Multicultural Communication in Interfaith Families in Indonesia

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There are relatively many interfaith marriages happened in Indonesia. In one condition, a Muslim husband has a wife who is a Catholic, Protestant, Buddha, or Hindu, vice versa. In this interfaith family, they interact with each other regardless of their faith and theology barriers. Mutual understanding and respecting their position grow well, so that religious harmony is obviously shown. This study is intended to find out and analyse (a) self-concept of a different religion family; (b) motives of the interfaith marriages; (c) adaptation process of a different religious family, and (d) communication patterns practised in a family of a different religion. The study utilised a naturalistic paradigm or interpretative subjective. Meanwhile, the method used was qualitative (phenomenology). The results of the study show that (a) there were motives of the marriages: getting their descent, building happy families, economy and future orientation, preventing self from moral degradation; (b) self-concept of the leader of interfaith families are personal self, family self, religious self, moral, ethical self, and social self; (c) adaptation process of the interfaith family was through the following stages: prepare for change, honeymoon, and frustration; and (d) the social communication pattern of the interfaith family with the society who have the same religion, and transcendent communication pattern with God (Allah/Jesus/Gods). This study investigates religion concept, motives, self-concept, communication which is based on theories: phenomenology by Edmund Husserl (1970), interactional by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, integrated communication, cross-cultural adaptation by Y.Y Kim, and Family Communication Patterns by McLeod and Kafee.

Keywords: Adaptation, Communication, Motives, Religion, Self-Concept
Introduction

The phenomenon of interfaith marriage in Indonesia is quite high, like what happened in Yogyakarta city and Gunung Kidul district. Some couples performed interfaith marriages; for example, a Muslim husband has a wife who is a Catholic or Protestant; conversely, a Catholic or Protestant man has a wife who is Muslim. Similarly, in Gunung Kidul district, there are many interfaith marriage couples, a Muslim man has a Buddhist wife, vice versa, a Buddhist man has a Muslim wife.

According to the informants, the religious difference is not a barrier to building a family, because, in principle, all religions are equal, teaching goodness and truth. Geertz (in Pals, 2001) stated that religion is a system of symbols. Because it is a symbol, there is no difference between a religion and the other religion. They said that all religions are genuine and have the same goal, with different paths to that goal. In this regard, Jalaluddin al-Rumi says, “religion is different paths towards the same perfection (the Ultimate)” (Husaini, 2005).

The views of Rumi and John are a view of religious pluralism and understanding of the diversity of religions. This implies there is absolutely a true religion in the world, but there some other religions are considered to be true. Rumi and John perception influenced the point of view of the different worldviews, including a small number of Indonesian society, as people in Yogyakarta City and Gunung Kidul district who considered all religions same.

Despite they have different religions in a family but their communication with each other works effectively. It is assumed there rooted a high tolerance among them, and they mutually respected and appreciated one another. Even there has grown awareness within their selves that the different ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group relations (SARA) is not a barrier to building relationships and interaction with each other.

This article aimed at revealing the motives of interfaith marriage, self-concept of the leader of interfaith families, the process of adaptation in interfaith families and the patterns of communication in interfaith families.

Literature Review

Every communication is set in a context. In multicultural communication, some of the contexts are religions, ethnicities, races, business, minorities, and so on. Harmony in a marriage is crucial since a dysfunctional marriage can lead to depression and eventual divorce (Sayers, Kohn, & Heavey, 1998). Marriage between people of a different culture has been around since early history. In the age of the kingdom, intermarriage between royalties has been used to secure alliances from other kingdoms. Dual cultural marriage is not the same
as intra-cultural marriage since each spouse must adapt to each other. Communication between both partner’s cultural differences must be talked throughout the marriage (Rohrlich, 1988).

The dual cultural relationship can bring more problem than an intracultural relationship, particularly a problem regarding friends and family (Fontaine & Dorch, 1980). Although it does not affect marriage life satisfaction, the intercultural couple faces many challenges that intracultural marriage couple does not have. There is always pressure for the couple to adjust to the partner’s culture from their family members. This is especially the case for women. Furthermore, intercultural couples also often face opposition from others (Graham, Moeai, & Shizuru, 1985).

Several factors can make people choose a person from a different religion as their couple. One of the reasons of religious intermarriage is the low commitment to the faith. Low availability in the marriage market is also a strong predictor of religious intermarriage (Lehrer, 1998). Religious intermarriage was relatively rare in Ireland a century ago since there is ethnoreligious hostility (Fernihough, Ó Gráda, & Walsh, 2015). The trend of interreligious marriage in the US has increased since World War I, although limited to moderate and liberal Protestant (Sherkat, 2004).

