

Seeking Common Ground: Coffee Shops as Information Grounds in the Context of Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Using coffee shops as information grounds in the context of Christians and Muslim violent conflicts in Indonesia, this paper explores and explicates the emergence of information grounds in the context of conflicts. In a polarized society, coffee shops are constructed as a venue for social reliefs and rituals. They function as social magnets, attracting conflicting actors to put off their differences in lieu of community building. As information grounds, coffee shops allow human actors to cultivate trust and develop networked individuals. Individuals' capabilities are connected within the communitarian spectrum. Diverse information is shared and exchanged but searching for a common ground is the main goal. As information grounds, the coffee shops reported in this paper are spaces where social capital flourish and increase in value with greater levels of trust. Through the discussion, we posit information grounds as spaces for conflict transformation.

Keywords

Information Grounds, Coffee Shops, Polarized Society, Peace, Conflict

INTRODUCTION

In a polarized society, an information ground plays a crucial role in harnessing common understanding and mutual knowledge (Giddens, 1976). In a conflict situation, it has the potential to function as a space where conflicting actors engage in informal interactions and move beyond their differences. In the information ground, individuals have to seek common grounds in order to interact. Stepping aside from their competing standpoints, the conflicting actors might encounter one with another beyond the simplistic

dichotomy of 'enemies' or 'friends.'

An information ground refers to 'an environment temporarily created by the behavior of people who have come together to perform a given task, but from which emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information' (Pettigrew, 1999 p. 811). This definition surfaces potential relationships that occur within interwoven interactions between people, place, and information. These three elements are not mutually exclusive. They contextually construct the meaning of their relationships over time. The information ground theory has been applied in various contexts, which are also mediated by technological environments. For instance, online and offline information grounds among housewives involve immediacy and delays in both formal and informal interactions. They share information through their usual social media and often find serendipitous information from others (Yeh, 2013). A review of literature shows that social media has been argued to be a type of online information grounds (Narayan, Talip, Watson, & Edwards, 2013). A study on Second Life shows that this virtual world can turn into an information ground for collaborative information (Lin, Eisenberg, & Marino, 2010). Additionally, mobile-social messaging is pointed out as an example of information grounds. It helps facilitate social networking as in face-to face information grounds (Counts & Fisher, 2010). However, these studies are usually situated within stable environments and do not always consider the wider social contexts in which the technological platforms are functioning in.

This study adopts the constructivist approach to examine people, place, and information relationships reflected in the original information grounds theory. It seeks to explore the theory in understanding the function of information grounds in the context of violent religious conflicts and expand the theory to deeper and a more meaningful spectrum of human interactions. The modern state of human civilizations is more prone to conflict as the society is polarized into various fractures, such as religion, race, and culture. Information grounds theory could contribute to address the clash of civilizations. Christian and Muslim violent conflict

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situation in Ambon, Indonesia is used as a context in this study. The context is seen as change (Courtright, 2007) in social actors' interaction because disruptive event in the everyday life. Hence, human information behavior is interrelated with the context where meaning is constructed.

This novel context differentiates the present study from previous work. It aims to answer: a) what do coffee shops as information ground mean in conflict situations? b) How do coffee shops play out as an information ground for peace in conflicts?

This research argues that a coffee shop, as a manifest of information grounds, serves as a neutral place in conflict situations. It is a source for social reliefs and rituals. It bridges individuals' social capital to shape and reshape their communities. Individuals develop social networks and cultivate trusts one with another. Coffee shops permeate direct contacts with diversity and opportune common grounds between the conflicting actors.

LITERATURE

Information Grounds Theory

The theory of information grounds initially appeared in Pettigrew's work (1999) on elderly, nurses, and other individuals' interactions in a community food clinic. The study found that information in the waiting room was multidirectional, involving regular exchanges of information between the nurse and the elderly beyond existing personal networks. Along with that, active information seeking was observed among the elderly. In other words, the foot clinic was more than just a place to get foot services, but a rich context where individuals can serendipitously find information.

