

# RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN THE MODERN DEVELOPMENT: UNPACKING THE FRAGILITY OF AGRARIAN RELIGION IN SOUTHERN REMBANG

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## A B S T R A C T

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**T**he idea of development does not always concern on the idea of empowerment. Recently, after decentralization policy established in Indonesia and the idea of rural economic development flourished, local community resource was much explored to enhance local revenue and to gain community prosperity. Hence, there are still serious problems within development design that is about the neglected ethic and value toward resources. This research was focused on strong rejection from local community over the exploration of cement factory toward the mountain in the southern Rembang and unpacking what are missing in the negotiation. Examining Kathrine Marshal's idea about common cases of neglected values in the modern development, and Hallowell's idea about inter-personal relation, this research then attempts to unpack how deagrarianization in the heartland of Central Java has endangered agrarian community religious values that worsen the conflict. Through ethnographic research, this paper has a significant finding; First is that the proposed development does not consider local religious value of agrarian community in seeing the mountain as "person" that integrated in the pivotal body of their agrarian structure. Secondly, the developer and government are lacking the ample room about local spiritual wisdom in seeing the equilibrium relation between human and nature as well as lacking in seeing agrarian religious practice in seeing the earth compassionately. The third is that local communities are having local idea about economic development as the reason behind preserving agrarian identities.

**K E Y W O R D S :** Economic Development, Agrarian Religion, Conflict, Prosperity, Rembang.

## INTRODUCTION

The challenge of ending poverty in Rembang grabs many attentions from government leaders and community institutions. The idea brought to tackle poverty is founding the cement factory. This idea is driven that many efforts of economic development in rural areas are through local exploration on the natural resources. The consequence of this idea, specifically in the Central Java is about massive deagrarianization in the heartland of agrarian communities (Davidson, 2015:107). In Rembang per se, it is clear that the purpose of these efforts is following regional economic competitiveness through increasing Local-Own Revenue (Pendapatan Asli Daerah). (Rembang-Bapedda :2016)

The impact of over exploration is that Rembang also affected from environmental degradation in the local level (Nurrochmat, 2005:10), raising number of discrimination and gender issues (Candraningrum 2015:3). Indeed, after Strategic Environmental Assessment (KLHS) issued in April 2017. There is no research linked religious issues and development. Hence, this research then puts simply on investigating how development issues constitute also religious issues specifically in the context of natural exploration.

Regarding the relations, this research considers that religion, and economic developments are broad and hard to be simplified. Conventionally, the term economic development has been examined for specific purpose such as the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), poverty, tax, income, and so on so forth. Otherwise, the element of religion that consists of belief, ritual, myth, organization and many more are conventionally studied for eschatological-ethical purposes. This conventional understanding puts both economic development and religion into different areas of studies. The impact of the conventional separation is that very few of economists taken non-economic factors such as ideology, culture and religion as part of economic analysis (Palanca 1986:1).

Within this interrelated framework, this research investigates Kendeng conflict as a case study to see the relation between religious view and economic development.. Kendeng is a proper name for mountain located in the north coast of Java and stretching out from Grobogan, Pati, Rembang, Blora, and Bojanegoro. Specifically in Rembang, Kendeng conflict happened when local communities from two villages, Tegaldowo and Timbrangan have taken a stand against the government planing for the establishment of the cement factory. This conflict began when the proposed environmental impact analysis explained that mining in the Kendeng mountain is allowed for the geological-hydrological explanation that mountain in Rembang is not classified as Karst zone and as infertile area. For the government, the establishment of cement factory had also purposes for contributing economic development, increasing regional revenue as well as absorbing local employment and enhancing PDRB (Product Domestic Regional Bruto) (Bappeda; 2016).

