

Local Religions and Contested Civic Space in Indonesia: A Case Study of Sunda Wiwitan Community in Cigugur, West Java

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Abstract: The study explores the problem of civic space of the local religions in Indonesia, with a case study of *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur. While global studies assert that local religions have experienced the lowest level of discriminations among other religious minorities, the Indonesian case shows otherwise. Using a combination of case study and digital analysis, the study shows that struggles for religious freedom and civil rights of the communities of local religions in Indonesia are often challenged by the state and majority groups, resulting a contested civic space. The study asserts that the three actors are in active position in shaping the civic space: local government with the support of majority groups seek to control the space; while the local religion community strives to reclaim the space. It concludes that while the case study of *Sunda Wiwitan* demonstrates a complexity of civic space problem for the religious minority in local setting, it essentially reflects a deeper problem of civic space for the adherents of local religions in Indonesia. This work contributes to the study of local religions by expanding civic space theory to reframe the dynamics of religious freedom of the minorities in Indonesian case.


1 INTRODUCTION

For long, religion is considered as a fertile source of social values for sustainability. Much of the sociological studies on religion has also emphasized the potential role of religion in sustainability transitions (Jo, Kim, & Lee, 2021). Scholars have argued that while the sociological aspects of religion can provide diversity to the types of niches that enhance sustainability transitions, religious beliefs can also provide a pragmatic force to create purposeful transitions and sustainability by sharing ecologically positive habits of practice and attitudes with succeeding generations (Foltz, 2003; Ives & Kidwell, 2019; Koehrsen 2015, 2018; Mohamad, Idris, & Mamat, 2012). Hence, discussion on the relationship between religion and the concept of sustainability is profound in all world religions, including local religions. Almost all local religions adhere to the principle of being friendly with nature and maintain the sustainability of their community based on that principle.

Yet issues regarding the existence and sustainability of local religions have been a major

concern. While their values and religious worldview are believed as closely related to nature, however, the existence and sustainability of the local religions is constantly threatened and under pressure. Despite its long historical roots in traditional societies, local religions have been losing their social and political significance. The massive spread of world religions and their adoption by the state has further consequences on the emergence of governmental discrimination towards the adherents of local religions. In many parts of the world, states tend to provide very narrow space for the adherents of local religions to embrace and practice their beliefs. They often impose restrictions and even discriminations against communities of local religions, making them as minority, socially and politically. Often, countries with religious-based policies discriminate against local religions particularly by imposing legal and political restrictions, as well as degrading their religious beliefs as merely customs or cultural expression.

While studies on governmental restrictions against religious minorities suggest that local religions are the least discriminated compared to

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other religious minorities (Finke & Martin, 2014; Grim & Finke, 2006; Mataic, 2018), a recent study from Fox finds that it was largely due to where local religions are located, as well as the size of their population. In this regard, Fox argues that when it comes to governmental discrimination against local religions, regional culture seems to overshadow theology (Fox, 2020). As Fox indicates in his findings, the level of governmental discriminations seems to be more apparent in countries with religion's policy that is guided by a combination of religious and political ideology. In Indonesian case, a sizeable body of research show that local religions have always been a subject of governmental restrictions and discriminations (Aqiqah, 2014; Ismail, 2015; Kholiludin, 2009; Kholiludin et al., 2015; Maarif, 2017; Maarif et al., 2019; Rosidin, 2000; Saidi, 2004; Sudarto, 2016, 2017; Sukirno, 2018; Wiardi, 2007; Wulansari, 2018).

Discriminations against local religions occurred not only in terms of freedom to practice their religious beliefs, but also freedom to uphold their beliefs –due to the adoption of the politics of religion by the state. Furthermore, these studies argued that the adoption of the politics of recognition by the Indonesian state has brought severe consequence for adherents of local religions in three aspects. *Firstly*, downgrading their religion as a mere customary belief rather than a set of belief system. *Secondly*, undermining their basic rights to embrace and practice their beliefs. *Lastly*, denying many aspects of their civil rights, from acquiring national identity card, to accessing education, job, public services, and even recording marriage.

In practice, although governmental discriminations generally target any communities of local religions in Indonesia, some communities experienced more discriminations than others. It occurred partly because of the dynamics of local politics in post-1998 *Reformasi* which has differently shaped the civic space of religious minorities. In the case of local religion, this trend has also brought consequences in which communities of local religions in some areas experience severe governmental (and even societal) discriminations.

