

# Construction of Ethnic Identity in The Inter-Ethnic Conflict

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**Abstract.** Ethnic identity refers to sense of belonging or identification with an ethnic group. An ethnic is shared common internal as well as external values such as language, ideas, attitude, and feeling. This research focuses on communication conflict between member of Muna and Tolaki Tribe whom live in Southeast Sulawesi. The aim of this study is to explain construction of ethnic identity from the Muna and Tolaki's tribe member which trigger conflict. To make the exploration deep and specific, case study approach, in-depth interview and social identity theory are set. based on interview from all informants, it can be found that tribe as ethnic identity give them value, norm, idea, way of life that direct them to think and to act. Each tribe used their own moral value to judge the behavior of others, besides there is competition between the member Muna dan Tolaki that make them looking for power. As indigenous tribe in southeast Sulawesi, Both Muna and Tolaki different perspective about presenting moral value although the moral value that they are talking about is actually same for example each tribe both Muna and Tolaki respect the politeness, good manners but the way to translate the meaning of "good manner" is various.

**Keywords:** Ethnic, Identity, Muna, Tolaki, Inter-Ethnic.

## 1 Introduction

Indonesia is consisting of 1340 ethnic groups according to data from the Indonesia's Central Statistics Agency in 2010. Besides adding cultural treasures of the archipelago, the diversity of these ethnic groups is also trigger possibility for inter-ethnic conflicts. Various cases of conflict occurred in different regions in Indonesia, such as in Aceh, Timika (Papua), Ambon (Maluku), Pontianak (West Kalimantan), Sampit-Mataram (NTB) and Poso (Central Sulawesi). All of these are examples of conflict cases that were strengthened by inter-ethnic, religious community, and/or inter-group disputes. In one journal states that in the last twenty years, many conflicts have occurred due to increasing cultural diversity both in terms of quality and quantity [1]. In line with this, experts and academics discuss inter-ethnic case studies, ethnic identities, inter-ethnic conflicts with various approaches and fields of study to understand the problems of cultural diversity in Indonesia. Journals written by Christiany Juditha in 2015[2] This research uses a descriptive study approach that looks at inter-ethnic conflict problems from the perspective of communication science, or a journal written by Prayudi about the Root Causes of Ethnic Conflict and alternative solutions that examines ethnic conflict from law perspective. The various studies on ethnic plurality in Indonesia and the conflicts are a form of public awareness regarding the urgency of the results of this research for Indonesia, therefore this kind of research must continue to be carried out because each ethnicity has uniqueness and differences that are difficult to generalize

Ethnicity or ethnic Identity has become diverse in Southeast Sulawesi because during the New Order era. Since 1970s this area has become the target location for the transmigration program. In practice, more and more Javanese, Sundanese and Balinese people inhabit this province, especially in the regencies of South Konawe, Konawe, Kolaka, Muna, to the Buton Islands. Actually acculturation and cultural assimilation have occurred since the fourth century when the Bugis and Mandar people began to migrate in this area, especially around Bombana, South Konawe, North Kolaka and Kolaka. Thus this migration and acculturation further enriches the culture and local wisdom of the community [3]

Muna and Tolaki are two indigenous tribes from Southeast Sulawesi. Originally Tolaki tribe inhabits the areas of Kendari and Kolaka Regency in Southeast Sulawesi. Both are former territories of the Konawe and the Mekongga kingdom [4]. Muna tribe is a tribe that comes from Muna Island. In 1964 when Southeast Sulawesi was established as a new province with Kendari as its capital, many members of Muna tribes moved to inhabit several locations in Kendari. Based on interview with anthropologist, friction between member of Muna and Tolaki has occurred around 20 years. According to data from online media it was found there are several riot occurred until 2022 which bring the name of ethnic for example, On May 5, 2021, a brawl occurred between the Tamalaki group (a Tolaki tribal community organization) and a group of Muna ethnic students in the complex area of the Haluoleo University New Campus Jl HE Mokodompit, Kambu Village, Kendari City, which resulted in two Tamalaki members being injured by sharp objects. One person received a stab wound on the right side of the back and one person received a stab wound to the right rib and an incised wound in the chest. Then, there was a blockage and closure of the access road by a group of community organizations from Tamalaki who headed and left the UHO campus to look for students from the Muna tribe. The road access was blocked by the Tamalaki. Due to this event, police from the Kendari Resort Police had to stand guard at several points of the riot [5]. The other conflict On June 12 2022, there was almost a clash between two youth groups of the Muna and Tolaki ethnic groups in front of the Halu Oleo University campus. Incident was triggered by acts of violence received by a member of an ethnic group so that they did not accept and wanted to retaliate, as a result the ethnic group whose members were victims blocked the entrance to the campus area and carried out searches of student boarding rooms and committed violence, making the situation tense[6].

