

ARTICLE

Power Structure, Hegemony, and Marginalization in A Case of Religious Co-Production

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Abstract

Through the application and expansion of the concept of “religious co-production,” this paper aims to interrogate the co-producing dynamics between state-acknowledged religions (Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism) and an Indigenous belief (ancestral religion) that is not formally acknowledged by the state as a “religion” (Sapta Darma) in the East Javan village of Sukoreno. The paper focuses on two main questions, namely, how do we utilize “religious co-production” to understand the interreligious relations in the here and now, especially those practiced not through doctrinal discourses, but rather through the embodied, everyday lives? And how does the concept of “religious co-production” engage with the question of inequality of power in interreligious relations? In answering both questions, the paper argues that contemporary dynamics of religious co-production are not only shaped by doctrinal exchanges among different religious believers, but also through the combination of governmental policies, and majority-minority sociological dynamics in a locale. The paper also argues that power inequality within religious majority-minority relations normativize specific ways of living religiously, whilst alienating others. This means that an analysis of religious co-production cannot presume that religions shape and re-shape each other in an equal manner, but rather should see that ritual, theological, and social adjustments are demanded more from a minoritized religion and not from a dominant one. Furthermore, it also means that observations about power dimensions in religious co-production can shed light on how the hegemonic presence of a religion is buttressed by socio-

political, and economic processes that are often missed from a strictly theological and/or historical analysis.

Keywords

Religious co-production, religionization, normativization of hijab, power structures, Sapta Darma.

Introduction

The concept of religious co-production is critical in understanding interreligious relations at an epistemological level because it shows the porousness of religions that are often understood as singular entities that are exclusive of each other. Referring to the emergence of the concept from the past and present relations between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg write: “We would go so far as to say that Jews, Muslims, and Christians cannot understand their own religious tradition without taking into account how it has been shaped by the other two, real or imagined, in the manifold moments of their co-produced history.”¹

Of course, critical accounts on interreligious relations between different religious traditions that go beyond mere dialogical encounters are common, especially in the fields of comparative theology and interreligious studies. Marianne Moyaert’s edited collection on interrituality, Jeannine Hill Fletcher’s study on interreligious encounters and relations among women from different religious traditions across the globe, and Jerusha Lamptey’s exploration on Muslim and Christian feminist thoughts through the lens of Muslima comparative feminist theology are few examples of what has been written about the intertwining relations between diverse religions in the world.² Nevertheless, religious co-production as a concept shows another layer of relationality between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam at a paradigmatic level: that it is not only inevitable, but has also constituted each

- 1 Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 50 (2026): 4–33, 15.
- 2 Marianne Moyaert, ed., *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries: Explorations in Interterrituality* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Motherhood as Metaphor: Engendering Interreligious Dialogue* (Fordham University Press, 2013); Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Divine Words, Female Voices: Muslima Explorations in Comparative Feminist Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

religious tradition to the extent that one cannot be understood without the others.

Even so, the rootedness of religious co-production as a concept in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim relations seems to limit the application of a concept that can contribute significant insights into the ways that interreligious relations occur. In order to understand this limitation, we ought to study the definition of religious co-production below:

By “co-produced religions” we mean that these traditions, in all their sectarian variety, have always formed, reformed, and transformed themselves through interacting with, thinking about and imagining each other, and continue to do so. This enduring co-dependence derives from two basic facts. The first is their shared reservoir and competing canon of prophetic claims, scriptures, and narratives. The second, more often forgotten, is that the historical as a mode of knowledge has itself proven fundamental to each of the three religions not only at their origins, but in every moment of their existence.³

It is true that in their fuller elaboration on the concept of religious co-production, Heyden and Nirenberg stated that it is not restricted to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.⁴ Nevertheless, it is the interrelations between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that become the primary locus of the concept. This focus on the three religions is due to the historical hermeneutics practiced by their believers that take inspirations from and make use of the “shared reservoir and competing canon of prophetic claims, scriptures, and narratives,” and connect the past, present, and future of their traditions.⁵ Thus, the concept of religious co-production as conceived by Heyden and Nirenberg is an exploration of the interconnection between history and theology in which construction and re-construction of the meanings of religious histories constitute the lives of the faithful, the ways they perceive their religions, and the manners in which they build or detract their relations with the religious others.⁶

3 Heyden and Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together,” 7.

4 Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg, “Co-produced Religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” *Harvard Theological Review* 118, no. 1 (2025): 159–180, 162.

5 Heyden and Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together,” 7.

6 Heyden and Nirenberg, “Co-produced Religions,” 177, 180.

Looking at the possibilities to expand the application of the concept of religious co-production to another context outside of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim relations, we propose to utilize the concept to observe the dynamics of interreligious living that are characterized by religious majority-minority relations in Indonesia. We specifically look into the case of interreligious relations in Sukoreno Village in East Java Province, where Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and the followers of an *aliran kebatinan/kepercayaan* (lit. spiritual/belief/faith stream) known as Sapta Darma have been living side-by-side for decades.

Aliran kepercayaan (lit. belief/faith stream) is a term rooted in the Indonesian Constitution Chapter 29 that delineates the place for religion within the life of the nation, and defines the national narrative on what classifies as “religion” and what is not.⁷ Before the term *aliran kepercayaan*, the term *aliran kebatinan* (lit. spiritual stream) was used by people both inside and outside the *aliran* communities to identify these groups of local religious sects that grew in Indonesia within the last decades of the 19th century up to the first half of the 20th century. However, since the term *aliran kebatinan* was associated with the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia/PKI) during the anti-communist purge in 1960s, the communities have redefined themselves as *aliran kepercayaan* by utilizing the word “faith” in Article 29 Clause 2 of the Constitution to seek protection from the state, and to legitimate their socio-political and religious presence in Indonesia.⁸ This identification was altered again in Post-Reformation Indonesia after 1998, in which *aliran kepercayaan* is heretofore known as *agama leluhur* (lit. ancestral religions), *agama asli* (lit. indigenous religions), *agama lokal* (lit. local religions), and *kearifan lokal* (lit. local wisdoms).⁹

7 Chapter XI Religion, Article 29 reads as follows: “1. The state shall be based on the One and Only God; 2. The state guarantees the freedom of every inhabitant to embrace his/her respective religion and to worship according to his/her religion and *faith* as such” (italic ours). The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia, “The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia [and] Law of the Republic of Indonesia Concerning the Constitutional Court,” The Office of the Registrar and the Secretariat General of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015, 30.

8 Samsul Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi Agama Leluhur dalam Politik Agama di Indonesia* (Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies, 2017), 8.

9 Regarding *agama leluhur*: “Ancestral religions refer to local religious practices (material subject) that so far have been identified as practices of animist [belief], magic, *adat* (custom, tradition), culture, and others within the [Indonesian] public discourses and literature Some of these practices include [but not limited to] *semedi* (meditation), *sesajen* (giving offerings), pilgrimages to sacred mountains, forests, and rivers, *bersih desa* (rituals to clean the village from bad omen), and others” (Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 3–4). On *kearifan lokal* see Maarif, *Pasang Surut*

It is important to note that *agama leluhur* is a term that encompasses two different groupings of local religions. They are: *penghayat kepercayaan* (lit. those who embodied faith), and *masyarakat adat* (lit. adat societies/societies who live based on traditional customs).¹⁰ *Penghayat kepercayaan* can be differentiated from *masyarakat adat* to the extent that the latter is defined as: “Communities who live on land that has been passed down from generation to generation. They have territory and natural wealth. Their social and cultural life is governed by customary law and customary institutions that have continuously sustained them as a community.”¹¹ Consequently, the former alludes to local religious groups whose existence is not tied to any specific territory and customary institution. Sapta Darma belongs to this group. Although it is also important to note that the usage of the terms *penghayat kepercayaan*, *masyarakat adat*, and *agama leluhur* is not mutually exclusive in the context of Indonesian discourses on religion.

The shift in terms from *aliran kebatinan* to *aliran kepercayaan* to *agama leluhur* to refer to religious groups like Sapta Darma reflects the ambiguity of their presence within the national script of belonging in Indonesia. What is more,

Rekognisi, 3.

- 10 “Those who embodied faith” is my translation. Maarif himself prefers to use “belief” to translate “kepercayaan” into English. I chose to use “faith” for a smoother translation of “penghayat kepercayaan” into English. Furthermore, Maarif defined “kepercayaan” as, “the religions of specific groups and individuals registered with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (MECRT), groups who have struggled for recognition of their *kepercayaan* as *agama* (Indonesian: religion) from the Indonesian state since the early Indonesian independence, and only succeeding in 2017 when the Constitutional Court (The Indonesian Constitutional Court Decision No. 97/PUU-VII/2016) approved their petition for religious recognition.” See Samsul Maarif, “Human (Relational) Dignity: Perspectives of Followers of Indigenous Religions of Indonesia,” *Religions* 14, no. 7 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070848>.
- 11 Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara/AMAN) quoted in Mufdil Tuhri, “Religion and Land Rights in Indonesian Indigenous-State Relations: Case Study of Orang Rimba in Jambi,” *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-agama* 10, no. 2 (2020): 229–248, 234; Maarif defines *adat* as, “religions of groups or communities “officially” defined by the government and civil society alliance to have at least three criteria: a genealogical kinship-based community, residing in an inherited territory, and living with an *adat* law system [...]” Samsul Maarif, “Human (Relational) Dignity,” 1. This understanding of *adat* as “religion” is based on his conceptualization of “religion as a way of relating” which expands the limited world religion paradigm which according to him “sees religion as a practice which requires the hierarchical relation between God, humans, and nature.” Mufdil Tuhri, Samsul Maarif, and Rikardo Simarmata, “Adat, Islam, and the Idea of Religion in Colonial Indonesia,” *Al Albab* 9, no. 2 (2020): 159–178, 161.

as the attempts to define “religion” is always accompanied by a portrayal of what is not, the terminological shift above indicates the struggles that *agama leluhur* communities have gone through in securing the protection of their rights from the state. This is clear when we see the binary between *agama leluhur* and *agama resmi* (lit. formal/acknowledged religions) and the historical hermeneutics that characterized the conceptualization of “religion” (*agama*) in Indonesia that will be explained in Section Two of this paper. For the purpose of this introduction, it is sufficient for us to know that there are currently six state-acknowledged religions in Indonesia. They are: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Konghucu (a “religionized” version of Confucianism).¹²

The distinction between *agama leluhur* and *agama resmi* in Indonesia is not simply symbolic. The state acknowledgment of six formal religions in Indonesia comes with a stratified protection for the rights of their believers to practice their traditions, and, since monotheism is written as a primary foundation of the country, one’s identification with any of the formal religions becomes key to accessing various public services.¹³ In fact, it is only since November 2017 that the followers of *agama leluhur* could identify themselves as such in their national identity and family cards that are crucial for obtaining jobs, education, health care, marriage record, proof of land ownership, and others.¹⁴ Before November 2017, many of the followers of *agama leluhur* chose to identify themselves with one of the six formal religions in their identity and family cards just so they could access public services.¹⁵ The followers of *agama leluhur* in Indonesia are not only deprived of their rights to freely practice their religions, but more than that, the discriminatory status on their religions prevents them from accessing their basic rights as Indonesian citizens.