The theory was then formalized in Fisher & Naumer (2006) after several empirical studies in the contexts of immigrants (Fisher, Durrance, & Hinton, 2004; Fisher, Marcoux, Miller, Sánchez, & Ramirez Cunningham, 2004), rural residents (Fisher, Naumer, Durrance, Stromski, & Christiansen, 2005) and college students (Fisher, Landry, & Naumer, 2007). These studies conclude that information grounds are contextually rich, temporal setting, have instrumental purpose, social types, social interaction, as well as informal and formal information flow, and alternative forms of information use. Information grounds are arenas where people, place, and information complementing each other and constructing the meaning of information.

The theory of information grounds is related to the 'third place' concept (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982; Oldenburg, 1989). It refers to a place after home (first place) and work (second place). Third-place is neutral where people come to relax and escape from their daily routines. In the third-place, social types (Simmel, 1971) emerge as visitors, regulars, and management. Regulars happened to be visitors once; as their chemistries flourish they become regulars. They cultivate relationships with the place and one with

another through conversation and climate they collectively construct. The place obtains equal positions to explore probable intents. It offers freedoms without strict responsibilities. Attention to others comes before personal interests. It is a communitarian place where selfishness and narcissism do not belong.

A coffee shop can give warmth and social regeneration (Seamon, 1979). It presents friendliness and refreshment from everyday life fatigues. The people and the atmosphere are social magnet attracting others. Therefore, many visit it not because of its instrumental functions (i.e. for coffee, food), but to rejuvenate themselves by meeting others and engaging in conversations. Regulars treat it as a ritual (Goffman, 1967), and need no specific reasons to be there as it has become their daily routine. This routine has ingrained within themselves and passing a day without it is strange.

With regards to the information grounds theory, a coffee shop can serve as a platform where people, place, and information interact multi-directionally. Its meaning does not occur in vacuum, but is recursively constructed. Interactions move beyond its instrumental functionality as it turns into a ground where people connect one with another via information. Hence, it can be a source for individuals to form networks and bridge their each other necessities as community members.

Information Grounds in the Context of Conflict

The root of conflicts is neither ideology nor economy, but civilizations (Huntington, 1993; 1996) to refer to religions, cultures, and races. These societal elements have grown as identities to differentiate one from another. Strong proliferation of these identities springs tensions with states or other civilizations. Violent conflicts oftentimes color these polarizations. Huntington implies that conflicts lie beneath cultural diversities. As culture is idiosyncratic, misunderstanding is expected when one is less informed about another.

However, lies beneath culture too, is social capital. It is where a conflict can be seen as a neutral social phenomenon (Simmel, 1955). It leads to better or worse off situations depending on how society can transform it into peaceful means. Within this transformation process, information grounds may play as places to nurture bridging social capital (Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen, 2003). Bridging social capital holds capability to connect one civilization with another. Putnam (2001) proposes that social capital can be used as a positive force for civic engagements. The more the community members know each other, the higher possibility for them to lean to each other's shoulders. Therefore, stocks of social capital (Fukuyama, 1995b; 1995a; 2001) improve as trust among the community members develops. Both Fukuyama and Putnam associatively agree that trust is a currency in the social capital market.

Individuals interact in information grounds by exchanging information. They bridge one with another via cultivating trust. Knowledge on a particular subject is shared to connect and reconnect with others'. This interconnecting action prompts social networks that are independent from religious or institutional affiliations. Groups no longer constitute these networks but individuals (Rainie & Wellman, 2012) as the interactions flow between person-to-person and who-knows-what-whom. The networked individuals allow individuals to share what and to whom they know with other members. It fosters collaborations as a universal goal, the conflicting actors, directly or indirectly, transform differences into common ground. Social capital partake is as contextual influence (Courtright, 2007) determined by the quality of social interaction in information grounds.

As bridging social capital grows in the networked individual, information grounds create space for individual to become a cosmopolitan influential (Merton, 1968). They shape and reshape their relationships with place, people, and information through mirroring others' behaviors. Their individualities matter and affect one to another. One no longer lives in a solitude world, but connects it with elements of information grounds. Over time, a sense of communitarianism (Tonnie, 1957) based upon friendships and neighborhoods emerges. This sense accommodates differences that individuals have by emphasizing a sense of togetherness as one community. The manifestation may be in form of neighborhood or state of mind as people who experience violent conflicts. Individuals sharpen commonalities and blunt dissimilarities to live as coexisted communities after their civilizations clashed. Hence, Christian or Muslim identities are negotiated through interactions in information grounds.

