

## REDEFINING “SACRED” THROUGH THE INDIGENOUS RELIGION PARADIGM: Case Study of Sunda Wiwitan Community in Kuningan

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**Abstract:** The definition of sacred in the World Religions paradigm is limited to the things that have to do with the symbolization of spirituality. Oftentimes, the sacred value which is not in accordance with the characteristics required by the World Religions paradigm is considered as something non-religious. In terms of preserving nature, based on the findings, many scholars have proven that indigenous people have their own value in interpreting the sacred. By attaching the sacred word to the realm where they live, it is not merely a matter of ownership or a place where they practice religious rituals. The Sunda Wiwitan community in Kuningan is one model that still carries out the tradition of ancestral heritage which they apply to the ecological aspect by the forest zoning and having a special place, namely Leuweung Leutik, a sacred little forest which for them is not only a place to perform rituals, but also as a means of preserving nature. Through the paradigm of Indigenous Religions, in which indigenous people have a strong connection with nature and recognize the subjectivity of nature as coequal living things, they are able to treat nature as they benefit from nature. This paper examines how the paradigm of Indigenous Religion is able to give new meaning to what is the sacred, which in this regard they apply to customary forest management. With a qualitative research approach using mixed data collections: secondary data and in-depth interviews, this paper explains new ideas obtained from the local knowledge of the Sunda Wiwitan community in Kuningan in order to protect their sacred place.

**Keywords:** Sacred Place; Sunda Wiwitan; Indigenous Religion Paradigm; Costumary Forest.

**Article history:** Received: 21 October 2021; Revised: 25 November 2021; Accepted: 09 January 2022; Available online: 01 March 2022

### How to cite this article:

Hakim, Fany Nur Rahmadiana. “Redefining ‘Sacred’ through the

Indigenous Religion Paradigm: Case Study of Sunda Wiwitan Community in Kuningan". *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-agama* 12, no. 1 (2022): 41–62. <https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v12i1.1859>

## Introduction

For the endeavor of protecting nature, many have shown that indigenous communities have been the front-liners because of their distinguished views on nature which have persisted long before modernity and advanced technology were invented. Amid the modern—or so-called postmodern era, where the world becomes dependent on all modern and global aspects, including religion and science. People of the world whose number increases continue to exploit natural resources because they must meet their needs in order to survive. They continue to clear land to build a place to live. For this reason, most of the natural forest areas were opened for residential land. As Kovel mentions that deforestation in Indonesia is mostly caused by settlements, not by commercial interests.<sup>1</sup> However, he did not deny that many corporations commit deforestation by clearing land to build oil palm plantations, mining, or their company's factory area.

However, with the emergence of many criticisms against the World Religions paradigm<sup>2</sup>, some scholars have begun to offer alternatives to view problems from an indigenous perspective. In Indonesia's context, we could see the phenomenon of how indigenous communities manage their natural environment. For instance, Maarif researched this issue. In his article, he gave an example of how indigenous people carry out religious practices with their local traditions, managing something absent oftentimes from the attention of the World Religions paradigm: nature.<sup>3</sup> Indigenous peoples such as Ammatoans, Kendeng, and Mollos have become benchmarks for the movement of indigenous peoples in the environmental movement in Indonesia.

In the global context, there are many scholars that researched how indigenous people protect their sacred land through their beliefs

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<sup>1</sup> K. H. von Kaufmann, "The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or The End of The World (Book Review)," *Future*, no. 36 (2004): 385–387.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Samsul Maarif, "Indigenous Religion Paradigm: Re-Interpreting Religious Practices of Indigenous People," *Studies in Philosophy* 44 (2019): 103–121.

and traditions. Nonetheless, the idea of sacredness in view of indigenous people and most people that embrace World Religions are different. Keller examines the specific meaning of what is sacred for the indigenous people. She used the term "indigenous studies" as a particular concept to analyze the phenomenon of the sacred place of indigenous people in America. She studied the Apsáalooke people, mostly by interviewing the elder and compared his view with the Anglo-Christian's view as the predominant religion there.<sup>4</sup> The study shows that there are three features of the definition of a sacred place—as they call sacred space—that are formed by the indigenous people of Apsáalooke: first, for them, sacred space is ritual space, "a location for formalized, repeatable symbolic performances"; second, sacred space "is significant space, a site, orientation, or set of relations subject to interpretation because it focuses crucial questions about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world"; and third, sacred space is "inevitably contested space".<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, many indigenous people are removed from their sacred places because their rituals or religious practices in the sacred place are understood as non-sacred by most people with their modern view.

