conflict with statements that the conflict is personal, not a conflict based on religion or belief so that the potential for conflict involving two different communities can be avoided. In addition, the role of community leaders from both sides by prioritizing the cultural values of mutual humane and respect (*sipakatau* and *sipakainge*) in dealing with the community turned out to be effective in reducing existing conflicts by involving the government, local military, and police officers to provide advice in efforts to resolve existing conflicts.

Second, it is about reconciliation. Reconciliation attempts to repair broken relationships between groups or individuals involved in conflict or opposition to achieve peace, promote justice, and build trust between conflicting groups. Reconciliation can be applied in a variety of contexts, including political, religious, ethnic, and gender conflicts. Reconciliation can be applied in strategic measures, such as inter-group dialog, mediation, cultural exchange, and efforts to strengthen trust and mutual understanding.

In social science, reconciliation is considered a complex process that often takes a long time to achieve. In addition, reconciliation efforts can also face challenges such as mistrust between conflicting groups, deep-seated differences in views, and trauma from previous conflicts. However, despite the challenges, reconciliation is considered an important approach to promoting peace and justice in society.

As an area inhabited by two different groups of people, both culturally and religiously, the seeds of latent conflict are likely to surface again. The Teppo incident is an example of how the seeds of latent conflict are still growing in the cracks of their seemingly harmonious relationship and is unlikely to be eliminated. In an effort to keep the seeds of conflict from spreading and surfacing, various efforts are made, such as maintaining social patrons as a reference in conducting interactions. For example, local wisdom continues to be explored as a role model or locomotive of peace. The following is one form of role model extracted from the local wisdom of the Amparita community as an effort to reconcile a number of problems that may turn into communal conflict.

mappaletteor marakka bola is a form of local wisdom that is still maintained today by the Amparita community. This wisdom is a form of reconciliation in which the two groups melt in a cheerful atmosphere with full togetherness. In a statement from a Towani Tolotang figure (WS, mal, 75 years old), he stated that the spirit of *mappalette bola* and *marakka bola* can melt the tension caused by various conflicts. He continued that although there have been cases, we still maintain this habit that has been embedded long before and do it together, such as in the case of moving houses (WS, male, 75 years old). The informant's statement confirms that reconciliation with a spirit of togetherness through the *mappalette bola* or *marakka bola* event must still be done to reduce conflict. Togetherness through this kind of event can melt the previously tense atmosphere due to conflict. The atmosphere full of jokes that sometimes come out of their mouths that are fluent in the typical Bugis language is a moment to eliminate negative prejudices. With this event, the atmosphere will be liquid again so that it no longer leaves traces of problems that have occurred before.

IV. FINDINGS

In a new community environment, individuals or groups face several challenges that require adjustment. One of the main obstacles is differences in belief systems or religions, which often make it difficult for new individuals or groups to be accepted by existing groups due to these differences. To overcome this challenge, it is important to have active mutual interaction, where each party plays a role in understanding and respecting people with different religious beliefs.

For the Bugis Towani Tolotang community, intense communication through intercultural communication plays an important role in building harmonious relationships between the two groups of people with different religions. It is reflected in their daily lives. The harmony created is based on the ability of each religious group to deal with differences in uncertain situations in a more functional way to reduce the barriers of cultural and religious identity both individually and collectively. The agreement they have reached is to respect differences to create brotherhood and respect kinship relations that have been established for a long time. For

them, the difference cannot be homogenized but goes hand in hand with mutual respect and recognition of existing differences.

The empirical evidence from the research site shows that kinship is the strongest element in the relationship between the two community groups in Amparita. In addition, the interaction patterns they build together also show that their communication behavior is no longer influenced by anxiety and suspicion that hinder their interactions. In other words, they no longer interact automatically but are more open to building relationships. However, in other assumptions, negative suspicions and prejudices should not be ignored as seeds of conflict that continue to exist even though they are not visible on the surface. However, if left unchecked, these seeds of conflict may surface as a threat to the harmonious relationships built. For example, the Towani Tolotang group may feel suspicious that the Muslim group has not fully accepted their presence in Amparita, despite their relationship being good and open. Similarly, Muslim groups may not fully acknowledge Towani Tolotang's teachings and still consider them as primitive behavior and shirk. These prejudices still exist in their minds. Although the prejudice is still there, it is not reflected in the relationship and communication that they do in reality. The prejudice is very low or even almost absent in their communication. They are aware and always maintain the relationship, so the prejudice is kept in the heart's deepest recesses.

In addition, another phenomenon that can be described as a pattern of interaction that keeps their relationship harmonious is the pattern of a very high level of cooperation, clearly visible in various forms of their activities. It allows for a close and harmonious relationship that ignores religious boundaries as a barrier. Their cooperation is not limited to individual interactions, such as greeting each other on the street or warm and friendly neighborly relations, but also extends to collective intergroup relations. For example, they engage in *gotong royong* activities, such as building houses on stilts or moving houses together. These relationships demonstrate good interpersonal and intergroup communication patterns, which do not create social segregation based on religion. The efforts they make are the result of the ability of individuals and groups to manage the various interests that exist. They can do this thanks to their knowledge of communicating, both through verbal and non-verbal communication. Empirically, with the knowledge and ability to communicate, they managed to maintain harmonious relationships and build strong cooperation. They can utilize communication as a tool to achieve common goals and ensure that individual and group interests are maintained.

V. CONCLUSION

Intercultural communication is a means to build harmonious relationships among the Towani Tolotang Muslims through the ability to translate situations of differences in uncertain situations into a more functional direction to eliminate the barriers of cultural and religious identity both individually and in groups. It can be concluded from the previous explanation, which can be found above. Intercultural communication is a means to build harmonious relationships among the Towani Tolotang Muslims. In the end, the relationship between the two religious groups in conducting encounters becomes the adhesive component through patterns of cooperation, kinship relations, and historical relationships. It is shown via the patterns of interaction that they establish that their communication behavior is no longer trapped in a pattern of relationships marked by fear and distrust that co-opt their efforts to communicate. It is shown through the fact that the patterns of interaction that they build can be seen. It is possible to conclude that intercultural communication is a means of building harmonious relationships between Towani Tolotang Muslims. They are accomplished through the ability to translate differences in uncertain situations into a more functional direction, with the end goal of removing the barriers of cultural and religious identity that exist both individually and in groups.

Ultimately, this study proved that the significant contribution of intercultural communication to fostering peaceful coexistence between two distinct religious factions, namely the Muslims and Towani Tolotang, is noteworthy in Sulawesi. The capacity of each faction to incorporate religion into societal domains as an exemplar via the mechanisms of differentiation. The cultivation of mutual comprehension regarding differences has the potential to foster a sense of concord and unity, ultimately resulting in the establishment of a harmonious relationship. The perception of harmony is not solely contingent upon the magnitude of interactions undertaken but rather comprehension fostered through communication.

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