One of the most prominent case of discriminations against local religion occurred in *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur, Kuningan, West Java. Despite its existence since 1921 in the region, this community has been a subject of state surveillance, severe harassment, conversion to major religion, and even denial of social services. Up to date, the community is still struggling to obtain state recognition as legally recognized customary law

community (known as *masyarakat hukum adat*). Yet, not only their endeavour is challenged with legal and political restrictions by the local and national government, but their religious beliefs are also labelled as *heretics* and often faced harassment from conservative groups in Kuningan.

Against this backdrop, this study addresses the issue of civic space of the *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur, Kuningan. In particular, the study seeks to explain the dynamics of contested civic space between the state, the majority groups, and the *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur. Drawing on civic space theory, this study aims contributes to the debates of local religions by expanding the theory to reframe the dynamics between restrictions and struggle for civil rights and religious freedom in post-reform Indonesia.

This study argues that despite stronger state's recognition on the rights of religious freedom, discriminations against local religions are still prevalent in democratized Indonesia. They occurred in the form of governmental discriminations, causing a contested civic space between religious minority *vis-à-vis* the state and the majority groups. In the case study of *Sunda Wiwitan* in Cigugur, the three actors are in active position in shaping the civic space, in which local government with the support of majority groups seek to control the space, whereas the *Sunda Wiwitan* community with the help of civil society struggles to maintain and create a new space.

2 METHODS AND DATA

As the study addresses the issue of governmental discriminations in the case of *Sunda Wiwitan* in Cigugur, two research questions guide this study. *First*, how does the manifestation of governmental discriminations against *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur and how does it impact their civic space? *Second*, in what way that the government, the majority groups, and the *Sunda Wiwitan* community seek to influence the civic space and how does it shape the power relation between actors?

To answer these questions, this study uses qualitative research combining case study and digital research method. While the case study describes the dynamics of civic space in specific community of *Sunda Wiwitan* in Cigugur, digital research analysis illustrates data trend on the civic space problem of the *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur.

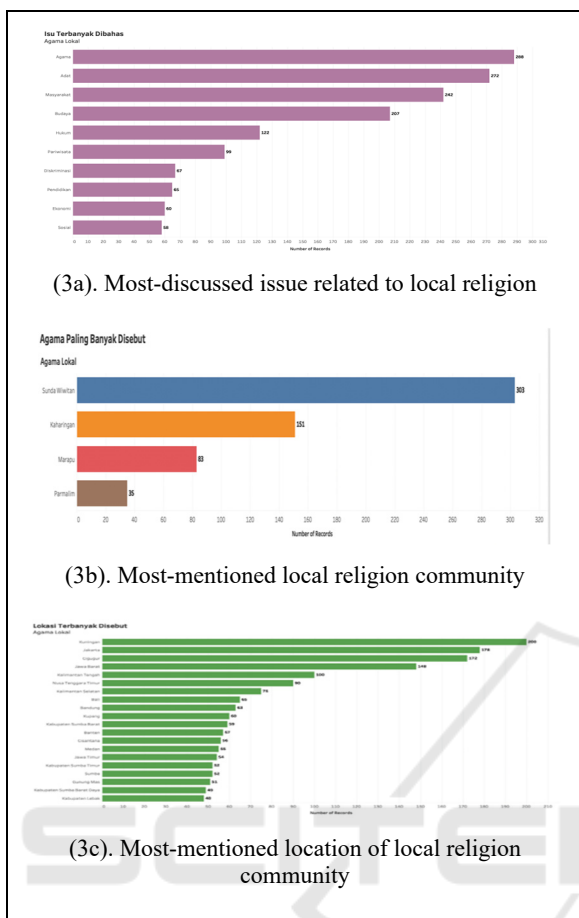


Figure 3: Issues coverage related to local religions. Source: Data processed, 2020.

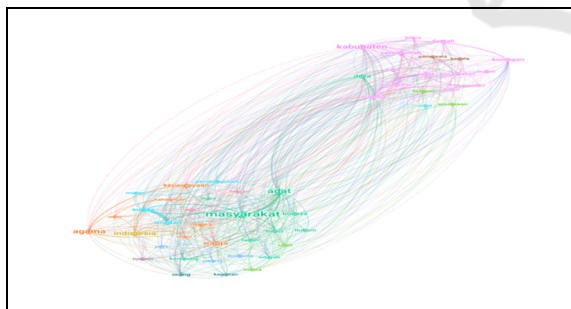


Figure 4: Cluster analysis on narratives and issues regarding Sunda Wiwitan Community in Cigugur. Sources: Data processed, 2020.

