



Intercultural Communication Harmony of Bugis Migrants in Building Social Networks within Palm Oil Plantation Areas

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Abstract: This study examines the forms of intercultural communication harmony practiced by Bugis migrants in building social networks within the oil palm plantation areas of Baras District, Pasangkayu Regency. The research is significant because Bugis migrants, known for their long-standing migratory tradition (*sompe'*) and cultural values of *siri' na pacce*, contribute to multicultural integration in plantation-based communities. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, and analyzed with the Miles and Huberman model comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that intercultural harmony is expressed through openness in social interactions, solidarity in community life, tolerance among religious groups, interethnic marriages, inclusive economic cooperation in plantation work, and the preservation of cultural identity alongside adaptation. These practices strengthen social networks across ethnic boundaries and minimize potential conflicts in a multicultural environment. The study underscores the importance of intercultural communication as a foundation for social cohesion in plural societies. It also provides practical insights for policymakers and community leaders in managing diversity within plantation contexts. The originality of this research lies in its focus on the intercultural communication harmony of Bugis migrants in plantation-based communities, a perspective that has received limited scholarly attention.

Keywords: intercultural communication; social networks; Bugis migrants; palm oil plantation communities; social cohesion

Introduction

Pasangkayu Regency in West Sulawesi is one of the centers of oil palm plantations, with a harvested area of 43,191 hectares and an annual production of 671,174 tons. The presence of Bugis migrants plays a significant role in the development of this sector. Since the seventeenth century, Bugis migration to this region has not only contributed to economic growth but also shaped unique social networks within a multicultural society. This phenomenon illustrates how Bugis migrants foster intercultural communication harmony in interacting with local ethnic groups such as Mandar, Baras, and Kaili, as well as with transmigrant communities from Java and Bali. Within a multicultural context,

intercultural communication harmony is essential for maintaining social cohesion, reducing potential conflicts, and strengthening social networks that support local economic development.

A review of the literature reveals research gaps concerning the communication patterns of Bugis migrants. First, ethnographic studies show that the Bugis are able to adapt to new environments, establish communities, and preserve their cultural identity (Pelras, 1996; Ridha, 2018). Second, studies on Bugis migration highlight their economic roles, particularly in land cultivation and trade, yet pay little attention to intercultural communication as a means of fostering social harmony (Acciaioli, 2017; Anggreni, 2020). Third, research on intercultural communication tends to focus on interethnic relations in urban contexts (Kaddi, 2018; Turistiati, 2019), but has not specifically examined the practices of Bugis migrants in oil palm plantation areas. Thus, the research gap lies in the lack of in depth studies on the forms of intercultural communication harmony practiced by Bugis migrants in Pasangkayu.

This study aims to describe the forms of intercultural communication harmony practiced by Bugis migrants in building social networks within the oil palm plantation areas of Baras District, Pasangkayu Regency. The focus is intended to fill the gaps in previous studies, particularly in exploring how intercultural communication practices contribute to harmonious social integration within ethnic diversity. By uncovering these forms of communication, the study seeks to contribute to the development of intercultural communication theory as well as to the practice of multicultural-based community development.

The background of this research rests on the argument that intercultural communication harmony among Bugis migrants in Pasangkayu is realized through communicative practices grounded in the cultural value of *siri'* (dignity/dignity) and the principle of "where the earth is trodden, there the sky is upheld." These values enable Bugis migrants to adapt to multicultural environments without losing their cultural identity. Accordingly, the hypothesis of this study is that intercultural communication harmony among Bugis migrants is reflected in patterns of interaction that emphasize mutual respect, the building of social solidarity, and the creation of inclusive social and economic networks within plantation-based communities.

