

# THEOLOGY, ILLUSION AND BAHARI <sup>1\*</sup>

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Why is diversity of religious life, both traditional and modern, in Indonesia is it harmonious and peaceful? Not just recently, but since a long time ago; not hundreds but thousands of years ago?

What is meant by the rhetorical question above, is the spiritual reality of the nations in this Archipelago since the paganistic (polytheistic) era, is a fact that greatly respects the beliefs/religion of other parties, including the procedures of worship. What develops, as I often emphasize, is not "tolerant" life (which in practice still contains limitations), but "acceptance" as a cultural attitude where all different things are taken as part of (the existence) of a person/group, of me/us.

The diversity of spiritual beliefs at that time was far higher and more complex than the "modern" period in the post-paganistic sense. Even the neighboring villages, which are only ten to twenty kilometers away, even less, can have different beliefs and procedures for worship. Just pay attention to the traditional spiritual ceremonies that are still alive today, such as *seren-taun* or *sedekah laut*, from one coastal area to another coastal area which is not too far away, different forms are also spells or their mantra. Or if we go to Papua, the difference in belief is found in several tribes that are only one or two kilometers away.

There is one form of tradition that is unique and identical, found and developed by people in these islands, which then creates that social reality. Traditions that form the basis of the formation of a culture, and in turn become civilizations, from what I have always called "Bahari". What and how Bahari of course will not be explained here, because it requires more time and paper.

What is contextual from this symposium is historical and archaeological explanations why the nation/people of Indonesia do not see any differences, including religion, as a difficult problem, even as a blessing. Because these differences not only make them mature culturally, but also increase the identity (including religious) and broad association to insight-world (world view) to the

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formation of cosmology to the philosophy of his life, also theology in terms of this forum. That happened in almost all (tribes) of the nations in this country.

Thus, life which is co-existent between all forms of different social and cultural exposures, including in religious life, has become a necessity of maritime society from the very beginning. Including when "modern" religions (heaven and earth) then enter and remain long to become part of the identity of most of the people of this country. The country's spirituality, in the form of its faith or *tawhid*, in its religious rules, to the depths of theology or Sufism to its *kejawen*, is actually the result of mixing - partly eclectic - with other forms of spirituality (local and foreign), as all other cultural products that it produces .

There is no original in living cultured in this sea country, in this archipelago or Indonesia. Some ethnic groups or traditions do claim or consider themselves a "nation" not just "tribe" or ethnic and sub-ethnic, but they can't claim to be original, in the pure sense from the beginning, but a mosaic of influence (which accidentally and unaccidentally) received from other nations. This applies to Javanese, Minang, Bugis, Sundanese, Gayo peoples, including traditional beliefs to modern religions to the post-modern which they believes.

## **Schizophrenic Man**

But what has been exposed above has now changed significantly, if it cannot be said to be (sufficient) radical, in recent times. The socio-cultural reality of the primordial country that has become a modern country is now entering a phase where all primordial authorities that have been able to survive for thousands of years, throughout the history of their nation, are seen (by many) unable to maintain their position, function and traditional role as determinants or main actors of order the community they lead, the mainstream of life that is harmonious, balanced and full of kinship as history inherited.

It does not need to be described in more detail, at least in the past two decades, the nation's life in this country which has tended to position politics as a "commander" in its state of life even in its public daily discourse, filled with increasingly sharp exploitation of differences - which has been normal and necessity along time — just to fulfill the intent of power, starting from the power of politics, economy, to power over common sense in the wider community. Differences are used to create unilateral truth claims, and directly negate or reject (even by defaming) the truth of the other party.

The development of information technology, telecommunications, especially in the field of computing (with platforms on the internet and algorithms) which gave birth to new media, such as social media, became an extraordinary facilitator in the truth claims above, because "truth" is no longer authoritative in social media, but become preferential. Truth is no more than a culinary preference or clothing or choice of devices from everyone, which sometimes, more determined by industrial intentions than individuals. In that situation, not only slander, but also all false facts or hoaxes to fake-truth become daily consumption creating what we know as post-truth lately.

What exerts from the non-precedent information traffic above is the impact that is also non-precedent at the social, cultural, both national and communal levels to the personal level. There has been a shift in even significant changes from the way citizens in this country reacted to all of the above, creating conclusions and comprehension, until finally how to take a stand and execute actions in their daily lives. All social rites which ultimately betrayed some of the basic values and characters that formed of the nations in this country in the past. Not only in how to achieve goals, but also how to create relationships between people, including among family members. Moreover, the relationship with the environment (ecosystem, or other creatures/entities) which in the primordial life of this nation is very well maintained in a fairly strict order or regulation in its customs.

