

The Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church: A Symbol of Muslim-Christian Cultural Interaction in East Alila, Ilawe Village, Alor

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Abstract: This article aims to describe and analyze the views of the Ilawe village community regarding the existence of the Isak mosque and the Ismail church which can be a symbol of cultural interaction in Alor district. In writing this, I did not only provide the history of the Isak mosque and the Ismail church, but also the ways of dialogue between those religious communities in the place. Besides, it also describes how people establish their relationship and lives in harmony in various problems and debates occurred in other places. The interfaith dialogue which is built in the community is based on their day-to-day relationships. The research method used is a qualitative approach with a survey and interviews for the data collection. Both methods can encourage the author to look at how the Ilawe community comprehends the Isak mosque and the Ismail church. The existence of the Isak mosque and the Ismail church can also be a symbol of the cultural interaction of the people in Alor district. The research concludes that the Isak mosque and the Ismail church are symbols of cultural interaction in interfaith dialogue for people in Ilawe village and all communities in Alor district.

[Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan dan menganalisis pandangan masyarakat kampung Ilawe mengenai keberadaan masjid Isak dan gereja Ismail yang dapat menjadi simbol

interaksi kultural di kabupaten Alor. Tulisan ini tidak hanya menyajikan sejarah masjid Isak dan gereja Ismail, tetapi juga cara berdialog antarumat beragama dalam kehidupan masyarakat di kampung tersebut. Selain itu, tulisan ini juga memaparkan bagaimana masyarakat menjalin relasi dan hidup secara harmonis dalam perbedaan di tengah berbagai persoalan dan perdebatan yang terjadi di beberapa tempat tertentu. Persoalan menyangkut agama, suku, ras dan golongan sering menjadi pemicu renggangnya relasi masyarakat dalam kehidupan yang beragam budaya dan agama. Dialog lintas agama yang dibangun dalam masyarakat ini tidak terjadi secara formal melainkan informal, yang didasarkan pada pengalaman keseharian di antara mereka. Metode penelitian yang digunakan ialah kualitatif dengan metode pengumpulan data berupa survei dan wawancara. Kesimpulan dari penelitian adalah masjid Isak dan gereja Ismail merupakan simbol interaksi kultural dalam dialog lintas agama bagi masyarakat di kampung Ilawe dan seluruh masyarakat yang berada di kabupaten Alor.]

Keywords: Isak Mosque, Ismail Church, Symbol, Culture, Inter-Religious Dialogue.

Introduction

The Christian-Muslim relations in Indonesia, in one of its aspects, inherited the “historical burden” of their predecessors, namely the cultural origins of the two religions: Islam in Arabia (Middle East) and Christianity in Europe (West). Therefore, when it comes to conflict, theological issues is not a dominant factor, although it may still play an important role. The clash of two cultural patterns is more likely to become the escalator of the conflict. Both are missionary religions and now living and developing in a new context from their origins, the context of the national independence of Indonesia. If we look carefully at Indonesia’s history, conflicts that seem to have religious motives have occurred oftentimes. In the early days of the formation of this country, we know some rebellions that seem to have religious motivations and objectives as well as fighting for certain religious interests, such as the *Darul*

*Islam/Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII) insurgency in West Java and South Sulawesi.*¹

Religious life and tendencies of spiritualism are often intertwined with social conflicts. Although religion is not always become an escalation factor, certain religious ideologies play an important role in it.² Other problems are also related to acting on behalf of religion by certain individuals for their interests, resulting in the emergence of many conflicts between religious communities, such as the eviction and burning of worship places and inter-religious terror. These things make people trapped and unable to build interreligious harmony, whether in a small or in a large community. Efforts for religious peace are not easy. Not only because of the trigger from the media, but it must be admitted that religion also distorts the potential for conflict within itself, besides the potential for peace which is the mission of every religion.³

In Alila Timur, Ilawe-Alor village, the community has made the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church symbols of cultural interaction between Islam and Christianity. Alor is a small district located in the province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). The people in Alor generally have two dominant religious communities, one is mountain people (Christian) and the other is coastal people (Islam). Ilawe is one of the villages located in Alor, precisely in the village of East Alila. Inter-religious harmony in Ilawe village has existed for a long time and this interfaith relationship is not only a formal relationship between both religious communities but also related to blood and social life who need each other.⁴

¹ Anderias. A. Yewangoe, *Agama dan Kerukunan* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2006), 100.

² Kunawi Basyir, "Membangun Kerukunan Antarumat Beragama berbasis Budaya Lokal *Menyama Braya* di Denpasar Bali," *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, Vol.6, No. 2 (September 2016): 187, <https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v6i2.603>.