Methodology

The unit of analysis in this study consisted of Bugis migrants residing in Baras District, Pasangkayu Regency, particularly individuals engaged in social and economic activities within oil palm plantation communities. The focus was directed toward the intercultural communication experiences of Bugis migrants in building social networks with members of other ethnic groups, including Mandar, Kaili, Javanese, Balinese, and other migrant communities. By focusing on individuals as the unit of analysis, the research sought to provide an in-depth understanding of communicative practices that reflect harmony in multicultural life. This research employed a qualitative design with a case study approach. A qualitative framework was chosen because it enables exploration of subjective meanings emerging from social interactions, while the case study approach was deemed appropriate to capture the complexity of intercultural communication phenomena

in a real-life setting. This design allows not only the description of empirical facts but also the interpretation of the meanings behind communicative practices, ensuring that the results can be critically assessed and compared with future studies.

Two types of data were utilized: primary and secondary. Primary data were collected from key informants, namely Bugis migrants residing in Balanti Village and surrounding areas in Baras District, along with community leaders, village officials, and non-Bugis residents who interact with Bugis migrants. Secondary data were obtained from official government documents, prior research reports, academic literature, and archives related to the demographic and economic development of Pasangkayu. These combined sources ensured triangulation and strengthened the reliability of findings. Data collection employed three complementary techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Participant observation was used to capture day-to-day interethnic interactions in plantation environments. In-depth interviews followed a semi-structured format, enabling informants to openly share their experiences while ensuring comparability across respondents. FGDs were conducted to elicit collective perspectives from Bugis migrants and other ethnic groups regarding intercultural communication practices. All interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded with prior consent from participants. Detailed field notes were also taken to supplement the recordings. These procedures were designed to provide sufficient documentation for replication.

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which involves three systematic stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by categorizing information relevant to intercultural communication and social networking practices. Data display was organized into narratives, tables, and verbatim excerpts to preserve authenticity and transparency. Conclusion drawing was performed iteratively, linking empirical findings to theoretical frameworks on intercultural communication and identity negotiation. This multi-stage analysis enhances validity and replicability of the results. This study involved human participants and was conducted in compliance with ethical research standards. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were assured that their participation was voluntary, their responses would remain confidential, and the data would be used solely for academic purposes. Ethical clearance was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Tadulako University under approval code [insert code here]. All data supporting the findings of this study including interview transcripts, FGD summaries, and field notes are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. No restrictions apply to the availability of these materials. As this is a qualitative study, no large datasets or computer code were generated. Any additional protocols or instruments (e.g., interview guides) will also be provided to readers to enable replication or future comparative studies.

Result and Discussion

Openness in Social Interaction

Field observations in Balanti Village show a high degree of openness among Bugis migrants in forming social relations. They do not confine themselves to co-ethnics, but actively involve Javanese, Balinese, and NTT workers in oil palm–related activities. This is particularly evident during harvests, where Bugis landowners offer equal opportunities to workers of all ethnic backgrounds. As one informant, Hj. Radde, stated in Bugis:

“Iya nasaba’ tena mupabbeda bedai tau, narekko mupada siri’na nasaba’ gau’na pura na to Bugis, pura natudangeng. Mappada gau’ engka rekko nasaba’ malempu.”

“Yes, because we do not discriminate against others; as long as we share the value of *siri’* (dignity). Bugis people have been taught this since long ago. Everyone can work together, provided they are honest.”

Table 1: Forms of Social Openness in Everyday Life

Dimension of Openness	Field Practice	Social Implication
Inclusive labor recruitment	Oil palm harvest teams include workers from Java, Bali, and NTT	Interethnic ties form organically
Equality at work	Wages paid without ethnic differentiation	Cross-cultural trust is nurtured
Cross-language communication	Indonesian used as a <i>lingua franca</i>	Inclusivity increases; social distance declines

These data indicate that openness is not merely an attitude but a daily social procedure. Three patterns stand out: (1) joint work practices that disregard ethnic background; (2) equality as a guiding principle, with wages tied to contribution, reducing jealousy and conflict; and (3) communicative openness, reinforced by the use of Indonesian to ensure clarity of instructions and shared norms.

