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Lalian Tolu: Science, Religious, and Tradition in Contemporary Timor Leste Society

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ABSTRACT

Timor-Leste has a complex social environment where culture, religion, and science interact with each other and shape the daily lives of the people. In contemporary society, these three components play a role in the life of modern Timorese society.

This study aims to explore the process of harmonizing the three regions above and to show that all three have an important role in harmonizing the lives of the community as indicated in the metaphor of the Lalian Tolu as historical development of the interaction between science, religion, and culture in East Timor, exploring changes in the views of society and social structure over time, and use a philosophical approach to require critical thinking and theoretical understanding of the ideas of science, religion, and tradition in relation to each other in contemporary Timor Leste society.

As a finding of this research the three stones of fire stove as a foundation of social and cultural life of the Timorese people cannot be separated from the entire construction of the civilization of the lives to the Timorese people until now and will exceed the generations of this nation.



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INTRODUCTION

Looking at the theme above is very interesting for the author. What is interesting is the insertion of the metaphor Lalian Tolu (three hearthstones)¹ in three areas of life in the vitalization of human life: culture, religion and science. In various anthropological studies around the world, including eastern Indonesia, the concept of "three hearthstones" is often used to describe a life that has balance and harmony. One hearth three stones is seen as a cultural system that is abstracted from concrete events, which is used to understand things about living together individually and in society.²

The metaphor of Lalian Tolu describes how three important elements: science, religion, and culture work together to shape the life of society. This is similar to the three stones that support a traditional furnace. In this case, the Lalian Tolu is considered to represent the survival, prosperity, and harmony of society. The furnace requires all the "stones" to complement each other. If one of them is weak, the furnace will be unstable and will not function properly.

East Timor, which became an independent country in 2002, has a complex social environment where culture, religion, and science interact with each other and shape the daily lives of the people. In contemporary society, these three components play a role in the life of modern Timorese society. The three are not only separate components but also as pillars that influence each other and contribute to the formation and development of identity and the state. The three also function with each other and influence each other in the collective efforts of society, to find meaning and negotiate their positions amidst ongoing social, political, and economic changes. For the sake of clarity, in this introductory section, the author tries to briefly break down the three pillars as initial knowledge.

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¹The philosophical concept of Lalian Tolu or "three stones of the Fire Stove" is very important in the social and cultural life of the Timorese people. This concept illustrates social balance and stability through the three stones that support the traditional cooking stove. If one of the stones is missing or unbalanced, the stove will wobble, causing the food to not cook properly. In this case, the three stones represent the three essential components needed to maintain harmony and

stability in society.

²Daud Alfons Pandie, 'Konsep "Satu Tungku Tiga Batu" Sosio-Kultural Fakfak Sebagai Model Interaksi Dalam Kehidupan Antarumat Beragama', *Societas Dei: Jurnal Agama Dan Masyarakat*, 5.1 (2018), 49 <<https://doi.org/10.33550/sd.v5i1.78>>.

negotiate their positions amidst ongoing social, political, and economic changes. For the sake of clarity, in this introductory section, the author tries to briefly break down the three pillars as initial knowledge.

Culture, as defined by an anthropologist William A. Haviland, is a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, morals, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by humans as members of society.³ The definition above, in my opinion, contains four elements, namely: Common life practised in society, Symbols of group identity, Stories about our place in the world and agreements about what is 'good'.⁴

Religion is an influential force and is most felt in human life. Religion influences many aspects of life. Religious beliefs and values still motivate many people to act.⁵ There are four elements of religion that are very prominent, including: Belief in God and his power in public spaces, sacred symbols, sacred stories that connect the past, present, and future and the existence of a group gathering and worshipping together.⁶

In the case of East Timor, religion, especially Roman Catholicism, plays a vital role in the way people live. More than just a spiritual belief, religion in this country is a key element in building social solidarity, community identity, and providing meaning in post-conflict life. The religion (Catholic Church) has developed into a significant organization responsible for education, social services, and political advocacy. In addition, the syncretism that still often occurs between Catholicism and traditional beliefs shows an interesting dynamic of how religion functions in a changing culture.

While science is a systematic and organized discipline that studies natural, social, and physical phenomena through the scientific method, which involves observation, experimentation, data collection, and analysis. The goal of the scientific method is to produce verifiable and reliable knowledge. Science seeks to understand how the world works, to discover patterns, and to make predictions based on natural laws. Gerald Holton in his *Introduction to Concepts and Theories in Physical Science* wrote: "The task of science, like all thought, is to go beyond what is directly visible to what is invisible to the visible or see with eye."⁷ What is expressed from this perspective represents an ideal that is different from, and even challenges, what is idealized about science today. Scientific knowledge, we often maintain, is always derived from a perception that is also inherently limited by space and time. This is where science often intersects with culture and religion.