Another research conducted is about the exclusion of indigenous communities from their own land by the authorities who create unfriendly laws for the indigenous people. Bakht and Collins examine the issue of discrimination against the indigenous people in Canada who tried to defend their sacred sites. They argue that the state has a responsibility to protect the freedom of religion by staying neutral and impartial that ensures religious minorities—including indigenous people—are not discriminated against and treated with respect and dignity, most importantly by recognizing their belief and tradition as part of religious practices.<sup>6</sup> However, the truth is always bitter beyond expectations. According to them, historically speaking, Canada has a long record in violating the indigenous people rights by way of outlawing religious ceremonies, the destruction of sacred sites, and the operation of residential schools, and other harmful treatments

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<sup>4</sup> Mary L. Keller, "Indigenous Studies and "the Sacred"," *American Indian Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2014): 82–109.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Natasha Bakht and Lynda Collins, "The Earth Is Our Mother": Freedom of Religion and the Preservation of Indigenous Sacred Sites in Canada," *McGill Law Journal/Revue de droit de McGill* 62, no. 3 (2017): 777–812. (<https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1042774ar>).

from the authorities that can be considered as severely tragic persecution in the name of European religions,<sup>7</sup> or of World Religions paradigm as the instrument that the state used to exclude indigenous beliefs. Therefore, it is easy for the state to use this reason and reinforced by the law-making that results in discriminative regulations.

Not only the state or those in power but scholars also have roles in excluding the indigenous people and their beliefs by conducting research and writing articles that have been much biased with the paradigm of World Religions. For instance, in the article *Empty space or sacred place? Place and belief in social work training*, Indigenous conception of sacred places interfere with the program of social work because the indigenous people defend what they call “empty space”. They argue that the sacred place is man-made and suggest that land is empty until people harden, contain, and control it; for them, the land is provided as a resource to people for them to fulfill their sacred and temporal needs; and most importantly, people made a place become sacred through sanctification and belief systems to separate the profane from the sacred.<sup>8</sup> The way those authors identify what is sacred appears to be too rigid and does not take into account the ecological approach that presents in the paradigm of Indigenous Religion. Stanner affirm their argument since, in her research, she describes the Aboriginal belief that she observed in “creating” the notion of the sacredness of land which initially constructs distinctive myths and narrative about the creation, The Dreaming concept, and the present of ancestor spirit role who gave the particular tribes or clans rights to land.<sup>9</sup> This notion is seemingly ignored that the sacred place for indigenous people is not only about the struggle for ownership. Rather, indigenous people fight for their rights in the name of environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, conflicts can sometimes be in the form of unclear forest status. Forests in villages sometimes have different meanings for the government and the local communities. The status of a forest either as a community forest or customary forest differs in terms of its management. Communities who wish to claim the village forest as

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Greta Galloway, Pat Wilkinson, and Gavin Bissel, “Empty Space or Sacred Place? Place and Belief in Social Work Training,” *Journal of Practice Teaching & Learning* 8, no. 3 (2012): 28–47.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

the customary forest need to consider things such as: having clear boundaries, being recognized by the district government, and the community not holding the management rights of village forest.<sup>10</sup> Forest management is regulated to provide benefits for both parties. The community forest and customary forest management scheme is a sustainable development strategy with multiple objectives that can benefit the community in fulfilling wellbeing and livelihoods, as well as preserving nature.<sup>11</sup>

Some scholars have argued that local communities, also known as customary or indigenous communities, have carried out proper forest management through their local wisdom and values. In an article by Fatem et. al., they interviewed several heads of customary tribes about the relationship between humans and their forests, they found that people have strong bonds with forests because they have used and protected the forests in a sustainable manner through local wisdom and traditions passed down from generation to generation.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the relationship between formal and informal authorities can benefit indigenous peoples through tenure and cultural systems with evidence of sacred forests and ritual sites as relatively preserved.<sup>13</sup>

After all, the aim of this research is not to counter the idea of a sacred place in the World Religions paradigm. This paper intends to identify how the indigenous communities of Sunda Wiwitan perceive nature as a sacred place or space, and also to examine the values of wisdom that they embrace as a way to maintain its sustainability. There will be a slight criticism for the paradigm of World Religions in defining sacred, in this regard, including how the modern value

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<sup>10</sup> Rodd Myers et al., "Claiming the Forest: Inclusions and Exclusions under Indonesia's 'New' Forest Policies on Customary Forests," *Land Use Policy*, no. 66 (2017): 205–213.

<sup>11</sup> Truly Santika et al., "Community Forest Management in Indonesia: Avoided Deforestation in the Context of Anthropogenic and Climate Complexities," *Global Environmental Change*, no. 46 (2017): 60–71.

<sup>12</sup> Sepus M. Fatem et al., "Camouflaging Economic Development Agendas with Forest Conservation Narratives: A Strategy of Lower Governments for Gaining Authority in the Recentralising Indonesia," *Land Use Policy*, no. 78 (2018): 699–710.

