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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Analysis of Placemaking in Religious-Based Regional Segregation

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Abstract

Maluku is a province in eastern Indonesia, famous for having a harmonious inter-religious life, one of which is because of the *panas pela* tradition that binds its people to live side by side like brothers and sisters, regardless of differences in belief. However, in 1999 a conflict arose in Maluku and created tension between Christian and Muslim residents. The impact is still clearly visible today in the segregation of residential areas based on religion. Apart from that, a small portion of the Christian people still choose to live in the middle of Muslim settlements. The same thing also applies to a small portion of the Muslim people who still live in Christian residential areas. The purpose of this study was to determine the form of placemaking of Christians and Muslims to create a comfortable and safe place to live even though they are in the middle of a religious group that has been involved in conflict with them. This study was conducted through a qualitative design using interview and map elicitation methods involving 10 respondents. The results revealed three main forms of placemaking for Ambon city residents, namely building positive interactions with neighbors of different religions (relational), reflecting on narratives and memories of the past (historical), and entrusting security and safety to God (spiritual). The findings offer valuable insights for local communities and authorities in developing strategies to promote inclusive, interfaith coexistence in areas affected by past conflict.

Keywords: Placemaking, Segregation, Christian, Muslim

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural country, rich in cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. This is why the nation embraces the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, meaning "unity in diversity." This serves as a call to Indonesian people to continue coexisting peacefully despite many differences that exist among them (Muhammad Mansyur et al., 2023). Maluku is one of the provinces in Indonesia that is renowned for its harmonious interfaith relationships. This is due to the cultural teachings of Maluku, which emphasize harmonious communal living. One of the traditions practiced by the people of Maluku to maintain this harmony is *panas-pela*. This ceremonial oath binds the community to live as siblings, irrespective of their religious differences (Dandirwalu, 2014).

Despite the strong sense of brotherhood within the community, conflict remains a possibility. In 1999, a conflict emerged in Maluku, particularly in the city of Ambon (hereafter referred to as the Ambon riots), which was one of the most significant conflicts in the region. This violence led to nearly 5,000 deaths, destruction of property, including churches and mosques, forced faith conversions, and marked a dark chapter in the history of the Republic of Indonesia (Indrawan & Putri, 2022). The Ambon riots, which occurred from January 19, 1999, to 2002, began as a conflict between a public transport driver and his colleague, who happened to be in a different religion, led to a violent altercation. However, due to continuous provocations, this initially criminal conflict escalated into a religious war between Christians and Muslims, lasting for several years (Bakri, 2015). One of the visible impacts that persists today is territorial segregation, wherein residential areas are divided based on religious affiliation. This segregation is evidenced through screenshots of maps from Google Maps, as well as testimonies from long-time residents of Ambon, including those who lived there during the riots (figure 1).

Another map of territorial segregation in Ambon was created by a cartographer, Abdurrahman AbdulMoneim. In this map, the green color represents Muslim-majority areas, pink indicates Christian-majority areas, and yellow marks regions where the dominant group is unclear (figure 2). For example, Batu Merah is now predominantly inhabited by Muslims, while the villages of Hative Kecil and Passo are now predominantly inhabited by Christians. Before the Ambon riots, these areas were jointly inhabited by both Christians and Muslims (Dandirwalu, 2014).

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The territorial segregation that emerged following the Ambon riots is both intriguing and significant to discuss. Despite the conflict officially ending 22 years ago, Christian and Muslim communities continue to live separately in their respective areas. This phenomenon has led to Christians feeling unsafe when residing in Muslim-majority neighborhoods, and vice versa, due to discomfort and mutual suspicion. Muslim and Christian communities still exhibit a strong sense of fear and hesitation when it comes to entering areas dominated by the other religious group. This persistent fear is not only rooted in memories of past violence but is also actively reproduced through social norms and parental control. For instance, it is common for parents to prohibit their children from entering neighborhoods affiliated with a different religion, citing safety concerns. Additionally, news coverage of even minor incidents of violence can rapidly escalate communal tensions. These dynamics contribute to the perpetuation of spatial divisions and mutual distrust, further embedding religious segregation into the fabric of everyday urban life in Ambon. This study is particularly relevant because the lingering fear among residents continues to restrict their mobility across the segregated areas. Despite the absence of active violence, many individuals still avoid entering neighborhoods dominated by the other religious group, indicating that psychological barriers remain deeply entrenched.

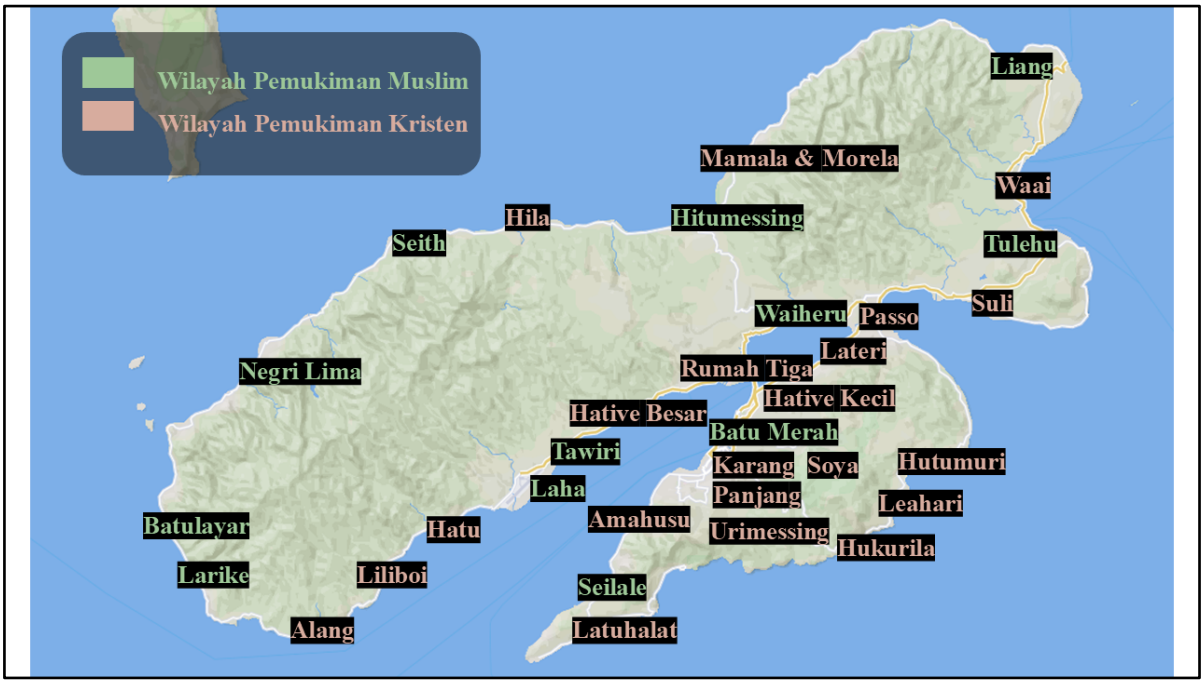

Figure 1. [The Map of Territorial Segregation in Ambon]