It is within this context that the interreligious relations between Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Sapta Darma followers in Sukoreno Village occur. Samsul Maarif, one of the foremost scholars on *agama leluhur* in Indonesia frames this issue through the notion of politics of religion. In his monograph on the ever-changing landscape of “religion/non-religion” binary in

12 “Religions that are followed by the Indonesian citizens are Islam, Christianity [Protestantism], Catholicism, Hindu, Buddhism, and Konghucu (Confucius). This fact can be proven by the historical development of religions in Indonesia” (Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, “Presidential Decision of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1/PNPS 1965 on the Prevention of Religious Blasphemy and Misuse of Religion,” <https://putusan3.mahkamahagung.go.id/>).

13 The Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Chapter XI, Article 29:1.

14 Tuhri, “Religion and Land Rights,” 244.

15 Maarif, “Human (Relational) Dignity,” 2.

Indonesia, Maarif uses the term “politics of religion” as a way to see religion, belief, *adat*, and culture as political constructs that are utilized to justify the domination of religious groups over those who are deemed as non-religious.¹⁶ Politics of religion certainly characterizes interreligious relations in Sukoreno Village, in which hegemonic religious groups (particularly, but not limited to Muslims) make use of the religion/non-religion binary to deny the religious legitimacy of Sapta Darma, and to deprive its followers of their religious freedom. Yet the religion/non-religion binary is more than a political construction used to sustain the socio-political and religious hegemony of the dominant religious groups. As we will see in the context of Sukoreno Village, the religion/non-religion binary itself is constantly being negotiated by the state, the dominant religious groups, and the minority religious groups on an everyday basis, and it is here that religious co-production can shed light on the complexity of their relations.

As previously mentioned, Heyden and Nirenberg place a priority on relations between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—while acknowledging that religious co-production can also be applied to different cases—primarily due to the three religions’ shared reservoir of prophetic claims, scriptures, and narratives whose meanings are constructed and re-constructed through historical hermeneutics that brings paradigmatic and material changes to the past, present, and future of the three religious traditions. Something shared is, of course, a prerequisite for any form of cooperation, including religious co-production. In the case of Sukoreno Village, what is shared between the dominant religious groups is not a reservoir of historical/theological narratives and prophetic claims, but rather a socio-political position in the hierarchical reality of interreligious life in Indonesia that grants them legitimacies as the state-acknowledged religions in Indonesia, and thus as the “religions.” The locus of the issue in Sukoreno Village is about socio-political belonging, which is rooted in the contemporary dynamics of political authority and legitimacy, and the ways that state and religious authorities negotiate their relationship with each other.

As with other case of religious co-production, mutual transformation—though far from equal—characterizes interreligious relations in Sukoreno Village.¹⁷ In this case, mutual transformation is centered on the shaping and re-shaping of the meanings of “religion” within the local and national narratives of national monotheism in Indonesia. This is where the concept of religionization proves useful in elucidating specific features of the religio-

16 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 9.

17 Regarding “mutual transformation,” see Heyden and Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together,” 10.

political co-production that occurs in Sukoreno.¹⁸ Three aspects are particularly important in this matter. First, the role and place of the state in the formation of religions' perspectives of themselves and their religious and secular others. Second, a different kind of co-production in which the border between religious self and religious/secular others is located in the debates on socio-political legitimacy and belonging, and not in the discourses on orthodoxy and authenticity. Three, the agency of marginalized/secularized religious others in which they adopt the hegemonic narratives of religionization to negotiate a space of belonging within the national narrative of religion and progress.

The upcoming section of this paper outlines the long history of construction and reconstruction of the category of "religion" in Indonesia that specifically pertains to the existence of Sapta Darma as *aliran kepercayaan*. The First Section also narrates the history of Sapta Darma, and its presence in Sukoreno Village. The section will then be concluded by a description of social strategies that Sapta Darma followers do in the face of interreligious discrimination. Following the Second Section, the Third Section of the paper expounds on the dialectic of structure and agency in the process of religionization as an expression of religious co-production in Sukoreno Village. This section introduces institutional, paradigmatic, and interreligious meanings of religious co-production in Sukoreno through narratives of religionization. Lastly, the conclusion will highlight important points of the paper.

Sapta Darma: Existence, Contestation, and Social Psychology of a Minority Religion

A. Religion or Belief Stream? The Existence of Sapta Darma in Indonesia

Sapta Darma was born from a spiritual experience of an East Javanese man, Mr. Hardjosopoero on December 26th, 1952.¹⁹ As the story goes, Mr.

18 Marianne Moyaert, *Christian Imaginations of the Religious Other: A History of Religionization* (Wiley Blackwell, 2024); Michel Picard and Rémy Madinier, eds., *The Politics of Religion in Indonesia: Syncretism, Orthodoxy, and Religious Contention in Java and Bali* (Routledge, 2011); Markus Dreßler, "Modes of Religionization: A Constructivist Approach to Secularity," *Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities—Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities"* 7 (2019).

19 The followers of Sapta Darma in Sukoreno Village stated that Mr. Hardjosopoero did not identify himself as a follower of any religion before he accepted the Sapta Darma revelation in 1952. They also stated that though not identifying

Hardjosopoero—who was a local barber—was plagued by an overwhelming anxiety on that day that he decided to skip work and rest in his house. At 1:00 AM that night, Mr. Hardjosopoero's felt his body move against his will and he found himself sitting cross-legged facing East with his arms crossed. He tried to free himself from the influence of the invisible power, but he could not help but to scream three phrases repeatedly instead: "Allah Hyang Maha Agung," (God the Almighty) "Allah Hyang Maha Rokhim," (God the Most Compassionate) and "Allah Hyang Maha Adil" (God the Most Just).²⁰

The spiritual experience continued and Mr. Hardjosopoero's shaking body involuntarily prostrated while he chanted "Hyang Maha Sujud Hyang Kuwasa," (I prostrated to The Almighty) "Hyang Maha Suci Sujud Hyang Maha Kuwasa," (My sacred soul prostrated to The Almighty) "Hyang Maha Suci Hyang Maha Kuwasa" (My sacred soul, [and] The Almighty). He then sat, and prostrated again while chanting, "Kesalahane Hyang Maha Suci Nyuwun Ngapuro," (My sacred soul asks for forgiveness [from God] for all of my mistakes) three times, and then in the last prostration he chanted, "Hyang Maha Suci mertobat Hyang Maha Kuwasa" (My sacred soul repents to The Almighty) also for three times. The movements involved in this spiritual experience then served as a foundation for the primary ritual that Sapta Darma believers practice and known as "sujud" (prostration).²¹

To verify his claim of a spiritual experience, Mr. Hardjosopoero visited several of his closest friends who then witnessed and themselves experienced the same spiritual enlightenment. Mr. Hardjosopoero continuously gathered more witnesses to experience this spiritual enlightenment until on February 13th, 1953 he heard an invisible voice that legitimized his claim to be a messenger of God.²²

Sapta Darma (lit. The Seven Teachings) stands on seven principles that have to be followed by all of its believers. They are: 1, Devotion to God the Almighty, The Most Compassionate, The Most Just, The Wisest, and the Eternal; 2, Obeying the state's Constitution with honesty and pure heart; 3,

himself as a follower of any religion, Mr. Hardjosopoero believed in the existence of God and His omnipotent power. There is no explanation provided on the issue in the official historical account of the birth of Sapta Darma and the biographical account of Mr. Hardjosopoero (*Sejarah Penerimaan Wahyu Wewarah Sapta Darma dan Perjalanan Panuntun Agung Sri Gutama*) as well.

20 Sekretariat Tuntunan Agung Kerokhanian Sapta Darma, *Sejarah Penerimaan Wahyu Wewarah Sapta Darma dan Perjalanan Panuntun Agung Sri Gutama* (Sekretariat Tuntunan Agung Kerokhanian Sapta Darma, 2010), 12.

21 Sekretariat Tuntunan Agung Kerokhanian Sapta Darma, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 12.

22 Sekretariat Tuntunan Agung Kerokhanian Sapta Darma, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 14.

Actively participate in the building and development of the nation; 4, Unconditionally helping everyone in needs with love and compassion; 5, Living courageously by believing in our own strength; 6, Striving for moral social and familial lives, being gentle and compassionate, and provide guidance in the service of others; and 7, There is no permanence in this world, everything is transient.²³

It is important to note that the birth of Sapta Darma in 1953 took place in a context where the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (heretofore, MORA) had decided to tighten its leash to control the growth of “quasi-religious sects” that were considered unprecedented.²⁴ MORA, which was established in 1946 to appease the loss of “santri” political faction over the erasure of Piagam Jakarta from the Indonesian Constitution, was specifically tasked to “make contact with [or to monitor] movements or religious groups and local religious sects which are not the part of Islam and Christianity” which they did by establishing a task force known at that time as Pengawas Aliran Kepercayaan Masyarakat (PAKEM/Supervisory Body of Local Beliefs in Society).²⁵

However, the state surveillance pushed the quasi-religious sects to establish an organization that can represent their interest vis-à-vis the state. In 1955, two years after Sapta Darma was born, Badan Kongres Kebatinan Indonesia (BKKI/Indonesian Kebatinan Congress Body) was established and chaired by a prominent politician who was involved in the preparation of the declaration of Indonesian independence, Mr. Wongsonegoro.²⁶ The result of the national election in 1955 that was won by the nationalist parties comprised of Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI/Indonesian Communist Party) and Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI/Indonesian Nationalist Party) over the Islamic parties NU/Nahdlatul Ulama, and Masyumi/Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia also strengthened the political opportunity for groups like Sapta Darma to strive for acceptance in Indonesia. The attendance of two thousand delegates who represented around two million believers of

23 Sri Pawenang, *Dasa Warsa Kerokhanian Sapta Darma: 10 Tahun Usia KSD* (Sekretariat Tuntunan Agung Unit Penerbitan, 1978), 6.

