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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## The Dynamics of Local Religion in Indonesia's Multireligious Community

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the dynamics of local religions in the multi-religious society of Indonesia from the perspective of religious and cultural anthropology. The focus of the study is on the local religion of Sunda Wiwitan in Cigugur, Kuningan, West Java, Indonesia, which has managed to exist despite never being recognised as a religion. We collected data using qualitative research strategies through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and a literature review. The data was analysed based on the perspective of religious and cultural anthropology developed by Emile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Hans Küng. Local religions in Indonesia have never been officially recognized as religions. The disappearance of a large number of local religions is an inevitable fact. The followers of local religions that still exist experience discrimination in various dimensions of life. Categorizing religions as right-wrong, correct-incorrect, or legal-illegal will only absolutize one and exclude the others. The local knowledge of the Sunda ethnic community known as *Sineger Tengah* could be an alternative solution. *Sineger Tengah* is a cultural way of thinking, a collective awareness of the community to place all differences or even conflicts as complementary, coexisting, and completing pairs of existence.

**KEYWORDS**

World religions paradigm, state regulation, multireligious society, local religion, Sunda Wiwitan

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**1. Introduction**

Indonesia is a multireligious society. Various religious traditions exist in one area of Indonesia and in the same time period. These religions are an integral part as well as a constitutive element of Indonesia's multireligious society. Such a societal reality has existed for a long time and resulted in the inevitable diversity of religious traditions in society. Therefore, all ideas and attempts to eliminate religious diversity are unrealistic and appropriate (cf. Kuharets, 2001:v; Smith, 2001:xii).

At present, interreligious interaction and communication in a multireligious society is relatively strong. The development of science and technology, especially information, communication, and transportation technology, has become a catalyst and even a categorical imperative for religions to co-exist with one another. Today no religion can isolate itself from other religions and be in a zone of total isolation. A multireligious society allows different religions to coexist in harmony.

Peace and universal humanity are the foundations of the meeting of religions. The mission of peace and appreciation of human rights and dignity, which is based on understanding and experience of faith, which is the same in every religious tradition,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Religious traditions of every religion which are essentially the same is the discussion of historian A. Toynbee (1956), who specializes in Comparative study of Religion in Islamic studies W.C Smith (1964), Fritjhof Schuon, philosopher Aldous Huxley, orientalist Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Hindu scholar Rene Guenon, Islamic thinker Seyyed Hossein Nasr, popular comparative religion figure Huston Smith, and global ethicist Hans Küng. According to A. Toynbee, religious differences only concern things that are not essential such as sacred places and times, sacred figures, ritual patterns, symbols, dogmas, or laws. Religious differences are only external and experimental in nature (actions), and not spiritual, which is

facilitates a space for meeting and dialogue of religions where religious exclusivism can change towards a more positive inclusive attitude (Küng, 1990:115; Nasr, 1988:293 in Philips, 2020:227; Sugiharto, 2000:147). In this meeting and dialogue space, all forms of differences are negotiated for the sake of peace and humanity.

It is, however, unfortunate that the mission of peace and appreciation of human dignity, which is supposedly the direction of the meeting of religions in a multireligious society, is still far from ideal. Social facts are heavily influenced by the paradigm of world religion and religious politics, which ignores the reality of religious diversity. Religions are categorized into official-unofficial, true-false, and perverted-religion. The state, through its regulations and policies in managing religious life, stipulates and recognizes only six world religions as the state's official religions, namely: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Quantitatively, the diversity of religions in a multireligious society is castrated into only six religions. Discrimination and misrepresentation of the existence of local religions are apparent.

The world religions paradigm and state regulations do not acknowledge local religious beliefs as official, true and proper religions. The question is, according to the perception of public eyes, is local religion a religion? How is the existence of local religions that had existed before world religions came about and have lived religious traditions?

To answer the above questions, this ethnographic research looked into *Agama Djawa Sunda* or ADS (the Javanese Sundanese Religion) or Sunda Wiwitan in Cigugur, Kuningan, West Java, Indonesia as a research case study; and will employ a mixed method of participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and literature (and manuscript) studies. Sunda Wiwitan is chosen as it bears the consequence of discrimination and misrepresentation due to the dynamics of local religions in Indonesia's multi-religious society. The dynamics of Sunda Wiwitan, caused by the paradigm of world religions and state regulations during the New Order era, are basically the same as the dynamics of local religions in Indonesia. Public perception constructed by the perspective of world religions (that religion is monotheistic, prophetic, scriptural, and has trans-national adherents); and further strengthened by state policies which only standardize 6 (six) religions as official religions, have a negative impact on the existence of all local religions in Indonesia, including ADS or Sunda Wiwitan. ADS, just like other local religions, tries to maintain its existence by affiliating with the official state religion, making changes to its cultural identity, and adapting to socio-political situations.

