

## **Philosophical View and *Rarambangah* System: a Local Genius of the *Bajau* People Living at Bungin Permai Village, Southeast Sulawesi**

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According to the philosophical view of the Bajau people, the values inherited from their ancestors which are maintained in their socio-cultural belief still constitute their supernatural strength, which is still referred to when they conceptualize and express their lives, the essence of their lives, objectives, orientation, knowledge and their interpretation of the cosmos. It is their local genius which has enabled them to survive and grow in the sea which is full of challenges. As their creative reply to numerous problems faced to make both ends meet, they have developed a social network termed as *rarambangah*, in which a number of people, who have the same objective to alleviate their living burden by helping, trusting and accepting each other, develop a social network.

Keywords: Local genius, cosmology and *rarambangah*

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Every group of people, including the poor one, basically has socio-cultural resources which may be used to overcome the various problems they face. In this case, what is meant by the socio-cultural capital is the local genius. It is a cultural product of the past which is derived from the great or basic values a community has had. It is created from the experiences and habits of the community in the past. It is so selective and flexible in nature that it is sustainable whatever the challenges are (Ardika, 2007).

It is the essence of the socio-cultural system, in which there are intelligence and sense, of a community. Intelligence means that a local genius is a thought which is shown by the sense and adjusted to the harmony of collective life agreed by the community (Wijaya, 2008). Furthermore, Wijaya (2008) states that the local genius is not only intended to help reinforce the harmony of collective life at the time when it is established but can also be used as life equipment needed now and in the future. The local genius is sometimes made identical with primitive knowledge and belief, pre-capitalism or knowledge developing during the pre-industrialization, or the

knowledge and culture the local community has. Therefore, it is categorized as non-capitalistic knowledge.

The local genius refers to the attitude, view and ability of a community in managing its spiritual and physical environment which allows it to survive and grow where it is in existence. In other words, the local genius is the creative answer to the local geographic, geopolitical, and historical situation (Saini, 2005: 16). The Department for Social Affairs (2006) defines the local genius as a view, knowledge and various life strategies shown in the form of the activities done by the local people to give answer to the various problems they may face and to the attempts made to fulfill their needs. The ways in which they make both ends meet include all their life elements such as religion, knowledge, economy, technology, social organization, language and communication, and arts. The local people understand what programs should be made and what activities to do to maintain, improve and develop what they need and the ways in which they make both ends meet by paying attention to the human and natural resources where they live.

According to Mbete (2006b:7), material culture, legends, myths, texts and the verbal and written expressions inherited from generation to generation in every part of the world contain the local genius equipment. Furthermore, Mbete (2006a: 24) also states that the culture of every ethnic group has a socio-cultural system for binding the life and togetherness of its people; and the local genius exists in the socio-cultural system formed.

The appreciation of tradition, values and norms, and the attitude of mutually accepting and trusting each other lead to the togetherness of the people in a community. Such a tradition is fully comprehended and preserved in the societal life from generation to generation through the learning process (Tim Fisipol UGM, 2001: 56, Hermayati, 2002: 24). In the Ayatrohaedi's perspective (1986: 261), it is stated that the essence of the full comprehension of values, norms, traditions, custom and knowledge developing in a community crystallize as the identity or the personality of a nation. In the other terminology, the identity or personality of a nation is termed as the local genius (Poespowardojo, 1989: 121-122; Ayatrohaedi, 1986: 102).

It is such a local genius which serves as the socio-cultural capital and even as the economic capital which is always in existence and inherent to every community, one of which is the Bajau people living at Bungin Permai Village, Southeast Sulawesi. They have a number of local geniuses which they have inherited from their ancestors or which they have learned from the environment (the sea). The values their local geniuses contain have been the cultural elements of the Bajau people which have been preserved and immune to the changes taking place in their life order. In addition, such cultural elements have also controlled and directed the culture. The Bajau people have a number of local geniuses which are preserved in their socio-cultural system. Such local geniuses are reflected from their belief, their emotional religious brotherhood, their transcendental relation with the supernatural power, their conceptions of life and the essence of life, their objective, their orientation, their knowledge and how they interpret the world. The local geniuses the Bajau people have are realized in the forms of their philosophical view, and their social network system referred to as *rarambangah*.