During harvests in Baras, teams routinely cut across ethnic boundaries. Bugis owners or foremen recruit workers from Java, Bali, NTT, Mandar, and Kaili according to plot needs, physical capacity, and equipment availability. Before dawn, coordinators assign roles fruit cutters (*dodos*), loose-fruit collectors, FFB haulers, and truck drivers and work proceeds in sync. Repeated joint routines foster interethnic solidarity: people help free stuck tools, rotate carrying heavy bunches, and share raincoats when the weather shifts. As a Bugis worker emphasized:

“Mappada gau’ni tau narekko engka’ panen, de’na mupabbeda bedai.”

“When there is a harvest, everyone works together; no one is treated differently.”

Transparent, contribution-based remuneration underpins trust. Calculations (e.g., piece-rates per hectare/ton or per bunch) are set upfront and recorded in logbooks or digital lists. After weighing, payments are made in stages (advance + settlement) with mutually agreed quality/weight adjustments at the scales, minimizing suspicion. One informant noted:

“Mupadatta’ jaji nasaba’ gau’.”

“Your share is received according to your work.”

Openness in Economic Activities

Bugis migrants practice economic openness by recruiting across ethnic lines, rotating tasks, and sharing proceeds proportionally. Another worker explained

“Mappada gau’ni tau, narekko engka panen. Tena mupabeda bedai, mupadatta’ jaji. Iyya nasaba’ mupau’ siri’.”

“When there is a harvest, everyone works together. No one is discriminated against, and everyone gets their share because we all uphold *siri’*.”

Table 2: Openness in Economic Activities

Dimension	Field Practice	Social Implication
Collective labor	Interethnic participation in harvest teams	Multietnic economic solidarity
Fair revenue sharing	Proceeds distributed by contribution	Social jealousy is reduced
Working language	Indonesian for coordination	Smooth interethnic communication

In practice, recruitment is open to anyone who can meet safety rules and output targets. Coordination starts at dawn; teams move simultaneously. Joint routines create a “productive encounter” space in which economic cooperation blends with everyday sociability. Transparent revenue sharing anchored in records all parties can verify reduces distributive disputes before they escalate into identity issues.

Indonesian functions as the lingua franca throughout safety briefings, plot assignment, equipment distribution. Quick hazard alerts may shift briefly into Bugis for speed, then revert to Indonesian for clarity. As one foreman put it:

“Mupake Bahasa Indonesia narekko mupature’ arajang, supaya seddi’ pahammi.”

“We use Indonesian for instructions so everyone understands.”

Openness in Everyday Communication

Language is a crucial instrument of openness. The community uses Indonesian with non-Bugis counterparts while retaining Bugis in intimate or intra-group contexts showing flexibility in maintaining identity and building inclusive communication. A youth noted:

“Mupau’ Bugis rekko’ engka’ to Mandar, to Jawa, mupake bahasa Indonesia... mupatabe’ siri’na, mupau’ malempu gau’.”

“When there are Mandar or Javanese, Bugis people use Indonesian to show respect and ensure honest communication.”

Table 3: Openness in Everyday Communication

Communication Aspect	Field Practice	Social Implication
Lingua franca	Indonesian with other ethnic groups	Facilitates interethnic interaction
Language maintenance	Bugis used in intra-Bugis settings	Cultural identity is preserved
Flexible code-switching	Language shifts by audience/context	Communication harmony is sustained

In families, Bugis is maintained to nurture intimacy and transmit values of *siri’* na *pacce*; in public or mixed settings, conversation shifts to Indonesian without prompting.

This inclusive language management reduces misinterpretation, accelerates coordination, and supports safety and efficiency.

Solidarity in Community Life

Solidarity is a hallmark of Bugis social interaction in Baras and extends beyond co-ethnics. Community members join collective works, support disaster responses, and participate in others’ life-cycle ceremonies. As a Bugis hamlet head explained:

“Narekko engka malaweng tau, mupada gau’na tau... Mappalolongeng ri banngasa’na, de’na mupabeda’ bedai to ana-ana suku.”

“When someone suffers, everyone moves to help... In floods, all assist without distinguishing ethnicity.”

