Indonesian's Religions and Their Contested Narratives: Government Policy and Cultural Chronicle[1][2]

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Introduction

Indonesia is well known for its peaceful relationships among world religions (Hilmy 2010; Hefner 2011; Seo 2013; Menchik 2015). Statistically, 87% of Indonesian citizens are Muslims, the country holds significant numbers of Protestants, Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians, and followers of local religions.

The country underwent numerous conflicts instigated by religion such as Christian-Muslim conflict in Maluku and Central Celebes as well as terrorist attacks in many parts of Indonesia (Van Klinken 2001; 2007; Al-Qurtuby 2016; Lattu 2014). In 2002, Indonesia experienced the first suicide bomb blast in Bali, a world tourism center, and the only predominantly Hindu province in the country. Terrorist outbreak in May 2018 killed a number of police officers and church members in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, and Surabaya, the second largest city in the country. Responding to outbreaks of violence, national and local governments have established interfaith clerical forums for interreligious dialogue at multiple levels. Yet the mode of official dialogue failed to ensure peaceful interreligious relationships in the biggest Muslim majority country.

When government policy failed to ensure respect to religious diversity, how civic recognition through orality functions to

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strengthen interreligious solidarity in quoditian-imaginative interaction? Taking local interreligious engagements into account, this article explores rituals, symbols, and oral narratives to unpack interreligious relationships in Indonesia. Using a cultural sociology approach, and indigenous knowledge in folklore studies to examine interreligious relationships in Indonesia, my paper offers patterns of interreligious engagements for an oral-oriented society to enrich existing interreligious approaches. The article concludes that interreligious relationships in an oral-oriented society, such as Maluku, Tana Toraja and Central Java in Indonesia, need to include forms of orality and collective memory.

Structural Violence and Government policy

Indonesia is a nation-state that places religion at the heart of its political system (Menchik 2015; Hefner 2018). Since pre-Independence conversations about the political system and national ideology in 1945, founders of the nation-state agreed to situate religion as the first pillar of Indonesia's five "Pancasila" pillars. "Believe in God," the first pillar highlights the centrality of religion in Indonesia's political system. Historical documents of conversations on Indonesian political system (*Risalah* BPUPKI) and national constitution (UUD 1945) have emphasized the connection between national ideology and religious diversity in Indonesia. Religion in the political realm covers both world and local religions: *Kejawen, Kaharingan, Sunda Wiwitan, Parmalim, Aluk Tadolo*, etc. In politics, however, Indonesia practices state favoritism towards some religions (Fox 2008), while it discriminates against other beliefs, including world and local religions, because the government only recognizes six world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Catholicism, and Protestantism.

The Indonesian government, through the Presidential Decree (*Penetapan Presiden*) No 1/PNPS/1965 (blasphemy law) took a different direction than that of the civic-religious pluralism of the national constitution. The bylaw claims that the state recognizes six world religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism,

Buddhism, and Confucianism. The Presidential Decree has excluded indigenous religions that existed long before the introduction of the world religions and formation of Indonesia as a nation-state. With this in mind, the government through the decree forced indigenous religious communities to choose one of six state recognized religions. Communities that resisted the idea of forced conversion are considered atheists and subjected to structural discrimination in the public services, including civil registration, schools, and hospitals.

Indigenous religious communities suffered after the failed coup of 30 September Movement (G 30 S) in 1965. During this period of transition from the Soekarno presidency to the New Order administration, the government forced indigenous communities to convert to one of the six state recognized religions. Using the politics of anti-communism, the New Order government ordered every Indonesian citizen to become a registered member of one formal religion. Rejection of this policy would be stigmatized as anti-Pancasila and as a sympathizer/member of Indonesia's Communist Party (PKI), and led to punishment or even torture. Another exemplary of governmental policy that challenges religious pluralism in Indonesia is the introduction of the marriage law (UU no 1 Tahun 1974). The marriage bylaw chapter 2 verse 1 claims that the government can legalize a marriage if the couple have a shared religion.