## 2. Religious Regulations in Indonesia's Multireligious Society

The diversity of religions in Indonesia is a necessity. Various regions in Indonesia are constructed by various types of religious traditions, which are now known as the official state religion and local religion (beliefs). Indonesia's multireligious society can be in a safe and peaceful condition if the religions are maintained appropriately and wisely.

Indonesia's population is at 272.23 million as of 2020, based on 2020 data from the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registry (*Kependudukan dan Catatan Sipil* or *Dukcapil*) of the Ministry of Home Affairs (*Kementerian Dalam Negeri* or *Kemendagri*). Amongst the 272.23 million, 86.87% or 236.53 million people identified themselves as Muslim; 7.49% or 20.4 million as Christian; 3.09% or 8.42 million as Catholic; 1.71% or 4.67 million people as Hindu; 0.75% or 2.04 million as Buddhist; and 0.03% or 73.02 thousand people as Confucianist. The data also states that there is a minority (0.04%) of Indonesia's population, or the equivalent of 102.51 thousand people, that still holds local religions.

Regarding the spread of local religious communities, data from the Ministry of Education and Culture (*Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan* or *Kemendikbud*) for 2017 states that currently, there are 186 local religious groups across 13 provinces in Indonesia. The thirteen provinces are: Central Java (53 groups), North Sumatera (12 groups), Lampung (5 groups), Banten (1 group), Special Capital Region of Jakarta (14 groups), West Java (7 groups), Yogyakarta Special Region (25 groups), East Java (50 groups), Bali (8 groups), West Nusa Tenggara (2 groups), East Nusa Tenggara (5 groups), and North Sulawesi (4 groups).

Rachmat Subagya's *notes on Kepercayaan – Kebatinan, Kerohanian, Kejiwaan dan Agama* (1976) listed a number of local religions that make up Indonesia's multireligious society. According to him, in 1951, Indonesia had 73 local religious communities, which are commonly referred to as sects, beliefs or spiritualism. In 1959, there were 142 communities. In 1965 there were 300 communities; in 1970, there were 151 communities (only found in big cities on the island of Java); in 1972, there were 644 communities (217 at the central level and 427 at the branch level). Some of these local religious communities are in West Java (69), Central Java (149), East Java (105), Sumatera (96), the Special Region of Yogyakarta (39), and Sulawesi (20). According to Subagya, these numbers do not accurately reflect the true data, as not all local religions are registered in official records (Subagya, 1976:9). Subagya also recorded 281 names of local religious communities in Indonesia (1976:130-138). The names of the local religions include: the Religion of Adam Maripat (Central Java), the Javanese-Sundanese Religion or Madraism (West Java), Agama Ketujuh

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essentially the same in every religion (1956:274-277). According to W.C. Smith, the external area is known as cumulative tradition, and the inner area is known as faith (1964:16-17).

or the Seventh Religion (Jakarta), Agama Pancasila dan Agama Suci Jember or the Religion of Pancasila and the Sacred Religion of Jember (East Java), Agama Waktu Tiga or the Religion of Time Three (Lombok), Alluk Todolo (Toraja Land, Sulawesi), Kejawen or the Javanese Religion (Yogyakarta), Parhu Damdam (Medan), Parmalim (Sumatera), Sapto Darmo (all of Indonesia), Taoni Tolotang (South Sulawesi), Marapu (on Sumba Island), Kaharingan (on the island of Borneo), and Triluhur (Banjarnegara).

Since Indonesia's declaration of independence on August 17, 1945, all religious traditions in Indonesia have received the same legal recognition and protection. Regulations that are inclusive and appreciative of religious diversity in Indonesia appear in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and Pancasila (Five Principles of Indonesia) as the basis of the state and ideology. The 1945 Constitution guarantees freedom of religion to all Indonesian citizens. Article 29, paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution states that "The state is based on belief in the One and only God", and paragraph (2) states that "The state guarantees the freedom of each resident to embrace their own religion and to worship according to their religion and beliefs". The basis of the state, namely Pancasila, also covers all religions in Indonesia through the formulation of the first precepts of Pancasila, which reads, "Belief in One Almighty God". The first precepts of Pancasila indicate that the Republic of Indonesia guarantees the existence of all religions (not just the six official religions) and does not make Indonesia a country based on one particular religion.

Based on these two regulations, all religions and beliefs (local religions) are recognized and protected. Timeline-wise, it can be said that the local religion has been legally recognized since the Indonesian nation declared itself as an independent and sovereign nation on August 17, 1945. The Indonesian nation achieved its independence and sovereignty while liberating the existence of religious traditions that constructed this country.

