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Abstract

This paper aims to understand formation of indigenous knowledge production in Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS), Graduate School, Gadjah Mada University. One main question analyzed here is mainly focused on definitions of indigenous religions embraced by CRCS students. Consequently, CRCS students’ theses submitted in the CRCS library from 2003 until 2012 would be employed as the representative subject to look at the discourse of indigenous definition offered by the students. There are 29 of 192 theses located as the representative subject. I argue that there is a shifting paradigm of indigenous religion in CRCS from essentialism paradigm to worldview one.

Keywords: Indigenous, Religion, Culture

Global Discourses of Religion

Who has authority to speak indigenous religions? Since the early of the second millennium, Western scholars have been dominating the definitions of religion seeing this issue in the shadow of world major religions. This was somehow called a civilizing process, which categorizing indigenous people as uncivilized things that must be brought to the truth salvation; whiles some claim that this approach entails essentialist mirror of indigenous religions. Kruyt’s writing on Toraja is representative of this subject. Because of this tendency, some researchers claim that the concept of religion has frequently been generated in the light of Christian tradition. Consequently, when we talk about religions (in the plural meaning), it means that other religions should be fixed or conceptualized in the Christian concept of religion.
In Fitzgerald’s view, it is a kind of theological ideology, meaning there is a conceptual powerful framework that can be a standard of religion and not-religion, that of religion and secular, and that of sacred and not sacred. In other words, the concept of religion is very monolithic definition containing truth-claim of certain religion. To disrupt the monolithic concept of religion, Fitzgerald outlines the concept of religion in the light of cross-cultural perspective. In this outline, he emphasizes analysis of religion on ‘cultural studies’—a concept that should be studying cultures. To him, rather than focuses on theological aspects of analysis, a researcher should pay more attention to the everyday practice of certain religion. It will be more analytical if the researcher put it in the context of cross-cultural perspective, not analyze it in the one, but two religions. If so, the dynamic of religious practices will be seen in the unique and diverse analysis, because each religion has his characteristics.

Another construction of defining religions is on the use of “primitive”. Gill deeply suggest applying the term “non-literate” instead of “primitive” in order to understand a community which has oral and non-verbal culture. According to him, a word is not only a word, but it maintains our tool frame of analysis. On one hand, it seems that using the word primitive will not give clear analysis toward the community we research on it. On the other hand, applying the word non-literate helps us to focus on language of the community that represents its cultures. In brief, non-literate frame will be more useful to see the salience aspects of the community.

The word “primitive” is an opposite mirror of Western imagination. The Western locates themselves as representative of modern cultures; while the primitive is identified for its opposite side. If the Western is civilized, the primitive is recognized as being uncivilized. Two of them are what known as caveman and native. Gill sees this stereotype will insufficient in understanding their cultures, because they are understood based on ideal type of Western culture. It strongly ignores the unique character of what is called as cavemen and native.

Instead of seeing the other culture as primitive, in Gill’s opinion, it is important to see symbol and speech that daily used within a community to do cultural activities. The basic assumption of this opinion is that the communities do not use literary cultures in their daily life. Furthermore, Gill suggests that to see the authentic cultures of the community, we better understand their symbolic activities in certain context related to time and space. It then based on our interpretation towards the symbolic that deals with other cultural elements within the community. Gill gives many
examples of it, and one of them is ritual. Ritual inaugurates phases of human life in certain cultural events. To Gill, it represents “a new time in human life”, including give birth, wedding and funeral as for examples. In addition, place is also being a salience factor to understand the nonliteral community. Relating to the concept of place, a nonliteral community may give “mark” their sacred spaces through building the memorial construction, such as shrine, megalith and altar.6

