

## FLOOD DISASTER, LOCAL BELIEF AND ISLAM-SUFISM

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### **Abstract**

*Flood disaster as a natural phenomenon has a lot of meaning for the rural community. They believe that flood is the power of deity, as a sign that a quarrel is happening 'under water', and a sign of God's kindness because flood has negative and positive aspects. These show that people's thoughts are shaped by several factors, such as local and religious beliefs (Sufism). This paper outlines how Segeri society describes the meaning of flood disaster constructed by local beliefs and Islamic sufism. Historically, the spread of Islam in South Sulawesi – that is generally characterized as 'Sufi' – is the factor influencing the religious belief of local society. The aforementioned belief is the sufism characteristic which is about the absolute resignation toward God's will and fate. This study uses phenomenological approach to interpret the understanding of flood and the local belief obtained through in-depth interview to Bissu and farmers. The interview data is also linked to the observation of the natural environment. The research shows that Segeri society believes that flood is God's will and reprisal. By being given an ordeal, someone's sins will be decreased. Flood – they believe – will give positive impacts and also bring God's blessing in their lives. This belief causes the so-called 'resignation' everytime flood destroys their area.*

*Bagi masyarakat pedesaan, bencana banjir adalah fenomena alam yang memiliki banyak makna. Beberapa di antaranya yaitu banjir sebagai perwujudan kekuasaan dewa, sebagai pertanda sedang terjadi pertikaian di alam bawah air, dan merupakan tanda kebaikan Tuhan karena banjir memiliki aspek negatif dan positif. Contoh-contoh tersebut menunjukkan pemaknaan masyarakat yang*

dibentuk oleh beberapa faktor, antara lain kepercayaan lokal dan keyakinan keagamaan (sufisme). Tulisan ini menguraikan pemaknaan masyarakat Segeri terhadap terjadinya bencana banjir yang dikonstruksi kepercayaan lokal dan Islam sufisme. Secara historis, penyebaran agama Islam di provinsi Sulawesi Selatan yang umumnya berciri 'sufistik' merupakan salah satu faktor yang membentuk keyakinan keagamaan masyarakat setempat. Keyakinan keagamaan yang dimaksud adalah adanya karakteristik sufisme yang berisi 'kepasrahan' mutlak atas kehendak dan takdir Tuhan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi dengan menafsirkan pemahaman masyarakat Segeri terhadap banjir, kepercayaan lokal mereka yang diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dengan bisu dan petani. Data wawancara tersebut juga dihubungkan dengan pengamatan terhadap lingkungan alam setempat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa masyarakat Segeri meyakini banjir sebagai cobaan dan kehendak dari Tuhan. Setiap cobaan yang dialami manusia berarti menggugurkan dosa-dosanya. Banjir yang datang dianggap memiliki hikmah kebaikan dan keberkahan Tuhan dalam kehidupan mereka. Keyakinan tersebut berkonsekuensi terhadap 'kepasrahan' masyarakat setiap banjir terjadi.

**Keywords:** *flood disaster; local belief; Islam-sufism; social construction*

## Introduction

The flood that hit several areas in Pangkep, South Sulawesi for years has damaged the environment and livelihoods, especially human and also to local sociocultural condition. In average, flood comes 2-3 times a year and it is usually a sudden flood preceded by heavy rain for several days.

These disasters constantly make Segeri society deals with various kinds of flood. They learn from the mistakes they made and find a new way of living. This process forms knowledge known by many experts as 'local knowledge' which is explained by Barsh (2000: 152-173) that local knowledge arises from long-term observations as the core of natural phenomena. According to Berger and Luckmann (1994) human knowledge in social life is regarded as the result of human construction through the concept of dialectics, known as externalizing - objectivation - internalization.

Warren et al. (1995) defines the local knowledge as a kind of knowledge used by locals to live in a particular environment. In the local knowledge, almost all knowledge is tied to a specific location where people are being considered making their dwellings and particularly for their way of life (Deloria, 1992: 114-134; Basso, 1996; Pierotti & Wildcat, 2000: 1333-1340). In this

context, Segeri society has a unique habit to name the kinds of flood they experienced. The term 'good flood' is given to flood which does not damage the infrastructure, whereas the term 'bad flood' is a kind of flood devastating infrastructure. It also depends on the local belief about the existence of 'God of good water' called *La Bulalleq* and 'God of bad water' called *La Eppang*.

