

Harmony in Diversity: Gus Dur's Pluralism Concept in Development Communication for Interfaith Unity in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's religious diversity is an important social asset for national development, yet persistent religious intolerance and interfaith conflict continue to challenge religious harmony. Previous studies have examined development communication and Gus Dur's pluralism separately, particularly in relation to religious tolerance, social diversity, and human rights. However, limited research has integrated Gus Dur's pluralistic thought into development communication for fostering interfaith harmony in Indonesia. This study aims to explore the manifestation of Gus Dur's pluralism through development communication for interfaith unity. Using a qualitative approach and library research design, the study analyzes primary sources from Gus Dur's works, including *My Islam*, *Your Islam*, *Our Islam*, *God Does Not Need to Be Defended*, and *Gus Dur Speaks*, supported by relevant books and journal articles. Data were collected through systematic reading and documentation, then organized, categorized, and analyzed descriptively to identify recurring concepts. The findings reveal three main pillars: interfaith dialogue, advocacy for tolerance-oriented policies, and conflict prevention and resolution. These pillars position religious leaders as development communicators who translate pluralistic values into practical efforts to promote mutual understanding, protect minority rights, and strengthen social cohesion. The novelty lies in integrating Gus Dur's pluralism with development communication as a practical framework for fostering interfaith harmony in Indonesia.

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Introduction

Indonesia is a nation characterized by immense diversity. One facet of this diversity is the plurality of religions. Indonesia adheres to a system grounded in Pancasila, the first principle of which proclaims "Belief in the One and Only God" a testament to the profound presence of religion within the country. The officially recognized religions in Indonesia are Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. In principle, the sheer

number of religions should serve as a valuable asset and a treasure for the Indonesian nation. Such diversity should be a prized asset reflecting the country's rich pluralism and ought to serve as fundamental capital for fostering positive religious dynamics. Indeed, this diversity is something we ought to respect and cherish. In reality, however, the opposite has occurred it has instead given rise to numerous conflicts that persistently surface, stoked by various recurring differences. Religious differences, for instance, are frequently exploited as easy fodder to fuel discord. Religion, which ought to embody love and compassion, has instead often manifested violence. Cases perpetrated in the name of religion seem to be unending in Indonesia.

Historical evidence demonstrates that adherents of different religions in Indonesia still frequently clash and become embroiled in conflict. Examples include conflicts between Muslim and Christian groups in Poso, Ambon, Tolikara, Aceh, and Situbondo. In South Lampung, conflict also erupted between Muslim and Buddhist groups. Even intra-Muslim conflict occurred in Sampang, Madura, between Sunni and Shia communities. This certainly serves as proof that we must exercise greater wisdom in navigating our differences.

In the cases of Poso and Ambon, the feuds involved more than just religious symbols animals and plants were also drawn into the fray. For instance, a cat that dared to cross into a Christian-majority area would not return alive. Likewise, dogs commonly kept by Christians would vanish without a trace if they wandered into a Muslim area. Furthermore, numerous fir trees were cut down at STAIN (State Islamic Institute) Ambon simply because they were perceived as "Christian trees." (Hasan, 2013).

In 2024, cases of intolerance remained prevalent. For instance, in Gresik, the disruption of worship services occurred again, targeting the congregation of the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB) Benowo at the Cerme Indah Complex, Cerme District, Gresik, East Java. The incident took place on Wednesday, May 8, 2024, at approximately 10:00 AM local time. In a viral video, several individuals were seen suddenly disrupting the worship activities of the GPIB Benowo congregation. The altercation began when a married couple and a young boy shouted, drawing the attention of nearby residents who then gathered and attempted to de escalate the situation (Malau, 2024).

Furthermore, another case of intolerance occurred in South Tangerang, where the recitation of the Rosary prayer by a group of students from Pamulang University (UNPAM) was forcibly halted by a number of residents at a rented house. The forced cessation of this activity escalated into attacks and persecution against the students. In fact, one individual was reported to have sustained injuries after being struck with a sharp weapon wielded by a resident (Dwi, 2024).

