



Muslim communities' identity transformation through the *pela gandong* ritual communication in Moluccas Immanuel Church, Indonesia

Sulaeman Sulaeman¹ · M. Ridwan² · Irta Sulastri³ · Anasufi Banawi⁴ · Nur Salam⁵ · Darma Darma⁶ · Eman Wahyudi Kasim⁴

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Abstract

This study focuses on the phenomenon that arose from the involvement of the Muslim community in the *pela gandong* ritual communication on December 2, 2018. Religious symbols were used to celebrate the first Advent held in Immanuel Church, Moluccas Islands, Indonesia. Symbols included chanting the call to prayer, *lafadz Rawi barzanji*, and the call to worship, singing hymns of praise, and lighting Advent candles. Using qualitative methods and subjective interpretive paradigms with data collected through interviews, observations were made from a phenomenological perspective, especially ritual, social transformation, social identity negotiation, and symbolic interactionism theory. The results showed that the involvement of the Muslim community in communication rituals has beliefs and values as central principles of kindred equivalence and social-community concerns. In addition, implementing cross-religious kinship in the subjective experience impacts proof of self-identity, human kinship, relationship creation, treatment acceptance, and joint worship labels. The last leads to a developed case of civic pluralism in the pre-conflict era that had been shattered by the conflict. It is likely that cross-religious civic pluralism is a necessary precondition for efforts to build theological pluralism. This article contributes to understanding Muslim communities' subjective experience regarding cross-religious *pela gandong* ritual communication and encourages further research in this area.

Keywords Identity transformation · Ritual communication · Muslim communities · *Pela gandong* · Immanuel Church

✉ Sulaeman Sulaeman
sulaeman@iainambon.ac.id
<https://publons.com/researcher/3276263/sulaeman-sulaeman/>

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Introduction

The location article qualitatively analyzes Muslim communities' identity transformation in the Moluccas, Indonesia. The Moluccas, Spice Islands, are Indonesian islands of the Malay Archipelago that lie between New Guinea to the east and the islands of Celebes to the west. The Philippine Sea, the Pacific Ocean, and the Philippines are to the north, and the island of Timor and the Arafura Sea are to the south.

The Moluccas, located in the southern part of the Moluccas Islands, is an Indonesian province that was officially designated as a province in 1958 based on Law Number 20 of 1958, with Ambon as the provincial capital. The Moluccas is an archipelagic province comprising a total of 1392 small islands. Most of the territory consists of waters with a recorded land area of 46,914 km². The area is directly adjacent to the Seram Sea in the north and the Indonesian Ocean and the Arafura Sea in the south. Moluccas has a strategic location in Eastern Indonesia, as it is located between two islands (Irian Island and Sulawesi Island) and traversed by three Indonesian Archipelago Sea Lanes.

Administratively, the Moluccas is divided into 9 regencies and 2 cities with 118 subdistricts and 1240 villages and subdistricts. The total population in 2019 was 1,945,092 people, with a population growth rate of 1.83%. The population density in the Moluccas is recorded at 39 people per km², with the highest density being in Ambon City (1163 people per km²). Regarding religious demographics, Islam is the majority religion. Based on 2019 data, the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration (Dukcapil) of the Ministry of Home Affairs (Kemendagri), 1,031,587 residents are Muslim, which is equivalent to 52.76% of the population totaling 1,955,334 people. The total Christian population is 895,893 (45.82%), including 686,340 (35.27%) Protestant Christians and 209,553 (10.55%) Catholic Christians. A total of 15,696 (0.80%) are Hindus, 1916 (0.10%) are Buddhists, 10,008 (0.51%) have religious beliefs, and 234 (0.01%) are Confucians.

In the Moluccas, the population is mostly settled on the coastal areas of the islands with a plurality of tribes, languages, religions, races, and in-between groups due to the diversity of religions. In harmony with the diversity of rituals, pluralism is created through particular and meaningful community interaction. Ritual diversity has a dialectical relationship used as truth and has developed in society, leading to traditions that have values and benefits. Rituals are enforced and guide life, such as the *pela gandong* cross-religious ritual in the Moluccas. The cross-religious ritual is proof that the local traditions in Indonesia have immense values of diversity and plurality. The Moluccas cross-religious traditions include the hold *pela gandong* ritual, a local tradition of kindred equivalence and social-community concern.

Pela gandong, two cross-religious populations, and a village of Muslim–Christian communities have kinship ties. According to Watloly (2005) *pela gandong* is an identity. The cross-religious community has a religious and a social identity. Identity is different in religious aspects related to meaning and the creator.

Differences in religious identity based on belief (Bamat et al., 2017; Mensah et al., 2020) are a symbol of the recognition of religious differences. However, the village has social similarities (Hayes, 2021; Varisco, 2014). The cross-religious populations have kindred ties (Toth, 2016), cooperative symbols (Lattu, 2019), caring, and support in social aspects as *pela gandong* values.

Through *pela gandong*, Muslim–Christian communities feel an obligation to help and care for one another. If the Christian community carries out celebratory communication acts, such as building a church, the Muslim community has empathy to participate. Conversely, when the Muslim community builds a mosque, the Christian community participates. *Pela gandong* can unite and strengthen cross-religious kinship in the Moluccas. *Pela gandong* is certainly not a guarantee that cross-religious populations will avoid conflict. However, it is a medium that provides early warning information so conflict does not spread.

Pela gandong is a symbol of tolerance that strengthens kindred relations (Toth, 2016) by building peace as a tolerance value (Bamat et al., 2017). However, the meaning and practice (Oparin, 2017) of tolerance toward *pela gandong* is transforming its development. Tolerance not only accepts but also celebrates religious differences. According to Walzel in Simarmata et al. (2017), the meaning and practice of tolerance have several stages: recognizing differences and then mutually supporting, caring for, and celebrating them. Cross-religious populations are involved in *pela gandong* ritual communication, such as that held on December 02, 2018, when the first Advent was celebrated in Moluccas Immanuel Church, Indonesia, as shown in Fig. 1.

Cross-religious communities share experiences and continue to produce and pass them on to the next generation. The sharing of experiences avoids inconvenience and builds a harmonious life between the cross-religious villages of *Amahusu* and *Hatalae* (Christian communities) and *Tial* and *Laha* (Muslim communities) in Moluccas, Indonesia.

The four villages have been involved in the conducting of rituals in Immanuel Church using cross-religious symbols. For example, the Muslim community recited the *lafadz Rawi barzanji* and a muezzin chanted the call to prayer on the church



Fig. 1 *Pela gandong* ritual communication of the Muslim–Christian community celebrating the first Advent held in Immanuel Church, Moluccas Island, Indonesia

altar. The Christian community sang hymns of praise, and lit one of four Advent candles in the week leading up to the birth of Jesus Christ. The use of religious symbols was followed by cross-religious populations welcoming the first Advent in Immanuel Church, as shown in Fig. 2, which was a unique and essential situation for conducting research.

In 2007, at Marble Collegiate Church in New York, a Muslim–Christian–Jewish dialog took place. In 2009, a muezzin chanted the call to prayer as part of a cross-religious tolerance campaign. In 2016, the call to prayer was chanted at the altar of a Javanese Christian church, *Papadange Djagat Wonosobo*, Indonesia. The chanting of the call to prayer aims to build togetherness through mutual respect and tolerance for the Muslim–Christian–Buddhist–Hindu community. In January 2017, in front of Church Trinity, Copley Square, Boston, demonstrators gathered, including Mayor Walsh and U.S. Senators Warren and Markey, in protest to the executive order implementing a travel ban. In June 2018, at The Church of all Nations’ in Melbourne, Australia, the Protestant Christian Victorian Council of Churches invited the Muslim community to break their fast and churches to sound the evening prayer to the Qibla, the same direction as the large cross hanging on the church. On May 09, 2019, the Muslim–Christian–Hindu community broke fast together in St. Luke Anglican Church in Ras al-Khaimah, the northern region of the United Arab Emirates. Then, a muezzin chanted the evening call to prayer for the Muslim community without the involvement of the Christian–Hindu community.

