

Intercultural Communication Among Togale Women in South Halmahera: Adaptation, Resistance, and Identity Negotiation

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Abstract

This article reorganizes and strengthens the analysis of intercultural communication among Togale women in South Halmahera. The term Togale refers to a relational social category connecting Tobelo and Galela communities. It does not name a homogeneous ethnic block. The study examines how women negotiate gendered authority through adat, religion, kinship, livelihood, education, and post-conflict memory. The revised argument uses communication ethnography with a critical-postcolonial orientation. It also strengthens the discussion with recent literature on gender norms, women's empowerment, intercultural identity negotiation, indigenous relationality, religious communication, and peacebuilding. Field data came from interviews, participant observation, and documentation conducted in 2025. The analysis follows reflexive thematic analysis and uses Hymes's Speaking model, high-context communication, face negotiation theory, and communication accommodation theory. The findings show that Tobelo and Galela women share relational agency, but they use different symbolic resources. Tobelo women's public authority often grows through education, health work, church-related service, and family mediation. Galela women's public authority often grows through Islamic moral discourse, taklim participation, modesty norms, garden economy, and everyday da'wah. Adat practices such as salay, bobangu, sa'ali, and o dailako protect women's dignity while also regulating speech, mobility, and bodily conduct. The article develops the concept of indigenous gender negotiation to describe culturally grounded agency that works through tradition, religion, and relational ethics rather than outside them. This concept contributes to intercultural communication and multicultural da'wah studies by showing how women sustain moral identity, social coexistence, and practical authority in a post-conflict Muslim-Christian setting.

Keywords

intercultural communication; Togale women; gender construction; indigenous women; identity negotiation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gender construction among indigenous women cannot be explained only through a general contrast between men and women. It must be read through everyday communication, kinship, religious ethics, customary law, economic labor, and historical memory (Butler, 1990; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). This problem is important in South Halmahera because Togale women live at the meeting point of Tobelo and Galela identities. They communicate across adat, Christianity, Islam, family obligations, agricultural work, education, and post-conflict social relations. Their agency, therefore, appears in small communicative acts: who may speak in family deliberation, who may interpret custom, who mediates tension, and who receives moral recognition in public life. The term Togale refers to a social category that connects the Tobelo and Galela communities. It is not a single homogeneous ethnic block. Tobelo communities are commonly associated with Christian traditions and the historical influence of the Nederlandsche Zendinggenootschap mission. Galela communities are commonly associated with



Islam, religious gatherings, taklim networks, and customary life shaped by Islamic moral norms. These differences matter because they shape the communicative forms through which women negotiate status. Tobelo women's public legitimacy often grows through education, church-related service, and health work. Galela women's public legitimacy often grows through family morality, modesty, participation in taklim, Islamic advice, and community-based da'wah. The two communities also share a broader history of North Maluku, marked by kinship, adat, agriculture, and the 1999-2000 conflict (Al Qurtuby, 2016; Platenkamp, 1984, 1990; Sabban & Mahmud, 2022; Wilson, 2008). The context also requires valid regional data. BPS Statistics for Halmahera Selatan Regency presents South Halmahera as a regency with diverse socio-demographic, geographic, economic, educational, health, and welfare indicators (Regency, 2025a, 2025b). This statistical context does not replace ethnography. It helps locate field findings within a broader social setting in which gender, religion, livelihood, and public service shape daily interactions. The revised manuscript, therefore, links micro-level speech events to macro-level regional conditions without turning a qualitative study into a demographic survey.