Information grounds serve as platforms to balance individualism and communitarianism to address problems in the polarized society. It elicits bridging social capitals among the visitors and facilitates them to develop a networked individual. In this network, they search for common grounds to remake their communities in a conflict situation. Although fractures within society are undeniable, conflict potentials can be transformed through proliferating trusts. In this spectrum, information grounds play as spaces that allow individuals to nurture trusts and participate in the social capital market within communitarian spirits.

BACKGROUND

Ambon experienced violent conflicts between 1999 and 2011. The cause was unclear but the dominant narrative singled out elites at local and national level. Their motives were political from gaining positions of power to improving budget for military purposes. Ambon was seen as easy to provoke because of its inherited religious segregations from Dutch colonialism. Both conflicts escalated from street crime incidents when a young man tried to extort money from a bus driver. When he failed, he turned violent which

provoked a violent response in turn from the driver. Soon after, rumors that a Christian had killed a Muslim began to spread. This information triggered massive hatred followed by killing and house burning. Thousands were killed and many were internally displaced. Ambonese believed that provocateurs spread false information to promote the conflicts. The 2011 conflict was relatively smaller compared to the 1999 conflict, which many believed to be a simple case of street crime.

The conflict led to a distinct division between the Muslim and Christian communities. Villages with mixed religious beliefs, converted to either of these religions. Trauma caused this separation and living with those who shared the same religion was perceived to be safer. Before the conflicts, it was very common to see churches providing places for Muslims to conduct informal schools in the afternoon. However, conflicts had created strong religious identities in everyday life. For instance, a Muslim man would address his kind with 'Abang' and the Christian with 'Bung' (Both refers to 'Mate/Pal'). Wearing religious symbols was more apparent among women (e.g. veil or cross necklace).

Despite these differences, Ambonese shared coffee as part of local culture. They drank coffee in the morning and mid- or late afternoon. Inviting each other for coffee in their house or coffee place is very common. Visitors and coffee shop people knew each other well. It normally took three visits for the regulars to recognize new comers. The waitresses/waiters remembered what the regulars wanted and commented that, "it is written in your face." Their relationships were mutual and often developed into friends or acquaintances who they invited to weddings.

Coffee places could be categorized into three types in Ambon: a) traditional with karaoke stage; b) semi-traditional; and c) modern. The traditional with karaoke stage coffee place was claimed as the original form of coffee shops in Ambon. It had a stage just like in a karaoke bar where people came to sing. Ambon was a city of music and well known as a producer of singers with golden voices in the country. Therefore, both singing and music were inseparable from their daily life. Every table had a number and anyone who liked to be on stage needed to register his/her details with the host. Everyone could sing one or two songs and be well coordinated with the guitarist. The songs were local, Indonesian, or American. Most people spent at least two hours chatting with others. Some stayed until it closed in the early morning. This is different to the traditional cafes that closed by 9 or before midnight during the weekends. The availability of Wi-Fi, music played and good served, differentiated (semi)traditional and modern coffee shops. A (semi)traditional coffee shop did not have Wi-Fi access and played traditional songs and served local food. Most people spent time interacting with other visitors. Those who came to the modern one had varied motivations. They came to access the Internet, meet colleagues, or to

work. It oftentimes played American songs and served diverse food from local, fusion, or western cuisines.

METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork was conducted in Ambon, Indonesia. The town was approximately 360 KM square with nearly 330 thousand people (2010). Mountainous and coastal topographies divide it into upper and lower neighborhoods. Muslims normally lived in the lower neighborhood, whereas the Christian in the upper one. Ambon had more than 100 dialects and still embraced Dutch legacies, e.g. many locals can spoke the language and consumed breads instead of rice as a main course across the country. The researcher spoke Indonesian during the fieldwork and clarified local expressions if necessary. For example, Ambonese used the word ‘Beta’ to say ‘I’ (English) or ‘Saya’ (Indonesian).

The snowball method was utilized to recruit informants. Initial contact with one of them was started via Facebook and followed up with conversations using WhatsApp and Skype. The informants’ backgrounds were varied: coffee shop owners, waiters/waitress, and visitors. In total, fifteen informants (of which seven were female) were recruited. Observations and in-depth interviews were used for data collection. Observations were conducted in 8 coffee places as described in Table 1. Most coffee shops opened during the weekdays and some on Sundays. Some were closed and some opened in the late afternoon after church services.

