

THE CONCEPT OF LIFE AFTER DEATH *FATU BIAN MA*

HAU BIAN:

A Study of the efforts to maintain the identity of indigenous religion *ATOIN PAH METO* among the Boti tribe, East Nusa Tenggara

By Elisabeth Helen (CRCS – UGM)

Religious practices of indigenous peoples of Indonesia are perceived not as religion by the Indonesian state. They are claimed to be merely "cultural." Indigenous practices, which are theoretically understood as religious in this research, have also been claimed to be full of superstition, myths or childish. Those indigenous religious practices are even accused of irrational and infidels. To state it again, In Indonesia, indigenous religions are classified by the state not as religion but only as *adat* or *kepercayaan*. This is the case of a community in a rural island of Timor, which is quite difficult to reach. This community still holds tightly their ancestral beliefs (indigenous religion). This community settle in a village called Boti, in South Central Timor regency, East Nusa Tenggara province. It is often called as Boti '*dalam*' (inner) community. For their ancestral belief, the community has been identified as 'Halaika' or infidels or irreligious by the government as well as outsiders. Such identification is to mean that the community should alter their ancestral tradition. That is the government pressure. In addition, missionary efforts of world religions as well as modernization have also been part of issues this community has to face. Despite the spiteful pressures of those forces, this small group still survives with ancestral tradition or indigenous religion.

This thesis brings various components of peoples' traditional ideas practices to look at from a different point of view on Indigenous Religion, and not from the standpoint of world religions. From such an insight we will see how they make sense of identity which is given by outsiders for them and their survival strategies. We will also discover how their belief system contains elements or characteristics of a religion. Results from this study are expected to expand the understanding and theories about the local or indigenous religion, especially as seen from the perspective of their own religion. In particular, this thesis focuses on the concept of 'life after death' in the Indigenous Religion community of Boti tribe as a starting point in understanding the identity of the tribal people Boti and their survival strategies in the face of pressures from outside groups like government and followers of world religions. In religion there are so many concepts that will affect the mindset and lifestyle of followers. But one interesting concept and also important is the concept of death and life after death.

The method used in this study is the field research. The study began by conducting a preliminary study of information associated with the research literature as well as looking for people who know the information about the location of the study as well as those that can be a connector for writer and field research. In this preliminary study, researcher sought to find writings related to the object of research. Initially researcher only focuses on the literature on Boti tribe, but later expanded it again to the literature on Timorese ethnic. Writer gets some thesis relating to the tribe of East and Boti, as well as several articles on the

internet which talking about the tribe of Boti. Not only through some writing sources, writer also began to see some peoples of which have experience and understanding of tribal of Boti. Through the writing sources and people are writers hoping to get the general picture of the location would be the object of the study authors.

Data obtained by researcher by means of in-depth interviews with some sources, both, at the research location and that are outside the research location, that have a good understanding of the research object. In addition while in the field, researcher made the observation about daily life of Boti 'dalam' but also Boti 'luar'.

In Chapter II, researcher attempts to give an overall general picture of the location from the various aspects of the research field. Geographically this object of research located in the sub-village of Boti Ki'e, South Central Timor (TTS) regency, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province. Boti Village is one of three villages in TTS, which the government designated as tribal areas isolated and away from external communication, making what is called 'the roots of the past' is still preserved. With a total area of 16 500 ha / m², located between the mountains, as well as transportation routes in the pass is quite difficult, to make these people's lives seem isolated.

The terms Boti 'dalam' and Boti "luar' often used to describe the differences in location, and also differences between the Boti who still embraced Indigenous religions with Boti community that embraced Christianity, were both Protestant and Catholic. Indeed, there is a wooden fence as if a separation between

those who are local religions and those who had become Christians. However, if explored further then it would seem that such restrictions do not then make the area belongs to the absolute of only one group. Some sources said that such a separation is not actually occur naturally or by the community itself, but the term Boti 'dalam' and Boti 'luar' made by the government in this case the Department of Tourism for the purpose of promotion of cultural tourism with the object of the tribal people who still embrace Indigenous religion.