Da'wah relevance lies in three issues. First, da'wah is treated as religious and social communication that invites ethical conduct through wisdom, advice, and community care (Ilaihi, 2010; Munir & Ilaihi, 2006). Second, Galela women's religious communication shows how Islamic da'wah works in everyday gender relations, not only in formal preaching. Taklim forums, family advice, moral speech, and women's informal mediation function as spaces where Islamic values meet adat and social change. Third, the Togale case contributes to multicultural da'wah because religious communication takes place in a post-conflict region where Muslim and Christian communities must maintain social trust. Da'wah in this setting cannot be separated from moderation, interreligious sensitivity, and respect for local culture. The theoretical problem is more specific than the issue of the lack of studies on North Maluku women. Existing gender and communication studies often explain women's position in terms of patriarchy, empowerment, communication style, or public participation (Acker, 1990; Cislighi & Heise, 2020; Kabeer, 1999). These concepts are useful, but they do not fully explain how indigenous women gain communicative authority while preserving the moral language of adat and religion. Intercultural communication theory also often focuses on contact between cultural groups, yet pays less attention to gendered communication within indigenous communities that already contain religious differences, customary hierarchies, and post-conflict memories (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Hall, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 1988). The Togale case, therefore, asks how women negotiate identity and voice when the cultural resources that protect them also regulate them.

This study addresses that theoretical gap through the concept of indigenous gender negotiation. The concept refers to a culturally situated process in which indigenous women use adat, religion, kinship, livelihood, and everyday speech to expand recognition, participation, and communicative authority. The concept differs from strategic compliance because it is not only a tactic of survival under domination. It differs from pragmatic accommodation because it not only adjusts communication to avoid conflict. It also differs from agentic traditionalism because its main field is not a single religious tradition. Indigenous gender negotiation works through overlapping indigenous norms, intercultural contact, and post-conflict social life. It shows how women preserve relational ethics while reinterpreting the boundaries that define them. The analytical framework combines four elements. Gender construction theory explains how social roles become normalized through repeated practice (Butler, 1990; Ridgeway, 2009; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Communication ethnography explains how gender meanings appear in speech events, codes, settings, participants, norms, and genres (Hymes, 1974; Spradley, 1980). Postcolonial feminist thought helps examine whose voice becomes audible when

indigenous women speak within unequal structures of adat, religion, ethnicity, and state institutions (Spivak, 1988). Intercultural communication theory explains how women manage difference, face, context, and accommodation across Tobelo-Galela relations and Muslim-Christian encounters (Giles, 2016; Hall, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 2017). Together, these lenses guide the study of adaptation, resistance, and identity negotiation among Togale women.

Based on these fields, this article defines indigenous gender negotiation as a culturally situated process through which indigenous women use adat, religion, kinship, livelihood, and everyday communication to expand recognition, participation, and authority. It differs from strategic compliance because it is not only about survival under domination. It differs from pragmatic accommodation in that it is not merely an adjustment to reduce friction. It differs from agentive traditionalism in that it draws on multiple indigenous and intercultural resources, rather than a single religious tradition. The concept centers on communication events in which women reinterpret tradition while remaining socially recognized as legitimate members of their community.

2. METHODS

This study uses qualitative communication ethnography with a critical-postcolonial orientation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hymes, 1974; Spradley, 1980). Communication ethnography is well-suited to the study because the main data comprise speech events, symbolic practices, customary codes, religious expressions, and relational meanings in the everyday lives of Togale women. The critical-postcolonial orientation keeps the analysis attentive to indigenous and gendered voices. It treats women's narratives, silences, hesitations, and practical negotiations as evidence of agency under unequal social conditions. Fieldwork was conducted in South Halmahera in 2025. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews explored family communication, garden labor, religious participation, customary restrictions, education, health work, and community mediation. Observations focused on family interaction, religious meetings, customary encounters, garden-related communication, informal women's networks, market contact, and public community events. Documentation included local customary notes, regional statistical publications, community materials, and relevant literature on Halmahera, gender, da'wah, and intercultural communication.