In any country, and also in East Timor, science is currently faced with the challenge of bridging the gap between modern knowledge, local traditions and religion. The application of science often has to deal with cultural and customary barriers that are still deeply rooted in society in creating space for dialogue between traditional and scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, the government, science education is increasingly emphasized by educational institutions to encourage economic and social development. Initiatives in the fields of agriculture, health, and infrastructure seek to utilize technology and scientific approaches to improve the quality of life. So, to understand this dynamic, the

underlying question here is can a path be found towards harmonizing these three pillars for community life? To what extent can this harmonization be sustained?

This study aims to explore the process of harmonizing the three regions above and to show that all three have an important role in harmonizing the lives of the community as indicated in the metaphor of the Lalian Tolu. That, the three cannot be separated from the entire construction of the civilization of the lives of the Timorese people until now and will exceed the generations of this nation.

To achieve the purpose of this research, the author will use a social history study (literature). This study traces the historical development of the interaction between science, religion, and culture in East Timor, exploring changes in the views of society and social structure over time. In addition, the author will also use a philosophical approach, because this research will require critical thinking and theoretical understanding of the ideas of science, religion, and tradition in relation to each other in contemporary Timor Leste society.

THE METHOD

This study traces the historical development of the interaction between science, religion, and culture in East Timor, exploring changes in the views of society and social structure over time. In addition, the author will also use a philosophical approach, because this research will require critical thinking and theoretical understanding of the ideas of science, religion, and tradition in relation to each other in contemporary Timor Leste society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical exploration of the meeting between Culture, Religion and Science

The history of East Timor culture is the result of a blend of native culture and foreign influences that have developed over centuries. The interaction between natives and immigrants as well as geographical, political, and historical factors shape this culture.

That long before the arrival of Europeans (Portuguese) the people of East Timor had an indigenous culture. This culture is mainly related to ethnic groups such as Tetum, Mambae, Makasae, Bunak, and Fataluku. These ethnic groups have different languages, traditions, and customs. Most indigenous people have a social structure consisting of clans or tribes, with strong animistic beliefs and worship of ancestors, nature spirits, and traditional rituals.

However, since the 16th century there has been contact between local culture and European culture. This is marked by the arrival of the Portuguese as a representation of the presence of Europeans in East Timor. For 450 years, East Timor was colonized by the Portuguese. This nation brought Catholicism, Portuguese language, and elements of European culture and the aroma of science to the region. The meeting of colonial history brought both to the altar of "mixed marriage". Uniquely, Catholicism became the majority religion and had an impact on

³ A. William Haviland, *Antropologi Jilid 2 / William A. Haviland*; Editor: Herman Sinaga; Penerjemah (Jakarta: Erlanga, 1985).

⁴ John A Rees, 'Religion and Culture', *Religion and Culture*, 2017, 1-9 <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315022857>>.

⁵ Bernard Raho, *Sosiologi Agama, 1st edn (Mauwere: Penerbit Ledalero, 2019)*. p.11

⁶ Rees.

⁷ Mikhael Dua, *Filsafat Ilmu Pengetahuan (Mauwere: Ledalero, 2019)*. p. 11

various aspects of daily life, such as visual arts, music, dance, and architecture.

During the Portuguese colonial period, religion became a weapon of conquest for the culture of the Timorese people. The Portuguese were very aggressive in missionizing in East Timor. They forced the local people to convert to catholic christianity, often ignoring or destroying local belief practices. Many traditional sacred sites, places of worship, and religious symbols of the indigenous people were destroyed or desecrated. All cultural rites were branded as infidel (gentio), uncivilized.⁸ The traditional social and political structures in East Timor were changed by the arrival of the Portuguese and the implementation of colonialism. Before colonialism, the Timorese people had a traditional government system led by kings or liurai. Often, the Portuguese destroyed and disrupted this system by replacing disobedient local leaders with those of their own choosing, or by employing Portuguese to police the territories.