## THE BAJAU PEOPLE'S ETHIC WORK AND PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW OF THE SEA

As a community of people (maritim culture), they have a number of philosophical views, one of which is reflected by their cosmology stating the sea serves as their source of life, garden and compound. The Bajau people believe that they have been born and selected to occupy and watch over the sea. They regard themselves as the descendants of the God of the sea, who have the right to design and direct the maritim life; therefore, they cannot be separated from the sea. The sea is the property provided by what is called *Mbo* (the God of the sea) for them to manage. Such a belief is attached to their philosophical view reading "*Papu manak ita lino lao bake isi-isina, kitanaja manausia mamikira bhatingga kolekna mangelolana*", meaning that God has created the sea with everything in it and that human beings should think about how to make use of it).

The Bajau people seriously pay attention to the maritime environment, as it serves as their economic artery. The sea is regarded as the source of their lives. It plays an important role in improving their economy. The sea, as the place where they earn their living, is regarded as such a sacred place that it may not be treated as they like. Therefore, they preserve the sea, as one of the natural resources, by creating local regulations such as *pamali* and doing things which protect the environment such as planting mangrove trees along the beach.

The Bajau people so highly appreciate the sea that their ancestors have created a philosophical expression reading "*kadampaannu kampo maiga-iga, pugai allou mabunda ana'umputa*" (love the sea for the next generation). Such an expression reflects how high the Bajau's sense of belonging of the sea. Therefore, they always do their best to watch over and preserve their invaluable source of life.

The Bajau people regard themselves as the descendants of the God of the sea. They believe that they were born in the sea with its waves and will die in the sea as well. Therefore, they do not regard the sea as the enemy; they regard it as their teacher. With reference to the generative thought proposed by Bourdieu (Hoed, 2008), it can be stated that it is

the sea which has formed the Bajau people's habitus that they are the agents who work hard with high mentality and work ethic. In addition, they are never frustrated. According to them, working hard is what has been taught by their ancestors. Hence, working hard has been part of their lives. They are advised to be hard workers with full responsibilities, as stated as follows "*Papu manak ita lino bake isi-isina kita naja manusiana mamikiria bhatanga kole'na mangelonna.*"

Such an advice implies that working hard with full responsibilities is a must. According to the Bajau people, the wide sea with whatever it contains has been submitted by God to human beings to manage. However, the Bajau people should work hard as good fortune will never come to the boat by itself if it is not searched out. However, the sea may not be explored as they like. The Bajau people exploit the sea by referring their ethics referred as the Bajau ethics which includes: self control, self introspection, self confidence, and self-esteem.

Self control means that when undertaking a business one should not be greedy; one should not do what one likes as, for example, destroying the maritime environment. The sea should be looked after and watched over as the main source of livelihood and for the next generation. Self introspection means that what is termed as *Mbo* (the God of the Sea) is the source of the livelihood; therefore, when searching out livelihood one should not rely on good fortune only; one should pray to the *Mbo*, the God of the Sea. The Bajau people recognize that their capacity is limited; hence, the final result is fully submitted to the *Mbo*. Consequently, all forms of *pamali* or the things or activities which may cause the *Mbo* to be angry should be avoided. To make the *Mbo* help them search out livelihood in the sea, a ceremony is performed before making and using a new boat or before going to sea.

Self esteem means that the Bajau people have been born and selected to occupy the sea by God. They are proud of calling themselves the maritime people, and they group themselves as *sama* (the Bajau group) and *bagai* (the non Bajau group). They believe that they the descendants of the God of the Sea that has the right to determine and design the maritime life. None is able to separate them from

the sea except death. Therefore, it is not surprising that every attempt made to relocate them to the mainland fails.

