

River, Modernity, and Everyday Religion: An investigation on the New Spiritual Engagement between Society and River

Wiwit Kurniawan^{1*}, Tri Hidayati²

^{1,2} Pamulang University

* Corresponding author:

Email: wiwitkurniawan@unpam.ac.id

Abstract.

This study aims to reveal the current view of modern society on rivers. Modernity has given a new view of nature and changed human behavior towards nature. Modern humans still keep the spirituality inherited from the past and welcome progress and rationality in the present as well. This study used a literature study as a research method. This study shows that there is a dilemma of community behavior over rivers. The spiritual bond between the community and the river still exists, but humans' behavior about destroying the river contradicts their beliefs.

Keywords: religiosity, spirituality, society, river, nature

I. INTRODUCTION

Since centuries ago, humans have had a strong linkage with rivers because they provide a water supply and various other benefits. Therefore, it is not uncommon for us to find the world's great civilizations proliferating on the banks of rivers, such as the civilizations of the Nile, Euphrates, and Tigris rivers, the Ganges, and the Yang Tse River. These bonds have shaped human's worldview and cultural system, including religion. The river is considered a natural element that brings life. On the other hand, rivers pose a threat of flooding. These make human's relationship with the river more or less inclined to spirituality and something sacred because rivers provide life and threat simultaneously- *tremendum et fascinans*. The human need to survive has formed a strong spiritual bond between people and rivers. We can still see the sacred view of the river in various world religions today, such as baptism in the river by Christians and the Kumbh ritual by Hindus in India. The sacred element of the river persists today, although modernity and rationality have given it a secular view of the world.

The forms of spirituality that lead to and refer to rivers are still sustainable. Modernity brings president concept, which has shifted human's understanding of nature. Scientific evidence delivers a materialistic point of view that considers nature as a mechanic system that works based on mathematical postulates and natural law in physics. The experimental method and scientific reasoning eliminated the idea of a deity that operates the universe. Various natural phenomena that were previously considered as angels' work have been subsided by science. This advent of the age of reason was predicted as an eliminator for mystical thinking and religious doctrine. But what has been predicted did not come true. Phenomena that

happens today is the transformation of religious form, which has been trying to parallel with the spirit of progress and reason. In today's modern times, the sacredness of the relationship between humans and rivers has become desacralized. However, it does not mean that religious forms have completely disappeared from the relationship between humans and rivers. In modern society, rivers are still considered a threat and need to be managed. Therefore, the "tremendous" nature sometimes remains, which occasionally brings out the nature of human spirituality.

When the flood comes, people sometimes try to recall "the sacred" and improve their relationship with the river to be more transcendental. In daily activities, respecting the river, maintaining cleanliness, and maintaining the river sometimes arises from religious values. Religious practice does not fully emerge in the context and form of formal religiosity but is mingled with profane entities that appear a complex religious phenomenon. The concept of religion cannot be defined and understood merely as a single aspect of life that emphasizes the discourse of deity and rituals. Still, religion constantly interacts with other entities, which makes its appearance must be investigated by many perspectives. In the case of an environmental crisis, the religious community has tackled those global problems. In responding ecological crisis, the religious community has taken the stand to preserve nature and has been trying to live side by side with nature.

The doctrine about loving the nature appears in various sacred texts. So, it is a vivid basic for religious people to preserve nature. From the description above, we can conclude that modernity which brings rationality and secular ideas, cannot wholly erase forms of religiosity. This is because these various forms of religiosity have adapted to the conditions of modernity. Religiosity has turned into actions that can appear in multiple daily activities. Religiosity is no longer confined to places of worship and ritual forms. Today's religiosity can appear in a simple and easy form to understand by ordinary people. They appear in a mother's breakfast room, study, and kitchen. On this basis, the worship of rivers in the past has also been transformed into a form of worship in harmony with the modern world. This paper will discuss how religion can emerge and survive in the modern world. Furthermore, how modern society responds to rivers will be revealed. This disclosure attempts to see how the daily activities and ordinary people view the river. In addition, this paper will also look at how human's vision of nature and rivers is. In modern society, the anthropocentric view is common. However, it is necessary to see if there is still a vision that respects the nature and how this interacts with modern thinking.

II. METHODS

The literature study is used as a research method to answer the problems raised in searching for religious forms in the modern world and how the human vision of rivers in the current era. This study will examine various literature that discusses religion and modernity and religion and rivers. Diverse literature provides theoretical

views on these matters, but some studies offer examples of phenomena in the real world. These various examples will enrich the understanding of how spirituality forms in the relationship between humans and rivers in today's modern world.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Everyday Religion: Spirituality in Secular and Modern Society