The data presented above indicate that the concept of pluralism which entails respecting differences among adherents of other religions continues to fade within Indonesian society. Thus, one effort to address these issues is to cultivate and continually instill the importance of religious tolerance. At the very least, a proper understanding of religious tolerance can minimize the potential for violence committed in the name of religion. One such approach is to embrace diversity, commonly referred to as religious pluralism. Gus Dur stands as a role model in understanding this concept of religious pluralism. Although his physical body passed away on December 30, 2009, his thoughts and ideas remain vibrantly alive to this day. He was a true pluralist hero, daring to go against the mainstream, which was equally vocal in condemning pluralism. Therefore, Gus Dur's concept of religious pluralism is expected to serve as a guiding framework in Development Communication for inter-religious harmony in Indonesia.

Recent scholarship on religious pluralism and interfaith relations in Indonesia has evolved significantly beyond theoretical discussions of tolerance. Essentially, previous

studies have examined issues related to the aforementioned problems. For instance, a study conducted by Rif'atul Khoiriah Malik (2020) entitled "*Modern and Traditional Islamic Boarding Schools: A Reflection of Development Communication*" revealed several key findings. First, alumni of Islamic boarding schools play a significant role as subjects in the creation of religious Development Communication. Second, the teaching of *akhlak al-karimah* (noble character) at these institutions is applied without discrimination, thereby supporting religious Development Communication within society. Third, these institutions serve as an alternative for the community to deepen their religious knowledge (Malik, 2021).

Second, a study entitled "*Mass Media in Development Communication*" by Tomi Hendra revealed that as communication technology continues to advance, the utilization of mass communication media has become increasingly pervasive. Regarding media as a driver of development, it can be approached through several aspects. One such aspect is the use of various types of media to facilitate the course of development. Many media can be utilized, including radio, television, newspapers, and even the internet. This indicates that media can drive the success of the development process (Hendra, 2019).

Based on the aforementioned studies, it is evident that comparable research exists. The common ground between these studies and the present research lies in the utilization of Development Communication theory as the primary analytical framework. However, the present study offers a distinctive contribution by specifically focusing on how Gus Dur's concept of pluralism informs Development Communication for inter-religious harmony. It is anticipated that this research will provide valuable insights for resolving various cases of violence and intolerance among adherents of different faiths. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to explore Gus Dur's concept of pluralism through the lens of Development Communication for fostering inter-religious harmony.

Method

The research method employed is qualitative with a library research approach, which is a data collection technique that utilizes a review of books, literature, journals, or notes relevant to the problem being addressed (Mahmud, 2011). According to Khatibah (2011), library research is a systematically conducted activity aimed at collecting, processing, and concluding data using specific techniques or methods to find answers to the problems formulated through the literature study. This research is conducted to address a specific problem concerning development communication for inter-religious harmony, derived from a critical and in-depth examination of the religious pluralism framework advocated by Gus Dur.

This research employs two categories of data: primary and secondary. Primary data are defined as information obtained directly from the research subject through the use of measurement instruments or data-gathering tools aimed at the source of the desired information. In this study, the primary data consist of Gus Dur's books and writings, including *My Islam, Your Islam, Our Islam*, *God Does Not Need to Be Defended*, and *Gus Dur Speaks*. Secondary data, on the other hand, are acquired from other sources and are not directly collected by the researcher from the subject of the study (Zed, 2014). The secondary data utilized in this research encompass various academic works, including books, journals, and other print media that bear relevance to the issues under examination.

Data collection techniques are defined as the methods utilized to gather information or empirical facts from the field. This stage represents a critical step in the research process, given that the fundamental purpose of research is to obtain data. Without a comprehensive understanding and proficiency in data collection methods, a researcher will not be able to secure data that aligns with the established research standards (Prastowo, 2016).

Accordingly, the data collection technique employed in this research is the library research method.

Data analysis techniques constitute the stage of organizing the gathered data and categorizing it into fundamental analytical units. The data analysis technique adopted in this research is the descriptive method an approach that endeavors to describe and interpret existing phenomena, emerging ideas, ongoing processes, resulting effects, and evolving trends (Sumanto, 2014).

