

TOWARD A COLLABORATION IN CONSTRUCTING NATIONAL IDENTITY: REREADING THE PLACE OF INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS IN INDONESIAN CATHOLICISM

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Abstract: Indigenous religions and world religions has a complex relationship. It is generally understood that world religions came as a foreign culture and in many ways take opposition to indigenous religions. This research aims to understand the relationship between indigenous religions and Catholicism after the independence of Indonesia in relation to the national identity of Indonesia. Using historical analysis, this research attempts to understand the ideas of J.M.W. Bakker or Rahmat Subagya (1916-1978), a Catholic priest and thinker who wrote extensively on Indonesian indigenous religions, Catholicism, and Indonesia's national identity in the 1970s. Considering the richness of Indonesian culture and the deep spirit of indigenous religions, it argues that indigenous religions in Indonesia become a fundamental source for Indonesian nationhood. Moreover, through this research, rereading the works of Rahmat Subagya also shows how world religions understand indigenous religions and at the same time try to build an epistemological bridge to work together in the context of Indonesian society.

Keywords: Indigenous religions, *Kebatinan* Movement, national identity, Catholicism, Indonesia

Introduction

After the independence of Indonesia, discussion about national identity of Indonesia (*kepribadian bangsa*) was dominant in public discourse. One of the impetuses is the messages of President Soekarno on the Anniversary of Indonesian Independence (August 17, 1957; 1958; 1959, 1961).¹ Soekarno urged to rediscover the national identity (*kepribadian bangsa*). According to Soekarno, independence of Indonesia is not only achieving freedom from imperialism but also rediscover the national identity and live in accordance with national identity in many aspects.² After the messages of Soekarno, the “Musjawarah Sekitar Arti Kepribadian Nasional” (Consultation Concerning the Meaning of National Identity) was held in Salatiga (August 13-16, 1960).³ Since the national identity as suggested by Soekarno is based on indigenous culture, the meeting discussed it from

¹ Soekarno, Ir. *Dibawah Bendera Revolusi*. Vol. 1. Bangkitlah Bangsa, 1963.

² Soekarno, *Amanat Presiden Soekarno pada Ulang Tahun Kemerdekaan Indonesia, 17 Agustus 1958*.

³ Musjawarah I Sekitar Arti Kepribadian Nasional. See Papers presented at the Musjawarah I Sekitar Arti Kepribadian Nasional, Salatiga. Some of the papers are Hoemardani, S. D, “Kesenian Kita Dalam Persoalan Kepribadian Nasional”; Handipaningrat, Kj. A.. Mukti R.T., “Pribadi Bangsa Indonesia dan Kebudajaan Nasional Ditinjau Dari Sudut Agama Islam”; Driyarkara, “Mentjari Kepribadian Nasional”; Mihardja, A. “Seni Dalam Pembinaan Kepribadian Nasional”; Prijono, “Sambutan untuk Musjawarah”.

different perspectives, namely education, ethics, religion and philosophy, the arts, and law and society.⁴

Using historical analysis, this research tries to read the work of Rahmat Subagya or J.W.M. Bakker, as a Catholic missionary, on the role of indigenous religions in forming national identity. This research aims to understand the relationship between indigenous religions and Catholicism after the independence of Indonesia in relation to the national identity of Indonesia. To do the research, the works of Rahmat Subagya would be read closely. Rahmat Subagya (1916-1978), a Catholic priest and thinker, wrote extensively on Indonesian indigenous religions, Catholicism, and Indonesia's national identity in the 1970s. It will understand how Rahmat Subagya defines indigenous religions amid the debate on *Kebatinan* movement in relation to world religions and state policy. It also covers the question to what extent indigenous religions in post-independence of Indonesia give directions to Indonesian society. This argument presupposes the understanding that indigenous religions consists of knowledge and belief which drives the actions. Indigenous religions are understood as a genuine belief and native culture from Indonesia which become a fertile soil for building Indonesia as a nation. It is only through finding the indigenous culture, Indonesianess could be strongly bound.