Previously there was research entitled The Relationship Between Ethnic Identity and Prejudice Tolaki tribe to Muna Students at Haluoleo University Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi which used quantitative research methods, where the results of the research stated that the stronger the ethnic identity, the higher prejudice Tolaki tribe to Muna students at Haluoleo University, Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi. However, this research cannot explain further how ethnic identity can trigger a conflict. Therefore, in this study, the researcher wanted to explore further about construction of ethnic identity in the interethnic conflict based on the reality of the conflicts that have occurred so far. Then what is ethnic identity means which explain in this research?

Ethnic identity refers to a sense of belonging to or identification with an ethnic group. Individuals associated with a particular ethnic group may not necessarily act according to ethnic norms, depending on their level of ethnic identification. For example, many Australians identify their ethnicity based on the country of origin of their ancestors. Some Vietnamese Refugees who came to Australia during the 1970s as orphans may still identify themselves as Vietnamese, even though they were raised in Anglo-Australian culture and may not even have Vietnamese names [7]. An ethnic group represents one of a number of populations, which together consist of the species *Homo sapiens*, but individually maintain their differences,

physical or cultural, by means of isolation mechanisms such as geographical barriers and social[8]. Ethnic identity includes two aspects, namely: The internal aspect of ethnic identity refers to images, ideas, attitudes, and feelings that are then divided into four dimensions, namely affective (affective), Fiducial (trust), cognitive (cognitive), moral (moral). External aspects are shown by observable behaviors which include: language accent (dialect); practice ethnic traditions; participation in such ethnic networks as family and friendship; and involved in the institution [9].

Conflict in the context of intercultural communication is defined as something that involves feelings or a real incompatibility with goals, values, expectations, processes or results between two or more individuals or groups that are interdependent[10] from this perspective, it means conflict is not things that is always end in riots. Furthermore, cultural differences can lead to conflict; once conflict occurs, cultural background and experience influence how individuals deal with it. Culture can shape what people find valuable (such as moral and religious beliefs) and worth fighting for; from values, moral beliefs, and religion that someone interprets the actions of others. Sometimes conflicts arise not because of differences in values or morals, but simply because someone is "different". Even Martin and Nakayama believe that intercultural conflict is a very complex topic. Based on the explanation in the background section, the problems in this research is how construction of ethnic identity can trigger interethnic conflict. The framework on this study is how the ethnic identity constructed by member of Muna and Tolaki tribe that trigger conflict in the perspective of intercultural communication. `

## **2. Research Method**

### **2.1 Research Approach**

This research uses qualitative methods with a case study approach. Qualitative research is a method that aims to explain phenomena in depth through data collection as deeply as possible. The approach used in this research is a case study where this method uses various data sources that can be used to research, describe, and comprehensively explain various aspects, individuals, groups, a program, organization, or event systematically [11]

In this study, researchers will explain is how construction of ethnic identity in can trigger interethnic conflict from perspective of intercultural communication. Specifically in the case of conflict between member of Muna and Tolaki Tribe in Kendari. For this reason, the case study method is very suitable to be chosen as an approach because this approach is considered capable of explaining communication conflicts that occur between the two tribes

### **2.2 Research Locations**

The location of this research is in the city of Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi. This city is the place where the conflicts occurred. The city of Kendari is the capital of the province of Southeast Sulawesi.