Results and Discussion

1. Brief Biography of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)

KH. Abdurrahman Wahid, better known by his affectionate nickname Gus Dur, was born on September 7, 1940. He was the son of KH. Wahid Hasyim, who was himself the son of the renowned Islamic scholar and founder of Nahdlatul Ulama, a major Islamic organization in Indonesia. His mother, Solichah, was the daughter of KH. Bisri Syansuri. Raised in a pesantren (traditional Islamic boarding school) environment, Gus Dur was immersed in religious education from childhood. By the age of five, he had already become a fluent reader, developing into a dedicated bookworm with an extraordinary thirst for knowledge.

Gus Dur commenced his elementary education at SD KRIS in Central Jakarta. He began his studies in the third grade, later progressing to the fourth grade. He subsequently transferred to SD Matraman Pertiwi, primarily because the school was located close to his new family home. Viewed from the perspective of his formal education at this stage, it was entirely secular. However, owing to his grounding in Islamic education, he had already mastered the Arabic language from childhood and was also proficient in reciting the Holy Qur'an (Barton, 2003).

Gus Dur subsequently pursued his studies at the First Middle School of Economics (SMEP) in Gowangan, Yogyakarta, in 1955, while concurrently receiving religious instruction at the Krapyak Islamic Boarding School. At the boarding school, his passion for reading continued to grow. Remarkably, owing to his command of the English language, by the age of fifteen he had already read Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* in its entirety, along with works on the philosophy of Plato and Thales, as well as novels by William Bochner all of which he obtained from his teacher at SMEP. Upon graduating from SMEP, he proceeded to the Tegalrejo Islamic Boarding School in Magelang. After completing three years of study there, Gus Dur felt that his exploration of religious knowledge remained inadequate, leading him to decide to return to Jombang to enroll at the Denanyar Islamic Boarding School, which was under the direct tutelage of his grandfather, KH. Bisri Syansuri (Qomar, 2002).

In 1963, precisely at the age of twenty-three, Gus Dur was awarded a scholarship by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to pursue his studies at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. By this time, he had already committed to memory the entirety of the thousand-verse Arabic grammatical poem (Alfiyah), having memorized it completely. At Al-Azhar, he enrolled in the Faculty of Sharia (Islamic Law). However, after seven years, he grew increasingly discontent, as he found that the lecture material did not exceed what he had already learned at the Islamic boarding school. For this reason, he chose to spend his time actively engaging with the Indonesian Students Association rather than participating in formal lectures. He subsequently relocated to Iraq to attend the University of Baghdad's Faculty of Literature. During his stay in Baghdad, Gus Dur not only studied formal academic subjects but also acquired French, practiced Sufi mysticism through pilgrimages to the tombs of saints from various parts of the world, and explored the history, culture,

and traditions of the Jewish people (Rifai, 2010).

2. Religious Pluralism

The term "pluralism" etymologically consists of the words "plural" and "ism." "Plural" signifies diversity, whereas "ism" refers to a particular doctrine or ideology. Pluralism, however, does not simply denote a state of plurality; rather, it substantially embodies an attitude of mutual appreciation for diversity and difference (Naim, 2017). As an intellectual concept, pluralism necessitates a sense of fairness from the most dominant group in order to accommodate the existence of other distinct groups. In the view of Nurcholis Madjid, pluralism not only implies a readiness to acknowledge the right of other groups to exist, but also involves a just and equitable attitude toward them, upheld by a commitment to peace and mutual respect (Madjid, 1992).

Etymologically speaking, the term "religious pluralism" is derived from two constituent words: "pluralism" and "religion." In Arabic, it is translated as *at-ta'addudiyyah al-diniyyah*, whereas in English it is rendered as "religious pluralism." According to John Hick, religious pluralism is a conceptual framework which holds that the great world religions represent distinct perceptions and conceptions of, and at the same time function as real manifestations of, the Divine Reality taking shape as the cultural institutions of various human communities. Moreover, the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness occurs authentically within each of these cultural institutions and, as far as can be observed, reaches a comparable degree across all of them (Sapendi, 2012). In essence, what Hick posits is that all religions are fundamentally equal and that none is superior to another.