<sup>13</sup> Samsul Maarif, "Dimensions of Religious Practice The Ammatoans of Sulawesi, Indonesia" (Arizona State University, 2012); Micah R. Fisher et al., "Striving for PAR Excellence in Land Use Planning: Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration on Customary Forest Recognition in Bulukumba, South Sulawesi," *Land Use Policy*, no. 99 (2020): 1–7.

affects such definitions of sacred that distinguish what is sacred for the Indigenous Religion. Using the terms sacredness, sacred place, and the Indigenous Religion paradigm as the main concept that can analyze the cases. Choosing the locus in Cigugur, Kuningan as one of the centers of the Sunda Wiwitan indigenous community that still exists. The main questions, how the Sunda Wiwitan community views sacred places in relation to managing their forests, and how their local knowledge/wisdom can be their way of preserving ancestral rituals as well as the environment. The method of research is using a case study by conducting in-depth interviews with one representative person from Sunda Wiwitan Community.

The main finding in this paper is that the Sunda Wiwitan Community is practicing their local knowledge through forest management, which is protecting their sacred place for rituals and also preserving the environment. The main argument is that the Indigenous Religion paradigm has different interpretations of what is sacred in a way they are preserving their sacred place. They do not solely imply sacred as something that has to do with spirituality and supernatural things. More than that, they also have a deeper connection with nature, the place where they have a living, practicing rituals, and communicating as well. Yet before discussing further the analysis of the cases, the next section will introduce main concepts that are quite relevant to analyze the cases.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### **a. The Sacred in World Religions Paradigm**

To understand the proper meaning of what is sacred, we must track the chronological history of the development of the term religion since, in the earlier period, the definition of sacred can only be found in the religious aspect. Many scholars from the Victorian era to recently have perpetuated in the search on what is count as religion or religious aspect. According to Smith (1964: 8), the religious aspect is just like the other aspect that is existing in human life and has the characteristic of historical, evolving, and in the process. Previously, Tylor (1871), an anthropologist, hypothesized that the evolution of religion is initially by the concept of Animism as a philosophy of human life that continued to expand and extend to finally become a

larger philosophy of nature.<sup>14</sup> He explained that human soul theory recognized the souls of animals through its natural extension, then human souls also found the other souls from other objects such as plants and trees in the way of partial and obscene, and finally expanded a broader category that crosses the line which they found souls in inanimate objects.<sup>15</sup> Tylor (1871) also argued:

“For as the human body was held to leave and act by virtue of its own inhabiting spirit-soul, so the operation of the world seemed to be carried on by the influence of other spirits”.<sup>16</sup>

Scholars that are notable in addressing the sacred are Emile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade. Durkheim is known for defining religion as sacred and profane. He stated:

“Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden.”<sup>17</sup>

The word sacred is highlighted as the main feature in religion and religious practices. Sacred and profane in Durkheim (1961) theory is not about the good and evil, it's rather about the representation of the concern of an individual or group of people in religion in which sacred mainly represents unity as the group interest that is embodied in sacred symbols of the group, and the profane is the opposite which represents human concerns on worldly things.<sup>18</sup> The sacred can contain good or evil, and vice versa with the profane because the difference is only about the content of social settings in the sacred. However, there is no specific definition of what is sacred and what is profane in every religious aspect even though people are debating to define it on its essential nature, and Durkheim enclosed the issue by stating that society can freely categorize whatever they consider as sacred.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, Eliade, responding to the sacred and the profane, analyzed it using the term “axis mundi” which he defined as the Center of the World that is significant to divide reality into what is

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Banton, *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1966).

sacred and what is profane, and by this, he further explained as the sacred embodies all values.<sup>20</sup> Thus, to gain purposes and meaning in life shall pass through the *hierophany*.<sup>21</sup> What Eliade mean by *hierophany* is a “fixed point, a centre” that is an orientation of all purposes. In relation to the sacredness of nature, he added:

“For a religious man, nature is never only natural; it is always fraught with a religious value. This is easy to understand, for the cosmos is a divine creation, coming from the hands of the God, the world is impregnated with sacredness.”<sup>22</sup>

For him, it is not a certain place that can be called sacred, nor a certain religion that can categorize a place as sacred because a whole world is “impregnated with sacredness”. By understanding the term sacred genealogically, it can be deduced that there is still hegemony in it. In general, in the study of religion, the construction of what is meant as sacred is dominated by recognized World Religions.