24 “It has been reported that the number of these groups rose to approximately 360 in Java in 1953, whereas there had been only 29 groups in 1952” (Ismatu Ropi, *Religion and Regulation in Indonesia* [Palgrave Macmillan, 2017], 109).

25 A document drafted by the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Independence (Badan Penyelidik Usaha-usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia/BPUPKI) that served as a foundation for the preamble of the Indonesian Constitution that was known for including a controversial point in which Muslims must adhere to the Islamic Law. For more see Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 21–2. For the quotation see Ropi, *Religion and Regulation*, 109.

26 Ropi, *Religion and Regulation*, 109–110.

Kebatinan groups in their second congress in August 1956 showed the significant growth in numbers and political power of these groups.²⁷

Nonetheless, the success of Kebatinan groups to organize themselves nationally was not enough to grant them a legitimate presence in Indonesia. The state, through MORA, controls the definition of what considered a “religion” in a thick Abrahamic sense: a religion should have a prophet, a written scripture, international recognition, and be monotheistic.²⁸ To counter and conform to this definition, Kebatinan groups stated that they did not aim to form new religions, but rather to increase the quality of Indonesians’ understandings of religions.²⁹ Though later in 1960, during the Fourth Congress of BKKI, Kebatinan groups stated that the only difference between them and the state-acknowledged religions is on their foci, viz., while the state-acknowledged religions focus on the formality of worship and rituals, they place their focus on spiritual experiences and perfecting their humanity.³⁰

To this day, the struggles that are faced by religious groups such as Sapta Darma has been centered on acquiring the state’s acknowledgment of their existence as religions. As previously mentioned, this is an important issue for these religious groups because state acknowledgments do not only come with symbolic recognition, but also with social, political, and material implications for the believers. It is literally about survival. It is not surprising then that in 1978, Sri Pawenang—an assistant to Mr. Hardjosopoero who then replaced

27 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 29.

28 Krisharyanto Umbu Deta, “Deconstructing the Dichotomy of Agama and Kepercayaan: A Transformative Strategy in the Politics of Recognition towards Marapu Indigenous Religion,” *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-agama* 12, no. 1 (2022): 102–125, 103. An analysis from Jane Monnig Atkinson on the divide between *agama* and *kepercayaan* is especially important to highlight. Atkinson writes: “The reason for the omission of traditional pagan ways from the Indonesian roster of legitimate religions is clear. Implicit in the concept of agama are notions of progress, modernization, and adherence to nationalist goals. Populations regarded as ignorant, backward, or indifferent to the nationalist vision are people who de facto lack a religion. Agama is a dividing line that sets off the mass of peasants and urban dwellers, on the one side, from small traditional communities (weakly integrated into the national economic and political system), on the other. People who lack an officially recognized religion are referred to in Indonesian as orang yang belum beragama (“people who do not yet possess a religion”). The negative belum is significant here, for it implies that conversion to a recognized religion is inevitable.” Jane Monnig Atkinson, “Religions in Dialogue: The Construction of an Indonesian Minority Religion,” *American Ethnologist* 10, no. 4 (1983): 684–696, 688.

29 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 29.

30 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 31.

him to be the leader of Sapta Darma after his passing—claimed that Sapta Darma is a religious group, and demanded the government to acknowledge its equality with other state-acknowledged religions.³¹

As recently as 2017 with the Constitutional Court Decision that authorizes the believers of *aliran kepercayaan* and *agama adat* to list their respective religions on their national ID and family cards, and with the statement from the Ministry of Home Affairs stating that, despite the decision by the Constitutional Court, *aliran kepercayaan* is different from but equal to *agama*,³² the discourses over the classification and differentiation of what is and is not “religion” still occupy a primary space in Indonesia. We agree with Samsul Maarif that the importance of defining what is “religion” in Indonesia is due to the formation of “politik agama” (politics of religion), which in turn is a product of high-level negotiation in the founding of the country, and a legacy of colonial politics of religious differentiation. In the colonial context, Maarif refers to the Dutch colonial policy by the end of 19th century to institutionalize *adat* (Indonesian local customary laws, traditions, and ways of life), and depoliticize Islam as the root of institutionalization of *agama* in Indonesia.³³ The institutionalization of *adat* and the support that they got from the colonial government not only diminished the wider meaning of *adat* from way of life to legalistic structure, but also bred animosity between the Islamic groups and those who are associated with *adat* (indigenous groups, *aliran kebatinan* followers, Muslims who practice *adat*, etc.).³⁴ Furthermore, even when *adat* was supported and institutionalized, the colonial government also saw it as backward supernatural thoughts and practices that must be civilized through the introduction of Christian education.³⁵ It was from this colonial distinction between *adat* and religion then that, first, *adat* lost its religious connotation and become no more than structure of customary laws, and second, a foundation for an epistemological distinction between “religions” and “non-religions” was erected in Indonesia. The association between *adat* with backwardness and superstitions also contributes to the marginalization of religious groups such as Sapta Darma, and to the connotation of state-acknowledged religions with national progress and modernity.³⁶

31 Pawenang, *Dasa-Warsa*, 6.

32 Umbu Deta, “Deconstructing the Dichotomy,” 103.

33 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 12.

34 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 14, 13.

35 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 13.

36 Atkinson, “Religions in Dialogue,” 688.

The divide between *adat* and religion then overshadowed the divergence between categories of “santri” and “abangan” in the early 20th century. “Santri” (lit. students of Islamic schools in Indonesia) and “Abangan” (lit. the red group)—along with another category of “Priyayi” (lit. royalty class)—are socio-religious categories of Javanese society proposed by Clifford Geertz in his 1960 book *The Religion of Java*. Geertz defined Santri, Abangan, and Priyayi in this way:

Abangan, representing a stress on the animistic aspects of the over-all Javanese syncretism and broadly related to the peasant element in the population; santri, representing a stress on the Islamic aspects of the syncretism and generally related to the trading element (and to certain elements in the peasantry as well); and priyaji [old spelling of “priyayi”], stressing the Hinduist aspects and related to the bureaucratic element—these, then, are the three main subtraditions I shall describe.³⁷

Geertz’s classification has been subjected to critiques that show the complexity of Javanese society beyond *santri-abangan-priyayi* categories.³⁸ However, at a national level, and within Indonesia’s national history the categories of *santri* and *abangan*, it has still proven useful to understand the development of politics of religion in Indonesia.³⁹ As Maarif argues, the root of politics of religion in Indonesia was planted deep in the founding moment of the nation in which *santri* political factions demanded the formation of Indonesia as an Islamic state, while the *abangan* and non-Islamic political factions opposed that demand and aimed to shape Indonesia as a secular state.⁴⁰ A compromise was achieved on June 22, 1945 in which the Jakarta Charter (Piagam Jakarta) was formulated as the foundation of the establishment of the country. But then another debate ensued in which Christian and *abangan* political factions expressed their disapproval of seven words that were written as parts of the Jakarta Charter: “[...] with an

37 Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 6.

38 Robert B. Cruikshank, “Abangan, Santri, and Priyaji: A Critique,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 3, no. 1 (1972): 39–43; Muhamad Ali, “Categorizing Muslims in Postcolonial Indonesia,” *Moussons: Social Science Research on Southeast Asia* 11, (2007): 33–62; Amanah Nurish, “Santri and Abangan after A Half Century of Clifford Geertz,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 21, no. 2 (2021): 226–239.

39 Syafiq Hasyim, “Abangan, Santri, and Priyayi: Three Streams in Indonesia’s Electoral Politics,” Commentary: RSIS Publications, 16 April 2019, <https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/indonesian-presidential-election-2019-abangan-santri-and-priyayi-three-streams-in-indonesias-electoral-politics/>.

40 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 17.

obligation to practice the Islamic syariah for Muslims.”⁴¹ Eventually, Jakarta Charter was rejected as part of the Indonesian Constitution, though the Islamic factions successfully planted epistemological distinctions between “agama” and “kepercayaan” in Article 29 of the Constitution of The Republic of Indonesia.⁴²

With the legalization of Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism as the six state-acknowledged religions, the debate over what is “agama” and “kepercayaan” becomes more limited since the state has a hegemonic understanding of what is “religion.” The contemporary discursive landscape of “agama” and “kepercayaan” is characterized by the *kepercayaan* groups’ advocacy for equal rights and protection from the state, and the rise of “agama leluhur” (ancestral religions) as a post-Reformasi category for religious groups such as Sapta Darma.⁴³ Indeed, as Julia Howell writes, Indonesia approaches its religious diversity through the lens of “delimited pluralism” in which it circumscribes “what officially counts as religion by imposing on its citizens an obligation to acknowledge one of a limited number of “world religions,” only one of which is Islam.”⁴⁴ It is within this delimited pluralism that Sapta Darma still struggles to find its legitimate place as a religious group in Indonesia.

B. “A Means to Reach God”: The Theology of Sapta Darma

Let me use a travelling metaphor: We both want to go to Jakarta, but you go there by car while I go there by riding my motorcycle. Our destination is the same, Jakarta, but our vehicles are different. This is how I understand the religious differences between us, though my tradition is not formally acknowledged as a “religion.” Your religion, and my religion both are means to reach God (Andi, Sapta Darma follower).⁴⁵

In his article on the difference between World Religions Paradigm (WRP) and Indigenous Religions Paradigm (IRP), Samsul Maarif notes that the IRP is characterized by an interpersonal cosmology in which, “Both human and non-human persons are recognized through their intentionality and

41 “[...] dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya.”

42 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 21.

43 Maarif, *Pasang Surut Rekognisi*, 9.

44 Julia D. Howell, “Muslims, the New Age and Marginal Religions in Indonesia: Changing Meanings of Religious Pluralism,” *Social Compass* 52, no. 4 (2005): 473–493, 474.