From a historical standpoint, the discourse on religious pluralism emerged in the early twentieth century. During this period, the German Christian theologian Ernst Troeltsch underscored the necessity of adopting a pluralistic stance amid the escalating conflicts within Christianity as well as between various religious traditions. In a similar vein, Anis Malik Toha posits that the concept of religious pluralism essentially constitutes an effort to construct a theoretical basis within Christianity for fostering tolerant interaction with other religions. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that religious pluralism is not exclusively a product of Western intellectual thought; it also possesses strong roots in the thinking of Eastern religious scholars, particularly from India. Western scholars such as Parrinder and Sharpe, for example, maintain that the proponents of religious pluralism were actually thinkers from India. Sri Ramakrishna (1834–1886), a Bengali mystic who undertook a spiritual odyssey across different faiths moving from Hinduism to Islam, then to Christianity, and finally returning to Hinduism asserted that the distinctions between religions are ultimately inconsequential, as these differences are merely manifestations of varying forms of expression (Sapendi, 2012).

Exploring the concept of pluralism, it is evident that this doctrine has taken root and flourished among religious communities in Indonesia, leading to the emergence of diverse perspectives within religious circles. These perspectives on pluralism vary considerably, ranging from extreme to moderate positions. This diversity of opinion became particularly pronounced following the MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council)'s classification of pluralism as a deviant ideology, based on the assumption that it equates all religions and posits that truth is relative a ruling subsequently codified in Fatwa No. 7 of 2005. Nevertheless, this ruling was challenged by Moh Shofan, Director of Research at the Maarif Institute, who contended that pluralism is not equivalent to the relativist notion that all religions are the same. Instead, he maintains that religious pluralism constitutes an active engagement with and appreciation of diversity (Saihu, 2019).

Upon closer scrutiny, it becomes evident that Islam inherently acknowledges the reality of plurality, which is essentially the natural order (fitrah) ordained by God Almighty. Humanity was never intended to be monolithic but rather to manifest diversity in all its forms. Consequently, Islam places great emphasis on the value of tolerance. It respects and protects the followers of other faiths, as well as their places of worship. This principle was practically demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Peace Be Upon Him) during the formulation of the Charter of Medina in 622 CE. Through this historic document, the Prophet introduced to the world a framework for inter-religious harmony a paradigm that remains an integral part of historical record. The Charter of Medina exemplifies religious coexistence, embodying a recognition of human diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, and belief, all of which are equally acknowledged and endowed with the same rights and responsibilities. The evident plurality among human beings is not intended to foster discrimination or division. Rather, it is meant to encourage mutual recognition and understanding. These principles are grounded in the Charter's foundational concept of human equality a doctrine asserting that all residents of Medina constitute a single community (ummah), possessing equal standing within the social order (Rahmatika, 2018).

3. Development Communication in the Context of Inter-Religious Harmony

Communication and development are intrinsically interconnected. The role of development communication has been widely addressed by numerous scholars, all of whom generally concur that communication occupies a pivotal position in the development process. In the specific context of inter-religious harmony, development communication underscores the necessity of communication for comprehending the respective strengths and weaknesses of various religious communities across all societal strata. This presupposes that religious communities earnestly cooperate and collaborate, particularly when religious leaders instruct their congregations on the fundamental importance of religious tolerance (Djupe & Neiheisel, 2022). Everett M. Rogers, a prominent scholar in this field, posited that, fundamentally, development constitutes a purposive transformation toward a socioeconomic system that is articulated as the will of a state. Furthermore, Rogers emphasized in his other works that communication constitutes the very basis of social change (Sitompul, 2002).

Every religion, by its very nature, defines the relationship between humanity and the Divine, while simultaneously governing the relationships among human beings themselves (Bobyreva et al., 2019). The desired transformation in development necessarily moves toward a more favorable condition than what preceded it. Consequently, the role of communication in development must be continuously strengthened, particularly with regard to effecting change. In other words, communication endeavors must be capable of anticipating and adapting to the trajectory of development. Consider, for instance, the manner in which the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Peace Be Upon Him) communicated with the Quraysh leadership in the Islamic tradition. Similarly, upon his arrival in Medina, where an established structure and organization already existed, the Prophet engaged with the extant governmental apparatus (Ottuh & Jemegbe, 2020). Hence, development communication fundamentally encompasses at least three constituent elements: first, the development communicator who may be government officials or community figures, including religious leaders; second, the development message—containing ideas and concepts pertaining to the development program; and third, the development communicatee namely, the broader public who constitute the target of the development efforts (Sitompul, 2002).

