



## Post-Colonial Study to Understand the Identity of God in the Experience of the Indonesian Indigenous

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**Abstract:** Post-colonial studies offer a critical lens to examine the impact of colonialism on various aspects of society, including religious beliefs and practices. In Indonesia, a country with a rich tapestry of indigenous cultures and religions, the legacy of colonialism has profoundly influenced the perception and understanding of the divine. Understanding the identity of God within the framework of post-colonial discourse is essential for comprehending the complexities of Indonesian religious identity. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing bibliography methods. By engaging with indigenous communities, this research seeks to uncover their perspectives on the identity of God, exploring how colonialism has shaped these perceptions and examining the resilience of indigenous belief systems in the face of external influences. Preliminary findings suggest a multifaceted understanding of the divine among Indonesian indigenous peoples, reflecting a synthesis of traditional beliefs and post-colonial interpretations. The experience of colonialism has resulted in a complex negotiation of religious identity, with indigenous communities navigating between traditional worldviews and the imposition of foreign ideologies. Despite these challenges, indigenous perspectives on the identity of God demonstrate resilience and adaptability, offering insights into the ongoing processes of cultural revival and decolonization in contemporary Indonesia.

## INTRODUCTION

In the context of life in the Indonesian archipelago, or more broadly, Indonesia, the reflection of God varies. In the context of the archipelago, God always refers to the Almighty, the most Glorious, and other supreme qualities. In short, when people of the archipelago speak of God, they always refer to the source of life itself. No society reflects God as a small and powerless entity. References to God in the archipelago's society also vary, although they carry the same meaning (Lina & Wijanarko, 2022).

The question of who God is in society cannot be answered briefly. This question must be answered by considering the community's understanding of God in relation to its culture and daily life or by comparing a tribe's reflection in relation to its culture (Onah, Ogar, & Okoi, 2023). Someone who wants to understand about God in their own culture or in the culture of others must first get to know their culture, experience it, or at least understand it. Culture or

cultural heritage must not be separated in reflections about God. This happens because the recognition of God is always primarily lived within the culture of each archipelagic society.

In discussing post-colonialism, the term "post-colonial" or "post-colonialism" can refer to the era after the end of colonialism, along with the independence of former colonies in the early 20th century. However, in this article, it is more important to understand post-colonialism as a method of searching for meaning or as a study of discourses of resistance against colonial experiences and self-articulation that develop within (former) colonized societies. Post-colonialism indicates a discourse of resistance from the colonized people who critically question colonial discourses and utterances that have become a sort of grand narrative. The discourse that questions this grand narrative also aims to rediscover the past, which has been buried by (mis)information and colonial influences. Therefore, post-colonialism is an attempt to reorient conceptual understanding towards a new consciousness that transforms experiences filled with ambiguity and inferiority.

Post-colonial studies are interdisciplinary and are used in many academic fields with different emphases and examples, including Anthropology, Geography, International Studies, Music, and History. Furthermore, the use of the term "post" preceding "colonial" is quite problematic. The term "post" is often understood chronologically, meaning "after." With this understanding, post-colonialism is understood as the condition after the era of colonialism, which began around the 1960s when European colonialism formally ended. However, the understanding of post-colonialism in terms of chronological time seems insufficient. Post-colonialism can also be understood as criticism and resistance against dominant knowledge that is hegemonic and suppresses various minor knowledges. Hegemonic knowledge is knowledge produced by colonialism, whether old colonialism or new colonialism. Colonialism (old) is the conquest, domination, and placement of a territory to extract its wealth for the benefit of the colonial state. Although formal colonialism as territorial domination has ended, there is now a form of new colonialism (neo-colonialism) that leans towards the control of a country's economic structures by another country, while also turning it into a market that consumes goods from other countries.

Colonialism entails domination, control, and hegemonic rule that influences many aspects of life, including language, ideology, ways of thinking, theology, and the cultural identity of a society. Even when colonialism ends, the latent effects of colonial hegemony remain deeply ingrained. Postcolonial studies are understood as a process of cultural emancipation, a discourse of resistance against all forms of colonial (Western) thought domination that have "colonized" various fields (Wilfred, 2020). In postcolonial studies, what has long been under the shadow of Western hegemony, or dominant culture in general, begins to emerge and play a role as a subject. Therefore, it is not surprising that postcolonial approaches are more often undertaken in regions that have experienced colonialism. They are the ones who have borne the burden of history that has been embedded in their consciousness of thinking patterns and cultural identities. Postcolonial studies are an attempt to formulate their cultural identities that have long been silenced.