The most prominent dimensions, besides race, ethnicity, social class and so on, in reality the above is a religion that is utilized (more precisely manipulated) as a means of even arsenal to create truth-wrong (fake truth) in order to achieve libido of power from several circles, including the religious community itself. This situation is not only an argument for change from religious way to esoteric practices of the people of this country, but also the destructive consequences that occur as a consequence.

In a "hot" situation in the months of political contestation towards the presidential election and legislative elections held in the near future, concern will arise about social segregation - in all its dimensions - until the nation's split, feels strong, even in the center of government. The issue of "balkanization" to Indonesian "arab-spring" raises many questions and needs for answers, which unfortunately, cannot be adequately fulfilled, especially fast.

Comprehensive and adequate answers are always failed or erroneously given, because indeed the understanding of the problem substance becomes obscure because the obscurant-eclectic way of thinking and even invalid fake data as the basis for analysis or understanding. This fact is not a "pure" intellectual error of this nation, but it is indeed a "congenital defect" (*cacat bawaan*) of the intellectual history of the Indonesian nation, even from the beginning they knew what is called science.<sup>2</sup>

"Congenital defects" are created when the community that is actually built and developed is also subsequently inherited, from the beginning, not based on scriptural culture, but based on its oral and visual tradition, actually experiences a sense of excitement or a kind like "logos-shock", when they suddenly have to digest a cultural achievement called science, without a fundamental basis - say Latin and Greek philosophy - the "mother" of the science. The absence of an ontological root, which results in an epistemological basis, is in scientific thinking that makes science accepted obscurely, eclectically, even in terms of mixing with mysticism, as

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<sup>2</sup> Next read: Dahana, Radhar Panca, *The Path of Posmodernism: The Struggle of Indonesian Intellectuals*, Yogyakarta: Bentang Pustaka, 2006

most Indonesians perceive or accept the outside culture, both in art, religion, and science.

So it is not surprising, if in the latest situation, the Indonesian nation still encounters a quite "miraculous" reality. When the government and opposition, as well as many non-governmental parties, talk about anticipating or preparing to enter the 4.0 industrial era, almost all elements of society in this country fail to understand the reality of industrial society in that era, even to understand and become part of the 3.0 era also not yet completed. Moreover, there are still many realities when some elites (central or local), who want to gain political office, as members of the legislature or state officials, to entrepreneurs who want to succeed in their business, still go to graves, caves or shamans as a shortcut. Modern clergy, scholars to scientists who, after acting as postmodern humans in their workplaces, returned home to intensely care for or rub the kris and agate (batu akik), looking for *primbon* for circumcision or marriage of their children. Does industry 2.0 even 1.0 give birth to machines and capitalism live within them, or only in its performative action?

Indonesia is maybe a unique case, because it lives and develops, is recognized by the world of existence and some of its achievements, but lives in the socio-cultural reality of its people which are piled up or layered by *l'état* or its *maqam* of civilization. Some are still in the pre-industrial era, some feel they have become an integral part of unicorns that utilize Big Data, artificial intelligence, and programming of algorithms. More complex, because there are still many tribes classified as "primitive", such as Asmat, suku Anak Dalam, Baduy, Naga, Tengger, Trunyan, Toraja and many others that even the word "modern" is still an alien to them.

That is the factual reason that makes this country fulfilled by humans whose identity or *jati-diri* is dual, culturally schizophrenic. They can live, even comfortably, in two or three different civilizations. If the word "biadab" etymologically becomes a combination of "bi" (dual) and "adab" (culture), then cultural pluralism or adab in an Indonesian does not immediately mean lexical or denotative such as savage or biadab understanding in a dictionary, even though the potential for it is in it.

### **Illusive religion**

The lengthy explanation above becomes part of the argument to explain how religion can be a powerful arsenal not to carry out the sacred or primordial tasks of creating peace or the role of "moderation" - as many have been termed lately - but precisely to create conflict-filled antagonistic situations and segregation ambitions. The antagonist's ambition is relatively easy and quickly achieved, not only because of technological penetration as above, but also the intellectual-mental-spiritual condition of the Indonesian people who are full of fake-consciousness and schizophrenic character.

God as the core of monotheism also in theology in turn is also understood in the mode of thinking to the wrong conclusion. Say, for example, the personification of God in many religious teachings, especially heavenly religion (modern),

experiences a kind of "theological" failure because its supra-human capacity cannot be used to answer current problems, including the hard challenges presented by science. The strengthening of agnostic tendencies among the younger generation (millennial), even atheistic ones, is partly a result of God's "reality".