45 Interview with Andi, October 14th 2023, Jember.

purposive actions that constitute (interpersonal) relationships.”⁴⁶ In this paradigm, “To be a person is to engage in relationship(s),” and thus to be religious is to engage in harmonious relationships, with the consequence that disharmonious relationships are deemed as irreligious.⁴⁷ In Sapta Darma, five of seven main pillars of their teachings are concerned with the ways their followers ought to build relationships with others, with themselves, and their roles in Indonesian social contexts. The second pillar of *Wewarah Pitu* (lit. The Seven Advice) in Sapta Darma is, “obeying the state’s Constitution with honesty and pure heart.”⁴⁸ This pillar connects faith in Sapta Darma with one’s obligation to obey the Constitution of the state, and it is complemented with the third pillar in *Wewarah Pitu*, “actively participate in the building and development of the nation,” which depicts a faithful Sapta Darma believer as an active member of the Indonesian nation.⁴⁹ In essence, these pillars teach that an ideal Sapta Darma believer is the one who obeys the constitution and actively contributes to the nation-building process.

Scaling down from a Sapta Darma’s vision for their believers in the life of the nation, the fourth and sixth pillars of *Wewarah Pitu* delineate believers’ places in their communities, families, and interpersonal relationships. The fourth pillar teaches, “unconditionally helping everyone in need with love and compassion,”⁵⁰ while the sixth pillar declares, “striving for moral social and familial lives, being gentle and compassionate, and provide guidance in the service of others.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, the emphasis on interpersonal relationships and devotion to the community in these two pillars is tampered with a focus on individual independence and strength in the fifth pillar of *Wewarah Pitu* which states, “living courageously by believing in our own strength.”⁵²

True to the interpersonal cosmology that Maarif identifies as a characteristic of IRP, the core teaching of Sapta Darma comprises of the

46 Samsul Maarif, “Human (Relational) Dignity,” 3.

47 Samsul Maarif, “Human (Relational) Dignity,” 3.

48 “Kanthe djudjur lan sutjining ati kudu setja anindakake angger-angger ing Negarane” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 18).

49 “Melu tjawe-tjawe atjantjut tali wanda andjaga adeging Nusa lan Bangsaane,” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 18).

50 “Tetulung marang sapa bae jen perlu, kanthe ora nduweni pamrih apa bae kadjaba mung rasa welas lan asih,” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 18).

51 “Tanduke marang warga bebrajan kudu Susila kanthe alusing budi pakarti tansah agawe pepadang lan mareming lijan,” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 19).

52 “Wani urip kanthe kapitajan saka kekuwatane dewe,” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 18).



Figure 1. The symbol of human personhood (Image source: Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 171).

combination of applied social ethics, and physical and spiritual trainings with the goal of the formation of a “perfect human being” (Javanese, *Satria utama*).⁵³ Their motto (Javanese, *Sesanti*) that, as the case with *Wewarah Pitu* and other core teachings of Sapta Darma, came as a divine revelation to their Founder, Sri Gutama, is “wherever and to whomever, Sapta Darma community must be shining like the sun.”⁵⁴ At the individual level, the teachings of Sapta Darma aim to shape their believers to know themselves physically, spiritually and theologically, and for them to reach physical and spiritual tranquility. The teachings also focus on shaping physical and spiritual awareness to pursue moral values as taught and embodied by Sri Gutama, the honorific title bestowed by God on Mr. Hardjosopoero, the founder of Sapta Darma. In his teachings, Sri Gutama stated that the purpose of our life is to calibrate ourselves with the Divine Will, and thus, to reach the highest spiritual awareness known as *Suci Sejati* (lit. the true sanctity).⁵⁵ This can be done through the combination of faith, mystical path, and the practice of Semedi (Javanese meditation).

The intertwining of Sapta Darma's visions of creation narrative, concepts of personhood, and social, moral, and spiritual teachings can be gleaned from their meaningful symbol that is known as "the symbol of human personhood." This symbol can be found in the houses of the faithful, and in their designated houses of worship known as "Sanggar" (Figure 1).

The four corners of the green square in the symbol reflects Sapta Darma's creation narrative in which humans are created from the

53 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 180.

54 “Ing ngendi bae marang sapa bae warga Sapta Darma kudu sumunar pindha baskara,” (Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 179).

55 Pawenang, Dasa-Warsa, 6.

coalescence between Divine Light (Javanese, *Sinar Cahaya Allah*), the essences of earth (Javanese, *Sari-sari bumi*), and the partnership of man and woman. The human body that contains Divine Light then represented by the dark green edges of the square, and the light green backdrop in the square respectively. Furthermore, the creation narrative is also shown through the white triangle with golden edges in the symbol, whose three corners constitute the concept of *Tri Tunggal* (lit. three in one) that are Divine Light (*Nur Cahya*), sperm or essence from man (*Nur Rasa*, the light of senses), and egg cell or essence from woman (*Nur Buat*, the light of creation). The golden edges of the triangle symbolize the Divine Light that envelops all creation, and the white backdrop in the triangle stands for the sacredness of essences that create human beings. The sacredness of human creation then obliges all human beings to embody honesty and justice while being aware that the mission of their lives is to return to the holiness of their Creator. Ultimately, the cycle of life and death that reflects the transient quality of physical beings is represented by the circles in the middle of the symbol.

In turn, Sapta Darma's concept of personhood is indicated through the black, red, yellow, and white circles at the center of the symbol. These colors represent the four different ardent impulses that compete to define a person: black depicts wrath that is located in the mouth, red portrays rage that is located in the ears, yellow illustrates desire that is located in the eyes, and white reflects virtuous impulse that is located in the nose. Thus, since each impulse corresponds to specific physical sense, Sapta Darma's believers ought to physically train their senses to control malicious impulses, and develop benevolent one: that is, the physical and spiritual dimension of a believer is intertwined with each other and should be shaped in conjunction with one another. The Javanese mythological character Semar that is placed in the middle of the circle serves as a model of "perfect human" for those who could control their malicious impulses, develop righteous morality, and thus achieve a personal connection with God.⁵⁶

56 Semar (also known as Ismaya) is a mythological character in Javanese stories that is widely believed to be a representation of the voice of the people against a hegemonic power. In Javanese puppet stories, Semar is known as one of the descendants of Sang Hyang Wenang (the creator of the universe) who, after losing a competition against his sibling Manikmaya (also known as Batara Guru who replaced Sang Hyang Wenang as the lord of the universe), was sent to earth to take care of humanity and the descendants of Manikmaya. Semar was also charged to report any injustices that Manikmaya might have done in their tenure as the lord of the universe to Sang Hyang Wenang. For more, read: Catur Nugroho, "Asal-Usul Mitos Tokoh Semar: Eksistensi dan Esensinya bagi Masyarakat Jawa," *Lakon: Jurnal Pengkajian dan Penciptaan Wayang* 20, no. 1 (2023): 1–9.

Lastly, the symbol also shows three words and one phrase written in Javanese characters. The word on the left side of the triangle means impulses (Javanese, *nafsu*); the word on the right side of the triangle means ethics (Javanese, *budi*); the upper word on the bottom side of the triangle refers to morality (Javanese, *pakarti*); and the words on top of the triangle, and the bottom word below the triangle both form the phrase *Sapta Darma* that means the seven sacred obligations. The three words (impulses, ethics, and morality) contain the core of *Sapta Darma* teachings that aim to create a personal connection with God through the combination of physical and spiritual trainings, and the practice of righteous living.⁵⁷

The primary ritual in *Sapta Darma* is “sujud” (lit. prostration). Sujud can be traced back to an event on December 27th, 1952, in which Mr. Hardjosopoero received his first revelation that caused his body to move beyond his control in a chain of prostrating movement.⁵⁸ This chain of prostrations was then institutionalized as the primary ritual of *Sapta Darma*. There are two kinds of prostration in *Sapta Darma*. They are daily prostration, and explorative prostration. Believers are commanded to do daily prostration—individually or with the community—at specific hours during which they can fully concentrate, usually in the early morning or late at night. Meanwhile, explorative prostration is conducted as specific events in *Sanggar* in which believers cultivate knowledge of their spiritual selves as individual, and as a community.

With the goals of achieving physical and spiritual knowledge of oneself, and communion with God, the most important thing to attain during prostration rituals—and anytime and anywhere as needed by the believers—is a state of mind and soul called “*ening*” (lit. quiet, silent, tranquil). When one is in the state of *ening*, one would be able to feel gentle vibration within oneself (physical and spiritual) that indicates one’s unification with God (Javanese, *manunggal*). The Handbook of *Sapta Darma* explains *ening* in this way:

Ening is not about closing your eyes, or something like that. Ening is the quiet of the mind.... For example, we forgot where something is, let us say, our matches. We looked for it everywhere, but we could not find it. And then we stopped searching, quieted our minds, then suddenly we remembered where we placed our matches. How do things like that happen? When we quiet our minds, we emit a light that then kindle our knowledge about the location of the matches.

57 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 171–174.

58 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 12.

Let us refine our coarse ethics and morality, so that it is easy for us to own the essence of life within ourselves [...].⁵⁹

Another example:

[We know that] one who is asleep lost their consciousness. The truth is that the one who is ‘asleep’ is their mind. For example, they dreamed of being in Jakarta. Who is actually going to Jakarta? This is your light and essence of life. Let us learn how to make our minds ‘asleep’, that is achieving *ening* while we are fully conscious: asleep in our consciousness.... *Ening* is not thinking about anything, so that you can focus on the essence of your life.⁶⁰

Ening is a meditative state in which a believer reaches unification with the Divine by resting their mind, sharpening their intuitions, and activating the sacred vibrations in their body. Two of our informants, Andi and his father, told us that it is not easy to attain the state of *ening*, and thus Sapta Darma believers in Sukoreno utilize a traditional percussion instrument called “*tabuan*” to assist them in their communal prostrations to achieve the state of *ening*. *Tabuan* makes the sound of “*nang, ning, nung, gung,*” which symbolizes the vertical spiritual steps that the believers must experience to reach *manunggal* (lit. unification/communion with God) which is the core of the state of *ening*.⁶¹

To understand the interweaving concepts between physicality and spirituality in the teachings of Sapta Darma, it is important to engage with the concept of *rasa* that is also a primary idea in Javanese cosmology. In Sapta Darma, since *cahaya* (light) and *rasa* (intuition, senses, feelings) were actually integrated to create *wadag* (vessel, body) then the ideal constitution of human beings is represented by the domination of *rasa* over *pikir* (thoughts). Yet, what commonly occurs is that human places primacy to *wadag* over *rasa* and *cahaya*, and therefore allow *pikir* to dominate *rasa*. Sapta Darma, then, is a set of teachings and moral and ethical principles that train humans to reverse the domination of *pikir* over *rasa* through physical and spiritual practices.⁶²

59 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 123.

60 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 123.