The research was conducted upon Institutional Review Board’s approval. Open-ended in-depth interviews were used. Informal and conversational settings nuanced the interviews. Its average length was one hour. The informants were aware that the interviews were recorded and their privacy maintained. The interviews were transcribed accordingly. The data analysis began with reading the interview transcripts and interpreting them. This process could not be divorced from the researchers’ background and frame of reference. To gain more contexts, reflective field notes were combined. The coding was done manually.

Coffee shop	Description	Category	Location
Lela (old and new)	Males and people aged between the early 30s and late 50s visited both the old and new Lela. These coffee places were identical, and attracted Muslim visitors. Visitors conversed about various topics but the locals perceived that the	Semi-traditional	Muslim neighborhood

	old Lela had more political ambience; Politicians and government officers visited it to stay connected with their constituents.		
Mai Nusu	Males, aged between 40 and 60, were the main visitors. Women accompanied the men. It was a neutral place, situated at the borderline of the bay. It was an example of a traditional coffee shop where people came to sing on the open stage with a band. People knew each other and came in a group.	Traditional	Mixed neighborhood with traditional market
Pasir Putih	Young adults and middle aged men were the main visitors. It was claimed as the pioneer of modern coffee shops in town. It served local cuisines and had Wi-Fi. People came to meet others or talk with the owners about entrepreneurship. The coffee shop had historical connections with peace movements at a grass root level.	Modern	Conflict area in 1999 violent conflict
Sibu-sibu	Males and people aged between their early 30s and late 50s were the main visitors. The expectation was that this cafe followed the traditional values of Ambon; traditional food was served, and traditional music played in the	Semi-traditional	Christian neighborhood

	background. Along with that, it introduced public figures originally from Ambon such as soccer players, singers, models, and politicians. Political activities occurred in the cafe.		
The Street	Teenagers and young adult, males and females, liked to visit the Street. The design and menu were current, as other coffee places in any city. It used an AC instead of fan, had Wi-Fi, served western and fusion foods, and often played American music. The visitors met friends or had work meetings. This place used to be a third place for young activists in town.	Modern	Mixed neighborhood
Joas (old and new)	Joas is similar to Lela, but attracted Christian visitors. The new Joas had a more current design and Wi-Fi.	Semi-traditional/ Modern	Border area in 1999 violent conflict

Table 1. List of the Observed Coffee Shops

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The first and second parts of this section address RQ 1 by showing evidence and discussing the meaning of coffee shops for the visitors and owners, respectively. The third part answers RQ 2 by elaborating the role of coffee shops as common grounds in conflict situations.

Visiting the Coffee Shop

For visitors or regulars, going to a coffee shop was a ritual. Although coffee could be made at home, a coffee place offered more than just caffeine. It was a daily habit. Ordering a coffee, having a cigar, talking with the workers, the owner, or other visitors was part of their everyday ritual. A sense of loss was experienced when this ritual was not performed, as explicitly expressed by a regular; “I feel strange when I don’t come” (Participant A). The coffee

shop created a sense of belonging as exemplified by one of the waitresses in her conversation with a regular, “I asked where he lives, where his wife is, and why he came here. He has [coffee at] home, why drink it in here? [They] say here, it is very different from home. We can meet friends and chat about many things” (Participant W).

During the 1999 conflict, a coffee shop served as a place where visitors/regulars took leave from what they called interreligious war. “Those who went for war got stressed out at home. They came back from killing people,” Participant Y recalled. Many interviewees expressed that the coffee shop was a place where they could calm down and escape the atrocities. During the conflict, many coffee shops were closed but one situated at the border was full of visitors. At this time, gun shots could be heard everywhere and crossing the border was very risky. However, there were strong demands for the coffee shop to be opened as per normal. Despite the dangers, people wanted to go to the coffee shop. The owner eventually opened it, after much deliberation. He hoped his coffee shop could become a space for people from both religions to meet. He hired military personnel to secure his coffee shop and the visitors. More money was spent to pay the guards compared to what was earned from the business. “I don’t really think about money. I feel bad with my customers if I don’t open my coffee shop. If I didn’t hire the military personnel, my customers could’ve not come here [during the violent conflict]. They wanted to be here to have coffee together [regardless their religious affiliations].” Here, people shared information about what they were feeling and experienced, as well as important ways to meet daily needs in the midst of a violent conflict (e.g. they bartered fish, rice, fried oil, and vegetables).