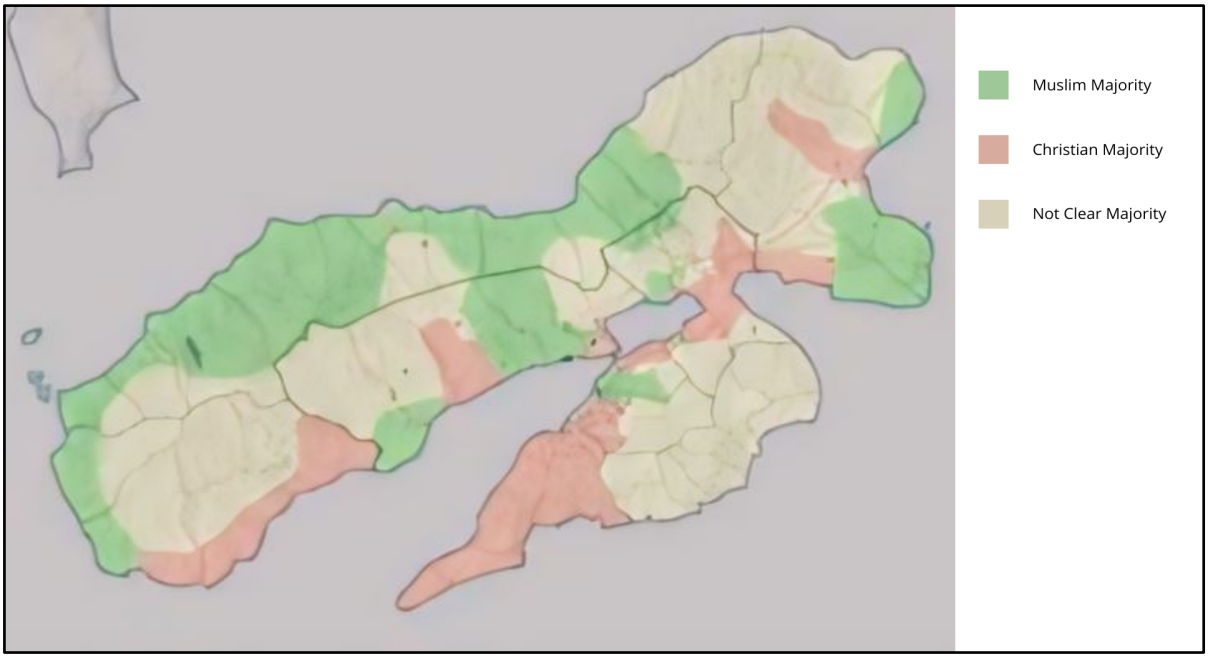

Figure 2. [Peta oleh Abdurrahman Abdul Moneim]

However, despite this territorial segregation in Ambon, a small portion of the Christian community still chooses to live in Muslim-majority areas for various personal reasons. The same applies to some Muslims who continue to reside in Christian-majority areas. For instance, in Kebun Cengkeh area, which is a Muslim-majority settlement, there are also Christian families living there. Similarly, Muslim families can be found in the Passo area, which is predominantly Christian. This phenomenon is noteworthy and significant to study because their presence among individuals of a different faith might provoke feelings of insecurity, yet they manage to make these places comfortable to live in.

The concept of "place" is central to the analysis in this study. According to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), the term tempat (place) can be defined in several ways, including as a space or part designated for accommodating something, performing an activity, or residing. In English, the term "place" is associated with several distinct concepts such as space, place, and scape. From an environmental psychology perspective, Pacheco et al. (2020) consistently use the term "space" to describe "place." The term "space" is understood to encompass more than just physical existence because it is deeply influenced by social, cultural, and historical factors. Space is a tangible manifestation of experiences projected by those who occupy it, leaving behind traces that can generate dynamic meanings that change over time (Urry, 2017). In the past, Ambon city did not recognize the division of territory between Christian and Muslim communities. Joint activities, in which both Muslim and Christian communities participated, maintained peaceful interfaith relations. However, after the riots, the terms "Muslim area" and "Christian area" came into use, marking a distinct separation.

On the other hand, the concept of "place" refers more specifically to the individual who occupies it. The two concepts–space and place–are interrelated, as physical elements that constitute a place can foster positive or negative feelings for the individuals residing within. The involvement of emotions and feelings generates experiences that form the meaning of the place for the individual. Collectively, these individual experiences shape what is known as the atmosphere or quality of a place (Hacıoğlu & Polatoğlu, 2023). For instance, in Muslim-majority neighborhoods, access to Muslim places of worship is more convenient, while Christian residents in these areas may experience less favorable conditions, having to travel further to attend services.

Another term used to describe places is "scape," derived from "landscape," which represents a place where two individuals can create a sense of ownership through activities and shared memories. Specifically, the term relation-scape emphasizes the meaning of place as a medium for encounters between individuals to create their stories through shared experiences and activities (Yulianto et al., 2022).

Based on the studies of space, place, and scape, it is clear that past events play a key role in shaping the impressions and emotions of individuals within a space. This process leads to the emergence of subjective meanings of place for each individual. In this research, the author will adopt the concept of "place" as proposed by Hacıoğlu & Polatoğlu (2023), due to its contextual similarity to the study. The analysis will focus not only on the relationship between a place, the stories behind it, and the individuals living there today, but also on the historical context that shaped the place into its current form, with an aim to transform it into a comfortable living environment. This transformation process is referred to as placemaking.