Guarantees for freedom of religion are also contained in *Undang-Undang* or UU (Laws) Number 39 of 1999 concerning *Hak Azasi Manusia* or HAM (Human Rights). Article 22 of the Human Rights Law states that: "(1) Everyone is free to embrace their own religion and to worship according to their religion and belief; and (2) The state guarantees the freedom of everyone to embrace their own religion and to worship according to their religion and belief." This Human Rights Law clearly mentions two terms, namely "religion" and "belief". This means that the Human Rights Law guarantees freedom for world religions and local religions (beliefs). This Human Rights Law understands the fundamental human rights that everyone is appreciated, and all religious traditions (both religions and beliefs) are recognised.

If the 1945 Constitution and Pancasila are the basis and source of all sources of law in Indonesia, then all derivative legal products should not go against the 1945 Constitution and Pancasila. Norms and policies in structuring religious life must be in harmony with Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. All legal products within the Republic of Indonesia should be inclusive and appreciative of the diversity of religions that exist in Indonesia. However, what happened was just the opposite.

The government, through the Decree of the President of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1 of 1965, determined that there are only six religions embraced by the people of Indonesia, namely: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The standardization of the country's official religion was further emphasized by Presidential Instruction Number 1470 of 1978 and Minister of Home Affairs Circular Letter Number 477/1978, in which the state only recognized five (5) religions: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism (omitting Confucianism which was banned in 1973). The standardization of the six religions as the state's official religion is still valid today. This means that until now, local religions have never been recognized as religions.

The ultimate decision that local religion is not considered a religion is reflected in the Decree of the People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat* or MPR) Number IV/MPR/1978 concerning Outlines of State Policy (*Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara* or GBHN). GBHN emphasizes that local belief (local religion) is not a religion. The official recognition of the existence of a belief system (local religion) is only meant for guidance so that it does not lead to the formation of a new religion outside of the six existing religions. Apart from that, Instruction of the Minister of Religion Number 4/1978 was also issued, which states that the religions recognized and fostered by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia were only five religions, specifically: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism; with no mention of local religion.

The rejection of local religions as a religion is further strengthened by the criteria written by the Department of Religion. A religious tradition is seen as a religion if it fulfills three criteria, such as: believing in God Almighty (monotheistic), having prophets, and having holy books. These criteria are the elementary characteristics of religion based on the World Religions Paradigm. Unfortunately, local religions do not meet these criteria. In other words, the legitimacy of the World Religions Paradigm by the Ministry of Religion further denies the existence of local religions as religion because local religions do not meet the criteria regarding religion in the perspective of world religions.

Furthermore, the regulation of local religions also presents a challenge to the institution of marriage and family. Since local religion is not categorized as the official state religion, a marriage ceremony, according to local religious procedures, is prohibited and considered illegal. In the case of ADS or Sunda Wiwitan, for example, regulations regarding the prohibition of ADS marriage appear in Decree No. 01/SKPTS/BK.PAKEM/K.p./VI/64 issued by the Coordinating Institution for Supervision of Community Beliefs (Bakor PAKEM) Kuningan Regency on June 18, 1964. The Bakor PAKEM of Kuningan Regency mandated that:

1. Marriage ceremony, according to ADS, is inappropriate, as it deviates from official regulations; it is therefore declared invalid.
2. Marriage ceremony, according to ADS, is therefore banned for the Kuningan Regency Area.
3. Residents living in the Kuningan Regency area are prohibited from marrying with the ADS method.
4. Those that violate these rules will be dealt with according to applicable regulations.

This regulation regarding the prohibition of marriage according to ADS procedures also occurs in Tasikmalaya (one of the areas where ADS residents are located). By letter No.1941/K.K./VIII/64 dated 10 August 1964 on behalf of the Head of the Kuningan District Attorney, F.M. Nasution asked the District Prosecutor's Office in Tasikmalaya to do the same thing as the Kuningan District Prosecutor's Office- to take legal action against those that marry using ADS method as the PAKEM Bakor for the Kuningan Level II Region has mandated for these marriages to be banned. The Bakor PAKEM Tasikmalaya Level II Region issued letter No. P004/HSD/64 regarding ADS Marriage Dissolution. The letter was written by the secretary of H.S.D. Jamin dated: Tasikmalaya, 15 September 1964 (cf. Sukmana, 2014:56-57).

The state appears to interfere at all level in private human matters; even the world's religious regulations and perspectives also controls the institution of marriage and family. The involvement of the state does not improve the situation of local religions but rather makes it worse. Does the state want the extinction of local religions? The answer could be: yes. The logic is very clear, the institution of marriage and family is the smallest building block of society (community). If this "smallest cell" is destroyed, then the destruction of the local religious community is inevitable.