³ Ihsan Ali-Fauzi, "Ambiguitas Agama sebagai Peluang dalam Menciptakan Perdamaian Agama," *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, Vol.5, No. 2 (September 2015): 242, <https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v5i2.575>.

⁴ <https://ntt.kemenag.go.id/berita/462749/alor-menerima-harmony-award-tahun-2016>. (Retrieved February 28, 2017).

In Ilawe village, the community participates in each other holidays and the construction of the Church and Mosque. It is not surprising that Eid al-Fitr and Christmas become a joint celebration for all the people. Religion does not lock the people in certain security but shows them a new way that must be addressed to realize mankind's deepest dreams. Faith as the deepest and personal belief of the human has the power to change itself and the world.⁵ Society embodies this in the practice of life and makes changes in relationships with others, so that they can feel peace, prosperity, and do not dominate each other. When religions are encountered, they can enrich and destroy each other as well. Religions may not coexist, although they may have some similar characteristics. Every religion is unique in itself.⁶

In this article, I will explore how the community, both Muslims and Christians in Ilawe Village, views the existence of the Mosque Isak and the Church Ismail and how both sacred places become symbols of cultural interaction. I used qualitative approach and interview methods to collect the data through surveys and structured conversation.⁷ This research took place in East Nusa Tenggara, particularly at the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church, which are located in East Alila village, Ilawe, Alor Regency. I interviewed religious leaders and administrators of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church. I also interviewed several residents in the village of Alila Timur who are part of both mosque and church.

Symbols, Cultural Communication, and Interfaith Dialogue

Etymologically, the word symbols are derived from the Greek word *sumballo* (*sumballein*) which can have several meanings, namely to interview, contemplate, compare, meet, throw together,

⁵ Paulus Budi Kladen, *Dialog Antaragama Dalam Terang Filsafat Proses Alfred North Whitehead* (Maumere: Ledalero, 2002), 122.

⁶ John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987).

⁷ Uber Silalahi, *Metode Penelitian Sosial* (Bandung: PT Refika Aditama, 2009), 312.

and unite. There are definitions of symbols according to several experts with the context and development of their respective times. A.N. Whitehead, for example, writes in his book entitled *Symbolism*, that “the human mind functions symbolically when some of the components of its experience evoke awareness, beliefs, feelings, and images of other components of its experience.”⁸

More than a century earlier, it was Goethe who argued that true symbolism was specifically expressing the universal as a living revelation. Coleridge also said that a symbol actually “takes part in a reality that makes it understandable.” So that the meaning of these symbols can be understood well and does not reduce the existing meaning of a symbol.

Erwin Goodenough in his study *Jewish Symbols in Graeco-Roman Period*⁹ defines symbols as follows “Symbols are things or patterns which, whatever their cause, act on humans and affect humans, beyond mere recognition of what is presented in the given form.”¹⁰ According to him, symbols have more meaning, have their value, and provide their power to move us. The power of the symbol itself is emotive, meaning that it can stimulate people to act so that this is part of its characteristics that are considered essential.

From several meanings of symbols above, FW Dillstone sees symbols as, (1) an object or item or action or event or pattern or person or thing that is concrete, (2) which represent or describe or imply or signify or subvert or convey or replace or reveal or remind or refer to or stand to replace or scatter or show or relate to or correspond to or illuminate or refer to or take part in or redistribute or relate to, and (3) something greater or transcendent or highest or last: a meaning, reality, an ideal, value, achievement, belief, society, concept, institution, and a situation.¹¹

⁸ F.W. Dillstone, *The Power of Symbols* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Kanisius, 2002), 18.

⁹ Read Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953)

¹⁰ Dillstone, *The Power of Symbols*, 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

So that for him, the symbols combine and also connect. Each individual has been formed in the same symbol system, although his contribution to the symbol can change it, this contribution does not mean that it can replace the symbol system. Symbols and society have and influence one another. A symbol can also open the door to a bigger world.¹²

On the other hand, Anthony Cohen argues that symbols are an inseparable part of the word “community”, because the community is part of the culture, myths, rituals, and symbols. Symbolism according to him is possible as explicit as, for example in rituals that distinguish between roles, between life and death, between stages and status in the life cycle, between sexes, between generations, and between pure and contaminated. Community is just a symbol expressing boundaries.¹³

Communication is a process of various meanings through verbal and nonverbal behavior, as that behavior can be called communication if it involves two or more people. Communication also occurs when a source generates a response to the recipient through the delivery of a message that will be conveyed either in the form of a sign or symbol, in verbal or nonverbal form, without having to ensure that the two parties communicating have the same symbol system.¹⁴

In the context of interculturality, communication does not have to be designed or deliberate, because it can be difficult to define or to find the meaning. Communication happens well if the meaning contained in the message can be conveyed. Intercultural communication also includes the meaning of symbols. There are two communication concepts contained in it, namely humanistic and mechanistic. The humanistic communication model “assumes that the parties involved in communication are equal and recognizes

¹² Ibid., 23-25.