This research comes out from an idea that agrarianism pointed out human relation with the environment is not all about economic calculation, but also about values. Within the relation, human understanding on their religion-culture is shaped also by their understanding on environmental condition around and vice versa. This relation affirming the old thesis of Steward saying that environment shaped human understanding on their religion (Julian Steward, 1955:25, Geertz, 1976:5 ). Through this relation, this research locates the values of agrarianism as basic foundation of community in understanding their environment religiously.

For seeing the failure relation between religious values and development, this research is standing on Marshall's idea about the neglected local values in the design of economic development are frequently triggering the conflict. She noted a significant point that one failure factor of global development is because the design and the model of developments are not considering the ethical and religious values maintained by local communities (2008:199). Marshall then summarized that religious values are frequently as 'blind spot' of modern economic development. Specifically, Marshall summed up that there are three arguments in which development neglect religious values; unclear boundaries between religious and political domain, contradiction between religion and modernization, and the perception that religion is decline in the modern communities (2008: 200).

Further, to understand about fragility of agrarian religion and community understanding to their land, this paper examines Hallowell's idea about inter-subjective relation. Hallowell through understanding Ojibwa community has proposed an inter-subjective relation between Ojibwa and 'other person', such as non-human being that consider as 'person' (1960; 27). He also explained that this relation influenced human's behavior since the 'non-human being' were also perceived as 'person' form other class. What Hallowell wants to pointed out from the idea about "person-ification" is how the narration about other being as 'person' had maintained in sophisticated ways in order to keep relation between human and other human being (1960;27). The paradigm of inter-subjective relation had also criticizing the concept of 'animism' proposed by Tailor that dominant in the world religion paradigm.

By this paradigm, the research employs 'agrarian religion' deliberately to point out a specific religious traditions that highly valuing agrarian activities as a religious practices. Through the communities are adherent of Islam, but also accepting indigenous idea values about Mother Earth from Saminism. Samin is a proper name from a group of community who follows Samin's teaching. Both Samin and Muslim were gathered as group of '*tolak*'. Particularly in Rembang group of '*tolak*' constituted 15% from total communities in the first zone of the factory. The value of blending featured through highly localized contexts of religion and in ways that the practice and ideas are hybrid. The

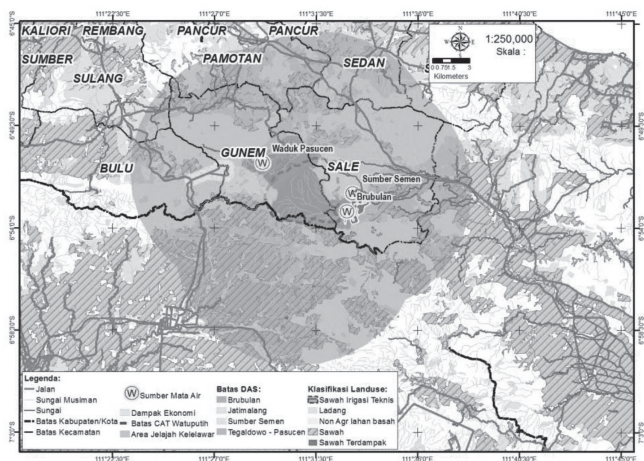
mining as the idea of modern economic development internalized within community then threatening the value of ‘agrarian religion’.

In order to develop an idea, this research then examined how deagrarianization in the Southern Rembang has endangered agrarian community religious values and why religious idea about agrarianism motivates them to reject modern economic development.? This paper employs ethnographic research; the presented data is based on community’s expression in their daily life, the song, statistic data, Environmental Impact Analysis (Amdal), Strategic Enviromental Analysis (KLHS) and interview.

## DISCUSSION

### Local Understanding on Economic Development

Likewise traditional farming, economic activities through land are growing slowly. In contrast, through nominated as a developed country, Indonesia is fostering the development growth in many sectors that are centrally driven by economic goals. Clearly, it was believed that the idea of cement factory in Rembang was key to achieving this economic goal.. Based on annual report of Gunem sub-district, there are four factors for the weaknesses of economic growth rate in the district Gunem. First is that the majority of communities are farmers who are depending all their income through farming and without additional income. Second is low infrastructure, such as street and public facilities are not properly constructed. Third is low educational rate in the Gunem in which the majority of communities are finishing elementary education only. Fourth is natural resources, the villages in the Gunem district are mostly located in the limestone mountain that frequently lack of water (annual Gunem report 2016).



