

Unity in Diversity of Religions in Bumi Flobamora, Indonesia: From Traditional to Modern Pluralism

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Abstract

The religiously diverse society of NTT (Bumi Flobamora) has received national title as the most tolerant province in Indonesia. However, reality shows that there are religious conflicts, such as the rejection of the establishment of Islamic places of worship and the emergence of various forms of violence with religious nuances. This study attempts to provide a new contemporary social philosophy explanation for the development of religious social conditions. With the help of philosophical methods, the results show that the ideology of pluralism has long lived in Bumi Flobamora. However, this model of "traditional pluralism," which is based on local wisdom and supported by the government's policy of harmony, is currently no longer in line with demands for universal human rights, because "traditional pluralism" shows the unequal treatment of people of different religions. Therefore, contemporary social philosophy develops a "modern pluralism," which is built on the principle of equality. To strengthen this new model of pluralism, efforts are needed to overcome the weaknesses of communitarianism. The main weakness of communitarianism is that it opens up a space for religious appreciation that only emphasizes the togetherness and unity of a spiritual community and views those outside the community as other people who may or should even be excluded. The study concludes that the unity of religions in Bumi Flobamora will only survive if traditional pluralism is replaced with modern pluralism, which is in line with



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the Political Ethics of the Indonesian nation, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, and the basic philosophy of Pancasila.

Keywords: *Bumi Flobamora; Communitarianism; Modern Pluralism; Traditional Pluralism*

INTRODUCTION

Bumi Flobamora is the favorite name of the people of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province to refer to NTT Province sociologically and anthropologically (Skera & Lema, 2013). Politically-administratively, NTT is a province that was founded in 1958, as a fraction of the Sunda Kecil Province (Bali Province, NTB Province, and NTT Province). The people of NTT as far as the essence and existence of the unity of different religions and tribes are concerned, live spread across the islands of Flores, Sumba, Timor, Alor, Lembata, Sabu, Rote, Komodo, Pantar, Rinca, Palue and other islands. The surrounding small island prefers to call itself Flobamora rather than NTT. Flobamora is an abbreviation of Flores, Sumba, Timor, and Alor. So where are Lembata, Adonara, Solor, Sabu, Rote, Komodo, Pantar, Rinca, and Palue in this abbreviation? The name only concerns four islands, but that is the essence of the togetherness of the people of NTT, namely that the four islands are a representation of four religious community groups that have lived side by side peacefully for so long. Flores represents Catholics as the majority on Flores Island, Timor represents GMIT (Gereja Masehi Injili Timor = Timor Evangelical Christian Church) Protestants as the majority on Timor Island, Sumba represents GKS (Gereja Kristen Sumba = Sumba Christian Church) Protestants as the majority on Sumba Island, and Alor represents Islam as the majority on Alor Island. Meanwhile, Lembata, Solor, and Adonara are predominantly Catholic, but their existence is represented in the name Flores. The islands of Sabu, and Rote, are predominantly Protestant, but their existence is summarized in the names Timor and Sumba. Meanwhile, the small islands inhabited by

the majority of Muslims, such as Komodo, Rinca, and Pantar, are all represented in the name Alor.

The total number of religions living in Bumi Flobamora is seven religions, namely Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Catholicism and Protestantism are called two different religions, although in terms of the source of revelation, they are one faith, faith in Christ, but the Indonesian State views them as two different socio-religious institutions. Protestantism itself in Bumi Flobamora has two different religious institutions, namely GMT embraced by the Timor tribe, and GKS embraced by the Sumba tribe. They feel so close as a unity or togetherness in their differences of religion and ethnicity, that in the end, they feel like they are living on a separate Earth, even though geographically we know and they also know that there is only one Earth for all mankind. The word "Bumi" (earth) here is used to describe the strong and deep unity and togetherness between different religions (Gomang, 2007). Therefore, when they talk about the encounter of religions or conflict between religions, they use "Bumi Flobamora Society" rather than the political-administrative name, "NTT Society". Only in official government administrative documents is the name NTT used, while the sociological-anthropological term is "Flobamora" or more fully, "Bumi Flobamora". The name has indeed borne fruit. In 2019, the Central Government, through the Indonesian Ministry of Religion, named NTT as one of the three most tolerant provinces in Indonesia, after West Papua and Bali (Mirsal et al., 2023).

Proud of this condition and to maintain that status, in 2020, the leaders of each NTT religion, together with several academics, provided thoughts and evaluations on the current condition of the togetherness of religions which is full of peace and coolness, by publishing an E-Book: *Narasi Damai dari NTT untuk Indonesia [Narrative of Peace from NTT for Indonesia]* (Kompak, 2020). In this book, Budiana

reports that Hinduism is a religion of peace and the fact is that there is peace and harmony on Bumi Flobamora, therefore he is grateful for this condition. In the same vein, Effendy, from Buddha, reported that Buddha taught peace and harmony and that this was compatible with local NTT wisdom. Lattupeirissa, from Christianity, also reported the same thing that the Christian Church carries out the teachings of Christ to love others and this is realized in Kupang City. Only Duka, from Catholicism, sees something else, namely that the politicization of religion often gives rise to conflicts with religious nuances in NTT. In line with that, Wongso, from Islam, reported based on the experience of Muslims in NTT, and the city of Kupang in particular, that there are dynamics in the lives of Muslims in NTT. This means that there is peace and harmony but there is also tension between Islam and Christians. Meanwhile, the other two authors, academics, also reported in the same basic tone that there is harmony in NTT (Rohi) because all religions teach peace. Meanwhile, Geme reported that there was peace and harmony because there was local wisdom that taught harmony and peace.