¹³ Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2001), 15.

¹⁴ Deddy Mulyana, *Komunikasi Efektif: Suatu Pendekatan Lintasbudaya* (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2004), 3.

that the same nonverbal words and behavior can be interpreted differently by people of different cultures," while the mechanistic communication model is "more suitable for mass communication, or at best public communication, which emphasizes the effect of communication, namely the extent to which the results are under the objectives of the communicator as a messenger."¹⁵

Deddy Mulyana also emphasizes communication that is more directed at cultural influences in everyday human life. He said that communication is also basically a cultural representation. Culture is communication and communication is culture. Culture and communication interact dynamically, but in its development, the culture that is created can also affect the way of communicating and interacting with members of the culture concerned.¹⁶

As for the definition of culture, according to Geert Hofstede,¹⁷ culture is collective programming that distinguishes members of another category, and values are the core of a culture. Meanwhile, according to Trenholm and Jensen, culture is a set of values, beliefs, norms and customs, rules, and codes that socially define groups of people, which then bind them to one another and give them a common awareness. In both understandings, this culture can be a guide for us to perceive the world, how we can think about ourselves and our relationships with others, and also how we set and achieve our goals in exchanging our messages with others.

In line with the above opinion, Deddy Mulyana argues that culture has a very large role in our lives. What we think and our choices of action are also the result of what appears in our culture. The worldview influences the meaning of a message. The world view is a set of attitudes, beliefs, and values held by a person or group of people who are nurtured in a culture. The world view is

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷ Read Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (London: Sage Publication, 1984).

also an important aspect of culture that colors the individual's view of their position with their environment.¹⁸

Religion is a symptom that can be said to be universal in human life, because most people in the world live with various environmental, climatic, and cultural backgrounds, adhering to one religion.¹⁹ In Indonesia, people live and develop with various religions. Therefore, religious encounters are inevitable. An interfaith encounter can occur in several processes, such as *syncretism*, *adaptation*, *acculturation*, or *inculturation*. Consequently, religious communities can also face other religions with several attitudes, namely *indifferent*, *relativistic*, *respectful*, *insecure*, and *fanatical*. In inter-religious relations, religious adherents do not only influence each other but also make an association with one another. In this association, religious followers can be *apologetic*, *polemical*, *competitive*, *tolerant*, and *dialogue*.²⁰

First, apologist, derived from the Greek word *apo* which means *from*, *far from*, and *logos* which means *word*, *mind*, *reason*. *Apologos* means *defense*. An apologetic attitude is an attitude to defend one's religion. In this case, the person will defend their faith and religious teachings that are attacked by adherents of other religions. Second, polemical derived from the Greek word *polemos* which means *war*. Polemical attitudes create “weapons” to defeat adherents of other religions and paralyze their activities, these weapons can be in the form of written media or audio-visuals in which the contents of faith and teachings held by others are exposed and attacked. Third, competitive, which can be closed when it happens secretly, and open when each of the religious adherents highlights the goodness, truth, and strengths of their religion. Fourth, tolerance is derived from the Latin word *tolerare* which means to *endure*, *tolerate* and *suffer*. This is a soft attitude, allowing and giving flexibility to followers of

¹⁸ Mulyana, *Komunikasi Efektif*, 32.

¹⁹ AM. Hardjana, *Penghayatan Agama: Yang Otentik & Tidak Otentik* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Kanisius, 1993), 9.

²⁰ Hardjana, *Penghayatan Agama*, 101-110.

other religions. Tolerance can be limited to teaching, what is called *dogmatic tolerance*, while what is not limited to teaching but comes to practical implementation is called *practical tolerance*. The fifth is dialogue, derived from the Greek word *dialogos* which means *speech* or *conversation*. In dialogue, followers of different religions meet and hold discussions together to seek mutual understanding. The goal is to seek universal truths contained in the teachings of their respective religions. The basis is for mutual respect and the willingness to learn from each other because both parties are aware that the God they believe in is great.²¹