Participants were selected purposively. The selection considered involvement in Togale social life, knowledge of Tobelo or Galela adat, religious or community participation, and experience in cross-cultural communication. The usable field archive contains ten primary interlocutors. Six were Togale women: three from Tobelo social settings and three from Galela social settings. Four were supporting interlocutors from religious, customary, education, or health roles, and from village or community roles. The revision uses participant codes and fieldwork notation. Interview data appear as field evidence. Published literature appears only in the reference list. The Tobelo-Galela distinction is retained throughout the analysis. Togale is used as an umbrella category only when a pattern is shared. Tobelo or Galela is specified when the field evidence shows a religious or cultural difference. The comparison remains exploratory because the available field archive did not consistently record metadata on age, clan, education, and residence for every interlocutor. This limitation is acknowledged and should guide future research design.

Table 1. Participant profile and field data function

Code	Interview source	Available profile	Function in analysis
P01	Abu, A. H.	Togale woman from Tobelo social setting. Christian background where stated. Involved in family, education, health, or community life.	Explained public service, church-related moral values, family mediation, and changing domestic-public role divisions.
P02	Bahtiar, K. T.	Togale woman from Tobelo social setting. Christian background where stated. Involved in family, education, health, or community life.	Explained public service, church-related moral values, family mediation, and changing domestic-public role divisions.
P03	Djafar, S.	Togale woman from Tobelo social setting. Christian background where stated. Involved in family, education, health, or community life.	Explained public service, church-related moral values, family mediation, and changing domestic-public role divisions.
P04	Gulingan, A.	Togale woman from Galela social setting. Muslim background where stated. Involved in family, garden economy, religious groups, or community networks.	Explained taklim participation, modesty norms, da'wah communication, garden-based savings, and informal influence.
P05	Kasuba, G.	Togale woman from Galela social setting. Muslim background where stated. Involved in family, garden economy, religious groups, or community networks.	Explained taklim participation, modesty norms, da'wah communication, garden-based savings, and informal influence.
P06	Mole, Y.	Togale woman from Galela social setting. Muslim background where stated. Involved in family, garden economy, religious groups, or community networks.	Explained taklim participation, modesty norms, da'wah communication, garden-based savings, and informal influence.
P07	Rauf, R.	Religious figure familiar with Togale customary and religious life.	Explained moral language, respect for women, religious legitimation, and norms of speech.
P08	Sibula, N.	Customary or community figure familiar with salay, bobangu, sa'ali, and o dailako.	Explained adat rules, symbolic protection, sanctions, and social hierarchy.
P09	Sinu, N.	Education or health worker from the field setting.	Explained women's professional participation and public credibility.
P10	Zein Sandra Matoro	Village or community official from the field setting.	Explained political participation, village leadership norms, and informal women's communication networks.

Source: primary data, 2026

The analysis followed reflexive thematic analysis. The researcher first reread interview notes, observation notes, and documents. Second, initial codes were generated from segments related to adat, religion, speech, gender expectation, livelihood, public participation, and post-conflict relations. Third, codes were organized into candidate themes. Fourth, themes were reviewed against the data and research question. Fifth, themes were defined and named. Sixth, the analysis was written by linking empirical evidence to communication ethnography, postcolonial feminism, and intercultural communication theory (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017). Trustworthiness was strengthened through method triangulation, source triangulation, reflexive memoing, and, when possible, member-oriented clarification (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018). Interview evidence was compared with observation and documentation. The researcher also checked whether a claim applied to Tobelo, Galela, or both. Ethical care was maintained by using participant codes and by avoiding personal names in the findings. This procedure follows qualitative reporting principles that require transparency, reflexivity, evidence discipline, and contextualized interpretation (Dodgson, 2019; Levitt et al., 2018).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that women in Tobelo and Galela share a relational model of agency. They maintain household order, care for children, support kinship relations, protect family dignity, work in gardens, participate in religious groups, teach, assist health services, trade, mediate family conflict, and influence community decisions through informal networks. This pattern confirms that gender is not only a division of roles. It is a communicative system that tells women when to speak, how to speak, where to stand, which register to use, and which moral language makes their speech acceptable. Tobelo women more often gain public credibility through education, church-related service, health work, and the language of family responsibility. Field interviews described women teachers and health workers as figures whose authority comes from competence, service, and trust rather than from formal customary leadership alone (Abu, 2024; Sibula, 2025). This pattern connects women's public legitimacy to the historical importance of schooling and Christian institutional life in Tobelo communities (Mahmood, 2001; Platenkamp, 1984).