The seven reports have the same basic intention, namely to reveal that in Bumi Flobamora there is no religious conflict because all religions teach peace and harmony. So, this publication aims to further achieve a harmonious and harmonious relationship between religious groups, within a framework and foundation based on the teachings of each religion which is supported by local wisdom. These seven writings can be called a theological framework for the harmony of religious life in Bumi Flobamora, a kind of guideline for maintaining and increasing harmony between religious communities without reducing each other's faith and beliefs.

However, the current reality shows otherwise, as reported by an academic study by NTT researchers, as follows. Raho et al. (2020)'s study with respondents were mostly women (66.8%), reported that

50.5% of them believed that Islam was the only true religion and that outside of Islam there was no true religion; and 49.1% believed that people who are not followers of Islam are infidels (cf. [Achmad et al., 2023](#); [Burhanudin & Khairuddin, 2022](#)). Previous studies reported that there was a positive relationship between social and familial relations and the spirit of dialogue or tolerance between religious believers ([Tule & Raho, 2009](#); [Yasa et al., 2019](#); [Nugroho & Wahyono, 2023](#)). However, [Mirsal et al. \(2023\)](#) reported that the title of NTT province as the most tolerant in Indonesia needs to be evaluated again. According to this research, on the Bumi Flobamora, which is known as a peaceful and tolerant Earth, now there is a rejection of the establishment of Islamic houses of worship, mesdjid, in Kupang-Timor and at a softer level this is also happening in Flores, which is predominantly Catholic. The ranking of NTT as the third most tolerant province contradicts the prevailing global and national reality, which has been marked by intolerance, extremism, religious fundamentalism, and terrorism in recent decades ([Mirsal et al., 2023](#)).

This study aims to critically discuss the thoughts of religious figures and some of the latest research on the facts of the encounter between religions in Bumi Flobamora as described above, while at the same time wanting to respond critically to the general views of religious figures, community figures and the government which are always and very NTT Province is proud of being a harmonious province so that it becomes an example for other provinces in Indonesia ([Mirsal et al., 2023](#)). In other words, this study aims to critically discuss the general thoughts and awareness in Bumi Flobamora regarding the fact of the current encounter between religions that seem to be in harmony, to show where their weaknesses lie. Therefore, this study takes a more counter-factual stance, meaning, speaking based on negative factual realities, such as the fact that there is conflict with religious nuances ([Jegalus, 2020](#)). From this negative

fact, we can create an ethical-theological orientation so as not to repeat that negativity. Counterfactual thinking is always critical, that is, it dares to express what is bitter in the encounter between religions. The goal is not to repeat the bad incident but to learn from the bitter experience.

To achieve this goal, this study focuses on two things as starting points, to find an ethical-theological orientation for a harmonious encounter between religions, namely: first, discussing the differences between the fact of religious plurality and the ethics of religious pluralism; second, discussing the differences between traditional pluralism and modern pluralism. Based on this understanding, we can build an ethical-theological orientation that all religious groups do not just live side by side as the fact of plurality, but especially, build a shared ethical awareness to ensure the continuity of the fact of plurality without conflict (Raho et al., 2020). Because, even though currently they live side by side peacefully, if it is not supported by an adequate ethic of religious pluralism, then a religious plurality that is without conflict at this time could turn into a conflictual religious plurality. Therefore, the key question of this study is what kind of ethical pluralism can truly create harmony, is it traditional pluralism as has been implemented by the Flobamora indigenous community so far, or a new model of religious pluralism that goes beyond the traditional?

METHOD

In a study of social philosophy, especially from the perspective of contemporary social philosophy, the researcher uses the philosophical method, which is different from the study methods of sociology, anthropology, or cultural sciences. In the eyes of philosophy, these three groups of knowledge are very useful for the study of philosophy, because they are in direct contact with socio-

religious facts in the field. Social philosophy realizes and recognizes that these sciences are "the first level sciences", while philosophy itself, despite having the title "social", is only "the second level science". Therefore, in this article, there are no tables, figures, or statistics. In this case, social philosophy obtains data in two ways, first, by directly encountering facts in the field and then collecting them into data which is then analyzed philosophically; secondly, indirectly, namely through the results of studies from empirical sciences as mentioned above. This study is more concerned with the final method, namely by receiving the results of the latest studies, from various empirical sciences (social sciences), regarding the encounter of religions in Bumi Flobamora, then strengthening them by observation or more precisely, critical reflection based on the researcher's direct experience as a citizen born in Bumi Flobamora. So, this study is included in the library research category.

The social philosophy perspective used in this study is not traditional social philosophy, medieval social philosophy, or modern social philosophy, but contemporary social philosophy. The greatest contribution of contemporary social philosophy in discussing or solving the problem of conflictual encounters between religions today is the idea of modern pluralism. Pluralism has existed since traditional societies it is not new in the modern or contemporary era. Since ancient times, the people of Bumi Flobamora have practiced religious and ethnic pluralism. However, traditional pluralism is still limited, if you don't want to say it, it still conflicts with the recognition of universal human rights which guarantee equal treatment for everyone. Because traditional pluralism in Flobamora society is based on the "principle of inequality" (cf. [Arza, 2019](#)). If you are Javanese, Balinese, Batak, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist, please live on Flobamora Earth, but you must know that you are still "not a native" of Bumi Flobamora, so you are "not the same". Meanwhile, modern

pluralism is based on the "principle of equality" (Daheri et al., 2023). This means, that whoever you are, wherever you come from, and whenever you arrive in Bumi Flobamora, you are accepted and treated the same as members of the local community. So, there are no categories of "native" and "foreign".