According to Franz Magnis-Suseno, there are various forms of inter-religious dialogue in Indonesia. There are semi-official dialogues sponsored by the Ministry of Religion or various agencies and levels of government. There is a lot of dialogue in the form of inter-religious relations seminars and of course, there is also a lot of informal dialogue on various occasions as well as local dialogue involving local people. However, for him, a dialogue is not enough since inter-religious problems still happen oftentimes. For Franz himself, the inter-religious dialogue is a new phenomenon. In his article on Christian-Muslim dialogue, Franz agreed with Abdurrahman Wahid who once said that “inter-religious dialogue is possible if the aim is to get to know each other better, so various prejudices and misunderstandings are reduced. Maybe, it is also possible by sharing *the* spiritual experience of each. However, it presupposes the inner attitude of the participants that feels mature and open.”²²

Meanwhile, Gavin D’Costa said that “dialogue” is not the only form that should be taken in interreligious relations. We have to ask questions about the demands for dialogue, the need for dialogue, the ability of people to engage in dialogue, and the dignity that should be given to dialogue between religions. He believed

²¹ Ibid., 110-115.

²² Olaf Herbert Schumann, *Agama Dalam Dialog: Penceraban, Pendamaian dan Masa Depan* (Jakarta: PT BPK Gunung Mulia, 2001), 20 and 27.

special kairos was needed to hold a fruitful dialogue. According to him, a dialogue is not universally occurring among all nations and communities, and there are almost universally applicable methods to continue a fruitful dialogue. He learned from his experience when he participated in the dialogue in Prague, which is the Christian-Marxist dialogue.

From what he has learned, a person does not lose his identity in dialogue but can achieve a deeper understanding of that identity. As for the kairos of Christian-Marxist dialogue, he concluded that some lessons can be drawn as follows: a) there must be a life-threatening conflict. The solution, dialogue offers a variety of hope, b) all participants must engage in the dialogue from within the context of their faith or worldview. Dialogue that does not revolve around questions of truth will remain irrelevant, c) everyone should be aware of the people that for them, they and their dialogue partners are talking to each other, d) dialogue should not be carried out “for the sake of dialogue”. On the contrary, the motivation should be based on changing life-threatening conditions, in other words, be directed to practical consequences.²³

Izak Lattu’s writing on performative Interreligious engagement offers a different way of dialogue. There are a lot of experts who argue that inter-religious dialogue is the ultimate necessary in contemporary multicultural societies. He mentioned three scholars on this expertise. First, Leonard Swidler, who explains that dialogue is a form of conversation to seek common goals in interfaith communities. In his understanding, a dialogue is also a formal process that requires formal conversation. Second, Nancy Ammerman who sees dialogue as a process of daily interactions and asserts that religious dialogue can become an “everyday strategic of action”. This strategy goes beyond the space of religion and culture by taking the background that can be used as the meeting point of the life of modern society. In line with her

²³ Gavin D’Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990).

thoughts, Diana L. Eck also emphasizes that dialogue in people's lives is based on daily activities and the usual relationships of society in general.²⁴ It is in this context that daily activities become cultural assets for interfaith relations.²⁵

Izak emphasizes that conversations based on everyday life at least occur in Indonesia and several other countries. In the Indonesian context, the daily dialogue is a common concern for the community as a whole. The life of Indonesian society as a whole shows that paying attention to the joys and sorrows of neighbors is the key to daily dialogue. Inter-community relations experts have also examined the important role of daily relationships for social integration. Jurgen Habermas, for example, has emphasized that daily relationships are important for dialogue in the public sphere. Daily communication in Habermas's understanding is the most effective way to build interplay relationships in communication in the public sphere.²⁶ For Izak, a dialogue is not just a conversation but is a new way of thinking, seeing, and reflecting on the world and its meaning, to affirm differences. Therefore, the purpose of dialogue according to Swilder and Mojzes in *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue* is to be open and learning from others without coercion. Dialogue is also a part of social interaction between followers of different religions, ethnicities, races, or groups. The experience of everyday life is a form of dialogue based on the reality of everyday relationships that pays attention to real actions and the human aspect. Thus, there will be a deep dialogue in which the parties in dialogue experience mutual transformation.²⁷

²⁴ Read Diana L. Eck, "Prospects for Pluralism: Voice and Vision in the Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (2007) 75 (4): 743-776.

²⁵ Izak Lattu, et.al., *Sosiologi Agama. Pilihan Berteologi di Indonesia* (Salatiga: Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, 2016), 282.

²⁶ Ibid., 283.

²⁷ Izak Y.M. Lattu, *Menolak Narasi Tunggal: Diskursus Agama, Pluralisme, dan Demokrasi* (Salatiga: Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, 2018), 66-67.