Going to a coffee shop allowed visitors to meet new people, to develop collaborative networks and broker important information, such as new conflict zones or how to get cheap rice in town. Through the exchange of information, it was also a place where they could socialize with other regulars or brand new visitors. Participant E explained this function:

“People are already aware that it is a place for communities. It is a venue for young people to collect together. The concept is *“romansa familiar”*. It creates vibes of fraternities. By the third visit, I am certain that a person would have befriended someone. Sometimes, the moment they walked in, we get a sense of what they want to achieve coming in here. This is a place beyond the home and workplace. People release fatigue here. I am usually here to chat with friends or discuss creative ideas then set some plans to execute them.”

For regulars, the coffee shop was a place where they wanted to spend time and where people could find them when their phones were unreachable. It was where a person wanted to be when they were not at home or work. “This is a second home for them” (Participant F). This assertion reflected feelings of attachment between people and places

as a result of finding good conversation, a relaxing environment, and relevant information. In conflict situations, coffee shops functioned as third-places (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982; Oldenburg, 1989), providing a neutral environment in which individuals cultivated relationships through conversations. The visitors constructed the meaning of relationships from the emerging atmospheres that differentiated the place from home and work as well as radiated warmth and social regeneration (Seamon, 1979).

A waitress was not only a worker for the visitors, but also a connector that mediated relationships. She was asked when a regular was missing. She was also trusted by customers. For example, a moviemaker left a tripod with her so that a street-music club could borrow it. “[The coffee shop] is like their house. They trust me enough to ask me to look after their stuff. Even if it may be for months... they do not hesitate at all [to ask for help]. They are so used to me,” (Participant F). In addition, she also expressed her knowledge of what music had to be played when certain patrons were in the coffee shop. To make them feel at home, she also allowed them to create their own playlist. She related herself to the patrons so as to make them feel like they belong.

This was highly effective, as the waitress functioned as a person who helped establish friendships, as expressed by one participant: “We are here because of her,” (Participant G). Agreeing with the sentiment, other regulars interviewed mentioned that they would come to a coffee shop because they liked talking to the waitress. They felt she was easy to talk with and did not mind introducing them to new visitors. The atmosphere in the coffee shop offered opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations. Although patrons were religiously different, the pursuit of finding similarities and commonalities helped in the process of healing.

The atmosphere of peace was highly valued and also guarded faithfully. One of the owners, participant Y said, “Coming here gives them peace... I encourage them not to fight but live together.” He posited himself as being neutral and made it a point to be accepted by both Muslims and Christians. He was somewhat of an activist, in promoting a campaign of peace. Having a Christian background, he allowed a Muslim family to live with him for seven years. Visiting the coffee shop helped to maintain and form relationships as they found connectedness through the exchange and sharing of information. Through social interactions, individual identities were shifted to communal identities. A sense of communitarianism (Tonnies, 1957) developed as individuals shared and influenced each other. In other words, instead of seeing themselves affiliated with particular religions, they saw themselves as one community that shared the same neighborhoods, starting with the coffee shop

Owning the Coffee Shop

“This is my living room. I am happy of having many friends. If I have guests, people just come, they do not have to pay. I am very grateful; I have my own living room which also helps me earn a living,” (Participant E).

For an owner, a coffee shop was also a means for fostering forgiveness and looking forward. Forgetting what happened in the past and working together to rebuild the city was regarded as more important than anything else. As one owner, Participant Y said:

“I dedicate my heart for this place to tolerate others. Don’t go anywhere for wars. [Being] here gives them peace ... Many Muslims have come here. This coffee shop is available for everyone.”

The coffee shop was a place to support each other by sharing resources. Those who were economically poor could get basic needs met. Those who lacked information could suffice their needs via interactions with others. The coffee shop’s ability to provide space to cultivate trust was conducive for seeking out for common grounds in the polarized society (Huntington, 1993;1996). Trust was earned from one another, and essential for building social capital (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 2001; Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen, 2003). One learnt to trust through interactions. In order to build such trust, differences were put aside in order to access the information ground before them.