2.3 Limitation

Despite vigorous data collection in this research, there is a methodological limitation regarding the use of case study and digital research. In terms of case study, the techniques for collecting in-depth interviews and FGD with state and non-state actors

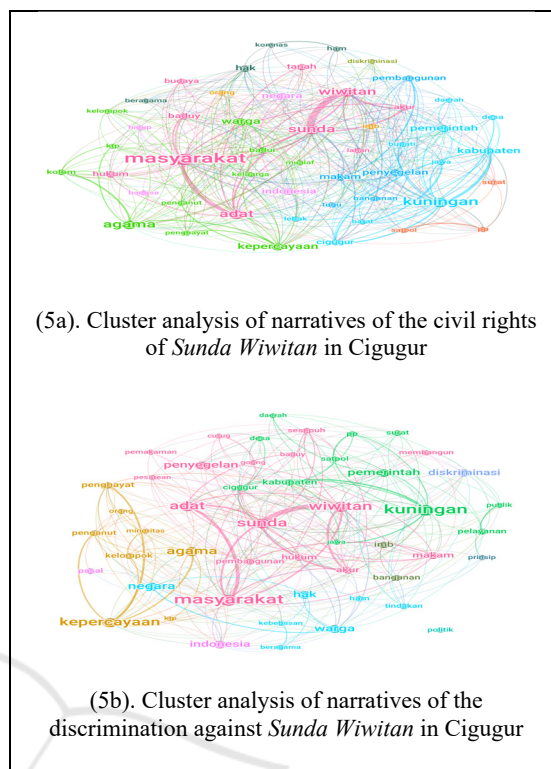


Figure 5: Textual network analysis on Sunda Wiwitan Community in Cigugur. Source: Data processed, 2020.

and individuals have created opportunities for data bias, since the individuals had to recall their knowledges and experiences.

Meanwhile, data collection for the BDA and TNA used in the digital research only covers six years period (2014-2020), despite discussing the problem of civic space of the local religions in the democratization era. While it is possible to retrieve datasets over a longer period of time, the limited capacity of the software and ability to process the big data made it difficult for researchers to do so. However, this is circumvented using specific keyword or 'corpus', as well as keywords to filter the data in accordance with the needs of the study analysis.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Framing Discrimination in Civic Space Perspective

While there are several terms used to define governmental restrictions, most scholars refer to policies, attitudes and actions from the state

actors/officials/agencies directing at restricting the free practice of religion (Grim & Finke, 2006; Mataic, 2018). This study follows Jonathan Fox's specific and narrowed definition of government religious-based discrimination (GRD), which refers to "*restrictions placed by governments or their agents on the religious practices or institutions of religious minorities that are not placed on the majority religion*" (Fox, 2016, 2020)

According to Fox, this definition of GRD distinguishes discrimination from religious restrictions. As he puts it, "*while religious repression may apply to all religions and can be substantial and violate the right to free exercise of all citizens (including majority religion), religious discrimination only applies to minority groups and manifest in an unequal state's support between majority and minority religions*" (Fox, 2020)

According to Fox (2020), there are various form of governmental restrictions, ranging from legal to political and security approach. Yet the pattern of GRD can be classified into four categories of restrictions. *First*, restriction on religious practices, which targets public and private observance of religion, religious laws, or religious groups; materials related religious teachings, rites, and ceremonies; and the practice of religious laws and customs. *Second*, restriction on religious institutions and clergy, which includes access to religious registration, places of worship, religious clergy, or even public facilities. *Third*, restriction on conversion and proselytizing, including conversion or renunciation of faith, and proselytizing of religious teachings. *Last*, other types of restrictions, such as laws and policies on mandatory education in the majority religion; child custody based on religion; state surveillance of religious activities, groups, or perceived heretic sects; or state's negligence to protect religious minorities.