Development communication in the domain of inter-religious harmony constitutes a

communicative endeavor undertaken to realize developmental objectives in the sphere of religious tolerance. Within this framework, the principle of development communication for inter-religious harmony necessitates that all religious leaders share a unified vision namely, the unity and integrity of the nation. It is imperative that religious leaders adopt a universal perspective, as the advancement of a nation's civilization can only be achieved through collaborative cooperation among all religious traditions. Buddhism, for instance, teaches the virtue of goodness, explicitly forbidding the reciprocation of hatred with hatred, and instead advocating the response of hatred with loving-kindness. Likewise, in Christianity, its doctrinal teachings are inseparable from the principle of tolerance, requiring adherents to actualize their faith at a practical level by affirming and embracing diversity. The outward manifestation of one's faith is not always readily identifiable in terms of formal religious affiliation whether Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or others. The authentic expression of faith is ultimately realized through acts of goodness, harmony, mutual understanding, and reciprocal acceptance (Widayati & Maulidiyah, 2018).

4. Gus Dur's Concept of Religious Pluralism in Development Communication for Inter-Religious Harmony in Indonesia

While contemporary discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia has gained significant traction as a state-endorsed framework for promoting tolerance and countering extremism, Gus Dur's pluralism offers a distinctively different approach that merits analytical distinction. Religious moderation, as currently conceptualized, tends to operate as a top-down policy mechanism emphasizing *wasathiyah* (moderate Islamic values) through institutional channels and state-led initiatives. It focuses on cultivating moderate attitudes among religious communities, often framed as a response to radicalization and ideological polarization.

The cultivation of inter-religious harmony deserves to be accorded significant attention as a matter of priority. While other developmental agendas such as economic growth, poverty eradication, unemployment reduction, and the like are undoubtedly of paramount importance, religious leaders, by virtue of their esteemed status and exemplary role within society, hold a strategically influential position in fostering communal harmony. Crucially, religious figures serve as facilitators who bridge communication channels within a pluralistic society. This approach constitutes an effort to mitigate tensions between divergent groups, without necessarily avoiding communicative interaction among them.

Although Gus Dur passed away on December 30, 2009, his intellectual legacy and ideas continue to flourish to the present day. He stood as a steadfast pluralist hero, daring to challenge the prevailing mainstream with a voice as forceful as that of his opponents who condemned pluralism. As a consequence of his uncompromising stance, he was subjected to considerable criticism. Yet he remained undeterred and persisted in articulating his vision with unwavering courage. It is undeniable that his pluralist character was rooted in a profound theological understanding and a sincere devotion to Indonesia. Indeed, Gus Dur may be considered not merely a champion of pluralism, but also an iconic paradigm for the advancement of pluralism in this nation a nation established upon a diverse democratic system, which fundamentally necessitates the recognition and acceptance of differences, embodied in an attitude of mutual respect. More precisely, Gus Dur has left an indelible imprint on the pursuit of inclusive politics in this country, ensuring that pluralism extends beyond abstract rhetoric to become a lived reality.

Gus Dur's dedication to implementing the principles of religious pluralism in Indonesia underscores the understanding that religious differences should not constitute a barrier to

collaboration among followers of different faiths, especially when addressing various humanitarian challenges. In his view, mutual understanding constitutes the essential foundation upon which religious communities can collectively undertake self-reflection and work together to preserve morality and peace for humankind. The following outlines Gus Dur's conceptual framework of pluralism within development communication for fostering inter-religious harmony:

a. Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is of paramount importance in addressing the needs and objectives associated with safeguarding the fundamental values of humanity. The pursuit of such dialogue is essential to counteract fundamentalism and religious fanaticism, both of which tend to precipitate communalism and various forms of religiously motivated violence. Accordingly, it is crucial to cultivate an understanding of one another's religious traditions and to foster collaborative efforts in tackling contemporary humanitarian challenges (Sahu, 2019). As both a statesman and an Islamic intellectual, Gus Dur was actively involved in numerous interfaith dialogue initiatives. His participation in these dialogues was unequivocally driven by a commitment to advancing fraternity, humanity, and justice. In his view, the diversity inherent in Indonesian society should not be exploited as a means for any particular group to assert dominance over others. Rather, such diversity should be harnessed as a source of strength in forging national unity, a principle enshrined in Indonesia's national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.