Religious symbols trigger polemics with stereotypes and prejudices (Alibhai, 2019; Bergsieker et al., 2021; Evers, 2021; Hayes, 2021; Toth, 2016) based on ethnocentrism (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Turner (1969) did not envision negative community pressures, such as prejudice and racism. The Muslim community is experiencing identity transformation (Faulkner, 2017; Goitom, 2016; Kaliszewska, 2020; Seto, 2020; Tsourlaki, 2020; Zurlo, 2021) through the exchange of religious symbols in their minds and selves.

Underwood et al. (2011) posit that the identity transformation of the Muslim community implies a new assessment of the self and others regarding the events



Fig. 2 The Muslim community of chanting the call to prayer and *lafadz Rawi barzanji* at the altar of Immanuel Church of the *pela gandong* the celebrate the first Advent held in Immanuel Church, Moluccas Island, Indonesia

individuals experience relating to social life. Self-involvement identity is related to the negotiation theory of social identity (Dorjee & Ting-Toomey, 2020; Mitha & Jaspal, 2017; Seto, 2020; Ting-Toomey, 2017; Toomey et al., 2013), ritual and social transformation (Bigger, 2009; Kapferer, 2019a, 2019b) and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Nilgun et al., 2009; Sulaeman, Rijal, Malawat, et al., 2021a). According to Ting-Toomey (2017), identity negotiation is unique compared to its two predecessor theories—labeling (Timol, 2020; Wood, 2014) and social identity (Montenegro, 2018; Ridwan et al., 2020). Social identity theory belongs to social psychology, symbolic interaction theory belongs to sociology, and ritual and social transformation theory belong to relationships between people of cross-religious identities (Bigger, 2009; Kapferer, 2019a, 2019b). Identity negotiation is about communication, especially *pela gandong* ritual communication.

Therefore, the research axiology has novelty value in using religious symbols that provide knowledge to interpret the *pela gandong* ritual communication. Especially among the younger generation of Muslims, this crisis of the awareness, of the importance of understanding ritual messages, will not be repeated in the future.

The Muslim community is involved in ritual communication (Berrol, 2018; Sulaeman, Rijal, Malawat, et al., 2021a) describing how they feel, think, and do (Staudigl, 2017). This paper uses the phenomenological method to uncover social reality based on *pela gandong* ritual experiences.

Theoretical perspectives

In all its metaphorical richness, communication rituals evoke “the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality” (Sulaeman, Rijal, Malawat, et al., 2021a; Tallotte, 2018). As such, “A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (Sulaeman, Rijal, & Ridwan, 2021b; Underwood et al., 2011). Communication ritual involves compliance with rules agreed upon by the community in language, aesthetics, and the relationship between the head of the ritual performer’s tradition and the people with whom the performer communicates (Ridwan et al., 2020; Townsend, 2013). The rules are agreed upon because the language used in ritual communications differs from the vernacular (Nanda & Richard, 2020). This changed use of language can be understood as an interpretation of a traditional societal message in terms of the adopted religious activities (Awad, 2016) and belief systems.

From Turner’s van Gennepian (Kapferer, 2019a, 2019b) perspective, the human being is first and foremost a social being who is intensely realized by ritual. Rituals are carried out by understanding the communication process and symbolically transforming phenomena (Carey, 2009). From the communication perspective, rituals “symbolically affect human life, which is done in a patterned manner” (Pickstock, 2018; Sulaeman, Rijal, Malawat, et al., 2021a). The individuals performing rituals symbolize values, relationships, and social institutions in the form of local

traditions, such as *pela gandong* from *Amahusu*, *Hatalae* (Christian), *Laha* and *Tial* (Muslim) villages, which are communities with cross-religious kindred ties.

The Muslim community has experiences based on social action phenomenology (Merleau, 2007; Nurdin et al., 2022). However, phenomenology is also experienced, and each experience imparts knowledge through the previous one. Knowledge is based on the awareness underlying meaning-containing information (Goldthorpe, 2014). Experience is necessary and subjective, and has a remarkable impact (Sulaeman, Rijal, & Ridwan, 2021b; Tasleem et al., 2020). Social action, meaning, and awareness are individual experiences (Darawsheh et al., 2021; Nurdin et al., 2022; Sulaeman, Rijal, & Ridwan, 2021b). Subjective experiences are “... knowledge [that] contains information from individual experience” (Darawsheh et al., 2021; Nurdin et al., 2022; Sulaeman, Rijal, & Ridwan, 2021b). Their meaning results from their construction through individual experience. Through the ritual performed in Immanuel Church, which used religious symbols, individual experiences developed alongside the Moluccas Muslim community life experiences. Berger and Thomas (1991) describe changes in beliefs as an alternation. Turner (1962, 1969) repositions ritual practice as a methodological site for the production of concept and theory. Changes in actions mark this process, as do changes in worldviews. The ritual is the basis for the initiation and articulation of a general sociological theory of continuity and change. Change implies a transformation of the awareness, motives, and meanings of social reality among the actors involved.

The Muslim community was involved in the use of religious symbols, such as the recital of the *lafadz Rawi barzanji*, the muezzin’s chant of the call to prayer on the church altar, the singing of the hymns of praise, and the lighting of one of four Advent candles. The involvement of the Muslim community changes the world’s views of its actions.

Turner’s (1962, 1969) attention to the symbolic dynamics of ritual practice in the ritual process not only changed much of the attitude toward ritual but also played a part in the reinvention of ritual. According to Mead (2008), the mind uses symbols that have the same social meaning. The ritual process builds from his now classic ritual ethnographies that articulate a social phenomenology in which subjective experience becomes engaged with the objectification of meaning into new value structures (Bigger, 2009; Kapferer, 2019a, 2019b). The ability of humans to respond to symbols among themselves when interacting helps explain symbolic interactionist views of the self-concept (Blommfield & Doolin, 2012; Hoskins, 2015).

The symbolic interaction, one concept of “self,” as stated by Cooley (1990), is “a process in the communication of individuals with others.” Self-meaning is built by the Muslim community through interaction and communication with the surrounding environment. This article uses Cooley’s perspective on self-meaning to understand how the Muslim community determines its self-identity.

According to Toomey, identity means constructing self-reflection seen, built, and communicated in specific cultural interactions (Dorjee & Ting-Toomey, 2020; Ting-Toomey, 2017; Toomey et al., 2013). Negotiation means a transactional interaction process in which individuals in a cross-cultural situation affirm, define, contrast, or support the image desired by others (Gudykunst, 2005). The conceptualization of negotiation is a communication activity. Individuals engage in the transactional

interaction process in a cross-cultural manner by forcing, interpreting, changing, opposing, or imagining the desires of themselves or others. Identity negotiations are sometimes carried out unconsciously, and sometimes they are conducted with an awareness of the dynamics of the process, especially concentrated on the “cognitive focusing” process learned through repeated skill exercises (Dorjee & Ting-Toomey, 2020; Ting-Toomey, 2017; Toomey et al., 2013).

Ritual communication theory focuses on the individual’s desire to be a competent source of information in diverse interactions. Ritual communication is very influential in exchanges between individuals and includes group and individual-based identities. According to Mead (2008), the individual’s concern for these two identities stems from internalizing the views of others about themselves. Therefore, the process of individual self-reflection is formed through symbolism with other individuals. Conversely, after involvement, individuals felt they were a Muslim group with cross-religious relations because the self-identity of the expected group yielded a positive response.

Methods

The Muslim community’s involvement in ritual communication is a subjective experience that progresses through phenomenological stages. This article seeks to reveal the reality of the awareness experience through involvement. This paper uses a qualitative design (Sulaeman, Rijal, & Ridwan, 2021b) with a subjective interpretive perspective (Denzin & Yvonna, 2018) to deeply explore ritual communication.

The researchers chose the participants by purposeful sampling (Sulaeman, Rijal, & Ridwan, 2021b). Initially, the researchers approached the critical stakeholders of the designated village: the village chief, village secretary, and Imam, who were the formal and informal leaders of the village. Twenty-one informants, including 14 men, were involved. Their ages ranged from 21 to 63 years when the study was conducted. Thirteen informants were married, and eight were single.

