

## Local Religious Values of Javanese-Sundanese Religion: Resistance to Modernity

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### Abstract

Modernity can erode traditional values, particularly religion. Local religions often reflect community cultural values more prominently, resulting in stronger traditional aspects than mainstream religions. This research investigates the educational principles established by Madrais, the founder of the Javanese-Sundanese Religion (*Agama Djawa-Soenda/ADS*), aimed at the indigenous population regarding resistance to modernity. Central to ADS is the promotion of harmony with the natural environment. Nevertheless, this principle can also be examined through the lens of resistance to modernity and the potential imposition of external values that may jeopardize the integrity of their traditional beliefs, including foreign religions. Viewed in this context, ADS represents a dual commitment to environmental sustainability and safeguarding traditional cultural values. The analytical framework is grounded in value education theory and the theory of modernity rationalization. Data for this study were collected through a literature review of manuscripts authored by Madrais, alongside interviews with prominent figures within the ADS community. The findings indicate that the teachings of ADS inherently reflect a robust resistance to modernity. This resistance is particularly evident in three key tenets: rejecting all forms of colonialism, encouraging harmony with nature and returning to authentic human identity, and the imperative to honor and protect customs and traditions. These three principles are interconnected and share a common underlying ethos. This study highlights the importance of providing insights into the traditional aspects of local religions as a strong foundation for preserving traditions amidst the onslaught of modernity.

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*Modernitas dapat mengikis nilai-nilai tradisional, terutama agama. Agama lokal sering kali mencerminkan nilai-nilai budaya komunitas dengan lebih menonjol, menghasilkan aspek-aspek tradisional yang lebih kuat dibandingkan dengan agama-agama mainstream. Kajian ini membahas pendidikan nilai yang dididik dan diajarkan oleh Madrais selaku pendiri Agama Djawa Soenda (ADS) kepada warga adat, terkait perlawanan terhadap modernitas. Inti dari ajaran ADS sebenarnya ajakan untuk melakukan harmoni dengan alam. Namun, ajaran ini bisa dianalisis dari aspek perlawanan mereka sesuatu yang baru (modernitas), serta membawa nilai yang membahayakan keberlangsungan ajaran mereka, termasuk agama yang datang dari luar eori yang digunakan sebagai basis analisis adalah teori pendidikan nilai dan teori rasionalisasi modernitas. Data didapatkan melalui kajian pustaka, berupa manuskrip yang ditulis Madrais, ditambah dengan wawancara kepada tokoh penting ADS saat ini. Kajian ini menemukan, bahwa ajaran ADS memiliki semangat perlawanan yang kuat terhadap modernitas. Paling tidak, hal ini terlihat dari tiga substansi ajaran, yakni penolakan terhadap kolonialisasi dalam bentuk apapun, ajakan untuk selaras dengan alam serta kembali kepada jatidiri kemanusiaan, serta ajaran untuk menghormati serta menjaga adat dan tradisi. Studi ini menunjukkan pentingnya memberikan wawasan tentang aspek-aspek tradisional agama lokal sebagai fondasi yang kuat untuk melestarikan tradisi di tengah serangan modernitas.*

**Keywords:** Javanese-Sundanese religion; modernity; values education

## Introduction

The contrasting paradigms of religion, characterized by its profound cosmological and transcendental values, and modernity, which prioritizes empirical rationality, frequently result in conflict (Russell, 2000). Evan asserts that this discord between religious beliefs and the empirical rationality introduced by modernity is intrinsic, stemming from the foundational differences between the two. The most significant distinction is their respective methodologies or epistemological approaches (Evans, 2011). Modernity, which glorifies rationality, only believes in something empirical and scientifically research-based, while religion prioritizes the transcendental aspect and strongly holds cosmological values.

Through globalization, modernity is inevitable. Modern values such as rationality, empirical scientific knowledge, individualism, etc., penetrate all layers of society without exception. Giddens posits that modernization induces significant transformations across multiple facets of life, including the realm of religion. In this regard, modernity is perceived as undermining the

cosmological principles inherent in religious belief systems. This phenomenon is particularly observable in Western societies, where the emergence of liberal democracy, a hallmark of the modern age, initiated a trend toward the privatization of religious practice. Historically, religious authorities, such as clerics, managed numerous elements of communal life and played pivotal roles in education, healthcare, and economic well-being (Fadhilah, 2011; Sukanto, 1999; E. Susanto, 2014). With the advent of modernization, the roles of religious figures have been replaced by modern institutions such as educational, health, and economic institutions (Wiktor-Mach, 2011). Modern humans no longer rely on religious figures or traditional elders. If they need education, they enroll in schools. If they fall ill, they go to hospitals, and so forth.

Almost all religions, including indigenous ones, react to modernity (Berger, 2012). This reaction emerges because modern rationalization causes a decline in religion's mystical (or 'magical,' as Weber describes it) aspects. Although, by nature, religion possesses a certain reaction to the rationalizing forces of modernity, the relentless wave of rationalization ultimately compels religions to compromise with modern norms (Casanova, 2019). In the realm of indigenous religions, this tension becomes particularly evident. Numerous groups fail to acknowledge indigenous religions as valid, perceiving them as deficient in the intricate and structured belief systems that are typical of established religions. For example, Geertz posits that it is more appropriate to refer to indigenous religions as "religious cultures" instead of classifying them as fully developed "religions" (Geertz, 1993).