Religious Fundamentalism and Violence

Religious fundamentalism has been a challenge for interreligious relationships in Indonesia. Existing researches by national non-government organizations (NGO's) highlight the rise of religious fundamentalism in Indonesia. The Wahid Institute, a Jakarta based NGO's, found in research in 2017 that 11 million Indonesian Muslims (equivalent to 7.7% of Muslim in Indonesia) are ready to conduct violent deeds towards others. According to the Wahid Institute survey, the percentage increased from 51.0% in 2016 to 57.1% in 2017. The institute also discovered that a number of Indonesians that joined ISIS escalated from 500 members in

2016 to 800 in 2017 (Wahid Institute 2017). At the same tune, Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace research on religious freedom in Indonesia illustrates the upsurge of violence against minority religious communities. Politically based conflict before and after the 2017 Governor's Election in Jakarta created divisions among fundamentalist and progressive groups. In its 2017 Report on religious Freedom Violations, Setara concludes that violence targeting religious minorities comes not only from different religious backgrounds, but also from similar religions (Setara Institute Report 2017). The Institute found that violence occurs against minority groups in political contestations in Jakarta. As a result, the institute cites Jakarta as the most intolerant city in Indonesia. Surprisingly, the Institute Reports in 2016 and 2017 placed Yogyakarta, the center of Javanese culture that used to be the city of tolerance, among intolerant cities in Indonesia.

Previous research indicates that educational institutions such as high schools and universities in Indonesia have become the site of fundamentalism rather than multiculturalism (Suhadi et al. 2013: 40-6). Student religious based organizations in public schools such as High School Muslim Student Spiritual Group (Rohis) and High School Christian Student Spiritual Group (Rokris) have created wide social gaps among students. The research claims that these high school student organizations have strong connections with fundamentalist university student organizations. High school religious based student organizations function as the first recruitment ground for religious fundamentalist groups at the higher education level.

According to the Indonesia National Agency for Combating Terrorism (BNPT) public report of May 2018, fundamentalism and radicalism have penetrated almost all top ten universities in Indonesia, which are public schools supported by the state budget. The national agency has also conducted research in 15 provinces out of 33 in Indonesia, where the BNPT found that 39% of college students publicly express ideas of anti-democracy and anti-Pancasila. The report concludes that the growth of fundamentalism in public universities is related to transnationalist ideologies

(Wahabism, Ikwanul Muslimin, Hizbut Tahrir, etc), especially in the last decade of the New Order government (BNPT report, May 2018; see also Machmudi 2006: 133-146).

Unlike Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia, that works to establish an Islamic State in Indonesia and a modern caliphate (*khilafah*) in a global context, Christian fundamentalism among students in Indonesia seeks to convert non-Christian students to Christianity as well as to convert Mainline Christian students to Evangelical Christianity. Although the report did not explore fundamentalism for non-Muslim student perspectives, fundamentalism to convert others to Christianity is the mission of evangelical Christian student organizations: Fellowship of the Inter-campus Christian Students and Indonesia Student Evangelical Institution.

Considering the rise of fundamentalism in Indonesia, government has worked to create public spheres for interreligious dialogue at many levels. The Indonesian government since Independence (August 17, 1945), has made interreligious relationships a focal concern. The office of interreligious relationships is located in the Department of Religious Affairs, with a focus on interreligious dialogue. In the New Order era, the government submerged public religious disagreements under the policy of the Command for the Restoration of Security and Order (Kopkamtib) (Aspinall 2010: 20-34). Ironically, the mushrooming of conflicts in the first decade of the reformation era (era reformasi) has paralyzed the main reformation spiritof political freedom and democracy. Under Joko Widodo's presidency, on October 2017, the head of the state has appointed The President's Special Envoy for Interfaith-Civilizations Dialogue and Cooperation. The existence of the special envoy is a reflection of the government's seriousness to create peaceful dialogue in Indonesia.

In addition to these governmental initiatives, join decrees the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Home Affairs no 8/2006 and 9/2006 the government opens avenue for religious elders to institute dialogue through the Forum for Interreligious

Communication (FKUB) in many cities. Instead of serving it's main goal,, to foster interreligious understanding, FKUB has served the political agenda of religous fundamentalist group in Indonesia. The forum functions as a tool of discrimination against religious minority groups. Fundamentalist groups in many areas of Indonesia employ the FKUB to hamper minority groups to develop religious shrines.