While much of the research use human rights perspective as analytical framework to explain why and how discrimination against minority religions is ubiquitous, they overlook why government discriminate against certain minority groups. Against this backdrop, this study looks into the explanation of civic space theory. Developed out of democratization literature, this theory provides a general understanding of how the state and society compete for civic space and explains why this situation occurs and likely to be profound.

In the mainstream literatures, the concept of civic space is often understood as central to "*any open and democratic society and means that states have a duty to protect people while respecting and facilitating the basic fundamental rights to associate, assemble*

peacefully, and express views of opinion" (Civicus, 2011). Following this definition, freedom of religion, which is recognized as one of the fundamental civil rights, is therefore closely related to civic space.

The civic space is open when all religious groups have equal freedom to embrace and practice their beliefs: individually and collectively; privately and publicly. Conversely, when the state fails to protect this freedom, or deliberately limits religious freedom that should be enjoyed by all religious groups equally, this will cause this space to shrink, or even closed. Although in reality, this situation in which religious freedom is shrinking is not new. As some study shows, the trend of shrinking religious freedom and civic space is actually making headlines around the world, including in Indonesia (Pew Forum, 2019; Hurriyah, 2020a, 2020b).

When studying the extent of civic space, it should be emphasised that this is not solely dependent on external pressures exerted upon it. As Buyse (2018) asserts, this space is dynamics, never static nor given, and is created in the interactions between citizens and civil society elements and others. They are its main formal and collective manifestation, and they actively shape civic space but are also dependent on it. In this regard, Buyse offers a more specific and narrow definition of civic space, as "*the practical room for action and manoeuvre for citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs), and the extent to which they can enjoy the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression.*"

According to Buyse, how a CSO's activity is perceived and reacted upon civic space may vary between the domestic and international level and also within a country, depending on the state's level of effective control over an area or on the state institution involved. This is because the civic space consists of and determined by three factors: *first*, existing institutional channels, including laws and procedures and the possibilities for contestation they offer. In this regard, the state and civil society may compete in using legal means and mechanism: with the state employs administrative and criminal law to suppress the work of CSOs and citizens; and the citizens or CSOs take legal actions to advocate themselves. *Second*, discourse and the power to label and frame, by which the state uses derogatory terminology aims to deter criticism, discourage free expression, increase negative public opinion, and justify the repression; and the civil society respond with counter-narratives. *Third*, the capacity to maintain and create new space, which includes the use of pressures from state actors or private sectors using carrot-and-stick strategy; and the dynamic of

civil society's pushback against state's pressures (Buyse, 2018)

3.2 Trajectory of Civic Space of the Sunda Wiwitan Community in Cigugur

Unlike other local religions in Indonesia, the history of *Sunda Wiwitan* religion and its community is relatively new. It can be traced back to colonial era, when Prince Madrais Alibasa Widjaja Ningrat (also known as *Kyai Madrais*), which was believed as generation of *Sultan Gebang* of Prince Alibasa I, established a religious organization and its teaching named *Agama Djawa Sunda* (ADS) or *Madraism* – a name taken from its founder in 1848 at Gebang, Eastern Cirebon. Although, one study asserts that the name of ADS is given by people outside the group led by Prince Madrais.

This religion is also known as *Cara Karuhun Urang* (ancestry tradition), *Sunda Wiwitan* religion, Madrais percept or *Cigugur* religion (Komarudin 2017: 97). Some studies even said that ADS is abbreviation from *Atikan Daya Sampurna* (Kepustakaan Nasional, 2013: 33). The name of *Sunda Wiwitan* itself represents its characteristic as ethnic-religious group, which also distinguish it from other local religions like *Marapu*, *Kaharingan*, or *Parmalim*. Literally means 'early Sunda' or 'real Sunda', the adherents of *Sunda Wiwitan* assert that their religion has been part of Sundanese way of life since before the arrival of Hinduism and Islam. While few studies argue that the name of ADS refer to the teaching of this religion which combine nationality values in Java' and Sunda's spiritual tradition (Komarudin, 2017), other studies find that the teachings of this religion are actually combined the elements of Islamic values and early Sundanese culture (Qodim, 2017; Rosidin, 2000; Syukur & Qodim, 2017)

Historically, the foundation of *Sunda Wiwitan* religion was originated in Cirebon, this teaching is more developed in Cigugur, before finally expanded to other areas in West Java, such as Ciamis, Garut, Tasikmalaya, Sukabumi, Bandung, and so on (Qodim, 2017). However, Cigugur has served as ADS development basis even until now (Kepustakaan Nasional, 2013: 38). The proliferation of the *Sunda Wiwitan* teachings in West Java area was made possible after the exile of Prince Tedjabuana, a descendant of Madrais, during the Japanese occupation. During that time, the colonial government who feared that the community would support rebellious groups fighting for Indonesian

independence, gave ultimatum to Tedjabuana to disband the ADS. Due to his ignorance of the ultimatum, the government has finally banned the proliferation of ADS teachings, and sent him into an exile in Bandung in 1944 (Qodim, 2017).