Although some scholars claim that local religions do not have an established belief system, they possess a clear cosmological system to guide their community's social interactions (Buffavand, 2016). This study will examine the value of education of one local religion, *Agama Djawa Soenda* (ADS), in resisting modernization. The teachings of ADS will be analyzed based on the aspects of value education. If value education is understood as a process of acculturation (N. H. Susanto, 2018; 2020) to maintain the

cosmological values of the community, then one of the value education aspects in ADS can be seen as resistance to modernity.

ADS is one of the local religions that has garnered significant scholarly attention and is characterized by extensive research. A considerable portion of these studies focuses on the tensions between this faith and the predominant religion, Islam, as well as the strategies employed for its continued existence in the face of various forms of discrimination (Z. Z. Mutaqin, 2014; Qodim, 2017; Tendi, 2016; Zulkhibri & Sukmana, 2017). Besides examining conflicts and survival strategies, these studies present various ADS teachings. However, not many (if any) studies have linked these ADS teachings with modernity. As a local religion that upholds Java's cosmological views and cultural values (Z. Z. Mutaqin, 2014), ADS embodies a spirit of opposition to values regarded as external and potentially detrimental to its survival. Nevertheless, research directly investigating this spirit of opposition is notably scarce, if not completely lacking. The present study addresses this deficiency by concentrating on resistance to elements perceived as novel, originating from outside, and threatening their existence.

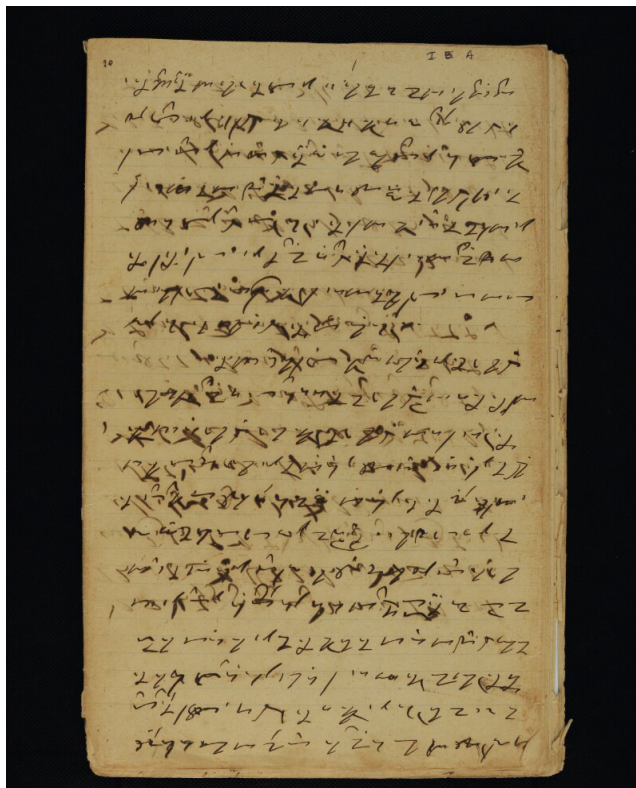
This study adopts a qualitative methodology, enabling the researcher to explore the meanings associated with the observed phenomena and social realities. The data collection and analysis process can occur concurrently by applying a comparative method and an inductive approach, hallmarks of qualitative research (Patton, 2015).

The primary source of this study is the manuscripts written directly by the founder of ADS, Madrais. These manuscripts were composed by Madrais while he was imparting teachings to the indigenous community or his students. Because the manuscripts were written during these teaching sessions, certain teachings are often repeated, albeit with different emphases. The language used in the manuscripts is written in Javanese script (*Hanacaraka*). The script includes various regional variants from the Nusantara archipelago, such as Tapanuli, Batakaro, etc. The British Library, intrigued by these manuscripts, transliterated them into English based on the Latin transliteration process carried out by the elders and descendants of Madrais, who continue to lead the

community (D. Kanti, interview, July 14, 2018). One of the pages of the ADS manuscript can be seen in Figure 1.

The manuscripts used as data sources in this study are those transliterated into English by the British Library. We received the link to these transliterated manuscripts from Dewi Kanti, a significant figure in ADS today. Dewi Kanti is the great-granddaughter of Madrais and the founder of the community. In addition to the manuscripts, data is further reinforced and deepened through in-depth interviews with key actors who continue the religion initiated by Madrais.

Figure 1  
Original ADS Manuscript Written by Madrais



Source: Madrais (2017)

The collected data is then sorted and triangulated between interview data and the manuscripts, reduced, and analyzed from the perspective of value education and its relation to modernity. To carry out this process, we repeatedly reviewed theories of value education and modernity. In simple terms, the steps in this research involve gathering data from various sources, reducing and sorting the data according to the research focus, conducting analysis, and finally drawing conclusions.