### **2.3 Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection technique is one of the main things that affect the quality of research data, in addition to the quality of research instruments, which is related to the accuracy of the methods used to obtain data [12] as for obtaining data, facts, and related information, the researchers used several data collection methods used in research in the field. Some of these data collection methods are:

#### 1. In-depth Interview

In this study, researchers use structured and in-depth interviews which are expected to be able to explore more fully the information conveyed by the informants. The interviews in this research use interview guidelines which contained an outline of the main issues to be asked, the elaboration of the concepts in the research to obtain more complete information from the informants.

#### 2. Non participant Observer

In conducting this research, researcher act as a non-participant observer where researcher is not involved in following the daily activities of the informants, but the researcher is only an independent observer.

#### 3. Documentation

The documentation in this study is more focused on collecting supporting documentation for the required research data. In the interview activities, the researcher will prepare a recorder and photo documentation to support the research data so that the data from interview easier to process.

#### 4. Library Studies

Literature study in this case is using references from books, journals, articles, proceedings related to the object or subject of research, so that it is expected to increase the quality of research results.

### **2.4 Informant Determination Techniques**

The technique of determining informants in this study used purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. In the first stage, the authors determined informants using purposive sampling based on certain criteria, then followed by snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique with certain considerations. Informants in this study were people who are considered according to the research theme with the assumption that they have the information needed for research. While snowball sampling is a sample determination technique that is initially small in number and then enlarges.

The subjects in this study were members of the Muna and Tolaki tribes. The conditions for selecting Muna tribe informants in this study were:

1. The members of an indigenous tribe from the Muna Ethnic,
2. Living in Kendari City, where inter-ethnic conflicts occur in this city;
3. Has a high level of activity in interacting with the Tolaki ethnic group
4. Knowing the problem of communication conflicts between the Muna and Tolaki tribes

Furthermore, the conditions for selecting Tolaki ethnic informants in this study were:

1. Member of the original tribe of the Tolaki Ethnic,
2. Living in Kendari City, where inter-ethnic conflicts occur in this city;
3. Have a high level of activity in interacting with ethnic Muna.
4. Knowing the problem of communication conflicts between the Muna and Tolaki tribes

## **3 Results and Discussion**

Based on explanation from informants of Tolaki tribe, it can be found that tribe as ethnic identity give them reference about value, norm, idea, way of life that direct them to think and to act. The ethnic identity more than physical attributes such as skin color. Tolaki tribe well

known for the unity within the tribe, even other tribes acknowledge it. In the perspective of Tolaki's informant, *mepokoaso* and *medulu* (unity and helping each other) is basic standard to live together in a society. The way they treat other tribes, it is also influenced by the norm they have inside their tribe for example all informants said that they are tolerant tribe, they are taught to respect others, to solve problem in peaceful way, basically they tend to avoid conflict.

In the perspective of Muna's Informants they also have similar opinion with Tolaki's informants. Ethnic identity give them value, norm, idea, way of life that direct them to think and to act. They describe character of personality as their identity and proud of it. Ethnic identity helps them to identify who they are. They are taught to be honest person, to be careful in acting and behaving, they strongly adhere to the concept of prudence and tend to be analytical.

Based on interview, Ethnic identity is not the only reference in the life of Muna and Tolaki informants. They believe education, religion and environment also take part to influence their behavior and mindset but the roots of their moral value come from their ethnicity. Ethnic identity is more than attribute; it ties the member of the tribe from inside. Stimulation, lesson and experience they have received since the very young from their parents and interaction in family or ethnic society make the ethnic value adhere strongly.