The View on the Existence of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church in Ilawe Village

Alor Regency is located in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and is one of the 16 districts in NTT that has 15 islands, including 9 inhabited islands and 6 uninhabited islands. Land area 2.864,64 km², water area 10.773,62 km², and a long coastline of 287,1 km. Geographically, this area is located in the northern and most eastern parts of East Nusa Tenggara Province at 8°6'LS - 8°36' latitude and 123°48' east longitude - 125°48' east longitude. The natural boundary of the Alor Regency is to the north by the Flores Sea, to the south by the Ombay Strait, to the east by the Wetar Strait, and the waters of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste and to the west by the Alor Strait (Lembata Regency).²⁸

Isak Mosque and Ismail Church are located in the village of East Alila, the village of Ilawe in Alor Regency. This village is divided into two parts, namely the mountains and the coast. The existence of these two places of worship in this village has been quite long. The two buildings of worship have a distance or location that is not far away, with approximately 500m. Ilawe village itself is a coastal area that is also part of the place most inhabited by Muslims. Most of the livelihoods of the population in this village are fishermen and all the people in this village are “one blood.” It is because all the people in Ilawe village “marry each other” so that both Muslims and Christians can be “one blood.” The life of the people in Ilawe village is also quite difficult, due to distances from the city and there are still many people who are not familiar with changes and development of today’s social life. The educational background of the people in Ilawe village is also limited, so they

²⁸ <https://www.bappenas.go.id/files/3113/5228/3135/9.pdf>

have no much knowledge of religion, politics, society, economy, and others.

History of the Isak Mosque

The people of Ilawe called the mountainous part a Christian village and the Coastal part an Islamic village. Initially, the coastal part of Ilawe village was not inhabited by Christian communities, all who lived in the coastal part of Ilawe village were only Muslims. Before the 1940s, their ancestors used to live in these mountainous villages and their livelihoods. At the time, they did not embrace any religions such as Islam or Christianity because they believe in spirits and supernatural powers. However, after the 1940s, Muslims comes from the city to Ilawe village to teach and preach Islam to the community. As a result, many people change their belief to accept the teachings of Islam as their religion, without being forced by these religious leaders and any party. Some of their ancestors changed their belief to Islam, even though they did not separate as family. With the presence of Islam, community leaders held deliberations to reach a consensus for them to move from the mountains to the coast, to be closer to water and beaches because people who live in mountainous areas have lacked water. The transfer of ancestors has been well prepared to the point of having several work plans including building mosques, schools, and churches, although at that time the Christian community was still very few, but plans to build a church had been drafted by several community leaders at that time.

Several mosques existed at that time. However, because there were so many Muslims and they become dominant in quantity, they started to rebuild a mosque, which is the Isak Mosque. The existence of the Isak Mosque is part of the work plan. The parents who played a role in building this mosque are no longer in this village because most of them are gone. Indeed, from the stories of previous parents, the community at that time in this

village, which is part of the coast, was almost entirely Muslim and there were no Christians. This village used to be Muslim living on the beach and Christian living in the mountains. However, because there were earthquakes and the lack of water in the mountains, they started living permanently in the coastal area, all of them are Muslims.²⁹ Today, Christians also lived in the coastal area as well.

There is no specific information in regards to the construction of Isak Mosque because most of the local people today do not know much about the story. However, according to I.S., Muslims do not know the detailed history of the Isak Mosque because most of their parents have died and they did not pass down the information. Meanwhile, Christian communities have a history that is quite complete because some of their parents are still alive and some of them were masons who were involved in the construction of the church. Despite existed earlier, people—mostly Christian—believed that the construction of the Isak Mosque and Ismail Church is not far away. Indeed, there is still one Muslim figure from the mosque who may know the story, but he is no longer able to explain because of age. However, Christian is involved in the construction process. Therefore, the existence of these two buildings is not only a symbol of harmony in our lives but a symbol that they are brothers and sisters.³⁰

History of Ismail Church

From time to time, in an atmosphere of the struggle of a small group of congregation members in Ilawe village, an overflowing desire to build a cottage for worshipping Christians arose. In their limited ability, they try to do their intentions, and Muslim families supported it. Their intention was granted by God and they managed to build a hut. The initial church members consisted of 8 families with 20 members. At that time, they had

²⁹ Interview with S. P., (August 19, 2017).

³⁰ Interview with I. S., (August 19, 2017).

begun to arrange their rituals of worship briefly according to their abilities and provide services according to the conditions of the congregation in the existing worship associations. Their worship began to function as it should. After a few years, they began planning to build a new large house of worship in the form of a foundation measuring 18 x 7 m. In the 1940s, the development plan was started by collecting local and non-local materials in the form of stone, sand, and cement. The construction of the church was successfully built and used right after. With cooperation at that time, both family members strengthened a dignified kinship. There was no divisive emphasis because the members of the congregation were originally regulated by adat law. So, the majority of the first congregations came from Islam as a result of being married without coercion but in the form of kinship. Since the construction of this church was also assisted and completed by most of the brothers and sisters of the Muslim community, this house of worship was also given the name “Mata Jemaat Ismail”.