### **Value Education, Local Religion, and Modernity**

Understanding education cannot be separated from pedagogical aspects, which cover various studies on education. In Greek, the term "*pedagogy*" comes from the word "*paidegogik*," which means the science of guiding children (Nurkholis, 1970). Education is generally understood as a process aimed at nurturing an individual's full potential, facilitating their development into a well-rounded human being. In contrast, values are characterized as principles deemed significant, beneficial, and essential for preservation. For example, Steeman, as referenced by Sutarjo, describes values as elements that imbue life with meaning, offering guidance, foundational perspectives, and objectives for living (Adisusilo, 2013). Values are more than just beliefs; they always involve thought patterns and actions. According to Tyler, values are objects, activities, or ideas expressed by individuals that control education in directing interests, attitudes, and satisfaction (Mardapi, 2015).

Thus, value education is guidance for someone to realize the values of goodness, truth, and beauty through the proper process of value consideration and consistent action habituation (Zaqiah & Rusdiana, 2014). The values of goodness, truth, and beauty instilled through education by certain communities are believed to realize a better life.

Value education is often used as a strategic vehicle for self-preservation and spreading an ideology, ensuring the survival of a community (Haris, 2006; Sirozi, 2005). According to Takwin, shared values stemming from a common ideology are the secret to a community's survival. Through the struggle for values deemed true, a community will unite and continue to

endure (Takwin, 2016). Value education processes are necessary to maintain, preserve, and even spread these shared values.

In the context of local religion –ADS–, upholding and sustaining values deemed beneficial for the envisioned good life is imperative. Any teachings, values, or beliefs contradicting these established principles are met with resistance. This resistance is manifested through promoting and reinforcing these values, which is achieved via educational processes. Such education is not confined to formal classroom settings; rather, it can also transpire in the context of everyday life.

Local religion is often interchangeably used with indigeneity (Tamma & Duile, 2020). Local religion is indeed identical to indigenous communities that external influences have not touched. However, if indigeneity implies originality in various aspects, local religion focuses more on the belief system, though not as complex as mainstream religions.

Descriptions of local religion can vary among scholars, depending on the academic context being discussed. Generally, local religion refers to a specific community's belief system, spiritual practices, and rituals within a particular area. For example, Hakiki defines local religion as the indigenous religion of a specific community, "unaffected" by external teachings, often anonymized with transnational religions (Hakiki, 2011).

Local religions are characterized by many elements, including environmental factors, cultural practices, local traditions, rituals, and social identity. The belief systems inherent in these religions are often shaped by the natural surroundings, leading adherents to venerate spirits and deities associated with local features such as rivers, mountains, and forests. Furthermore, local religions embody cultural heritage by transmitting creation myths, legends, and rituals preserved across generations. The practice of various rituals and ceremonies, which may include worshiping spirits and ancestors, offering gifts, and other specific rites, serves as a hallmark of local religious expression. Additionally, local religions contribute to the formation of social identity, often manifested in wearing distinctive traditional attire that signifies group belonging (Wheater, 2017).

The local religion discussed here is ADS. Local religions, including ADS, are characterized by their distinct belief systems, spiritual practices, and specific religious rituals. ADS's identity is shaped by various values that are influenced by the surrounding environment, cultural context, local traditions, and the social power and identity derived from the teachings of the *Sunda Wiwitan* ancestors. The values upheld and transmitted by ADS are examined in relation to the inescapable forces of modernity.

Modernity is frequently juxtaposed with traditionalism. This concept pertains to the period spanning the late medieval era to the early Renaissance, specifically from the late 15th century to the early 16th century. Profound transformations distinguish this period in comparison to the preceding traditional era, particularly in the realms of thought, art, science, and culture. This era signifies the liberation of European society from the dominance of feudalistic and religious systems toward rational thinking. Modernity is considered to bring about the era of globalization, affecting people worldwide (Powell, 2014).

Unavoidable modernization leads society towards a rational life (Hatu, 2011; Munir, 2017; Rosana, 2015), transforming from traditional life patterns to economic and political patterns typical of stable Western countries (Moore, 1964; Sztompka, 2007) and demands a change from feudal society to democracy by changing the way people think to improve effectiveness and efficiency (Sujianto, 2009).

Ideologically, modernization is considered Western values deliberately campaigned (Fakih, 2001) to perpetuate the structure of domination or even hegemony of Western countries capable of massively producing science and technology for consumption and creating dependence in developing countries (Suradi, 2018). Blind modernization is considered to reduce cultural values, national identity, and self-identity (Sujianto, 2009), or borrowing Sa'id's term, eroding the metaphysical guideposts of unique Eastern culture (Said, 2010). Daulay states that modernization can cause three issues: materialism, hedonism, and individualism (Daulay, 2004).