61 “*Nang, ketenangan* (lit. tranquility), *ning, bening* (lit. clarity), *nung, demunung* (peak of consciousness), *gung, manunggal* (lit. unification/communion with God),” (Interview with Andi and his father, May 23rd, 2024).

62 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 126.

Writing about the concept of *rasa* in Javanese cosmology, Paul Stange writes:

The special potency of the concept of *rasa* stems in part from the spectrum of meanings attached to it. Because *rasa* links the physical sense of taste and touch to emotions, the refined feeling of the heart, and the deepest mystical apprehension of the ultimate, it provides a continuum which links surface meanings to which anyone can relate to inner levels of experience which normally [...] appear discontinuous.⁶³

Accordingly, even when the relationship between *rasa*, *cahaya*, *pikir*, and *wadag* are hierarchical in the teachings of Sapta Darma, they still form a continuous connection in which the spiritual is—partly—located in, constituted by, and activated through the physical, and likewise, the intuitive power of the physical/spiritual is formed through the control of *wadag* and *pikir* by *rasa* and *cahaya*. Therefore, Sapta Darma's teaching on *ening*, with quotidian examples of looking for one's misplaced matches is not actually farfetched because the mastery of *rasa* would allow one to both access ultimate knowledge (Javanese, *Kewaskitaan*) gained from unification/communion with God, and to find one's lost matches if needed. In other words, knowledge is in physical and spiritual domain and, thus, embodied and abstract, felt and thought.

A major part of Sapta Darma's teachings in which the amalgamation between the physical and spiritual manifests clearly is the concept of *Sabda Usada* (lit. healing words). *Sabda Usada* is a social-spiritual practice in Sapta Darma in which their believers heal the sick through the treatment of the patient's *tali rasa* (rope of inner/intuitive feelings that are located in twenty different locations in the body), and the efficacy of the believers' words through an utterance of the word *waras* (lit. healed, healthy).⁶⁴ Not only that *Sabda Usada* uses a spiritual power to make an impact in the physical world by healing the sick, but it also becomes one of the most common ways of people from other religions to convert into Sapta Darma; it brings demographic ramification into this nascent religious tradition.

Mrs. Siti, a middle-aged woman in Sukoreno, converted into Sapta Darma from Islam after her now deceased husband was healed through the treatment of a *Sabda Usada*. After years of medical treatments proven to be in vain, Mrs. Siti brought her husband to meet with a Sapta Darma believer

63 Paul Stange, "The Logic of Rasa in Java," *Indonesia* 38 (1984): 113–134, 127.

64 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 38, 143, 153.

who guided them to do *sujud*. After several encounters, her husband felt much better and eventually healed. Convinced by the spiritual power within the Sapta Darma tradition, her husband then converted and she followed suit. Mrs. Siti stated that she actually could not care less about converting into a new religion in her age. Yet, the healing that her husband gained from Sapta Darma treatment filled her with gratitude and inspired her to convert into the tradition. At a later time, Mrs. Siti also suffered from an illness that was also healed through *Sabda Usada*.⁶⁵

The affective-instrumental factor that influenced many to convert into Sapta Darma made it into a pluralistic tradition that is comprised of people who come from different religious backgrounds. Sapta Darma elders in Sukoreno informed us that many believers still have ties to their previous religions, even after they converted into Sapta Darma, which in turn influenced Sapta Darma's teachings on interreligious relations. Yet, more important than that, the fluidity of Sapta Darma's definition of "religion," and its teachings of social ethics engendered a conception of porous religious border in Sapta Darma's perspective on themselves, and their religious others.

Instead of defining *agama* (religion) in a way that outlines rigid religious differences between them and their religious others, Sapta Darma's understanding of *agama* shows the foundation of their epistemology that is rooted in their creation narrative and the relationship between human and the divine: "Sapta Darma is an agama [religion]. [Do you know] why? You must know that the definition of agama according to Sapta Darma's spiritual teachings is, a = asal mula manusia [the origin of human], ga = gama/kama, that is the sacred/white water, and ma = maya, that is the light from the Divine [the human soul]."⁶⁶

It can be argued that Sapta Darma does not concern themselves with drawing up borders between them and the other religions. The concept of *agama* that commonly stands for "religion" in Indonesia operates as a descriptor for the relationship between human and the divine in Sapta Darma which is partly in line with Maarif's conceptualization of "religion as a way of relating." Though a deeper analysis on Sapta Darma's fluid interreligious boundaries is beyond the scope of this paper, based on our fieldwork in Sukoreno we contend that Sapta Darma's emphasis on embodied experiences—especially through healing rituals—instead of theological discourses in the ways their followers convert into the religion

65 Interview with Mrs. Siti, October 15, 2023.

66 Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 138.

create a lower concern about establishing a rigid religious border. In addition, the pressure that comes from their marginal socio-political position demands the followers of Sapta Darma to be flexible enough in practicing their religion to the extent that often times they need to find their own religious meanings and values while practicing other religions' rituals. An experience from a follower of Sapta Darma, Andi, who needed to hide his identity as a Sapta Darma follower and practiced Muslim prayers throughout his school years is an example of the theological flexibility that Sapta Darma followers develop amidst the marginalization of their religion in Sukoreno.

The debacle over whether Sapta Darma is an “agama”—in its formal sense—significantly shaped the ways Muslim leaders in Sukoreno engage with its believers, and the ways in which they perceived Islam. Our interviews with two Muslim leaders in Sukoreno show that they take Sapta Darma's conception of porous interreligious boundary, and the absence of rigid doctrines within the tradition as proofs that Sapta Darma is not an *agama* and thus does not deserve an acknowledgment from the state with all the rights and protection that come with it.

One primary lens from which Muslim leaders in Sukoreno judge Sapta Darma's lack of qualifications to be an “agama” is funerary rites. For these leaders, the absence of prescribed funeral methods and rituals in Sapta Darma as practiced in Sukoreno indicates the absence of specific laws in the tradition that, in turn, defines a religion. Ustadz Muhammad, a Sukoreno Muslim leader stated: “My neighbor was a Sapta Darma believer, but when they died, the funeral followed Hindu rites because Sapta Darma does not have specific regulations concerning funerary rites. This is why Sapta Darma is an “aliran” (sect) and not an “agama” (religion) because if it is, then it should have a “syariat” on how to do a funeral.”⁶⁷

In the same vein, Mrs. Sutini, a convener of a local female Islamic activity group and a community leader, said:

I often think [about the fact] that Sukoreno is known nation-wide as a Pancasila village whose people live in harmony. I think all is good and well for me. I like harmony. But do you know that [interreligious] harmony in Sukoreno is possible because the people here are lacking in their religious knowledge. That is why they accept [any] religions; [when someone] invited them into Christianity, [they would say] yes, [when someone] invited them into

67 Interview with Ustadz Muhammad, April 20, 2024.

Hinduism, [they would say] yes, [when someone] invited them into Sapta Darma, [they would say] yes. For those who invited these people into new religions, please be accountable about it; guide them [in that new religion], do not leave them alone, so that they can practice the new religion well. The Hindus I think are still strong [in giving religious guidance to their followers]. The weakest one is Sapta Darma. I am wondering, what [religion] do they want to follow? Yesterday, there was a Sapta Darma follower who passed away, I was astonished [because] there were no Sapta Darma leaders who could help the family caring for the dead. Instead, a Muslim ustadz took care of the dead, [he] bathed [the body], wrapped [the body in shroud] and read tahlil for the dead.⁶⁸

In addition to the problem of Ustadz Muhammad's narrow definition of "agama" that is only boiled down to the presence of an equally narrow understanding of "syariat" (religious positive law), we also see an interreligious anxiety in Mrs. Sutini's response in which the ambiguity posed by the flexibility of Sapta Darma's interreligious border was perceived as a weakness of faith that threatens the integrity of other religions whose coherence were proven by the existence of traditional religious authority. For Mrs. Sutini, rather than an indication of communal harmony, the interreligious amity in Sukoreno is a sign of weakness, if not degradation of faith in which followers of religions other than Islam ultimately are not as steadfast in committing to their faiths as the Muslims do. This perspective is also applied to Muslims who converted into Sapta Darma and/or Muslims who live in a multi-religious family in Sukoreno. Thus, it can be said that for Mrs. Sutini real Muslims who have a strong understanding and knowledge of Islam will not be engaging in such heterodox practices.⁶⁹ It is this deeper layer of local perception on interreligious relations that we must observe in order to understand the complexity of interreligious contestation in Sukoreno Village.

C. Religious Groups' Self-Perceptions, Contestations and Resistance in Sukoreno Village: A Social Psychology Analysis

According to the data released by BPS-Statistics Indonesia in 2024, the religious demographic profile of Sukoreno Village is as follows: Islam, 8,742 people; Christianity (Protestants), 31 people; Christianity (Catholics), 127

68 Interview with Mrs. Sutini, November 1, 2023.

69 Interview with Mrs. Sutini, November 1, 2023.



Figure 2. The location of a Muslim *musalla* (left) and the Sapta Darma's *sanggar* (right) in Sukoreno. The distance between the two is only 100 meters away (Photo source: Field observation, Sukoreno, October 12, 2023).

people; Hinduism, 357 people; and Sapta Darma, 8 people. In addition, there are six mosques, twenty-two *musalla* (small mosques with the capacity of tens of worshippers), one Protestant church, one Catholic church, and two Hindu temples that serve as houses of worship in the village.⁷⁰ There is a gap between these formal numbers with the religious demographic data that our researchers gathered in the field which look as follows: Islam, 7,152 people; Hinduism, 124 people; Christianity (Catholics), 110 people; Sapta Darma, 70 people; Christianity (Protestants), 35 people; and Ilmu Sejati, 25 people.⁷¹ This gap is interesting because it clearly shows the profiles of religious minority groups that are either reduced in numbers and/or completely non-existent in the formal religious demographic data released by the state.

Furthermore, based on our field interviews with the elders of Sapta Darma, it is known that there are at least seventeen *sanggars* (Sapta Darma's houses of worship and community buildings) scattered throughout Jember Township with the largest of them all located in Sukoreno Village.⁷² What is more interesting is that the location of the largest Sapta Darma's *sanggar* in Sukoreno is just across a Muslim *musalla* in the village, with a distance between them less than 100 meters (Figure 2). Some would see this as a

70 Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Jember, Kecamatan Umbulsari dalam Angka (Umbulsari District in Figures), 2024 (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Jember, 2024), Katalog: 1102001.3509140.