In general, the education of the Boti community (especially the Boti 'dalam') is still quite low level where most of the population just completed their education at the elementary school or junior high school level. This is because the institution is in that place only elementary school and junior high school, whereas if they want to continue to a higher level of school, the children of this tribe should go or Niki-Niki or Oenlasi which have distance of just far enough. Especially for people of Boti 'dalam', still have some constraints in terms of education. School and education for the local tribal religions Boti are identical with modernity and Christianity. The reason why it quite difficult for the Boti 'Dalam' peoples because the legal requirements are very difficult to meet due, they do not have almost all of identity papers such as birth certificates, and so forth. Although in the school, children should change their religious identity became one of the religions recognized by the government, and the study of religion is not convinced by them.

In terms of public health in general, this community still using traditional ways and medicines to treat a variety of illnesses suffered by them, or through a

supernatural force in overcoming some diseases ascribed to the supernatural. For the case of childbirth, for the tribe of Boti 'dalam' peoples, they usually do at home assisted by a village shaman because it is associated with local religious rituals to them, but since there is policy of government to have birth in a health clinic if not will be fined with a sum of money has its own dilemma for this community.

As a community that is not recognized by the government in terms of its existence and beliefs often get discriminated against, but they are very obedient to various rules and regulations given by the government for them. Actively involved in various activities such as elections and continues to support government policies.

The Boti village has a population of 2.207 peoples or 562 households and scattered in four hamlets, which have Timorese ethnic background. Of these as many as 1.801 peoples (81.60%) of the population embraced the Protestant religion, 93 peoples (4.21%) of the population embraced the Catholic religion, and the remaining 313 peoples (14.18%) of the population embraced to local or indigenous religions. Years of living side by side with Christianity greatly influenced the peoples who still embraced indigenous religion perspectives on themselves and their own religion. If we ask what the name of their religion or belief then start from kids to adults said that they are infidels or *Halaika*. They received this term from Christians or missionaries, and use term such as their identity to explain what the name of their religion.

With the polite cultural background that promotes others, this community developed with values that preserve religious harmony with the divine, human and also in nature. This is evident in the unique calendar system life and the wise ways in solving problems of this society. The simple system of marriage but advanced aspects of the responsibilities is the characteristics of marriage system in this place. As communities are predominantly farmers, they have important rituals around agriculture, very respectful and well positioned divine nature as giver of life.

As a community who known as a symbol of authenticity of *Atoin Pah Meto*, this community truly put their trust to the Divine in the form of *Uis Neno* (the god of the sky) are believed to be *amo'et-apakaet* (maker-forming); *Uis Pah* (the god of Earth) are believed to be *amnaifat-afafat* (shore up-sustaining), and *Nai-bei* or also called *Nitu* (ancestral spirits) are believed *alikin-ape'en* (incubator-riser). The three strengths are greatly affected people's lives. Cooperation between *Uis Neno* and *Uis Pah* led to the merging of all life and living. While *Nai-Bei* (which usually also called *Nitu*) believed to cause the release of a live radiated, as well as maintain, monitor, control and enforce norms in order to live a regular basis.

In Chapter III, researcher discusses about a very unique religious concept of community, namely the concept of *Fatu ma Hau Bian Bian* (the world behind the stone and behind the tree), a concept of life after death from this community who have considerable influence in shape their behavior.

There are three levels of the cosmos in Timorese cosmology. The first world, on top of the sky called *Neno tunan* (the peak of the sky). The master on *Neno Tunan* is the highest god called *Uis Neno* (Lord of the heavens). The second world is located under the earth or called *Pah Pinan* (natur /the underworld). The master of this place is *Uis Pah* (lord of the earth). While the third is, on the surface of the earth where living all human life, but also those who already died, they are sharing this place (*Pah Nitu*).