## Origins and Historical Development of *Agama Djawa Soenda*

*Agama Djawa Soenda* (ADS) is located in Cigugur Village, Paseban District, Kuningan Regency, West Java. This village, situated on the slopes of Mount Ciremai, is about 35 KM south of Cirebon City and approximately 168 KM from Bandung. Cigugur is located at an altitude of 700 meters above sea level, with an average rainfall of 26.80 mm and an average temperature of 26°C. Cigugur has three dominant religions: Islam, Catholicism, and the local religion (*Agama Djawa Soenda*/ADS). The population consists of 4,756 Muslims, 3,067 Catholics, and 215 followers of ADS. Additionally, there are 89 Protestants and 3 Hindus in Cigugur (Royyani, 2008).

The existence of ADS cannot be separated from its founder, Pangeran Madrais Alibasa Widjaya Ningrat, often referred to as Madrais. Therefore, this community is often called Madraisme. According to several sources, Madrais is believed to be a descendant of the nobility in Cirebon, specifically from Sultan Gebang Pangeran Alibasa 1 (Z. Z. Mutaqin, 2014).

A nobleman, believed to be a descendant of the Sultan in Cirebon, had a concubine residing in one of the villages within the Losari District of Cirebon. From this union, a son was born and named Muhammad Rais by his maternal grandfather, who later became known as Madrais. Throughout his formative years, Madrais was nurtured and educated by his grandfather. Upon discovering that the man he had regarded as his father was, in fact, his grandfather, Madrais sought permission to locate his biological father in Cirebon. However, due to insufficient information, he ultimately accepted an invitation to reside with a prince in Cirebon. Within this household, Madrais was encouraged to explore the local knowledge referred to as *ngelmu sejati* or *ngelmu hakikat*, which is closely associated with Sufism in Islamic tradition. Eventually, Madrais married a woman from Cigugur village, where he established his residence, further developed his teachings, and founded a belief system known as ADS. Prior to settling down, Madrais embarked on journeys to various places (*paguron*) in pursuit of authentic knowledge. (Strathof, 1979).

Madrais's seriousness in delving into various forms of true knowledge enabled him to establish a well-defined belief system, eventually founding a

local religion. The fundamental values forming *Agama Djawa Soenda* are a collaboration of the noble cultural values of Javanese (Cirebon), *Sunda Wiwitan* traditions, and the values of Sufism in Islam. The designation of *Agama Djawa Soenda* seems to be influenced by the geographical context of Cigugur, the village where this community emerged. Cigugur is located at the intersection of southern West Java, characterized by a significant Sundanese cultural presence and Central Java. Consequently, blending Javanese and Sundanese customs is notably evident in this locality. Over the years, *Agama Djawa Soenda* has spread to various regions in West Java, including Indramayu, Majalengka, Ciamis, Tasikmalaya, Garut, Bandung, Padalarang, Bogor, Purwakarta, and even Jakarta, with its adherents at one point numbering around 10,000 individuals (Strathof, 1979).

Madrais's teachings, strongly imbued with the spirit of nationalism, the preservation of national identity, and patriotism, inevitably led to confrontations with the colonial rulers. The community faced repeated pressure from Dutch and Japanese colonizers (D. Kanti, interview, July 14, 2018). Alongside the pressures exerted by colonial forces, the teachings of ADS, which were deemed unconventional, frequently encountered resistance from conservative Islamist factions. A notable example occurred on December 21, 1954, when a right-wing Islamic organization known as DI/TII set fire to the central activities of ADS. This event compelled Tedjabuana, the son of Madrais and the community leader at that period, to relocate to Cirebon. (A. Mutaqin, 2013).

The early days of Indonesia's independence brought new opportunities for the ADS community. President Soekarno's policies initially accommodated the presence of indigenous belief communities, including ADS. In 1955, ADS was even chosen as a member of BKKI (*Badan Kongres Kebatinan Indonesia*). During that time, they could freely conduct their religious activities, including rituals, cultural performances, and others (A. Mutaqin, 2013). However, over time, pressure from conservative Islamists resumed. President Soekarno seemed to side more with the Islamist majority to maintain his popularity.

On September 21, 1964, Tedjabuana, the son of Madrais and his successor as the leader of ADS was compelled to sign the organization's dissolution. To ensure their safety, he and his family publicly identified as Catholics, conforming to the state policy that required all Indonesians to belong to one of the five officially recognized religions at that time. The government established this classification of official religions through the Ministry of Religion in 1946, which stipulated that an official religion must fulfill specific criteria, including the existence of a singular deity, a prophet, a sacred text, and universal principles. June and Steenbirk argue that this decree effectively marginalized the authentic spiritual heritage of the Nusantara. (McDaniel, 2015; Steenbrink, 2015).

Moreover, Tedjabuana urged all his followers to cease ADS rituals, especially marriage rituals. His decision was based on a decree issued by the *Panitia Aliran Kepercayaan Masyarakat* (PAKEM) on June 18, 1964, which declared that traditional marriages conducted by indigenous communities were legally invalid. This resulted in the loss of administrative rights for the children, such as the father's name not being recorded on birth certificates, loss of inheritance rights, difficulties in school registration, etc. (A. Mutaqin, 2013). The removal of these administrative rights not only resulted in sociological consequences but also had the capacity to induce psychological repercussions, such as a sense of marginalization.