Placemaking extends beyond the physical structure of a place and involves behaviors and practices that foster attachment between individuals and their environments, making the area comfortable for them (Saad, 2022). Placemaking can occur in two ways: concrete and symbolic. In concrete terms, placemaking involves creating buildings or physical sites. Symbolic placemaking involves creating narratives about a place that leave a lasting impression on those who hear about it (Codina et al., 2022). In the context of territorial segregation, concrete placemaking can be observed in the construction of religious buildings in these areas. Symbolically, placemaking is shaped by the stories passed down about the place, including the history of how people came to occupy it. According to Rembulan et al. (2024), placemaking can also be achieved through repetitive actions intended to transform a place to meet the needs or goals of individuals. To fully understand the meaning of placemaking–transforming a place into a comfortable environment for living or conducting activities (Saad, 2022)–it is essential to identify the elements that contribute to a place's comfort. When we think of a place, the first thing that comes to mind is often its physical structure, such as tiles, walls, and roofs in the case of a house.

However, Akbar et al. (2023) argue that the concept of place is more than just physical elements and comprises four key components: sociability, access & linkages, comfort & image, and uses & activities. Sociability refers to the social aspects within a place, including the relationships individuals have within it, or demographic factors such as population size. Access refers to how easily individuals can circulate within the place. Comfort relates to the sense of well-being created by the elements of the place, such as local amenities. Finally, activities refer to the patterns of behavior of individuals residing in the place, which are influenced by the place's architecture (Yogarsiwayan et al., 2022). Placemaking theory offers a significant contribution to social psychology by highlighting how individuals reconstruct emotional relationships with their environment in the aftermath of conflict.

The phenomenon of territorial segregation in Ambon represents a situation in which place becomes a contested space to occupy. Christians strive to live in Christian-majority areas, and Muslims seek residence in Muslim-majority neighborhoods to feel safe post-conflict. In a preliminary interview, a source explained that his uncle, after the riots, swapped homes with a Christian resident in the Galunggung area (a Muslim-majority neighborhood) for a home in Batu Gajah (a Christian-majority area). This mirrors Bonaiuto et al. (1996), who view place as a contested object.

Previous research on placemaking discusses how individuals carry out placemaking in new territories by engaging in repetitive behaviors (Rembulan et al., 2024; Saad, 2022). Another study by Akbar et al. (2023) analyzed placemaking from an architectural perspective, focusing on the concrete elements of a place. Meanwhile, this research examines placemaking in the context of individuals in the same area, but at different times, specifically post-conflict. This study also focuses on the phenomenon of placemaking across religious boundaries, a subject that has not been previously explored from a psychological perspective, analyzing how individuals create attachment to a place they occupy (Codina et al., 2022). Research on the Ambon riots has mostly focused on ways to sustain peace today,

using concepts like Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Akbar et al., 2023) and Totem Ambon Manise (Dandirwalu, 2014).

The research gap in this study, compared to previous studies, lies in the theoretical contribution, as it utilizes placemaking theory to examine territorial segregation post-conflict in Ambon. Prior studies on the Ambon conflict have not used psychological theory, instead focusing on principles that reinforce post-conflict peace, as seen in Bakri's (2015) research. This research is theoretically significant because it expands the concept of placemaking beyond neutral or newly developed spaces into post-conflict territories, highlighting how place attachment and comfort are constructed not only through spatial or behavioral repetition (Rembulan et al., 2024) but also through other possible dimensions that have yet to explore in previous placemaking literature. Other studies have analyzed the Ambon conflict to understand the sequence of events and the resulting segregation (Dandirwalu, 2014; Indrawan & Putri, 2022). Meanwhile, this study will analyze how individuals make efforts to create a comfortable and safe living environment as minorities surrounded by a group that was previously involved in conflict. Traditional post-conflict studies such as the one belongs Abduh & Kamal (2023), which discuss the Chinese and Malay Ethnic Relations in Tanjungbalai City Post-Conflict, tend to focus on peacebuilding at the macro level, such as having less interaction and building communication as a form of formality. Placemaking provides a micro-level lens to understand how individuals actively reclaim, reimagine, and redefine contested spaces to foster safety and belonging,

The research question raised by the author is: What are the placemaking efforts of Christians and Muslims living in neighborhoods dominated by people of a different faith? The aim of this study is to understand the efforts made by Christian and Muslim communities to create comfortable and safe places to live, particularly as minorities. The theoretical contribution of this study is to generate new knowledge in environmental psychology regarding placemaking, as well as social psychology, as it will explore the relationships between different religious communities living together post-conflict. Practically, this research can help communities create comfortable living spaces, even in the presence of other social groups, fostering peaceful coexistence. The study can also serve as a reference for local authorities in making policies to resolve territorial segregation issues that limit interaction between Christian and Muslim communities, which could otherwise lead to distrust and suspicion in Ambon.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The qualitative design is used in this research because it aligns with the topic of study, which involves multiple perspectives or pro-contra realities related to the phenomenon under investigation, and is sensitive to the values within the research context (Guba, 1990). Specifically, this study employs a qualitative instrumental case study method, where the boundaries of the case involve individuals who have experiences or memories related to a specific event (Yazan, 2015).

The data collection methods used are interviews and map elicitation. The interview guideline consists of structured questions aimed at exploring participants' personal experiences of living in a religiously diverse neighborhood in Ambon, with a focus on daily interactions, perceived similarities and differences among neighbors, the lasting impact of the Ambon riots, and how individuals negotiate comfort. Some of the questions are like "What made you stay here even after the Ambon riots?" and "What challenges have you experienced related to differences between neighbors?". The map elicitation command is "Please illustrate a map of your residential area, indicating the locations of public facilities such as shops, places of worship, village administrative offices, and other relevant infrastructure.". The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling (Suardi, 2017). Participants in this study must meet specific criteria: they must be individuals who directly experienced the Ambon riots, live in Ambon city where the Muslim population predominates (for Christian respondents), or live in a Christian-majority neighborhood (for Muslim respondents) for at least one year. Additionally, in their daily lives, the participants should engage in religious practices according to their faith, as observed through their places of worship. The map elicitation technique is used to gather participants' perspectives about their living environments. Specifically, the location selection will focused on the border area or participant who lived in an area dominated by different religions with landmarks related to that religion. This technique is valuable because it allows participants to provide in-depth, reflective insights into the implicit social situations and personal feelings related to their living spaces (Moore-Cherry et al., 2015).