### 3. The Dynamics of Local Religion

The designation of six world religions as official state religions and the concept of religions based on three criteria (monotheism, prophets and scriptures) has a serious impact on the existence of thousands of local Indonesian religions. The most obvious impact of these discriminatory religious regulations and paradigms is the annihilation of a number of local religions. The names of local belief systems that once existed, as mentioned by Rachmat Subagya (1976), now no longer appear. A few of them were Sulaiman Gayam Order (Bogor), Agama Kuring (West Java), Prapanca (Jakarta), Kajambulan (Serang city), Bale Filsafat (Solo), Dukun Gelandangan (Surabaya), Kebogeleng (Yogyakarta), Tri Ekokapti (Yogyakarta), Tullamollah and Waktu Naqsbadiyah (South Sulawesi), Tarekat Rifayah (Aceh), Tariqoh Abdurrahman (South Kalimantan), Igama Hak (all of Indonesia), and Suci Rahayu (all of Indonesia).

In addition to the destruction of local religious beliefs, local religions that still exist also experience marginalization and misrepresentation. Since juridical-local religions have never been recognized as official religions, people that identify themselves as followers of those beliefs have to convert or be affiliated with a religion recognized by the state. Conversion should be an option, but it is not the case. A major incident that took place in 1965, whereby Indonesia banned the existence of communism, did not help this case. Everyone who did not adhere to an official religion was categorized as a follower of communism and had to convert. This negatively impacts local religions even more (cf. Beatty, 1999; Nugroho, 2008).

In comparison to world religions, local religions can be said to be "losing prestige." World religions are not only superior in doctrinal equipment but also in the field of ideology (Subagya, 1981:237). The prestige of world religions further facilitates the disappearance of local religions, as many followers of those local religions convert to world religions due to their perceived external prestige. Local religious believers also face some challenges to their civil and political rights. As Indonesian Citizens (Warga Negara Indonesia or WNI), they cannot fill in the belief identity on their Identity Cards (*Kartu Tanda Penduduk* or KTP) and must therefore fill in an official religion that they do not believe in. Their marriage and birth data are also not registered in the Marriage Certificate and Birth Certificate at the Population and Civil Registry office (Qodim, 2017). Politically, even though they are Indonesian citizens, it seems "impossible" for followers of local religions to become leaders of political parties, and members of the People's Representative Council (DPR), let alone become president of the Republic of Indonesia.

The negative impact of world religion regulations and paradigms also occurs in the context of social relations. Society often conceptualizes local religion as a culture (something profane) and not as a religion (something sacred). They see local religious believers engage in practices and teaching of animism-dynamism that are contrary to the practices and teachings of monotheism; have shirk practices that must be abandoned; and is primitive, so it must be modernized, and the people as non-believers, so it must be eradicated (Maarif, 2016:40). Furthermore, followers of local religions also receive intimidating and discriminatory

treatment, social exclusion, even physical and verbal violence (cf. J. Hassel, Bernard A.R. & Z.A. Bagir, 2011; Ahnaf & Hairus Salim, 2017).

The state's education system is also negatively affected by the regulations and paradigms of world religions. Local religions are studied, taught, and understood based on concepts or definitions of religion that are influenced by world religions (Maarif, 2016: 35-36). Local religions are taught based on the state's definition of religion, which has been influenced by world religions. The Religious Education curriculum in formal schools only studies the six world religions, without local religions (Maarif, 2016:38). Thus, the process of introducing local religions to the younger generation, teaching the values of local religions, and providing opportunities for the regeneration of successors to local religions is almost impossible.

Under such conditions, how can local religion have the possibility to exist? There are three strategies that ADS or Sunda Wiwitan employ to maintain its existence. The three most visible forms of the strategies of existence will be discussed as follow. *First*, the local religion is affiliated with the official state religion. Nearly all local religions are affiliated with the official state religion. They either convert or become religionized. For example, ADS or Sunda Wiwitan (in West Java Province) were affiliated with Catholicism, Islam, and Christianity in 1964/1965, while Kaharingan (Kalimantan islands) and Alluk Todolo (Sulawesi islands) merged with Hinduism in 1970. In both these cases, the teachings and practices of local religions are able to be maintained. The tradition of "*Selamatan*"<sup>2</sup> is evidence that local religious teachings and practices still exist. Due to inculturation in world religions (such as Catholicism and Islam), local religious teachings and practices can still be seen. Traditions such as: *nyadran*<sup>3</sup>, *tirakatan*<sup>4</sup>, *Seren Taun*<sup>5</sup> are some examples where local religious teachings can still be seen today.

*Second*, local religions identify themselves as regional cultures. Local religion often uses traditional culture and local arts as their foundation, which in turn preserve some of the nation's cultural heritage. They embed within their religious practices, traditional festivals or ceremonies, scripts (native letters) and local languages, dances, music and songs, traditional food and drink, traditional clothing, and local knowledge such as manners (*tatakrama*) and mutual cooperation (*gotong-royong*).<sup>6</sup>

*Third*, local religions adapt to the current socio-political climate. Local religion adheres to the ruler's policy, as it does not want to risk its existence. Affiliating with the official religion and identifying with the local culture are forms of adaptation of the local religion to real conditions. Both are ways that are seen as safe to do or do not add new existential challenges.