In line with Gill’s opinion, according to Harvey, indigenous religions are diverse. It locates in diverse areas, such as forest or isolated places. It range up with broad topics, such as activities relate to other-human-persons. To celebrate the challenge, Harvey rejects the use of some previous concepts to denote indigenous religions. First, he rejects the term primitive. This term, in Harvey’s view, strives considerations of excluding the dynamic of indigenous religions. Primitive attached in the indigenous people may lead evolutionary analysis that they are simple people vis-à-vis complex people who use technology. Here, rejecting the term primitive means considering the indigenous people do human agency in choosing in living with simple ways. Second, Harvey rejects the term pre-literate or non-literate. This term is past analysis of understanding indigenous people as non-literate. To Harvey, there is indigenous people use literary to express his ideas of life, writing many books of life, and spreading his ideas through Internet. Third, the term “primal religion, which is rejected by Harvey, because of “non-empirical theological construct”. By using this term, indigenous religions are imagined as ‘developed’ that should be preserved in the museum and waiting for the civilizing process. The last is the term ‘traditional’ which is rejected because of its meaning. According to Harvey, this term connotes the static dimensions of indigenous people.7

Another argument in countering world religions paradigm is that of worldview. This concept mainly focuses on the relations of human beings toward other human beings. In further explanation, Hallowell elaborates

Self-identification and culturally constituted notions of the nature of the self are essential to the operation of all human societies and that a functional corollary is the cognitive orientation of the self to a world of objects other than self. Since the nature of these objects is likewise culturally constituted, a unified phenomenal field of thought, values and action which is integral with the kind of world view characterizes a society is provided for its members.8
The aforementioned definition is a key word of understanding the concept of worldview. First, the relationship between person and its world is a somewhat culturally constituted, meaning this concept has continuously embedded within society. Second, the concept of relationship is unity between mind and behavior; in doing so, the concept of worldview does not emphasize on mind as such, but it focuses on the daily practice of humans.

Two discourses of indigenous religions above are being used to examine the CRCS students’ worldview on indigenous religious, through analyzing their master theses. CRCS, as unique religious studies program in Indonesia, has the same dilemma as the previous issue. This study program engages with civic pluralism both in academic and in activism. In addition, since 2005, this study program provides a course of religion and local culture hand in hand with indigenous religion in 2010. Viewed from critical point of view, some questions arises, are whether this study program relates the modes of knowledge productions to its indigenous activism, and how then the student responds the courses of religion and local culture and indigenous religions. Therefore, the examination of the offered courses and the students’ understandings on indigenous religion call for the urgent.

**CRCS: A Brief Description**

In CRCS, indigenous subject is being one of three academic clusters, but with little emphasis. We may see from theses titles that consist of less one third of 192 theses submitted in the CRCS library. This number is surprisingly amazed, because research methodology course encourages students mostly to conduct anthropologically fieldwork. In addition, some lecturers are anthropologists by training, though. Presumably, the issue of research funding would be a central concern of this trend.

There are three components of indigenous knowledge production in CRCS. The first is lecturing process, including its syllabus and its reading materials. Two courses highlights here are religion and local culture and indigenous religions. Since 2005, CRCS significantly provides the course of religion and local culture under supervisions from two prominent anthropologists. However, the lectures tend to use world paradigm and its dialectical encounter with other cultures. It seems that the paradigm has dominated framework of theses published during 2006 – until now. Entering 2010, a new course, focusing on indigenous religion, is installed to enrich perspective in CRCS, and has been taught by an anthropologist who holds indigenous knowledge approach.

The second is related literatures in the library where is often cited to give invaluable resources. This library is a progressive library that regularly
renews its collections. Indigenous religions subject is one of top priority while the library buys some new books. The third is fieldwork where the students do research on their topics. It is worth to mention that one or two supervisors have accompanied the students in order to drive directions of the students’ theses. Mostly the supervisors would determine the success stories of students’ theses.

The selected theses have been divided into three trends of analysis based on focuses that they use. First, the theses that seems to have questioned identity formations of indigenous communities. Second, the writings that focuses on rituals in the society. Third, the works that emphasizes on worldview of certain indigenous communities. Here, the focus of analysis remain emphasizes toward the understanding of indigenous communities they observed.

**Questioning Identity Formations**

Identity formation related to indigenous religions has frequently become one of interested issues, which discussed by CRCS students. The main character of this discussion is to criticize the state construction of religions in Indonesia. Mostly, the students discuss local religions in which they are engaged or known it before. Three of examples are Ammatoa, Tolotang and Hindu Kaharingan.