The data are analyzed using narrative analysis and the constant comparative method. Data analysis begins with the transcription of interviews to extract key quotes that represent the core information. This is followed by interpretation and comparison of information across participants (Merriam, 1998). Through this method, the researcher interprets the information provided by the sources, supported by a literature review, to generate a comprehensive analysis. Data source triangulation is then employed to assess the credibility of the information obtained (Yazan, 2015). This method involves comparing similarities in information across participants and identifying differences, comparing it the map elicitation results to make a better understanding out of the participant's neighborhood layout, as well as with the relevant theoretical framework on the topic.

By utilizing these qualitative methods, this research is able to deeply explore the nuanced experiences and perspectives of individuals living in post-conflict Ambon, and provide meaningful insights into how placemaking efforts are undertaken by religious minorities in segregated areas.

RESULTS OF STUDY

Data collection was carried out over a month, involving 10 participants with direct experience with the riots in Ambon. The participants were purposefully selected to represent both Muslim and Christian communities living either in areas dominated by the opposite religion or in border/mixed neighborhoods. They come from diverse backgrounds and professions, enables the sample to reflect the broader social realities of post-conflict Ambon, particularly in relation to inter-religious coexistence and territorial segregation. Details of the participants can be seen in Table 1.

This study reveals the placemaking efforts of both Christian and Muslim residents in Ambon, which take the form of (1) building positive interactions with neighbors of different faiths, (2) reflecting on past narratives and memories, and (3) entrusting security and safety to God.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

Code	Religion	Home	Region	Age	Role
N0	Christian	Hative Kecil	Mix	50	Citizen
N1	Christian	Wayame	Moslem	40	Citizen
N2	Christian	Wayame	Moslem	40	Citizen
N3	Christian	Wainitu	Moslem	48	Citizen
N4	Moslem	Latta	Christian	59	Mosque care taker and former neighborhood leader
N5	Christian	Aster	Mix	60	Wife of neighborhood leader
N6	Christian	Wainitu	Moslem	59	Citizen
N7	Christian	Aster	Mix	53	Pastor (pendeta)
N8	Moslem	Passo	Christian	51	Mosque care taker /former brimog during the 1999 conflict
N9	Moslem	Waiheru	Mix	44	Citizen

In an effort to make their living spaces comfortable, residents strive to build good interactions with their neighbors, despite religious differences. These interactions often start with simple acts, such as greeting each other and exchanging stories. Interreligious interactions between Christian and Muslim community members often occur through everyday, informal encounters, such as when a traveling vegetable vendor passes through the neighborhood. In these moments, women from different households come out of their homes not only to buy vegetables, but also engage in casual conversations and share stories about their daily lives. These spontaneous exchanges serve as subtle yet meaningful forms of social connection, where religious differences are set aside in favor of shared human experience and neighborhood solidarity. Additionally, the use of appropriate titles during interactions is seen as important. For example, when interacting with Christians, it is considered polite to use terms like "bu" for men and "usi" for women. Meanwhile, when interacting with Muslims, titles such as "Abang" for men and "Caca" for women are used. These interactions are not limited to adults; allowing children to play together also serves as a form of interaction.

> ***N8:*** *"Terus karena su (sudah) kebiasaan aparat islam yang di Ambon ini, dong (mereka) panggil abang-abang, panggil bu, kadang-kadang biar orang kristen dong (mereka) panggil abang, seng (tidak) boleh. Panggel bu! ada situ-ada- ada ikatan khusus. Iyo kalo kamong (kalian) bilang salah panggil, Islam panggil usi, Kristen panggil caca, repot."*
>
> ***N1:*** *"Nah kalau hari libur misalnya kita eee misalnya mereka keluar membersihkan halaman rumah bersama sama, kita bisa biasanya cerita, sambil cerita."*
>
> ***N0:*** *"pas Mas sayur ada di depan nah baru katong (kita) rame-rame keluar baru katong (kita) baku carita (bercerita)."*
>
> ***N2:*** *"Maksudnya kadang anaknya datang main ke rumah kami."*

Interactions between Muslim and Christian communities also take place during events such as religious holidays, where both parties visit each other during Christmas or Eid. Moreover, the celebration of Indonesia's Independence Day becomes an opportunity for them to build togetherness through activities organized by the local government. Religious differences do not hinder neighbors from sharing food; despite their different beliefs, they often exchange meals and comfortably consume them, both during special events and in everyday situations. However, some respondents reported a different experience, where their Muslim neighbors were hesitant to accept food from their Christian neighbors due to concerns about whether the food was halal.

> ***N6:*** *"Tapi malahan dong (mereka), ini kasih kue par (untuk) katong (kita) lai (juga). Kalo pas beta (saya) pung (punya)…. Beta (saya) nih kan deng (dengan) dong (mereka) par taong (bertahun-tahun). Kalo dong (mereka) pung (punya) hari dong (mereka)kasih beta (saya), beta (saya) kasih dong (mereka) lai (juga)."*
>
> ***N8:*** *"Kemudian beta (saya) pung (punya) bini (istri) kan semua yang jual-jual roti di sini kan orang Kristen semua. beta (saya) bilang mai tua (istri), orang bilang katanya roti tuh haram. Hey, makanya kalau mengaji ilmu agama ini harus jangan separuh-separuh lalu mengharam-haramkan, mengharam-haramkan orang sembarang-sembarang itu lah Islam. beta (saya) bilang kamong (kalian) masih belajar, masih kecil. Dalam agama tuh ada masakannya orang Kristen sama Yahudi itu dimakan, seng papa (tidak apa apa). ada hadisnya? ada dalilnya? ada!"*
>
> ***N8:*** *"halal haram orang jua (juga) tahu seng (tidak) mungkin dong (mereka) kasih makan katong (kita) babi bodok (bodoh)."*
>
> ***N0:*** *"Iya dong (mereka) yang jadi tuan rumah karena dong (mereka) kan seng (tidak) mau Katong makanan-makanan (makanan-makanan kita) toh. dulu tuh katong (kita) memang akrab dengan dong (mereka)."*
>
> ***N3:*** *"Ada acara, contoh perkawinan, kemarin baru bikin tujuh belasan, diundang ke belakang."*
>
> ***N5:*** *"Ya kayak 17an ada. Terus kalau ada dari desa itu ada ada." bikin acara Makan Patita (makan bersama). Kayak itu tetap."*
>
> ***N2:*** *"Natal kita dikunjungi, lebaran kita kunjungi."*

Both Christian and Muslim communities in Ambon demonstrate a shared awareness of the need to live together harmoniously through tolerance and respect for each other's religious practices. For example, one Christian participant chose to sell their pet dog to avoid causing discomfort to their Muslim neighbors. Similarly, Muslim residents adhere to government regulations regarding the use of mosque loudspeakers to prevent disturbing neighbors of different faiths. Interestingly, another Christian respondent shared that they felt helped by the sound of the mosque right behind their house, as it assisted them in waking up early in the morning.