It is the less of understanding of what the Bajau people are like which has frequently led to the stigma that they are hard and difficult to organize, and frequently rob and hijack. According to Adiwikarta (1998), such a provocative labeling has resulted from the bias of less understanding of the environmental role in forming the personality of an individual or community. Furthermore, he states that someone or a community is highly influenced by the environment where he/she/it is in existence (Adiwikara, 1998).

The personality and the characteristics of the Bajau people, as the people who reside in the sea, are highly influenced by the maritime atmosphere. The hard waves and wind form the natural phenomenon which has naturally formed their characteristics and mentality. It is true that they speak hard; however, they actually love peace. The responses they give when communicating with other people are highly determined and influenced by the forms of responses they receive. What is meant is that if other people respect and appreciate them, they will do the same thing or more than that, and vice versa. Being proud of becoming the maritime people has been one of the capitals making them brave enough with high mobility to search out livelihood wherever the sea is.

Self confidence means that when searching out livelihood or undertaking a business, they trust their own capacity. Their individual abilities and their collective consciousness are their capitals which can build and develop their economy. No *bagai* (non Bajau people) will pay attention to their lives, except themselves. They have to survive on what they and their group do.

Most of the Bajau people work so hard that whatever they do is perfectly completed regardless how long it takes. The natural phenomenon becomes the *sumanga* (spirit or enthusiasm) which inspires them to do what they do perfectly. Therefore, working has been part of their lives in order to obtain the results which are already before them.

The *Bajau* people are creative individuals who are able to make use of the natural resources available around them as a means of making both ends meet.

### **RARAMBANGAH SYSTEM**

As the *Bajau* people who share their trials and tribulations, they are motivated to organize all the potentials they have so that they are able to survive and to face various socio-economic pressures. As traditional fishermen, they always have problems such as uncertain income and difficulty in making both ends meet. They form what is termed as *rarambangah*, one of the ways of surviving. It is a form of cooperation which is established by the *Bajau* People and organizes their activities such as *ngarempa*, the activity of making *rumpon*, planting and harvesting seaweed, and so forth.

Basically, *rarambangah* refers to a group of people who have the same objective and feelings such as *situlu-tulu* (helping each other) so that the life burden of its members may be alleviated. Suparlan (1982: 35); Barnes (1969: 55-57); (Mitchell, 1969: 8), as quoted by Kusnadi (2000: 13), state that *rarambangah*, as a social network of the *Bajao* people, is made up of two systems. One is established based on kinship (*bares*-based *rarambangah* system) and the other is based on mixed relation (friendship, neighborhood and kinship). Such a social network is established on the principles of *sippa tappa* (trusting each other), *sikaada* (accepting each other's condition), and *situlu-tulu* (helping each other).

#### **Bares-Based Rarambangah**

The *bares*-based *rarambangah* (established based on kinship) has 7 – 12 members, who are close relatives such as father/mother, child, cousin, nephew/niece, and uncle/aunt. Simply, such a social network is established based on the family tree, meaning that its membership cannot be separated from nepotism. It is intended to maintain harmony, solidarity and dynamism of the group. In relation to the *bares*-based *rarambangah* membership, it is interesting to pay attention to what is stated by Mboliki (57 years of age) as follows.

“Many people undertake a collective business; however sometimes it does not last too long as its members have different ideas; they differ in regard to what they want. As a result, one or some leave the business. As the people residing in the sea and

depending on the maritime products, being dishonest, jealousy, taking revenge against others and making others sad means that we will catch less fish or nothing. We do not know whether fish know that we are sad so that we go home with little fish. Therefore, we establish *rarambangah* whose membership is based on kinship, starting from the children to adults so that we can work together. The members who are relatives are easily organized; furthermore, we are poor; we collect from the relatives coming from the same family (Interviewed, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2008).”

