

still stored in the collective memory of Bantenese society, especially the older people.

Even though popular cultures with various interesting accessories develop rapidly in Bantenese society, the existence of these religious myths, more or less, has influenced on the socio-religious life of the Bantenese. Religious myths, in some cases, also play significant roles and function for Bantenese society because they frequently contain moral values. Strengthening something, changing something, maintaing solidarity and unity among muslim societies, keeping prestiges and social status, guiding human behaviours are several roles and functions of religious myths for the Bantenese society.

Various religious myths are spread out and still believed and maintained from generations to generations in most of Bantenese society. Many of daily events and daily activities of Bantenese society are frequently covered by religious myths. The myths of the holy people or saints, sacred places, sacred objects (sacred cows), the parentage of villages, supernatural animals, supernatural beings, genie, and evil spirit are several kinds of religious myths that are often available in Bantenese society.

Keywords: *Religious Myth, Culture, Banten*

Introduction

Myth is a fiction story that exists in almost everywhere, in every era, in almost every society; and that it appears in many cultures. Many researches, especially conducted by the West researchers, show that myths always appear in various socio-religious activities of the society, especially in primitive society. Almost no society that is not covered by myths which have the sacred values for its adherents. Both primitive and modern societies often make use of the sacred myths as the symbols of strengthening and authority. In performing various socio-religious activities, indeed in conducting economic and political activities, there are always mythes emerged to make people convinced that what they believe has actually the sanctified values that could not be disparaged or destroyed.

Many experts argue that human, both individually and collectively, could not live without myths or mythologies. It means that the existence of myths is very vital and important for the existence of human life, especially dealing with religious myths and the belief systems. In this regard, Kluckhohn, as quoted by Roberts, argues that religious beliefs are usually expressed in the form of myths. By myth, the social

we will result in a more complete treasure of local culture that can be used for exploring the local wisdom or world view of our society as a guidance of human in performing their socio-religious activities. Exploration of local religious myths from every area may result in a treasure of Indonesian culture that can be used to make Indonesian people aware of the existence of multiculturalism in our nation.

If we analyze several interpretations on religious myths from several areas, we can see how the Bantenese society understands myths as the sacred thing and frequently contains moral and religious values that should be maintained and conserved by the society in order that they can control their actions and behavior to be appropriate to their local culture and local wisdom.

Based on the explanation above, discussing on the role and position of religious mythes of Bantenese society among the rising genres of populer culture becomes an interesting topic to study because of several reasons: First, as a multicultural area consisted of people who dominantly speak in Sundanese and Javanese language and well-known as a religious area, Banten has various religious myths spread out among the society. Second, many religious myths in Banten are only kept in the collective memory of the older people. They will be extinct or lost by the rapidly rising genres of popular culture that is becoming more dominant in our country if they are not written and documented by us.

This article tries to discuss several main questions as follow: how Bantenese society undertands and believes in religious myths that spread out and are still maintained from generations to generations? What are the roles and functions of religious myths for Bantenese society?, and how is the position of these religious myths among the rising of populer culture in the Bantenese society?

Theoretical concept of Myth

Some dictionaries defines myth as stories telling about the origin of the nature, gods, human, and many things in the World, and it deals with any magical action and supernatural beings happened in the past. In this regard, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* defines myth as ‘stories of a nation on gods and heroes in the past containing interpretation on the origin of the nature, human, nation that contains deep meaning expressed magically.’³³⁸ Similar to this definition, *the Dictionary of Religious* also defines myth in the same point of view. This dictionary states that,

“Myth is narrative, usually traditional, in which, events are described as deeds of god, heroes, or other super-human beings; i.e. events in the realm of nature

³³⁸ Tim Penyusun, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, cet.10, Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1998, 660-1

build the value principles of the society even though they can reflect such a kind of values.