Especially when in the past when there were many religious authorities, from ustadz, kiyai, monks or priests, who used religious arguments, both book-based and sacred worship (santa) in the past, merely to get profit not only socially, intellectual, but also material. A giant billboard, for example, once stood at the entrance to Pondok Indah, South Jakarta housing, which presents a picture of a tree in which one of its branches filled with clouds (instead of leaves) stands a small house. Under the picture was a striking note, "It turns out that a house in heaven is cheaper than a house in a Pondok Indah," equipped with a hashtag, "pay your qurban immediately," plus the address and contact number of the institution of *amal-sodaqoh* (alms-charity) as billboard installer. Heaven turned out to be only the price of a cow and even a sheep.

The tsunami-hit public is not only a lie, slander, and fact manipulation but also an understanding that keeps God away from its transcendental dimension, making Indonesian people lose the spiritual footing which in the past has become the root of existence as well as constitutive variables of their communal life. God over-personification has created confusion and finally obscurity of monotheism, because God is imagined like Santa Claus who gave gifts on Christmas Eve. As long as we want to ask for it with a pinch of grass in the shoes we put in front of the door, immediately he arrived at the dawn to fulfill it. As politics, science, and an obsessive and even illusory economy, religion and God's understanding in it also become illusory for the general population in this country.<sup>3</sup>

The personification of God has failed to bring people closer to Him, among others, also due to the more distant humans from God-experience. Because experiences that are mental, physical and spiritual have been substituted by intellectual experiences that are filled with perceptions and become illusions when understanding reason is fake.

## **Cultural Hijrah**

In its anthropological reality, the spirituality of Indonesian traditional society is actually closer to practical religious ways, which in its esoteric side pursue the moment where it experiences His presence. This experience, perhaps apophatically, overcomes all understanding of reason about what and who He is. This is perhaps the answer to why the archipelago/Indonesian maritime (bahari) society is so quick and easy to adopt and internalize Islam, rather than other modern religions, because in Islam the religious praxis (Sunnah Rasul) becomes an upstream-reference which is almost equivalent to the scriptures (alkitab).

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<sup>3</sup> Read more, Dahana, Radhar Panca, "Exclusive Tauhid", *Kompas*, October 14, 2015

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In the maritime tradition, say in Java, the phrase created by Pakubuwana IV in the anthology of Wulang Reh's *macapat*, which states "*ngelmu iku kalakone kanthi laku*", gives meaning to all kinds of knowledge, including scriptural or scriptural memorandum, does not make a person a scientist or scholars (*oelama*), if he does not transform it into (fairy) behavior, or praxis of everyday life. The way we are religious, indeed, does not stop or culminate in memorizing books and other interpretations or understandings; does not stop at an academic degree or graduate from a religious school, but on how all understanding experiences an existential metamorphosis as a "way of life". He no longer lives in perception especially in illusions, but in creation, in practice which creates benefits for the surrounding life (other creatures / entities).

So the designation or call of "kyai" in the Javanese spiritual tradition, for example, is not directed at figures who master the knowledge and history of the book (*alkitab*), especially because he leads a religious school (*pesantren*) as widely understood today, but is directed towards its social implementation. On the benefit or *maslahat* of a shared life, it is not surprising, not only knowledgeable people (*ulama*), but even a tree, kris, or cow can get the title of Kyai. So, religious piety and people's *tawhid* are not measured by the number of footnotes that accompany the scriptural sciences, but on the foot print of the owner of the knowledge. Maybe this is where "God-experience" gets its immanent and transcendent dimension integratively.

In a somewhat chaotic situation lately, we should, perhaps also theology, be able to build a kind of intellectual bridge that can cut gaps that are increasingly distant between the abstract scientific world and the concrete world of behavior, as being the main identity of Indonesian current social reality. I think this effort is not very easy, because in addition to requiring strong political will and courage, it also takes a very long time, because our current process of education (formal and informal) actually does what it contradicts.

Maybe, as a proposal, what is faster and easier for us to do is to do a kind of "cultural hijrah (migration)". Where each individual in this nation has a good will to re-examine and re-identify himself with the primordial reality where he originated or intertwined. Finding and practicing consistently the practice or rite of tradition, which may be harmonized with the latest reality, to experience and gain strength, say reviving custom in oneself, where the ancestors had succeeded in developing and producing cultural works that fascinated the world, and increasingly impossible for us in the present repeat it.

How the process of undergoing the hijrah, is a problem that cannot be parsed on this short paper. But our willingness and ability to reflect, correct and metamorphose our identity is the key, if what is wrong now is going to be corrected.

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