Oral Based Approaches for Interreligious Engagement

My research on orality and civic engagement in those areas shows that people communicate effectively through oral forms: rituals, symbols and verbalized narratives (Lattu 2014; 2018). Using Jackson's idea of "tool for conviviality," bridging relationships between oneself and others (Jackson 2016 : 135). Orality helps a member of society to communicate with others and to understand cultural messages through rituals, symbols, and oral narratives as a "tool for conviviality." Ritual fosters social cohesion and shapes cultural bridges to create the sense of *communitas*: deep and strong solidarity regardless of social divisions. In areas like Maluku, Toraja, and Central Java, ritual, or the social dimension of ritual, plays an important role in strengthening cohesion and binding the community together

In the context of Maluku, ritual creates a sense of communitas after religious based conflict occurred in the area between 1999 and 2004. Ritual and meanings about myths has become a common ground that ties a community (Lattu 2016). Borrowing from Henri Lefebvre's concept of space (Lefebvre 1991) ritualization in Maluku serves as a mental space where Malukan Christians and Muslims share a comradeship after five years of social unrest. I have written elsewhere that ritual in private and public realms creates a sense of belonging among Malukans through offline and online realities (Lattu 2012; Lattu 2014). Thus, the *panas pela* ritual re-writes the cultural text social integration among Malukan Muslims and Christians.

Resonates ritual in Maluku, ceremonial in Tana Toraja creates the *loci communes* (common ground) for social solidarity beyond

religious boundaries (Aluk, Christianity and Islam. People in Tana Toraja mark life through ritualization: the ritual of grief (*rambu solo*) and the ritual of happiness (*Rambu Tuka*). Animal sacrificial in the Torajan ritual creates ritualistic sphere for interreligious engagements. Sacrificial opens avenue of ritualistic mental space for interreligious relationships. The ritualistic event in Toraja highlights the creation of shared mental space for interreligious engagement of Torajan who share kinship narratives. Here, in the *rambu solo* ritual, the ritualistic chronicler (*tomina'a*) narratives of kinship connection encapsulates the ancestral rapport between the family of the dead and relatives who sacrifice animals. In Rambu Tuka, tomina'a recall the collective memory of a common ancestor centered on a mythical figure named *Lakipadada*, the forebear of Toraja, Luwu, Bone, and Gowa Kingdoms in South Sulawesi. In Torajan Ritual, the *tomina'a* announces the collective memory of family relationships up to *Lakipadada.* Equally important in the chronicle story is Torajan reconciliation with people of Bone (now a Muslim community) after the war (Topadatindo War in 16 centuries). The memory of *Topadatindo*'s oath, "peace agreement and intercultural acceptance between the Torajans and the Bones" has created a freedom of religious practices in Tana Toraja area because Muslims, Christian and local religious believers (*Aluk To Dolo)* could life together with strong mutual understanding.

Ritualization also functions as a bridge for interreligious communities where religious fundamentalism strongly occupies the urban public sphere in Javanese city of Solo. Although holding a significant number of Christians and Buddhists, the city of Solo in Central Java is well known for its Muslim radicalism. The city serves as home to some radical Islamic groups called "Ngruki network:" Al-Mukmin Islamic Boarding School, *Jammah Ansharut Tauhid*, *Front Permuda Islam Nusantara* (Nusantara Muslim Youth Front) and *Majelis Mujahid* Indonesia. Yet the city provides ground for interreligious relationships. The Javanese ceremony *Halal Bihalal* operates as a key to interreligious relationships in Solo. Clifford Geertz claims that *Halal Bihalal* is a "mutual begging of pardon" as it intertwines Javanese tradition and Islamic

teaching. Geertz argues that *Halal Bihalal* comes from the Javanese celebration (*riyaya*) and Islamic Eid Mubarak (Idul Fitri) that centers on forgiveness (Geertz 1976: 380). Using Lombard's three stages of Islamization in Java: folklorization, formalization, and Arabization (Lombard 1990), *Halal Bihalal* is an example of the assimilation of Islamic tradition to Javanese practices. Nowadays, the ritual is a Javanese celebration opento all Javaneses regardless of religious affiliations, and functions as the epitome of interreligious relationships.