Four of the informants worked for the state apparatus or as a homemaker; three were studying in tertiary institutions; two were Saniri, empowerment, and youth leaders; one each served as a religious figures, a community leaders, a national civil worker, and one was unemployment. All informants had a formal education, and eight had undergraduate-level educations. Of the remaining seven subjects with advanced educations, three had an undergraduate education, two had an advanced education first, and one had a diploma in education three, as shown in Table 1.

The informants were selected because they had important characteristics about the information to be examined. They interacted with the ritual at Moluccas Immanuel Church.

The data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and a literature review. Then, researchers used structured interviews (Ridwan et al., 2020). The in-depth interview method was used to maintain the informant’s confidentiality by choosing a comfortable place. The data were collected from the

Table 1 Research informant identification of the Moluccas Muslim community

No.	Name are pseudonyms	Age/Year	Gender	Education	Work	Population status
1.	Usman	46	Man	Bachelor	Village officials	Married
2.	Lukman	52	Man	Bachelor	Village officials	Married
3.	Alimuddin	59	Man	Bachelor	Middle school teacher	Married
4.	Faizal	28	Man	Bachelor	Youth figure	Single
5.	Arrahman	21	Man	Still in college	College student	Single
6.	Kartika	28	Woman	Bachelor	Empowerment	Single
7.	Similar	34	Woman	High school education	Housewife	Married
8.	Dewi	41	Woman	High school education	Homemaker	Married
9.	Sumiati	47	Woman	First school education	Housewife	Married
10.	Ismail	21	Woman	Still in college	College student	Single
11.	Muhammad	63	Man	Diploma education	<i>Saniri</i> village	Married
12.	Arif	55	Man	High school education	<i>Saniri</i> village	Married
13.	Yani	51	Man	High school education	Village officials	Married
14.	Alma	38	Woman	First school education	Homemaker	Married
15.	Sahrul	57	Man	Bachelor	Village officials	Married
16.	Udin	25	Man	High school education	Youth figure	Single
17.	Idrus	29	Man	Bachelor	Religious leaders	Married
18.	Rani	24	Woman	Still in college	College student	Single
19.	Badran	39	Man	High school education	Public figure	Married
20.	Iswandi	26	Man	Bachelor	Empowerment	Single
21.	Safina	23	Man	High school education	Does not work	Single

Source: Field data (2021)

Muslim community of *Tial* and *Laha* villages, assessing experiences, views, and knowledge without burdening the individuals' minds.

The field data were analyzed through qualitative data-processing activities carried out simultaneously (Creswell & Cheryl, 2017; Sulaeman, Rijal, & Ridwan, 2021b); namely, data reduction, data presentation, the drawing of conclusions, and verification according to the context of the research question and related research objectives (Creswell & Cheryl, 2017). The conclusions regarding the

ritual involvement experiences of the Moluccas Muslim community were verified with other data or with the research informants.

Cross-religious relation in Indonesia

Indonesia is a developing country, with a population of more than a quarter-billion people with a variety of religious issues, including differences in religious understanding, which are manifested by greeting each other and that will indirectly find the meaning of theological pluralism (Coward, 1989). Pluralism is the engagement of difference, not just the celebration of diversity (Eck, 2007). The problem of the humanitarian pluralism agenda triggers social conflict if the religious community is exclusive, apathetic, unaccepting and/or poor at managing plurality. In contrast, pluralism will help build harmony if it is inclusive, pluralist, transformative toward civil as well as theological pluralism and if the people are able to manage it fairly and wisely.

According to Majid's (1998) statement of religious harmony, the relationship among cross-religious believers is quite reasonable when it is still seen, heard, and even felt that harmonization of relations among cross-religious believers exists. Therefore, the form of the boundaries of religious relations is classified into four cross-religious harmonizations, each of which is related to one another: (1) tolerance, (2) cross-religious harmony, (3) cross-religious dialogue, and (4) cross-religious dialogue and cooperation.

Tolerance

Religious believers in Indonesia have reached a "saturation" of tolerance, because tolerance, in reality, has led to an apologetic attitude. The meaning of tolerance is more flexible with social changes and times.

Kuntowijoyo (1998) states that the relationship between religious believers needs to obtain a new name, content, and substance. This tolerance leads to the religious community itself, is oriented back to the "normal" era, and refers to the status quo based on Panchasila—the basic principles or values of belief in God, common humanity, democracy, and social justice (Eck, 2007). What is needed at this time is to be external and to build interreligious relations.

Cross-religious harmony

Cross-religious relations in Indonesia during the reform era emphasized cross-religious harmony. This objective was still inseparable from the government's interest in seeking political stability. The government guided religious people to live tolerantly, harmoniously, and peacefully (the trilogy of religious harmony in the form of harmony among adherents of the same religion, cross-religious harmony, and harmony between religious adherents and the government) (Naim, 1983). The government acted as an arbiter—the arbitrator (Majid, 2004). The government should not be a factor in determining the harmony of religious life. Cross-religious harmony is

the responsibility of religion itself, not the government. If there is a dispute, whether from within or outside a religious community, the religious community itself can resolve it.

Cross-religious relations and the state have a consultative relationship and partnership, not a dominating relationship because Indonesia is not designed as a religious state. Using 2021 data on cross-religious harmony, the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia shows that religious tolerance is 68.72%, religious cooperation is 73.41%, and equality is 75.03%. The index not only looks at the success of cross-religious harmony in Indonesia, but also problem mapping, problem prediction, and detection of cross-religious relationship problems. At first, cross-religious harmony received a lot of attention as the cross-religious dialogue in its various forms.

Cross-religious dialogue

During the reform era of government, the dialogue of cross-religious relations in Indonesia was a formal-bureaucratic “religious dialogue.” The dialogue aims to preserve the unity and integrity of the nation, to support and contribute to the success of national development, and to fight poverty, underdevelopment, and ignorance. It is also a form of collective hard work to support the realization of interfaith welfare. Dialogue provides each person with information regarding the search for religious meaning, which are the same and different at the same time from one religious teaching to another. Dialogue creates civil pluralism of cross-religious relations based on “human values and religious diversity” to live together peacefully.

“Human values,” as a cross-religious root of religious life, are realized by respecting each other, not offending each other, adapting a healthy level of humility, and not hating or insulting one another with fear and prejudice against the logical consequences that have been experienced in the surrounding environment. Cross-religious relationships based on “religious diversity” are not only about oneself, without enacting change in carrying out social contracts. Cross-religious relations include respecting diversity as God’s creation.

Cross-religious dialogue and cooperation

Dialogue and cooperation are the result of cross-religious understandings in Indonesia through social transformation. Through dialogue, a harmonious life is cultivated. Religion, which is embraced through the spirit of vertical dialogue (between an individual and his or her God), will produce a holy life and a life far from misery, while horizontal dialogue (between fellow humans) will create order, harmony, peace, and unity.

Cross-religious dialogue and cooperation are adapted to local needs (for example, in education or literacy, health, natural disasters, environmental protection, and security). Dialogue and cooperation use various paradigms, from demographic, geographical, sociological, and economic, to political paradigms; for example, cross-religious dialogue and cooperation are used for drug prevention, eradicating gambling, fighting alcohol, handling crime, and promoting social support.

Cross-religious relations in Indonesia are realized through tolerance, cross-religious harmony, cross-religious dialogue, and dialogue and cooperation, which are based on human values and religious diversity. Indonesia is relatively wide and diverse, demographically, topographically, and geographically. Of course, the pattern of cross-religious relations in each region also varies. Therefore, the values of cross-religious dialogue and cooperation (between individuals and groups) can build the harmonization of cross-religious relations or cross-religious ties with the government of the Republic of Indonesia.

Context of *Pela Gandong* indigenous peoples in the Moluccas

Data were obtained from in-depth interviews and observations on the *pela gandong* of the indigenous peoples in the Moluccas. The author found that the *pela gandong* context is considered a social and religious identity through kinship ties and cross-religious communities (Bartel, 2017; Watloly, 2005) that are classified into three *pela gandong* contexts each of which is interconnected with one another: (1) the *pela gandong* as an identity, (2) conflict transformation in residential patterns and *pela gandong* cross-religious relations, and (3) cross-religious dialogue and peacebuilding through the *pela gandong* indigenous peoples.