After the European period, East Timor was taken over by Indonesia. History records that in 1975, when the Flores revolution occurred in Portugal, East Timor, which was colonized by Portugal at that time, proclaimed its independence on November 28, 1975. However, after that, Indonesia invaded and annexed the territory. During its 24 years of occupation, culture has been significantly affected, through language, education, and government. However, many aspects of East Timorese culture still exist, and resistance to Indonesian occupation is a strong example

The Timor People experienced a cultural renaissance after the 1999 referendum that resulted in full independence in 2002. Local cultural heritage is protected and promoted by the government and society. Furthermore, in the process of documentation and preservation of local languages, Tetum and Portuguese were designated as official languages. Traditional dances, music, carvings, tada bando and weaving became symbols of the revival of national identity. This is regulated in the Constitution of the Republic of East Timor (C-RDTL) Article 13 paragraphs (1 and 2): Tetum, Portuguese are the official languages and regional languages are valued and developed by the government.⁹ Furthermore, Article 59 paragraph (5): "Everyone has the right to enjoy and create culture, as well as the obligation to preserve, maintain and appreciate cultural heritage of the nation's cultural identity."¹⁰

Among the many cultures above, *Uma Lulik* (sacred house) is the main symbol for the identity of the Timor Leste nation. So important is Uma Lulik, the government even issued a government resolution number 24/2009 on national politics for its culture.¹¹ In my opinion, it contains, the awareness of the Timorese government for the preservation and dissemination of the heritage and cultural and artistic values of society is also stated in this policy, through a series of actions that include the

creation of laws, support for research, education and training programs, and infrastructure development.¹²

The meaning of this infrastructure development is directed towards the development of "uma Lulik." If translated into English, uma lulik literally means a Holy or sacred house. This term is used repeatedly even in linguistic contexts where Tetum is not the main language. Uma Lulik still survives to this day, lulik has various polysemy: "divine", "intact", "sacred", "sacred" and "holy".¹³ And there are still lulik frogs often "lulik": "luli", synonymous with "abstinence", "restraining oneself", "oppressing oneself", and "forbidden".¹⁴ Although over the years Uma (lulik) has been destroyed (from the Portuguese to the Indonesians) and has shifted between its visible exterior and its hidden interior which is a sacred ritual element, from a social and political perspective, lulik is still used as a unifying symbol.¹⁵ The practice of lulik and traditional conflict resolution are part of the reconciliation process in East Timor.¹⁶

The practice of abstraction (ideas) in the infrastructure of uma lulik is the concretization of abstraction in the reality of life in every society.¹⁷

Because the principle of every society has a unique and special image of the natural world of thinking. Within society, knowledge is stored. Every society has an a priori figure, image, imagination that spontaneously responds to various phenomena that refer to self-awareness and awareness of living together in relation to the meaning, function and role of logistics of a phenomenon in a society.

This reality gives us a vision of the continued existence of "uma lulik" here and now in Timorese society and its symbolic and unifying role.

Conflict between Culture, Religion and Science

If we look at history, the conflict between the three has occurred hundreds of years ago.¹⁸ For example, the conflict between science and religion in the case of Galileo and Darwin's theory. Science challenges the existence of religion, and vice versa, so that both only validate their own existence.¹⁹ Meanwhile, religion and culture, in the early days of the emergence of Christianity faced Jewish and Roman culture. So, in this discussion, the question is Where is the conflict between culture, religion and science the context of East Timor? it's:

Epistemological Disagreements

In East Timor society, religion and science often differ in how they understand the world. Religion often relies on revelation, scripture, and belief, while science relies on empirical methods and rationality. Culture can be a place where these two things meet, but it can also be a source of conflict when traditional values clash with new research findings.

Ontological Disagreements

⁸ Timor Leste Em Estudo Cultura e Religião, ed. by José Sanches, Mário António Da Costa, Domingos Alves e Maia, Nature Microbiology, 1st edn (Curitiba - Brasil: Editora CRV ISBN:, 2020).

⁹ C-RDTL, Constituição Da República Democrática de Timor-Leste, Tribunal de Recurso (Dili, 2007), p. 5

¹⁰ C-RDTL, p. 19

¹¹ <https://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/?q=node/1816>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Lúcia Sousa, 'Passado E Presente Das Uma Lulik', 2017, 415-40.

¹⁴ Sousa.

¹⁵ A McWilliam, 'Houses of Resistance in East Timor: Structuring Sociality in the New Nation', In *Anthropological Forum*, 15.1 (2006), 27-44.

¹⁶ Sousa. Loc.cit.

¹⁷ Gregor Neonbasu, *Sketsa Dasar Mengenal Manusia Dan Masyarakat (Pintu Masuk Ilmu Antropologi)* (Jakarta: Buku Kompas, 2020), p. 169

¹⁸ Jendri, 'Hubungan Sains Dengan Agama Perspektif Pemikiran Ian G Barbour', *Tajdid: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 18.1 (2019), 57-78.