Methodology

This research employed a naturalistic paradigm. Naturalistic Paradigm is the so-called subjective interpretative model. The method in this study is a qualitative method (Mulyana, 2001). A qualitative approach was considered relevant to this study because it is intended to describe and analyse a phenomenon, even, social activity, attitude, belief, perception, thought of people individually in interfaith families.

This research applied Husserl’s traditional phenomenology approach. Husserl said that phenomenology is the science of phenomena, objects as the objects are encountered or presented themselves in consciousness (Misiak & Sexton, 2005). Meanwhile, Kusworno (2008) stated that phenomenology is not a single reality that stands itself. This tradition aimed at constructing people’s experiences as the actors of interfaith marriage and revealing how they truly shared their experiences from the early marriage to finally having children and the development of their daily lives both in the family and social activities and showing how they respectively run the communication patterns.

Informant or data source in this study consisted of primary and secondary data sources. The primary data source covered eleven leaders of interfaith families as samples of the total tens of interfaith families residing in Yogyakarta city and Gunung Kidul district. Moreover, the
secondary data sources were included: 11 children from interfaith families, three priests, three MUI boards in Bantul district and Yogyakarta City, some experts of comparative religion and observers and religious activities of interfaith marriage.

Results and Discussion

Marriage Motive of Interfaith Families

Cause Motive

The marriage reason for prospective husband-wife who has different religions in Yogyakarta city and Gunung Kidul district is based on two motives: cause motive and purpose motive. Cause motive includes:

a. **The motive of love and agreement.** With a sense of mutual love and understanding with each other, a couple feels their outer and inner closeness. The inner and outer closeness was shown by the regular meeting in special places, such as schools, entertainment, and performances places. During the meeting, they devoted love and affection to one another by way of their own; it is called dating. In this regard, Guenney and Arthur stated that dating is a social activity that allows two people of the different genders to be bound by social interaction with his/her couple without family relation, to love each other (Dacey & Kenny, 1997). Wilson and Kraft stated that love could be a cheerful matter. However, passionate love is a universal experience; love is too intense and overwhelming to be maintained as a permanent state (Baron & Donn, 2005).

b. **The motive of life principle similarity.** The principle of life for a couple of different religions is the basis for deciding marriage. The principle they tightly hold is the Javanese principle. The principle of life consists of, (1) urip iku urup (life flames, experience should provide benefits for others, the greater of benefits given are, the better would be); (2) memayu hayuning bawana, ambrasu dur hangkara (human who live in the world should pursue safety, happiness, and prosperity and eradicate anger and greed); (3) datan serik ketaman, datan susash seagrass kelangan (do not hurt easily when a disaster comes to you, do not be sad when losing something); (4) wrote gumunan, wrote getunan, wrote kagetan, wrote aleman (do not be easily astonished, do not regret easily, do not get shocked easily, do not get angry easily, and do not be spoiled); and (5) wrote kuminter, mundak keblinger, wrote Cidra mundak cilaka (do not feel the most intelligent to avoid the wrong direction, do not cheat in order not to get misfortunate).

c. **The motive of culture and custom similarity.** The marriage of the couples from interfaith families in Yogyakarta city and Gunung Kidul district has continued from year
to year. This did not discourage couples of different religions from keeping the marriage due to the motive basis of similar Javanese customs and culture. Third, they have similar Javanese tradition. Javanese tradition is a very dominant factor in reconciling different perceptions and religious beliefs of all Javanese ethnicity. Javanese customs include: (1) Ceremony of mitoni or tingkepan is a woman’s pregnancy ceremony aged 7 months; (2) Tradition of grebeg is a ceremony as an expression of kingdom gratitude for the mercy and grace of God Almighty; (3) ceremony of sekaten is a Javanese respect to the Prophet Muhammad SAW who has spread Islam in Java; (4) Ceremony of kenduren or selametan is the result of the acculturation of Javanese culture and Islam in the 16th century AD; and (5) Tradition in Javanese marriage had a series of specific ceremonies and known to be very sacred.