Postcolonialism is more understood as a mindset than as a specific movement or school of thought. It is a subversive attitude towards dominant knowledge, an oppositional reading practice, a critical approach to Eurocentric ways of thinking that have permeated and shaped meanings and knowledge dominantly. Due to its function as critical discourse against various forms of domination, postcolonial studies can be used in a wide range of fields, including within colonial countries, to criticize various forms of domination and singular understandings. In short, postcolonialism becomes a critical conversation for those who have been "othered" and sucked into the shadows of domination. Issues often raised in postcolonial discourse are issues of marginalization such as slavery, gender, and diasporic ethnicity. However, it should be noted that although postcolonial discourse is a critique of colonial cultural domination, it does not mean romanticizing locality by exposing and seeking the flaws of colonialism and glorifying local culture as anti-colonialism. Local cultures considered "authentic" may often be feudal and contain colonial-influenced domination, such as slavery, class stratification, and patriarchal culture. Additionally, attempting to find "authentic" local culture by trying to eliminate all colonial elements is not possible because colonial identity has become part of the local identity that has been colonized. Identity becomes hybrid, mixed, as a new identity that is neither the same as local "authenticity" nor with the colonizer. Therefore, postcolonialism becomes a critical tool, both for colonial and local cultures.

Post-colonial studies have profoundly impacted religious studies, particularly concerning the concept of God. These studies have revolutionized the field by challenging the Eurocentric perspectives that have historically dominated religious discourse. By deconstructing Eurocentrism, post-colonial scholars have opened up space for the exploration of diverse understandings of the divine that exist outside Western paradigms. This has led to a more inclusive and pluralistic approach to the study of religion, acknowledging the validity of non-Western interpretations of the divine. Furthermore, post-colonial studies have prompted scholars to critically examine how colonialism has influenced religious beliefs and practices, including the concept of God. They highlight how colonial powers imposed their own interpretations of religion onto indigenous cultures, marginalizing alternative perspectives. By uncovering and challenging these impositions, post-colonial scholars seek to restore agency to colonized peoples in shaping their religious identities. Additionally, post-colonial studies prioritize the voices and experiences of indigenous peoples in religious studies, reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems and spiritualities that were suppressed or marginalized during the colonial period. This reclamation process contributes to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of religious diversity, particularly in terms of the concept of God. Post-colonial scholars also emphasize the complex intersections between colonialism, religion, and other social factors such as race, class, and gender. This intersectional approach allows scholars to explore how various aspects of identity intersect and shape individuals' understandings of the divine. Moreover, post-colonial studies recognize that religious beliefs and practices are often hybridized as a result of colonial encounters, challenging essentialist notions of religion and encouraging a more fluid understanding of religious identity.

However, despite its many contributions, post-colonial studies in religious studies also face several challenges. Firstly, there is resistance from traditional scholars within religious studies who may view post-colonial perspectives as overly politicized or as undermining established academic frameworks. This resistance can hinder the integration of post-colonial insights into mainstream religious scholarship. Secondly, post-colonial studies often rely on interdisciplinary methodologies that may not align with traditional approaches in religious studies, creating tensions around issues of methodology and epistemology. This can make it difficult to integrate post-colonial perspectives into existing academic structures. Thirdly, the study of religion, particularly in post-colonial contexts, raises complex ethical questions regarding representation, power dynamics, and cultural appropriation. Scholars must navigate these ethical considerations carefully to avoid perpetuating colonial legacies or exploiting marginalized communities. Lastly, the complexity of religious identity within post-colonial contexts poses challenges for scholars seeking to analyze and understand religious phenomena. The multifaceted nature of religious identity challenges simplistic categorizations and binaries, requiring scholars to adopt more nuanced and contextually sensitive approaches. Overall, while post-colonial studies have significantly enriched the field of religious studies by centering marginalized voices and critiquing colonial legacies, they also present challenges that require careful consideration and engagement by scholars in the field.