¹⁹ Jendri.

Religions often offer explanations that differ from those offered by science about how the universe and life began. For example, some religions may disagree with the theory of evolution. Culture can also influence how people see the world, sometimes combining myths or folklore with scientific perspectives.

Ethical and Moral Disagreements:

Based on particular moral views, some religious teachings may oppose certain scientific practices, such as euthanasia, contraception, or stem cell research. Local cultures may also hold moral views that conflict with scientific or religious consensus.

Conflict in Social Practice

There are numerous instances where standards or regulations originating from modern science or humanism clash with cultural or religious practices. Common examples include women's rights, LGBT rights, and reproductive health. Conflict in Social Practice: There are numerous instances where standards or regulations based on modern science or humanism clash with traditional or religious practices. Common examples include women's rights, LGBT rights, and reproductive health.

Faced with the reality of the conflict between the three in the mindset and lifestyle of contemporary East Timor society, on the one hand there are also efforts to find common ground between these three elements. Several communities and organizations try to combine traditional culture with religious teachings and science to create a more holistic approach to social and environmental issues. Because there is a collective awareness that when the aspect is likened to the three stones of the furnace. Where, one of them must not be removed. If one of the three stones is removed, it will have an impact on the entire construction of Timor Leste society.

The Philosophical Meaning of Lalian Tolu in the Framework of Thinking of Culture, Religion and Science

As mentioned earlier, the Lalian Tolu philosophy, also known as the "Three Stones One Fire Furnace", plays an important role in the social and cultural life of the Timorese people. This concept depicts social stability and balance through the three stones that support the traditional cooking stove. The stove will be unstable if one of the stones is missing or unbalanced, causing the food to not cook properly. In this case, the three stones represent the three essential components needed to keep society harmonious and stable.

Thus, the author emphasizes that, it is very important, for the people of Timor Leste to realize and acknowledge and understand wisely-philosophically that culture, religion and science can be interpreted in the philosophy of Lalian Tolu.

The following is a philosophical explanation of how to interpret these three aspects in the philosophy of Lalin Tolu as follows:

Philosophical values of unity and balance

Life requires balance and unity, as shown by this metaphor. Three stones must firmly support each other to keep the furnace stable. In such a situation, religion, culture, and science must complement each other to create a balanced and harmonious society. Each part performs a unique and important function. Religion provides moral and spiritual guidance, art drives technological progress, and culture maintains social identity and values.

Interconnectedness and interdependence

The philosophy of Lalian Tolu shows that all aspects of human life are interconnected and interdependent. These three components cannot survive alone. Religion and culture need religious and cultural values to maintain human goals and ethics; religion needs culture and science to remain relevant to today's world; and religion needs culture and science to develop and adapt to the times.

The principle of survival and continuity

The center of daily activities is the kitchen, where people gather, cook, and share stories. As a result, these three stones also serve as a representation of the principle of sustainability. Society must achieve harmony between science, religion, and culture in order to achieve better sustainability and survival, just as a stove requires three stones to function properly. If any of these elements are neglected or ignored, the balance and sustainability of society can be disrupted. The people of East Timor must know how to use all three in their social life. So that the people of this country do not become blind victims of the development of science and technology, they must be rooted in their own religion and culture.

Local wisdom ideas

Local philosophy, which has existed for a long time in traditional societies, is also present in this metaphor. This value teaches each member of society how important it is to work together, tolerate, and respect each other. This view reminds us that joint efforts and recognition of the importance of each role are needed to achieve common goals such as keeping the fire burning and producing something useful. In the culture and religion contain local wisdom philosophies that must be respected by science. Science that relies on reason explores and promotes it through media or communication tools which are the biological children of Science. Science functions to protect, maintain and promote local values born from the womb of culture and religion, such as ethics, morals, life and respect, etc.

CONCLUSION

The Interaction of the three elements: science, religion, and culture must work together well, like three stones supporting a furnace. The balance will be disturbed if one of the three is too dominant or weak. For example, ethics and deeper meanings can be ignored by science when they ignore traditional or spiritual aspects. Likewise, religion and culture that ignore research results can get trapped in irrelevant or dangerous beliefs.

From the results of the research above, the author believes that culture, religion and science are the same as *Lalian Tolu* which in principle will always be side by side with each other in the lives of the Timorese people. Culture and religion are the identity of the Timorese people while science is the main path to a more human life in the civilization of culture and religion in East Timor.

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