Galela women more often gain legitimacy through Islamic moral communication, modest conduct, participation in taklim, garden-based contributions, and family advice. Women use religious language to explain responsibility, patience, mutual help, respect for elders, and care for children. A Galela participant explained that women often discuss family needs, children's education, and social problems in religious gatherings before those issues enter broader community deliberation (Gulingan, 2025). This practice links gender negotiation with da'wah because Islamic values circulate through everyday communication, not only through formal sermons. The shared Togale pattern is relational agency. The difference lies in symbolic resources. Tobelo women's authority often draws from education, service, and Christian communal ethics. Galela women's authority often draws on Islamic advice, modesty, taklim networks, and da'wah as a form of moral communication. This comparison prevents the analytical collapse of two ethnoreligious communities into a single undifferentiated category.

3.1 Adat, Symbolic Protection, and the Regulation of Women's Bodies

The strongest evidence of gendered communication appears in adat practices around salay, women's clothing, male escort norms, bobangu, sa'ali, and o dailako. Field notes describe salay as a place where garden products or women's belongings may be placed. Men who are not socially

authorized should not take or damage those belongings. Violations may invite bobangu, a customary sanction that marks the act as disrespectful (Rauf, 2025). The rule is not only about property. It communicates moral boundaries around women, family honor, and social propriety. A similar logic appears in rules concerning women's clotheslines. Some male actors should not touch women's personal clothing when the owner is absent or working in the garden. Participants explained this rule through concerns about sexual suspicion, gossip, and spiritual anxiety (Kasuba, 2025; Rauf, 2025). The male escort norm also places men in front of women during certain forms of travel or public movement. Community members interpret this as protection. The same practice also communicates that women's bodies and mobility remain subject to public moral reading.

These findings show the ambivalence of adat. Adat protects dignity, regulates distance, and defines respect. It also disciplines women's bodies, speech, and movement. The point is not to label Togale adat as either oppressive or egalitarian. The field data show both dimensions at once. Women are not only objects of the adat rules. They interpret them, transmit them to children, invoke them when seeking protection, and adjust them in response to education, migration, work, and interreligious contact. This ambivalence is central to indigenous gender negotiation. Women do not gain agency only by rejecting adat. They often gain agency by interpreting adat in ways that protect dignity while opening room for participation. A rule that once defined women's movement through male protection can be reframed as a demand that men respect women's safety and labor. A rule that protects clothes and garden belongings can become a language for recognizing women's economic contribution.

3.2 Dailako, Garden Labor, and Economic Communication

The concept of o dailako explains family communication. Field interviews described o dailako as an arrangement of roles between husband and wife, sons and daughters, and older and younger family members (Rauf, 2025). Men are expected to provide protection, financing, and external links. Women are expected to maintain affection, household organization, children's emotional education, and daily economic order. The concept is not static. Participants stated that older arrangements are still recognized but are now adjusted by education, migration, women's work, and changing family needs.

Garden labor gives women an important communicative and economic position. Field material distinguishes Darius from North. Darius refers to short-cycle crops such as vegetables, chili, tomato, and tubers. North refers to longer-cycle crops such as coconut, cocoa, and nutmeg. Darius is often associated with women and daily household needs, while North is more often associated with men and larger financial planning. Yet the boundary is shifting. A Galela participant explained that women's darius crops are no longer treated only as subsistence goods. They may serve as savings for school fees, housing repairs, religious travel, or emergency expenses (Matoro, 2025). This shift changes the meaning of women's labor. Garden work becomes economic communication. It signals reliability, competence, and decision-making capacity. When women contribute to school fees or major family needs, they gain a stronger position in household deliberation. This finding refines gender construction theory. Women's domestic and agricultural work not only reproduces traditional roles. Under changing economic conditions, it can become a resource for voice, bargaining, and recognition (Cornwall, 2016; Kabeer, 1999; Pearse & Connell, 2016).