The coffee shop owners became a magnet for visitors. Coffee symbolized a transaction, but the real meaning of being in a coffee shop lied in the information they shared. For example, the opportunity to talk about life experiences and business strategies with the owners motivated patrons to keep coming back. When life was hard, they went there for relief. They shared their burdens with persons they trusted. They encouraged each other to keep moving forward from conflicts by discussing ideas to promote peace. In this way, the coffee shop was also a place for healing and support. As discussed by Participant E, the coffee shop “Can be a place to vent and meeting points for creative ideas. Young people like to be here. They come from many interest groups and communities, such as photography and music.”

As relationships developed and evolved, coffee shops transformed into information grounds (Fisher & Naumer, 2006; Pettigrew, 1999). Individuals had not aimed to satisfy their basic needs (e.g. drink and food) but to actualize themselves by broadening their horizons. Exchanging information and learning about new people was perceived as ways to extend their small worlds that may suffer information seeking (Chatman, 1999). Doing so, individuals became cosmopolitan individuals (Merton, 1968) in which one connected with another and shared influence within their social networks. These networks provided social support, information, or direct assistance, which was similar to a communitarian environment where friendships and neighbors played a crucial role to smoothen everyday life (Tonnies, 1957). A coffee shop was an

information market where individuals exchanged information that mattered to them. They exchanged ideas, creative thoughts, inspirations, and relayed empowering messages to each another. This brought them closer as a community.

The owners become information brokers for the visitors too as Participant E stated: "People lie when they say coming here for the coffee. They want to meet me." He went on to elaborate that the patrons sought advice on life in general, or tips to start up a business. The owners shared their coffee shops' philosophy and information that would help the community to improve. For instance, the same owner, Participant E, urged the importance of opening more jobs for young people to diminish the potential of conflicts. Or, simply saying that his business was not about money but a choice to serve community through what he felt good at—such as making coffee or creating a safe and comfortable zone to meet. During elections, politicians also went to the owners asking which candidate was preferred and how to gain votes from the people. Government officers listened to the owner's suggestions on how to engage more people in policy making through public deliberation. The coffee place owner's close relationship with the visitors gave them expertise to share sentiments of the people on the ground.

The owners played an important role as cognitive authorities (Wilson, 1983) that were capable of describing well, the governance of communities. Their perspectives were also diffused to the visitors that altogether engaged in information exchange to construct what could be done to remake their world in post-conflict situations. The visitors perceived the owners not only as having sufficient knowledge on a particular subject, but also personalities of charisma.

Coffee Shop as Common Ground

A coffee shop was neutral because individuals put off their religious hats whenever they visited. It was a space for peace in a conflict situation. "You are not making war in here [coffee shop]. Find your enemy out there," (Participant Y). It became a safe zone where people, regardless of religion, spent time with others, made new friends and sought entertainment. It was a place where visitors could get exposed to the other community members. Muslims and Christians could meet and talk about things they had in common, such as arts and music. No one spoke about religions or differences; they searched for a common ground to relax and be amongst friends. As Participant E commented, the coffee shop was:

"[A]space where I am able to meet the two communities... at that time [*in the conflict situation*] people are in need of something to bring together Christians and Muslims ... People are neither coming to talk about religions nor fight. Many who come here [coffee shop] blend in... then interpersonal relations grow."

The coffee shop was considered a place for conflict transformation. One of the owners encouraged young people from several villages to organize a music event. His goal was to form opportunities for them to meet up and alter their negative energy. He did not say the event organization was for peace-building. It was a subtle trust building activity. The owner believed that once they could trust each other, peace would arise. The event was a proxy for cultivating sense of belonging as one community. The young people were seeking common interests. They all wanted the event to be a success, and collaborated with this end goal in mind. Through this work, they interacted with a diverse group of people. After the event, they maintained this relationship through other activities. Coffee shop owners and visitors asserted that promoting peace through the bottom-up approach was more relevant to transform the conflict. The top-down approach (e.g. government initiatives, peace agreements) to resolve conflicts was not as successful because the people holding positions in the government, for instance, were indirectly affected by the conflict. The owners and visitors of the coffee shops contributed to peace-building activities, but this was not the main point of interest or discussion.