My two years of research in the city of Solo on the *Halal Bihalal* ritual of the Ronobaskoro-Yoedhohartanan family, shows the formation of the civic sphere of interreligious engagement in a Javanese family (Lattu 2018). The family lines of Ronobaskoro-Yoedhohartanan go back to Pakubuwono II, the First King of Kasunanan Surakarta, who lived in 1711 – 1749. *Halal Bihalal* ritual strengthen the relationship and genealogical line of the family, who believes in different religious practices such as Islam, Christianity and local belief (Kejawen). Throughout the *Halal Bihalal* ritual, family members may pray according to various religious prayers and display different religious symbols: hijabs and crosses. Interestingly, Ronobaskoro-Yoedhohartanan family members who are connected to radical Islamic groups also join the *Halal Bihalal* ritual, sharing collective forgiveness with non-Muslim relatives. Ronobaskoro-Yoedhohartanan is one among millions of families in Java that practices *Halal Bihalal* to connect interreligious communities.

Symbolic Dialogue: Interreligious Engagements without Voice

From his research in Indonesia, Geertz (1973) claims that "sacred symbols function to synthesize a people's ethos – the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood – and their world view – the picture they have of the way things in actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order" (Geertz 1973 : 89). People's ethos in many parts of Indonesia lies within the system of symbolic meanings including the significance of interreligious relationships.

As a vehicle of cultural meanings, interreligious communities in a given area interact with other spiritual groups through symbolic significances. In the same way, cultural symbolic expressions in the Toraja cemetery highlight the symbolic significance of interreligious relationships. Unlike many parts of Indonesia, people in Toraja, Christians and *Aluk to Dolos* continue to employ communal cemetery that carved out of rock. Despite its individual ownership, a tomb within the Torajan cemetery belongs to one family. However, Muslims reject the burial of the body in a rocky tomb. According to Muslim beliefs, it is necessary to bury the body in the soil. Therefore, in the same cemetery one might encounter Muslim tombs on the ground, while Christian's and *Aluk to Dolo*'s tombs in the rocky walls. In this sense, the graveyard functions as a symbol that amalgamates a spirit of social solidarity.

In addition, interreligious-interethnic symbols in Indonesia shape an imagination of cultural acceptance and mutual relationships. In Semarang, Central Java, the symbol of *Warak Ngendog*, a cultural product of the late 19th Century when the pre-colonial Arabic and Chinese merchants developed their settlement, epitomizes ethnic mutual interaction and religious acceptance. Interreligious-ethnic communities in Semarang create an imaginative animal called *Warak Ngendog* to illustrate the multiple belonging of inter-religious-ethnic relationships in the area. The head of *Warak Ngendog* is a dragon, while its body comes from a camel, and its four legs are from a goat. *Warak Ngendog*'s dragon head represents the Chinese community, its camel's body symbolizes the Arabic group, and the goat four legs indicate the Javanese host society. In 2014, the municipality of Semarang constructed *Warak Ngendog* monuments in many urban areas. Through the sacred symbol of the *Warak Ngendog* carnival performance and monument, the interreligious-ethnic communities in Semarang highlight the ethos of openness towards each other.

Oral Narrative and Oral Texts in Dialogue

As mentioned before, *tomina'a,* in Toraja, recalls the interreligious collective narratives based on genealogical

relationships and cultural oaths in the ritual of *Rambu Solo* and *Rambu Tuka*. In addition, the narrative of folksong in the *ma'badong*, dance during ritual, tradition encapsulates cultural-oral stories. *Ma'badong*'s folksong helps Torajan to maintain a memory of religious others in the cultural public sphere. While the body movement in the *ma'badong* tradition produces a kinetic memory that serves as storage for Torajan collective remembrance. Oral narratives of interreligious relationships circulate through *tomina'a* as verbalized texts, narratives of folksong in *ma'badong* (singing and moving in the circle) occur during the *Rambu Solo* ritual, and on Toraja TV and social media as third orality.

Echoing oral narratives in Toraja, modern genres of folksong in Maluku contribute to the circulation of cultural texts that have strengthened interreligious-cultural networks. In Maluku today, song writers and music producers have turned *kapata* in traditional song narratives into numerous modern genres: Reggae, Hip Hop, Pop, Dangdut (an Indonesian traditional genre) to help people master the narrative of culturally based interreligious engagement in. Malukan modern songs have copied indigenous cultural narratives. Borrowing from Benedict Anderson, "unisonance" is a sense of belonging among people who sing the same song, as people sing a national anthem. He states, "nothing connects us all but imagined sound" (Anderson 2006: 145). Culturally based social solidarity creates the sense of community.

Conclusion

When central government policies do not guarantee freedom of religious expression or interreligious engagement, oral-oriented interreligious relationships through imagined-symbolic interreligious engagement provide social space for interreligious relationships.