The New Order regime's collapse and the reform era's subsequent advent are frequently characterized as a revival of local religions. The efforts of the Alliance of Indigenous Faiths (ADS and other local religious groups) to gain recognition yielded positive outcomes. The Constitutional Court's ruling No. 97 of 2016 recognized the existence of indigenous belief communities, including ADS, allowing their inclusion in the religion section of identification cards. However, as noted by Renaldi, discrimination against followers of ADS persists, with ongoing challenges in accessing health care, education, and civil services (Renaldi, 2017).

## Core Teachings of *Agama Djawa Soenda*

The core teachings of ADS are inspired by the *Sunda Wiwitan* tradition, specifically the concept known as *Pikukuh Tilu*. *Pikukuh* means "reinforcement," and *tilu* means "three." *Pikukuh tilu* translates to "three reinforcements that serve as the foundation of human life to achieve perfection as a human being" (Yayasan Trimulya, 2000). In simple terms, these three reinforcements are classified into the formation of the highest human awareness (*cara-ciri manusa*), the formation of national consciousness (*cara-ciri bangsa*), and devotion to the rightful (*madep ka ratu raja*) (Yayasan Trimulya, 2000).

*Pikukuh tilu*, also known as *tri tangtu*, is a philosophical concept believed to maintain harmony in life, both vertically and horizontally. The philosophy of *tri tangtu* articulates the concept of "three uniting to form one, and one dividing into three." This principle posits that the essence of "three entities" is fundamentally "one entity," and conversely, that "one entity" can manifest as "three entities." *Tri tangtu* functions as a cultural moral framework that underpins the behavior of ADS, encompassing three dimensions of existence: *tri tangtu dina raga* (guidance for personal conduct), *tri tangtu di buana* (customary law), and *tri tangtu di nagara* (official law governing a region). Each life concept has its divisions, roles, procedures, and implementations.

One important teaching of ADS is *ngaji badan*. The human body is perceived in terms of its physical and biological attributes and as a symbolic communication from the divine that requires interpretation. For instance, human blood transcends its role as a mere bodily fluid and is imbued with cosmic importance. Its dynamic essence is characterized as perpetually sustaining the soul in its quest for the highest form of mystical understanding, representing existence's ultimate aim (Strathof, 1979). *Ngaji badan* implies that we must understand and recognize the various characteristics around us, each with its ways and features. All entities in the world influence humans, affecting behavior and actions. The human self becomes the final terminal for filtering and uniting all these entities through sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste.

Like established religions, ADS posits the existence of an omnipotent, just, merciful, and wise deity. The divine power is boundless and intrinsic to the nature of God. This deity is intimately connected to His creation, particularly to humanity, which is regarded as the pinnacle of creation. (Yayasan Trimulya, 2000). This concept of God's closeness to humans leads the community to believe in the union or inseparability between the transcendent God (the absolute essence of God) and the immanent God (all His creations) (Imam S., 2005).

The core principles of ADS teachings are encapsulated in the founder's key thoughts, expressed as follows: 1) *Percaya ka Gusti Sikang Sawiji-wiji* (Belief in the One Almighty God). 2) *Ngaji Badan* (Self-reflection, introspection, retrospection). 3) *Akur Rukun Jeung Sasama Bangsa* (Living in harmony with others). 4) *Hirup Ulah Pisah ti Mufakat* (Prioritizing deliberation to reach consensus). 5) *Hirup Kudu Silih Tolongan* (Living in mutual assistance) (Yayasan Trimulya, 2000).

In terms of self-awareness, *Sunda Wiwitan* teachings recognize that life consists of "*Tri Daya Eka Karsa*," which means three levels of life: the vegetative level (living but passive), the animal level (active life but based only on instinct), and the human level (human life based on reason, feeling, and intellect) (Djatikusumah, 1995).

As outlined above, ADS's core teachings fundamentally advocate for harmony with nature and the environment. This central doctrine aligns with principles commonly held by traditional religions (Gillen & Ghosh, 2007). The teachings of ADS do not explicitly advocate for resistance against any individual or group. Nevertheless, in the face of external threats jeopardizing their cherished values, ADS will instinctively engage in acts of resistance. Consequently, the notion of resistance discussed in this context is not a fundamental principle of ADS, but rather a response to external challenges that threaten its very existence.

### **Value Education in ADS as a Resistance to Modernity**

The analysis reveals several significant aspects of value education practiced by the ADS community to safeguard their ancestral teachings

amidst the challenges posed by modernity. These aspects culminate in principles that denounce colonialism in all its manifestations, promote a harmonious relationship with nature, encourage a reconnection with their intrinsic humanity, and advocate for a revival of ancestral customs and traditions.

### **Anti-Colonialism**

A defining feature of the modern era is the extensive colonialism that transpired from the 11th to the 20th century. The progress in science and technology prompted developed nations to embark on global exploration, leading to pervasive colonialism that impacted developing nations, often categorized as third-world countries. (Gillen & Ghosh, 2007). Regarding ADS value education, Madrais's teachings in the manuscripts guide the indigenous community/students to reject and resist colonialism in its simple and broader meanings.