Along with the idea of modern pluralism, there is also a debate in contemporary social philosophy between liberalism versus communitarianism (Wattimena, 2018; Jegalus, 2020). The results of this debate help a pluralistic society to analyze the social reality of religious conflict based on differences in religious teachings and appreciation. Communitarian ideas are very attractive because they emphasize togetherness and unity as a community. However, the idea of togetherness and communitarian unity has a fundamental weakness, namely that community members only respect fellow community members more or less, while people outside the community are accepted but treated unequally. At least this communitarianism is in line with traditional pluralism. In this study, these two ideologies will be analyzed to find their respective strengths and weaknesses.

With this framework of thought, the researcher conducted this study which includes several steps or basic methodical elements of a social philosophy study, namely:

(1) Interpretation: Data reported by studies of empirical sciences and socio-religious phenomena directly experienced by researchers are "read" with philosophical conceptions, namely the most basic conceptions regarding the nature of religion in the pluralistic contemporary era.

(2) Induction and deduction: The researcher unites and reads together all reports from empirical science and the researcher's direct experience to find a general principle fundamental view or basic attitude about the nature of religious life (induction). At the same time,

researchers were able to clarify a lot of data and detailed patterns of religious relations in Bumi Flobamora whose meaning was not very clear, if viewed separately (deduction).

(3) Internal coherence: All points of basic views regarding religious life on the pluralistic Bumi Flobamora are investigated again according to their relationship to each other. Researchers will look for real and logical relationships of dependence on each other, either in total or only in part. From there, researchers will try to find which elements are the most central or dominant (traditional pluralism) and which are more marginal (modern pluralism).

(4) Holistics: All elements of philosophical thought and conception (traditional pluralism versus modern pluralism and liberalism versus communitarianism) are used to assess the overall vision and appreciation of religious people in a pluralistic religious society. With this total and complete horizon, new researchers can provide a definitive meaning for every religious phenomenon in the pluralistic society of Bumi Flobamora.

(5) Historical continuity: Researchers will pay attention to the line of historical development of the encounter between religions in Bumi Flobamora, which may be found in the cultural history of the Bumi Flobamora Society itself from the beginning until now, or special phenomena, such as the early history of Catholicism in Flores which brought under by German missionaries and Protestantism in Timor and Sumba by Dutch missionaries, and Islam in Alor by traders from Sulawesi and Sumatra. Or, perhaps it can also be found in the original community's underlying view of life before the arrival of the revealed religion. However, this element of historical continuity will not be the focus, because almost all social researchers already know and admit that these religions were not present in Bumi Flobamora simultaneously. This is where the problem lies, namely that even

though some came first and others came later, modern pluralism teaches that they are all treated equally.

(6) Heuristics: Finally, based on the data or more precisely, the methodical reflection above, the researcher will try to see the problem of the encounter of religions on Bumi Flobamora in a new light, so that a new synthesis or new accentuation is formed, such as traditional pluralism, although in line with local wisdom, must be abandoned, because it is not by human rights demands regarding equal treatment. Instead, society must live up to modern pluralism, where all parties are treated equally, so there are no categories of native and foreign. Likewise, the liberalism versus communitarianism debate. This debate contributes positive values, but communitarianism has weaknesses and these weaknesses must be abandoned to form a lasting, peaceful, and harmonious pluralistic society in Bumi Flobamora.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data on the number and population of religions in Bumi Flobamora

To be able to follow the discussion on traditional and modern pluralism in religions, here is a factual description of the existence of these religions in Bumi Flobamora. There are seven religions: Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Catholicism occupies the top position in terms of the percentage of adherents, which is more than half of the total percentage of the population. Then followed by Protestantism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Catholicism is predominantly found in Flores; Protestant GMIT is predominantly found in Timor Protestant GKS is entirely in Sumba; and Islam is predominantly found in Alor. Meanwhile, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are only found in cities, provincial capitals, and district capitals. In this regard, there are two things worth noting: First, Islam is indeed the majority in Alor, but some of it is spread throughout the

islands in Bumi Flobamora, especially in coastal cities and provincial capitals, district capitals and sub-district capitals. The form of the spread of Islam is almost the same as Catholicism which is also spread throughout the cities in Bumi Flobamora although the majority are in Flores. Second, Islam is relatively growing faster in number because of the arrival of traders from Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi who want to run a trading business in Bumi Flobamora and then settle.

Table 1 lists the population in East Nusa Tenggara according to religion in 2023. This study explains how the six religions on Bumi Flobamora present a harmonious face despite the differences that exist.

Table 1

Religions in East Nusa Tenggara, 2023

Religion	Numbers	Percentage
Catholics	3.013.820	53,73%
Protestants	2.028.057	36,16%
Islam	529.807	9,45%
Hindus	5.413	0,1%
Buddhist	387	0,01%
Confucianism	19	0,0%

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur (2024).

Positive Statements and Ethical-theological Imperatives

Religious leaders stated the teachings of each religion about respecting other religions and then made a proud statement, namely that their religion was a religion of peace. Not only religious leaders but also the government make positive statements about harmony in the province of NTT (Bumi Flobamora), in fact the government always prides itself on NTT as an example of a harmonious province in Indonesia (Kompak, 2020; Mirsal et al., 2023). In short, community leaders, the government, and especially religious leaders themselves celebrate the Flobamora community as a harmonious and peaceful religious community. Why can they live in harmony? Their answer is

simple because every religion that lives in Bumi Flobamora teaches loving others which is supported by local wisdom.