71 This data is in line with the finding of other group of researchers that is presented in: Fitriatul Hasana, Ahmad Arif Widiyanto, and Joan Hesti Gita Purwasih, "Dinamika Konflik Identitas Penghayat Sapta Darma di Desa Sukoreno, Jember, Jawa Timur," *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 16, no. 1 (2021): 1–26.

72 Interview with Sapta Darma elders in Sukoreno, November 30th, 2024.

picture of interreligious harmony. However, the same picture also shows interreligious contestation between different religious identities in the village. As can be seen from statements made by Ustadz Muhammad and Mrs. Sutini before, suspicions towards the growth and existence of Sapta Darma abound in the village. This sense of threat would usually be expressed in term of “sesat” (lit. strayed, lost) that is associated with the teachings of Sapta Darma.⁷³

In a social psychology perspective, anxiety is known as a response that comes out in a threatening situation. In this setting, anxiety can take many forms including cognitive fear, avoidance, physiological responses, and subjective experiences that produce tensions.⁷⁴ At a systemic level, the social anxiety that religious majority groups direct toward the minority ones can be seen as a result of national policies that alienate religious minority groups by not acknowledging them as “agama.” Without this acknowledgement, religious minority groups with indigenous beliefs like Sapta Darma are often seen as “primitive beliefs” and thus targeted to be subjects of conversion by state-acknowledged religious groups.⁷⁵

Though progress has been reached—with the Indonesian Constitutional Court’s ruling that allows religious minority/indigenous groups to list their religious identities on national ID and family cards—religious minority/indigenous groups still feel disquiet about their existence in Indonesia. Followers of Sapta Darma specifically hope that they would be treated on an equal basis with other religious believers, and that Sapta Darma can be acknowledged not only as “kebudayaan” (culture), but also as “agama” (religion).⁷⁶

Thus, it can be argued that interreligious discriminations towards religious minority/indigenous groups cannot be wholly explained by interreligious prejudices, but rather are the results of various factors, including national political dynamics, and the vast development of

73 Interview with a Muslim head figure of the local Religious Harmony Forum (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama) in Sukoreno, October 13, 2023.

74 Tri Dayakisni and Hudaniah, *Psikologi Sosial* (University of Muhammadiyah Malang Press, 2015), 130–131.

75 The then President of Indonesia, General Soeharto stated in his speech during the 1967 Interreligious Conference (Musyawarah Antar Agama) in Jakarta: “The government would like to make it clear that we will not stand in the way of any religious propagations. It is a noble task for a religion to convert those who do not have any religion in Indonesia into one of the faithful religions (state-acknowledged religions),” (cited in: Afif Muhammad, *Agama dan Konflik Sosial: Studi Pengalaman Indonesia* [Penerbit Marja, 2013], 83).

76 Interview with Sapta Darma followers, October 2024.



Figure 3. The celebration of Tanggap Warsa Satu Suro 1958 Saka Jawa by Sapta Darma followers in Sukoreno (Photo source: Awan, 2024).

technology and globalization. In this case, it is important to recall that the slow growth of Sapta Darma in Sukoreno mostly depends on those who converted into the tradition due to their search for physical and spiritual well-being amidst the hectic, modern life. On the other hand, globalization also provides a wider space for interreligious dialogue in which religious minority/indigenous groups are relatively free to express their cultural and religious identities. For example, on July 20, 2024, despite all the interreligious tensions in Sukoreno, Sapta Darma followers celebrated the auspicious day of Satu Suro in Javanese calendar as their religious holiday. The celebration was well attended by Sukoreno's religious leaders (Figure 3).

The social identity of a group is mostly composed of the membership of that group. The formation of a social identity depends on the individual characters of the member of the group, as well as through social association within the group. In turn, social identity and group membership fulfill the individual need to belong. The need to be accepted by a group motivates us to seek and sustain a positive social relationship with others. On the other hand, positive relationships with others are a basic component of one's psychological well-being.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Tajfel and Turner argue that we tend to build and strengthen our identities through association with our groups (ingroup), and differentiation from other groups (outgroup).⁷⁸ It is within this ingroup-outgroup dynamics that we tend to see our own social associations in positive lights (ingroup favoritism) while discriminating against those who are outside of our associations (outgroup discrimination). This

77 Yanti B. Sugarda, *Multikulturalisme dan Toleransi: Sebuah catatan Konsepsional dari Perspektif Filsafat dan Psikologi* (Gramedia, 2022), 33–34.

78 Henri Tajfel and John Turner, *An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relation*, (Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47.

dynamic can be seen in Sukoreno's Muslim leaders' perceptions on Sapta Darma and its believers whom they thought of as "lacking in religious knowledge," as well as in the perspectives of some Sapta Darma believers who see some Muslims in Sukoreno as "fanatics" (as opposed to Sapta Darma believers who see themselves as "nationalists").

The Muslim *musalla* that is located face-to-face with the Sapta Darma's *sanggar* in Sukoreno symbolizes a contestation between religious majority and minority groups. During our observations, we noticed that the *musalla* placed their loudspeaker at a low point right under their door. The Muslim community in Sukoreno identifies this as a sign of an interreligious conviviality. However, the loud voice that comes out of the low-hanging speaker outside of the *musalla* presents a distraction for Sapta Darma followers whose *sanggar* is located right in front of the *musalla*.⁷⁹ In that situation, Sapta Darma followers were forced to conduct their worship amidst the disruptive loud voice that comes out of the *musalla*. The followers that we interviewed told us that they chose to stay quiet and adapt to the loud voice from the *musalla* to sustain "social harmony." Andi, a follower of Sapta Darma further explained the concept of "harmony" as the alignment of spiritual (inner) and social (outer) dimension of their lives which is nurtured through the ritual of 'sujud' (prostration). In the case of interreligious discrimination that they suffered in Sukoreno, Andi interpreted those challenges as a form of trial from God to strengthen their belief. Being aware of their marginal status in Sukoreno, the followers of Sapta Darma decided to see the unfair treatments that they received as a crucible for achieving balance between their spiritual and social lives.⁸⁰

In the field of social psychology, rationalization is known as a self- and group-defense mechanism in which individuals and groups construct "fake explanations" for counter-intuitive actions that they take.⁸¹ Through "rationalization," one presents a seemingly logical reasoning to explain their behaviors even though such reasoning does not reflect what really happened. Sapta Darma followers in Sukoreno see their discomforts that come from interreligious discrimination as a part of their social life. A follower of the tradition that we spoke to said that they felt disturbed by the loudspeaker yet also took the disturbance as a part of their daily life.⁸² The followers of Sapta

79 Field observation, Sanggar Candi Busana Sapta Darma, October 14, 2023.

80 Interview with Andi, June 16, 2026.

81 Siegfried Zepf, "About Rationalization and Intellectualization," *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 20, no. 3 (2011): 148–158.

82 Interview with a Sapta Darma follower, Sanggar Candi Busana Sapta Darma, October 14, 2023.

Darma opted to avoid social conflict by staying quiet and not complaining. They prefer to focus on the substance of their worship than invoking social unrest by complaining about the *musalla*'s loudspeaker.⁸³ Another follower of the tradition told us that as long as they can unify their focus with Allah Hyang Maha Kuasa in their *sujud* ritual, then the presence of any disturbance does not matter much.⁸⁴ Some followers of the tradition further referring to the practice of *sujud* amidst the noise of the loudspeaker as *topo ngrame* (lit. meditation in noisy/crowded space) which serve as another layer of test of the faith for them.

Moreover, the followers of Sapta Darma also opted to keep their pain to themselves to sustain their social relations with others in Sukoreno. In this context, they apply what is known in the field of social psychology as “impression management” to shape their social images according to the expectations of their local community.⁸⁵ In this process, individual actions are curated to fulfill social expectations and/or to produce certain impressions. Argyle argues that there are three primary motives for impression management, they are: one, to accrue social rewards; two, to sustain and/or increase self-esteem; and three, to support the formation of personal identity.⁸⁶ An interesting point to note in this matter is that the followers of Sapta Darma are not the only one who practice impression management in Sukoreno. In the occasions of *selamatan* (neighborhood gatherings over prayer and food to celebrate/commemorate important life events) both the followers of Sapta Darma, and members of “formal” religious groups in Sukoreno would invite each other. *Selamatan* has always been an interreligious affair in the village though it involves different motivations from each group. For the followers of Sapta Darma, inviting members of other religious traditions into their *selamatan* is a way to sustain some kind of “social harmony” in which they can be free from direct conflict with their neighbors. While for the members of “formal” religious groups inviting the followers of Sapta Darma to their *selamatan* is a nod to the title of “Desa Pancasila” (Pancasila Village) that Sukoreno is known for. Thus, a case can be made that both sides agree to maintain the appearance of nominal

83 Interview with a Sapta Darma follower, Sanggar Candi Busana Sapta Darma, October 14, 2023.

84 Interview with a Sapta Darma follower, Sukoreno Village, May 23, 2024.

85 Erving Goffman explains social interaction in terms of theatrical performance in which every person plays their roles in a specific social context. They act, “accordingly, verbally and/or otherwise.” Every action is curated to create a specific impression on others who interacted with them. Erving Goffman cited in: Dayakisni and Hudaniah, *Psikologi Sosial*, 69.

86 Dayakisni and Hudaniah, *Psikologi Sosial*, 69.



Figure 4. The *musalla*'s loudspeaker is located outside, right at the corner of its entryway (Photo source: Field observation in Sukoreno, 2024).

interreligious peace (the absence of direct violence) by way of impression management, though structural interreligious violence through which the followers of Sapta Darma have been marginalized remains unresolved.

In the contestation between religious majority and minority groups in Sukoreno, Sapta Darma followers are not only motivated to sustain their social statuses, but also to strengthen their identity as a group. Nevertheless, a similar process of impression management is also being done by religious majority groups in Sukoreno in their daily encounters with Sapta Darma followers. Contesting claims over what the *musalla* loudspeaker's means show that impression management is being deployed by both sides to present certain images in Sukoreno. As previously mentioned, the Muslim community claims that the *musalla*'s loudspeaker represents the interreligious harmony that Sukoreno is famous for. Yet, we can also see how disturbing the loudspeaker is for the followers of Sapta Darma whose house of worship is in front of the *musalla* (Figure 4). When we consider the hegemonic presence of the Muslim community in Sukoreno, we can certainly see that the *musalla*'s loudspeaker can also be interpreted as a form of interreligious provocation, as much as it is a symbol of interreligious harmony.