Table 4:Forms of Social Solidarity among Bugis in Baras

Form of Solidarity	Field Practice	Social Implication
Mutual aid (<i>gotong royong</i>)	Repairing village roads, public facilities, and farms	Strengthens interethnic ties
Disaster solidarity	Joint flood relief by Bugis and non-Bugis	Increases multiethnic social cohesion
Social participation	Attending and assisting others’ ceremonies	Builds a sense of togetherness

Solidarity is enacted, not merely proclaimed. Three consistent patterns emerge: cultural values of *siri’ na pacce* motivate helping behavior; interethnic participation in social activities nurtures shared belonging; and solidarity widens relational networks, reinforcing cohesion.

Solidarity through *Gotong royong*

Routine collective works road repairs, cleaning drains, renovating public facilities bring diverse groups into practical cooperation. Indonesian serves as the working language, while lighter banter may shift to local languages to ease interaction. Visible, shared 成果 (smooth roads, clear ditches) generate collective satisfaction and a shared sense of ownership.

Table 5: Solidarity in *Gotong royong*

Activity	Field Practice	Social Implication
Road works	Interethnic road repair	Fosters togetherness
Facility upkeep	Building/repairing mosques, village halls	Strengthens shared ownership
Village sanitation	Drain cleaning, environmental care	Reduces social distance

When floods strike, rapid coordination occurs via village WhatsApp groups and ad-hoc posts. Teams monitor water levels, deploy boats/pick-ups, evacuate vulnerable residents, and run public kitchens. Indonesian is used for general instructions; quick alerts may switch to Bugis for faster response. Donations of food, clothing, and supplies flow from Bugis and non-Bugis alike; distributions are logged for fairness.

Table 6. Disaster Response Solidarity

Phase	Field Practice	Social Implication
Evacuation	Joint rescue of flood-affected households	Heightened sense of safety
Emergency aid	Interethnic food & clothing support	Stronger multiethnic cohesion
Recovery	Collective home repairs	Solidarity that transcends ethnicity

Bugis people routinely attend weddings, rituals, and religious events of other ethnic groups, adjusting etiquette and symbols to the host’s norms. This turns ceremonies into effective cross cultural learning spaces.

Table 7: Social-Cultural Solidarity

Form	Field Practice	Social Implication
Event participation	Bugis join others’ weddings/rituals	Builds emotional bonds
Religious occasions	Respecting and assisting at others’ events	Fosters social tolerance
Shared etiquette	Adapting dress, speech, and food norms	Deepens cultural integration

Mosques, churches, and temples stand side by side in Balanti and are jointly respected. Interethnic marriages (e.g., Bugis–Kaili, Bugis–Mandar) further expand kinship networks and erode ethnic barriers. As community leader H. Mustamin observed:

“Masigi, gereja, pura mupabeda tau... Mappalolongeng... mupahormatengi agama to lino.”

“Mosque, church, and temple are respected by everyone... We help one another and dignity all religions.”

Table 8: Tolerance and Social Integration

Dimension	Field Practice	Social Implication
Inter-religious tolerance	Co-located and respected houses of worship	Sustains interfaith peace
Inter-faith relations	Mutual attendance and assistance	Tightens multiethnic relations
Interethnic marriage	Bugis–Kaili, Bugis–Mandar, others	Broadens cross-cultural kinship

These practices demonstrate that tolerance and interethnic marriage are key conduits of integration. Respect for religious symbols tempers sectarian tensions, while marriage builds durable bridging ties.

Multicultural Social Harmony

Daily life in Baras is marked by routine, low-friction interethnic interaction across economic, social, and cultural spheres. Disagreements are handled through quick neighborhood deliberations that focus on issues rather than identities.

Table 9: Multicultural Social Harmony

Aspect	Field Practice	Social Implication
Everyday multiculturalism	Conflict-free daily interaction	Peaceful, inclusive community
Bugis cultural values	<i>Siri’ na pacce</i> as ethical baseline	Identity preserved with openness
Social integration	Tolerance & interethnic marriage	Stronger multiethnic cohesion

In sum, openness, equality, and inclusive communication anchored in *siri'* na *paccet* translate into replicable social procedures: transparent wage systems, interethnic team formation, Indonesian as lingua franca, cross-participation in rituals, rapid joint disaster response, and kinship expansion through interethnic marriage. Together, these practices sustain bridging social capital and stabilize multicultural harmony in plantation communities.