However, government's hostility and even accusation toward this community has long rooted since the establishment of ADS. At the beginning, ADS was established as a resistance form toward VOC. During Dutch colonialism era, Madrais and his ADS followers was considered as a radical and dangerous group due to their strong nationality sense to fight against colonialism. When Japan entered Cigugur, accusation toward Madrais and his adherents were even stronger, which then led to the forced exile of Tedjabuana (Komarudin 2017).

In terms of civic space, *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur has been facing narrow space compared to those who are lived in other parts of West Java. Their long history of struggling for civic space can be traced back to colonial era until present time. In this regard, one study asserts that the shifting political attitudes and government policies on religion since the colonial era to date have always greatly impacted on the way this community strives to obtain recognition as autonomous religious community (Swazey, 2017). In addition, the hostile attitude of the majority groups towards this community has also threatened their civic space. It occurred not only in the past, but even present time.

During the so-called Old Order, their religious beliefs was denied state's recognition, and their organization was once again banned by the government. In 1964, state-established trust supervisory body named *Pengawas Aliran Kepercayaan Masyarakat* (PAKEM) issued a decree stating that the practices of *Sunda Wiwitan* were only recognized as *custom* and thus, their marriage rites and status were denied registration by the government (Swazey, 2021).

In addition to legal restrictions, the government and Islamist conservative groups have also accused the community as being affiliated with the communist ideology, in which they argue that such affiliation could threaten the lives of its adherents. At that time, the *Sunda Wiwitan* community faced two serious challenges: the *Darul Islam* militants, who repeatedly intimidated and attacked them, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which actively tried to align "underdeveloped religions" such as theirs with Christianity or Islam (Harsono, 2020).

Such situation has forced Tedjabuana, who had returned from his exile in Bandung, left the ADS teaching and joined the Catholic church. While some

viewed this action as survival strategy (Qodim, 2017), it has brought consequences in which many of his followers followed his action by renouncing their conversion to popular religion (either Catholicism or Islam), and left only a small group of adherents of *Sunda Wiwitan*. In 1965, when the government issued a decree No. 1/PNPS/1965 (known as Blasphemy Law), the problems of discrimination against religious minorities (including local religions) was escalated, and even caused disastrous effects until present time.

During the first few years of the New Order era, the atmosphere under Suharto's administration was more favourable for the *Sunda Wiwitan* community to practice their religion. Suharto's friendly attitude to local religion, given his affiliation with Javanese Kejawen faith, has prompted the *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur to renounce their faith. Furthermore, they have also tried to further obtain state's recognition. In 1982, Prince Djatikusumah, a third descendant of Madrais who attempted to revive the ADS teachings, established an organization named *Paguyuban Adat Cara Karuhun Urang* (PACKU) and seek for official recognition by registering the *Sunda Wiwitan* faith to the Ministry of Education and Culture's Directorate.

However, the effort was once again denied by the government officials. Instead of gaining recognition as religious beliefs, their organization was declared illegal by court's decision in 1982. Soon after that, the government has banned all activities of the *Sunda Wiwitan* tradition and rites, including *Seren Taun*, annual festival of the *Sunda Wiwitan* to celebrate the new agriculture year in the Sundanese ancient calendar as well as thanksgiving for the blessings of the abundance rice harvest, and to pray for the next successful harvest.

Under the administration of Abdurrahman Wahid which marked a new era of democratization, the government issued Law No. 9/1998 concerning Traditional Ceremony Activities, the *Seren Taun* was finally acknowledged as cultural festival. In addition to that, the government has even facilitated the celebration by providing not only financial support but also direct participation from the government officials. Later on, the decision to allow and facilitate the practice of *Seren Taun* was also followed by the local government.