Rereading the works of Rahmat Subagya also open a new horizon about how world religions, namely Catholicism, think about indigenous religions. After many years his works were almost neglected, nowadays looking at his works on many different topics especially on indigenous religions enlightens several crucial issues particularly on the role of indigenous religions in society and the encounter between indigenous religions and world religions, especially Islam and Christianity. The role of indigenous religions in society recently has been discussed in several researches such as on the topics of indigenous religions and ecology, indigenous religions and interreligious dialogue etc. Therefore, rereading the works of Rahmat Subagya would give contributions to understand the position of indigenous religions in Indonesian society and the relation between indigenous religions and Christianity, particularly Catholicism in Indonesia.

World Religions, Indigenous Culture, and Indonesia

a. Rahmat Subagya (1916-1978)

It was forty-two years ago, on October 21st 1979 at a beautiful afternoon, a group of students gathered surrounding the temple of Plaosan, near the Prambanan temple. A Dutch professor eagerly explained about the temple to the students. As he explained, Plaosan temple brings peculiar peace and serene which is different from other temples.⁵

⁴ Tod Jones explores in his *Kebudayaan dan Kekuasaan di Indonesia: Kebijakan Budaya Selama Abad ke 20 Hingga Era Reformasi* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2015).

⁵ Dick Hartoko, a colleague of Bakker writes it in the preface of the book, *Filsafat Kebudayaan* which is published after Bakker's death. See, Bakker SJ, J. W. M. *Filsafat Kebudayaan: Sebuah Pengantar*, 1984.

However, a beautiful afternoon, a sunset and the temple he liked most at that day also became a witness of the life of the professor. When the professor, his name is Jan Bakker or Rahmat Subagya, reached one of the peak of the temples, he faced the terminal time. He got a heart attack and soon after that passed away at the age of 63 years. He bequeathed hundreds of writings about culture and civilizations in different areas, particularly on Indonesian cultures.

As a Dutch Catholic missionary working mainly in Central Java and Yogyakarta, Rahmat Subagya represents typical missionary which concerns on local culture aside of doing service in the church. He is known for his writings and ideas on Indonesian cultures. As a young Catholic in formation to be a priest, he came to Indonesia in 1937. He came to experience the formation of spirituality (Novisiat) in Girisonta, Ungaran. After two years in Girisonta, he studied Philosophy and Theology in Kolese Ignatius, Yogyakarta (1939-1941), and doing services at Mertoyudan Seminary in Magelang (1942). In the time of Japanese occupation, he was in camp (jail) at different places. He was in Banyuwangi (1943), Banyubiru (1944) and Bandung (1946). He then studied Theology in the Nederland (1945-1950) and doing spirituality formation in Australia (1951). After his studies, he returned to Girisonta and for 12 years spending his time to teach Seminarians (1954-1966). He moved to Yogyakarta in 1967 to teach Theology in Sanata Dharma Faculty of Teacher Training (IKIP) and stayed at Kolese Ignatius. He passed away on October 21st 1978. He is known for his reputation as a professor of local religion of Indonesia. He has offer his life to study Indonesian culture, languages, history, and religions.

His concerns in Indonesian culture has been shown in his works when he was in Girisonta, Ungaran in 1954 and after that intensively engage in many different topics on religions and local culture. He is also known on his mastery on many different languages which supported his researches. Some of his writings in relation with indigenous cultures and religions are: *Filsafat Kebudayaan: Sebuah Pengantar* (1984), *Agama Asli Indonesia* (1981), *Sejarah Filsafat dalam Islam* (1978), *Epistemologi Indonesia* (1978), *Kepercayaan dan Agama: Kebatinan–Kerohanian–Kejiwaan* (1976), *Chandra Manusia Islam* (1975), *Chandra Manusia Indonesia* (1974), *Ilmu Pracasti* (1974), *Umat Katolik Berdialog* (1972), *Alam Pikiran Indonesia* (1958), *Persoalan Akulturasi Hindu Indonesia* (1958), *Pantja Sila Dasar Negara Indonesia* (1955), etc.⁶ He also found Taman DAMAI (*Dokumentasi Agama dan Masyarakat Asli Indonesia*), a desk documenting issues on religions and Indonesian indigenous people.⁷ His “*Agama Asli*