These existential strategies are actually forms of resistance (protest) from local religions. Local religions reject the banal perspectives of world religions and discriminatory state regulations in safe and respectful ways. Both are considered irrelevant in measuring the religious diversity of society and greatly discredit the existence of local religions. Local religions view themselves as religions that must be recognized and protected by the state and citizens equally. Local religions demand equal treatment from the state for all religions, without exception.

#### **4. Definition of Religion**

What is religion? This question is not an ordinary question. Precisely here lies the existential problem of local religions. The answer to this question greatly determines the existence and dynamics of local religions in a multi-religious society. The answer to this question can also describe whether the public and state authorities are aware or ignorant of local religions. Likewise, the emergence or disappearance of challenges experienced by local religions cannot be separated from the concepts that arise from the answers to these questions. The freedom and peace of Indonesians in following their beliefs will also be largely determined by the answer: religion or not religion. In other words, a definition of religion is needed.

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<sup>2</sup> *Selamatan* is a ceremony or ritual of human gratitude to God who has bestowed safety and welfare on humans. The celebration is usually attended by a number of people from different faiths, marked by a prayer of thanksgiving and supplication to God, and ends with a meal and a drink together. In a happy atmosphere, individuals unite into one people and are treated equally, without discrimination of any kind., without any partitions or limitations. *Selamatan* becomes a medium for how all forms of differences are negotiated and becomes shared wealth.

<sup>3</sup> *Nyadran* is a ritual of visiting the graves of relatives or ancestors and praying for those who have died to find eternal peace. Someone usually cleans the tomb first then sprinkles flowers or pours (holy) water, and ends the ritual by praying for the spirits.

<sup>4</sup> *Tirakatan* are prayers about someone's death. *Tirakatan* is usually performed at the house of the deceased, on the first day to the seventh day, 40<sup>th</sup> day, 100<sup>th</sup> day, first year, second year, and 1000<sup>th</sup> day after a person's death.

<sup>5</sup> *Seren Taun* is a traditional rice harvest ceremony to praise God's goodness of the year's abundance, and to pray for the next successful harvest in the coming new year.

<sup>6</sup> *Tatakrama* or etiquette is a set of norms of a person's manners in his actions and speech. Manners are relative and dynamic, meaning that the norms of politeness do not necessarily apply to all circumstances at all times. *Gotong-royong* is a form of cooperation (physical and material) or mutual solidarity of members of a community (society). Togetherness among residents and concern for others are the spirit of this mutual cooperation activity. *Tatakrama* and *gotong-royong* are two concrete manifestations of local knowledge whose existence are increasingly disappearing. Individualist cultures and behaviours are often accused for causing the decline of manners and mutual cooperation.

It is a shame that there is no standard and single definition of what religion is. Religion is not an easy and simple thing. Religious phenomena are always complex and may not be easily understood and defined. Religion itself contains various elements, so it is difficult to distinguish which are primary or essential elements and which are secondary and additional elements. In addition, the human element plays a significant part in religion. The religious attitude itself is evidently one of those primary human factors that impact the significance of religion. Yet, human understanding of religion is still limited.

If this is the case, then we cannot agree on a single and definite concept of religious phenomena. A single and narrow definition will make it difficult to identify and understand religions and their development (cf. Durkheim, 2017:54). Moreover, the partiality of only one particular definition tends to be absolute "one" while simultaneously setting aside "others" are not included in the concept adopted. The narrower and shallower the concept of religion is taken, the greater the potential for discrimination and misrepresentation of certain religious communities. Conversely, the more universal and elementary the criteria for defining what religion is, the more open it is for the community to be recognized as a religion (Komnas HAM RI, 2020: 12).

This paper raises three formulations regarding the interpretation of religion, namely (i) religion seen from its elementary characteristics (Durkheim), (ii) the relationship between religion and culture (Geertz), and (iii) religion as a way of peace (Kung and Nasr).

*First*, according to Durkheim, there are three core values that are common to all religions, specifically belief, practice, and community of religion (cf. Connolly, 2016:20). Religion is characterized by a belief in "the sacred", things that are supernatural or transcendental (something that is outside the realm of empirical observation or is profane). Religions believe in supernatural agents whose existence cannot be verified by human senses or directly perceived in the natural world. This is the most widespread and universal feature of religion. Ideas concerning mythical ancestors, legends, gods, *Sang Hyang*, heaven, hell, or the afterlife provide the rationale for most religious beliefs and practices (Durkheim, 2017:63; Diamond, 2018:433; Zazuli, 2018:2).

Every religion has a system of practices (religious rites). They are rules regarding moral commitments and certain behaviour or actions (of the same types of dogmas, doctrines, and religious beliefs). It dictates what is right, what is wrong, and what should be done in relation to sacred things (Durkheim, 2017:68). Thus, religious rites can be distinguished from ordinary actions (practices). They are special actions based on the unique nature of the object. These can be seen in religious rituals such as: prayer, meditation, fasting, and making sacrifices (material to life). Rewards rather than punishments from sacred agents are often the motives for ritual actions.