3.3 Framing Sunda Wiwitan in Media: Discourse, Narratives, and Actors

While the trajectory of civic space of the *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur is marked by

repeated history of governmental discriminations, our findings also shows that the dynamics of civic space of the *Sunda Wiwitan* community are also characterized with contested narratives between the government and the community, particularly on the issue of religious freedom, civil rights, and discriminations (see Fig. 5).

Overall, our data-crawling finds a total of 752 articles captured from 84 online media between October 20th, 2014, to October 20th, 2020, that were related to the issue of local religions and *Sunda Wiwitan* (see Fig. 3). General observation on the time series data shows that the while the distribution of online media coverage on local religions is evenly distributed, but the amount and frequency of the news is quite modest, which indicates lack of attention from both public in general (see Fig. 3).

The data trend shows that only when there are specific events or incidents involving the community of local religions, they attract media attention (see Fig 1; Fig 2c). In addition, the trend also shows that most of the news coverage in online media mainly discuss about issues related to religious, cultural, and societal aspects. Meanwhile, issues related to discrimination against local religion are lesser compared to other issues (see Fig. 2). Interestingly, a closer look to big data analytics shows that discourses about discrimination against local religions are mostly dominated with topics about *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur, Kuningan (see Fig 3b, 3c). Interestingly, a closer look to big data analytics shows that discourses about discrimination against local religions are mostly dominated with topics about *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur, Kuningan (see Fig. 3b, 3c).

While the news covers a six-year period, however, the most frequent news only appeared in July 2020, when there was an incident in which the Kuningan government sealed off the construction of *Batu Satangtung* on July 27, 2020 (see Fig. 2b, 2c). The construction was built by the *Sunda Wiwitan* community on their own land and designated as tomb prepared for two elders of the community: Prince Djatikusumah and his wife Ratu Emilia Wigarningsih. However, the government accused that the construction looked like a monument rather than a tomb, saying that the group had no permit to build a monument (Kompas.com, 24/07/2020).

Based on our textual network analysis, there are two dominant narratives regarding the issues of local religions: *first*, the framing of local religions as merely customary beliefs and traditional communities, and *second*, the framing of local religion's community and its customary rites as

tourism commodity. This contrasting narratives represents each actor's point of view and their narratives: the government's narrative perceiving local religions as cultural and tourism commodities; and the community's narrative emphasizing the issues of governmental discriminations against local religions (see Fig. 4).

A careful observation on the issues regarding the rights of *Sunda Wiwitan* community shows that discussions related to rights aspect of the community are mainly dominated with two cluster of issues. *First*, local issues related to the efforts of *Sunda Wiwitan* community to obtain recognition as customary law groups and their rights to own customary land. *Second*, national issue related to the decision of the Constitutional Court in November 2017, which allowed local religions to be incorporated as additional religious category on Indonesians' ID cards (see Fig 5a). As for the issues on discriminations against *Sunda Wiwitan* community, the TNA visualization shows that most popular discourse are mainly about the case of *Batu Satangtung* and government's commitment to implement the decision of the Constitutional Court (see Fig. 5b).

However, a closer look to the actor's network shows that the discourse about the needs for rights fulfilment and governmental discriminations against *Sunda Wiwitan* community were mainly voiced out by critical public, civil society organizations, human rights activists, and the *Sunda Wiwitan* community itself. In responding this issue, state actors tend to emphasize more on the procedural problems hindering the fulfilment of civil rights, or, in the case of *Batu Satangtung* incident, to justify government's policy and actions to seal the construction, at the cost of religious freedom of the *Sunda Wiwitan* community (Interview, 25/9/2020)

3.4 Contested Civic Space: Dynamics between Restrictions and the Pushback

On the field, contrasting views between the state actors and the local religious communities in perceiving the space for local religions is also evident. For instance, the contested narratives between the government *vis-à-vis* *Sunda Wiwitan* community were also reflected in the interviews with government's officials and Regent of Kuningan, when highlighting the importance of *Seren Taun* festival as potential assets for cultural exhibition and tourism assets in Kuningan regency (Interview, 24/9/2020). Whereas the *Sunda Wiwitan* community

and civil society's organizations perceived government's attitude and policies toward this community as discriminations and even cultural genocide (FGD, 9/9/2020).