In the light of religious freedom, Maarif seems to have examined the definition of religion embraced by Ammatoan people. He tries to convince the readers, and may be for the government, that Ammatoa religion is unique, and so it cannot be imposed by the state definition of religion. However, his effort to examine the idea of religious freedom in the case of Ammatoa is fail, because he traps the discussion more into the unique of Ammatoa.

Maarif writes,

The lifestyle of the Ammatoa community described above implements their religious belief. The simple life is a fundamental belief for them and they have to defend it continually against the outside world, because it is a commandment accepted by the Ammatoa (the first human being) as coming from Tau Rie A’ra’na (God the Omnipotent). For that reason, the model of their houses, uniformly black clothing, and not wearing sandals are symbols of a simple life. It seems very unique, because whereas ‘modern community’ is future oriented, the people of Ammatoa are past oriented. The life in the past, in ‘the original community,’ was the ideal the golden age, for them. This is true in all parts of their religious beliefs.
The quoted paragraph shows how Maarif successfully describes the unique of Ammatoa. It means that he for a long time has engaged and understood Ammatoa very well. However, it seems that his understand toward his religion tend to impose their understanding toward Ammatoa. It is evidently seen, when he writes, “It is a commandment accepted by the Ammatoa ... as coming from Tau Rie A’ra’na (God the Omnipotent). Here clearly mentioned, he posits Tau Rie A’ra’na in the level of God.

Questioning the state construction of religion invites great attentions for Juba. Juba, like Maarif, tries to show the negative effect of the state construction of religion, which make indigenous religion in discriminative level. Juba pays attention to the community of Tolotang, in where he grows up. In his discussion, Juba clearly explains two important factors of his thesis. On one hand, he explains the state policy of religions; and the lively description of Tolotang on the other. However, seemingly, he failed to connect the two important factors.

His failure of understanding the discrimination is two fold. First, like Maarif, he comes from the location in which he understands well before, so he cannot criticize it then. This condition makes Juba describes Amatoa in romantic way and forget to analyze in it in the condition of discrimination. Second, he does not offer enough the concept of discrimination in his theoretical considerations. Instead, the explain it more about religion as symbol. Juba writes,

Agama sebagai suatu sistem kebudayaan yang merupakan simbol. Agama merupakan motivasi batin seseorang bentuk dari keyakinannya. ... Religi adalah suatu sistem simbol yang dengan sarana tersebut manusia berkomunikasi dengan jagad rayanya. ... Agama sebagai sebuah sistem simbol yang mengikat dan bersifat memaksa sebagai pemersatu yang diadopsi oleh masyarakat. Agama dipahami sebagai ikatan atau yang mengikat antara manusia dengan Tuhan, manusia dengan manusia serta lingkungannya. Agama diharapkan dapat mentransformasi nilai-nilai yang luhur sebagai landasan etik dalam kehidupan manusia secara menyeluruh.13

In the quoted paragraph above, Juba clearly mentions his definition of religion that never touch about state, religion and discrimination. Instead, he defines religion in the normative/romantic way. Presumably, it makes his description about Tolotang so lively, but he fails to examine the discrimination of this religion.

The state construction of religions has been creating conflicts among intra-religious community. Astawa’s thesis is clearly supporting this
argument. He subsequently portrays the conflict between Hindu Bali and Hindu Kaharingan in Palangkaraya. Although he uses the frame of politics of identity as a tool of analysis, however, implicitly, the state policy of religion seems to intervene in this case. However, differs from Maarif and Juba, Astawa successfully describes the act of agency of the religions.

Astawa writes, “Hindu Kaharingan memiliki identitas budaya yang berbeda dengan agama Hindu Bali. Hindu Kaharingan merupakan sinkretisme antara kepercayaan asli masyarakat Dayak dan agama Hindu yang terjadi berabad-abad lalu.”14 Here, he clearly differentiates between Hindu Kaharingan and Hindu Bali. Seemingly, he posits Hindu Bali as a majority Hindu in Indonesia, while Hindu Kaharingan is a religious minority. He considers that Hindu Kaharingan has been a form of syncretism between indigenous religion in Dayak community and Hinduism for a long time. In this definition, Astawa does not able to analyze Kaharingan as indigenous religion on one hand; and on the other hand the construction of Hinduism toward this indigenous religion. Presumbaly, his subjectivity dominates his understanding of this issue.