The *Pela Gandong* as an identity

Indigenous peoples in the Moluccas have various traditional values, such as the *pela gandong* tradition embodied in a life that guides civilization. The *pela gandong* values are a model for cross-religious and kinship relations in peacebuilding. According to Watloly (2005), *pela gandong* is an identity. The cross-religious community has a religious and a social identity.

The idea of *pela gandong* occurred in indigenous peoples who initially did not have attachments but bound themselves through traditional agreements and ties because of a particular event. After being bound in *pela gandong*, they think of themselves as brothers who have to live with each other, help each other, be tolerant, and achieve mutual cooperation and togetherness. For example, (1) they are obliged to help each other in times of crisis—such as natural disasters or wars. (2) Whether asked or not, the village that is engaged with the other village is obliged to provide assistance to other villages that wish to carry out projects in the interest of public welfare, such as building a house of worship. Muslim brothers will help Christian brothers when they are building churches, and vice versa, Christian brothers will help Muslim brothers when they build mosques. (3) When a village that is *pela gandong* with the village of origin is visiting, the community in the *pela gandong* village visited is obligated to give food voluntarily to the guests, and they do not need to ask permission to bring home crops or fruits from the village visited. (4) All villagers related to each other by *pela gandong* are considered blood relatives so that villagers from the two villages that are tied in *pela gandong* are not allowed to marry each other.

The practice of the *pela gandong* of indigenous people, especially the Moluccas, has entered a mental dimension and a deep sense of community value. The bond developed from the practice of *pela gandong* is considered deeper than that between siblings. Indigenous peoples uphold the “*panas pela*” values with traditional rituals carried out in the agreement process. The goal is to remind the indigenous people involved in *pela gandong* practices about cross-religious collective responsibilities that are bound by custom so that cross-religious harmonization is realized. The “*panas pela*” tradition is carried out with celebrations, containing traditional rites and oaths of the elders/ancestors in the form of developing communications to preserve and maintain kinship. This tradition has become an icon of harmony with the symbol of nonverbal communication—the “gong of peace.” The symbol is the identity relationship of kinship and cross-religious bonds. The purpose of the symbol as a “communication of a unifying soul” is not to demean, insult, hate, intimidate, or prejudice others.

The strength of the *pela gandong* identity is that it unites and respects cross-religious differences. *Pela gandong* sets an example and a method of conflict resolution (lessons learned) for many religions in Indonesia. If there is a violation of the *pela gandong* agreement, it is understood that then the community in question will be punished.

Conflict transformation in residential patterns and *Pela Gandong* cross-religious relations

Violent conflict hampers humanity’s ability to address urgent problems (Eck, 2007), such as in the Moluccas. The Moluccas conflict that occurred on January 19, 1999, characterized by a very high level of violence and many casualties, reflects political identity dynamics and community polarization as a dissociative social process (Herman, 2015). The chronology of the conflict is divided into several stages. The first was on January 19, 1999, when a fight broke out between a car driver and a thug at the car terminal in *Batumerah* Village, Ambon City. The dispute (Herman, 2015) quickly escalated into a cross-religious conflict.

The second stage occurred on July 24, 1999. The conflict started with a riot in *Poka* Village, Ambon City, and spread throughout the city. The third conflict stage began on December 26, 1999, when the *Silo* church and *An-Nur* Mosque were burned down in Ambon City. The Christian community’s Christmas celebration at that time coincided with “bloody Christmas,” which triggered conflict, violence, and terror as a tool of social control (Herman, 2015).

The last incident occurred on May 14, 2000. *Laskar Jihad* entered Moluccas. This event was considered an act of anarchy with actors from outside the Moluccas “participating” in the conflict. The entry of *Laskar Jihad* into the Moluccas, led by *Ja’far Umar Thalib* with approximately 10,000 people as troops, resulted in an imbalance of cross-religious power in the Moluccas.

The conflicts in the Moluccas involve cross-religious impacts on social segregation, regional segregation, and mental and physical segregation (Herman, 2015). Segregation brought about in-group vs. out-group polarization with the labeling of the people in the Moluccas, such as “we are not them, they are not us,

and we are against them,” or “*katong* (us) against *dong* (them),” or “*acang*” (Muslims) against the “*obet*” (Christian), or the “white” community (Muslim) against the “red” community (Christian). Cross-religious relationships have become a source of political identity or religious politicization; there has also been a rise of hoaxes and hate speech on social media. Cross-religious segregation brings about the collective stigma of the past and the construction of communal “imaginary enemies” and “negative reference groups.”

In an effort to engage in conflict resolution in the Moluccas, the government facilitated a peace meeting through the “Declaration of *Malino 2*,” a cross-religious agreement for the people to live in peace with one another. One of the follow-ups to the declaration of *Malino 2* is to carry out “settlement segregation” by placing people from a religion in one particular settlement homogeneously, without being in the presence of other religious communities. The Muslim community is placed in a separate settlement, for example, the villages of “*Batumerah*, *Kebun Cengkeh*, and *Waihaong*,” while the Christian community is placed in the villages “*Kudamati*, *Mangga Dua*, *Hative Kecil*, and *Passo*.” Cross-religious life in their respective communities is separate from each other. There is no longer any social interaction with other religious communities. Therefore, social interaction is only with those of the same religious communities.

The segregation of cross-religious settlements disintegrates social interaction. First, cross-religious peace is only superficial and pseudopsychological. In addition, it brings about cross-religious social distance. Each cross-religious person lives his or her own life and is not inclined to visit others and build empathetic communication. Second, the segregation of settlements creates barriers to territorial integration. The cross-religious people create a negative stigma against individuals outside the community. The Muslim community considers the Christian community as “the other,” creating social tensions that lead to conflict. Third, settlement segregation separates cross-religious people as an independent community without social assimilation. Each cross-religious community strengthens itself and even carries out programmatic internal consolidation, prepared to anticipate what might happen.

Fourth, social interaction occurs only through formal relationships in government offices, schools, and other public facilities. Social interaction is related to work tasks, a fulfillment of temporary needs and only for formal purposes; it is full of suspicion and distrust of one another. Thus, social interaction does not take place. Fifth, the segregation of settlements makes each cross-religious community experience uncomfortable in daily life. Cross-religious people who always feel anxious and suspicious build social interactions that are not harmonious.

Before the conflict, there was no segregation of settlements in the cross-religious area. However, when this research was conducted, interreligious people had no desire to return to their pre-conflict areas for security reasons. The Muslim and the Christian communities feel that the current conditions have not provided security. They still experience trauma from living in cross-religious settlements, while they feel safe and comfortable living (Herman, 2015) together with people of the same religion.

Cross-religious dialogue and peacebuilding through the *Pela Gandong* of indigenous peoples

According to Bakhtin (1982, 1996), any utterance is a reply to the other's previous utterances and an anticipation of subsequent utterances. According to the sociocultural framework, the notion of dialogic is another way of showing the social nature of human activities or the constant circulation of semiotic means from interpersonal to intrapersonal processes (Linell, 2009). Furthermore, speech and an individual's thoughts, feelings, activities, or social representations can be considered dialogic even when performed by cross-religious people in the context of the invisibility of other religions. The dialogical perspective has shown the permanent tension between staying the same and being different, maintenance and change, collaboration and conflict, what is and what can be (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Leiman, 2011).

The following are various sketches involving interreligious people in the Moluccas in dialogue. The aim is to refer to the modalities of psychological orchestration made possible by a dialogical process involving religious experiences of various *pela gandong* problems, which surely provides a deeper perspective in the field of dialogue and cross-religious peacebuilding. As examples: (1) *pela gandong* for the harmonization of life of the *basudara* people in the Moluccas; (2) creating social awareness by the younger generation of the local culture of *pela gandong* for the social life of the *basudara* people; (3) improving the lifestyle of coexistence by referring to the value of *pela gandong* for cross-religious living together in harmony; (4) awareness and humility of cross-religious people about the importance of harmonious religious acceptance, which can prevent past conflict that has damaged the harmony of religious life and has had the potential to foster attitudes and actions of religious fanaticism, prejudice, stereotypes, and cross-religious exclusiveness; (5) the existence of a unifying bond as a model of religious harmonization with a symbol of nonverbal communication—the “gong of peace”—in the *pela gandong* culture as a kinship bond of religious diversity; and (6) the realization of *pela gandong* preservation.