Madrais guided the ADS community to reject colonialism in its simple form, that is, the subjugation of one nation by another. This was particularly relevant as his nation experienced colonialism during his lifetime. Madrais strongly emphasized resistance against such colonialism. He explicitly stated that his purpose in writing the manuscripts was rooted in the injustice he witnessed during Dutch colonial rule (Madrais, 2017, p. 2A). Moreover, Madrais actively resisted Dutch colonial rule, such as by writing letters to Queen Juliana highlighting the injustices experienced (Madrais, 2017, p. 16B). This resistance brought hardship to his life, including being tried, accused of provocation, and exiled to Merauke (Madrais, 2017, p. 28B).

Madrais also encouraged the ADS community to embrace a broader rejection of colonialism. He implored the indigenous population to cultivate a deep respect and affection for their homeland, emphasizing that this sentiment is fundamentally connected to the imperative of distancing themselves from external control. In Madrais's view, the homeland is a source of all necessities for its inhabitants. With proper stewardship and management, it has the potential to bestow dignity and prosperity upon its people (Madrais, 2017). On

another occasion, Madrais called for the indigenous community and society at large to recognize and synergize with nature and the homeland. Based on this, Madrais firmly rejected the dominance of one nation over another (Madrais, 2017). He argued that every nation has its own behavior, customs, and cultural rules, so constitutions should be based on indigenous traditions, not Dutch thinking. Therefore, Madrais strongly opposed the constitution in his area because it was made by the Dutch (Madrais, 2017). Furthermore, he asserted that all humans from different nations should respect each other and avoid dominance (Madrais, 2017).

Madrais's rejection of colonialism in a broader sense is evident in his opposition to both physical and cultural colonialism (Madrais, 2017). He opposed various external teachings (religions) that might not align with Javanese culture. For example, he believed that the widespread dissemination of Islam made it difficult for society to find peace and happiness (Madrais, 2017, p. 18B). Furthermore, Madrais expressed his disapproval of doctrines that offer the allure of blissful companionship with celestial maidens in the afterlife. He contended that such assurances might diminish human awareness, prompting individuals to engage in behavior driven by self-serving desires, particularly those related to base pleasures such as the company of maidens, gourmet food, and other sensory indulgences. Regrettably, these behaviors could arise from teachings that may contradict genuine self-awareness. Madrais observed that numerous individuals sought to fulfill their desires under the guise of divine will and the promise of heavenly maidens (Madrais, 2017, p. 16B). An interview with Dewi Kanti (Madrais's great-granddaughter) clarified ADS's teachings on the concept of heaven. According to Kanti, heaven is not achieved in the next life but in the current one through pure consciousness and self-harmony with nature (D. Kanti, interview, July 14, 2018).

Madrais's rejection of colonialism was fundamentally aimed at creating peace and harmony, whether as simple conquest or broader cultural dominance. He believed that the source of destruction and chaos was the existence of colonialism or the dominance of one nation over another.

### **Harmony with Nature and Return to Human Identity**

Aligned with the rejection of colonialism, Madrais urged the indigenous community and society to harmonize with nature and return to their true human identity. According to Madrais, much chaos arises because people have lost their true identity and are not in harmony with nature (Madrais, 2017, p. 10). He believed this loss of identity and disharmony with nature was partly due to cultural colonization (Madrais, 2017, p. 4).

Madrais highlighted that his teachings were not innovative but a revival of age-old ancestral wisdom, especially that of the Javanese. He intended to encourage individuals to reconnect with their authentic human identity, which he regarded as the pinnacle of human potential (Madrais, 2017, p. 2A).

The principles of aligning with nature and rediscovering human identity are interconnected and cannot be separated. To restore and enhance human potential, achieving harmony with the natural world is essential. Consequently, religious practices should align with nature and the community's cultural context (Madrais, 2017, p. 9). According to Madrais, maintaining the universe's balance is a divine law. To harmonize with nature, humans must befriend nature, maintain cleanliness, exercise self-control, and preserve their culture (Madrais, 2017, p. 14).

Madrais further articulated that individuals must exercise mindfulness regarding their dietary choices to achieve harmony with nature. The consumption of food and beverages significantly impacts human character and behavior. Individuals need to regulate the spiritual essence in the food and drink they ingest to maintain awareness and uphold their human identity. Each type of food possesses a distinct spirit, necessitating individuals to exert control over it (Madrais, 2017, p. 1B). The inability to control food and drink can lead to the loss of human identity (Madrais, 2017, p. 12). He added that people should not become so obsessed with food that they forget the rules and limits. Food and drink are beneficial for health, strength, and intelligence, but they can also cause physical and mental illness. People can consume anything they want, but if the essence of the food and drink becomes too dominant, it will harm both body and soul (Madrais, 2017, p. 39D).