## **b. Indigenous Religion Paradigm in Seeing Nature**

The conception of Indigenous Religion is not as rigid as the World Religions paradigm that requires certain conditions for a belief to be recognized as a religion. In his book *From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Religion*, James L. Cox described:

“The primary characteristic of Indigenous Religions refers to its being bound to a location; participants in the religion are native to a place, [...], they belong to it. The single and overriding belief shared amongst Indigenous Religions derives from a kinship-based world-view in which attention is directed towards ancestor spirits as the central figures in religious life and practice.”<sup>23</sup>

A place where the indigenous people live, oftentimes to be called as sacred. The sacredness of a place came from the tradition of their ancestor and has lasted since long ago. Nevertheless, for it has no written text of their tradition, sometimes it can make them face

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<sup>20</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> James L. Cox, *From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Religions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).



legal difficulties in defending their rights. So that they began to fight to preserve the ancestral land and tradition, as Cox said:

"It is also important to note, ... that indigenous peoples today have begun writing down their traditions, partly in order to assert authoritative land rights in court of law, in other cases to preserve an ancient tradition and in still other instances to communicate to a wider audience what traditional culture entails."<sup>24</sup>

For the specific issue of environmental management, Maarif (2019) conducted research with the Ammatoans, Kendeng, and Mollos as the subject of his research. In his paper, he argued:

"Indigenous Religion paradigm is an alternative to World Religion paradigm, or at least should be incorporated in examining religious practices of indigenous peoples."<sup>25</sup>

The factor why, for Maarif, the Indigenous Religion paradigm is suitable to be considered in preserving nature is because they have "inter-subjective understanding", which he elaborated:

"If compared in World Religion paradigm, cosmological domains in Indigenous Religion paradigm are dwelled by beings, consisting of human and non-human beings ("subject-subject"), and the kind of relationship between the self and otherselves is "inter-subjective"."<sup>26</sup>

The way indigenous people have that kind of relationship with nature, they treat their nature as they treat other human beings and other living creatures. The relationship is reciprocal, with no hierarchy and domination over what in the World Religions paradigm calls "object". However, the term "sacred" itself is dynamic in the indigenous communities since they can engage or disengage to the inter-subjective relation.

### **c. The Sacred Place**

A place is not sacred by itself. Even though people say a sacred place has existed for thousands of years and is part of a hereditary tradition that comes from ancestral heritage, it doesn't mean that the forest is sacred without being sacralized by humans. Michael Northcott in his book *Place, Ecology, and the Sacred* explained that:

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Maarif, "Indigenous Religion Paradigm: Re-Interpreting Religious Practices of Indigenous People."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

“As we have seen, places of dwelling become places, and sacred places, as they are shaped by human experiences and events in interaction with local and specific ecological qualities.”<sup>27</sup>

This proves that there is a historical background when indigenous people give meaning to the place they live on the basis of their relationship with nature. Humans live in nature and from nature they live, then nature is protected and preserved by humans.

Despite the indigenous people dwelling in a specific landscape, it doesn't mean they claim ownership of that place to exploit all the resources that are provided in that place. Instead, they intend to preserve it while making a living from it. As explained by Tuck-Po that conducted research in Malaysia with the Batek community:

“To look after the forest, then, is to keep the trees in their place and maintain forest cover. For in their very existence trees also symbolise the close relationship between the Batek and the entities of the other-world.”<sup>28</sup>

From those explanations above, we learn that indigenous people offer good lessons on the notion of the sacred which is not only for the sake of ritual and religious practice, but also to keep the balance of natural vegetation and biodiversity. The indigenous people offer an alternative understanding of managing the forest to that of the modern people.

Natural sites that are popularly considered to be sacred places by indigenous people include mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, caves, to entire islands. Their view of sacred places is not only a place for ancestral spirits or ritual places but also as a source of water and plants.<sup>29</sup> More clearly, Oviedo and Jeanrenaud (2007) explained the definition and characteristics of sacred places which they call sacred natural sites as follows:

“Sacred natural sites are natural areas of special spiritual significance to peoples and communities. They include natural areas recognized as sacred by indigenous and traditional peoples, as well as natural areas recognized by institutionalized religions or faiths as places for worship and remembrance.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Michael S. Northcott, *Place, Ecology and The Sacred* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Lye Tuck-Po, “The Meanings of Trees: Forest and Identity for the Batek of Pahang, Malaysia,” *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 6, no. 3 (2005): 249–261.

<sup>29</sup> Oviedo and Jeanrenaud in Joseph-Maria Mallarach and Thymio Papayannis, eds., *Protected Areas and Spirituality (Proceedings of the First Workshop of The Delos Initiative)* (Montserrat: Publicacions de l'Abadia, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

In this explanation, institutionalized religions or we can also call them World Religions only consider these places as natural areas without having any spiritual meaning in them. This is because World Religions have a different view from Indigenous Religions, where in the paradigm of Indigenous Religions, cosmologically nature is non-human subject and so humans have an inter-subjective relationship with nature, whereas, in the World Religions paradigm, humans consider nature as an object.<sup>31</sup> This inter-subjective relationship assumes that nature is alive and equal to humans, thus they must be treated equally in term of rights.