Death to this community is a process of moving the existence of the "visible" to "the invisible". To the Timorese, the human person consists of *auk* (body) and *snasaf* (sigh) and incorporated by *smanaf* (spirit) which is located on the *kliuka* (pulse) and *na* (blood). *Smanaf* (spirit) and *na* (blood) is closely related to one another. Death will occur when *smanaf* left *auk*. *Smanaf* without *auk* is *nitu* (corpse). *Smanaf* then be transformed into a spirit that went into the 'other world' or the spirit world inhabited by the ancestors (*Pah Nitu*) called *Fatu Bian ma Hau Bian Bian* meaning behind the stone and behind the tree. The phrase *Fatu Bian ma Hau Bian* is a metaphor to explain that just like something was behind rocks and trees can not be visible but invisible. Similarly, the spirit world was not visible by naked eye.

World of the spirits for the Boti is not a place that is geographically separated from those who are still alive. Only the world for those who have died of follow longer visible by naked eye. One informant said that 'they are like the wind that can not be seen but can be felt. Movement from the visible existence to

the invisible is also not something that happens in a flash but the immediate need of the process that we will see in the stages of death ceremonies of Boti people.

The unique concept of *Fatu Bian ma Hau Bian* in *Atoni* local religious communities especially the Boti tribe, only can be understood when we found the association with other concepts. In a conversation with Pastor Eben Nuban Timo, he explained that life and death for the East are always closely related to *Fatu Hau Kanaf*. Each clan believes that the antiquity *Uis Neno* showed his will in the form of culture and values to their ancestors on a rock. The place then become a sacred place or the clan and was called *Fatu Hau Kanaf*. There they are born and, from that place they get their identity. Because it every Timorese have their own lovely name which refer to *Fatu Hau Kanaf*.

When *kuan* or village located on *Fatu kanaf* is already full then some of the members of the clan move to find a new place. In the new place whenever they are marriage, and spawned a new breed, then for 4 days (in some information formerly 40 days) the child and his mother must stay in the house or *ume kbubu* round, this period is called the transition to ensure that if a new child born were from *Uis Neno* or from the devil. Fire takes on the understanding that the baby comes out of the dark therefore need light. After passing through the transition period the baby will be introduced to the public in the event called *Tapoitán li Ana*. The important questions in this event is where they came from and what is they brought. Originally, the question: where they came indicate their *Fatu Kanaf* and what is they are brought will show the child work during the life forms that have been set by the ancestors as the provision of *Uis Neno* in their *Fatu Kanaf* at

first time. That is why the weave pattern or motif every *kanaf* or clan be different one to another.

When they died, and wrapped with blankets to show that it is the result of their work during their lifetime, so if they are asked by their ancestors and to make sure the ancestral spirits in the spirit world, that they have come to the right place because they bring a blanket motif as determined by *Uis Neno* for thier *Kanaf*. The place that they will go when they die is where their ancestors came is that their *Fatu Kanaf*. That is why the grave of someone always direct to his/her *Fatu Kanaf*.

To understand the attitude of the Boti people who live in harmony relate to the concept of *Fatu Bian ma Hau Bian* very closely linked to responsibility as a Timorese or Atoin. In an interview with pastor Eben Nuban Timo, he explained that the Timorese is generally called as the Atoin, the word is derived from the letter 'a' which is the definite article and 'toni' meaning answer / respond. That must be answered or the response is *Uis Neno*. Thus, for the Timorese, life was a response to a mandate or command given by *Uis Neno* to their ancestors at *Fatu Kanaf*, and it must be responsibility when death arrives and when they go back to their *Fatu Kanaf*.

Researcher also found a deeper meaning in the concept *Fatu Bian ma Hau Bian* by comparing the rituals of death and birth rituals, at the rituals we can see a number of similarities both in the calculation of the day of the ritual, the elements used in these rituals, the meaning behind the ritual, and the person most instrumental in the implementation of these rituals who called *Atoin Amaf*. Why in

some rituals of death and rebirth in the Boti community is experiencing similarity or even refer to one with each other? What is actually connection or relationship between birth and death in the eyes of Boti society? How can we understand world and life after death for these people who are known in the figurative *Fatu Bian ma Hau Bian*, by seeing these rituals?

As researcher have said before that the place where the dead heading, for the local religious of Boti tribe, not a place geographically separated by the living. The place is not a far different from this world and different from where we live now. The place is also not something that is utopian, as well as the concept of heaven or hell is in monotheistic religions. Both the living and the dead occupy the same world or place. As expressed by the chief, Mr Namah Benu, "here that place, together with us, it's just that they are no longer visible". Thus the concept of death in the Boti tribe local religious, not the displacement of this world to the world, but the existence of a visible shift to the invisible. From the tangible to the intangible.