N4: *"Kita berdasarkan instruksi dari kementerian agama. Kurang seperempat jam untuk masuk sholat, kita buat pengajian, 15 menit, 5 menit. Kita berdasarkan undang undang tersebut, aturan-aturan."*

N5: *"Jadi kalau, makanya anjingnya sudah saya jual."*

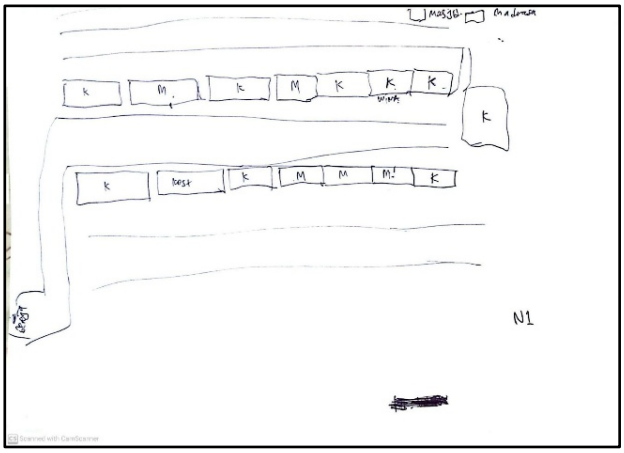

Figure 3. Map elicitation Results of Participant N1

Figure 3 shows the map elicitation results from Participant N1, a Christian who lives in a Muslim-dominated area. However, there are still some Christian neighbors near their house. Right behind their house, marked as "wina," is a mosque. The image above was selected as an interesting result of the map elicitation because it depicts the home of a Christian participant living in the middle of a predominantly Muslim neighborhood, and their house is located close to a mosque. However, the participant shared that rather than perceiving the early morning call to prayer from the mosque as a disturbance, she views it as something that helps her wakes up easily. This perspective illustrates how she choose to see things on it' s bright side.

The community also acknowledges the importance of mutual assistance, even with religious differences. For example, one mosque keeper respondent explained that when a Christian neighbor has an accident, they will help. The underlying reason for the community's effort to maintain good relations with neighbors of different religions is the belief that everyone needs one another in life, and by doing good, the neighbors' response will also be good.

N4: *"Iya toh, tergantung orang itu sendiri. Dia mau baik apa tidak baik. Agamanya itu baik. Orang itu yang baik."*

N3; *"yang punya anak ada, keluarga ada. Itu kasih makan apa? Apalagi sekarang tambah susah. Satu rupiah saja sangat berarti."*

In addition to building harmonious relationships, the community also feels the need to take preventive measures to avoid potential conflicts. Some of the steps taken include stopping young people's behavior that could trigger quarrels, with the belief that conflicts initiated by children could affect relationships among parents. The awareness of the negative impacts of conflict motivates the community to act more wisely in dealing with differences. Several respondents emphasized the importance of staying away from disputes that do not relate to their community.

N7: *"anak-anak kalau ribut gitu di jam istirahat, itu saya sering tegur" N6: "SMP, SMA. Kadang-kadang yang bikin-bikin akhirnya yang tua-tua yang terima ya kalau orang itu akan jadi besar jadi sebelum jadi begitu ya harus cegah sekali gitu."*

Reflecting on past narratives and memories is also a form of placemaking for the people of Ambon. They believe that the conflicts in the past were triggered by external provocations. This reinforces their belief that, in reality, the local residents had a good relationship.

N4: *"Setan dia masuk di antara dua agama ini, dia bikin kita jadi kacau. Sebenarnya orang Ambon itu orang baik"*

The Pela-Gandong and Masohi traditions also serve as tangible practices of the strong historical relationship between Christians and Muslims. Pela-Gandong is a tradition that binds two or more regions in Ambon in a brotherhood relationship, as seen between the regions of Ema (Christian) and Batu Merah (Muslim), as well as Naku (Christian) and Larike (Muslim) (Dandirwalu, 2014). Meanwhile, Masohi is a term from Maluku meaning "communal work," such as the collaboration in building mosques and churches (Titaley & Matatula, 2023).

N8: *"Ini kan Masjid Nur Isla negeri Passo. Isla itu kan bahasa Arabnya kan kerukunan. Ada di bangunan ini. Ha gotong royong bangun, orang islam Kristen pi (pergi) di kali (sungai) angka (angkat) batu kali (sungai), sampai jadi masjid ini."*

The people of Ambon are indeed aware of the importance of building good relationships with neighbors of different faiths to maintain harmony amidst the existing differences, and this becomes a form of placemaking they apply together. However, through the researcher's findings, all of this is still accompanied by a sense of vigilance and readiness.