According to Seznec, as quoted by Malefijt, relativity of the dissemination of myths from one culture can be folktales for other cultures. Mythological inheritance of Ancient Greek, for example, has survived up to the present day in the West culture. These myths have spread out from generations to generations, long after they have their religious meaning. In transmission process, they maintain the art values in European literatures, and continually perform their functions, except the sacred function.³⁴⁹

Based on the above explanation, it is clear to demonstrate that a story is called a myth if it has the sacred element within it, and it is believed and considered 'true' by the society, or it is considered having ever been happened in the past. It means that stories or tales that have no the sacred values, or society considers them merely as fairy tales or entertaining tales, are not considered as myth. They are possibly regarded as folklore, folktales, or legends. Based on the above description, it can be concluded that at one period, a tale can be regarded as a myth by a certain society because of its sacred values and being considered as 'true story' by that society. However, on another period or on another culture, the tale is no longer considered as a myth because its sacred values have been faded or completely lost, and the society only considers them as a fiction that functions for entertaining only.

The Meaning, the Role and the Function of myth

To understand the meaning, role, and the function of myth, we can approach it from different perspectives. Each perspective may result in different views on it. An anthropologist, for example, will analyze and observe the phenomenon of myth based on anthropological perspective. He will not judge whether myth is permitted or forbidden by the religious rules because it becomes the theologians' responsibility to express it. In this regard, Malefijt argues that 'myth consists of language; it appears in the form of a narrative with a plot; it has style and, often, beauty; it has a history and cross-cultural distribution; it is a cultural institution and, as such, possesses psychological, social, and religious functions and meanings. Thus, a linguist will analyze the language of myth; the folklorist is interested in its motifs and plots, the literary critic focuses on its style and aesthetic value, the psychologist searches for its emotional content, the theologian examines its relationship to religious truths, and the social scientist concentrates on its social and functions'.³⁵⁰

Many experts argue that human, both individually and collectively, could not live without any myth or mythology. It means that the existence of myth is very vital

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ Annemarie de Waal Malefijt, *Religion and Culture...*, 172

purposes. Nowadays, *Wali Beji's* offspring live near his cemetery and keep his cemetery. His offspring become charismatic figures in their society, and they obtain much respect from the society because they believe that *Wali Beji* was a holy saint who had spread Islam in this village.³⁵⁶

➤ The myths of the sacred places

In Banten. There are many sacred and holy places which are believed by both some Bantenese society and many people from outside Banten as places that can give them *barokah* and luckiness for their live. Because of this belief, these places are always crowded by many people who wanted to look for *barokah* and any magical science. One of the sacred places is Banten Lama where Sultan Hasanuddin (the first sultan of Banten Sultanate) and his family and his offspring are buried. Almost everyday, especially on Fridays, this place was always crowded of many people for performing *ziarah* for various purposes.

At another place in Banten, there are a myth of *Batu Qur'an* (the stone of Qur'an) and a myth of *Tujuh Sumur* (seven wells) that are believed as the sacred and the holy places. These places are also always visited by many people from inside and outside Banten for performing *ziarah*, asking *barokah*, seeking magical sciences, and so on. People believe in the story or myths about both of these places as something true and have ever been happened in the past. By performing *ziarah* to these places, they hope they succeed in obtaining their desire and hopes because of the *barokah* of these places.³⁵⁷

➤ The myths of supernatural animals

One of religious myths that is spread out in Banten is myths on supernatural animals. Some Bantenese people believe that several people, especially the sacred and holy people such as saints and kyai, and certain charismatic figures, had supernatural pets which always accompany them both during their life and after their death. Some people also believe that these magical animals will keep and protect their offsprings and will appear and show them selves at a certain time, especially when the people they protect need their help. Lions, tigers, and snakes are kinds of supernatural animals which are believed being possessed by certain people. The myths of these supernatural animals exists in almost every areas in Banten. One of the myths on supernatural animals is available in desa Ciomas, Serang Banten in which some of people in this village have ever witnessed a supernatural animal showing itself in the form of a big lion. They believed that this animal was K.H.Halimy's pet. K.H.Halimy was a charismatic ulama who established and lead a pesantren in this village. He was believed

³⁵⁶ Interview with Ust. Munawir, one of offspring of *Wali Beji*, November 12th, 2010.