The *pela gandong* cross-religious dialogue is a method that fosters tolerance and religious life as part of religious harmony. Cross-religious people should show respect and engage in actions to institutionalize the value of harmony to build a life of tolerance, for example, through mutual help, selfless solidarity, and mutual respect in everyday life.

The cross-religious dialogue of *pela gandong* is the development of social space inconsistency as a bridge of peace, symbolized by the “gong of peace” as the cross-religious social reality of harmonious religious life in the surrounding environment that has shaped the world they believe in and have developed into a reality in religious life. During times of conflict, when differences in beliefs in a social context are emphasized, religious tolerance undergoes a transformation. Gongs of peace contribute to the postconflict peace process by discovering religious beliefs and social patterns that offer opportunities for religious accommodation and to avoid cross-religious tensions by instilling the values of the *pela gandong* “unifying soul.” This is symbolized by the *basudara samua* culture, which does not demean, insult, hate, intimidate, or show prejudice against other religions.

***Pela Gandong* as part of the muslim community**

Muslims from *Tial* and *Laha* villages and Christians from *Amahusu* and *Hatalai* villages are part of the cross-religious *pela gandong* of *Amalahat* village on Ambon Island, Central Moluccas Regency, Indonesia. The trial is part of “*pela*” (*basudara* or kinship) with *Laha*, *Tulehu*, *Asilulu*, and *Lamu Muslims*. *Tial* also has “*pela*” with Christian *Amahusu*, *Latuhalat*, *Hulaiu*, *Paperu*, *Sila*, and *Leinitu*. Meanwhile, the Muslims of *Laha* are part of “*pela* and *gandong*”. *Laha* has “*pela*” with Muslim *Tial* and Christian *Hatalai*. *Laha* also has “*gandong*” (blood relationship agreement) with Christian *Amahusu*. Originally, *Tial* and *Laha* were categorized as part of the Muslim community.

For the Muslims of *Tial* and *Laha*, involvement at Immanuel Church is part of the customary community of the ties of blood relationship “*gandong*” and kindred relationship “*pela*.” The relational bond is formed when cross-religious siblings interact with each other. Relationship ties become customary for *Amalahat* when performing “*panas pela*.” This ritual aims to maintain the values of the community’s ancestors for generations and help an individual recognize his or her identity.

As far as I remember, at least once a year, there is a hot ritual of *pela gandong* involving eating patita with the villages of *Amahusu*, *Laha*, *Hatalai*, and *Tial*. There are bound brothers and sisters, but from different religions, like I am a Muslim ... there are *pela* (kindred relationships) between different religions and Christianity in *Amahusu* and *Hatalae* (Interview with Muhammad at *Tial* village on March 14, 2021).

My parents always teach their children how to maintain and preserve ancestral values with *pela Tial* and *Hatala*. I am Muslim. I am in partnership with the Christian community of *Amahusu* village. I still have a cross-religious relationship between *basudara pela* and *gandong* (Interview with Sahrul at *Laha* village on June 03, 2021).

The Muslim communities of *Tial* and *Laha* participate in cross-religious *pela gandong* with the Christian communities of *Amahusu* and *Hatalai*. The *Tial* and *Laha* are part of the Muslim community that maintains and preserves the beliefs and values of the bonds of kindred relations from generation to generation. The aim is to strengthen and build peace by strengthening *pela gandong* between religious communities, symbolizing the “peace gong” as a “unifying soul” that does not demean, insult, hate, fear, or prejudice kindred relations in the Moluccas.

Ritual communication of cross-religious *Pela Gandong*

As a concept in communication theory, ritual is most well known in three forms as an approach to conceiving communication (Bigger, 2009; Middleton, 1967; Toulson, 2012; Turner, 1962, 1969). Forms of ritual actions are symbols of guidance in social relations (Bigger, 2009; Middleton, 1967; Pickstock, 2018; Turner, 1962, 1969), orders, and social institutions where the ritual is performed, such as the *pela*

gandong local tradition. Individuals who perform ritual communication relations (Bigger, 2009; Knowlton, 2015; Middleton, 1967; Turner, 1962, 1969) confirm their commitment to familial, ethnic, ideological, or religious traditions. The study of ritual communication provides knowledge of its diversity (Broad, 2013) based on interactions between cross-religious *pela gandong* communities.

The central principle of cross-religiosity is the agreement on the bond of the kinship identity over human affairs in local traditions. The cross-religious community in the Moluccas strives to discover how individuals and groups are compatible with religious teachings and to pursue local traditions' purity as a show of dedication to ancestors to realize harmony in cross-religious life. Because ritual as social drama provides it with a significant social function, it dispels conflict and schisms and mends quarrels (Bigger, 2009; Middleton, 1967; Turner, 1962, 1969). The critical cross-religious *pela gandong* beliefs and values include diversity, togetherness, equality, kinship, and social–community concerns, as shown in Table 2.

Diversity

Pela gandong as self-identity (Toth, 2016; Watloly, 2005) helps individuals understand their differences (Eck, 2007). Diversity is not the only characteristic of every religious tradition. Diversity is also a characteristic of ourselves in terms of thoughts, emotions, religious drives, and relationships. In the words of Michael Sandel, identities are “multiple situated selves” (Eck, 2007), and as Sen (2006) puts it, our identities are not choiceless and singular but complex, chosen, and plural. Self-identity is generated to preserve and maintain relationships by using the principle of kinship as an intrapersonal “diversity.” It has the meaning of mutual understanding, respect, and acceptance.

Self-identity embodies the individual self as intrapersonal with respect to diversity. The *pela gandong* bond is self-identity (Goitom, 2016; Wood, 2014), which gives a specific meaning to the situational experience and the knowledge felt and experienced. The cross-religious *pela gandong* relationship as civic pluralism (Eck, 2007) enables cross-religious people to live together peacefully and to cooperate in

Table 2 The principles of cross-religious *pela gandong*

No.	The principles of cross-religious <i>pela gandong</i>	Meaning
1.	Diversity	Mutual understanding, respect, and acceptance of the cross-religious identity.
2.	Togetherness	Understanding the human values of togetherness and strengthened kindred relations.
3.	Equality	Equality in the feeling of the bonding relationship with respect and acceptance of the cross-religious identity.
4.	Kinship	The belief systems based on the identity of unity, openness, and courage and a result in shared family responsibility.
5.	Community-social concern	Ritual encounters with taking the oath of kindred relations.

Source: Field data (2021)

ventures. Pluralism is not just the enumeration of differences, and pluralism is certainly not just a celebration of diversity in a spirit of good will through engagement of religious difference (Eck, 2007).

Diversity as self-identity (Wood, 2014) acts in kindred cross-religious relations (Toth, 2016) to help individuals understand each other's religious differences. Diversity cross-religious ritual communication performed in the Moluccas indicates that *pela gandong* was a well-developed case of civic pluralism in the pre-conflict era and that it was shattered by the conflict.

Thus, diversity as a relationship of self-identity (Goitom, 2016; Wood, 2014) is accepting to create a harmonious life (Lattu, 2019) with mutual respect and tolerance in which individuals do not offend each other. A cross-religious community belief in the Moluccas is a theological pluralism (Eck, 2007) that interprets religion (including rituals) as a form of mutual respect. It permits individuals to engage in healthy humility and not to hate or insult one another. However, self-identity is built with kinship and social solidarity.

Togetherness

Acceptance is a process of “togetherness,” a way of life based on “human values,” describing oneself (Salvatore, 2019) by establishing relationships. Social identity does not differ from civic pluralism (Eck, 2007), even when individuals have different religious identities, or from theological pluralism (Eck, 2007). Even though they often have different perspectives, they still take care of each other with shared pride. They are open to the desire to learn based on the human value of togetherness and strengthened kindred relations (Toth, 2016).

Cross-religious individuals have the right to live and are believed to respect diversity and their ancestors. Togetherness is realized through cooperation (*masohi*); the lack of discrimination; openness to external values; and consistent, clean humility that does not justify intolerance with fear and prejudice. However, a specific meaning is given to the communication action (Salvatore, 2019) in kindred ties as a series of togetherness acceptances of the reality encountered.