The finding also relates to post-conflict communication. Gardens, markets, and small trade create contact zones where women from different religious and ethnic backgrounds exchange goods, information, and trust. In the Moluccas, women have often played practical roles in rebuilding social

connections after conflict (Al Qurtuby, 2014; Hartoyo et al., 2020). The Togale case adds that daily livelihood communication, not only formal peace programs, helps sustain social recovery.

3.3 Da'wah, Religious Communication, and Galela Women's Identity Negotiation

The revised analysis places da'wah inside the empirical field. In the Galela settings, da'wah appears through everyday moral communication. Women participate in taklim groups, family advice, child education, modest dress practices, and mutual help. These practices communicate Islamic values as social norms. They also shape how women speak about obedience, dignity, responsibility, patience, public participation, and respect for elders. Da'wah in this context is not reduced to male preaching from a pulpit. It is also a gendered practice of social care. Galela women circulate religious messages in households, women's circles, garden exchanges, and community visits. A participant described religious gatherings as places where women exchange advice on family conflict, children's schooling, and relations with neighbors (Gulingan, 2025). This finding connects da'wah with community empowerment, moral education, and social harmony.

Da'wah communication has an ambivalent role in gender construction. Islamic moral language can strengthen women's authority as moral educators, family advisors, and community mediators. It can also reinforce expectations that women must be modest, careful in speech, and responsible for family morality. The analytical issue is not whether da'wah liberates or restricts women in a simple way. The issue is how women use religious communication to negotiate authority within accepted moral boundaries. This negotiation becomes important in a Muslim-Christian region. Galela women's da'wah practices operate near Tobelo, Christian social life, market contact, kinship relations, and post-conflict memory. For this reason, multicultural da'wah must use language that does not intensify religious boundaries. The field material suggests that women's everyday da'wah often works through care, advice, and practical solidarity. These forms of communication support religious identity while maintaining local coexistence.

3.4 Hymes's Speaking Model Applied to Togale Women's Communication

Hymes's Speaking model explains why the Togale case should be treated as an instance of intercultural communication. The communication field involves Tobelo-Galela difference, Muslim-Christian contact, adat-religion translation, and movement between family, garden, religious, market, and state spaces. Women often use high-context communication. Meaning travels through silence, order of speaking, bodily distance, clothing, respect terms, and the presence or absence of elders. Direct opposition is not always the main sign of resistance. Resistance may appear as careful reinterpretation, selective silence, indirect advice, or practical action.

Table 2. SPEAKING model applied to Togale women's communication events

Element	Field application	Analytical meaning
Setting and scene	Family houses, gardens, markets, taklim forums, church-related service spaces, customary ceremonies, and village meetings.	Gendered authority changes by place. Women speak more freely in family, religious, and informal networks than in male-dominated formal offices.
Participants	Tobelo women, Galela women, husbands, elders, religious leaders, customary figures, village	Authority depends on age, gender, religion, kinship, and moral credibility.

	actors, children, and cross-religious neighbors.	
Ends	Maintaining dignity, solving family issues, preserving adat, teaching children, supporting livelihood, and mediating social tension.	Women seek relational order and practical recognition.
Act sequence	Advice, indirect correction, respectful silence, negotiation, story-telling, moral explanation, sanctions, and careful public speech.	Agency appears in gradual and coded communication, not only in explicit resistance.
Key	Polite, indirect, respectful, protective, cautious, and firm when family welfare or dignity is threatened.	High-context communication shapes how resistance becomes socially acceptable.
Instrumentalities	Tobelo and Galela speech forms, Indonesian, religious idioms, adat terms, non-verbal conduct, clothing, and ritual presence.	Identity is negotiated through verbal and non-verbal codes.
Norms	Respect for elders, avoidance of shame, protection of women's dignity, marital propriety, religious modesty, and kinship responsibility.	Norms protect women and regulate them at the same time.
Genre	Customary advice, family deliberation, taklim discussion, church or service talk, market exchange, and mediation narratives.	Genres determine who may speak and what counts as legitimate speech.