⁶ See Heru Prakosa, “Passing Over Antara ‘Haram’ dan ‘Haram’”: Membaca Ulang Romo J.W.M. Bakker, SJ (1916-1978) in Seminar III: Gagasan Kebudayaan, Sejarah Gereja dan Teologi Rm. JWM. Bakker, SJ & Rm. Jan Weijtens, SJ (Yogyakarta, 22 November 2011), pp. 17-53.

⁷ Many of the documents of Taman DAMAI could be accessed at Kolsani Library and Sanata Dharma Library in Yogyakarta. See A. Budi Susanto, SJ, “Jejak Gereja Masa Lalu untuk Langkah Indonesia Berjuang Masa Kini”, in Seminar III: Gagasan Kebudayaan, Sejarah Gereja dan Teologi Rm. JWM. Bakker, SJ & Rm. Jan Weijtens, SJ (Yogyakarta, 22 November 2011), pp. 5-16.

Indonesia” (*Indonesian Indigenous Religion*) becomes one of the sourcebooks on Indonesian indigenous religions.⁸

b. Defining the *Kebatinan* Movement

Indigenous religions and world religions has a complex relationship. It is generally understood that world religions came as a foreign culture and in many ways take opposition to indigenous religions. Understanding the unending debate, Rahmat Subagya suggests that “humiliation must be avoided, because it creates mutual insult...”.⁹ Although there will be no agreement on several issues, both indigenous religions and world religions come to understanding that toleration should be the basis of mutual relationship. Rahmat Subagya also follows the discourse on defining the indigenous religions. His effort to document the result of the discussions about indigenous religions shows his point of view to make new definition of the indigenous religions which at that time are called *Kebatinan* Movement.

Based on the understanding about *Kebatinan* Movement and world religions, Rahmat Subagya tries to construct good relationship between them in the context of Indonesian society. He did several steps to build a definition about *Kebatinan* Movement. First step is giving peculiar characters on *Kebatinan* Movement. According to Rahmat Subagya, there are six characters of *Kebatinan* Movement: *batin*, *rasa*, *asli*, *relasional*, *akehlak*, and for society.¹⁰ *Kebatinan* put its concerns on the inner aspect of human life or inward (*batin*). *Kebatinan* comes to the essence of life, united with the Divine. It also comes to the melting point of a will and knowledge (*keanrub*) that is an awareness (*rasa*). It is also rooted in local culture or native (*asli*). *Kebatinan* also emphasizes the importance of right relationship among communities. It also transforms characters (*akehlak*), and the *Kebatinan* also urges action to build good society or a common good. These characters, according to Rahmat Subagya, supports a better understanding about *Kebatinan* compares to several typologies given by scholars and religious leaders. Mostly, scholars and religious leaders are suspicious of *Kebatinan* as a heretic or bid’ah (Ramman Ramali, Prof Kamil Kartapraja), syncretism (Yusuf Abdullah Puar). Other typologies of *Kebatinan* are concerning to its membership/in a group or private. According to Rahmat Subagya, typologies which based on secondary realities, pragmatism, and appearances do not help to understand the *Kebatinan* Movement.

The *Kebatinan* Movement could be understood from its daily practices which come from the spirit of *Kebatinan*. Rahmat Subagya argues that *Kebatinan* should be understood as a movement primarily for an integral human development. The *Kebatinan* covers all aspects of human life: *badan-jiva-atman* (body-spirit-real self), *naluri-rob-batin* (instinct, mind,

⁸ Several researches on indigenous religions uses his book, such as Samsul Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi Agama Leluhur dalam Politik Agama di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: CRCS UGM, 2017).

⁹ See Rahmat Subagya, *Kepercayaan dan Agama: Kebatinan–Kerohanian–Kejiwaan* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1976), p. 42.