It can be observed from what is stated by Mr Mboliki above that in the *Bajau* community, family enthusiasm and the organization of a family institution has been one of the strategies applied to overcoming uncertainty and life problems. What has happened to the *Bajao* people who work as fishermen strengthens what is stated by Kusnadi (2000) that the community of fishermen frequently mobilize what their families have as one of the strategies to overcome uncertainty and life difficulties resulting from socio-economic pressures.

In addition, if viewed from the perspective of semiotics proposed by Hoed (2008), the *rarambangah* exists in the *Bajao* community as a means of solidarity among the *Bajao* people. In practice, the basic elements of *rarambangah* motivate the spirit of togetherness in the *Bajau* community established through either formal or informal social interaction or relation. The *rarambangah* which is already formed and well managed has turned out to be a means of emotionally tightening its members.

What is meant is that those who are members of *rarambangah* regard that their fellow members are part of their lives. As a consequence, the problem faced or done by one of the members is always faced and done collectively.

*Rarambangah* established in the *Bajo* community can work productively and effectively as physiologically, the members know each other personally. They are close to each other and emotionally, they are closely bound to each other. The solidarity and the sense of belonging of the *Bajau* people established on the foundation which is made of bricks of love and their deep spiritual unity are so beautiful. It is what is meant by Ferdinand Tonnies (Sanderson, 1995: 240) that in a simple community the pattern of collective

life, whose members are bound by their eternal and sincere relation, is established.

Such a life habit of the Bajau people is in line with the theory of practice proposed by Bourdieu that individuals always relate to each other in the objective structural network available in the social space (Harker et al., 2009: 13). It can be understood that the *rarambangah* tradition established by the Bajau people is a social practice in collective life. The social practice in the *rarambangah* tradition is not determined by individuals but by all the members. Every activity in the *rarambangah* is a result of the agreement made by its members and every member should be responsible for its consequence. Such an attitude appears resulting from the strong emotional relation in the *rarambangah*; hence, it serves as the place on which risks hung on, and as the medium for sharing risks collectively.

#### **Neighbor and Kinship-Based *Rarambangah***

The other model of social network or *rarambangah* found in existence in the Bajau Bungin community is the *rarambangah* which is established on house proximity or neighborhood apart from kinship. The Bajau people at this village also establish a working group based on house proximity apart from on kinship. As described before, Bungin Village is a *bares* or family one. The people living there marry their relatives; they still maintain the custom of marrying only within the limits of a local community, clan or tribe referred to as endogamy. This means that their neighbors are their own relatives.

The neighbor and kinship-based *rarambangah* is different from the *bares*-based one. Whereas the members of the *bares*-based working group are their own siblings, nephews, nieces, cousins and so forth, who may live far from each other, the members of the neighbor and kinship-based one are their neighbors and non close relatives. The philosophy of the letter is that “the Bajau people will not be neighbors or the same if they are not hungry while their neighbors are hungry”. In addition, they also have another philosophy that “do not make your neighbors offended by throwing the clamshell onto their boat and sand to their yard”.

According the Bajau people, the two philosophies mentioned above mean that “it is necessary to maintain the village totality which is based on

politeness and morality. Such teachings have made the Bajau people treat their neighbors well. It is natural that human beings need each other. Their opinion is that they are obliged to maintain good relation among them so that harmony and safety will be created. The expression that “they will not be the same if they are not hungry whereas their neighbors are hungry” means that they should not be individualistic and egoistic. As far as this context is concerned, they are obliged to prevent their neighbors from being sad and to share their neighbors’ sadness. Furthermore, the above expression also means that when their neighbors do not have enough to eat and do not have any money, they, feeling that they have more, are obliged to help them or to lend them some, to visit them if they are sick, to amuse them if they are stricken by misfortune, and to apologize them for the mistakes they have possibly made.