Source: data processed, 2026

3.5 Facework, Accommodation, and High-Context Negotiation

Face negotiation theory helps explain why women's agency is relational. Women protect their own dignity and the faces of their husbands, elders, and the community. Open confrontation may be avoided because it can damage kinship harmony. Yet, face concern does not remove agency. It changes its form. A woman may influence family decisions through repeated advice, control of household resources, garden income, or trusted moral speech. Communication accommodation theory shows how women adjust language and tone across religious, ethnic, and institutional sets. Accommodation supports social harmony, but it can also mask unequal expectations when women must adapt more than men do. The findings, therefore, extend intercultural communication theory by showing that intercultural negotiation can occur inside an indigenous social field. The main boundary is not only between national cultures. It is also between adat and religion, Tobelo and Galela, Islam and Christianity, household and village office, formal authority and informal influence.

4. Discussion

Gendered Intercultural Communication and Women's Relational Agency

The findings show that intercultural communication among Togale women is not merely an exchange of messages between the Tobelo and Galela communities. It functions as a social arena where women negotiate identity, authority, dignity, and participation. Togale women live within intersecting structures of adat, religion, kinship, garden labor, education, social service, and post-conflict memory. Therefore, women's position cannot be explained only through a domestic-public division of roles. It must be understood as the result of daily communicative practices that regulate who may speak, when women may speak, what moral language makes speech acceptable, and which social spaces give legitimacy to women's voices. This finding supports Butler, 1990) view that gender is formed through repeated social practices, and Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) argument that gender status gains power through social judgments about appropriateness, competence, and authority.

In the Togale context, gendered communication appears through salay, bobangu, sa'ali, o dailako, the division between darius and north, taklim forums, church-related service, education, and family mediation. Field data indicate that women do not always express agency through open resistance. They often express it through indirect advice, management of garden income, children's education, health services, religious participation, and the ability to protect family dignity. This pattern is important because Togale women communicate within a high-context society. (Hall, 1976) explains that in high-context communication, meaning is often carried through social cues, relationships, silence, speaking order, and norms of propriety. This pattern is evident in how Togale women regulate their voices, choose the right moment to speak, adjust their language in the presence of customary or religious figures, and offer subtle advice to influence family decisions (Hymes, 1974).

The ethnography of communication helps clarify why women's communication must be read through setting, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genre. At home, women have more room to manage the daily household economy, children's education, and emotional relationships. In gardens and markets, women build economic communication, exchange information, and maintain cross-community networks. In taklim forums or church-related service spaces, women gain moral and social legitimacy. In customary meetings or village deliberations, women's voices often appear indirectly through husbands, relatives, religious figures, or informal networks. This means that women's authority shifts according to the communicative setting. Gender, in this sense, is not only a structure. It is also a communicative practice that changes across social spaces.

Adat, Resistance, and the Ambivalence of Women's Protection

The distinction between Tobelo and Galela women is a central finding. Tobelo women more often gain public legitimacy through education, health work, church-related service, and family mediation. Interviews with Abu (2024) and Sibula (2025) show that women who work as teachers or health workers gain authority because of their competence, closeness to family needs, and social service. This legitimacy does not always lead to women holding formal customary leadership positions. However, it gives them room to influence families and communities. This finding shows that Tobelo women's authority grows through the combination of education, public service, and Christian communal ethics. (Ridgeway, 2009; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) helps explain this process because social status is not shaped only by gender. It is also shaped by recognition of skills and contributions that the community considers valuable.