However, we consider that their pride is built on a fragile foundation. They forget that each religion has teachings about loving others, but the context, *Sitz im Leben*, is different. That is what will show surprising results, namely that they both have the teachings of loving each other, but in reality, they are hostile to each other. For example, the teaching of loving others in Islam and Catholicism or Christianity (Jegalus, 2009; Baatsen, 2017). Islam relies on Surah al-Imran 3.64: “O People of the Book, come (hold) to a sentence (decree) that there is no dispute between us and you, that we worship none but Allah” (cf. Hamid et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Catholics adhere to Mark 12:30-31: “Love the Lord your God with all your strength. And the second law is to love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other law that is more important than these two laws.” However, in this case, we must not ignore the differences in *Sitz im Leben* between the two texts, because even though the two texts have the same teachings, they have different backgrounds and contexts, so that the meaning and significance for the lives of each believer is different (Yewangoe, 2007; Yusdani, 2022). The differences in *Sitz im Leben* are what make it possible for each religion to carry out the contents of the teachings differently and even conflictingly in concrete life.

Likewise, the formulation of *Nostra Aetate* Vatican II regarding Islam (cf. Kirchberger, 2020). The Council Fathers simply equated the belief in one God between Islam and Christianity without paying attention to the *Sitz im Leben* doctrine of that oneness. Even though the monotheism of Christianity and Islam are different, this is why there has been a critical response from the Islamic side in Indonesia towards *Nostra Aetate* art. 3. For them, even though Catholicism shows that there is a similar understanding of God between Islam and Christianity, Islam still realizes that its monotheism is different from

Christian monotheism (Baatsen, 2017). Responses like this make us realize that we work together and build tolerance between Catholics and Muslims, as well as with other religions, not because there are the same teachings about Allah, but because there is a shared ethical call to guarantee the uniqueness of each monotheism. So, mutual respect is not because there are similarities in teachings about God but because of the ethical-theological call of every religion to respect each other. Even if there are similarities, they are not unique similarities but analogous. This means that interreligious teachings are not completely the same, but also not completely different, but rather there are similarities and differences. This kind of cooperation based on differences is the ethical-theological orientation of modern pluralism (Kolb, 2020; Saumantri, 2022).

Therefore, even though the teachings of loving others exist in each religion, because the *Sitz im Leben* teachings are different, the same teachings do not guarantee that there will be no mutual hostility between them. This has been proven on Bumi Flobamora. The memories of Flobamora residents are still fresh in the memory of "December Kelabu" (gray December) in 1998 when several mosques were destroyed by rioters even though Christianity teaches about loving others. Then a self-defense statement emerged from Christian leaders in NTT that indeed this riot was preceded by a national mourning ceremony initiated by young Christians and Catholics in Kupang in response to the Ketapang incident in Jakarta, but this noble celebration was exploited by parties with evil intentions so that get out of control and become riots (Yewangoe, 2007). However, until now we have not found legal evidence that the destruction was not carried out by young Christians and Catholics, as announced by Christian religious leaders.

Apart from the cases mentioned above, other cases which have contributed to creating less harmonious relations are the rejection of

the construction of Islamic boarding schools in Sikka and Lembata Regencies, as well as the prohibition on the use of loudspeakers during the call to prayer in TTS (Timor Tengah Selatan) Regency. The rejection of the construction of Islamic boarding schools in the Magapanda District, Sikka Regency by the Forum Peduli Rakyat Sikka (PRS) (Sikka People's Care Forum) was a response to the phenomenon of Islamic boarding-based radicalism, even though not all Islamic boarding schools are hotbeds for radicalism actors. Concerns about the radicalism movement taking place in Java should not spread to the regions. This is different from the rejection of the construction of an Islamic boarding school in Dikesare Village, Lebatukan District, Lembata Regency, which was carried out by the local government because it violated the concept of regional spatial planning. Apart from that, there were community protests in Pisan Village and Teluk Village, East Amanuban District, TTS Regency against the construction of a prayer room and the use of loudspeakers during the call to prayer. The last two cases are more localist, in contrast to the first case which was related to the issue of radicalism movements in other regions. Tensions between Islam and Catholicism in Sikka Regency and tensions between Islam and Protestantism in TTS Regency have more religious nuances. However, there are also tensions between Islam and Catholicism in Lembata Regency regarding mining development policies. The issue of natural resource (mining) development policies has created polarization in society between those who support it and those who reject it. What is interesting is that the people who support mining are identified as Muslims, while the people who oppose mining development are Catholics. It turns out that those behind this rejection are Catholic clergy ([Atang, 2018](#)).

In the matrix below we obtain facts on the ground that are different from the statements of religious leaders, government, and

community leaders that all religious groups in Bumi Flobamora live side by side peacefully and tolerantly. Conflicts generally occur between Christians and Muslims. Why? Because Catholics in Flores and Protestant-GMIT in Timor and Protestant GKS in Sumba feel themselves to be “native”, that is, as people who were there first (native) and Muslims who are then as “newcomers”. Catholics in Flores respect Muslims but respect them as “foreigners”. Likewise, Protestants in Timor and Sumba see themselves as “native”, therefore they do provide living space for Muslims but they do not have the same rights to exist in society. This spirit of traditional pluralism is what gave birth to the conflict between Christians and Muslims in Bumi Flobamora.