By looking at the relationship between the rituals of birth, the ritual of given name and the rituals of death, researcher analyze the existence of the concept of "reincarnation" or rebirth when talking about the concept of life after death in the this Boti local religious community. Birth is the entrance to the existence or forms that appear while the death is the door to the existence or manifestation of the invisible. Naming ritual is evidence that the movement is. It is obvious to us why there are similarities in some of the rituals of life and death, as well as the people who play in it.

The concept reincarnation or rebirth it is inseparable from the concept of *karma*, which in generally can be said to contain the idea that every action has consequences. The consequences of an action can be directly obtained or felt at that moment, but there are also actions that result or the consequences felt in the life to come, and the consequences of those actions as well that will also be experienced in the experience of life after death (Allen, 2004: 92). In the concept of 'reincarnation' in the local religious community like Boti, *karma* or consequences of actions performed by a person in his life also has an influence, but slightly different from the concept in Hinduism or Buddhism described above. Consequences of one's actions and not affect the shape or what will be after the reincarnation, but the effect on the waiting time in the realm of life after death to get back into visible existence. In other words, faster or late in a person who has died or is in invisible existence to get back in this life or reincarnation is also determined by the actions as long as he seems to be in visible existence.

Thus we can see that the attitude behind such Boti society which friendly to nature and each other, a seemingly obvious in the calendar of their lives and also the forms of their problem solving (see Chapter II), was strongly influenced by their religious concepts, one of which is the concept of life after death or the known as *Fatu Bian ma Hau Bian*. Neither living nor dead, either in the form of visible and invisible, the place for them are one, here in this world, not in the different and distant nature or other world or utopian. Zacharias Neno (2003: 103-104) reveals that by stating that "for the Timorese concepts like heaven, hell, sin, justice, truth and salvation are concepts that relate to the reality of life on earth.

Expectations of a utopian life, for those not imagine concrete beyond reality life. Thus the things that cause of havoc does not have connection with a life that lies beyond the present reality. Justice and truth understood as a straight line with the norms in force for the safety of life and the safety of life understood as *aomina-aoleko* or physical condition (healthy, fresh and good) ". Therefore keep the harmony with nature and each other is very important for a good life. Eternal life is the life being lived today, because it's best to get yourself a good life today but also for future when you died, so it was in anticipation you did not take too long to get back in this life.

To understand that death and life afterwards in Boti tribal communities had a very close relationship with the origin of a clan or *kanaf*. The place of origin clan is the place where someone will going to come back when she/he dies or when someone in invisible existence, and also the place which then will be back when he returned again in life or the existence of the visible through the process of reincarnation. Therefore, the concept of death and life after death is the basis for understanding the meaning of the identity of a person or group called *Atoin Pah Meto*.

Like I said before the concept *Fatu Bian ma Hau Bian* strongly related to *Fatu Hau Kanaf* means clan's wood or stone is a sacred mountain, the place where 'Uis Neno' (the divine) is worshiped by each clan's dwelling, the place of every clan ancestors came from, that's where all the rules in the form of customs and beliefs of the *Uis Neno* given to the *kanaf* as identity, and it was there where everyone from *kanaf* will be back when they died later. As a *Atoin* life is a

mandate to work or respond to all the commandments and ordinances of *Uis Neno* has been given to their ancestors or in other words, life is about living their identity correctly and precisely, because later it was a sign or symbol that must be accounted for when they died in *Fatu Bian ma Hau Bian*.

In a meeting with the government and the world's religions, the identity of which is so important to the Boti tribe, was then amended and interpreted differently as *Halaika* or infidels or non-religious. This term later became an identity for those provided by the world's religions, communities, governments and other scholars. However these communities retain their identity, because identity is a gift from *Uis Neno* (the divine), which has a role not only in the long life but also after death.