Galela women show a different pattern. They more often gain legitimacy through Islamic communication, participation in taklim, modesty norms, garden labor, and family advice. Interview data from Gulingan (2025) indicate that taklim functions not only as a space for religious learning. It also serves as a social forum for communication where women discuss family conflict, children's education, household finances, and relations

with neighbors. In this context, da'wah does not appear only as formal preaching. It appears as a form of moral communication that guides behavior, strengthens solidarity, and shapes women's social identity. Munir & Ilaihi (2006) define da'wah as a communication process that invites people to goodness through wisdom, advice, and social care. The Galela case extends this understanding because women are not only recipients of da'wah. They also become everyday da'wah actors through parenting, advice, mutual help, and family mediation. This comparison confirms that Togale should not be treated as a single homogeneous ethnic category. Togale is better understood as a relational category that connects Tobelo and Galela experiences. Both groups exhibit relational agency, but they draw on different symbolic resources. Tobelo women more often use the language of education, service, and Christian communal ethics. Galela women more often use the language of Islam, taklim, modesty, and everyday da'wah. This distinction addresses the analytical risk of merging Tobelo and Galela into one general category. From an intercultural communication perspective, this finding shows that cultural contact occurs not only between local communities and external groups. It also occurs within local society through religious difference, adat, historical memory, and post-conflict experience (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2017).

The adat practices of salay and bobangu, along with rules concerning women's clothing, reveal the ambivalent nature of adat in gender construction. Field data show that salay functions as a symbolic space that protects women's belongings, garden products, and dignity. Men who are not socially authorized may not take, damage, or touch women's belongings placed in this space. Violations may lead to bobangu as a customary sanction. On one side, this rule protects women from harassment, suspicion, and violations of family honor. On the other side, it also shows that women's bodies, clothing, and mobility remain subject to public moral surveillance. Interviews with (Kasuba, 2025; Rauf, 2025) show that prohibitions against touching women's clothes relate to concerns about gossip, sexual suspicion, and spiritual anxiety. Thus, adat works in two directions. It protects women, but it also regulates their bodies and movement.

Adat, Protection, and Women's Resistance within Moral Boundaries

This ambivalence forms the basis of indigenous gender negotiation. The concept explains that indigenous women do not always gain agency by openly rejecting tradition. They often gain agency by reinterpreting tradition from within. In the case of salay, women can use adat as a moral basis to demand respect for their work, property, and dignity. In the male escort norm, women can reinterpret protection not as absolute control over mobility, but as men's responsibility to ensure women's safety. In this way, adat is not only a mechanism of restriction. It also becomes a moral language for claiming recognition. This analysis aligns with Spivak, 1988) postcolonial feminist concern with listening to women's voices within unequal structures without forcing them into external models of liberation.

The concept of o dailako further shows that the family is a key arena of gender negotiation. Interview data from Rauf (2025) describes o dailako as an arrangement of roles among husband and wife, sons and daughters, and older and younger family members. Men are associated with protection, financing, and external relations. Women are associated with affection, emotional education, household organization, and daily economic order. However, the data show that o dailako is not fixed. Education, migration, women's work, and household economic needs continue to reshape this concept. This finding supports Cislighi & Heise, 2020) argument that gender norms operate through social relations and may change when daily practices, resources, and recognition structures are also considered.

The division between Darius and North also shows the close link between economy and gendered communication. Darius refers to short-cycle crops such as vegetables, chili, tomato, and tubers. North refers to long-cycle crops such as coconut, cocoa, and nutmeg. In customary understanding, Darius is closer to women's work and daily needs, while North is more often associated with men and long-term financial planning. However,

interview data from Matoro (2025) show that women's dairy crops are no longer understood solely as subsistence goods. They may serve as savings for school fees, home repairs, religious travel, and emergency needs. This shift changes the meaning of women's labor. Garden work becomes a form of economic communication that signals competence, responsibility, and decision-making capacity. Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as the expansion of resources, agency, and achievements. In the Togale case, Darius becomes one of the resources that expands women's bargaining position within the household.