In terms of civic space, the situation is like business as usual: the state actors use their legal power to employ restriction policies, while the communities continue to resist. The state restrictions have not only curtailed the space for the free practice of religious freedom for the local religions, but it also has further impact on their civic space as citizens.

Based on our findings, there are three major methods of governmental restriction. The *first method* is legal restrictions, which was done by launching regulations that sets strict limitations and using them to justify state surveillance against to the local religions. The *second* method is by controlling the discourse and narratives over civic space of the *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur. Finally, as the *third* method, the state also restrains the moral standing of local religious groups, by preventing them from spreading their teaching outside their own circle (and in some cases, even within their circle). In practice, these methods often overlap with one another (Interviews 24-29/9/2020).

Among others, legal restrictions become the most frequent method used by the government: in the past and present time; in the aspect of religious freedom and other civil rights; and has taken place both at national and local levels. Prior to *Reformasi* era, the community's efforts to obtain state's recognition as religious community were not only rejected from the related ministries, but even responded with a court's decision asserting their religious beliefs as heretics. Yet in present time, their efforts to gain state's recognition as customary law community are mainly challenged by the local government, by issuing a Regent's decree stating that the AKUR *Sunda Wiwitan* community does not meet state's criteria to be granted as customary law community.

During the interview, the Kuningan regent asserts that based on the assessment on historical, territorial, economics and institutional aspects of the *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur, the government had decided to deny their proposal. He also persisted that the decision was made by referring to a regulation set by the Ministry of Home Affairs, namely *Permendagri No. 52/2014* regarding the required set of criteria for customary law community (Interview 24/9/2020).

Apart from procedural impediments, the disinclination of local government to grant the community with a status of customary law community was because they are fearing that it will

trigger potential conflicts with the local government, as well as with majority religions. The Regent further stated that “*if the government recognized Sunda Wiwitan as masyarakat hukum adat, there is an increasing risk that they will make their own rules within the community, and it might be conflicting with state rules, and even the society. The case of Batu Satangtung for instance, the community has built the monument without asking permission to the government, and thus causing conflict with some religious groups*” (Interview, 24/9/2020).

Yet a closer look the dynamics of past discriminations faced by the community shows that government’s response has reflected the way this community is perceived. For long, the government and the larger parts of communities in Kuningan have thought of *Sunda Wiwitan* as merely a customary belief rather than a religion. The government made a very clear position that calling it ‘local religion’ will be even more sensitive and might trigger hostile acts from the larger community. Whether or not the term ‘local religion’ is sensitive to the community is yet to be investigated further. At this point, nevertheless, it is fair to say that the government keeps maintaining the control of public discourse, by labelling *Sunda Wiwitan* as a group of people with a specific belief that does not qualify them as a religious group.

By not recognizing them as an ethno-religious group, it is also easier for the government to set a clear boundary for the civic space of *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur. One of the clearest pieces of evidence to this argument is the afore-discussed *Batu Satangtung* case. As reported by the media, the stone construction was first openly rejected by a group of people that later known to come from outside Kuningan. Even though the community surrounding the site did not show any direct rejection, yet the local government used technocratic reasons to put a halt on the construction, by installing restricting lines around the enacted stone. The lines were only removed after the family gained the building permit, and the case got widespread public. Even after the incident, the *Batu Satangtung* case was not entirely closed, because the government still demand that the structure later be used as burial site, not a sarcophagus.

Apart from those restrictions, the *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur has also faced severe governmental restrictions in various aspects. They manifest in the forms of restrictions on accessing religious registrations, gaining protection as customary groups, restrictions on accessing social and educational services, restrictions on building religious site or house of worship, arbitrary

inspection, harassment, hostilities, and even violence acts when expressing or practicing their religious beliefs. In addition, their rights as religious community have been undermined by the government through the use of labeling and negative framing when the community struggles to obtain state’s recognition and their leader dealt with internal conflict with other family member (Interview 24/9/2020).

Responding to all these actions taken by the state, the *Sunda Wiwitan* community make use of at least two moves. *First*, they strengthen the supporting network with other actors, mostly from civil society realm. The community do so by maintaining close contacts with moderate religious groups, civil society organizations and advocates such as Unity in Diversity National Alliance (ANBTI) and Journalist Alliance for Diversity (SEJUK), as well as with state-initiated institutions such as the National Commission for Human Rights (Komnas HAM). On the case of *Batu Satangtung*, these organizations helped the community by voicing out the issue and raising public awareness through press release, petition at change.org, and advocate the issue to Komnas HAM (FGD, 9/9/2020).