In line with this, Berkes (1999) stated that there are social and cultural factors that underlie the sacred dimensions of traditional ecological knowledge, such as symbolic meaning and the importance of social values and relationships.<sup>32</sup> Berkes emphasized that social relations also exist between humans and nature, according to him:

"Traditional worldviews of nature are diverse, but many share the belief in a sacred, personal relationship between humans and other living beings."<sup>33</sup>

By assuming that nature is a living thing, the indigenous people have the responsibility to protect it. They have their own values which they embrace as beliefs and traditions, these values are also referred to as indigenous or local knowledge, and some also call it local wisdom. These terms have similar meanings and are interchangeable.

## Methods

Sunda Wiwitan Cigugur was chosen because it is an indigenous community that deserves more attention in terms of managing its natural resources, which is based on their religious system that the nature is sacred. The Sunda Wiwitan people in Cigugur have interacted much with modernism and are more or less integrated with the existing predominant religions mainly Islam and Christianity, yet they still maintain traditions related to sacred places for their rituals and also as their water supply. Sunda Wiwitan community in Cigugur has the sacred place which they mean is the customary forest. The customary forest has a very important role for them, such as for keeping the balance of vegetation and biodiversity.

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<sup>31</sup> Maarif, "Indigenous Religion Paradigm: Re-Interpreting Religious Practices of Indigenous People."

<sup>32</sup> Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*, second. (Routledge, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

This paper begins by determining a general topic first, namely related to issues between religion and belief, then narrows it to a whole ancestral religious paradigm, and to a lesser extent it becomes a paradigm of the Indigenous Religion in interpreting "the sacred". This study uses a qualitative approach to explain the phenomena that exist in a society that we encounter every day, which in this case is the existence of the indigenous community. In this paper, a new idea that is tried to find is the redefinition of sacred based on the paradigm of Indigenous Religion which applies it to the management and preservation of forests both as a ritual place and natural resources that can be used as needed.

The approach used is by conducting a case study. Other than that, a case study looks at a single thing from several social phenomena and the case study researcher can seek only one idiographic understanding of the particular case being studied.<sup>34</sup> This paper focused on one indigenous community, Sunda Wiwitan Cigugur, as representing the Indigenous Religion paradigm because they have ecologically relevant traditions in preserving forests. Furthermore, in analyzing the problems under the study, the Indigenous Religion paradigm is used in defining what is sacred.

The explanation of the concept and material findings using the literature review method. As Neuman suggests, a literature review is based on the assumption that knowledge keeps accumulating and that people establish new knowledge and learn from what has been done by others. This paper uses several relevant references, especially in explaining the conceptual framework and literature as the source of the findings. The collections of literature are mainly book and articles in previous research journals which have a similar topic to the problem that this paper examines. The type of review that is implemented in this paper is context review, which connects certain studies with a broader knowledge framework so that it can develop new ideas.<sup>35</sup> Certain studies are studies that examine the sacred place and the definition of sacred in general, while broader knowledge frameworks are the Indigenous Religion paradigm as a major theory to analyze the case. By reviewing the literature contextually and

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<sup>34</sup> Earl R. Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, Twelfth. (Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Lawrence W. Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Boston: Pearson, 2006).

understanding it comprehensively, we can develop further steps to determine a sample of subjects and then collect data.

To collect the data, this paper uses a qualitative method through existing information in relevant literature and an in-depth interview as a part of triangulation of primary data. All information on research findings obtained from previous research—as the primary data—and through direct interviews with Dewi Kanti (the daughter of the current leader of Sunda Wiwitan in Cigugur Kuningan)—as the complementary data. Data will be analyzed based on the relevant concepts, including the Indigenous Religion paradigm as the main framework in this paper and the concept of "the sacred" as the main terminology.

## Findings

### a. AKUR (*Adat Karuhun Urang*)

At the foot of Mount Ciremai, Kuningan, West Java, to be precise in Cigugur sub-district, lives a group of Sunda Wiwitan indigenous people, and they have a community called AKUR. AKUR is short for *Adat Karuhun Urang* or roughly translated to Our Ancestors' Custom. The name of the ancestor that they glorify through their hereditary tradition is Pangeran Sadewa Madrais Alibasa, since Sunda Wiwitan in Cigugur is also known briefly as Madrais teachings or religion (see Indratno et al, 2020: 1 and Murniputri, 2018: 57). It is stated that the number of followers of the Sunda Wiwitan religion in Cigugur reaches approximately 3000 people and other places that have adherents to other Madrais teachings are found in the Baduy community in Lebak Regency, Banten.<sup>36</sup> However, quite different from the Baduy communities who are more isolated from the outside world and have not been fully integrated with the wider community, the AKUR community coexists with the community in general. As mentioned by the informant:

“The Sunda Wiwitan community in Cigugur, known as AKUR, still adheres to customary law in terms of life cycle activities, such as birth, marriage, and death using customary law that has been passed down from generation to generation.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Margaretha S. Murniputri, “Implementasi Perlindungan Hukum Terhadap Leuweung Leutik Sebagai Hutan Adat Sunda Wiwitan Cigugur Oleh Pemerintahan Daerah Kabupaten Kuningan” (Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Dewi Kanti, October 2, 2021

“The difference between Sunda Wiwitan in Cigugur and elsewhere is the principle of Tapa in Mandala and Tapa in Nagara. Tapa in Mandala means meditating in silence and not being open to the outside world, while Tapa in Nagara is more open to the times that make it more inclusive.”<sup>38</sup>

The most famous tradition of the AKUR community is the *Seren Taun* ceremony which is held at their cultural center, Paseban Tri Panca Tunggal. The *Seren Taun* ceremony has the aim of expressing gratitude to God for the abundance of the crops they get.<sup>39</sup> The *Seren Taun* ceremony is part of the implementation of the ecological wisdom of the Sunda Wiwitan community in Cigugur in the context of preserving the environment by taking into account the goals of sustainable development through the treatment of nature.<sup>40</sup> The value of ecological wisdom is embodied in their local wisdom known as the *Pikukuh Tilu* concept.

## **b. *Pikukuh Tilu* Concept**

The concept of *Pikukuh Tilu* can be roughly translated to The Three Guidance. This concept came from Ancient Sundanese teachings that have been around for a long time and now are still being maintained by the Sunda Wiwitan indigenous community in Cigugur. In simple terms, the meaning of the *Pikukuh Tilu* is a guideline that must be held by people who adhere to the Sunda Wiwitan religion in carrying out their lives. In more detail, the definition of *Pikukuh Tilu* is as follows:

“*Pikukuh Tilu* are three provisions which include the *cara ciri manusa* (high awareness of human nature), *cara ciri Bangsa* (nature of the nation), and *ngiblat ka Ratu Raja* (serves who are supposed to). Faith in the land as our character because we are an agrarian society.”<sup>41</sup>

The three in the *Pikukuh Tilu* may mean the trilogical relationship between God, man, and nature which philosophically the concept is used to maintain harmony in life both vertically and

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Dewi Kanti, October 2, 2021

<sup>39</sup> I. Indratno et al., “The Persistence of Settlement Space of AKUR Customary Community in Cigugur, West Java, Indonesia,” *IOP Conf. Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 447, no. 1 (2020): 012053.

<sup>40</sup> Mina Holilah, “Kearifan Ekologis Budaya Lokal Masyarakat Adat Cigugur Sebagai Sumber Belajar IPS,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Ilmu Sosial* 24, no. 2 (2015): 163–178.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Dewi Kanti, October 2, 2021.

horizontally.<sup>42</sup> Thus, as a human being, he must be able to behave well towards fellow humans. Then as part of the nation, who inhabits a land, they must be able to be responsible for managing the land properly. And as servants, they must be able to serve those in power. The implementation of environmental management based on the *Pikukuh Tilu*, especially the forest, the Sunda Wiwitan community divides their forest into three zones.

### c. Forest Zonation

Forests in Kuningan, precisely under the foot of Mount Ciremai, the Sunda Wiwitan community are divided into three zones, namely *Leuweung Larangan* or *Titipan* (customary or protected forest), *Leuweung Tutupan* or *Geledegan* (closed or conservation forest), and *Leuweung Garapan* or *Sampalan* (open or arable forest).<sup>43</sup> The zonation of the forest is based on the provisions of indigenous people values that take into account the characteristics of the forest and accordingly to its function.

*Leuweung Geledegan* (conservation forest) is an old forest which is usually characterized by its dense forest type with various types of trees that grow naturally.<sup>44</sup> The characteristics of this type of forest are lush trees. This area also has a spring that functioned as a water catchment area which accordingly this area is a water supply area for the community. *Leuweung Titipan* (customary forest) is a forest that cannot be disturbed or opened because it is considered sacred.<sup>45</sup> This forest passed down for indigenous people is a heritage from their ancestors which must be preserved and authentic. This forest cannot be exploited at all, except with permission from the customary elders. *Leuweung Sampalan* (open forest) is a forest that can be managed by

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<sup>42</sup> Murniputri, "Implementasi Perlindungan Hukum Terhadap Leuweung Leutik Sebagai Hutan Adat Sunda Wiwitan Cigugur Oleh Pemerintahan Daerah Kabupaten Kuningan."

<sup>43</sup> Ahmad Muttaqien, "Spiritualitas Agama Lokal: Studi Ajaran Sunda Wiwitan Aliran Madrais Di Cigugur Kuningan Jawa Barat," *Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama* 8, no. 1 (2013): 89–102; Holilah, "Kearifan Ekologis Budaya Lokal Masyarakat Adat Cigugur Sebagai Sumber Belajar IPS"; Murniputri, "Implementasi Perlindungan Hukum Terhadap Leuweung Leutik Sebagai Hutan Adat Sunda Wiwitan Cigugur Oleh Pemerintahan Daerah Kabupaten Kuningan."