Thus, the church building activities run smoothly based on brotherhood. Religious and traditional leaders draw conclusions and understandings about the naming of churches. The determination of the naming of the Ismail church was based on several reasons: 1) this church was founded based on deliberation to reach a consensus, 2) this church was founded based on kinship with respect for customs and marriage which did not involve cause and effect from the past until now, 3) this church was founded based on the mandate of the holy book, namely: Ismail and Isaac, both brothers and sisters, both of whom were Abraham’s children.

On the aforementioned basis, the church name board was officially installed on May 25, 2006. The year of its establishment was May 25, 1949. With this understanding, Muslims and Christians in Alila, specifically in the village of East Alila, have no issues of ethnicity, religion, race, and culture. Tolerance between religious communities in Ilawe is maintained until today. They are proud of

this situation because they have been supporting and working hard together in this achievement.³¹

The existence of Isak Mosque and Ismail Church in Ilawe Village

According to F. A., the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church have become their homes since they are seeing each other. The existence of these two houses of worship does not interfere with the blood relations and kinship that exists in this village. Instead, it makes their bonds of brotherhood even more intense. They feel that they are taking care of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church just like they are taking care of two grown children. After the presence of these two houses of worship, their relationship as brothers and sisters is getting stronger. They do not see this as a sign that this village consists of two religions, but as a form of brotherhood. Both houses of worship act as bonds that continue to strengthen their relationship. They hope that the relationship they have established will continue to strengthen and be well-maintained. They are also proud of being in the situation today, as they maintained intercultural relationships inherited from their ancestor.

For them, blood relation is as important as religious belief. They said this because some of the Christian community at that time had the desire to convert their religion to Islam. After all, they did not have a house of worship. But with marriages, they can respect each other beliefs even though they come from different religious beliefs. Wedding ceremony in their tradition is legally held by customary law, not according to each religion's law. This is because they have a customary promise or oath called "Bela Baja", which makes this village a customary village.³² Hence, the harmony

³¹ Interview with A. O., (August 18, 2017).

³² It should be noted that the respondent said this in a firm voice. Because, this village is considered a traditional village, not an ordinary village. All the people in this village believe that why they can live harmoniously in the two different beliefs

that occurs is caused by the influence of the culture or customs that existed until today. The existence of mosques and churches is also a binder, in the sense that because the people living in this village not only have a good customary relationship as one blood or siblings but also because they have different beliefs that must be accepted and respected. There is no provocation or propaganda regarding religious belief since it is an *adat* or customary village.³³

The community has established a harmonious and kinship relationship for a long time since they are all Muslims. For them, houses of worship or the beliefs of each community are not an obstacle in carrying out activities. They have good relations with their neighbors. “Our fellow brothers and sisters are not taught to kill each other, instead, we are taught to love one another, both for Muslim and Christian.”³⁴ The Isak Mosque is there for Muslims and the Ismail Church is there for Christian. The principle of their life is to continue to live in harmony by giving and sharing, supporting and loving each other as has been maintained for generations from their ancestors.³⁵

Muslim and Christian Community Relations in Ilawe Village

The people of Ilawe live like people in other villages, they are rebuking and helping each other. Muslims are the most dominant in quantity. It can be seen through the house of worship, where there are more mosques than churches. The church that exists is only the Ismail church. However, they live in harmony, as they celebrate Christmas and Eid holidays together. They do not discuss matters of belief, such as questioning who is the most right and who is wrong, who deserves to be recognized and who is not, etc. The

is because their customs are still strong and lead them to a more peaceful life in the differences that exist.

³³ Interview with F. A., (August 18, 2017).

³⁴ Respondents emphasized that every religion, both Islam and Christianity, learns about love. As believers, of course one of the forms of love they do is respect their culture, living with others as sibling. Both Islam and Christianity.

³⁵ Interview with D. P., (August 18, 2017).

Bible and the Koran stated that the father of Isak and Ismail was Abraham. This is obvious for them that they are brothers as written in the holy book. Thus, they feel that they have to take responsibility for each other. As D.P. said, “We do not take advantage nor fame, this is our reality.”³⁶ The Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church do not seek popularity but build family solidarity. “When we saw fights between religions and even racial issues that we were hearing about, we wondered whether they were people without religion and culture or not.” For them, religion has taught so many things like their culture. “Then why are we still debating about things that should strengthen the faith”³⁷ of us,”³⁸ they stated boldly.