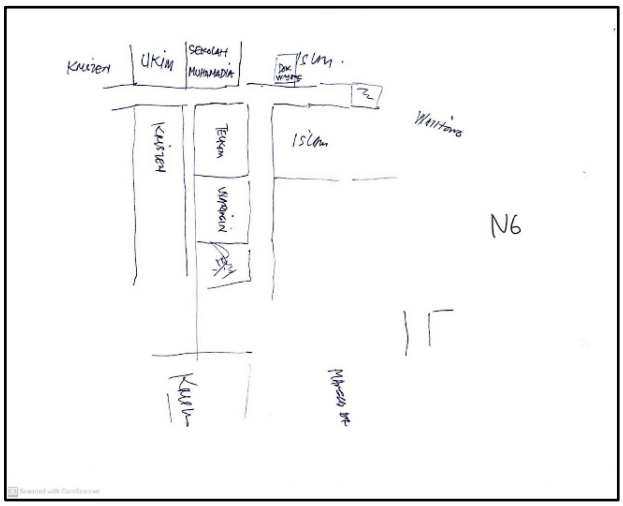

Figure 4. Map elicitation Results of Participant N6

Figure 4 shows the map elicitation results from respondent N6, who is Christian and lives in a Muslim-majority area. The next result of the map elicitation stands out for not only illustrates the layout of the participant' s neighborhood but also includes an evacuation route. This route was drawn as part of a personal mitigation plan, in case conflict were to break out again, highlighting the participant' s concern as a Christian about needing to flee to a predominantly Christian area. Respondent N6

specifically explains the location of the Christian area on the left side of the image and the Muslim area on the right, while their house is located on the border of the Muslim area. N6 divides the map into Christian and Muslim areas and explains that if a conflict were to occur in the future, they would go to the Christian side.

The expression of vigilance, as demonstrated by respondent N6's awareness of territorial boundaries and plans in the possibility of future conflict, reflects a complex dimension of placemaking in post-conflict settings. This vigilance can be interpreted as an adaptive mechanism. On one hand, it may appear to contradict the idea of comfort and safety typically associated with successful placemaking; the need to remain alert suggests that a sense of insecurity persists beneath the surface. However, in a context marked by a history of violence, such vigilance can also be viewed as a form of resilience, a proactive awareness that allows individuals to navigate their environment with caution while still choosing to remain and rebuild. This form of awareness contributes to a nuanced sense of security rooted in memory, experience, and preparedness. Therefore, while vigilance may indicate latent fear, it also plays a constructive role by enabling residents to maintain agency and a realistic sense of safety in an uncertain social landscape. This way, vigilance becomes a coping strategy that coexists with the process of placemaking, particularly in fragile or transitional contexts.

The historical narrative of the collective struggle in the Pattimura War is often used to strengthen solidarity. The history of the land also plays a role in the community's attachment to the place, such as land given by ancestors or regional kings long ago.

N8: *"Perang Pattimura itu ya sudahlah orang bilang Pattimura Islam atau Kristen katong (kita) seng (tidak) tahu ya tapi dia pung (punya) pengikut banyak termasuk dari pihak Nasrani ada islam-islam ada, Said Perintah kan? Itu! Dengan dengan jiwa itu. Makanya begini."*

N4: *"Raja Tanah ini, gimana ya ini kalau bukan Raja di sini, gimana kita mau tinggal."*

It was unfortunate that The historical narratives frequently shared during the interview are stories that have been passed down through generations within the family. They are not actively shared with the broader public in any form.

Not only historical narratives passed down orally, but also personal memories from the respondent's past experiences contribute to their comfort in living among neighbors of different religions. For example, they may have previously lived with neighbors of different faiths or have known their neighbors well before the conflict occurred. In many cases, individuals develop a deep familiarity with the traditions and daily life of other religious communities due to their upbringing and educational experiences. For example, some Christian residents grew up in predominantly Muslim neighborhoods, where they were immersed in the rhythms, values, and cultural practices of the Muslim community from an early age. Similarly, there are Muslim individuals who attended Christian schools during their formative years, where they were not only exposed to Christian teachings but also participated in religious studies classes focused on Christianity. These cross-religious experiences often foster a sense of empathy, mutual understanding, and comfort with religious diversity, forming a social foundation that can facilitate peaceful coexistence and inclusive placemaking in post-conflict settings.

N1: *"background saya dulu memang saya lahir dan besar di wilayah Muslim."*

N8: *"Beta (saya) dari kecil beta (saya) SD negeri lama, semua-beta (saya) dari SD kelas 4 seng (tidak) ada pelajaran agama islam, seng (tidak) ada guru agama islam. Tapi katong (kita) pung (punya) soal-soal agama, Yesus lahir di mana?"*

N4: *"Di sini orang takut gini. Terus itu sama anak muda kan, orang ganda. Tapi ada ibu satu di atas, dia bilang, kamu jangan sombong. Kamu saya peras susu kamu itu. Kamu mama bapak kerja di kantor. Saya jaga rumah. Karena kamu nangis, saya susu kamu itu."*

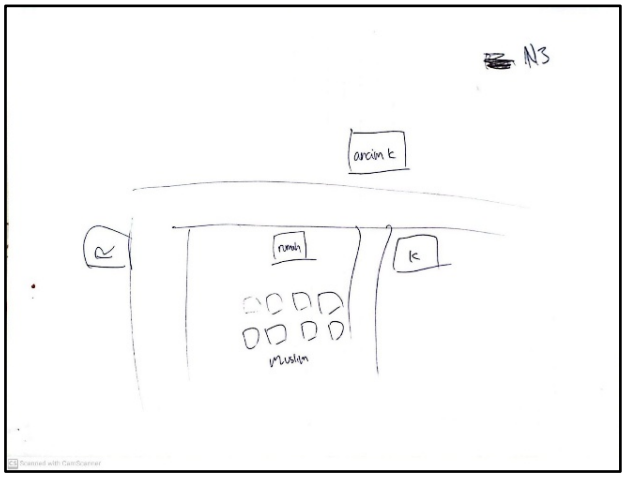

Figure 5. Map elicitation Results of Participant N5

Figure 5 shows the map elicitation results from respondent N5, who is Christian and lives in a Muslim-majority area. Right behind their house is a settlement full of Muslims. This final image was chosen because it depicts neighboring houses occupied by the same people who lived there before the conflict. Their return has made the environment feel familiar and welcoming, even though the residents now belong to different religions.