The expression “do not make your neighbors offended by throwing the clamshell onto their boat, and sand to their yard” also implies that the clamshell is rough, sharp and thorny. If it is stepped on, the foot will become wounded; if they happen to sit on it they will feel unhappy. The boat symbolizes the Bajau people’s center of life. Therefore, they should not offend and hate each other. In addition, they should not be jealous of each other.

The Bajau people comprehend deeply how they should treat their neighbors; they should love and look after each other. Such a philosophy is actualized by establishing a cooperation network termed as *rarambangah*; they use their closest neighbors as the main basis of their strength. Such a *Rarambangah* usually has 7 – 11 members and has the same function as the *bares*-based one, namely, alleviating each other and helping each other solve their problems.

The *rarambangah* membership is arbitrary, meaning that neighbors have the right to choose the *rarambangah* which, according to them, suit them. They also have the right to be the members of the *rarambangah* to which other neighbors belong, provided that it still needs more members. The principles of cooperation agreed in this *rarambangah* are similar to those agreed in the family-based one, namely, *sippa tappa* (trusting each other), *sikaada* (accepting each other’s condition) and *situlu tulu*

(helping each other). *Sippa tappa* means that, as the members of the same working group, they should trust each other; they should not deceive each other; they should not suspect each other. *Sikaada* means that they should understand each other; they should accept each other's condition although they have different characteristics, advantages and disadvantages. Decisions are made through negotiations. *Situlu-tulu* means continuously helping each other as they share each other's trials and tribulations. In other words, their lives depend on the sea which is full of challenges and risks. In addition, the *rarambangah* they belong to make them highly close to each other.

In practice, the activities done by the *rarambangah* are not only limited to the activities done in the sea but also include the social and religious domains, which can be exemplified by the activities such as *arisan* conducted by the mothers (regular social gathering whose members contribute to and take turns at winning an aggregate sum of money) and *pengajian* (reading the Khoran). In the Bajau community, the *rarambangah* is not only the association of the husbands but is also a means of relating the mothers to each other. The mothers, apart from supporting their husbands with their work, also establish groups of *arisan* and *pengajian* as mentioned above.

The *rarambangah*, as a social group, also serves as a means of helping its members. Its members are responsible for the ceremony conducted by its members such as wedding ceremony, house construction and so forth. In addition, in the event that one of its members gets sick, those whom he/she will contact are the other members of their working network.

The Bajau people's awareness of collective life has caused individual behavior to change into social behavior, causing the process of interrelation to take place regularly in their collective lives. Such an awareness has also caused social piety to take place among them, as can be illustrated by the moral commitment of the *rarambangah* shown by Pak Sade (50 years of age) to pay off a debt of Pak Musaini (55 years of age) by what has been collectively produced. This reality is in line with the thought proposed by Karl Marx (in Magnis-Suseno,

1999: 93) that a job is not only economically meaningful but is also a means of bridging human beings to meet what they socially need. It is also a field for self objectivation, meaning that the Bajau people are made to become highly close to each other through the *rarambangah*, in which one member plays his/her role for the others. Within this context, individuals play their psychological roles. The social nuance can clearly be seen from the fact that the *rarambangah* has what is called *pamatahna* (the group chief) and members; they interrelate to each other.

## CONCLUSION

Maritime cosmology and *rarambangah* system are two of the local geniuses the Bajau people living at Bungin Permai Village, Southeast Sulawesi, have. Cosmologically, it is stated that the Bajau people have been born to occupy and watch over the sea. They regard themselves as the descendants of the God of the Sea; therefore, they have the right to design and determine the maritime life. According to them, the sea is the center and source of their lives, garden and compound which should be well managed and looked after. They have developed a social or working network called *rarambangah* to manage and the sea and the activities done in it. Basically, the *rarambangah* is a group of people who have the same objective and feeling, namely, to alleviate their life burden through the principles of *situlu tulu*, *sikaada* and *sippa tappa*. There are two types of *rarambangah*; one of them is *bares-based* (kinship) and the other is friend, neighbor and family-based.

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