<sup>44</sup> Holilah, "Kearifan Ekologis Budaya Lokal Masyarakat Adat Cigugur Sebagai Sumber Belajar IPS."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

indigenous peoples at a larger scope.<sup>46</sup> The forest can be cultivated and utilized as wide as possible yet still in customary signs. Residents may open plantation fields, gardens, herd livestock, and collect firewood. This forest is located near residential areas.

Based on the explanation above, we can understand that forest zoning has an impact on the lives of the Sunda Wiwitan indigenous people. They share the forest area through their local knowledge and at the same time they understand it ecologically. In addition, they also have certain rules in managing the forests around them to maintain environmental sustainability. These rules include: 1) prohibiting deforestation, 2) prohibiting the use of Rosmala trees, 3) prohibiting selling forest products, 4) mountain patrolling, and 5) prohibiting selling land to communities outside Cigugur.<sup>47</sup> These rules are still being enforced by the Sunda Wiwitan community in Cigugur because they still maintain the customary rules established by their ancestors. Apart from customary laws, they also still maintain the ritual traditions of their ancestors. Usually, ritual activities are carried out in a sacred forest which is named *Leuweung Leutik* (Little Forest).

#### ***d. Leuweung Leutik***

*Leuweung Leutik* is a forest with an area of approximately 7300 m<sup>2</sup> located around the cultural center of Paseban Tri Panca Tunggal at the foot of Mount Ciremai Kuningan.<sup>48</sup> By the ancestors of the Sunda Wiwitan community, *Leuweung Leutik* became a place for them to perform rituals based on ancient manuscripts containing the customary principles of the Sunda Wiwitan people in Cigugur. *Leuweung Leutik* is not only used for rituals, but also the needs of the community there, as the following explanation about *Leuweung Leutik*:

“Despite not having a very vast cosmological space, Prince Madrais established *Leuweung Leutik* as a customary forest. Landscapes that for the Sundanese people show the connection between nature and the physical world.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Murniputri, “Implementasi Perlindungan Hukum Terhadap Leuweung Leutik Sebagai Hutan Adat Sunda Wiwitan Cigugur Oleh Pemerintahan Daerah Kabupaten Kuningan.”

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Dewi Kanti, October 2, 2021



"*Leuweung Leutik* became the site point designated by Prince Madrais as a place that has connections with other sites so as to form the AKUR Sunda Wiwitan community."<sup>50</sup>

"The function of *Leuweung Leutik* is as a place of ritual. Besides having function in spiritual dimension, it also has function in ecological dimension. When *Leuweung Leutik* was damaged which made it no longer a water catchment area, because it is a site point for connected water storage routes, it also experienced a drought."<sup>51</sup>

In the ecological context, *Leuweung Leutik* is not only used as a water catchment area, but is also planted with several types of plants that can be used by the community. In ritual matters, there are such things as the ritual of *ngadapur* or *kurasan* and also the procession of removing pests.<sup>52</sup> The important role of *Leuweung Leutik* in terms of rituals proves its function as the core area of the area that both traditions and ecological conditions are to be preserved. interchangeable.

## Discussion

Based on the findings above, each of these can be analyzed through concepts that have been described in the conceptual framework. The first is about the AKUR community. Specifically, the Sunda Wiwitan indigenous people have the name *Adat Karubun Urang* (AKUR) which means that the community maintains the values and traditions of their ancestors and has lived in the same land for a long time. AKUR can be perceived to be an indigenous community because they have inhabited their land and have maintained their sustainability as well as their traditions. Not only that, but they also have a cultural heritage called *Paseban Tri Panca Tunggal*, which is a center of knowledge if outsiders want to learn about Sunda Wiwitan. The religion they adhere to is the teachings of Old Sundanese whose manuscript was compiled by their ancestor known as Pangeran Madrais so that Sunda Wiwitan in Cigugur is often known as Madrais

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Yunita D. Adisaputri and Indah Widiastuti, "Territorial Identification of Vernacular Settlement Cigugur through the Practice of Seren Taun Ritual in Kuningan, West Java," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, no. 184 (2015): 196–205.

teachings. The main teaching in Sunda Wiwitan is known as the *Pikukuh Tilu* concept.