To some extent, this network strengthening also take benefit from the position gained by Dewi Kanti Setianingsih (a core family member of *Sunda Wiwitan* community and descendant of Djatikusumah) at the National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan). In addition, they also uphold alliances with academia from some universities through continuous communication maintained by Ira Indrawardana, a *Sunda Wiwitan* adherent working as a lecturer at Padjadjaran University, Bandung (FGD 25/9/2020)

The *second* effort taken by the *Sunda Wiwitan* people is enhancing their capacity to maintain and create the space, amidst ever-growing state restrictions (FGD, 25/9/2020). There has been at least one major event that forced the community to launch their defensive strategies in maintaining and creating the space. The event was when the state banned the ADS teaching and its organization in the 1960s. Leaders of the community converted to Catholicism, under an agreement with the Church that they could continue performing some rituals to preserve the teachings of Sundanese heritage (Interview, 24/9/2020).

By doing this, they could keep the freedom to carry out their original religion in practice, as long as they did not call it religious practices. Meanwhile, they also temporarily accepted state recognition as the representation of customary group through

Masyarakat AKUR. This has enabled them to preserve cultural expression of the local religion, including the annual procession called *Seren Taun*, as well as their traditional rites. With this, they can even invite people outside their religious group to participate. Even the government officials have been showing positive gestures toward the annual rites of *Seren Taun* – again, as long as they do not call it a religious ceremony.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The decrease of freedom and squeezed civic space for local religions has been prominent in Indonesia. Even after 1998 democratization, adherents of local religions throughout the country are still suffering from discriminations. Rather than offering an enabling environment for the free exercise of religion, the state continues to control the civic space using a repertoire of restrictions and discrimination.

Whilst restrictions and discriminations have been pervasive as means to undermine the rights of the local religions, our study shows that the dynamics of power struggle from the civil society and local religion's community to obtain these rights are relentless. Using various strategies ranging from legal, political, and even social and cultural approach, they respond directly to state restrictions on the one hand, while encouraging the openness of new civic spaces on the other. Hence, the case shows that both actors have actively shaped the dynamics of politics of religious freedom of the *Sunda Wiwitan* community, resulting a contested civic space.

The findings of the study also shows that the case of *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur demonstrates a complexity of power struggle to maintain and preserve civic space, which involved other political actors, including state agencies, civil society organizations, religious groups, and majority groups. As this paper previously argues, each actor is in active position in shaping the space for the local religions in Cigugur. On the one hand, the government and the majority groups are seeking to control civic space using various forms of restrictions. On the other, the adherents of *Sunda Wiwitan* religion are responding to the squeezed space by striving to preserve and reclaim the civic space using various strategies, both at local and national level.

Despite the significant contributions and findings of this study, it is important to note what the results do and do not demonstrate. The results demonstrate that the government restrictions on *Sunda Wiwitan*

community are related to national policies on local religions. Consistent with civic space theory and past research (Buyse, 2018; Fox, 2020), the patterns of government restrictions on *Sunda Wiwitan* community are manifested in both legal and political methods, which reflect the way the state has perceived and treated local religions so far. While the case study shows a complexity of problem related to local politics, the problems of contested civic space faced by *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur essentially reflects the nature of problem behind contested civic space for the adherents of local religions in Indonesia.

However, outliers and nonsignificant results are also present. For instance, the land issue which emerged in TNA analysis is an outlier and does not reflect general problem of the civic space for the local religions in Indonesian context. Although, in the case of *Sunda Wiwitan* community in Cigugur, this issue has somewhat hindered their efforts to gain state recognition as customary law group. While the case also shows the necessity to look at the influence of local context, future research is needed to investigate the extent and impact of local context to increased government restrictions. In the context of community sustainability, further research is also needed in order to examine the impact of the shrinker civic space of the local religion to the future of community sustainability in Indonesia.

Ultimately, this study contributes both narrowly and broadly with regards to the presence of government restrictions on to the religious minorities. While this study specifically builds on the knowledge that local context is significant predictor of restrictions on local religions, the study also reinforces the argument of contested civic space by expanding this theory to reframe the dynamics between restrictions and struggle for civil rights and religious freedom in the post-reform Indonesia.

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