According to Durkheim, religious beliefs serve a social function in human groups. Trust belongs to the group. The individuals who are part of the group declare and practice the rites inconsistent with their beliefs. They become part of a group and be with other individuals with a shared faith (this social cohesion can last a long time). They imagine the sacred world and its relation with the profane world in their attitudes. This religious community can be nationwide (or even across national boundaries), may extend to a specific group of people (Rome, Athens, Greece), some groups (reformed Christian denominations), based on one leader, or even not having an official form (Durkheim, 2017:72; Diamond 2018:459).

*Second*, another definition of religion comes from Clifford James Geertz (1926-2006). In *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays*, Geertz argues, "A religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz, 1973:90).

Geertz sees religion as a cultural notion, a place where human beings find the meaning and purpose of the world and of human life, despite its complexity in nature. Religious symbols illustrate the existence of an ethos and world view which are essentially the most important ideas for human existence. With the existence of an ethos and worldview that is emitted through these sacred symbols, humans live their daily lives. Thus, religion becomes something that exists in human life because humans define their lives based on religion or the sacred symbols they believe in (Lubis, 2015:87; Haryanto, 2015:82).

By viewing religion as a cultural system, religion can be studied scientifically. Religion will always be dynamic in nature, as within a certain period of time, the face of religion will always change. Religion is always in the process of becoming because it is influenced by society's perceptions of what is understood as the ultimate meaning. In this regard, the way of expressing religion between individuals and between religious groups is not a matter of right or wrong but more of the tension between theoretical truth and empirical fact (cf. Lubis, 2015:85-86).

*Third*, religion as a way of peace. Two of the many figures who called for the concept of religion as a facilitator for world peace were Hans Küng (1928-2021) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933-...).

"Without peace between religions, there will be no peace between nations," said Hans Küng (Küng, 1990:115). Hans Küng, in *Tracing the Way: Spiritual Dimension of World Religion* (2002) as described by Philips (2020:98), believes that religions can contribute to human peace if religions reflect the elements of ethics, fundamental consensus, binding values, and irrevocable personal standards of attitude. All religions have a message of salvation and a way of salvation. Religion is the way believers see their life, their attitude towards life, and the way they live in it" (Küng, 2002:xiv in Philips, 2020:98).

If Hans Küng raised the ethical content of all religions (global ethics), then Seyyed Hossein Nasr highlighted the origin of all revelations and truths from religions as a way for human peace. In *Knowledge and the Sacred* (1988), as quoted by Philips, Nasr said that religion comes from its source, from the Absolute. No religion can exist without a taste for the Absolute. The Absolute remains absolute; manifestations are "absolutely relative". Only at the level of the Absolute are the teachings of religions the same. Religious unity can be found first and foremost in the Absolute, which includes the origin of all revelation and truth (Nasr, 1988:292-293 in Philips, 2020:154-158). The origin is the centre where all "fingers" meet, the peak that can be reached from all paths (read: religion). The origin provides a meaningful dialogue between religions, a starting point to show spiritual appreciation or to place other religious traditions within the spiritual universe (cf. Philips, 2020:164).

Küng and Nasr see religion from the perspectives of unity and peace. If all religious followers look back to the essence of their respective faiths, to the divine origins, to the essence of truth, and engage in dialogues and understanding, respecting the details, differences and uniqueness of each religious tradition, only then can peace be established (cf. Philips, 2020:232).

World religions paradigm has a different perspective in interpreting religion. Jan G. Platvoet, in his article entitled "African Traditional Religions in the Religious History of Humankind", as presented by James Leland Cox (2007:61-63), says that world religions have distinctive characteristics. The characteristics of world religions are: they believe in their teachings as the only way of salvation, they consider themselves to be recipients of final and complete revelation (hence world religions are known as revealed religions), whereby ways of faith (orthodoxy) are concerned, and believe that salvation lies in another world or another realm that is different from this life.

Picard and Rémy Madinier claim world religions to be true and proper religions. True and proper religion must meet the requirements as follow: it has to be revealed by God (sent down by God through His messenger), has prophets and holy books, has a codified legal system (definitive teachings), is recognized internationally and is applicable to people in every place, situation, and time (cf. Picard and Rémy Madinier, 2011:13).

In the Indonesian context, the distinctive characteristics of world religions gain legitimacy. Indonesian regulations stipulate that the state's official religion must have the following characteristics: monotheism, having prophets, and having holy books. The state also stipulates only six world religions as state religions (Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism).

### **5. Is Local Religion a Religion?**

Referring to the perspective of world religions and regulations in Indonesia, local religions are not considered as religions. Local religions do not meet the criteria of how religion should be monotheistic, have prophets, have holy books as religious guidelines, and have trans-national adherents. However, based on the ideas of Durkheim, Geertz, and Küng & Nasr, local religion meets the criteria as a religion. The local religion is constructed by a belief system and practice system, has a community (indigenous people), is embedded in a certain cultural system (indigenous people), and carries a mission of universal peace.