Interreligious contestation through the deployment of impression management can also be observed from a sticker that can commonly be found on the windows of the houses of Sapta Darma's followers. The sticker, written in Javanese script reads: "Sing wis waras ngalah" (Those who are wise retreat from the fight) (Figure 5). In our interviews, they explained that the sticker means, "those who own healthy minds (*waras*), including those



Figure 5. The sticker reads “Sing waras ngalah” in Javanese script on the window of the house of a follower of Sapta Darma (Photo source: Field observation, Sukoreno Village, 2024).

who are wise, would usually retreat from a fight.”⁸⁷ In this context, the sticker can be understood as a passive resistance against the interreligious discriminations that they experience, while presenting a form of spatial claim in which their homes become the place where they can freely express their pain and disappointment.⁸⁸

As with many believers of indigenous traditions in Indonesia, many Sapta Darma followers employ conversion strategy—where they converted into one of the state-acknowledged religions—to repel interreligious discrimination.⁸⁹ Some of our interviewees shared that they listed Islam as their religion on their national IDs and family cards, even though they practice the teachings of Sapta Darma in their lives. Some others even paid

87 Interviews with Sapta Darma followers, Sukoreno Village, October 15, 2023.

88 It is important to consider that the term “ngalah” (retreat from the fight) is also an aspect of Sapta Darma’s philosophy concerning the ways we ought to socially conduct ourselves. A Tembang Mijil (song containing advice for life) from the teachings of Sapta Darma mentioned the term: “Dedalane guna lawan sekti; Kudu andhap asor; Wani *ngalah* luhur wekasane; Tumungkula yen dipun dukani; Bapang den simpangi; Ana catur mungkur.” (To gain knowledge and gnostic power; [We] should be humble and polite; Retreat from the fight, [then] we will be noble in the future; Bow your head [when] someone warns [or] angry at you; Avoid all challenges; Do not pay attention to those who humiliate you). Sekretariat Tuntunan, *Sejarah Penerimaan*, 28.

89 For more analysis on such strategy see: Rosita Albert, Adina Schneeweis, and Iva Knobbe, “Strengthening, Hiding or Relinquishing Ethnic Identity in Response to Threat: Implications for Intercultural Relations,” *Intercultural Communication Studies* 14, no.1 (2005): 107–118, 107.



Figure 6. A *tahlilan* organized by a Sapta Darma family with mostly Muslim attendants (Photo source: Field observation, 2024).

people from the state-acknowledged religions to represent them in the government offices to process their national IDs and family cards due to the fear that they would not be given one when the officers know that they follow the teachings of Sapta Darma.⁹⁰

More than just hiding their religious identity when dealing with government bureaucracy, the followers of Sapta Darma also adapt to the culture of religious majority groups, especially in social and religious activities.⁹¹ In 2016, Sapta Darma community in Sukoreno applied for a building permit in which they said that they were going to build a “pura” (Hindu temple) instead of “sanggar” (Sapta Darma’s house of worship). The strategy was implemented so that the application would be approved. Unfortunately, a person outside of the community knew of the plan and reported their “lies” to the head of the village, who proceeded to cancel the application.⁹² In addition, the followers of Sapta Darma in Sukoreno are also known to actively participate in Muslim’s activities such as *tahlilan* (seven days of communal Muslim prayers after someone passed away) and *pengajian* (communal forums to learn about and recite from the Qur’an) to the extent that they adopt those activities as their own (Figure 6). However, many Muslim leaders in Sukoreno—as represented by previously mentioned views

90 Interview with Sapta Darma followers, Sukoreno Village, December 29, 2023.

91 Interview with Sapta Darma followers, Sukoreno Village, October 14, 2024.

92 The *sanggar* was then proceeded to be built in 2020 on land privately owned by a Sapta Darma follower. As previously mentioned, the Muslim community then followed suit by building a *musalla* not far from the sanggar: Interview with a Sapta Darma follower, Sukoreno Village, October 14, 2023.

of Ustadz Muhammad and Mrs. Sutini—perceive them as the proof of a weak faith of Sapta Darma’s followers.

For all the pejorative perceptions that the religious majority groups, especially Muslims have about Sapta Darma followers, the followers of Sapta Darma also form their own perceptions on the religious majority groups.⁹³ Considering the designation of Sukoreno as a Pancasila village, many Sapta Darma followers perceive themselves as “nationalists” while labelling the religious majority groups who discriminate against them as a bunch of “fanatics.” The “nationalists” label that they attached to themselves refer to the display of respect for each other religious traditions that shape interreligious harmony in Sukoreno, while fanaticism is defined as an exclusivist approach to religious pluralism expressed through the surveillance and prohibition of non-Islamic religious events, and obstacles to build the house of worship for religious traditions that are not acknowledged by the state.⁹⁴

The contestation, compromise, adaptation, strategy of concealment, and discrimination that characterize interreligious relations in Sukoreno show that interreligious harmony cannot be achieved simply by sticking a label on a religiously diverse village. Unless there are serious efforts to address the interreligious injustices that religious minority groups have been subjected to, the status of Pancasila Village for Sukoreno only reflects two things, viz., (1) an imposition of interreligious peace that comes from the state, and (2) a superficial understanding of the interreligious dynamics in Sukoreno that betrays the discrimination and structural violence suffered by its religious minority groups. In the last section of this paper, we will analyze the religious majority-minority relations in Sukoreno that gives us an alternative understanding of what “religious co-production” means within the context of religious diversity characterized by hierarchical interreligious relations.

93 Among these pejorative perceptions are: dirty people, pig eater, strayed people, people with weak faith, stupid and ignorant, backward, and sun worshippers.

94 Such perception is also held by some members of the Hindu community in Sukoreno whose Nyepi festival was previously cancelled (but then following a negotiation was conducted under a heavy surveillance) due to the fact that it took place during the month of Ramadan in 2024. Interview with Sapta Darma followers, 2024.

Political Co-Production of “Religion” and Power Hierarchy in an Interreligious Context

While religious co-production is defined as the formation, reformation, and transformation of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in relation to each other, the interreligious context in Sukoreno Village allows us to see “co-produced religions” as a social and political process of co-production of “religion” as a category, i.e., the relationship between Sapta Darma and state-acknowledged religions in Sukoreno is one in which “religion” (*agama*) as a status is being contested through multiple methods of religionization.⁹⁵

In the work of Marianne Moyaert and Markus Dreßler, religionization is explained as a process of defining “religion” through two kinds of differentiation. The first differentiation occurs in the context of social relations in which interpersonal/intergroup “selfing” and “othering” consolidate the exclusivity of religious borders.⁹⁶ While the second differentiation takes place at a conceptual level in which religionization is accompanied by secularization that in turn strengthen the rigidity of religious borders.⁹⁷ Yet, as Picard writes, religionization in a postcolonial society is also a result of colonial encounter in which the modern/colonial category of religion is imposed on colonized subjects, who then responded by religionizing their faith and spirituality to participate in a colonial discourse.⁹⁸ What is important to consider at this point is that as a form of coloniality of power and being, religionization is not a one-off process that only happened during the colonial encounter, but rather a continuous one that morphs into new forms of unequal relations in postcolonial contexts.⁹⁹ An analysis of religionization in a postcolonial context then, as Picard argues, should focus on “what is identified and legitimized as ‘religion’, by whom, for what purpose, in which circumstances and under which political conditions.”¹⁰⁰

95 Heyden and Nirenberg, “When Theology and History Think Together,” 7.

96 Moyaert, *Christian Imaginations*, 1.

97 Dreßler, “Modes of Religionization,” 3.

98 Michel Picard, “Introduction: ‘Agama’, ‘Adat’, and Pancasila,” in *The Politics of Religion in Indonesia: Syncretism, Orthodoxy, and Religious Contention in Java and Bali*, eds. Michel Picard and Rémy Madinier (Routledge, 2011), 2.

99 Anibal Quijano and Michael Ennis, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580; Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

100 Picard, “Introduction,” 3.

This is where an expansion of the concept of religious co-production is needed. Instead of looking at how members of different religions shared the continuous process of construction and reconstruction of their traditions, within a postcolonial context such as Indonesia what ought to be interrogated first and foremost is how the category of “religion” is created and used to exclude the other. Hence, this paper provides an analysis on social and political aspects of co-production of “religion,” that is how the concept of “religion”—in its Indonesian equivalent of “agama”—is constructed and reconstructed through a network of interreligious and religion-and-state relations.

Looking at the case of co-production of “religion” in Sukoreno, we propose three different meanings of the concept that are inseparable from each other: the institutional, the interreligious, and the paradigmatic. “Institutional” here refers to the process of co-production of “religion” in which the imposition of “religion” as a category by the state is also sustained through gatekeeping practices done by those whose religions are acknowledged as such by the state. On the other hand, the “interreligious” meaning of co-production of “religion” concerns the ways members of state-acknowledged religions, through daily interpersonal relations and neighborhood socialization, integrate non-state acknowledged religious minority groups into the fold of world religion paradigm by normativizing hegemonic religious practices. Finally, the “paradigmatic” meaning of co-production of “religion” indicates the religionization process of non-state acknowledged traditions through adoption of the term and/or, “rationalization—the formulation of a canonical corpus, its institutionalization and its effective socialization [...]—as well as by secularization—desacralization of the immanent concrete in favor of an abstract and transcendent divine [...]—along with scripturalization and standardized practices.”¹⁰¹

As previously discussed in the introduction and the first section of this paper, the imposition of the category of “agama” (religion) by the state is not only rooted in myopic colonial paradigm, but also historically served as a form of political concession to Islamic factions during the birth of the republic. As a political category, “agama” (religion) as a status in Indonesia comes with economic and political advantages that significantly defined what it means to be an Indonesian citizen. On the contrary, the absence of “agama” (religion) as a status—and thus acknowledgment of the state—for many minorities religious groups indicate the lack of rights and protection

101 Picard, “Introduction,” 2.

for their believers. Such benefits create incentives for those who belong to state-acknowledged religions to gatekeep their status, and along with the state's discriminatory policies, filter those who deserve the status from those who do not.