Picture 1: affected area in the cement mining activities. (Source Picture: KLHS 2017)

The construction of the cement factory in the Rembang is based on the ideas of new economic development model. In the regional level, the idea of development through mining paradigm perceived as more profitable than the agrarian. This idea illustrated by Tegaldowo head village as; for instance, a farmer could earn additional income from the factory as well as he also managed his own farming land. In addition, the factory also expected to create multiple economic effects, such as rented house, catering and shops. On the other hand, Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) from the factory also expected to develop economic creative, and education. Through these reasons, the factory had offered brighter future for community social well-being (Interview in Tegaldowo:17:12:2016). According to Ridwan, the cement factory worker, said that “the average income he got from the factory is around Rp. 3000.000 per month. Beside working as hard laborer in the cement factory, he could also managed his farming” (Interview in Timbrangan 18:12:2016)

In contrary to the idea of development through mining, the communities affiliated themselves as group of ‘tolak’ consider the mining as destructive development. Unsustainable paradigm of mining is not only taking the land away from the communities, shortening reserved water but also destroying communities’ livelihood and religious values preserved by communities. The paradigm of mining had also destroyed community’s idea about sharing the goodness of mountain as ‘common good’ understood by local communities.

Further, the idea of ‘common good’ translated that all communities are able to take the benefit from the goodness of the mountain, such as water, fire-wood, edible tuber and other mountain goodness. The preserved mountain is giving security for them in continuing their life without any fragility. To unpack this idea, Tiyar a woman affiliated as group of ‘tolak’ demonstrated that “In the farming activities, a farmer may get only Rp. 3000.000 per land harvesting, and the length is about 4-5 months once. Thus in average, they earn less than Rp 1000.000 per month. However, they will not buy water, food, wood and primary human needs since these are available in mountain and all farmers are able to take it freely. (Interview, 26:12:2016).

By demonstrating local idea about ‘common good’ as foundation of local development, this research argued that sharing and maintaining the goodness of mountain for human life sustainability is far beyond modern economic idea about fostering development through mining. This idea is in accordance with the calculation of Strategic Environmental Assessment (KLHS) showing that mining activities have many economic disadvantages that unrecovered such as the loosing of Karts potency as water absorber, the extinct of cave bat and decreased production from wet land (KLHS, 2017:70).

Further, this research argued that local communities’ understanding on their own land is also highly containing sophisticated economic calculation. This idea called by Marvin Haris in the ‘riddle culture’ as ‘rational explanation’

from local community's idea. Through the points of sharing the benefit, the goodness and maintaining the land, local communities had shown an advance understanding of human relation with their environment. Indeed, this relation is hardly unexplained in the paradigm of modern unsustainable development. Through these points, this subsection may point out that religious values are also able to work together in the modern development through emphasizing that modern design on development also concerning on the idea of preservation.

### **Agrarian Religious Values: A Hybrid Religious Values**

In Rembang, the rise of conflict Kendeng in the first ring of cement factory is often thought as the continuation of 'Sedulur Sikep' or 'Samin' provocation in anti-development-government or as political constellation based on environmental issues. This idea comes up from an assumption that Kendeng mountain in Rembang is inhabited by Muslim communities. Indeed, Indonesia after Soeharto has fallen down featured with revival of indigenous communities demanding the establishment of customary law in their territory (Henley, 2007:1) However, this research located this phenomenon also reflection for something new; a religious turn. The notion of this idea is on the sets of concerns about 'Muslim and Samin' community perspective on their land.