According to S. B., the relationship between Muslims and Christians that occurred in Ilawe village was a kinship relationship. The customs in this village are still very thick and there is even no influence from outside that can shake it. However, the customs do not restrain the people. Conversely, the cultural values in this village remain strong and are shown through the relationships that exist among the communities. In everyday life, the people in this village all talk and establish good relationships with one another, as well as with newcomers or new people. Everyone who lives permanently for a while is considered a brother and even a family. Meanwhile, A. K. said that if only their customs were not strong, it is possible that the existence of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church would not have lasted until now. It is precisely the strong customs that

³⁶ The respondent said this in a loud voice and was angry because there were several issues heard in this village that the naming of the two houses of worship was a way for community leaders in this village to popularize their village. In fact, these two houses of worship have been around for a long time and have only recently been discovered by various government figures in Alor Regency so that they have been broadcast or discussed via several social media, such as NET TV, TVRI, etc.

³⁷ To emphasize faith, it means that the more we learn about differences, the more we can apply the teachings of our respective religions to our neighbors who have different beliefs with us. Of course we will instill good things, so that they will strengthen our faith.

³⁸ Interview with S. B., (August 20, 2017).

make them unite. “Culture is integrated with us, we don't throw it away, but we cultivate it so that we can give meaning to our lives, especially when we build relationships with our neighbors (both Muslim and Christian).”³⁹

According to D.P., many of the people have migrated and married another person from outside the village. It makes a lot of immigrants come in. Yet, they accept the immigrants like families who already have blood relations with them. They think that matter of differences such as ethnicity, race, class, and religion does not become an obstacle for them to relate and socialize with the people.⁴⁰ The issue of belief is no longer debated by them since the community and even their ancestors have never questioned such a matter. The people are aware that this is a traditional village in which culture is maintained, but belief is the choice of every individual freedom.

Every human being is given the freedom to embrace their religion. There is no need to demand and say which religion is the most correct because each religion has its truth. The people of Ilawe village believe that whatever human choices and decisions are, that is the best for them. They firmly say that they believe that there is a greater power than them that they call God and Allah. Besides that, every religion teaches good things, and they only want to do that in their life. In the holy book, whether the Bible or the Qur'an have no words that emphasize not associating or not making peace with others. This all depends on the habit built by the people in a certain place and culture. For them, religion does not lock them up but gives them the freedom to meet, mingle and make peace with anyone. As A. O. stated, “Nothing is different, all are one. I eat and

³⁹ Interview with A. K., (August 20, 2017).

⁴⁰ In fact, many migrants—because of their marriage—also learn the culture of the Ilawe village community and integrate with the people there. Many newcomers have said that the culture of Ilawe village is very visible and prominent, so that the harmonious relationship between religious differences is felt as part of an integrated culture.

drink what my brother eats and drink too. That is our relationship in Ilawe village.”⁴¹

Isak Mosque and Ismail Church as Symbols of Cultural Interaction

Based on the theory used and the research that I presented, it can be seen that the existence of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church is a form of effort by the community in Ilawe village which originated from blood relations due to marriages. The Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church can be paralleled to “brothers.” As confirmed by the informants, they are both sons of Abraham, namely Isaac and Ismael. This shows that the existence of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church is not a problem and has never been questioned by both communities, even before the two houses of worship were established until today. The symbol of brothers and sisters has been around since its beginnings. This is also what makes the inter-religious harmony in the village.

The harmony between Muslims and Christians in the village is a part of the culture and a symbol of the community itself. Because, as Erwin Goodenough puts it, symbols are things or patterns which, whatever their cause, act on humans, and affect humans, go beyond mere recognition of what is presented in that given form. According to him, symbols have more meaning, have their value, and provide their power to move humans. The power of the symbol’s strength itself is emotive, meaning that it can stimulate people to act so that this is part of its characteristics that are considered essential.⁴² This means that the existence of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church can become symbols because they have a strong appeal and have their values that encourage people to live in harmony in religious relations. Encouraging people to feel how they should be able to live and do the things of love taught by

⁴¹ Interview with A. O., (August 18, 2017).

⁴² Dilistone, *The Power of Symbols*, 19.

their respective religions and to be involved in expressing their religious teachings in social and religious life.

Besides, Anthony Cohen states that symbols are an inseparable part of the word “community”, because the community is part of the culture, myths, rituals, and symbols.⁴³ The Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church are also a community, both of which are part of the formation of culture contained in Ilawe village, namely the traditional or *adat* village.⁴⁴ When culture becomes part of the Muslim and Christian communities, it does not mean that the values contained in each religion fade away and become invisible. However, culture is involved in practicing the religious values that exist in these two religions. This harmony in diversity does not make the people of Ilawe village hostile to each other, as it happens in various cities in Indonesia. They even confuse the issue of SARA and wonder how it may happen to the people in Indonesia.