For the society of Segeri, flood is often related to their lives. Segeri known as flooded areas, especially during the rainy season. This indicates that the Segerian got used to flood so they do not feel fear and panic when the rainy season arrives. In fact, every flood occurred regarded as 'will', the hardships and tribulations of God they call *Dewata Suewwae*. For them, all miseries from God of Wisdom *Dewata Suewwae* are definitely beneficial to people. Therefore, they accept the flood fatefully.

The Segeri society known to have the myth of their messenger *Dewata Suewwae* on earth called 'To Manurung' who came down from Heaven. This myth is also known by natives of *Karampuang* (Manda, 2007), *Massenrengpulu* by Tahara (Ahmar & Syarifuddin, 2007), *Kajang* by Hijjang & Gising (Akhmar & Syarifuddin, 2007), and *Matajang* (Bahri, 2014). Bahri (2014) states that the purpose of 'To Manurung' is to create a harmony of human life under God's guidance.

The description above indicates the presence of a strong religious influence on the culture of Segeri. Perception and religious action that put human to the will of God and ignore self-desire are characteristics of 'Jabariyyah' thought. The thought is also called as 'resignation'.

Based on the description above, this paper reveals the knowledge of Segeri floods commonly understood by the locals. That understanding is the result of the construction of local beliefs with Islam-Sufism and its dialectic with the local natural environment.

### Local Belief of Segeri Society

Before accepting Islam as their religion, the people of South Sulawesi embraced animism and dynamism. Both believed to have the good and bad power of human life. The ancestors' belief is relied on '*Dewata Suewwae*' and '*Pototoe*', the transcendental forces that cannot be interpreted logically. The effect of ancestral beliefs that has rooted and shaped people's behavior in conducting rituals is still found until now. The religious rituals which are connected to Allah swt. have rationally absorbed into people's mind and

have become a central source of life force. The different belief raises a blend of confidence or syncretizing in the community.

The ritual of ancestral beliefs is publicly held based on Islamic thought and the process following Islamic rituals. The form of faith blending is shown through the relation of two main aspects: belief and the trust of the ancestral rites. Contiguity and assimilation occur in the field of trust, especially in the field of implementation of religious ceremonies. It also occurs almost in every aspect of religious ceremony, either in the form of life cycle ceremonial or other religious ceremonies.

The implementation of religious tradition of the first type based on the belief of the existence of ancestral wraith and '*Dewata*' were influential in human life. The ancestral wraith maintains and provides protection to humans. Furthermore, there are wraiths and other evils that bring disaster such as disease and disrupt human's life. In every important event in human life, they need to hold rite and give the offering and express hopes to avoid the anger of the wraith and to get protection for humans. The rite sometimes is accompanied by the expulsion of the bad evil that will interfere humans' life. Various symbols used in every rite are the rules that arise because of the belief in ancestral wraith. In its practice, there are elements and parts of the rite influenced by Islam. This is also a part of the ancestral heritage.

For example, a blend of Islamic with ancestral beliefs ritual is found while attending the tree planting ritual. This ritual is performed by reading the '*barzanji*' or Islamic poems by '*Sanro*' accompanied with incised betel leaf herb tradition and incense smoke. The prayers recited in the beginning of the ritual are taken from al-Quran. This contiguity of local tradition and Islam is the custom of Segeri society.

In the ritual, *Bissu* plays very important role to lead all the traditional rituals. He can give advice and counsel to the public about 'life'. He can also become '*Sanro*' or shaman with his supra-natural power to protect people from the wraith or evil disturbance. He also gives traditional herbs, as well as provides the public consultation about ritual ceremony.

'*I La Galigo*' manuscript says that '*Bissu*' is a complement for the existence of major characters of '*Batara Guru*' who descended from the sky. According to Mr. Eka (Fatahillah, 2012) *Bissu*'s role in the history development of Bugis kingdoms civilization has a strategic role in running the emperor, because the king always asked considerations from *him*.

Mr. Saidi (Fatahillah, 2012) says that the human origin is from 'Batara Guru'. 'Batara Guru' derived from 'Boting Langi' (over the world) to 'Alêq Kawa' (middle world or earth) with the intention of filling the void of the earth accompanied by 'Salassa' (palace). After that, it revealed 'We Nyiliq Timo' as a breast feeding brother used as wives, accompanied by servants and the people who serve the people. Besides, it also brought 'wodi' tree and 'tamarind' tree used as a place of rest. It is also descended a 'bissu' named 'We Semmaga' with his entourage on the slopes of Mount Latimojong.