Table 2

Data on Religious Conflict in Bumi Flobamora

No.	Religious Conflict	Year
1.	The conflict between Christians and Islam: (15 Masjid/prayer rooms and 265 Muslim houses burned down), 20 public facilities related to Muslims were also burned.	1998
2.	The conflict between Christians and Muslims in Kupang City is known as Grey December. Christian youths burned down Muslim houses and Islamic houses of worship in Kupang City as a retaliatory reaction to the murder of a Christian thug by a group of Muslims in Ketapang (Java). This was the largest physical conflict between Christians and Muslims in Bumi Flobamora.	1998
3.	The conflict between Christians and Muslims in Sikka Regency was related to the construction of Islamic boarding schools and the prohibition of loudspeakers during the call to prayer. The rejection and prohibition were carried out by Catholics	2017
4.	The conflict between Christians (Protestant GMIT) and Muslims in Amanuban District, TTS Regency, was related to the construction of a prayer room and the use of loudspeakers during the call to prayer.	2018
5.	Conflict between Christian (GMIT) and Islam: Rejection of Nur Musafir mosque construction at Batuplat in the city of Kupang.	2011 - 2016
6.	Conflict between Christian and Islam: Rejection of Prayer prayer room in Amanuban Timur, South Central Timor District.	2021

No.	Religious Conflict	Year
7.	Conflict between Christian churches and Denominational churches in Rote Ndao (Central Rote and North West Rote).	Often occur
8.	The conflict between Catholic and Islam: Rejection of Musala construction in North Central Timor District.	2022

Source: Primary data. Authors' analysis.

However, religious conflict in Bumi Flobamora is not only a resonance of religious conflict in other areas, such as the Gray December incident (Yewangoe, 2007). It turns out there have been incidents of hostia contamination in several places in NTT which have caused tensions between believers, Catholics, and Protestants. One of them is the case of hostia contamination in July 2002 in Maumere: A crew member of a ship anchored in Maumere attended mass at the Catholic Church. When it was time to receive "*komuni suci*" (holy communion) he also received the hostia. But because he wasn't used to that method, he looked hesitant. Someone saw it and took the hostia back. This did not fail to raise suspicion among Catholics because so far there have been many cases of hostia contamination, especially in the New Order era, which resulted in tensions between Catholics and Protestants, as well as between Catholics and Muslims, which had fatal consequences that even resulted in deaths (Gomang, 2007).

On the island of Sumba, we also witness tensions between Christian denominations that have just entered Sumba and the Sumba Christian Church (GKS). This did not fail to raise suspicion among the Sumba Christian Church which had long existed on the island. This was further triggered by the fact that many members of the GKS congregation were concerned, according to GKS's assessment, that the new denominations came in an inelegant way, namely, they invited KGS people to move to the new denominations. This is what caused GKS to ask the government to regulate these denominations (Yewangoe, 2007). This request sounds reasonable, even though it is not worth asking, if we consider the freedom of citizens, in the sense

of freedom of religion as guaranteed by the Indonesian constitution, to practice their religion anywhere throughout the territory of the Republic of Indonesia, including on the island of Sumba.

Several Church leaders, especially GMIT and GKS, were anxious because the ban on the Jehovah's Witness movement was lifted (Yewangoe, 2007). They even asked the Attorney General to review their decision. But the question is whether it is appropriate for religious figures to ask the government to do that. Is it normal for the state to be invited to intervene in the internal affairs of religions? The right answer to intrareligious conflict is that religion itself needs to be wise and mature in resolving its internal conflicts. Only if there is a religious group that disrupts security because of its teachings and provokes society, thereby committing crimes, then the state must take firm action based on state law. In this case, the state was indeed asked to attend, because Indonesia is a country of law (Mirsael, 2022).

The Plurality of Religions and Religious Pluralism

Even though there are tensions between religious adherents, as described above, the community remains proud that there are five religions that live side by side peacefully in Bumi Flobamora (cf. Aryati & Suradi, 2022; Nurjanah et al., 2022). However, this pride will become false pride if it only starts from the fact that many religions live side by side. In this case, we must distinguish between religious plurality and religious pluralism. Religious plurality is the fact that religions exist, so it concerns the fact that each religion meets other religions. Religious pluralism is demonstrated by differences in teachings, rites, institutional structures, moral praxis, and the Holy Scriptures, and the fact that this plurality does not reduce the level of belief in the truth of religion (cf. Baidi, 2020; Niam, 2017).

Meanwhile, religious pluralism touches more on awareness regarding the dilemma of religious truth, so it is not just factual but more normative. Therefore, this awareness dilemma can give rise to

awareness of a shared ethical orientation (the ethics of religious pluralism). If the truth of religion is one, namely about one God, why are there so many religions? The fact that there are many religions more or less creates a wound in the consciousness of religious adherents, because it means relativizing one's religious beliefs, so perhaps it is still difficult to accept the recognition of pluralism seriously. This question is at the doctrinal (orthodoxy) level ([Hadi & Sari, 2021](#); [Qodir et al., 2023](#)). Meanwhile, the question at the practical level (orthopraxis) is how each religious community can carry out its religious teachings without clashing with other religious groups ([Hasan et al., 2018](#); [Zulfatmi, 2023](#)).

Pluralism at the orthopraxis level is more concerned with socio-religious pluralism, namely pluralism related to the reality of life in a society with diverse religions ([Barihasion et al., 2023](#)). Meanwhile, pluralism at the level of orthodoxy is more about clashes in the consciousness of faith, because every religion claims to be the true religion that comes from Allah and Allah is one, so there is only one true religion. If God is one, then how can we accept (understand) the existence of many religions ([Daven, 2018](#))? So, this pluralism is more concerned with the theological doctrines of each religion which seem difficult for the minds of believers to accept. We, as Catholics, for example, can accept that God has acted definitively for the salvation of all people in Jesus Christ while also recognizing that Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians are guaranteed to stick to their religious beliefs and follow their path, receiving salvation. This awareness of doctrinal pluralism (orthodoxy) is indirectly related to modern religious criticism which tacitly condemns futile religious debate. Religious adherents increasingly understand that religious war is an irony that makes no sense and is starting to seek a way of peace ([Jegalus & Subani, 2023](#); [Saleem et al., 2021](#)) through a new understanding, namely pluralism.