Faced with a variety of forces beyond them, the strategy used can be described as a mix between an accommodative and resistance attitude. They received various terms and the identity given to them and let as if they are on the lower side, but never internalize it in the lives of their beliefs. They retain what they believe and believe in, but do not try to fight or confrontation with another group. The longer they are more aware of the uniqueness and their privileges, and change or put a negative term *Halaika* become their strength.

In Chapter IV the author describes how the belief systems and the concept of life after death in the Boti tribe local religious community that had governments and communities categorized as *Halaika*, pagan or custom, by scholars who pay attention to the study of religions, is had characteristics of a religion whose position is the same or equal to the world's religions or other religions State. In

this chapter will also be discussed about *Halaika* as an arena of struggle identity and the strategy from this Boti community to survive in the various dynamics outside their group.

Talking about religion, then we will find so many definitions of it. To describe something as a religion is very problematic and often highly political. This also happens in Indonesia when government will formulate a definition of religion contains political interests. Religion recognized by the Government of Indonesia should be a requirement to meet the requirements as follows: (1) shall be the reference for the believer lives with clear rules, (2) believe in only one God, (3) have a holy book, and (4) led by a prophet. Excluding these provisions the community is not recognized as a religion and should only be seen and recognized as a belief or custom. Since then until now recognized as a religion in Indonesia are Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Kongfucu, the postscript are all imported religion.

From the first to the present local religious or indigenous religion never got a place in the life of Indonesian people, it seems like not enough if they are referred to as atheist or not religious, they are also an easy target for governments and state religions. For the government they are cultural assets that are exploited for the sake of mere tourism. Because it's if you'll see it seems like they often get preferential treatment and get the attention of the government, but behind it is just for the sake of revenue or tourism promotion. While their basic rights ignored altogether.

Local or indigenous religion is always considered not as a religion in Indonesia. This can be seen clearly because their existence is not under the Ministry of Religious Affairs Department but under culture and Tourism Departement. Responding to the postion of Indogenous religion in Indonesia, Beny Susetyo representing the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia (KWI) clearly states that "Indonesia is a country of Pancasila to ensure diversity. He gives an example about Bung Hatta, in the constituent assembly contributed greatly to separate state and religion so that the Jakarta Charter replaced with Indonesia based on Pancasila and the Belief in God Almighty. Therefore, the State should not intervene and should not become the one and only interpreters of religion. States also can not determine based on majority and minority, or legal and illegal a religion. Constitutionally which protected religious rights can not be reduced. The state also must not intervene in what should be a religion or not. "

From the definitions made by the government, it is clear to us that the position of local religions in Indonesia is very risky to receive discriminatory treatment. For the Boti local religious community, the term *Halaika* is a term which is attached as the identity of the trust group. *Halaika* often referred to as the name of religion (belief) is embraced by Boti community. The term is actually to describe a person or a group that is still not religious or other terms are infidels. Of course, this term is a negative connotation, as the condescending tone and impression of a person or group that will arise is the speakers are in a superior position while the person or group known by the term itself is in an inferior position.

This community did receive a variety of terms and the identity given to them and leave as if they are on the lower side, but they are never internalize it in their religious life. They still maintain what they believe in, but do not try to fight or confrontation with other groups. As citizens they participate fully in the activities of government, obeying various rules applicable, and accept any decision against them. They co-exist with other religions and also with other groups, remains open graciously accepted any outside person or group, but remained with their beliefs and make restrictions that outsider able to appreciate their group. One thing is for sure, for writer, they more aware of their existence as a group of interesting and unique. They continue to strengthen their identity and wear that negative definition of *Halaika* which given from outsiders to those groups as a strength for them.

Beyond the definition of religion made by the government of Indonesia, actually it also have some definition of religion made by scholars who studied in the field of religion. J.G. Platvoet (1992, 12-16) states that all religions have evolved traits based on the type of society where religion is practiced. He further religious divide into two types: "community" religion and "transnational" religion. Religions of community are usually found in a particular community and practiced only by members of the community. Often referred to as an ethnic religion or national religion. Meanwhile, transnational religions are widely disseminated through certain territorial limits, often referred to as the 'world religions' which have characteristics that conflict with community religions.