'Bissu' is linked with 'Batara Guru' which is considered as human being "pole ri boting langi" (coming from the sky), with a strategic position as an advisor in determining good and bad; a trust and a worthy or unworthy decision of a king. According to Hamonic (see: Mujahiduddin, 2004) the ancient Bugis script concludes that 'bissu' is a small community in Bugis society that has an important role in regulating the territory of the kingdom.

The important position of Bissu in the past royal system is determining the direction and people's lives through the prediction and starting a job like down fields. In this context, 'Bissu' as part of the Segeri social structure forms an objective reality. He is the guide of social life of the local community in any context. 'Bissu' and ritual also provide community confidence in maintaining order and harmonization at the local social life by giving explanation to it. 'Bissu' and 'ritual' as the structure are not merely a symbolic order, but also a significant order in which people get the sense and meaning of his life by relying underneath.

The social structure in Segeri as an objective reality is also a subjective reality, in which the content or meaning of the social structure can only be understood from the local community perspective. It became necessary because of the dialectic between man and society. The dialectic occurs through three processes, two of them are externalization and objectivities and the third is internalization.

Through internalization, men become a product of society (formed by the public). Internalization has function of transmitting 'bissu' and 'ritual' as a reality to the members of the new society. Hence, the structure can be maintained from time to time, even though members of the public who conceptualized the structure also continued to internalize. The status of objectivity in the structure of consciousness remained firm. This process became the third cycle in the relationship between human dialectic of society. Human shaped society, then man formed community (Riyanto, 2009).

The dynamics of a 'bissu' long journey have passed through the track for ages with a variety of roles and function. It shows that 'bissu' was born and developed in the community in accordance with the system and the nature of society. 'Bissu' life trip corresponds to the development and the demands of the times. When the ancients 'bissu' is sacred with multi-function task, he is seen as a holy man who can relate 'Dewata Sewwae'. However, bissu is almost extinct. We can still find 'bissu' in Segeri that is inherited ancestral traditions and take care of 'Arajang' and lead traditional rituals.

### The Spreading of Islam-Sufism at Segeri

The formation of the community's religious beliefs of South Sulawesi derived from past experience and came from a wide range of knowledge and beliefs. One of them is the thought of Islam-sufism. Sufism thought developed in the kingdom era which consists of two groups, namely 'Khalwatiyah Samman' and 'Khalwatiyah Yusuf al-Makassary'. At first, the *Khalwatiyah* congregation has aristocratic pattern because many worshipers were from the nobility of Makassar. By the time, people from various classes are allowed to be the worshipers.

The *Khalwatiyah Samman* congregation entered South Sulawesi because of the role of Sheikh Abdullah al-Muniz in the mid-19th century. Most of his followers were villagers. Both groups are scattered congregations in South Sulawesi, including those in Segeri regency. According to Hamid (1994: 162), the spreading of both congregations is caused by the strong support of the kings of Bugis and Makassar. The core teachings on both congregations are similar. The difference is only on the implementation of the remembrance. In its development, *Khalwatiyah Yusuf* is more popular than *Khalwatiyah Samman*.

The application of tasawwuf doctrine is adopted by a person through a process of inner purification and inspiration of sufism, through some 'Maqam' or station or the level of life achieved by a 'salik' which looks at attitudes, moral and everyday behavior. This 'Maqam' is divided into many levels, but it is briefly a collection of three: (a) 'Maqam Bidayah' is for novice entering the congregation of the common people; (b) 'Maqom Tawassuth' is for *khawash* group; (c) 'Maqam Akhashul Khawash' called as class 'Abraar', or group 'Muqarrabin' (Wahab, 2014).

In the treatise of 'An-nafhatu as-saylaniah', Hamid (1994: 163-165) outlines the core teaching of the 'Maqam' achievements as follows: (1) repentance or 'taubat' to God from all of the spiritual and physical sin, repent of the sin of leaving the religious obligations such as leaving one of the pillars of Islam

or by eating and drinking 'haram' (illicit) things. The way of repenting sins includes regretting what was done, self-promising not to repeat it again; (2) piety or 'zuhud' by reducing the desire and keeping all the pleasures of the world and ourselves. The world is only temporary while the eternal is afterlife; (3) resignation or 'tawakkal' by turning the whole affair, attitudes, and actions to God; (4) 'qanaah' which was enough for the provision of God; (5) solitude or 'uzlah', is to avoid the society full of immorality and crime; (6) 'tawajuh', is a mental attitude that always feels the majesty of nature creation and the beauty bestowed in life; (7) patience or 'shabar' for all miseries happened and control one self and family from hateful things. It also means to bear the risk or suffering; (8) willingly accept or 'ridha' of 'qadha' and 'qadr' from Allah swt.; and finally (9) verbal and mind recitation or 'dzikr zahir' anytime.