Religious Communication, Everyday Da'wah, and Post-Conflict Coexistence

The findings also carry post-conflict significance. Gardens, markets, taklim forums, church-related services, and family networks become spaces of cross-community communication. Women exchange garden products, price information, family news, and practical assistance. In North Maluku, where Muslim-Christian conflict has shaped social memory, such everyday communication helps maintain social trust. (Al Qurtuby, 2016; Wilson, 2008) show that post-conflict recovery is not shaped solely by formal policy. It also grows through daily social practices. The Togale case adds that women help sustain social relations through economic work, parenting, religious communication, and informal networks (Ting-Toomey, 2017). Face negotiation theory explains why Togale women often use indirect communication. They must protect their own face, the face of husbands, parents, customary figures, religious leaders, and the wider community. Open confrontation may damage harmony and produce shame. However, indirect communication does not mean the absence of agency. Women can influence decisions through repeated advice, household economic management, religious legitimacy, and emotional closeness with children and relatives. (Giles, 2016) Communication accommodation theory also helps explain how women adjust language, tone, and style when interacting with husbands, elders, religious figures, village officials, or neighbors from different religious backgrounds. Accommodation maintains harmony, but it also reveals inequality, as women often bear a heavier burden of adaptation.

Conceptually, this study argues that indigenous gender negotiation differs from strategic compliance, pragmatic accommodation, and agentive traditionalism. It not only describes women's strategic obedience within patriarchal structures. It also does not simply refer to communicative adjustment to avoid conflict. Indigenous gender negotiation explains how women use adat, religion, economic labor, kinship, and everyday communication to expand recognition and authority while maintaining cultural legitimacy. The main contribution of this study lies in showing how Togale women adapt, resist limitation, and reshape identity through communication that is subtle, contextual, and socially meaningful.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings have practical implications. Gender programs in South Halmahera should not measure women's public participation only through formal village offices. They should also recognize women's informal authority in households, gardens, markets, taklim groups, education, health work, and mediation. Programs that ignore these spaces may miss the actual routes through which women influence family and community decisions. Da'wah and religious moderation programs should treat Galela women as communicators, not only as recipients of guidance. Women's taklim groups, family advice, and practical solidarity can support ethical conduct and Muslim-Christian coexistence. Multicultural da'wah should therefore use local language, respect adat, avoid boundary-hardening rhetoric, and strengthen everyday cooperation. Customary institutions should also recognize the double character of protection. Practices that protect dignity can be retained while their restrictive effects are discussed openly. Men can be encouraged to interpret protective adat as responsibility for respect, safety, and cooperation rather than as permission to control women's mobility or speech. Empirically, Togale women's agency is visible in their everyday communication practices. They transmit mother tongue, oral stories,

moral values, and customary knowledge within family life, while also maintaining cultural symbols through dress, ritual conduct, and respectful speech. Practices such as *sa'ali* and *bubangu* show the ambivalent character of tradition: they preserve respect, hierarchy, and relational ethics, but also regulate women's speech, mobility, and bodily conduct. In political communication, women's influence is more visible in family deliberation, religious forums, community mediation, kinship networks, and informal negotiation than in formal village leadership.

The novelty of this study lies in its explanation of Togale women's agency as a form of indigenous gender negotiation within intercultural communication. Unlike studies that view women's agency mainly as resistance against tradition or adaptation to modernity, this research shows that Togale women negotiate both simultaneously. They preserve cultural values while reinterpreting them to gain social recognition, public participation, and communicative authority. Theoretically, this study enriches gender and intercultural communication studies by showing that tradition provides moral language, gender construction organizes social expectations, and intercultural politics determines whose voices are recognized in public decision-making. In practice, the findings suggest that gender programs in South Halmahera should recognize both formal and informal spaces for women's participation. Local government, customary leaders, religious institutions, and community organizations need to involve Togale women more meaningfully in village deliberation, cultural preservation, livelihood planning, education, and local decision-making. Future research should examine generational differences among Togale women, the role of digital communication in negotiating indigenous identity, and the influence of religious interpretation on women's agency in Christian and Muslim Togale communities. These directions can deepen understanding of how indigenous women negotiate gender, communication, and power in contemporary local societies.

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