The three issues represents the issues appear in the cluster of questioning identity formations. Clearly seen that the concepts of world religion have dominated the students’ understandings toward indigenous religions. Even though he successfully portrays the existence of indigenous religion, however mostly he does not have enough though in defining what indigenous is. Furthermore, their understanding toward their own religions is too imposing his analysis of indigenous religions.

Ritual Described

Ritual has continuously become the most interesting discussion among CRCS students. The main topic of this cluster is to discuss about the meanings of ritual and its functions. To mention some are Ashari’s tutup layang, Ummah’s Cah Go Meh, Amaliyah’s bersih desa, Nurainiyah’s petik laut, Malik’s maulid hijau, Parngadi’s gombakan, Tamu’s Beati, Immanuel’s marapu and Syahrul’s bissu segeri. Their theses carefully discuss the meanings and/ or its functions of ritual in certain communities. However, these students, except Immanuel, seem to be fail in understanding the definition of meaning and function. They tend to make it similar. Amaliah’s bersih desa is for an example. She writes in the determining of meaning of bersih desa, “Sebagian warga masyarakat melaksanakan bersih desa sebagai ritual religi yang bersifat wajib, timbul bersalah apabila tidak berpartisipasi.” However, she also describes that its function is to maintain solidarity. Seemingly that the duty of participation and solidarity is the same concept.
Another topic relating to this issue is concerning on ritual and its spirituality. Suradji’s Lengger dance and Suitella’s Bulu Gila are two exemplary examples. Suradji’s Lengger can be located as an example of the application of worldview analysis. In this analysis, Suradji explores the relationship of the dancer with other aspects of life, such as spiritual function and social function of this dance in the society. However, his position, as a priest, has dominated his understanding of some concepts in Lengger, such as roh and Allah. In line with Suradji, Suitella also successfully describe the Bulu Gila dance in accordance to its symbolic meanings of this dance and its functions in the society. However, Suitella seems to focus on symbolic, or more aptly, surface meanings of this dance. Consequently, she cannot relate among the important concepts within this dance.

The interesting topic of this cluster comes from Idaman. He discusses the idea of ritual, identity and modernity in Aluk Todolo. According to Idaman, there is survival strategy to maintain ritual and identity in facing modernity. He writes, “Sakralitas dapat mempertahankan dan memperkuat solidaritas sosial. Sakralitas suatu simbol atau ajaran biasanya berdasarkan kesadaran kolektif. ... Survival menguat ketika ada tekanan dari pihak-pihak lain. Merujuk pada teori perubahan sosial Berger untuk melihat Aluk Todolo sebagai local wisdom yang mengalami arus perubahan.” Three important concepts here are sacredness, solidarity and collective consciousness. It seems that he want to say that the more pressure from modernity, the more survive and solidarity in the Aluk Todolo. Outside factors, in Idaman’s view, are located as the most challenge towards ritual. Interestingly, ritual in the sense of Idaman seems to be local wisdom, apart from whether it is indigenous or not.

Normative and Working Worldview

What I mean with normative worldview is that a collective view that described as cosmology. Here, the word ‘normative’ refers to the mind, or collective consciousness. Whilst, the definition of working worldview refers to the relationship of worldview (as collective consciousness) and other related practices in the society. Two distinct definitions may be seen in the work of Ali and Sumarsono.

Ali’s thesis is discussing about the worldview of Tri Tunggal, focusing on the idea of kebatinan and keberagamaan in this religious community. Based on the two concepts, it is clear that kebatinan refers to spirituality, and keberagamaan refers to the practice of religion. Dualism of spirituality and religion is clearly seen in this concept. Furthermore, Ali explains that there is two important concepts grounded in Tri Tunggal’s worldview,
namely, teologi kerakyatan and teology kejawen. He further explain that teologi kerakyatan, “Keyakinan yang didasarkan pada sebuah anggapan bahwa manusia pada hakikatnya adalah makhluk yang religius, entah apapun suku, ras dan kebudayaannya.” Whilst, teologi kejawen contains the concepts of God, nature and related issue. Here, Ali can successfully explore the worldview of Tri Tunggal, and explain Tri Tunggal’s activities in the society. However, he failed in discussing the logic relationship between the worldview and the practices.