The essence of sufism is that every mundane problem is not important in life, because it will keep one self away from the love of God. Enjoyment of the world can be difficult to control by people and it will cause them to fall in shameful and unjust deeds.

### **Flood Disaster: Local Belief and Islam-Sufism**

Disaster is a severe disruption to the survival and livelihood of a community system. It changes the vulnerability of communities to the impacts of disasters; it involves loss of life and or property and forces people's ability to cope without help.

Smith (2005: 301) argues that the disaster is an issue that results in death and destruction and causes social disorder, political and economic. Cisin and Clark (1962: 30) consider a disaster as any issue that seriously interferes with normal activities. As for Drabek (1986: 7), disaster is accidental or uncontrolled events, actual or threatened.

According to Bakornas (2012: 17), flashed flood usually occurs in the flow of the river which its bottom slope is steep. The high and very fast flow of flood, can reach more than 12 meters higher than usual (such as Bahorok flood at 2003) and it can bring huge rock/boulder and trees and damage or sweep anything. This flood then subsided. Flooding like this can cause human casualties (as there was displaced) and huge property losses in a short time.

For the Segeri society, flood in various forms and levels has special meaning. They believe that the flood was a sign of power and the will of the *Dewata Semwae* (God). This belief is consequential to 'surrender' and 'submission' to God. The resignation embodies in the form of rituals.

Through the role of 'Pananrang' institutions as astronomy traditional expertise, Segerians can classify the flood based on the season and its impact. For example, there is the so-called 'Wae-na appangnge' (flood that occurs in March), 'Wae-na mallomoe' (flood that occurs in April), and some others. Based on local knowledge of the rainy season, farmers can perform anticipatory measures in facing the flood impact that will happen. This confirms how strong the relationship between human and nature as a holistic entity environment.

In the perspective of Islam-sufism, the above understanding is in accordance with the orientation of the ascetic in sufism. The basis orientation of asceticism in Islam (Sufi) is through the *Khalwatiyah-Samaniyyah* command which is irrational. It is because of God's blessing which is abstract and mysterious. It is necessary to save oneself from flood but when it occurred, all humans can do is to believe in God's fate which is beyond humans' logic.

The basic idea of Islam is the concept that God is the supreme ruler of the entire universe and that God's power is absolute for every creature. The development in the research location among the followers looks like combining the Sufi way of life by obeying Islamic laws albeit they are different in jurist's perspective.

These followers tend to be tolerant and still absorb the beliefs of their ancestors in the form of tradition. This is because the Bugis-Makassar people, since pre-Islamic era, are familiar with the ancestor tradition which claims that wraith does not only live in its world but also in humans' world.

Communication with the wraith in another 'world' is traditionally done through offering and chanting by a 'bissu'. This tradition has been lasting since the pre-Islam. It is similar with the belief that the source of *rizqi* (sustenance) and fate is from God that is in another world. The unseen world is dominated by certain rulers as the messenger of God. The issue of a better life (increased income, prosperity, luck and so on) must also be taken by supernatural means and by honoring the sacred ruler. Thus, it implies that the Bugis-Makassar people especially in rural area believed in 'duality of trust'. They believe that sustenance/income is from the wraith but they also believe that in Islam, all sustenance is from God.

The steps they took are: farmers did not adopt agricultural system such as plowing land or sowing the seeds that they got less harvest. At that time, they pulled out the grass and made a small pond in the middle of rice fields as a shelter fish carried by flood. This type of flood is considered as a blessing

because it makes the ground fertile and brings many fish, so that people use to catch fish by installing fishing gear such as trawl or fish lathe.

Pre-Islamic belief and doctrine of *Khalwatiyyah Yusuf-Samman* congregation were inseparable. At that time, they claimed that provision can be obtained with the help of wraith in a certain or sacred places through offerings and chanting of a 'bissu'. But now, the doctrine of *Khalwatiyyah Yusuf-Samaniyyah* congregation is that the provision is only from Allah swt. They believe that every human has their own division of sustenance and that everyone must receive their *qadha* and *qadar*. It means that they rely on faith (belief and religion) but also not to be dependent on others.