The principle of aligning dietary practices with natural principles is elaborated upon in various interviews. In contrast to certain religious traditions that restrict particular foods, ADS does not endorse the notion of forbidden items. Instead, it emphasizes the prohibition of overeating. Adherents of ADS are encouraged to engage with specific readings before meals to prevent the spirit of the food from overshadowing their humanity. For instance, animal-based foods may embody a spirit associated with uncivilized behavior, lawlessness, and self-centeredness. Consequently, individuals consuming animal products are expected to manage these inclinations. Likewise, plant-based foods may convey a spirit of indifference, excessive compliance, and neglect. Therefore, those who consume plant foods are also required to exercise control over these tendencies (D. Kanti, interview, July 14, 2018).

#### **Return to Customs and Traditions**

Alongside anti-colonialism and harmony with nature, Madrais's teachings also called for the indigenous community to return to their customs and traditions. According to Madrais, failing to return to customs and traditions could lead to chaos. He believed that every nation has its own behavioral rules, customs, and cultures, which must be upheld by its people and respected by other nations (Madrais, 2017, pp. 10, 14). He emphasized that every nation should be self-aware and love their homeland and nature (Madrais, 2017, p. 22).

Regarding the spiritual characteristic of the Javanese people, Madrais stated that every nation must hold firmly to its spiritual ways. He stressed the importance of understanding the customs and traditions that form one's identity and essence (Madrais, 2017, p. 16B). In this context, Madrais criticized foreign religions that do not align with the local customs and traditions. He asserted that religion must harmonize with each community's customs (Madrais, 2017, p. 22). From the perspective of Madrais, the essence of religious life transcends the mere enforcement of rituals; it centers on the pursuit of goodness and the embodiment of divine law. Notably, in contrast to certain mainstream religions that prioritize the dissemination of their

doctrines, the teachings of ADS advocate for a profound respect for diverse belief systems and explicitly denounce any form of domination among them. Madrais expressed concern that the Javanese, as a historically significant and venerable nation, have neglected the principles inherent to their own culture and have become captivated by external cultures and religions (Madrais, 2017, p. 1B).

Madrais's use of the Javanese script (*Hanacaraka*) in his manuscripts strongly emphasizes returning to customs and traditions. He used various Nusantara script variants, such as Tapanuli and Batakaro. He believed that the Javanese script is a sacred heritage from ancestors that must be preserved (Madrais, 2017, p. 27). Madrais emphasized the interdependent relationship between nature and humanity, particularly highlighting the connection between the Javanese script and the cultural practices of its people. Consequently, the writing conventions found in Javanese manuscripts extend beyond mere religious instruction; they serve as enduring principles that guide individuals in developing their mind, spirit, and physical well-being (Madrais, 2017, p. 20).

Madrais believed that God had determined each nation according to the characteristics of their land and nature based on His will, wisdom, and infinite knowledge. Therefore, humans were created with different nations, customs, and scripts. Through these diverse characteristics, all humans are given life by God. However, humans often consider themselves holier than other nations. Often, a nation imposes its culture and beliefs on other nations, leading to chaos, jealousy, hypocrisy, slander, and even murder (Madrais, 2017, p. 38D).

Regarding returning to customs and traditions, the interview with Kanti reinforces Madrais's manuscript. According to Kanti, every nation has its own customs, culture, and spiritual ways. The different gravitational forces in various regions cause different perceptions. For example, Javanese people hear and describe a rooster's crow as "*kukuruyuk*," while Sundanese people describe it as "*hongkoroyok*." There is no issue with this difference. The problem arises when people argue over trivial matters like this (D. Kanti,

interview, July 14, 2018). In line with the manuscript, Kanti's statement underscores that all humans must respect each other and maintain their customs and cultures.

The emphasis on value education regarding the return to customs and traditions, as advocated by Madrais, has been maintained and enacted by his adherents through successive generations. This is reflected in the community's frequent donning of traditional attire, safeguarding various practices, including traditional songs and dances accompanied by indigenous musical instruments, and the regular observance of customary ceremonies such as the *Seren Taun* harvest festival. During *Seren Taun*, various events are held, including parades, cultural processions, dance performances, and traditional songs. Although *Seren Taun* was once prohibited, it is now celebrated with support from the Kuningan Regency Tourism Office and the community, making it a vibrant annual event (see Figure 2 and 3).

Figure 2  
The Process of the *Seren Taun* Traditional Ceremony  
in Cigugur, Kuningan Barat



Source: Kartaradjasa (2021)

Figure3  
The *Seren Taun* Traditional Ceremony in Cigugur, Kuningan Barat



Source: Prayitno (2020)

The various teachings of Madrais recorded in the manuscripts concerning anti-colonialism, harmony with nature, and the return to customs and traditions can be viewed as value education. According to Zaqiah and Rusdiana, value education guides individuals to recognize the values of goodness, truth, and beauty through value consideration and consistent behavior habituation (Zaqiah & Rusdiana, 2014). Madrais's teachings provide a fundamental framework for ethical conduct and serve as a guiding principle for the indigenous community in their actions and interactions. Furthermore, Madrais urged the Javanese populace to reconnect with their human essence while honoring and upholding their distinct customs, culture, and traditions.