People interact with places and information in many ways (Fisher & Naumer, 2006; Pettigrew, 1999). The relationship between people, places and information could cultivate trust and help in achieving common ground, as was the case in this study. A democratic notion could be used to define what is beneficial to individuals and the community. Interactions in the coffee shops, were not restrictive in nature, and encouraged a community spirit. The visitors shared their individual thoughts and opinions, and created a common meeting space for the community. This could mean that conflicts may be resolved through the creation of spaces (information grounds) such as coffee shops. A coffee shop was considered a place to search for common grounds among community members. "It could be hobbies or works. Ambon is lacking of public spaces that can accommodate us. Coffee shops turn out to be an alternative where we can get a coffee and share things [in common]. It is a good thing" (Participant R). Coffee shops enabled young people to broaden their social circles. Their involvement in the conflicts was significant (as combatants, victims, and kid soldiers).

Providing space where conflict-affected groups could meet with one another was essential in post-conflict situations. Those who only stayed at home or hung around the streets were susceptible to provocation, which could lead to conflicts. They needed places to meet others and to seek relevant information. "Those who do not have friends become juveniles. If they stay alone at homes or street lanes, they will become asocial. They need to get out, seek experiences and friends, instead of just hanging in there," (Participant Y). This comment could be related to Participant I's comment, "Conflicts happen because of too

many unemployed persons. That makes them easy to get provoked.”

In coffee shops, visitors and regulars had the opportunity to improve their social lives. It was common to see them exchanging phone numbers or BBM PIN. They would then, meet again in the same place, as a group with a common interest. Visitors could easily become regulars because they felt welcomed. Information they exchanged and conversation they developed made them grow closer as a community. In post-conflict situations, a coffee shop functioned as a social magnet attracting the community members. They assembled to meet one another. This social togetherness brought the communities closer together. A stranger was no longer perceived as dangerous. Their individualities merged within a communitarian spectrum. Religious affiliations were not discussed and did not come into the way of forming social networks. For instance, a person with technology astute matches his knowledge with one who understands the existing social wisdoms. So, interacting in an information ground could help form a networked individual (Rainie & Wellman, 2012).

Communitarian sense led to the emergence of the information ground. A notion to converge divergent beliefs drove the coffee shop into existence. Economic reasons were not important; social cohesiveness was the end goal. A specific social type (e.g. the owner) could make decisions on the design of the place, ambience, and visitors they would like to attract to the coffee shop. This last decision would drive the topics of discussion at the coffee shop. This social type becomes charismatic model who could influence other's world views through sharing their own beliefs. Coffee shops replicate communitarianism based upon friendships and neighborhoods (Tonnies, 1957). The information ground progresses toward a market for social capital. Stocks of social capital (Fukuyama, 2001) are traded multi-directionally – in respect to communitarianism. A person equips themselves with information and expertise to be part of a networked individual. Resource abundance for one community can be a scarcity for the other. Individuals distribute their resources to support each other within the networks. Collaboration and cooperation (Johnson, Johnson, & Tjosvold, 2012) are the language they use in common. As an outcome, conflict potentials are in deficiency as the stocks of social capital interplay over time.

Coffee shops were a venue to harness creativity. Visitors could encounter people who had varied interests. They discussed ideas and executed them in the real world. It was a place where people could connect with others based on their strengths. It was a place for self-actualization by presenting out self-ability then connects it to others'. “It is a place to be social, not to eat. They come here to be sociable. When they come here they know each other. When you find a new face, after two or three times they start to become familiar” (Participant E). Many visitors became open-minded and respectful of other people's thoughts. They

knew that the norm was: “We are going to talk about creativity here.” Nurturing creativity to support change was a common value they wanted to embrace. Creativity was believed to promote a safer environment as people discussed their ideas in the absence of religious beliefs. The visitors wanted to eliminate any differences between them, discuss ideas and rebuild the community.