Free one's heart of loving the worldly things is also a part of resignation toward fate and fortune, success or failure, set by God. It is like the tenet of middle-aged people (they work as rice farmers and gardeners) in Segeri that failure and success depend on God and those are absolute and mysterious. The important thing is to acquire God's blessing by performing zealous worship although they know that their perseverance does not warrant anything.

Accepting the fate, the will, and the blessing of God is what Weber concluded "... Islam was never really a religion of salvation; the ethical concept of salvation was actually odd to Islam" (1985: 263). Salvation was not the real concept of Islam and the ethical concept was also odd to Islam. According to Turner (1991: 15), Weber Islamic study centers on the question of patrimonial domination in a society dominated by Islamic culture, thus causing the instability of the socio-economic, politic and law.

Resignation of God's fate, fortune, failed or success and the disoriented of future that are believed by locals are the way to free their mind from loving the world. It is also a cause of weakness of instrumental values that entrenched this moment. Therefore, both the pre-Islamic traditions and the lessons of *Khalwatiyyah Yusuf-Samaniyyah* cannot be trusted to give encouragement to improve the society's prosperity, because they focused more on their own desire yet had less effort that affect the non-development of instrumental values.

In Islamic spectrum, spirituality of Islam is divided into passive and active sufism. Passive sufism is a sufi schools that limit the worship groups, self-conversion and community, and involves themselves in the arena of civil society, such as politics and economics. The active sufism interpreted its sufi behavior in the social reality. In relation with *Khalwatiyyah Yusuf-Samaniyyah* congregation's personality character, they are more inclined to passive sufism compared to active sufism. It is indicated by the ascetic piety that is not in line

with the attitude of aggression-related behavior in the environment. This stated the local knowledge substance of Bugis especially in Segeri people which is more dominant, namely: (1) heart, passion, and conscience; (2) mind, intellect, and the skills; (3) honesty; (4) firm-determination; (5) converse; (6) business and jobs; (7) men and women; (8) relationships with others; (9) responsibility and self-esteem; (10) 'siri' or ashamed, bold, and fear; (11) the spirit of life, and fate; (12) being careful and quiet; (13) being wise and graceful; (14) greed and ambition; (15) self-control; (16) reply favor; (17) good things; (18) bad things; (19) sundries; and finally (20) local wisdom (Mahmud, 1976).

Based on the characteristics of local knowledge that reinforced by elements of Islamic Sufism of the *Khalwatiyyah Yusuf-Sammaniyyah* congregation, it is implied that Segeri society oriented to a pattern of harmonious life. They are always satisfied with what they have obtained as the gift of Allah swt. They assumed, wherever they are and whatever they do despite the less or more gifts they got from Allah swt, they must thank to the Almighty Allah swt. This belief makes them resigned to life so that they are satisfied with their lives because of the power resigned to the fate that has been ingrained or crystallized. Resigned to the fate is already a culture that passed down through generations so that they are not ambitious to have riches in addition to the results of his work as a farmer.

## Conclusion

The entry of Islam in South Sulawesi in the form of Sufism affects local beliefs such as animism and dynamism. Characteristics of the *Khalwatiyyah Yusuf-Samman* congregation are belief in the supernatural, belief in spirits that can be accepted by the locals' faith. In the process, there was a mix of belief between them in the name of Islam but colored by local rituals as characteristic of animism and dynamism. The combinations of both beliefs still manifested today in various traditional rituals, especially ritual of '*Mappaliliq*'. In this ritual, the elements of ancestral beliefs combined with aspects of Sufism.

The main characteristic of the *Khalwatiyyah Yusuf-Samman* congregation is the purification of the material world. Living in the world is only temporary and eternal life is in the hereafter. All human activity in the world as well as their destiny is determined by Allah swt. Humans tried to fit these guidelines and obtained the result which needs more effort.

In social context, there was a process of socialization taking place of religious values among generations. The attitude 'surrender', 'feel quite', 'all

the provisions of the Lord', 'complacent' etc., has become a culture of the local community. This is categorized as a mindset of 'jabariyyah'.

The mindset manifested in a flood condition. For the society of Segeri, floods occurring every year is 'will' and 'conditions' of Allah swt. In their view, the flood was 'unfortunate' that is brought by God to cleanse themselves from sins.

Theoretically, this study confirms the social construction of Sufism on the mindset and actions of everyday life at Segeri society mainly related to the floods. The reality of Segeri society today also reinforces the perspective of 'dialectic of history' that social reality today is the accumulation of all human actions that occurred in the past.

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