³⁵⁷ Interview with Bpk. Katrin (45), Ds. Cipare Ranjeng, Serang Banten, October 13th 2011.

religious myths was a part of their respectfulness to the spirits of their parents and their ancestors who had died. By believing these religious myths, they also hope they may get *barokah* and happiness for their life. According to them, our ancestors and our parents in the past were usually honest so that their words and their stories usually contain *hikmah* (wisdom) and contain good advices for human.

Even though the majority of the Bantenese society did not understand the reasons and rationalisation of the religious myths, the belief on the religious myths was still high in the society, especially for the older people who live in the villages. It was indicated from the fact that many people still visited several sacred places for doing *ziarah*, performing meditation and asceticism to reach their practical goals, and many people still maintained these for guiding their behaviour and their socio-religious activities. Indeed, some of them keep them in their mind and transmit them to their generations to maintain their social prestige.

The Position of Religious Myths among the Raising Genres of Popular Culture in Bantenese Society

Apart from the lack of their understanding about the reasons and rasionalisation of the existence of the religious myths, the belief on this oral tradition is still alive among the culture of Bantenese society up to the present day. The raising genres of popular culture that develop rapidly among the society through all kinds of media that are easy to access by all society do not make this kind of myths lost and eliminated from Bantenese people's belief, at least, up to the present day.

The onslaught of popular culture, especially the West culture, that is frequently not appropriate with the norms, customs, moral and religious values of Indonesian people, less and more, have influenced the life style and behavior of our young generations. Many programs and information that show the West or Korean cultures that give priority to liberalism, consumerism, hedonism, free-sex, and other negative values are provided daily in all kinds of media such as internet, television, newspaper, novels, magazines, and so on. We can now witness the negative impacts of this popular culture in which many Bantenese people imitate various West styles. It influences all ages of Bantenese society, from children until the older people. They feel rightfully proud and more confident when they can act and dress as the West or Korean people. They no longer care whether it is appropriate with our religious and moral values or not. They worry if they do not act and dress like the modern people, they will be out of fashion.

Due to the rapid development of information technology and modern sciences that facilitates the access of information from all over the world throug internet and television in the future, it is something possible that this oral tradition will be left by the

and believe in their religious myths that they have and get from their origin village. They also tell and transmit their origin religious myths to their generations in their new places as a form of social solidarity toward villages where they were born and grew. These religious myths also frequently become identity symbol of their origin. The Banteneese, especially, generally do not want change their identity as a Banteneese even though they no longer live in Banten.

➤ Religious myths function to it maintain the prestige and social status

For some of Banteneese society, the existence of religious myths, especially myths of the origin of their villages and the myths of the sacred figures who become their ancestors, are considered having certain values for them. It is often happened that people who become the offspring of the sacred and holy figures, especially the offspring of charismatic and sacred figures who had islamized or converted the society into Islam in the past, obtain great respect and higher appreciation as well as higher position and social status among the society. This condition can be found in *desa Terumbu Serang Banten* where the offspring of *Wali Beji* is regarded as honourable people and obtain higher social prestige and social status in the society.

Conclusion

Religious myths are one of the treasures of oral tradition that is spread out and still survive in every culture and every society all over the world, and Banten is not an exception. This belief on these religious myths frequently relates to something sacred or holy and deals with supernatural beings that is difficult to understand by our logical reasons. They are also difficult to be proven scientifically and their creators are anonymous. Religious myths are regarded containing moral values. Hence, one of their functions is to maintain moral and behaviour of the society.

Moreover, the belief and conviction to these religious myths can show that modernity and the rapid development of sciences and information technology can not immediately erode and eliminate the mystical and magical dimensions of the modern society's thought and behaviour. It is indicated by the fact that the belief on these religious myths are believed and practiced not only by the common people, but also by educated people.

Various religious myths are spread out, still believed, and transmitted from generations to generations among the Banteneese society. Many events and socio-religious activities of Banteneese society are often covered by religious myths. The raising genres of popular culture that develop rapidly among the society through all