A coffee shop on the borderline turned into a space to meet at the peak of conflict. This coffee shop was located in an area amidst the conflict in Gaza, Palestine. Muslims and Christians were in the midst of war. However, the coffee shop was a place of escape for them. They were able to socialize. They were reminded that it was better to live as a society that fight one another. Common grounds were established between communities. Sharing common interests was a way of bringing peace amongst them. “We don't say hey Muslims and Christians, you guys should make peace. But, we created space for them to meet” (Participant E). Religious tensions that divided the society were forgotten in the coffee shop (information ground). Their mindsets changed, and violence was not acceptable. The visitors exchanged and sought out information that was relevant to their needs and the community.

In this instance, information grounds bridged individuals' social capital, which promoted connectedness in the segregated society (Putnam et al., 2003). In the information ground, religious followers could have direct contact with a diverse crowd (i.e. religions, tribes, and races). Hence, they learn to orchestrate their dissimilarities by transforming conflict experiences/potentials into peaceful means (Galtung, 1996).

Figure 1 depicts how information grounds could facilitate peace. People gain access to a space where they could forget the conflict and feel reenergized. In a polarized society, these were places to search for common grounds, by sharing knowledge, networking and trading social capitals. Cultivating trust was the currency and communitarianism was the social norm. In the information ground, certain social types (e.g. owners, workers, visitors, and regulars) determined the context of place and information. They discouraged self-deterrence and encouraged moving forward from past experience to pursue a better society.

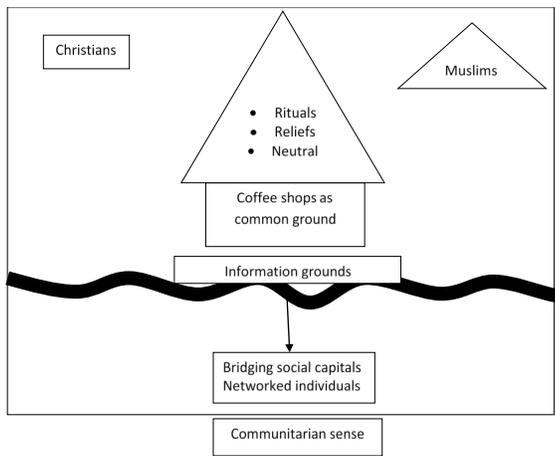


Figure 1. Coffee Shop as Common Ground

This research demonstrated the meaning of coffee shops and its role in creating space for conflict transformation in Ambon. The coffee shops encouraged relief and ritual. They offered a relaxing atmosphere and staff were friendly to visitors. The coffee shop was a place to feel reenergized and escape the conflict. The people and conversation attracted more visitors. It could be considered an information ground. It was a meeting point for networking and socializing. Individuals' capabilities were connected within communitarian spectrum. Diverse information was shared and exchanged but searching for a common ground was the main goal. As trust developed, the visitors improve their stocks of social capital to rebuild their communities in the post-conflict situation.

This research was not flawless. A longer time for fieldwork could improve the observation's quality, leading to the development of a more detailed description of this phenomenon. It would provide the opportunity to further explore the interrelationships between people, places and information in the conflict zone. Also, the researcher could have explored in more detail, the role of coffee shops as information grounds. In addition, given the idiosyncratic nature of this research, cultural context was not divorceable. Thus, generalization could not be provided.

Researching social network that emerged from information ground by using the ethnographic method could further this research. As mentioned, the information ground was a place where individuals exchanged and merged their social capitals making them networked individuals. The dynamic and power relations that materialized from the network could become an angle to look at in regard to information grounds. The most significant change method could be utilized to study the visitor's level of acceptance towards diversity, and the knowledge they gained through the interaction in the information ground.

This research shed light on the information grounds theory by introducing polarized societies as a context. Violent religious conflict was taken as a specific element

segregating the investigated community. As signaled in the discussion, this research highlighted the role of coffee shops as a space for peace by its ability to obtain rooms to search for common grounds. Simply, this research has broadened information grounds theory to non-western settings. This inquiry could ignite interests to research other forms of information grounds within Asian countries' context.

At least, two practical implications could be suggested for related stakeholders (e.g. policy-makers and civil society organizations). First, obtaining a common space to bridge individual social capitals in a conflict zone is important; therefore, enabling environments that promote civic engagements is substantial. For example, by obtaining more public parks, coffee shops, or libraries that is accessible for the community members. Second, conflict transformation programs should be inherited with the heart of the community. Finding a common interest to tie them together can become a starting point to design the programs.

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