As previously mentioned, the value education imparted to the Javanese can be interpreted as a form of resistance against the forces of modernization. Geertz posits that modernization may threaten to undermine the distinctive metaphysical principles that characterize the Eastern worldview (Geertz,

1993). Modernity is also understood as a process of internationalization and homogenization (Perrot, 2001). Additionally, modernization brings secularization and the proliferation of materialism, hedonism, and individualism (Daulay, 2004). Simply put, modernization has the potential to degrade the role of religion (including local religions) in the public sphere (Wiktor-Mach, 2011). Modernity, as characterized by Weber's rationalization concept, initiates a disenchantment process, effectively diminishing the presence of magical or sacred values in daily existence. Consequently, religion, historically as a foundational source of values imbued with spiritual symbols and significance, is frequently regarded as less pertinent in a modern context that prioritizes efficiency and logical reasoning (Speirs, 2023).

Madrais opposed the virus of internationalization and homogenization spread by modernity through his teachings of returning to nature and tradition. Philosophically, Madrais conveyed that God has established different customs and traditions for each nation through His infinite knowledge. Imposing one set of customs and traditions on another nation can cause chaos. Thus, Madrais's opposition to colonialism was not a call for rebellion but rather a struggle to maintain harmony with nature and preserve customs and traditions.

Furthermore, the rampant culture of materialism, hedonism, and individualism brought about by modernity was countered by Madrais through his teachings of harmonizing with nature and returning to the human identity. Through this concept, Madrais guided the indigenous community to live moderately, befriend nature, and be mindful of their food so that their human identity is not lost to the animalistic and plant elements they consume.

When related to contemporary humans' various environmental and social problems, Madrais's teachings find their relevance. On the environmental front, the exploitation of nature by modern humans due to hedonistic, materialistic, and individualistic attitudes has caused significant damage, especially global warming. This condition leads to various disruptions and chaos. The earth is getting hotter, the weather is increasingly unpredictable, and the polar ice caps continue to melt, causing sea levels to rise while the earth's surface is continually exploited. Floods are rampant, rivers dry up,

many farmers experience crop failures, and hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of people are displaced, seeking higher and safer ground.

On the social front, conflicts between religions, beliefs, and ethnic groups occur due to the fervent spirit of homogenization. According to Madrais, God has established rules and norms as cultural systems for different communities through His wisdom. A particular community's rules, standards, and cultures may not necessarily fit another. Imposing specific customs or beliefs disrupts the natural order, thus causing chaos. This misalignment with nature, according to Madrais, is the source of destruction and chaos.

In the past, Madrais warned that various damages and chaos would occur if humans did not harmonize with nature. His teachings of harmony with nature, returning to human identity, and adherence to customs and traditions are intrinsically linked with opposition to colonialism. Madrais explicitly resisted Dutch colonialism by writing to the government. He believed that the imposition of Dutch culture caused chaos in Java. Madrais's rejection of colonialism was broad in scope. He opposed not only Dutch colonizers but also anyone who degraded Javanese culture, including foreign religions. He argued that much chaos arises because many people act in the name of God and heavenly beings. Madrais's teachings do not recognize the concept of the "afterlife." According to ADS teachings, heaven can be experienced in this life by returning to one's human identity (D. Kanti, interview, July 14, 2018).

Therefore, Madrais's teachings of anti-colonialism, returning to human identity, and adherence to customs and traditions are interconnected. To find happiness and create peace, Madrais urged the indigenous community to harmonize with nature, return to their human identity, and uphold their customs and traditions. Perceiving these elements as threats to harmony and the continuity of customs and traditions, Madrais strongly opposed all forms of colonialism, including physical conquest and the dominance of foreign religions. Colonialism and cultural domination are consequences brought by modernity. Thus, the substance of Madrais's value education can be seen as a form of resistance to modernity.

## Conclusion

*Agama Djawa Soenda* (ADS) is primarily focused on fostering harmony with the natural world, yet it also subtly reflects a resistance to the forces of modernity. Modernity, characterized by new values that threaten to erode established traditions, is countered through the reinforcement of traditional values via value-based education. This resistance is not limited to modernity alone; it also encompasses foreign religions that are viewed as challenges to long-standing beliefs. The essence of this resistance is manifested in teachings that advocate for anti-colonialism, promote a harmonious relationship with nature, and encourage a return to genuine human identity, nature, and tradition. These principles are designed to educate and guide the indigenous community while addressing Javanese society at large. The interconnectedness of these teachings, which emphasize the importance of harmonizing with nature and reclaiming human identity, is deeply rooted in a commitment to respecting and preserving customs and traditions. To this end, all forms of colonialism are rejected, from physical conquest to cultural domination, including the imposition of foreign religions.

This study has only explored the teachings of value education and modernity, not yet addressing politics, conflicts, and other aspects. Therefore, future research could expand on the conflicts and tensions between ADS and foreign religions or compare the resistance to modernity between ADS and its mainstream religions.[w]

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