## **METHOD**

Post-colonial methods in religious studies offer a critical lens through which scholars analyze the impact of colonialism on religious beliefs, practices, and identities. This approach seeks to deconstruct Eurocentric narratives that have historically dominated religious discourse and marginalize non-Western perspectives. Scholars employing post-colonial methods interrogate how colonial powers imposed their interpretations of religion onto indigenous cultures, often suppressing or erasing indigenous spiritualities in the process. By centering the experiences and voices of colonized peoples, post-colonial religious studies aim to restore agency to those whose religious identities were subjugated under colonial rule. Additionally, post-colonial scholars explore the complex intersections between colonialism, religion, and other social factors such as race, class, and gender. This intersectional approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how colonialism shaped religious identities and practices, as well as how these identities intersect with broader systems of power and oppression. Overall, post-colonial methods in religious studies offer a transformative framework for analyzing the complex dynamics of religion within colonial and post-colonial contexts, challenging hegemonic narratives and fostering a more inclusive and pluralistic approach to the study of religion.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

From the perspective of post-colonial studies, revelation and faith transcend mere information or teachings; they represent profound facets of human existence and engagement with the divine. In colonial contexts, the dissemination of religious doctrines often

accompanied imperial conquest, serving as a tool for cultural domination and control. Western powers imposed their religious ideologies upon colonized peoples, shaping their beliefs, identities, and ways of life. Consequently, the understanding of revelation and faith became intertwined with colonial power dynamics, perpetuating hegemonic influences in various aspects of life, including language, theology, and cultural identity. Post-colonial scholars argue that even after the end of formal colonial rule, the latent impacts of colonial hegemony persist, influencing perceptions of religion and spirituality.

Within the framework of post-colonial studies, the concept of revelation and faith takes on a multifaceted dimension. It is not solely about the reception of divine messages or adherence to religious doctrines but also about the recognition of the complex power dynamics that shape religious discourse. Post-colonialism emphasizes the importance of emancipatory processes in understanding revelation and faith, viewing them as avenues for challenging colonial forms of dominance in religious thought. This perspective acknowledges the agency of formerly colonized communities in reclaiming their religious identities and reshaping theological discourses from their own cultural and historical vantage points.

Moreover, post-colonial scholars highlight the subversive nature of faith within colonial contexts. Faith becomes a site of resistance against oppressive colonial ideologies, offering alternative narratives and modes of spiritual expression that defy Western-centric worldviews. Through post-colonial lenses, revelation is not a static, monolithic concept but a dynamic process of engagement with the divine that evolves within diverse cultural and historical contexts. It involves a critical interrogation of colonial interpretations of religious texts and a reclamation of indigenous spiritual traditions that were marginalized or suppressed under colonial rule.

The impact of post-colonial studies on religious studies concerning the concept of God is profound. It encourages scholars to deconstruct colonial interpretations of divinity and recognize the plurality of religious experiences and expressions across different cultures. Post-colonialism challenges the universalization of Western theological frameworks and emphasizes the importance of contextualizing religious beliefs within their socio-political and historical contexts. This approach fosters a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the divine, acknowledging the richness of religious diversity and the interconnectedness of global spiritual traditions.

However, post-colonial perspectives also present challenges within religious studies. One significant issue is the tension between acknowledging the agency of formerly colonized peoples in shaping their religious identities and avoiding essentialism or romanticization of indigenous cultures. While post-colonialism seeks to empower marginalized voices, it must navigate the complexities of cultural hybridity and the ongoing impact of colonial legacies on contemporary religious practices. Additionally, there is a risk of overlooking internal power dynamics within post-colonial societies, where dominant religious institutions may perpetuate forms of oppression or exclusion.

Revelation and faith transcend conventional understandings as they are deeply intertwined with histories of colonialism, resistance, and cultural resilience. Post-colonialism offers a critical lens through which to examine religious discourses, challenging hegemonic narratives and empowering marginalized voices. While it presents opportunities for a more inclusive and diverse understanding of the divine, it also raises complex questions about identity, power, and representation within religious studies. Ultimately, post-colonial perspectives enrich our appreciation of the complexity and richness of religious traditions in a globalized world.