The meaning of cross-religiosity is “human values,” the acceptance of social reality in relational life. Cross-religiosity is used as self-identity (Goitom, 2016; Wood, 2014) to engage in mutual understanding, respect, and humility in constructing life with togetherness. In self-description, the togetherness of kinship becomes an inseparable part of cross-religiosity, which has a local life order.

Equality

By adhering to “equality,” cross-religious individuals share the same feelings of self-identity (Wood, 2014) and the urge to maintain kindred ties (Toth, 2016) and prioritize human values through the recognition and appreciation of the existence of social and religious identities.

Equality is used as a social identity in which individuals have concern for one another, based on social–community solidarity (*patita*) as a “bond relationship.” However, at the very least, the bonding relationship is carried out to maintain the

comfort of a harmonious life based on human values. Cross-religious ties cause individuals to feel obliged to help each other in communication events, such as when the Christian community builds a church and when the Muslim community participates, and vice versa. Cross-religious communication actions are not guaranteed to prevent conflict; however, they may serve as early warning signs.

Kinship

Kinship orients culture around belief systems, constructing a life with mutual help and understanding kinship values. It is formed from the relationship between rules and emotional ties. It conveys the transformation of ethical values, intensive social relations and continuity. Through clans, attachment relationships among kindred can be traced and maintained.

The relationship ties show the community that their ancestors built with a worldview. Relationship ties become the identity of unity, openness, and courage and result in a shared family responsibility. Kinship will form a self-personality. It consists of having a picture of one's life formed by two life principles, "*sagu salempeng mar bage dua*" (sago one divided by two). The principle of life means caring for each other, sharing, being responsible, and enjoying together. One person's misery is everyone's trouble and must be borne together based on the relational life. Thus, the togetherness–kinship worldview helps everyone in the community help and respect one another.

Cross-religious *pela gandong* has kinship ties (Toth, 2016) that imply a worldview based on a belief system that shows the clan symbol of self-identity (Wood, 2014) familial relationships. The worldview becomes the identity of unity, openness, courage and having a shared responsibility in the family. The family forms a personality by communicating mutual care, sharing, responsibility, and enjoyment together.

Social-community concern

Relationships can create harmony and strength through collective communication, which creates a social situation of togetherness and builds harmonious social–community concern. Concern creates values of social meaning (Salvatore, 2019) upheld as unity through religious and cultural values. These values result in peace and stability in social life *pela gandong*.

Awareness of social–community concerns aims to strengthen kindred relations (Toth, 2016) and establish the value of peace as a shared value. Social–community concern (Chou & Soe-Tsyr, 2015; Geiger et al., 2019) values the maintenance of relationship ties as an ancestral heritage. Relations of mutual understanding have differences; supporting, respecting, appreciating, boasting to, and helping one another are social benefits, together with the ties of friendship.

Pela gandong relations must be transformed with open and supportive self-concepts through awareness and humility (Sulaeman, Rijal, & Ridwan, 2021b). This bonding relationship is essential for encouraging self-acceptance, so life experiences such as Moluccas cross-religious conflict can be put in the past. Past life experiences

have damaged the order created by religious values and the traditions of harmonious life relationships. Even though cross-religious *pela gandong* supports different religions, individuals with different religious beliefs must communicate and interact to create harmonious life relationships (Chen, 2016). Cross-religious individuals must actualize the essential potential of humans to do good and behave virtuously for prosperity.

For the Moluccas, ritual communication is an act of self-identity, and individuals diligently maintain *pela gandong*. They consider obedience, hard work, and responsibility to be cross-religious obligations. They understand ritual communication not only from involvement but also from stories of the surrounding environment, such as shared experiences and stories from parents and the *pela gandong* community.

Ritual communication of cross-religious *pela gandong* merupakan pluralism “unity in diversity” (Eck, 2007) in the Moluccas has miraculously remained intact as a cross-religious practice, accepting differences through the *pela gandong* bond, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, gender, generation, social or economic status. Religious pluralism as a bridge builder whose aim is not to eliminate the different cultural and religious worlds in which we live (Eck, 2007), but rather to connect cross-religious communities with the *pela gandong* ritual communication.

Identity transformation in Muslim communities subjective experience

Individual community identities are transformed (Faulkner, 2017; Zurlo, 2021) based on “situational” experience and knowledge (Maupin, 2015; Selkrig, 2011). Each individual is unique. Individuals can always change along with the changing process of space and time (King et al., 2016), such as the identity transformation experienced when an individual is involved in the Muslim communities of Moluccas Immanuel Church.

Phenomenology assumes that humans are creative creatures (Iyadurai, 2011; Michael et al., 2014; Williamson & Hood Jr, 2011), have free will, and have several other subjective properties (Staudigl, 2017). It is the study of human experience and of the ways in which things present themselves to us in and through such experience (Fuad, 2020; Tallotte, 2018). According to Husserl, the subject creates its world according to its perspective, which differs from that of other subjects, resulting in a subjective and relative world (Geniusas, 2020). Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view (Smith, 2008).

A necessary experience is one that is the most memorable and that has a specific impact on an individual (Staudigl, 2017). The experience illustrates the meaning (Sulaeman, Rijal, & Ridwan, 2021b) that comes from the conscious experience of the involvement of the Moluccas Muslim community. The subjective experience is the Moluccas Muslim communities’ identity transformation through self-identity proof, human kinship, relationships, acceptance treatment, and worship labels, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 The Moluccas Muslim communities' identity transformation through ritual communication in Immanuel Church

No.	Identity transformation	Meaning
1.	Self-identity proof	A difference can be created by strengthening the cross-religious community's kindred relations.
2.	Human kinship	Relationship with a shared purpose and no difference that works through accepting and acknowledging that there is a difference.
3.	Relationships	A traditional life value and an institution of social–community concern and cementing the true ties of the cross-religious relationship.
4.	Acceptance treatment	The respecting and appreciating of cross-religious relations.
5.	Worship labels	Symbol of cross-religious identity labels.

Source: Field data (2021)

Self-identity proof

The *pela gandong* Muslim community's involvement in conducting rituals is proof of a situational identity. It proves that one's identity (Goitom, 2016) is a cross-religious understanding and that a difference can be created by strengthening the cross-religious community's kindred relations. The Muslim community considers itself to have experience through invitations to ritual involvement with ignorance, thinking only of themselves doing the act. They believe the cross-religious experience acts as self-identity proof, such as the identity of the social–community concern (Chou & Soe-Tsyr, 2015; Geiger et al., 2019).

The self-identity of the Muslim community shows ownership of tradition by constructing peace, and it strengthens its cross-religious relations through its involvement in rituals. This involvement shows the identity of the bond of the *pela gandong* kinship relationship. The relations are consciously experienced to build equality and foster a sense of kinship. Accepting the *pela gandong* harmonious life, basically the recognition of self-identity (Thoits, 2013), is traditional, especially in a cross-religious relationship.

Human kinship

The Muslim community's involvement is a kinship of cross-religious humanity; it is a relationship with a shared purpose and no difference that works through accepting and acknowledging that there is a difference. Involvement with the encouragement of humanitarian kinship (Bardhan, 2014; Starkman, 2013), although not expressed openly, repeatedly appears in social reality. Acknowledgments are made in rituals by the village head; over time, the togetherness goal of the relationship can be felt.

Initially, the Muslim community understood ritual as a social–community concern (Chou & Soe-Tsyr, 2015; Geiger et al., 2019), set outside and/or in the front yard of Immanuel Church. They felt the experience strengthened the diversity of the kinship of humanity (Bardhan, 2014; Starkman, 2013) through its mutual respect for fellow relational ties with no difference, except for the mutual recognition and

acceptance of differences of religious beliefs. Humanitarian kinship is not simply a relationship; it is a relationship constructed based on the values of justice, excellent treatment, compassion, peace, and even prioritizing the identities of cross-religious relations.

Relationships

The *pela gandong* relationship is a traditional life value and an institution of social–community concern (Chou & Soe-Tsyr, 2015; Geiger et al., 2019). In the past, ancestors attempted to foster kinship by understanding that there was a difference between cementing the true ties of the cross-religious relationship. The relational characteristics revealed the comfort of diversity and harmonious relationships.