Trusting in the safety and security to God Almighty. The faith in God becomes the foundation for the community to feel safe in an area with different beliefs. They believe that their residence is a blessing from God that must be preserved. This belief also brings a sense of responsibility to live harmoniously with others. The excerpt from the interview is as follows:

N1: *"Berpikir bahwa ini kan rumah kami, rumah yang Tuhan kasih berkat kan untuk kita tinggal."*

N3: *"Gitu jadi atas dasar kepercayaan percaya Tuhan, gimana saja bisa hidup."*

N3: *"Percaya. Kalau nggak percaya, mungkin keluar sini. Percaya buat Tuhan, percaya buat mereka juga."*

DISCUSSION

Building good interactions with neighbors is the most frequently mentioned effort. Both Christian and Muslim

communities mention that their behaviors include greeting each other when passing by the traveling vegetable seller, before going to work, or even intentionally visiting neighbors to chat. In addition, the way to address each other should align with the person′s religion, such as "abang" and "caca" for Muslim men and women, while "bu" and "usi" for Christian men and women. This finding is supported by research by Afdhal and Titing (2024), which mentions that an environment built on positive interactions can accommodate long-term peace and harmonious living among residents. Positive interactions help to reduce negative prejudices and stereotypes in society. With sufficient interaction intensity, communities are able to see the realities that were previously blocked by prejudice, building more trust between one another. Both Muslim and Christian respondents agree that being kind is essential because everyone needs each other in life, and good actions will be returned with goodness.

Allowing children to play together was also stated as an effort by some Christian participants to integrate with neighbors of different faiths. Preventing conflicts by stopping actions from children or teenagers that could trigger disputes is also done by dispersing high school students who want to fight near their homes. Previous studies have recognized the importance of involving children in placemaking processes. For example, Peacock et al. (2018) explored placemaking through a socio-technical approach by incorporating children's ideas into the design of public spaces to foster inter-child interaction and enrich the spatial experience from a child's perspective. Similarly, Slingerland et al. (2020) engaged children in the creation of outdoor activity spaces such as playgrounds, emphasizing how child participation can shape environments that better support physical activity and play. While these studies emphasize the value of children's input in shaping the physical and functional aspects of place, my research introduces a novel perspective by focusing on the role of children in placemaking within a post-conflict context. Rather than involving children as contributors to architectural or spatial design, my study highlights how everyday interactions such as playing in the neighbor of different religion can serve as a powerful medium for rebuilding trust and a sense of safety among the adult communities. This underscores the unique role of children as informal agents of placemaking in spaces marked by historical conflict.

This is an interesting discovery, as in the placemaking process, children are considered equally important. By letting children play freely with their peers of different religions, it can strengthen the relationship between their parents. On the other hand, if children are seen to be involved in potential fights, even among themselves, it is better to intervene to prevent it from escalating to the parents. While Muslim participants did not mention this, it still shows that Muslim neighbors also welcome these interactions through children, as mentioned by Christian participants. It is possible that this was not mentioned by Muslim participants because their children are already grown up and cannot be compared to the younger children of Christian participants who shared this example.

Attending events together, such as Indonesia′s Independence Day celebrations or wedding ceremonies, becomes a medium for interaction between Christians and Muslims. This aligns with the explanation by Yulianto et al. (2022), who researched the role of places, not just as gathering spaces but also through the moments they create, which can leave a deeper impression on the individuals involved. An example found in this research is gathering at the village hall to celebrate Independence Day or visiting neighbors′ houses during religious holidays. Here, there are differing opinions from Muslim and Christian participants, particularly regarding sharing food during religious holidays. A Christian participant explained that during Eid al-Fitr, they will visit their Muslim neighbors, but not vice versa during Christmas. This is assumed to be because Muslim neighbors need to be cautious about possibly consuming non-halal food unintentionally. However, another Muslim participant admitted that they were not afraid to eat food prepared by Christian neighbors. They gave an example of themselves and their wife, who had no problem buying from their Christian neighbors, as they believed there were Islamic teachings allowing it and trusted that Christians would not intentionally give non-halal food to Muslims.

Showing tolerance is also a form of placemaking found in the research, as according to the respondent, it is one way to maintain peace by considering mutual comfort. Forms of tolerance practiced include using mosque loudspeakers according to the duration regulated by Indonesian law and keeping the volume at a reasonable level so as not to disturb Christian neighbors. From the Christian participant′s side, they once sold their pet dog to maintain their Muslim neighbor′s comfort. The basis for the tolerance behavior mentioned by the respondent aligns with the explanation by Latuconsina et al. (2023), who stated that tolerance is crucial in maintaining harmonious interfaith life. Tolerance indeed requires empathy and understanding between residents, such as thinking about others' comfort and doing small things to accommodate that comfort.

Based on the researcher′s findings regarding the placemaking efforts of the Ambon City community in neighborhoods dominated by different faiths, it is clear that residents also experience a sense of vigilance. It is not about suspicion, but rather about being prepared for the worst possibility, such as a repeat of the 1999 conflict. This is seen in the efforts made by residents to prevent conflicts, such as avoiding involvement in minor personal conflicts, breaking up fights between children or teenagers, and preparing evacuation routes as conflict mitigation. Such vigilance has never been discussed before as part of placemaking, because in this context, placemaking is being analyzed in a post-conflict area like Ambon for the first time.

The second effort that strengthens placemaking, according to the researcher′s findings, is reflecting on past memories or narratives. The widely held belief that the 1999 conflict was the result of external provocation, not due to religious hatred between Christians and Muslims in Ambon, creates a sense of security even in the midst of a different religious area, as both Muslims and Christians do not want conflict. The strong tradition of masohi (communal work) in Maluku, especially in Ambon, also serves as a reminder of the peaceful and loving relationship between Christians and Muslims. Examples of masohi include building churches and mosques together. The history of the Pattimura warriors, consisting of both Christians and Muslims, fighting against the colonizers also serves as a similar reminder.

The finding regarding past narratives as one form of placemaking in Ambon City aligns with the basic concept of placemaking itself, which is not just about the physical structure of a place, but about the history of the place, including its culture, traditions, and the habits of its residents that give meaning to that place, which can be interpreted subjectively by each individual (Saad, 2022; Codina et al., 2022).

The existence of the pela-gandong tradition also prevents the community from hurting each other, even if they have different religions. Traditions and cultures passed down from ancestors, such as pela-gandong and the masohi culture, are indeed strong foundations for peace-building based on culture, as demonstrated by previous research by Dandirwalu (2014) and Hasudungan et al. (2020).

There are also personal memories related to neighbors of different religions, such as a neighbor providing breast milk when they were a baby. According to Codina et al. (2022), attachment between individuals and places can be created, one of which is through past experiences that leave a lasting impression in the memory and feelings of an individual. However, some Christian respondents formed this attachment not with the place they currently live, but with a similar place, having lived in a Muslim neighborhood during their childhood. This made it easier for them to integrate into their current living situation.