Faith is not just knowledge but recognition. Because through revelation and faith, humans are permitted to recognize God. However, this recognition is not the same as knowing God. Indeed, faith is not blind. Faith truly connects humans with God. Yet, God remains God, and that means remaining a mystery. "He dwells in unapproachable light; no one has ever seen Him or can see Him" (1 Timothy 6:16). The God seen by humans is no longer God. Thus, even after revealing Himself, God remains a mystery. "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is at the Father's side, has made Him known" (John 1:18). Christ reveals God: "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Nevertheless, God remains a mystery. Even in Jesus, God remains hidden, still a mystery. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, God manifests His presence, but in the form of a human being.

With the coming of Christ, God remains invisible, and the depiction of God remains distinct from God Himself. Yet, humans always relate to God through images and imagination in their thoughts. Thus, there are many depictions of God, all of which originate from humans themselves. These depictions usually correspond to people's mental nature and are influenced by their socio-psychological conditions. For example, they are highly influenced by their customs. A child's depiction of God differs from that of an adult. Yet, even adults often portray God in a childish manner. Culture and tradition also play a significant role. It's not uncommon for depictions of God to be manipulated for political or economic purposes. Therefore, caution is needed regarding depictions of God. As Christians, one must always distinguish between human-made depictions and the reality of God Himself, as God Himself cannot be fully depicted. God's greatness and majesty are often depicted as terrifying, even as a fierce ruler. This does not align with the portrayal given by Jesus. God is awe-inspiring and compelling. God is unlike any other, yet He reveals Himself in Jesus as a friend. God is exceedingly noble and holy, thus approaching Him requires reverence and sanctity.

Human depictions of God must always be confronted with the portrayal given by Jesus. However, it must be realized that Jesus also spoke in human language and imagery. Jesus often used parables taken from life at that time. Jesus's language and culture come from the customs of first-century Jews. Thus, the depictions in the Scriptures are not the same as God Himself. Here it is important to consider what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: "God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Believers must always be rooted in life experience and be wary of all understandings and representations that attempt to concretize the sought-after God. We are "far from the Lord because our life is a life of faith,

not sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith is an ongoing struggle to find the bright light. The Second Vatican Council stated: "For one to be able to believe, God's grace is necessary to precede and help, as well as the inner help of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and turns it to God, opens the eyes of the mind, and makes it agreeable and believe in the truth" (DV 5). In faith, humans have no other support than God Himself, who reveals Himself in human form. Therefore, in faith, humans must always overcome human-made depictions and views. The realization of the relationship with God is always more important than depictions and understanding.

In essence, the study of creation stories from a post-colonial perspective underscores the importance of cultural diversity, the power of storytelling in shaping identity, and the multifaceted nature of human spirituality. It invites us to appreciate the richness of worldviews beyond colonial paradigms and to recognize the enduring legacy of indigenous knowledge systems in shaping our understanding of the cosmos and our place within it.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, adopting the post-colonial perspective allows for a captivating exploration of creation stories from diverse cultures, unveiling a rich tapestry of mysteries. These enigmatic tales are meticulously crafted, intricately entwined with cultural nuances and shaped by the storytelling methods employed. Through this analytical lens, one gains profound insights into how each society reflects upon the concept of creation attributed to a divine power. Each narrative presents a unique viewpoint, serving as a mirror of the cultural, social, and spiritual milieu from which it originates. Thus, delving into these creation narratives not only celebrates the kaleidoscope of human imagination but also underscores the profound connections between storytelling, cultural identity, and perceptions of the divine.

By examining these stories, we uncover layers of meaning embedded within cultural symbols, rituals, and beliefs, offering valuable glimpses into the worldview of different communities. Moreover, the diversity of narratives underscores the plurality of human experiences and interpretations of the divine act of creation. Through storytelling, communities assert their cultural sovereignty, reclaiming narratives that have often been marginalized or overshadowed by colonial impositions.

Furthermore, the examination of creation stories highlights the dynamic interplay between oral traditions, written texts, and evolving religious practices. These narratives serve as vehicles for transmitting collective memories, ethical values, and cosmological frameworks across generations. They shape individuals' understanding of their place in the universe and their relationship with the divine, fostering a sense of belonging and interconnectedness within the community.

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