Differences in faith do not constitute an impediment or prohibition to cooperation between Islam and other religions, particularly with regard to matters concerning the welfare and interests of humanity. Islam's endorsement of such cooperation is inevitably realized in daily practice through the conduct of interfaith dialogue. Succinctly, the principle of fulfilling necessities applies in this context, as encapsulated in the *ushul fiqh* (Islamic legal maxim) dictum: "*That which is indispensable for the fulfillment of a religious obligation is itself obligatory (ma la yatimmu al-wajibu illa bihi fahuwa wajibun)*." Since cooperation cannot be established without dialogue, interfaith dialogue consequently becomes an imperative obligation (Wahid, 2006).

In Gus Dur's view, Islam must be progressively developed and should not be reduced to merely confronting individual provocations or attacks. The truth of Allah SWT remains absolutely inviolable and undiminished, even if humanity chooses not to affirm it. God does not require human defense, yet He does not refuse it either. Whether such a defense carries meaning will ultimately be determined by its consequences and ramifications in the course of future developments (Wahid, 1999).

Gus Dur's interfaith dialogue initiatives were not merely symbolic gestures; they were authentic expressions of his unwavering commitment to the universal principles of truth upheld by religious communities worldwide and by millions of individuals across diverse cultural backgrounds. This reflects Gus Dur's aspiration that dialogue should transcend polemical debates over religious doctrine and instead focus on how it can meaningfully contribute to addressing contemporary humanitarian challenges. Nevertheless, such interfaith dialogue cannot materialize so long as religious communities persist in exclusivist postures unwilling to wholeheartedly embrace differences and each presuming the absolute superiority of their own faith tradition.

b. Advocacy for Tolerance Policies

A crucial component of development communication for inter-religious harmony pertains to Gus Dur's advocacy for policies that promote tolerance. His unwavering dedication to religious tolerance frequently translated into political strategies that left

his adversaries astounded. A notable example was his decision to revoke Presidential Instruction (Inpres) No. 14 of 1967, enacted during the Soeharto administration, which had prohibited the observance of Chinese New Year (Imlek). By repealing this instruction, Gus Dur restored the freedom of the Chinese-Indonesian community to celebrate their cultural and religious traditions voluntarily. For Gus Dur, Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 represented an act of discrimination against the ethnic Chinese population. An examination of the historical roots of this discrimination reveals that it originated from the ambiguous determination of citizenship, which had been unclear from the outset. This ambiguity engendered confusion among the Chinese-Indonesian community regarding their legal status and rights. Furthermore, the New Order regime's progressive curtailment of their freedoms and space for sociocultural activities exacerbated their marginalization. It is important to recognize that the Chinese-Indonesian community chose Indonesian citizenship not to be subjected to discrimination, but rather to enjoy full protection and equal treatment under the law (Aryani, 2022).

In the aftermath of Soeharto's resignation and Gus Dur's assumption of the presidency following the first general election of the reform era a series of significant policy decisions were implemented. Among these was the revocation of Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967, concurrent with the issuance of Presidential Decree No. 6 of 2000 on January 17, 2000. This decree effectively paved the way for the Chinese-Indonesian community to freely resume the practice of their religious and cultural traditions. This policy was undeniably consistent with Gus Dur's overarching commitment to eradicating all forms of racism and discriminatory practices within Indonesia. Gus Dur's noble endeavor to combat racism was fundamentally driven by a desire to cultivate a spirit of mutual respect for diversity within a pluralistic and heterogeneous society. The policies he enacted clearly reflected his aspiration that all ethnic groups residing in this nation should be able to coexist harmoniously and treat one another with dignity and respect (Mustajab, 2015).