In the conflict that bring name of ethnicity, people or groups whom involved constructing ethnic identity based on their social construction. Just like Fearon and Laitin said [13] that ethnicity is socially constructed. Other experts said Ethnic identity as a complex construction that includes commitment and feelings of togetherness in a group, positive evaluation of the group, interest in the group and involvement in group social activities [14]. Definition ethnic identity that associated with "involvement in group social activities" it also answers the question why problem develop to the stage of ethnicity. Even though initially, the conflict only occurred in the personal or small group. Conflict bring name of ethnicity because ethnic is seen as power when it gathered in unity. Member of Muna dan Tolaki bring ethnic which basically a cultural aspect in the area of competition. Each tribe wants absolute power and become sensitive by word of "dominating and being dominated"

Conflict between member of Muna and Tolaki actually is limited and temporary. Which means only occurred in certain people, groups and does not long last. the informants especially former student Haluoleo university, they told that after the big chaos and they graduated from university they became friends for each other, because they realized that what they have been conflicting at that time only about election of university student, not the problem of daily life. Based on interview of anthropologist, conflict between member Muna and Tolaki only occurred in contestation arena in certain times like election of head district or election of student university president. The Tolaki and Muna tribe whom live in the village they don't have any problem to each other. Both Muna and Tolaki's informant said that they have a nice experience when they were invited to Tolaki or Muna Member's house.

The riot between Muna dan Tolaki only existed to organization which brings ethnicity but it does not epitomize the whole tribe. ethnic hold a big role in the mind of informant both Muna and Tolaki due to the value of the ethnicity become a part of self-concept thus hard to talk about personal or collective identity especially when inter-ethnic conflict or chaos which bring named of ethnic. based on Social identity theory which is concerned with involvement, a sense of care, and also a sense of pride from reporting in a particular group [15] the majority of informants answered spontaneously and firmly that they would defend their tribe when conflicts between tribes occurred, but when conflicts between groups carrying the name of the tribe, informants answered that they would not be involved because they felt they were

educated people thus they must be good at seeing problems, they only monitoring the conflict. This shows ethnicity as a social identity that creates feelings of care and involvement of group members.

Ethnic identity rises up the sense of belonging inside the group. According to the informant who is also an anthropologist, he state that both Tolaki and other tribes in Southeast Sulawesi are too mature at the tribe or ethnic level, so they sometimes develop feelings of attachment. In addition, ethnic identity is the most genuine identity among other identities as an example when talking about religion, when we are Christians and tomorrow we want to converts our beliefs to another religion, our habits will change. Change the name of the religion. But the ethnic identity is binding. Even though ethnic did not occur culturally, socially, or perhaps they never used their tribal language, never gathered with members of the same tribe, but there was always awareness inside that "I am this tribe".

Ethnic identity can trigger conflict due to each ethnic has different way to communicate. Each ethnic has different perspective about presenting moral value although the moral value that they are talking about is actually same for example each tribe both Muna and Tolaki respect the politeness, good manners but the way to translate the meaning of "good manner" is various. It has nothing to do with way each tribe performing their moral value because since the very beginning these two tribes hold different cultural value. Tolaki develop inland culture while Muna develop coastal culture which based on anthropologist perspective must be resulting different way of communication. living together cannot be avoided in this multicultural country, both Muna and Tolaki have to deducting prejudice, ethnocentrism and egoism for creating harmonization in society, conflict in personal area should not develop in ethnicity due to ethnicity bring about power which dangerous if it used in wrong way and the most important one is do not develop it into political identity which bring the conflict comes into complex problem.

#### **4 Conclusion**

Multiculturalism cannot be avoided in this country. Ethnic identity is uniqueness from God. It brings about different way of translating perspective, mindset and behavior. Ethnic identity give its member value, norm, idea, way of life that direct them to think and to act although education and religion can be another aspect which influence someone's behavior but the ethnicity play big role because it is taught since the very first someone's life institution named family. Ethnic identity can trigger conflict due to each ethnic has different way to communicate. Each ethnic has different perspective about translating and presenting moral value although the moral value that they are talking about is actually same.

In the end, to close this research, researcher would like to take a sentence written by Guddykunst and Young Yun Kim in 2003 in their book *Communicating With Strangers* that "the only way for us to understand other people's behavior is to in the context of their culture" which means very important for us to know that every person is different due to different culture. There is nothing to do with difference although accept it as cultural diversity.

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