It is for this purpose that we make Pancasila the philosophical basis of the Indonesian state which is diverse in religion and ethnicity. So, the pluralism guaranteed by Pancasila is a pluralism that guarantees differences (cf. [Fathoni, 2022](#)). However, this ideology of pluralism is not unique to modern Indonesian society. In traditional society, there is also an understanding of pluralism. The difference between traditional pluralism and modern pluralism lies in the underlying principles. In traditional pluralism (traditional values), the fact of plurality is carried out based on the principle of inequality, whereas in modern pluralism, such as Pancasila values and universal human values, the fact of plurality is carried out on the principle of equality ([Kamaludin et al., 2021](#); [Lewar & Madung, 2022](#)). This means, that in traditional society, all components of society, including those from other cultures or religions, are respected and have a place in society. Those who are not members of the community or who are not of the same religion are respected, but they are respected as foreigners, so natives and immigrants do not have equality in society. Those who do not share the same religion are appreciated for their existence but still valued with the view that they are newcomers (new minorities). They are respected only because there are traditional teachings that say that foreigners must be respected, foreigners must be guaranteed their lives.

The problem of meeting religions in Bumi Flobamora lies in this, namely how the togetherness of religions, where the religions are truly different, must be based on the principle of equality, so it must be based on the ideology of modern pluralism ([Tampubolon, 2019](#)). The main content of modern pluralism ethics is that all parties, in this case, all religions are treated equally: whether it is a minority or majority religion, whether the religion is newly present or has been around for a long time, all have the same position and rights and therefore they are treated equally, so it is not like traditional pluralism which stands

on the principle of inequality (cf. [Daheri et al., 2023](#); [Erken et al., 2023](#)). With modern pluralism, in Bumi Flobamora there will no longer be majority domination over minorities, or there will no longer be any classification of minority religious communities that must have a respectful attitude towards the majority, nor will there be a feeling that we are natives and they are immigrants, we are the majority and they are the minorities. We must honestly admit that the layers of religious consciousness in Bumi Flobamora are still characterized by categories of majority-minority and native-immigrant which give rise to unequal treatment. Modern pluralism ethics emphasizes equal treatment for every religious group, regardless of their number, and wherever they come from, and since whenever that religion arrived in Bumi Flobamora, all of them have been treated equally.

Religious Pluralism and Local Wisdom Approaches

What's even more interesting is that religious leaders, community leaders, and the government are proud of the local wisdom of the Flobamora people. They all believe that local wisdom moves the conscience of religious people to support the teachings of each religion to live in harmony. If there is a conflict between believers, the conflict can easily be resolved, because the values of local wisdom are integrated into their lives. We agree that local wisdom values are maintained and can be used to solve social problems, including socio-religious problems ([Bevans, 2019](#)). However, we need to be fully aware that religions, especially revealed religions, claim that the values they preach are universal. This means that religion will not simply be by particular local values ([Mulyana, 2023](#)). Of course, we have to admit that some local values are compatible with universal religious values and therefore some religious problems can be resolved using a local wisdom approach. However, we also need to be truly aware that the problem of conflict between religious groups can be resolved with local wisdom, this happens because the problem is

socio-religious (Burga & Damopoi, 2022). However, when problems between religious groups arise because they relate to the interpretation of religious doctrine, then of course the local wisdom approach is far from adequate.

In this case, we need to learn from the contemporary social philosophy debate about universal values and local values, namely between liberalism and communitarianism, which is now known as the debate between universalism versus contextualism, or universalism versus particularism, universalism versus localism (Jegalus, 2020; Wattimena, 2018). Liberalism argues based on universal ethical principles, while communitarianism argues based on communal ethical principles. These two positions think about the principles of a good and just society, but their answers are different. According to liberalism, society is good if it is fair and therefore what needs to be done is how to realize basic justice. Meanwhile, communitarianism argues that every understanding of justice already presupposes an understanding of a good society, and the understanding of a good society is not deduced a priori, but can only be extracted from the values of that community.

We can describe the consequences of the communitarian view as follows. If there are no universal values then there will be no dialogue between different religions, and that also means communication becomes solely strategic. In interreligious encounters, other religions are viewed and treated by my religious assessment. Simply put, if moral universalism is abandoned then dialogue to resolve religious conflicts can no longer be used, and if dialogue is not used, then what determines is power (Lapsey & Kelley, 2022; Wang, 2018). If strength is used to determine the right or wrong of a conflict, then the strong will win. However, we do not want Bumi Flobamora, which is a religious region, to resolve religious conflicts with a communitarian perspective, because that perspective will give room to the strong,

whether strong in numbers (majority) or in time because they came first (*asli*), as the winner.

Therefore, radical communitarianism is rejected because the assumption that there is a homogeneous community currently in Bumi Flobamora which can be a reference for shared morality is fiction (Keladu, 2018; cf. Larson, 2022). We must be realistic or speak in *hic et nunc* (here and now) and not speak in *illo tempore* (past at a time). Because after all, the people of Bumi Flobamora today are no longer homogeneous. Throughout Bumi Flobamora today there are Javanese, Batak people, Maluku people, Muslims, Balinese-Buddhist people, Balinese-Hindu people, not only Catholics and Christians, Rote people, Saturday people, Sumba people, Alor people, Lembata people or Flores people. In Kupang, the provincial capital, there are not only Timorese, Rote, and Sabu people, as in the early history of Kupang City, but there are Flores people, Lembata people, Sumba people, Alor people, and people from Java, Sumatra, in short, from various islands and tribes from all over the archipelago, even from outside Indonesia. Then what local wisdom do we use in Kupang City, is it Rote, Sabu, or Timor? The phenomenon of human heterogeneity currently exists not only in the provincial capital but also in various regions down to the village level throughout Bumi Flobamora.