In the case of ADS or Sunda Wiwitan, the local religious belief system is reflected in their belief in the existence of the Almighty God (*Gusti Pangéran sikang sawidji-widji, Gusti anu maha Tunggal or Sang Hyang Tunggal*), dividing reality into two domains: the sacred and the profane. The sacred contains everything that is sacred, superior and has special powers, such as sacred places/spaces (*Paséban; Situ Hyang, Curug Goong*), sacred times (times for performing rituals, prayers and religious holidays such as *Sérén Taun*), sacred objects (*gamelan monggang, padi, janur*), and holy figures (*rama, penatua*); whereas the profane realm contains everything with mediocre dignity and power, is mundane in nature, and is in the empirical realm.

Sunda Wiwitan also has a system of practices or ways of regulating human relations with "God" and with each other. Important aspects of the local system of religious practices include: ceremonial venues (*Paséban, Dapur Ageung, Situ Hyang, Curug Goong*); time of the ceremony (for example, the 22nd Rayagung Saka Sunda); ritual objects (*méméron, goong rénténg, jentréng, tarawangsa*, incense, fire, torches, water, charcoal, flowers, rice, tubers); ceremonial leaders (*rama, penatua adat* or traditional elder, crown prince); prayer formula (opening prayer or *raja* and spiritual prayer or *pangjajap*); and special gestures (standing, bowing head, kneeling, worshipping).

The forms of local religious ceremonies also vary. Sunda Wiwitan, which is in the cultural system of an agrarian society, shows forms of ceremonial actions such as: *ngadapur* (praying in front of a fire pit), *ngabuh-beuti* (consuming only tubers and fruits), *offerings* (making material offerings), *tirakatan* (praying and fasting), dancing (the dance of the goddess of rice, Nyi Pwah Aci), singing holy songs, reciting mantras, performing processions, intoxication, and meditating. These practices are integral parts of local religious rituals or holidays. In ADS, the ceremonial actions are integrated into a series of Sèrèn Taun rituals (a thanksgiving feast for the harvest and the end of the year) such as the *Dadung Festival* (a tradition of herding buffalo), a thousand *Kentongan Procession*, the *Damar Sèwu Ritual* (lighting 1000 torches), the *Mesèk Parè Ritual* (peeling rice manually), and *Nutu* (pounding rice using a mortar and pestle). Some materials such as rice, *kentongan*, torches or fire are meaningful symbols for Sunda Wiwitan. The rice symbolizes life, the *kentongan* (instrumental music of bamboo) symbolizes vigilance, and the torch/fire represents passion. These symbols will guide the behaviour of adherents of local religions to always maintain a good quality of life, be alert (safety), and have a passion for being a beacon of light for others and for the world.

Local religions provide a sense of social cohesion, as it gives people a sense of belonging to the community. Adherents of the local religions practice rites and teachings that are in harmony with their beliefs. In the case of Sunda Wiwitan, the majority of adherents are farmers and are scattered in several areas such as Cigugur, Cipari, Lumbu, Pasir, Cisantana, Sukamulya, Puncak, Winduhaji, Cibunut, Tagog, Walahar, Wédangtemu, Ciménga, Pugak, Lintungpaku, Subang, Capar, Ciamis, Susuru, Banjar, Tasikmalaya, Rajapolah, Ciawi, Nagarahérang, Sindangraja, Cisayong, Garut, Cibodas, Wanaraja, Majalaya, and Kacakaca Dua. They are united under one leadership (Prince Djatikusumah), in the organizational structure of the management of Sunda Wiwitan, in the spirit of love (compassion). As a community, Sunda Wiwitan prioritizes oneness with God (*Sang Hyang Kersa*) rather than recruiting members. Local religions do not look for "sheep" from outside the "cage", nor do they become rivals with other religions to gain the greatest number of adherents. Peace with God and peace with others (humans, the universe) are the essence of Sunda Wiwitan's teachings.

The existence of belief systems, systems practice, and local religious communities, as well as their attachment to the culture of indigenous peoples and local religious peacekeeping missions, as illustrated in the ADS/Sunda Wiwitan case, is empirical evidence local religion is religion. The two words "local religion" are only a matter of diction which imply aspects of locality and their attachment to indigenous peoples, but its essence is identical to what the public perceives as religion. Local religion fulfills the required elementary elements of what is conceptualized as religion.