¹⁰ Rahmat Subagya, *Kepercayaan dan Agama...*, p. 14-34.

inner spirit), *tubuh-jiva-sukma* (body, spirit, soul). However, the development could be achieved through daily exercises. Daily activities are a spiritual exercise, such as through Samadhi, yoga, keeping in silence, doing reflection, etc. Moreover, it doesn't separate people from doing activities. It needs whole life participations in its sociality. The *Kebatinan* transforming the whole life identity. It is a transformation from mundane motivation to spiritual motivation without gaining rewards, "*sepi ing pamrih, rame ing gawe*".

World Religions and *Kebatinan* Movement

Regarding a misunderstanding between world religions and *Kebatinan* Movement, Rahmat Subagya synthesizes the discourse. World religions understand *Kebatinan* as a new religion and supports syncretism. However, for *Kebatinan*, its movement is not religion. It is beyond religions and supports religions. Referring to the *National Symposium of Kepercayaan in 1970*, Rahmat Subagya states:

"... *Pelajaran Sang Suksmo Sejati bukan suatu agama dan tidak pula dimaksudkan untuk merubah Agama Tuhan yang telah ada, yakni Islam dan Kristen, bahkan sebaliknya. Sang Guru Sejati menegaskan agar mereka yang telah memeluk Islam dan Kristen hendaknya benar-benar dan sungguh-sungguh melaksanakan semua petunjuk-petunjuk Rahayu yang tersimpan dalam Kitab Suci al Qur'an dan Injil....*"¹¹

To understand the difference between world Religions and *Kebatinan*, Rahmat Subagya states the document of Kongres *Kebatinan* II (1956), "*Kebatinan adalah sumber asas dan sila Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa, untuk mencapai budi luhur, guna kesempurnaan hidup*". It is also needed to understand the difference about the mediator. For world religions, the way to perfection of life is through God's revelation, not alone by human's effort. According to *Kebatinan*, revelation is without mediator. Whereas for world religion, the mediator is prophet. There is also a significant difference between *Kebatinan* and world religions. For *Kebatinan*, the end is unity with God. The way to unite with God is eradicating human worldliness. While for world religions, human obeys God through personal faith.

Rahmat Subagya also defines the difference between Islam and *Kebatinan*, and Catholicism and *Kebatinan*. According to Islam, Islamic faith consists of *iqrar, tasdiq, amal*. It is through affirming with the tongue (*qawl bi'l-lisan*), believing in the heart (*tasdiq bi'l-qalb*), and doing the pillars (*amal bi'l-arkan*). While Sufis builds its ways through finding God in heart (*dhamir*) and loving (*hub and 'isq*) to God. It is through 4 levels: *syari'at, thariqat* (togetherness under a leader), *haqiqat* (truth), and *ma'rifat/mystical experience*.¹² The way Islam does, has similarities with the Catholicism particularly on the relationship with God. Rahmat Subagya states that in Catholicism, human person consists of reason, will, and feeling. These trichotomy creates three categories of theologies, namely dogmatic theology,

¹¹ See Rahmat Subagya, *Kepercayaan dan Agama...*, p. 72.

¹² See Rahmat Subagya, *Kepercayaan dan Agama...*, p. 85.

moral theology, and 'theologia mystica'. Faith consists of reason and experience which comes to action.

Looking at the way world religions build its spirituality, Rahmat Subagya argues that *Kebatinan* would be a good reminder for world religions to be always in its line to help its adherents. For Catholicism, the question would be does action is really come from the experience with God. *Kebatinan*, according to Rahmat Subagya, could remind Catholicism to grow in the inner experience with God (*Dhat Nan Mutlak*).¹³ As Mukti Ali also states, *Kebatinan* also reminds Islam the importance of inner heart. In conclusion, for Rahmat Subagya, *Kebatinan* would be a good friend to purify world religions in the time of critical situations, particularly when religions concentrate on its rules, laws, and dogmas. *Kebatinan* Movement reminds world religions to take its main orientation in responding to the human inner heart of longing for God. In the end, *Kebatinan* helps every person to come to his/her inner spirit which gives her/him power to work without seek for rewards, "*Sepi ing pamrih, ramai ing gawe*".