The relationship is the Muslim–Christian community’s identity (Goitom, 2016), part of the kinship bond. The relationship is a world of bridge-builders whose aim is not to eliminate the different cultures and religious worlds but rather to connect different self-identities (Eck, 2007). Self-identity is organized with the manifestation of the individual self as intrapersonal (Goitom, 2016; Thoits, 2013) to the diversity that must be endured by accepting cross-religious kinship. All kinships are *pela gandong* and do not force beliefs to be united in worship. The ritual involves Muslim Christians in the communication of the *pela gandong* ritual to celebrate the first Advent held at the Immanuel Church, Moluccas Islands, Indonesia, on December 2, 2018.

Acceptance treatment

Muslim community involvement refers to the treatment of cross-religious acceptance in harmonious relations. Ritual involvement is part of the worship of kindred people. Acceptance is driven to create harmonious relations by individuals understanding each other’s differences and respecting and loving one another. Even boasting to one another about the strengthening kindred relationships has a transformational process. Individuals engage in acceptance and mutual understanding, are open to friendship, and mutually learn relational values. These attitudes realize the harmonization of the relationship of acceptance of religious life practices.

Cross-religious communities must continue to open up and support each other through awareness and humility to the importance of accepting cross-religious experiences. These become our new experiences as our past lives have damaged the order of the values of life harmony. Even though the cross-religious communities have different beliefs and religions, they still maintain relatively unified communication in interactions. Cross-religiosity can actualize the essential potential of humans who do good and are virtuous in realizing a comfortable life of harmonious relations.

The acceptance of cross-religious treatment is to understand one another’s human existence and to open themselves to know one another and learn the *pela gandong* traditions from one another. The attitudes of the cross-religious community are openness, loyalty, and a willingness to listen to one another and give everything they know. These attitudes are used as a method of realizing religious harmonization by itself, which can build religious life with humility, free from prejudice,

and with a willingness to open oneself to accept all the diversity and ideas that are communicated.

Worship labels

Cross-religious symbols act as worship labels (Ingalls, 2017; Robinson, 2014; Timol, 2020; Wood, 2014) through the ritual communication of kinship, and social-community concern. After the shared worship experience, the Muslim community was invited by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of the Moluccas and several adherents to other Islamic religious organizations, such as Nahdhatul Ulema (NU) and Muhammadiyah. They gathered at the Moluccas MUI Secretariat.

The mass media know the symbol of the cross-religious worship label. The mass media is very important in informing the ritual procession. The Muslim community is also aware of various responses among Muslims in the Moluccas through mass media coverage. When the Muslim community reads news that increasingly intensively preaches kinship, people worship as a symbol of their identity labels.

Worship (Ingalls, 2017; Robinson, 2014; Timol, 2020) uses *pela gandong* symbols, such as the muezzin chanting the call to prayer and the *lafadz Rawi barzanji*, or people singing hymns of praise, priests preaching sermons, and people lighting one of the four candles. These symbols lead to “joint worship labels,” especially for the Muslim community.

Symbols of the Muslim community's identity

Pela gandong ritual communication emphasizes the process of the meaning of symbols. This paper reached four conclusions through interviews and observations, and the symbols were interpreted as a distinct phenomenon of Muslim communities through the following themes of ignorance, entrapment, traditional communication, and religious communication, as shown in Table 4.

Ignorance

The Muslim community was involved in carrying out ritual communication in Immanuel Church through “ignorance” (Prothero, 2007) by obtaining information from the surrounding environment. It received information about ritual communication, indirectly highlighting the advantages, uniqueness, and privileges of self-psychology, such as patience, empathy, and mutual respect, in its cross-religious concern for *pela gandong*. The community realized that it was motivated by ignorance, which was the reason it became involved. It was likened to “recipients of information,” directly “strengthening kindred relations” by mutual respect and concern for fellow *pela gandong* relations.

Entrapment

Entrapment is a change and chanting the call to prayer and *lafadz Rawi barzanji* was the reason for encouraging involvement, although not according to the written invitation. The invitation stated that the event was for the worship of the *basudara* people, but the worship service was not explained. The organizing committee distributed invitations only for “people to worship” to several community leaders, Ambon and Moluccas city government offices, heads of government of *Amalahat*, the Chairman of the Moluccas MUI, the Moluccas Synod Chair, and religious leaders of the Muslim–Christian community. Ultimately, changes and additions to the event were categorized as entrapment. This occurrence strongly influenced the psychology of self-identity in cross-religious relationships the bonds of kinship.

Another trap, the change, was situational, accompanied by *gandong* cloth and the collaboration of the Muslim–Christian community in entering and sitting inside the church. These ceremonial features signify the self-identity *pela gandong* relationship. The involvement was likened to the “diversity” with the acceptance of “people of worship” with relationships with the individual to perform on the main stage.

Traditional communication

Tradition at Immanuel Church provides an understanding of diversity based on involvement in the presentation of various symbols. The first is tambourine–*totobuang* collaboration, in which traditional nonverbal communication is played by the cross-religious community as a symbol of identity. Tambourine–*totobuang* is understood as a cross-religious bridge, representing the relationship bond. Understanding and acceptance preserve ancestors’ traditions by accepting differences in religious beliefs that strengthen the harmonious relationship of self-identity.

The second is *gandong* cloth, a long white cloth. White cloth symbolizes a “unifying” identity without distinguishing religion from social–community concerns. *Gandong* symbolizes the identity of the cross-religious community of women. It has the meaning of “kinship” and is worn while singing the song “*gandong*.”

Gandong lamari gandong
 Mari jua ale ooo
 Beta mau bilang ale
 Katong dua satu gandong
 Hidup ade deng kaka
 Sunggu manis lawange
 Ale rasa beta rasa
 Katong dua satu gandong
 Gandong nge,... sio gandong nge,...
 Mari beta gendong, beta gendong ale jua
 Katong dua cuma satu gandonge
 Satu hati satu jantonge
 Gandong nge,... sio gandong nge,...
 Mari beta gendong, beta gendong ale jua

Table 4 The symbolic of the Muslim community identity through ritual communication in Moluccas Immanuel Church

No.	Symbols of the Muslim community identity	Meaning
1.	Ignorance	Involvement in carrying out ritual communication in Immanuel Church by obtaining information from the surrounding environment.
2.	Entrapment	A written invitation that does not correspond to the act of ritual communication in the Immanuel Church.
3.	Traditional communication Tambourine- <i>totobuang</i> <i>Gandong</i> cloth <i>Lesso</i> dance Eat <i>patita</i>	Local traditions with a variety of differences are presented through traditional symbols. A cross-religious bridge, representing the relationship bond that strengthens the harmonious relationship of self-identity. Symbolizing a “unifying” identity without distinguishing religion from social–community concerns. Symbolizing the identity of “friendship” without distinguishing among religions by strengthening the harmonization of the bonds of relations. Symbols of the identity of “unity and togetherness” without distinguishing among religions in a social context.
4.	Religious communication Chanting of the call to prayer <i>Lafadz Rawi barzanji</i>	Symbols of cross-religious actions at the Immanuel Church. The chanting of the call to prayer at the altar of Immanuel Church that did not differ from the practice of other Muslim communities. Part of the ritual worship that was recited at Immanuel Church no differently than as recited by other Muslim communities.

Source: Field data (2021)

Katong dua cuma satu gandonge
Satu hati satu jantonge.

The cross-religious community is aware of the importance of harmonizing to construct the social resilience of the relationship. The resilience of social power maintains traditions by strengthening kindred relations from the perspective of acknowledging differences in religious beliefs and disputes that are marginalized in daily life.

Third, *lesso* is a traditional ritual dance medium using a white cloth handkerchief and performed by girls from the cross-religious community. *Lesso* symbolizes the identity of “friendship” without distinguishing among religions by strengthening the harmonization of the bonds of relationships. The *lesso* dance collaboration acts as a symbolic identity, accompanied by tambourine-totobuang in the procession welcoming guests to their seats in the church.