## 6. Religion and State

According to Jacob Sumardjo (2019:37-40), the core value linked with local knowledge of Sundanese people is *Sineger Tengah* or also known as the middle way. This moderate concept places all differences or even contradictions as a pair of existences that co-exist, complement and complete each other. There are only two possible outcomes from having things that are either different or in contradiction; they may focus on each other or cancel each other out. Mutually annihilating each other means letting the potential for conflict from differences or contradictions be the reason for power struggles that destroy each other until one of the entities disappears. The end result of this path of violence is the absence of both entities or the victory of either, which means victory without its counterpart of contradiction. *Sineger Tengah* is removing the potential for conflict and turning it into a potential for life, complementing and perfecting each other. *Sineger Tengah* becomes a way of culture, a collective awareness of the people to live together peacefully amidst various differences.

In a multireligious society, the potential for interreligious conflict is enormous. Even the government's categorization of religions into right-wrong, right-heretical, or legal-illegal can negate certain religions (local religions). In such circumstances, citizens need creativity, intelligence, and special wisdom. Because of this, the *Sineger Tengah* concept is seen as relevant and significant to represent the diversity of religions in Indonesia's multi-religious society. All differences and even contradictions must be seen as mutually existent, complementary, and balanced. The collective consciousness of this society must be constructed so that religions can live peacefully in their various differences and contradictions.

The state, through its regulations and policies, is obliged to build this collective awareness. State regulations and policies must reflect the recognition, fulfillment of rights, and protection of all religions that exist in Indonesia. State regulations and policies can build public opinion that is inclusive and appreciative of religious diversity, with the ultimate goal that all religions are able to live and meet in a safe and peaceful situation.

Hopefully, 2017 can be an important momentum for local religions. Local religions have been increasingly recognised by the state as part of Indonesia's multi-religious society. The moment of recognition of the existence of local religions was marked by the issuance of a Constitutional Court (*Mahkamah Konstitusi* or MK) decision granting a judicial review request regarding the rules for emptying the religion column on Family Card (*Kartu Keluarga* or KK) and National Identity Card (*Kartu Tanda Penduduk* or KTP) as

stipulated in Article 61 paragraph (1)<sup>7</sup> and (2)<sup>8</sup>, as well as article 64 paragraph (1)<sup>9</sup> and (5)<sup>10</sup> Law No. 23 of 2006 concerning Population Administration in conjunction with Law no. 24 of 2013 concerning the Population Administration Law. Surely the recognition of local Indonesian religions is not enough to empty the religion column on the KTP for local religions. Local religions need recognition and protection as the indigenous religion of the Indonesian people instead of being written as dashes (-) on KTPs. The sign does not speak much for the existence of a local religion.

## 7. Conclusion

The Republic of Indonesia has a society constructed by various religious traditions. Local religion is an integral part of the construction of Indonesia's multireligious society. State regulations and public opinion regarding religion have caused some of these local religions to perish. Even though there are local religions that still exist today, their existence does not receive formal recognition and protection from the government. Public opinion also views it as not a religion. These regulatory challenges and perspectives on religion encourage local religions to carry out three survival strategies, namely: affiliating with world religions, using cultural identities, and adapting to concrete situations. The local religion is a religion. There has never been one standard and definite definition of a religion. The concept of what is called religion is thus open to interpretation. The notion of elementary forms of religious tradition (having belief systems, practice systems, and communities), religion as a cultural system, and religion as a way of peace indicates that local religion is a religion. Local religion fulfills all three criteria. In other words, there are reasons for the state and citizens to be able to recognize, respect, and protect local religions so they do not die out. *Sinegar Tengah* (middle way) can be the most likely solution to live peacefully in a multi-religious society. Differences and even contradictions related to religious traditions are seen as having the potential to complement and complete one another. "The truth of all is part of the truth of each of us," said W.C. Smith.

**Novelty.** This study of local religions based on the perspective of religious and cultural anthropology reveals the ongoing discrimination against local religions and the resilience of local religions in the face of total extinction.

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<sup>7</sup> Family Card (*Kartu Keluarga* or KK) contains information regarding the KK number column, full name of the head of the family and family members, National Identity Number (*Nomor Induk Kependudukan* or NIK), gender, address, place of birth, date of birth, religion, education, occupation, marital status, relationship status in the family, nationality, documents immigration, parents' names.

<sup>8</sup> Information regarding the religion column as referred to in paragraph (1) for Resident whose religion has not been recognized as a religion in accordance with the provisions of Legislation or for adherents of beliefs is not filled in, but is still served and recorded in population database.

<sup>9</sup> Resident Identity Card (*Kartu Tanda Penduduk* or KTP) includes a picture of the *Garuda Pancasila* symbol and map of the territory of the Republic of Indonesia, containing information on NIK, name, place, date of birth, male or female, religion, marital status, blood group, address, occupation, nationality, passport photo, validity period, place and date of KTP issuance, sign the hand of the KTP holder, as well as containing the name and Employee Identification Number (*Nomor Induk Pegawai* or NIP) of the official who signed it.

<sup>10</sup> Each resident aged 60 (sixty) years and above is given a KTP that is valid for life.

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