d. The motive of mental readiness to build a family. Creating a family required a mental readiness of both the man and woman. The mental preparation included (1) the readiness to accept rights and obligations to build a harmonious family; (2) the readiness to encounter the worst reality; and (3) the ability to control ego and emotion. Accordingly, readiness is capital to prepare a healthy family in confronting temptations and challenges. In building a family, indeed, there must be many waves and storms that will hit the household. Therefore, a robust and resilient mental will be able to cope with the storm and the waves, so that the family will arrive at the planned destination safely. To achieve those objectives, the husband and wife should understand their respective rights and obligations. When husband and wife already understand their rights and responsibilities correctly, the husband-wife relationship will run in harmony. This motive drives them both to perform a marriage. The above rationale includes osteogenesis motive, as stated by Gerungan (2010) that osteogenesis motive, “comes from the interaction between man and God as manifested in worship and in daily life in which he attempts to realise the norms of his religion.”

e. The motive of the condition. Some people get married because a circumstance or situation that allows them to get married, as experienced by Watiman (40 years old) and his wife Sumiyati (38 years) a few years ago when their parents married them off. At that time, they were both Muslim, but they were married off by their parents in Buddhism ceremony. They were both shocked and felt strange when their parents married them in Buddhism manner, although they were Muslims at the time.

Purpose Motive

The motive of interest is the motive that drives someone of a different religion marriage. The motif consists of:
a. **The motive of having descent.** Almost all people have the same motive of a marriage, i.e. to get offspring. Children born from a married couple is a family’s honourable obsession and desire. The birth of offspring in a family makes the family complete.

b. **The motive of building a peaceful, quiet and happy family.** This motive is as important as some other motives. This means that all couples of interfaith marriages in Yogyakarta city and Gunung Kidul district have the same motive, i.e. building a happy family.

c. **The motive of Economy and future orientation.** This motive is fundamental in building interfaith families in Yogyakarta city and Gunung Kidul district. The prospective spouses make the same commitment to getting married on how the family economy run after the wedding took place. The commitment begins with making economic plans, a commercial field that will be developed, and it's capital solutions because the family’s economy will determine the survival of the family.

d. **The motive of Maintaining human from moral decay.** In this modern era, information technology strikes all people, no matter who and how old they are, wherever and whatever their status is. If they often access the information, they will get its effect, especially negative information such as sex act and pornography show that never cease to demolish users. With much-accessing sex act and porn, there will be increasing rape with violence, sex outside of marriage, and marital infidelity. Therefore, one of their motives is avoiding moral decadence or adultery.

**Self-Concept of the Leader of Interfaith Family**

According to Brooks, self-concept is “our views and feelings about ourselves.” Meanwhile, Cooley stated, “we do self-concept by imagining ourselves as others; in our minds. He called this phenomenon looking-glass self (self-mirror); as if we put a mirror in front of us.” (Rakhmat, 2009). Thus, the self-concepts carried by the leader of the informant family are as follows:

**a. Personal Image**

Personal image is a person’s attitude towards himself, consciously or unconsciously. This attitude is like someone who is looking at himself, whether I am (me) handsome, cute, or ugly, is visible in the mirror. In this study, all respondents have a favourable view of themselves as the leaders within interfaith families. They feel like an ordinary family, like a single faith family, they sometimes feel happy and sometimes encounter a problem; this is
common. However, they are pretty comfortable in building a family, despite different religions. They view themselves as useful, very tolerant, and wise people.

b. Family Image

The concept of the family image reveals how a person sees himself about individuals who are very close to him, i.e. his family members. They feel different feeling after they got a wife and children in the family. The sense of happiness and worry about the future of their children, what they will become someday when growing mature. The informant, as the leaders of the family, intends to devote their minds to take care of their family as well as possible. Thus, they regard themselves responsible figures, family counsellors, caregivers and educators of their children.

c. Religious Image

Religious image is a self-concept that sees himself as a religious person. In their view that Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, or Buddhist are the same, this means that all the people are religious, no matter what their religion is. They see themselves as believers, servants of God, and pious people.

d. Moral-Ethical Image

This dimension is someone’s image on moral values and ethics that he owns right or bad in his relation with God or his relationship with other people. As the leader of a family who has family members with different religions, he certainly has a self-concept that he is a good man and who always talks kindly and has a good character. He has felt that the people around him see him as a person with a good personality and a role model for those who are around him. In one side, that view sometimes has a definite appreciation that motivates to live better; on the other hand, it sometimes becomes a moral burden.

e. Social Image

The social image is one’s view of his relationship with others. In this context, the leader of the interfaith family should understand how to perceive himself when interacting with others in social life. Most of the family leaders see themselves as friendly people who love to help others and always work together.