Culture in Ilawe village is very important, therefore communication is also important. It is communication that makes the inter-religious culture maintained well. Without prejudice to the values and teachings of each religion, the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church prove a breakthrough that culture itself is very important and there needs to be communication with the culture that can strengthen the brotherhood of the two communities. Whether verbal and nonverbal communication, both have their respective symbols.

Deddy Mulyana also emphasizes that communication is directed through cultural influences in everyday human life. He said that communication is a cultural representation. Culture and communication interact dynamically. Yet, culture also creates the way of communication and interaction between members of the culture concerned.⁴⁵ For the people of Ilawe village, regarding the existence of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church, it is clear that

⁴³ Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, 15.

⁴⁴ Interview with F. A., (August 18, 2017).

⁴⁵ Deddy Mulyana, *Komunikasi Efektif*, 14.

culture influences the way they communicate and interact. The Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church are symbols that affect the life of the people in Ilawe village in general.

Therefore, I argue that culture cannot exist without communication and vice versa, because the two influence each other. The culture is still alive because of good communication between Muslims and Christians in Ilawe village, even all the people in the village. They talked about how the existing culture should not affect their development or pattern and lifestyle in the times, especially concerning their environment which has only two religions, namely Islam and Christianity. One of the preserved cultures is the celebration of the holidays of Christmas and Eid. Even the construction of houses of worship, both communities discuss and work together.

The people in this village have lived this religious harmony for years and they never thought that the existence of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church, which was initially considered to be a form of sympathy for their siblings, made them build houses of worship, especially the Ismail Church. Many people are amazed by this fact. A good start results in something good, that's the existence of the Isak mosque and the Ismail church. Amid the problem of inter-religious conflicts, where Muslims and Christians burnt houses of worship, become hostile to each other, the people of Ilawe village help each other and even live together and unite without thinking about conflicts. Even though the existence of these people is far from the city, their culture is sufficient to make their life more advanced than the people who live in big cities.

The communication that exists in the life of the people in Ilawe village has begun to lead to interfaith dialogue. Religion is a universal phenomenon in human life because every human being lives with a variety of different backgrounds and is influenced by their culture and environment. The inter-religious dialogue between the people of Ilawe village is local dialogue, which involves local people. The conditions and context of the life of the congregation

that are not familiar with interfaith dialogue and are still very slow in keeping up with the current developments do not prevent the existence of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church from instilling the values of religious harmony in this village. Indeed, they have limited ideas on inter-religious dialogue but practice and demonstrate it. They have a dialogue with their life practices from the culture that exists in the village and the values adopted by each religion. In other words, they practice a living dialogue based on local culture, let alone all the limitations of the knowledge they have. This dialogue is built on small things, such as thinking about a place of worship for others and how to live together. In big cities, many people hold conversations, discussions, and seminars on interfaith dialogue, but religious conflicts are getting bigger and wider. Interfaith relations do not have to be “formal,” because informal matters can also change people’s views and lifestyles.

The symbol of cultural interaction between Islam and Christianity means that the existence of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church in social life, especially in Alor, is very important and meaningful. The Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church are not only part of the whole community of Ilawe, but the entire community in Alor. The Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church, which are symbols of cultural interaction, very simply provide an understanding of religious harmony, in this case, Islam and Christianity, which have a big impact on the harmony of religion in Alor. Interactions resulting from daily communication and culture that have been around for a long time are used as role models in building social and religious relationships with those around them. When the existence of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church can have a good impact, then they are a symbol. A symbol of wholeness, a religious symbol, a symbol of the kinship of all the communities in Alor.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that the existence of the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church in Ilawe Village is an organic community effort. This effort is carried out by remembering that they are one blood. The culture that exists in this village, influences the existence of the Isak mosque and the Ismail church. However, it does not make them forget to develop and practice the religious values adhered to by each religion, namely Islam and Christianity. The existence of the Isak mosque and the Ismail church also had a very good impact, not only on their lives in this village but on the entire community in Alor. The existence of the Isak mosque and the Ismail church is a strength for the people of Ilawe village in building dialogue and inter-religious relations.

As symbols of cultural interaction, the Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church can convey a message to all people in Alor that difference is a thing to be grateful for. Differences in ethnicity, race, religion, and class become a symbol that is conveyed through the lifestyle of all people in Alor. The Isak Mosque and the Ismail Church are also symbols of kinship for the Alor people who have various religions and ethnicities with their way of life and their daily dialogues which are certainly inseparable from their culture. []

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