This *Pikukuh Tilu* concept can be said to be the values of the Sunda Wiwitan as indigenous people. The wisdom of *Pikukuh Tilu* contains various values and ideas that are full of virtue and knowledge and are embraced by the Sunda Wiwitan indigenous people as local members.<sup>53</sup> These values are reflected in the rituals and traditions practiced by the Sunda Wiwitan community by maintaining a relationship with God (vertical) and with humans and nature (horizontal). Ecologically, in particular, they understand how to treat nature as the environment in which they live. As a local knowledge, the concept of *Pikukuh Tilu* teaches humans to adapt to nature.<sup>54</sup> More than that, in accordance with the meaning of local wisdom in ecological terms *Pikukuh Tilu* contains values of natural management based on the response of the Sunda Wiwitan people to the land where they live. They try to maintain a balance in the relationship between the three aspects of their life. Protecting their land and not destroying it provides benefits for both humans and nature, where humans can take advantage of the resources provided by nature, and nature is preserved. Besides that, *Pikukuh Tilu* also inspired the Sunda Wiwitan community to divide their forest into three zones based on the characteristics of each area.

Forest zoning into three areas, namely *Leuweung Larangan* (customary forest), *Leuweung Tutupan* (conservation forest), and *Leuweung Sampalan* (open forest), not only in accordance with the principle of balance embodied in the meaning of *Pikukuh Tilu* as local knowledge but also according to sustainable development values which in the global world also continues to be encouraged. Indigenous people's understanding of the characteristics of the forest makes its use orderly and well measured. They make full use of the open forest to be utilized as land for settlements, agriculture, and plantations so that their basic needs are met. As for closed forests, they make it a conservation area that seeks to maintain the balance of biodiversity by protecting the animals and natural vegetation that live in them. From the closed forest, they can use wood as building materials, but they are responsible for replanting. Meanwhile,

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<sup>53</sup> Jundiani, "Local Wisdom in the Environmental Protection and Management", *IOP Conf. Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 175 (2018): 012130.

<sup>54</sup> Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*.

customary forests are sacred forests that are untouched. Only customary leaders are able to access it. Apart from customary forests, there is also a sacred little forest known as *Leuweung Leutik*.

Both *Leuweung Larangan* and *Leuweung Leutik* both have the same meaning as sacred places for the Sunda Wiwitan people in Cigugur. This sacred meaning is in accordance with the concept of sacred places explained by Oviedo and Jeanrenaud (2007) that sacred places for indigenous people are natural sites where they can perform rituals to worship ancestral spirits or God.<sup>55</sup> The Sunda Wiwitan community often practice religious activities in the forest, especially *Leuweung Leutik*, which is more accessible than their home. As Northcott described (2015), a place becomes sacred as its experience grows while dwelling in an ecological landscape.<sup>56</sup> Pangeran Madrais, the ancestor of Sunda Wiwitan in Cigugur, became a pioneer who established *Leuweung Leutik* as a pivotal sacred place for them to perform rituals, as he wrote in a manuscript using Old Sundanese. In ecological matters, *Leuweung Leutik* is also a water catchment area and plantations owned by local residents who are part of Sunda Wiwitan. The mutually beneficial activities between the indigenous Sunda Wiwitan and *Leuweung Leutik* (human with nature) show that there is an inter-subjective relationship between them. As described by Berkes (1999) and Maarif (2019), the relationship between humans and non-humans is an understanding of indigenous people about nature as living things.<sup>57</sup> The Sunda Wiwitan people recognize that their life depends on nature, thus the balance of nature and its sustainability depends on the humans who live in that place.

## Conclusion

The Sunda Wiwitan people in Cigugur have a community name called AKUR. They are indigenous people who maintain their ancestral teachings in various aspects of life, including ecological aspects. With their local knowledge, namely *Pikukuh Tilu*, they are persisting to maintain the balance of the horizontal relationship between humans and nature. One implementation of the *Pikukuh Tilu* in the environment is by dividing the forest into three zones, namely

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<sup>55</sup> Mallarach and Papayannis, *Protected Areas and Spirituality (Proceedings of the First Workshop of The Delos Initiative)*.

<sup>56</sup> Northcott, *Place, Ecology and The Sacred*.

<sup>57</sup> Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*; Maarif, "Indigenous Religion Paradigm: Re-Interpreting Religious Practices of Indigenous People."

customary forest, conservation forest, and open forest. The forest where they practice religious practices is the customary forest. There is also a small forest near their residence which they call the Sacred Little Forest, as a forest specifically used as a place to perform rituals. With the *Pikukuh Tilu*, their local knowledge, they not only regard a sacred forest for ritual purposes, but also for ecological interests for the sake of harmony and sustainability. The main purpose of making the forest sacred for them is to maintain natural preservation so that they can perform rituals in it, utilize the resource while maintaining the balance of biodiversity. By looking at the paradigm of Indigenous Religions that do not limit the meaning of the sacred to cosmic things, the values and traditions carried by the three are relevant to the sacred place they apply to forests. For them, the forest is a living thing, thus it must be treated properly. There are still many deficiencies in this paper, especially in the depth of analysis and the completeness of the data findings, the hope in the future is that this research can be developed more comprehensively.

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