Toward New Collaborations

Based on mutual understanding between world religions and *Kebatinan* Movement, new steps could be taken together. During the historical moment in the 1970s when national identity was strongly imposed, the role of *Kebatinan* Movement is fundamental. National identity is based on local culture, one of them is indigenous religions. Together with other identities, *Kebatinan* participated in the national building. Looking at the statement of the Soekarno, the approaches to the national identity is from bellow. National identity and the spirit of nationalism is not understood from the perspective of the state, majorities, heroes, and cities, but from the perspective of the people, daily life of the citizens. Moreover, local wisdom, traditions, and indigenous religions are the center of national identity.

Rahmat Subagya suggests three ways of collaborations where *Kebatinan* Movement and indigenous culture could find a footstep to support national identity.¹⁴ *Kebatinan* Movement offers its integral paradigm in seeing the whole world. Rahmat Subagya defines it in 3 ways. First, *pemikiran psikokosmis* (psyco-cosmic approach). It says that relationship between men and God becomes a paradigm in understanding the whole universe. Rahmat Subagya mentions, in Java, Sunda, and Bali, there is a similarity in understanding the world. Several terms explain these understanding, such as *papat keblat*, *kelimo pancer*, *kolomudeng*, *poncosudo*, *mocopat*, *moncosekawan*, etc. In this line of thought, creation does not stand alone, but it is always with others. Second is *tertib alam* (right relationship with the universe). Based

¹³ See Rahmat Subagya, *Kepercayaan dan Agama....*, p. 103.

¹⁴ See Rahmat Subagya, "Epistemologi Indonesia" in Pranarka, Anton Bakker. *Epistemologi: Kebudayaan dan Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: KSFY, 1979), p. 91-113.

on the psycho-cosmic relationship, human builds good relationship with the universe. Rahmat Subagya points out the importance of finding a melting point between several groups. He gives example such as Kraton becomes a melting point between conservative Islam, conservative Kejawen, progressive Islam, and progressive Kejawen. It comes from understanding about *caturtunggal* which supports harmony and toleration. Third, relationship is always based on an awareness, not only an understanding. Rahmat Subagya suggests the importance of *rasa* (awareness) in building a right relationship with universe and community. *Rasa* becomes a parameter of right relationship which creates harmony.

In daily practices, *Kebatinan* Movement supports and participates in the discourse of environment issues, Pancasila, social cohesion, and human characters or education. *Kebatinan* Movement provides many teachings and understanding about environment issues such as the way of planting, the importance of forests, rivers, mountains, trees, etc. In social cohesion, especially in the context of Indonesian society, *Kebatinan* Movement supports Pancasila in many ways. All the five principles could be found the grounds of it in daily life of the people. Moreover, *Kebatinan* Movement could participate in educational process through its understanding on human development.

Closing Remarks

Rereading the works of Rahmat Subagya shows knowledge production on *Kebatinan* Movement in Indonesia and the role of world religions, particularly Catholicism, on the issues of *Kebatinan*. *Kebatinan* Movement tried to define itself amidst political changes and dominant role of world religions in Indonesia. In that processes, *Kebatinan* Movement could participate in Indonesian society through offering a communal paradigm on the relation to society, universe, and the Divine.

Kebatinan Movement also reminds world religions to concentrate on the human needs of right relationship with God in daily life. World religions should not put its focus on the rules, laws, and dogmas. In this line understanding, *Kebatinan* Movement also encourages world religions to do enculturation (inculturation) or *pribumisasi* according to local contexts. It is only through *pribumisasi* world religions could be appreciated and involved in society.

Rereading the works of Rahmat Subagya also come to question about the role of power and how power works in society. Rahmat Subagya needs to understand the discourse of 'national identity' and *Kebatinan* Movement in a structural/post-structural way. Although Rahmat Subagya is rich with references, but he does put his concerns on the role of power in developing knowledge production of *Kebatinan* Movement.

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