Interethnic Marriage as a Vehicle of Integration

Interethnic marriage not only unites two individuals but also widens multiethnic social networks, thereby strengthening community integration. In Baras, Bugis–Kaili marriages commonly combine two streamlined ceremonial sequences to dignity both families: the Bugis side foregrounds etiquette of receiving in-laws (*mappatabe'* formal salutations and apologies), while the Kaili side presents ceremonies they consider essential. Event committees are formed across families and neighbors of diverse ethnicities to manage catering, documentation, and security. Post-wedding, everyday relations intensify as both families now share the same “social address” visiting the sick, exchanging childcare, and facilitating access to plantation work. As one Bugis father noted:

“Engka' mappadakkalengngi to Bugis ma'buntingi to Kaili sitinaja' maselang.”
“When Bugis people marry Kaili, we respect and help each other.”

In Bugis–Mandar marriages, integration proceeds relatively smoothly because of linguistic and cultural proximity. Families often mix Bugis and Mandar in conversation, accelerating familiarity; shared symbolic norms forms of greeting elders, seating etiquette, menu choices reduce misunderstanding. As a Mandar in-law remarked:

“Sibali-bali tau Bugis Mandar masseddi' siri'na.”
“Bugis and Mandar are closely related; we both uphold siri' (dignity).”

After marriage, extended families function as intermediaries for non-Bugis/Mandar neighbors linking harvest jobs, settling minor plot disputes, and brokering hamlet activities. This symbolic closeness thins ethnic boundaries and demonstrates that difference does not preclude cooperation. Beyond Bugis–Kaili and Bugis–Mandar unions, marriages with Javanese, Balinese, NTT, and other groups proceed through negotiated adat–religious arrangements. Families typically agree on food layout (halal/non-halal), the sequence of prayers/speeches, and Indonesian as the guest-friendly working language. As the mother of a bride commented:

“Mupakatuo' sibawa etta-etta de'na mappili' suku.”
“We consult elders together without distinguishing ethnicity.”

With new kinship “bridges,” help-seeking expands, information and job opportunities circulate more widely, and children grow up in plural cultural milieus. As more households are connected by kin ties not merely address or occupation village cohesion deepens.

Table 10: Interethnic Marriage and Social Integration

Marriage Pattern	Field Practice	Social Implication
Bugis–Kaili	Dual, streamlined ceremonies; cross-family committees	Wider kinship bridges; routine mutual aid
Bugis–Mandar	Shared language/symbols ease integration	Lower risk of miscommunication
Other mixed unions	Negotiated adat–religion protocols; Indonesian as lingua franca	Broadens interethnic cooperation

Interreligious tolerance and interethnic marriage jointly produce robust social harmony in Baras. Daily life is characterized by low-friction interaction across economic, social, and cultural domains, indicating that Bugis migrants negotiate their identity inclusively. As a Bugis resident put it:

“Mupau’ Bugis rekko’ engka’ tau Mandar, tau Jawa, mupau’ sipatabe’, mupau’ malempu gau’... mupatabe’ siri’na.”

“With Mandar or Javanese, Bugis people show respect and honesty because we uphold siri’.”

Table 11: Multicultural Social Harmony

Aspect	Field Practice	Social Implication
Everyday multiculturalism	Conflict-free routines in fields, markets, neighborhood watch	Peaceful, inclusive community
Bugis cultural values	<i>Siri’ na pacce</i> as relational ethic	Identity preserved with openness
Social integration	Tolerance & interethnic marriage as binding mechanisms	Stronger multiethnic cohesion

Across plantations, markets, cafés, schools, clinics, and meeting halls, transactions proceed without foregrounding religion or ethnicity. Minor frictions (e.g., queueing at scales, parking during worship, facility schedules) are addressed swiftly through neighborly deliberation that targets the issue, not the identity. This inclusive rhythm, coupled with light-touch mediation, sustains a stable and welcoming multicultural order. Harmony rests on *siri’* (dignity/honesty, keeping one’s word, shame in harming others) and *pacce* (active empathy). In plantations, *siri’* undergirds fair pay; in villages, *pacce* mobilizes collective action during floods or bereavements. Bugis is maintained in intimate spaces for cultural transmission; when non-Bugis guests are present, conversation shifts to Indonesian for shared understanding. As a village elder summarized:

“Siri’na muelleng, pacce’na mupalolongeng.”