The hybrid religious values work in the way that both of communities are continuing to believe in the same narration and the same worldview. World view as explained by Dechorty is involved "cosmological, cognitive map, image, mindscape, symbolic universe, world hypothesis, assumptive world, moral order, or just plain world" (Dechorty: 2001:65). Sharing the world view is that made the Islamic communities in the area of cement factory becomes specifically preserving agrarian religious values as the major tenet of religious principle..

The shared world view portrayed that in the beginning of my observation on 6 December 2016, around thousand of men and women from Tegaldowo and Timbrangan had walked on foot from their villages to Semarang (around 150 KM). The women wore complete dress as if they are about to go to rice field. After miles away, in Pati, hundreds of farmers from Sukolilo follow them as alliance, some of them wearing completely black dress and some men wearing Javanese head string as 'Sedulur Sikep' identity. They were walking and singing "Ibu Bhumi". Four days later, they come to official central java's governor in Semarang for conducting demonstration in completely one month. In everyday of their demonstration, they are singing '*Ibhu Bhumi*', the song is:

*Ibu Bhumi wes Maringi*  
*Ibu Bhumi dilarani*  
*Ibu Bhumi kang Ngadili*

نبي بملأ قحلا لئلا ملأ، لئلا ملأ  
 \* نبي مال دعولاً قداصل لئلا لوسر دمحم  
 Mother Earth has given  
 Mother Earth has wounded  
 Mother Earth would bring to justice  
 \*No God but Allah, the master of obvious real truth.  
 Muhammad the messenger of Allah  
 Whose sincere promise trustworthy

The song above is about protest for the government decision in attaching their sacred mountain that consider as mother. Otherwise, I began to point out the narrated song as a blending of two different traditions having shared cosmological values in seeing the earth as sacred through some points. First is historical point, the first stanza of song about *Ibu Bhumi* created by Gunretno, a prominent figure in ‘Sedulur Sikep’ community and the song made in only three lines. In addition, the second stanza is an addition from Muslim communities that also rooted on Islamic tradition.

The second point is through seeing the content. The first stanza strongly signaled ‘Sedulur Sikep’ conception in portraying the earth as compassionate mother who is giving, nurturing and feeding. In the ‘Sedulur Sikep’ tradition, the insight about sacred female figures named goddess Sri who manifested into paddy or Danyang who keeps water clean are strongly embedded and maintained through various rites. It is depicted in that song that Earth Mother is not only giving, but also feeling and alive. When the Mother is maintained, she gives all her mercy, but when she is wounded, she would also bring about justice. In addition, the second stanza is obviously coming from Islamic tradition. It is literally Arabic, having the concept about oneness of God (*tawhid*) and prophecy. Unlike in the first stanza that seeing the earth as absolutely having feminine quality, full of compassion for giving and nurturing the second stanza is pronouncing Islamic narration that God is the ruler of the world. The blending between ‘Sedulur Sikep’ seeing the earth as mother and ‘Muslim Samin’ community in seeing earth as both the mother and God’s creature are significant. What I want to emphasize here is that exactly both of these communities are having the same mechanism in understanding the relation between human and the mountain.

### **Fragility of Agrarian Religious Values**

To solve the conflict, the government had conducted an independent team for KLHS. Indeed, that KLHS recognized cultural values by emphasizing constitutional law in Article 281 verse (3) Republic of Indonesia 1945 about “Respect for cultural identity and traditional community rights” (KLHS, 2017: 49). However, a significance point that is missing in the KLHS’s

discussion is religious values. Since this missing had a serious consequence, that is community's insight about Ibu Bhumi, protecting agrarianism located as community cultural values instead of religious values.

Excluding religious identity in the environmental discussion is the impact of politic of 'religion' in Indonesia that following 'World religion paradigm'. In this paradigm, sacred human relation with mountain and land is not considered as 'religious' practice' but cultural practices. However, this paper advocates 'religious values' instead of 'cultural values' since in the context of Indonesia, the term religion and culture were overlapping through political-academicals distinction. A knowledge transmitted by ancestor over generation was classified as culture-tradition, meanwhile the other practices constructed by western called as religion. (Woodward, 2011:6 Picard, 2011:1).