The opinion of the informants is a reflection of their self-concepts concerned with the public interest, because they like to help others who are in trouble, often give a hand to people in trouble, and work together in social activity in the community. In this regard, the informants
genuinely understand the need to help each other in social life. Because, in nature, the human is a social creature or “zoon political” which means “human is predetermined to live in a society and interact with one another, a thing which distinguishes human from animals”. Also, Adam Smith stated that “human as a social creature with the term “homo hominin socius” meaning humans are friends for each other.”

**Adaptation Process of Interfaith Family**

The process of adaptation in interfaith families is not easy because it requires struggle and long mental process. The fight to adjust to a new environment with people of different faiths relatively requires a long time, pressing deep feeling, holding personal egoism, and emotional control. This struggle happens to anyone, including the informants in this study.

When informants get involved in interfaith families, they will adapt to a new culture and a new environment. The new culture includes relationship culture within a family, communication culture, meal, and eating culture. In the early marriage, almost all informants felt clumsy being in a new family and a new environment let alone husband and wife from different religions, due to (1) mentally there is no special preparation to encounter the new family, so the informants’ attitude and behaviour turned unsettled, nervous, and jumpy; (2) they are doubtful and afraid of making mistakes when doing daily activities; (3) uncomfortable condition make oneself restless, anxious and awkward; and (4) lack of confidence in performing regular worship,

The four causes of nerve obstruct the adaptation process to run smoothly, for both autoplastic adaptation or adjustment formed by oneself, and the alloplastic adjustment formed by the environment. The adaptation obstruction in integrative theory is a part of “stress-adaptation-growth” which over time leads to the individual transformation to a greater “compatibility” concerning a new environment.

The structural model identifies four-dimensional factors of interactively collaboration to launch or inhibit the adaptation process described in the process model:

- **a)** Individual character (adaptive personality, closeness/estrangement of ethnicity, readiness). In this context, it is understandable that each person in a new community brings his character, personality, attitude, and behaviour. The character can either launch or obstruct adaptation. It depends on one’s personality, attitude, as well as behaviour.

- **b)** Environment (adjustment pressure from the host) of host reception, the power of ethnic groups. The environment here means the attitude and behaviour of the host to accept or reject coming guests / new family member into the environment. If the host’s attitude and
behaviour are friendly, the adaptation process will work well. Conversely, if the host’s attitude and behaviour show hostility, the adjustment process will be hampered.

c) Intercultural Transformation (functional compatibility, psychological health, cultural identity development). Cultural transformation means a cultural change from both sides between newcomer personal/family and host’s personal/family that adjust to each other dialectically. They respond to one another in an open and friendly manner that reflects psychological health so that the development of cultural identity usually runs.

d) Communication (host’s communication skill, ethnic mass communication). “The greater the host’s communication skill is, the higher the participation in social communication will be; the greater the host’s acceptance and adjustment pressure are, the more excellent the host’s communication skill is (Berger, Roloff, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2014).

Communication Pattern of Interfaith Family

Communication with Interfaith Family Members

In this study, the Interfaith family consists of a nuclear family and extended family (Murdock, in Lestari, 2016). Both in the nuclear family in which there are father, mother, and children, and batch family (in which there are a father, mother, children, and son-in-law), the relationship between parents and children, seems familiar and close. With this intimacy, communication runs convincingly, heart to heart, between father and mother, and between father-mother and children.

In this context, the communication of interfaith family can be understood through symbolic interaction (Littlejohn & Foss, 2012) that “humans interact with each other all the time, they share an understanding of certain terms and actions and understand events in certain ways as well.” The form of communication used is dyadic interpersonal communication (communication between a person and the other one) or triadic (communication among three people). Moreover, the communication symbol used within the informant family in Yogyakarta is Indonesian. Meanwhile, the communication symbol within families in Gunung Kidul district is mixed codes of Javanese and Indonesian.

Communication with the Same Religion Family Members

Family communication between the leader of family members who have the same religion only happen on certain occasions. For example, the leader of the Muslim family invites his family members of the same religion, before fasting in the holy month of Ramadan and ahead of Eid al-Fitri celebration. They talked about the preparation of fasting and Eid al-Fitri
prayer. Even every sahur and iftar times they often communicate with each other about several topics related to their interests.