The promulgation of the Presidential Decree (Keppres) undoubtedly signaled a breath of fresh air for the Chinese-Indonesian community. However, it must be acknowledged that this policy also attracted considerable opposition from various quarters, many of whom were not aligned with Gus Dur's vision. Nevertheless, Gus Dur remained resolute in his commitment to cultivating a culture of mutual respect for diversity, and he did not allow opposition to deter him from realizing his objectives. Consequently, the Chinese-Indonesian community was able to celebrate Imlek (Chinese New Year) 2551, which was publicly observed in Jakarta and Surabaya in February 2000. In the aftermath of this historic event, various Chinese-Indonesian organizations began to re-emerge—organizations that had remained dormant for three decades during the New Order regime, having been constrained by a web of restrictive government regulations. One notable example is the revival of the Supreme Council of Confucian Religion in Indonesia (MaTaKIn), an organization that had actually been established as early as 1967 but had been rendered inactive under the New Order's policies. Moreover, publications on Chinese cultural heritage, including folklore, Sun Tzu's strategic wisdom, and Feng Shui, began to reappear in public circulation (Mustajab, 2015).

The brilliance of Gus Dur's strategic approach in championing tolerance and democracy often carried a controversial impression. In the short term, Gus Dur might have appeared opportunistic and pragmatic. However, when examined from a broader and more farsighted perspective, it becomes evident that his strategies were fundamentally oriented toward long-term objectives. Consequently, it may be asserted

that the validity of Gus Dur's actions would only become apparent in the years that followed. The rapidity of his intellectual and political maneuvering was at times difficult to match through tactical responses, thereby creating an impression of being improvised and emotionally charged. This was particularly the case when those in his immediate circle were unable to fully comprehend the deeper purpose underlying his initiatives (Wahid, 2005).

c. Conflict Prevention and Resolution

As a leading advocate of pluralism in Indonesia, Gus Dur rendered substantial contributions to the prevention and resolution of inter-religious conflicts. In his capacity as an activist of Nahdlatul Ulama and the fourth President of the Republic of Indonesia, he spearheaded a wide array of initiatives aimed at promoting inter-religious harmony. Among his notable efforts was his steadfast defense of minority groups both religious communities and faith-based movements that were frequently subjected to societal persecution. A compelling illustration of this was his unwavering support for the Ahmadiyah community. He famously asserted, *"As long as I am granted life, I will continue to defend the Ahmadiyah movement whether you comprehend my stance or not, that is entirely up to you!"* This statement was issued at a time when the Ahmadiyah community came under attack from the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), amid mounting demands for the group's dissolution. On multiple other occasions, Gus Dur extended his personal protection to the Ahmadiyah community, even offering them refuge at his own residence in Ciganjur in the event that the state could no longer guarantee their safety. Moreover, before hundreds of Ansor members, he explicitly urged them to safeguard this minority community (Basyir, 2016).

From a human rights perspective, the state's failure to intervene in cases of violence perpetrated by certain groups against the Ahmadiyah congregation constitutes a form of crime and human rights violation categorized as omission (by omission). The state is obligated to take decisive action against the perpetrators of such violence (Muhtarom, 2017). What merits particular attention and emphasis, however, is that Gus Dur's defense of the Ahmadiyah congregation was not motivated by theological considerations. Rather, it was driven by his commitment to humanitarian principles and constitutional mandates. He firmly maintained that his stance was in full accordance with the 1945 Constitution (UUD 1945), which guarantees the protection of every citizen within the Republic of Indonesia.

Hence, it is evident that Indonesia upholds the protection of Human Rights (HAM). Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that this assertion is often at odds with the realities on the ground. Under such circumstances, Indonesia's claim to be a nation that protects human rights would ring hollow, devoid of meaningful implementation in everyday practice (Wahid, 2006).