Amid heterogeneity and social complexity, an argument that is often used by religious figures, political figures, community leaders, and the government about the harmonious encounter of religions in Bumi Flobamora emerges is that they have a very rich range of traditional expressions from various traditions about togetherness. live, respect each other, and maintain harmony. However, we argue that although the traditional ethical imperative seems to be the same among tribes, we should not forget that all these expressions as "ethnophilosophy" have different backgrounds, contexts of birth and use, or *Sitz im Leben*, in different ways. each tribe (Lu, 2022).

Therefore, an expression about the primacy of harmony in a tribe does not automatically have the same meaning in its application, for example, in living together with different religions. The context of the birth and use of traditional teachings in each different traditional space is the reason, the ethical imperative of these traditions, even though the textual formulation is the same, is still different in its implementation and can even be contradictory.

This means we need to wisely explore and use local wisdom values to build harmony between religious communities or to solve problems of conflict between people of different religions because the use of these methods in the contemporary era is no longer adequate and can easily make us fall into primordialism ([Musyarrafah & Zulhannan, 2023](#)). We all acknowledge the benefits of revitalizing local wisdom, but the benefits are limited, namely to those in the environment who are still experiencing what German phenomenology calls *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld). Can we ensure that the revitalization of local wisdom will not metamorphose into tribal primordialism and ultimately lead to the birth of religious primordialism? Meanwhile, the social conditions of Bumi Flobamora show the possibility of metamorphosis, from tribal primordialism to religious primordialism, which could occur, considering that the majority of Flores people are Catholic and therefore the people identify Flores Island with Catholicism; the majority of Timorese are GMIT Protestants and identify Timor Island with GMIT; Likewise, the majority of Sumbanese are GKS Protestants and identify Sumba Island with GKS; and the Muslim majority of Alor people identify Alor Island with Islam (cf. [Mirsael et al., 2023](#)).

Therefore, we do need to adhere to the ethics of traditions because those traditions are still alive, but at the same time we still have to build a common ethic that goes beyond those traditions ([Aderibigbe et al., 2023](#)). As citizens of Indonesia and the world,

Flobamora citizens, however, must have the national insight of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* based on Pancasila and the universal insight of understanding Universal Human Rights. The national insight that has been developed so far does not replace the respective primordial insight of ethnicity or religion, as guaranteed by the State Philosophy, Pancasila (Azra, 2019; Waringga & Muchtar, 2021; Burhanuddin & Khairuddin, 2022). So, the insight of nationalism and universal humanity, as it appears in the ethics of modern pluralism which is based on equality, does not eliminate the primordial attachments of society but only relativizes their primordial attachments. In this case, modern insight is only an expansion of the range of human sociality. In this wide range of sociality, people remain tied to their primordial identity, and at the same time, they also live and love their nation and can view their religion and ethnicity critically from the perspective of universal human values (Kurniawan et al., 2023).

Government Regulations and Traditional Pluralism

The government aims to make PBM (Peraturan Bersama Menteri = Joint Regulation of two Ministers) no. 9 and 8 to create religious harmony and one of the factors that often gives rise to tension between religious groups is the issue of establishing houses of worship, and therefore the government regulates the establishment of houses of worship (cf. YUSDANI, 2020). However, in its implementation, this regulation becomes "counterproductive". This regulation has created more religious conflict in Bumi Flobamora, although it has not yet become an open conflict like in Poso and Ambon, it has created tensions, especially between Christians and Catholics, as well as Catholics and Muslims (Baatsen, 2017; Subchi et al., 2022). These tensions occurred because they were made possible by the PBM regulations themselves, especially Article 13, concerning permits for the establishment of places of worship. The government says houses of worship are a "real and genuine need" but their establishments must

meet the requirement of 90 adult believers. So, religious groups cannot build a house of worship if they do not meet the requirements of 90 adult adherents.

This requirement is prone to conflict because it opens up space for religious groups who, in the interests of their group as the majority religion in the region, desperately demand that the requirement of 90 adherents be fulfilled. Once they see the fact that the amount demanded is not met, even though the establishment of a house of worship is a real and serious need for the people concerned, they desperately refuse it, as in the case of the establishment of an Islamic house of worship in Batuplat, Kupang. The Muslims as a minority had obtained permission from the "Pemerintah Kota Kupang" (City government of Kupang) and received support from the FKUB (Forum Komunikasi Umat Beragama = Religious Communication Forum), but did not reach the requirement of 90 adherents, so GMIT as the majority in the area mobilized young people to carry out a resistance movement. Ultimately, Muslims oscillated between three parties: the Government, FKUB, and GMIT youth. Even though the Indonesian constitution does not recognize the number of requirements for citizens to exercise the right to religion and worship (cf. [Regus et al., 2020](#); [Tan, 2021](#)). Article 29, Paragraph 2, of the 1945 Constitution reads: "The state guarantees the freedom of every citizen to embrace their religion and to worship according to their religion and beliefs." Here it is clear that the state provides guarantees not as a group, 90 people with ID cards, but individually as expressed in the formula "every resident" (cf. [Utomo & Fattah, 2023](#)).