The historical narratives uncovered in this study hold significant symbolic power in shaping place attachment and fostering reconciliation in post-conflict Ambon. These ancestral gifts are not merely physical assets but are imbued with meaning, representing a legacy of unity, legitimacy, and shared belonging. When residents view their land as a sacred inheritance, it strengthens their emotional commitment to remain, rebuild, and coexist. Practically, these narratives can be incorporated into reconciliation efforts by embedding them in community dialogues, heritage education, and inclusive cultural events that highlight shared histories across religious lines. Public recognition of these land histories, perhaps through commemorative signage, storytelling programs, or customary ceremonies, can reinforce a collective memory of coexistence and ancestral cooperation. By grounding peacebuilding initiatives in locally respected historical references, communities can anchor reconciliation not just in abstract ideals, but in tangible, familiar stories that resonate across generations and identities.

The third effort is trusting in safety and security with God. Believing that their home is a place given by God and must not be abandoned, and trusting that God will protect them no matter what happens. This becomes a new finding, showing that belief in God's protection also plays a role in the placemaking of the people of Ambon City post-religious conflict. The role of spirituality in placemaking, as explained, reveals how belief in divine protection can foster a deep emotional and psychological attachment to place, especially in the aftermath of religious conflict. This spiritual dimension encourages residents to remain rooted in their neighborhoods, resist displacement, and maintain social ties despite past trauma. Practically, this insight can be integrated into future peacebuilding and community resilience efforts by acknowledging and supporting the spiritual narratives that each communities hold about their spaces. For example, community-based placemaking initiatives can incorporate interfaith rituals, shared religious spaces, or spiritual dialogue events that reinforce collective identity and a sense of shared destiny. Thus, spirituality becomes not only a coping mechanism but also a proactive force in building trust, place attachment, and long-term coexistence.

While spirituality plays a meaningful role in fostering emotional resilience and community attachment in post-conflict placemaking, relying heavily on belief in God or religious narratives also presents several challenges, especially in the event of future conflict escalation. One key concern is that the spiritual narratives and symbols may be vulnerable to politicization or instrumentalization, turning once-unifying beliefs into tools for exclusion or power struggles. Additionally, generational differences in religious belief may weaken the long-term effectiveness of spiritually anchored placemaking, especially if younger residents feel disconnected from inherited traditions. Therefore, it is important to pass down the same spiritual value throughout the generations while still promoting unity and peace in an inter-religious context.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the forms of placemaking among Christians living in Muslim-majority neighborhoods, and vice versa, to create a comfortable and safe living environment for minorities. Based on the data collected, it was found that placemaking is manifested through 3 efforts; 1) relational, 2) historical, 3) spiritual. Relational effort focuses on creating harmonious interactions with neighbors of different religions to foster mutual trust and tolerance, while remaining vigilant about the potential recurrence of conflict. This is marked by preparedness for evacuation and continuous preventive actions to avoid the repetition of past conflicts. The historical effort reflects on the history of the land they occupy, the shared struggle against colonialists, and local traditions such as *pela-gandong* and *masohi* also plays a crucial role as social glue, reminding residents of the values of brotherhood inherited from their ancestors. Additionally, a spiritual approach serves as a strong foundation in facing the challenges of being a minority in their respective communities. By entrusting their safety to God, communities have successfully created spaces that are not only physically safe but also socially and spiritually comfortable. The research findings also indicate that past conflicts not only left bitter memories but also serve as a reminder of the importance of unity to prevent the recurrence of conflict. The community views interfaith relationships in Ambon as a necessity, grounded in mutual trust and the belief that everyone needs each other.

The local government of Ambon City is encouraged to adopt strategic measures aimed at reconstructing the city′s spatial and social landscape in order to address the enduring effects of religious segregation. Rather than focusing solely on administrative boundaries, policies should emphasize the cultivation of interreligious social cohesion. One promising approach involves revitalizing and institutionalizing local traditions such as *pela-gandong*, which historically fostered mutual support and solidarity across religious lines. Government support for inclusive cultural programs and events that bring together communities of different faiths can serve as a means of restoring trust, reinforcing shared identity, and preventing future conflict. By embedding these traditions into official reconciliation and urban planning frameworks, the government can play a key role in transforming Ambon′s post-conflict spaces into inclusive environments for coexistence.

At the community level, there is a need to actively preserve and transmit historical narratives that have long supported interfaith harmony in Ambon. Traditions such as *pela-gandong* and collective memories of joint struggles such as the Pattimura War involving both Muslim and Christian fighters are vital cultural assets that reinforce the notion of religious unity as a foundational aspect of Ambonese identity. These narratives should be shared intentionally with younger generations through informal educational initiatives and community-based cultural

events that involve religious leaders and authorities. By strengthening these intergenerational narratives of brotherhood and shared heritage, communities not only safeguard their cultural identity but also contribute to the development of a resilient, peaceful society grounded in mutual respect and historical continuity.

The limitations of this study include the fact that the respondents were primarily middle-aged individuals who experienced the conflicts in Ambon. While this is relevant, the perspective of the younger generation or children who grew up after the conflict may provide a new viewpoint on the social changes and patterns of interfaith interaction in Ambon. Additionally, the majority of the participants in this study were Christian, so the perspectives of the Muslim community were less varied, and it is still not possible to fully validate the opinions of Muslim community members as comprehensively as those of the Christian participants. For future research, it is recommended to explore the variable of placemaking within the same context, but with younger respondents or those who did not experience the conflict directly, and only know about it through oral history passed down through generations. Furthermore, it is important to balance the number of Christian and Muslim respondents.

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DECLARATION

Ethics approval and consent to participate

All participants in this study participated voluntarily and signed an informed consent form as an indication of their agreement. All participants were anonymized to maintain confidentiality

Consent for publication

Hereby, we declare our consent for the publication of this manuscript. Availability of Data and Material (ADM) 'Not applicable'

Competing interests

There are no competing interest on this publication.

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Authors' contributions

The first author conducted data collection and manuscript writing. The second author contributed research ideas, assisted in the writing process and supported data analysis

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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