Further, the notion of religious values is based on communities' understanding about the land as *Ibhu Bhumi*. This paper located that there are two ways in understanding the meaning of *Ibhu Bhumi*, metaphoric context of land as mother and based on community intimacy. In the metaphoric context, land and mountain was perceived as mother for the reason that both of mother and land are shared capability to nurture, feed and protect human being. Otherwise, in term of intimacy, the meaning of 'mother' involved sacred sense that evokes act of responsibility to do something good to the land as devotion and expression in maintaining divinity.

In addition, this paper also noted that metaphoric language used by community is not only an expression, but also as the way of community's thinking and believing. In the perspective of Muslim-Samin community, the idea about *Ibhu Bhumi* is remarkable to see the way the communities think and belief about the inter-personal relation. Here, I argued that the term 'personhood', proposed by scholars to understand other, is also applicable in understanding agrarian community's relation with *Ibhu Bhumi*. This term 'personhood' proposed by scholars in order to understand human relation and non-human being. 'the relation build between human and another human then is about inter-subjectivity relation in which both of them are sharing mutual relation (Hallowel, 1960:21, Morrison 2000:24, Ma'arif 2014; 152). The point in seeing *ibhu bhumi* as 'person' is coming from Javanese cosmological understanding that the *Ibhu Bhumi* is also perceived as person able to share beneficiaries and malicious character. This idea based on community's expression that the *Ibu Bhumi* is able to give something good as well as capable also to do something bad.

The second is about the day as super person. This conception can be seen in how the communities mentioned about the behavior of *Ibhu Bhumi* in order to show that the mother could be beneficial and malicious. For Instance, the song said "the mother Earth has given" to show that the character of *Ibhu Bhumi* is giving her mercy. In contrary the last stanza said "Mother Earth would bring to justice" to point the malicious character of *Ibhu Bhumi*. This



malicious character is depending on the maintained relation between human and non-human being.

From the points above, this paper argues that modern consciousness seeing the mountain as ‘natural resources’ is inapplicable in the Muslim-Samin consciousness. Through understanding the song, this paper unpacked that local community has its own epistemology in order to understand their relation with mountain. Here, through understanding that land as person and the character of land as being malicious and beneficial, this paper unpacked that agrarian community understanding with the land is fragile in the paradigm of unsustainable development. Further, in the relationship between ‘Sedulur Sikep’ and ‘Muslim’ in Rembang, this paper also argues that these communities were continuing Samin teaching about agrarianism that rooted on Javanese religion as well as deeply rooted on the Islamic teaching about oneness and fully obedience to God order.

## C O N C L U S I O N

The idea of modern development through Industrialization in the heartland of agrarian communities has caused a major problem of fragile relation between human being the land religiously. Through ethnographic field works, this paper pointed out three findings. First is a local community in the southern Rembang having local ideas about economic development. This idea maintained through preserving the land from any destruction. Further, the communities are perpetually able to take benefit of the land, such as water, edible tuber, firewood and many others. This idea is showing about advance idea of economic development that neglected in the major cases of modern economic development.

Second, the idea about development through mining has endangered agrarian community’s religious values. The maintained religious values are naturally hybrid from Samin’s idea about ‘Ibhu Bhumi’ and Muslim community’s idea about oneness and obedience. The values portrayed in the song sung when they communities are in the demonstration. The third religious values endangered are about community’s cosmology in seeing the land and the mountain as also a person that should be respected and maintained. The land personified as ‘Ibhu Bhumi’ meaning mother earth. The mother has both beneficial and malicious character. Hence, human being relation with the mountain contains reciprocal relation. In the short conclusion, this paper pointed out that being agrarian is not only cultural activities, but also containing rational calculation and religious values preserved by agrarian communities.

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