Platvoet then divide religious communities into "literate community religion" and "religion of community oral society".

By looking at the distribution of religion by Platvoet, in other words it can be said that the 'world religion' with various characteristics is just one part of a group of so-called religion. Because there are other groups that also has its own characteristics which are also included in the section called religion. Thus, we should separate the meaning or definition of religion from world religions or global religions paradigm.

Besides Platvoet, Graham Harvey (2005) and J.L. Cox (2007) make the categories which show that the local religion is also a religion that does have the characteristics of a religion. Harvey and Cox states that general local religion characteristics are by only exist in a certain area and they usually do not have the desire to pass beyond the limits of their environment. They are emphasis on ancestors worship, and use of oral tradition. While the world's religions, does not have specific boundaries that are distributed to various places and have scripture that shows the tradition of writing.

Although this community for so long time viewed as custom and not as a religion communities by using the limits of the definition of 'religion' created by the government of Indonesia in this case the Ministry of Religious Affairs, but of the various definitions of religion are written by scholars based on in-depth research, we can say that all existing characteristics confirms that Boti is a religious community. As a community religion or indigenous religion whose position is equivalent to a world religion or religions other State. Their religious

concepts and issues answered questions about their daily lives related to the relationship with the divine, how they build relationships with each other and their relationship with nature that sustain life.

Boti tribe community actually has a unique concept about life after death is called *Fatu Bian ma Hau Bian* meaning behind the stone and wood. Death is seen as a visible shift to the existence of the invisible. Death is also closely related with a clan's origins place, as to where it was also the one who has to die from going back.

The concept of life after death is not only to answer questions surrounding the death and the life after, but it has an important meaning for the tribe's identity. Identity for a Timorese or commonly called *Atoin* formed in his/her *Fatu Hau kanaf*. Identity is given by *Uis Neno* very important not only for one's life, but also when he died. Therefore it is important to continue to maintain and strengthen the identity despite the external parties are not interpreted negatively as no-religion, or infidel which often called *Halaika*.

Although this community is often referred to as *Halaika* and identified with no religion or pagan custom, but if explored more deeply, by not using the definition of the Indonesian government and the paradigm of the world's religions, then this community actually contains the characteristics of a religion which in scholars term called Indigenous religious or religion of community, a position parallel to other religions.

If so, then it is time for Indonesian Government to rethink the definition of religion and also a variety of policies in the field of religion. Is not the State

guarantees every member of society to be devotion according to religion and belief of each? When defining the meaning of religion and no longer uses the paradigm of world religions, then we will see the meaning of religion is much more extensive. We also provide space for all the people of Indonesia for expression their religious by not using certain limitations that come only from a certain perspective. So that all the religions that have been synonymous with 'adat' or not a religion will be able to actualize what is their faith and trust without fear and candid. By redefining the meaning of religion in Indonesia, the potential discrimination against adherents of indigenous religions will be reduced.

It is also time for the Indigenous religion as conceived by the community like Boti tribe must be investigated or researched no longer uses the study of world religions but as local religious studies or indigenous religions. Therefore the study of religion is not just the study of world religions but also a study of indigenous religions.

Boti local religious community so long have been discriminated against and are seen as not a religious and only seen as customs, which became the object of the government and society. In fact, they have characteristics that can be classified as a religion, a indigenous religious. State religions (world religion) and the local religion are two different models of religion and has the characteristics of each. Any followers decided to embrace religion as a very personal decision and certainly religious concepts have influence and significance for the adherents. So, both are them eligible for the same award. In Christianity or other world religions

and also in indigenous religions, each has the real truth. Differences can not be denied but should be accepted and appreciated.

Boti is a religious community, and therefore should be treated as a religious community and respected their religious rights equal to other community members who embrace to the state religion. In order to do this it is time to rethink our definition of religion and examines Boti by category or classification of their own separate from the world or global religions and was awarded the same study other religions. Due to respect local religious community with which we adopted helped keep the authenticity of the identity of a community called *Atoin Pah Meto*, which has a unique religious concepts like *Fatu Bian ma Hau Bian*, which is the identity which have influence the behavior of its followers as guards harmony with the Divine, others and nature.