The fourth, *patita*, is a traditional ritual medium of eating together. *Patita* is a traditional Moluccas cuisine. Typical food offerings are shared symbols of the identity of “unity and togetherness” without distinguishing among religions in a social context. The identification of the relationship gives the meaning of “kinship, friendship, deliberation, cooperation, and tolerance.” *Patita* strives for “togetherness and solidarity” as the embodiment of a harmonious coexistence to strengthen the social resilience of self-identity in support of religious harmony.

Religious communication

The last part of the symbol of the Muslim community identity was religious communication that presented various symbols of Islamic religion at Immanuel Church. Such findings indicate that first, the chanting of the call to prayer, including ritual worship calls, shows the time for each Muslim to pray. The chanting of the call to prayer at the altar of Immanuel Church did not differ from the practice of other Muslim communities. However, the setting of the Immanuel Church altar was different.

The call to prayer is a symbol of the situational identity of the Muslim community. Beginning with the muezzin greeting, “*Assalamu alaikum waramatullahi wabarakatu*,” the Muslim then loudly responded to the Immanuel Church congregation, “*Walaikumsalam warahmatullahi wabarakatuh*.” The *pela gandong* community then responded, “peace be upon you for *basudara gandong samua*.” Finally, the muezzin sang the call to prayer. The muezzin ended with the words “*Assalamu alaikum waramatullahi wabarakatu*,” and Immanuel Church members answered, “*Walaikumsalam warahmatullahi wabarakatuh*.”

The muezzin chanting the call to prayer is a communication that informs the Muslim receiver that it is time to enter into prayer. The chanting of the call to prayer is a symbol of the religious identity of the Muslim community. However, the Christian community speaks and listens to communications from the church altar. Therefore, the chanting of the call to prayer as a symbol of the Islamic religion coming from the church altar, attended by the cross-religious community welcomed the celebration of the first Advent.

Second, *Lafadz Rawi barzanji* is part of the ritual worship of the Prophet Muhammad. It was recited at Immanuel Church no differently than it is recited by other Muslim communities. The Muslim community is exclusive, reciting the *Rawi barzanji* “*Inna fathana*,” the ten verses containing the Prophet Muhammad’s birth. *Lafadz Rawi barzanji* was heard in collaboration with the Muslim–Christian *pela gandong* community. The setting for reciting *Rawi Barzanji* as a symbol of identity represented the treatment of religious differences between the Muslim–Christian community. It overcame the barriers, permitting cross-religious *pela gandong* to live in harmony.

Impact upon Muslim community values

Pela gandong is a customary belief that symbolizes ancestral respect, solidarity, and social life. Cross-religious individuals and community groups enact their meaning by performing rituals that show their respect for traditional values and cross-religious social life. They interpret the rituals in their daily lives with harmony (Woodward, 2010) and practice traditions locally through beliefs and values that include diversity, togetherness, equality, kinship, and social–community concern (Chou & Soe-Tsyur, 2015; Geiger et al., 2019).

In cross-religious *pela gandong*, the ritual communication process is the cross-religious kindred relationship in solidarity. Cross-religious communities interact with one another and are bound to a shared identity. This identity developed to strengthen relations between religious communities by following the traditional values taught in *pela gandong* that allow individuals to fulfill their identity by practicing a harmonious social life, guaranteeing the sustainability of the cross-religious community.

The cross-religious community is made sustainable through ritual communication situated to negotiate self-identity in the construction of every communication action. Ting-Toomey (2017) stated that each individual believes in an identity when communicating with other individuals with the same and other cultures and may feel uncertain when communicating about themes bound by different cultural regulations.

After engaging in ritual communication with the surrounding environment, Muslim communities differ in beliefs and values. This difference creates an uncertain self-identity (Thoits, 2013) when individuals from such communities interact socially. Even in the surrounding environment, Islamic teachings and values are still strongly maintained in *pela gandong* relations, which often results in negative responses such as prejudice (Burch-Brown & Baker, 2016; Johnson et al., 2010; Stewart et al., 2018) and discrimination from other individuals, so the identity of the Muslim individuals becomes alienated. Ting-Toomey (2017) explained that individuals feel part of a group if that group responds positively to them. In contrast, they feel alienated when the group responds negatively toward the individual’s identity. To garner positive responses, mindful communication should be conducted to gain understanding, appreciation, and support from the surrounding environment.

According to Glock (1962), the ideological dimension is the essential dimension of religious doctrine that distinguishes one religion from another and even one belief in one religion from another. This dimension also influences the experiential (feeling), intellectual (knowledge), and consequential (social effects) dimensions. Religion as a system of local wisdom used symbolically (Blumer, 1969; Nilgun et al., 2009) offers a way to perceive the world. Religion as a “model for reality” provides a method or framework for seeing reality. Religion provides a socially created system of meaning for adherents (Geertz, 1973). The Muslim community has a local wisdom system called *pela gandong* traditions that are related to symbolic systems in the civic pluralism, experiential, intellectual, and consequential dimensions. Therefore, before involvement, the *pela gandong* Muslim community provided a different way of perceiving reality. Giving a new meaning to their religious pluralism is an indigenous people’s way of being part of the Muslim community.

Consciousness is attained when, after communication rituals, involvement is also transformed. These changes occur in communication patterns that, from the perspective of symbolic interactions (Blumer, 1969; Nilgun et al., 2009; Sulaeman, Rijal, & Ridwan, 2021b), involve symbols. After individuals participate by taking the role of the other to understand new symbols based on the beliefs, the beliefs hold (Mead, 2008). Thus, the Muslim community identity will always be internalized, and individuals will construct subjective meanings of new beliefs to negotiate their new identity.

Conclusion

Several findings explain that the involvement of the Muslim community undergoes a process of communication rituals about the cross-religious *pela gandong* beliefs and values—including diversity, togetherness, equality, kinship, and social–community concern—symbolizing the involvement that demonstrates self-identity. Involvement is described as part of Islam, Indigenous communities, and cross-religious kinship. Muslim community involvement is quite diverse in its reasons and objectives.

The Muslim community was involved as study subjects in rituals intended to celebrate the first Advent in Immanuel Church. The Muslim community can understand and explore in-depth the ritual communication process based on their daily life experiences, which shapes the social world in which they believe and develop into reality in social life.

The identity transformation of the Moluccas Muslim community involved in ritual communication has its own mutually sustainable meaning. The communication experience illustrates the meaning derived from the conscious experience of the community performing the cross-religious ritual communication, such as self-identity proof, human kinship, relationships, acceptance treatment, and worship labels.

Pela gandong ritual communication emphasizes the meaning of symbols through ignorance, entrapment, and traditional and religious communication. This analysis shows the benefits of cross-religious ritual communication studies in the digital era: modern technology and globalization affect cross-religious *pela gandong*. The

traditional values are transforming to build fraternal bonds of social identity. Cross-religious *pela gandong* as an inductive subject will enrich and develop social theory, especially the link with rituals that strengthen the scientific foundation in the development and roots of social science.

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Data availability Qualitative data in this study are kept confidential.

Declarations

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Authors and Affiliations

Sulaeman Sulaeman¹  · M. Ridwan²  · Irta Sulastri³ · Anasufi Banawi⁴  · Nur Salam⁵  · Darma Darma⁶  · Eman Wahyudi Kasim⁴

M. Ridwan
ridwaniain1968@gmail.com

Irta Sulastri
irta_sulastri64@yahoo.com

Anasufi Banawi
a.banawi@iainambon.ac.id

Nur Salam
nur.salam@iainambon.ac.id

Darma Darma
darma_rahman@gmail.com

Eman Wahyudi Kasim
wahyudi@iainambon.ac.id

¹ Department of Communication, State Islamic Institute Ambon, Kota Ambon, Indonesia

² Department of Civil Law, State Islamic Institute, Ambon, Kota Ambon, Indonesia

- ³ Department of Communication, Islamic State University of Imam Bonjol Padang, Padang, Indonesia
- ⁴ Department of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education, State Islamic Institute, Ambon, Kota Ambon, Indonesia
- ⁵ Department of Indonesian Language, State Islamic Institute, Ambon, Kota Ambon, Indonesia
- ⁶ Department of Islamic Broadcasting Communication, State Islamic Institute, Ambon, Kota Ambon, Indonesia