Our conversations with Andi, a young Sapta Darma community leader, revealed his disappointment with the fact that even with the Constitutional Court's recent decision to allow *aliran kepercayaan* to be listed on national IDs and family cards, the status of "agama" is still cannot be applied to Sapta Darma. Andi commented, "the new policy that allows us to list *aliran kepercayaan* on our ID and family cards is also the result of a political process. And we do not have any other options except to accept it. Of course, we still want to be different too, like 'agama: Islam', [or] 'agama: Hindu'. But we also know that who has the power, that is the one who wins."¹⁰² For Andi, the listing of "aliran kepercayaan" as a general category in lieu of the specific name of the tradition (Sapta Darma, or any other *aliran kepercayaan* in Indonesia) serves as a reminder that his religion will never be acknowledged as "agama" and accorded the specification that *agama* has in Indonesia. Andi is fully aware that as a product of political process, the designation of 'agama' will only be accorded to powerful groups, and not to his religious tradition due to their minority status. Andi further commented, "[If aliran kepercayaan can be classified as agama] I would be very happy because [my tradition] would finally be equal with others. *Our true identity is believers of a religion [Sapta Darma]*. As it is now, it [our religious identity] is being generalized [as aliran kepercayaan]. Meanwhile, for example, Sapta Darma is different from Ilmu Sejati [another aliran kepercayaan], but our government thinks that we are just the same."¹⁰³

On the other hand, many Muslim community leaders in Sukoreno classified Sapta Darma as *aliran kepercayaan* by invoking orthodoxy in which they highlight the fact that Sapta Darma does not have any specific body of religious law, nor an exclusivist religious identity. The term "sesat" (strayed, lost) is commonly used to characterize Sapta Darma, and to deny them the designation of "agama." In this context, institutional co-production of "religion" transpires through the imposition of state's understanding of *agama* that is enforced by law and thus legally differentiates between *agama* and non-*agama*. These legalistic differences then enforced through daily interreligious encounters in which members of the state-acknowledged religions gatekeep the concept of "agama" by identifying lacks exclusivist

102 Interview with Andi, Sukoreno Village, October 14, 2023.

103 Italics are ours: Ibid.

aspects of religionization in Sapta Darma that then served as proofs to classify Sapta Darma as “aliran kepercayaan” and not as an “agama.”

Yet, institutional co-production of religion—or should we say, *agama*—is not the only process that takes place in Sukoreno. The hegemonic presence of Islam and Muslims in the village means that some Islamic practices become parts of the social life in which non-Muslims, including the followers of Sapta Darma, were expected to attend. The ubiquity of *tahlil* and other forms of Muslim-based *selametans* made Islamic culture and practices into inseparable dimensions of the village’s social life, and it is in this setting that Muslim community leaders in Sukoreno seize the opportunity to integrate Sapta Darma’s followers into their Islamic life.¹⁰⁴ Responding to our question about what her take on the fact that Sapta Darma’s followers participate in *tahlil* and *selametan*, Mrs. Sutini said, “we Muslims are happy when they participate in our activities because it is a part of our syiar [propagation]. When they participate in our activities, they might realize how good the Muslim community is, and we are happy that they have the opportunity to witness it.”¹⁰⁵

Interreligious co-production of religion in Sukoreno refers to such process of integrating Sapta Darma’s followers into the fold of a state-acknowledged religion through daily socialization process. Though Muslims are certainly at the forefront of this practice, followers of other state-acknowledged religions have also been trying to pull Sapta Darma’s followers into their traditions. The formal position of the Indonesian government that allows for—and supports—religious propagation towards those who are seen as having no religion provides a legal protection for this practice. Mrs. Sutini openly shared with us that often time she would persuade her Sapta Darma neighbors to come to her Qur’an study sessions and demand they wear hijabs to attend it.¹⁰⁶ In a similar note, Ustadz Muhammad came up with a story in which a dead Sapta Darma follower whose corpse he cared for in an Islamic funerary ritual came into his dream and others and told him that he had converted into Islam in the hereafter.¹⁰⁷

104 Muslim-based *selametans* comes from the word, *selamet*, which means safe and sound in Javanese. *Selametan* is a form of Islamic communal gathering that is conducted for various reasons (death, wedding, birth, circumcision, etc.) in which attendants read from the Qur’an and pray together for the benefit of the host. Communal meals would then be served at the end of the prayer and were believed to bring blessings for all of the attendants.

105 Interview with Mrs. Sutini, Sukoreno Village, November 1, 2023.

106 Interview with Mrs. Sutini, Sukoreno Village, November 1, 2023.

107 Interview with Ustadz Muhammad, April 20, 2024.

Interreligious co-production of “agama” reflects a national anxiety about the place of *aliran kepercayaan* within the Indonesian mosaic of religious diversity. On one hand, the state and members of state-acknowledged religions gatekeep the definition of “agama” in the ways that make it impossible for *aliran kepercayaan* to gain legal status. On the other, the fact that *aliran kepercayaan* is acknowledged as belief systems in Indonesia beyond the boundary of “agama” produce a perceived sense of threat to the state-acknowledged religions that the followers of *aliran kepercayaan* were seen as legitimate targets for various missionary approaches and activities. In this case, religionization works through the promise of social recognition¹⁰⁸ in which members of *aliran kepercayaan* were pushed, demanded, and conditioned to embrace state-acknowledged religions and—that way—come into the fold of social logic of *agama*.

Nevertheless, the followers of Sapta Darma are not passive subjects in this network of interreligious dynamics. Mostly, as parts of their adaptation strategy and coping mechanism in Sukoreno, the followers of Sapta Darma socialized themselves in the culture and practices of state-acknowledged religions. Andi, as parts of his survival strategy during his school years, practiced Islamic rituals and claimed a Muslim identity in public settings. He had been getting used to do an Islamic *solat* (Muslim’s daily five times prayer) that he said he actually could get to the state of “*ening*” (spiritual tranquility in Sapta Darma’s teaching that is reached through one’s spiritual unification with Godi) by doing a Muslim prayer. Furthermore, to complete his public identity as a Muslim Andi was also active as a leader of mosque youth organization in his locale during his teenage years.¹⁰⁹ Another Sapta Darma follower in Sukoreno, Mrs. Sari shared with us that she happily wears hijab when she goes to the village’s social functions because hijab made her look prettier and boosted her confidence.¹¹⁰ Mrs. Sari’s testimony about hijab lined up well with Mrs. Sutini’s perspective on the ubiquitousness of hijab in Sukoreno in which she said that hijab is no longer an exclusively Muslim

108 “Social recognition refers to the social-psychological, ethical, and political practices through which actors evaluate, acknowledge, and otherwise engage their fellows in society social recognition refers to the more general and less state-focused processes through which actors perceive, categorize, and evaluate their social fellows within a particular sociopolitical community and then draw on those processes of recognition to understand and enact their own identities, rights, and obligations in relation to those around them,” (Robert W. Hefner, “The Politics and Ethics of Social Recognition and Citizenship in a Muslim-Majority Democracy,” in *Indonesian Pluralities: Islam, Citizenship, and Democracy*, eds. Robert W. Hefner and Zainal Abidin Bagir [University of Notre Dame Press, 2021], 2–3).

109 Interview with Andi, Sukoreno Village, October 15, 2023.

110 Interview with Mrs. Sari, Sukoreno Village, October 15, 2023.

women's identity since most of the women in Sukoreno—regardless of their religious affiliation—would wear one outside of their houses and/or when they attend any social functions.¹¹¹

In a setting where the perspective on religion is saturated with a legalistic understanding of what *agama* supposed to look like, the adoption of ubiquitous Islamic culture and practices by the followers of Sapta Darma can be seen as a paradigmatic co-production of *agama*. In this case, religionization takes place through the followers' self-socialization into the culture and practices of the state-acknowledged religions as they attempt to conform to their social surroundings. Paradigmatic co-production of religion complements interreligious co-production in explaining the dynamics of co-production of religion that occur amidst the unequal relations between religious majority and minority groups in the Indonesian context.

Institutional, interreligious, and paradigmatic co-productions of religion call our attention to two aspects. First, that the process of religious co-production does not always happen on an equal basis between two or more religious traditions. In this case, religious minority groups are expected to adopt and adapt more than the majority groups do. And second, that in addition to the intra-religious processes of construction and reconstruction, religious co-production can also be understood as the interreligious fashioning and re-fashioning of what "religion" is. In postcolonial Indonesia, this process is characterized by the contestation of the definition of "agama" that serves as a means of oppression for religious minority groups, while also becoming a paradigm for them to gain the right to freely practice their faiths as "religious believers."

Conclusion

By expanding the definition of religious co-production into the conceptual and political production of "religion" in an interreligious context, we argue that interreligious relations can also be deployed to discriminate against religious others. In Sukoreno Village, "agama" as a state-acknowledged status that comes with its own political and material advantages is used as a shared foundation to alienate religious minority groups whose presence is not acknowledged by the state.

The paper begins with a socio-historical analysis of the ongoing conceptualization of "agama" in Indonesia, and the ways in which *aliran*

111 Interview with Mrs. Sutini, Sukoreno Village, November 1, 2023.

kepercayaan negotiates their presence within the hegemonic imposition of a specific definition of religion by the state. The paper then presents the case of Sukoreno that is known as a Pancasila Village and praised nationwide for its seemingly peaceful interreligious life. Through 2023–2024 fieldwork research in Sukoreno, we found that the impression of interreligious peace in Sukoreno betrays a more complex picture of interreligious contestation in which the followers of Sapta Darma were discriminated against due to their status as a non-state acknowledged religious entity. Through a close reading of ethnographic data from the field, we propose three different meanings of co-production of religion to explain the intricacy of interreligious cooperation and contestation in Sukoreno.

Institutional co-production of religion highlights the ties between the state and the religious majority groups in defining, sustaining, and gatekeeping the definition of “agama” as an Indonesian equivalent of religion. Interreligious co-production of religion refers to the ways that the members of state-acknowledged religions try to integrate those who fall outside of the logic of “agama” into it by persuading and socializing them in the culture and practices of the state-acknowledged religions, especially Islam. Lastly, paradigmatic co-production of religion indicates the efforts taken by religious minority groups to religionize themselves by adopting the culture and practices of state-acknowledged religions.

The fluidity of interreligious relations, and the constructed quality of “religion” as a category are two important aspects of this paper that invite us to pay attention to the structure of power in any interreligious context. In addition to looking at how religious traditions have shaped each other throughout history, we contend that it is also equally important to see how the very concept of “religion” has been constructed and reconstructed interreligiously. Most importantly, we assert that the interreligious conceptualization of “religion” in postcolonial contexts like Indonesia are often used to alienate and discriminate the religiously minoritized others whose struggle in gaining rights to practice their tradition is critically important in achieving a genuine interreligious peace.

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