Catholic and Protestant informants often make personal communication with family members of the same religion, when they perform church service every Sunday and ahead of Christmas and New Year. The topic they discussed was about the rituals in churches and things to be prepared to welcome Christmas and everything related to their own needs. As with the Buddhist informants, they rarely make a particular communication with family members of the same religion. They stated that they always talked with all multi-religious family members, Buddhist and Muslims. They spoke of the matters related to worship and family interests together.

**Social Communication with the Same Religion Adherents**

Indeed, as social creatures, informants do not only interact with their respective family members but also build a relationship with other people outside. They establish communication with individuals who have the same faith. Muslim family members communicate with people who have the same religion, when attending regular events in mosques, performing Friday prayer and celebrating the holidays of Islam, such as Eid al-Fitr, Eid Kurban and so forth. Similarly, Catholic or Protestant family members communicate with their friends of the same religion, when following Sunday service in the church, worship Mass, Christmas celebration, and others. Furthermore, Buddhist family members often gather with people from the same religion, when performing prayer every Sunday night, and celebrating the holy days of Buddhism.

The communication context uses interpersonal communication, a small communications group, and large group communication. Interpersonal communication is employed because of a unique interpersonal relationship to one another. This is reflected in family relation, business relation, political relation or other relations. Small group communication takes place when there is small talk among five to ten more people about religion issue, race issue or other important matters. Moreover, large group communication is performed when listening to a speech of religious gathering (pengajian) and a speech of Friday prayer at the mosque, a speech of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha (for Muslims), listening to a speech of religious service, Mass worship and Christmas Mass in the church (for Christians). Likewise, large group communication is performed for the Buddhist family members when the following prayer every Sunday night in the temple, or Waisyak holiday, Asyadha holiday, Maghapuja holiday, Khatina holiday and Ulambana holiday in Temple.
Social Communication with Public

The informants often gather with the general public in events and activities carried out in RT, RW and village level. There are a lot of activities at RT and RW such as a routine night patrol has done once a week, social work of cleaning up the environment, mutual help in building RT office, building a mosque, building temples and others. Also, on 17th August people often gather in front of the hall of RT/RW to take part in various activities in commemoration of the Independence Day of Indonesia, such as sack race, marbles race, pitcher, climbing, and other public festivals.

In those businesses, they make social interaction with one another, multi-ethnic and multi-religious social events without religious and sociological barriers. In this context, Rich & Ogawa said, “they have done cross-cultural communication, i.e. communication between inter-cultural people” (in Samovar & Porter, 1976). Also, Liliweri (2011) said that intercultural communication is meaning exchange in the form of symbols that two or more people of different cultural backgrounds perform.” Thus, they practise cross-cultural communication on various matters relating to themselves, such as the condition of their families, their children’s education, family economy and plans.

Transcendental Communication

Transcendental communication is communication with the Hidden; He is God all religions believe (Saefullah, 2007). God in Islam is Allah the Almighty, God the Provider to whom human asks, and God, and there is nothing like him. Meanwhile, God in Catholicism and Protestantism is Jesus Crist, the forgiveness of sins and the Savior of Christians. Moreover, God in Buddhism is Buddha or Sidharta Gautama. The existence of God, according to all adherents, is a place where everything depends on. Therefore, in this study, the informants as a religious community make intuitive communication with their respective God.

Muslims perform intuitive communication with Allah through shalat, pray, and dzkir (Saefullah, 2007). Through shalat, pray, and dzkir, Muslim informants make a dialogue with Allah, they beg forgiveness for all the sins being committed, ask much mercy and beg all their wishes. Similarly, the informants who are Christians make transcendental communication with Jesus Crist in the church when attending the religious service every Sunday and Mass on holy days of the Christian religion. The messages conveyed are about the prayer of seeking forgiveness, long life and luck. Furthermore, Buddhist informants make transcendental communication (dialogue) with the Adi Buddha at prayer activities every Sunday night and special ritual on Waisak day and other holidays.
Conclusion

Multicultural communication of interfaith families in Yogyakarta city and Gunung Kidul district Indonesia is effective and communicative as shown in their ability to respect and honour one another and in the emergence of a harmonious relationship. Although they have different religions, they have been aware that different ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group relations are not a barrier to living in harmony and peace, let alone in a family they have founded.

The phenomenon appears in their everyday life relationships, either at home or outside the home when gathering with their family members and other family members in social activities. They can show the figure of a harmonic and peaceful family. Harmony does not mean that there is no problem with them; the problem still exists. Still, they can handle it well through efficient communication from heart to heart so that the family unit remains maintained until today.
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