With respect to the Indonesian Ahmadiyah Congregation (Jama'ah Ahmadiyah Indonesia), the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) rendered a formal ruling declaring them to be a deviant sect through its fatwa issued during the VII National Congress (MUNAS) convened on July 26–29, 2005 / 19–22 Jumadil Akhir 1426 H. The promulgation of this fatwa served to reinforce the MUI's earlier resolution from its II National Congress in 1980, which had already classified Ahmadiyah as a movement incompatible with the tenets of Islam. This classification was predicated on its perceived incongruence with the Qur'an and the Hadith, both of which unequivocally affirm the finality of prophethood with the Prophet Muhammad. Accordingly, any individual or group acknowledging a prophet subsequent to the Prophet Muhammad is deemed to have strayed from the Islamic faith. The claim that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad constitutes a

prophet following the Prophet Muhammad is therefore regarded as a departure from Islam. Moreover, the assertion that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is the Imam Mahdi whom Islamic eschatological traditions foretell will appear prior to the Day of Judgment is likewise considered a grave falsehood and a deliberate fabrication contradicting the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the Ijma' (scholarly consensus) (Basyir, 2016).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Gus Dur's concept of religious pluralism can be understood not merely as a normative commitment to tolerance, but as a communicative framework for fostering social change and interfaith harmony in Indonesia. The study's theoretical contribution lies in connecting Gus Dur's pluralist thought with development communication by showing how pluralist values can be translated into concrete communicative practices. In this framework, development communication functions not simply as a means of disseminating messages about religious tolerance, but as a process through which dialogue, advocacy, and conflict intervention contribute to changes in social relations, institutional practices, and the protection of citizens' rights.

Based on the analysis of Gus Dur's thought and practices, this study identifies three interconnected dimensions that constitute a pluralist development communication framework: interfaith dialogue, policy advocacy, and conflict prevention and resolution. First, interfaith dialogue functions as a dialogical communication strategy that creates opportunities for mutual understanding, cooperation, and recognition among religious communities. Second, policy advocacy represents the use of public and political communication to translate pluralist principles into institutional and policy change, particularly by challenging discriminatory regulations and promoting equal rights. Third, conflict prevention and resolution involves communicative intervention and the involvement of religious leaders in protecting vulnerable groups, reducing intergroup tensions, and promoting peaceful coexistence based on humanitarian and constitutional principles. These three dimensions demonstrate how pluralism can move from an abstract value to an operational approach within development communication.

The proposed framework therefore positions religious leaders not merely as religious authorities or transmitters of doctrinal teachings, but as development communicators, facilitators of intergroup dialogue, policy advocates, and mediators in situations of social tension. The framework can be operationalized through a continuous process: pluralist values provide the normative foundation; communication facilitates dialogue, advocacy, and mediation; and these communicative practices contribute to mutual understanding, inclusive policies, minority rights protection, conflict prevention, and ultimately greater social cohesion. In this sense, the contribution of Gus Dur's pluralism to development communication lies in its emphasis on actively engaging with difference rather than merely tolerating its existence.

This framework also provides a practical basis for strengthening interfaith harmony in Indonesia. For government institutions, pluralist communication principles can be incorporated into policies and programs on religious harmony by strengthening interfaith communication forums, addressing discriminatory regulations, and providing training for public officials in dialogue and conflict mediation. For religious organizations, Gus Dur's approach can inform the development of interfaith programs that prioritize humanitarian cooperation, mutual respect, and constructive dialogue, while equipping religious leaders with communication and mediation skills. For civil society organizations, the framework can be applied through grassroots initiatives, interfaith networks, community education, and early-warning mechanisms that identify and address emerging religious tensions. For communication practitioners, the framework can guide the development of communication

campaigns and community-based programs that emphasize shared humanity, inclusive participation, and cooperation across religious boundaries through traditional, digital, and interpersonal communication channels.

Accordingly, the significance of Gus Dur's pluralism for development communication lies in its capacity to transform the ideal of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* from a national principle into a lived social practice. Interfaith harmony should not be understood merely as the absence of religious conflict, but as the presence of sustained communication, equal participation, mutual respect, and collaborative action among diverse communities. By translating pluralist values into dialogue, policy advocacy, and conflict prevention and resolution, Gus Dur's thought offers an operationally relevant framework for development communication that can contribute to a more inclusive, just, and cohesive Indonesian society.

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