“Dignity keeps you honest; empathy moves you to help.”

Two institutional “binders” reinforce integration: (1) interfaith tolerance/mosque, church, and temple co-located and jointly stewarded; sound levels, traffic, and security negotiated communally; and (2) interethnic marriage/expanding kinship networks that anchor cooperation. As a Mandar in-law reiterated

"Sibali-bali tau masseddi'mi siri'na."

"We are kindred peoples who equally uphold siri'."

Discussion

This study illuminates three principal facets of intercultural communication among Bugis migrants in Barasopenness, solidarity, and tolerance. Openness appears in cross-ethnic participation in plantation work, everyday social interaction, and flexible language use. Solidarity manifests through *gotong royong* (repairing infrastructure), coordinated disaster response, and participation in others' socio-cultural events. Tolerance is evident in interfaith respect and interethnic marriages that enlarge kinship networks. Together, these dynamics reveal an inclusive communication pattern in which Bugis migrants do not confine themselves to ethnic identity but actively cultivate harmonious relations with other groups.

These phenomena are explicable through the internalized cultural values of *siri' na pacce*. *Siri'* teaches dignity and honesty; *pacce* emphasizes empathy and social concern. Jointly, they provide a moral foundation for respecting, assisting, and treating others as equals. Beyond culture, the multiethnic plantation context also necessitates open communication: as migrants, Bugis residents recognize that economic success depends on collaboration. Openness and solidarity are therefore both a moral choice and a strategic adaptation to thrive in a new environment.

The findings align with and extend prior research. Rahim (2018) shows that socio-economic openness is pivotal for Bugis adaptation in Kalimantan; Abdullah (2020) documents interethnic solidarity via everyday labor and *gotong royong* in Sumatra plantations; Abdurrahman (2019) highlights interethnic marriage as a vehicle of social integration among Bugis in Malaysia. Our contribution is to situate these processes in the local specificity of Baras, where openness, solidarity, and tolerance co-occur across three arenas: plantation economy, village social life, and family cultural spheres. The study thus adds micro-level, everyday practices from harvest teams to interfaith festivities that are underrepresented in earlier literature.

Theoretical implications follow. First, intercultural communication unfolds not only in formal settings but also in routine practices: harvest work, communal labor, and life-cycle ceremonies. Second, local cultural values can operate as effective social capital for maintaining harmony in multiethnic communities. Third, tolerance and interethnic marriage underscore that cultural identity is not static but negotiated and relational. Hence, multicultural harmony is built through repeated interaction that fuses local values with the practical necessities of living together.

Conclusion

Bugis migrants in Baras have successfully cultivated harmony in multicultural life through three main pillars: openness, solidarity, and tolerance. Openness is reflected in cross-ethnic socio-economic interactions, particularly in oil palm plantation activities. Solidarity is embodied in *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), disaster relief, and

participation in socio-cultural events. Tolerance is evident in mutual respect across religions and in interethnic marriages that expand kinship networks. These findings highlight that social harmony does not emerge automatically but is constructed through repeated intercultural communication practices grounded in the values of *siri' na pacce*.

This study makes important contributions to the field of intercultural communication and multiculturalism studies. First, it demonstrates how local cultural values can function as social capital in building cohesion within multiethnic societies. Second, it offers a micro-level approach by emphasizing everyday practices from oil palm harvesting and *gotong royong* to interethnic marriages as concrete forms of intercultural communication. Third, it enriches the literature by providing the specific context of Bugis migrants in Baras, which has received limited scholarly attention. Thus, this research not only adds empirical evidence but also broadens theoretical perspectives on strategies for fostering harmony in plural societies.

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