On the other hand, Sumarsono tries to explore the concept of dying within Boti community. She relates the concept of dying with other concepts logically, especially in the context of ancestors. She writes,

Uis Neno (penguasa langit) dan Uis Pah (penguasa bumi), dalam agama lokal atau agama asli masyarakat suku Boti juga memberi tempat yang istimewa kepada para leluhur. Orang Timor menyebut yang Ilahi sebagai “Uis Neno ma Uis Pah, Nitu ma le” (penguasa langit dan penguasa bumi, roh leluhur dan benda-benda keramat). Nitu atau roh leluhur juga bersifat Ilahi yang disembah. Hal ini tepat seperti yang digambarkan oleh para sarjana di atas, dimana salah satu karakteristik agama lokal adalah menghormati serta menjadikan para leluhur sebagai figur sentral dalam kehidupan keberagamaan dan ritual mereka. Hubungan antara masyarakat ini dan para leluhur tergambar jelas dalam ritual pemberian nama dan juga sistem kepercayaan mereka.

Berkaca dari karakteristik agama lokal atau agama asli yang dibuat oleh Graham Harvey khususnya tentang konsep personhood maka dalam agama lokal masyarakat suku Boti dapat menemukannya terutama dari konsep “fatu kanaf” (batu marga). Batu bukan sekedar benda mati yang tidak bernyawa. Batu memiliki peran yang besar dalam kehidupan orang Timor. Bagi mereka, orang Timor pada umumnya dan masyarakat suku Boti pada khususnya, mempercayai bahwa setiap marga berasal dari tempat tertentu yang diidentikkan dengan batu atau gunung.

From the quoted paragraph, clearly stated that Sumarsono try to relate the worldview of Boti people with other related person. However, from this quoted paragraph also, she does not clear enough in applying the concept of personhood. She writes, “Batu memiliki peran yang besar dalam kehidupan
"Timor." If she consistently applies Harvey’s conception, she may write, “Orang-orang Boti memiliki relasi personal dengan other-human-being yang dianggap kebanyakan orang sebagai batu belaka.”

Conclusion

Why is there any diverse understanding of religions in the CRCS students? First, relating to the teaching of indigenous religions in CRCS. As aforementioned, there are two periodicals of the teaching of indigenous religions, namely, before 2007 – 2010 and coming 2010 – 2012. In the first phase seems world religion paradigm has imposed the students’ worldview in defining indigenous communities; whereas in the second phase, the students have frequently understood the meaning of indigenous religions. We may consult this definition through re-pay attention to aforementioned theses. However, as seen in the case of Sumarsono, although she understand what is worldview, however, her application in writing need more to be trained.

Second is regarding to the students’ engagement in the field. As seen in the case of Robertus Suradji, the paradigm of worldview has been applied in his thesis. It is contradictory with the periodical teaching of indigenous religion, which more emphasize on local culture. Engaging and analyzing through the field may become the best learning in understanding the definition of indigenous religions. However, still world religion paradigm cannot be separated from his analysis.

Endnotes:


2 Albert Kruyt, “The Presentation of Christianity to Primitive Peoples; The Toraja Tribes of Central Celebes,” International Review of Missions 4, 1915, pp. 81-95.

5 Sam Gill, Beyond the Primitive, pp. 2 – 3.
6 Sam Gill, Beyond the Primitive, pp. 6 -13.


12 Samsul Maarif, Religious Freedom, pp. 88 – 89.
13 Hasse Juba, Diskriminasi terhadap Agama Minoritas, pp. 6 - 12.
14 I Nyoman Sidhi Astawa, Politik Identitas, p. 12.
15 Efa Ida Amaliyah, Makna dan Fungsi Ritual Bersih Desa.
16 Robertus Suradji, Religiusitas Tarian Lengger.
17 Vanny Suitella, Performance and Belief.
18 Idamon, Ritual Identitas, pp. 14 - 17.
19 Burhan Ali, Kebatinan dan Keberagamaan, p. 94.
20 Elisabeth Helen Sumarsono, Konsep Kehidupan setelah Kematian, pp. 154 - 155.

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Thesis


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