Meanwhile, the temporary use of buildings that are not places of worship for religious purposes, is regulated in articles 18-20. This arrangement also has the potential for conflict in Bumi Flobamora (cf. [Riyanto, 2023](#)). The problem so far is that there are religious groups, such as Christian denominations in Timor and Sumba, who use

residential houses for worship. This was done either for reasons of not getting permission to build a house of worship because they could not meet the PBM requirements or for reasons of not being able to financially build a house of worship. Even though worship is a fundamental need, or in the formulation of the PBM regulations "a real and serious need".

From this PBM regulation, it is clear that the government provides more protection to the majority community than to the minority community. Because, often the majority group feels uncomfortable or offended if a small group of people from another religion or another denomination shows themselves in the form of celebrating religious worship in their area, or establishing a house of worship. This feeling of discomfort from the majority is what triggers the birth of conflict. Because of this, the government stipulates requirements regarding the temporary use of buildings as places of worship that the congregation concerned "must maintain harmony". That means they must pay attention to the "feelings" of the majority in that region. The government sees the offense of the majority in this case as normal (cf. [Wejak, 2018](#)). Is that normal? This is the question that challenges modern pluralism in Bumi Flobamora.

This fact shows very clearly that the government adheres to traditional pluralism, namely a pluralism that is based on the principle of inequality. The government, through the PBM regulations, provides a kind of special privilege to the majority religious community or religious communities that previously existed in the area. Catholicism, as the first religion to enter and develop in Flores, feels that it is the party that deserves to be "respected" by all other religious groups in Flores because their religion was the first to exist with the largest membership. Likewise, GMIT in Timor and GKS in Sumba are the first religions and the majority. Government regulations, as described above, favor the majority (number) and

indigenous people, in the sense of those who came first. In this case, the government adheres to traditional pluralism and this model of pluralism has the potential for conflict.

At this point, we think that Catholics as the largest community, 56% in all of Bumi Flobamora, with the largest number in Flores, have an ethical and theological responsibility to be a beacon for other religions. This hope is not without foundation. The Catholic Church since Vatican II has opened a new religious insight such as (Buru, 2020; Jehaut, 2022): *Unitatis Red Integratio* regarding ecumenism, which firmly states the Catholic positive attitude towards Protestant Churches and hopes for cooperation and Church unity. Likewise, *Lumen Gentium* art. 8 emphasizes that the Church of Christ is "subsistit in Ecclesia Catholica" (found within the Catholic Church). This formulation shows the new Catholic attitude towards Christian Churches as equal to the Church of Christ. Meanwhile, the Declaration of *Nostra Aetate* fundamentally changed the Catholic attitude towards non-Christians (Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus), namely from an exclusive attitude of "ecclesial nulla salus" (there is no salvation outside the Church) to being inclusive and willing to cooperate with them. and even learn from them (Kirchberger, 2020).

Based on a new view of Christian Churches and non-Christians, plus the teaching of religious freedom in *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Catholic Church was able to develop its ideology of tolerance, no longer just negative tolerance as generally adhered to but also positive tolerance (cf. Du & Firmanto, 2021). Negative tolerance means the attitude of "allowing or not prohibiting" the presence of other religions besides Catholicism. This model of tolerance is not wrong, but it is not sufficient, because this tolerance can turn into a strategy in the encounter between religions. Allowing or not prohibiting the presence of other religions beside us is only because we do not yet have the power to fight or expel them. Or, because we haven't found the right

time or the right reason to kick him out. Once we have strength in the form of numbers, social, economic, and political, then we reject them and expel them. That is the limitation of negative tolerance (Jegalus, 2009; 2020). For this reason, the Catholic Church also builds positive tolerance, namely a tolerance that does not only allow or prohibit, but especially respects other religions as they are. That is an example of the manifestation of modern pluralism, although it is still at the level of in abstracto (limited to teachings) and has not yet fully become in concreto (real manifestation).

CONCLUSION

Based on the review above, we can conclude that the encounter between religions on Flobamora Earth will only be adequate if it embraces modern pluralism. Indeed, the Flobamora community has long had an ethic of pluralism, but traditional pluralism is no longer sufficient for the Flobamora community which already recognizes universal human rights. Therefore, people who do not share the same religion or those of other religions, have their place guaranteed in society on an equal footing. Everyone who lives in Bumi Flobamora, whether old religious people (natives) or newly arrived religious people (immigrants), whether majority or minority religious communities, has the same rights to live and practice their religion. The demand for equality is what makes modern pluralism still problematic in Bumi Flobamora. Because there are still religious components, such as Catholics in Flores as the majority (number) and Protestants in Timor and Sumba as the majority (number), it is difficult to accept that all religions in the region are treated equally.

Therefore, we must abandon traditional pluralism based on the principle of inequality and build a modern pluralism based on the principle of equality. To ensure equality in differences, the Indonesian nation, which is diverse in religion and ethnicity, established the

Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on the philosophy of Pancasila with its political ethic of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. So, Flobamora citizens as an Indonesian nation must adhere to the state philosophy of Pancasila and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Philosophically-culturally, the principle of diversity is not only understood as a "multiplicity" of numbers but is also understood according to the meaning of "diversity". Emphasis on the multiplicity of numbers will lead us to shallow pluralism (traditional pluralism). Meanwhile, the emphasis on diversity will lead us to a more advanced stage, namely achieving recognition and growing respect for "incommensurable" differences. We must understand diversity here not only in the sense of diversity but more as differences that cannot be substantially reduced to one or forced into a unity. Here we adhere to the principle of Unity in Plurality (Ex Pluribus Unum).

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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