Science, capitalism, and politics are pervasive and influential in the everyday lives of ever-expanding layers of the world's population, but so is religion[1]. The theory of secularism says that the more modern society is, the less religious it will be. But the reality today is that we can see that religion still exists in modern society. Religion has adapted, transformed, and adjusted to the foundations of modernity that exist in today's society. Religion is not a final entity but an entity constantly being formed and transformed. Religious forms have changed and differ from the religious characteristics that exist in traditional societies. Rationalism has become a part of society today. However, it does not mean that religious dogma and spiritual views disappear altogether. Modern society today does not necessarily reject religion when they accept rationality. Today's forms of diversity have changed to be more compatible with the modern world and rationality. Therefore, to see religious phenomena in modern society, we do not only look at the various rituals and doctrines in religious areas. The concept of religion has spread and is not focused on one institution; it is every religion. Religious phenomena in modern times appear in different daily lives that seem to be profane. Religion is experienced by living human beings in their actual lives[2]. Seeing phenomena in the modern world means seeing religion as something that has been transformed. Modernity provides freedom and diversity. This has an impact on how modern humans are religious. When formal religious institutions begin to weaken, on the other hand, individual religious identities become stronger. This does not mean dismissing the influence of religious institutions, but we are invited to see how religion forms outside the "walls" of mosques and churches. This is everyday religion, as Ammerman puts it so clearly:

Everyday implies the activity that happens outside organized religious events and institutions, but that does not mean that we discount the influence those institutions wield or that we neglect what happens within organized religion "every day." We are interested in all how nonexperts experience religion. Everyday religion may occur in both private and public life, among privileged and nonprivileged people. It may have to do with mundane routines, but it may also have to do with the crises and special events that punctuate those routines. We are simply looking for the many ways religion may be interwoven with the lives of the people we have been observing [3, p. 5]. This religious concept opens horizons for the presence of religion in the everyday spaces of ordinary people. Religion is present in the bedroom, dining table, and bathroom. Daily practice is motivated by religious teachings but is interpreted by ordinary people and manifested in their daily routines and life narratives. Because this form of religion is a

familiar story, it is necessary to use narrative analysis to research it. Ammerman (2006) said that the study suggests that we pay attention to the characters, relationships, motivations, genres, and the way the plot unfolds [4]. Like all stories, religious and spiritual stories are very complex.

It is not a didactic lesson or a moral prescription but a contingent account of how life continues from one point to another. It includes experiences of body and soul and thoughts [3]. Religion embodies mundane and profane activities in everyday life in this current situation. It means that religion has taken part in a secular world that is not restricted to rigid rituals. Modernity brings a new meaning to the world. It enforces the spirituality brought by religion to change and adopt the new lifestyle. Religion emerges in the discussion of hostile political conflict, a shallow dispute among neighbors, and various activities regard as daily routines. Any particular people's behavior is underpinned by an amalgam of ethics, which might religion is one of the ethical sources. In making judgments, evaluations, and examinations to specific daily cases, the moral conception is guidance and compass used to infer what they must do. It is possible to drag the religious doctrine in determining what kind of dish they should consume and what clothes they should wear. Hence, the presence of religion cannot be restricted by the narrow idea of spirituality which merely refers to static rituals. By this concept, it will be obvious to consider someone's belief in investigating their behavior to the existence of nature. The spiritual relation to the river reflects in humans' daily routines and in various aspects of life. Hence, what people do in their daily lives regarding the river may reflect their religiosity and vision of nature.

The Sacredness in River

During the century, a great civilization has been lived together with river. Human activities depend on water supply. It is not only for hydrating the body but also watering their plant and farm, which supply food for society. The river has a pivotal role in every community. Many religions and civilizations give high respect to the river. In reality, rivers provide abundant water for life. On the other side, the river can punish its surrounding by delivering a deadly flood. The drought which causes suffering relates to the river as well. This critical role generates many spiritual activities and religious narration which deals with the river. In various ancient religions, the worship of the god of the river is pervasive. The resemblant rites also perpetuate in world religions. According to Berger (2007), religion is a social reality and construction[2]. This means that religion is a reality that affects individuals/society, is shaped by individuals, and constantly changes. The forms of river religiosity that existed in the past have been transformed into other forms of religion suitable for modern life. Advances in technology, science, and modernity have influenced many aspects of life. Religion is no exception.

Therefore, in this modern era, religion is transformed into a form appropriate to its context. One of the vital rivers that closely interact with modern society is the Cisadane River, Indonesia. The Cisadane River, with 126 kms, passes through 5

districts in West Java and Banten Provinces. Because it is pretty long and passes through urban and industrial areas, many problems must be faced. Many studies have documented the low quality of water in the Cisadene River. In addition, the threat of pollution also occurs when the Landfill is damaged, and the garbage flows into the Cisadene River. In the Tangerang area, human settlements coincide with the river, which causes domestic waste to pollute the river. Floods have also been recorded every year in various regions of the Cisadene River. The people who live on the banks of the Cisadene river are a multicultural society and have a long history. In the past, the riverside of the Cisadene was used as Chinese settlements. The Chinese who lived in the area were called "Cina Benteng," which means China from Fortress [5]. This is because there used to be a VOC fort they lived nearby. Historically, the Chinese community mingled with local society, and many of them married local residents.

Therefore, the banks of the Cisadene river have become a multicultural place where Chinese, Sundanese, and Betawi live together. The religions in the region also vary from Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The Benteng Chinese community is unique because, unlike other ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, generally stereotyped with fair skin, slanted, rich, and non-Muslim. Yet, the Chinese Benteng's appearance seems similar to the natives, and many of whom are Muslim [5]. Changes in religious forms regarding human and river relations have also occurred in the Cisadene riverside residents, located on the island of Java. In the past, the Cisadene River was a vibrant river that served as a trade route and settlements for merchant migrant communities. About four centuries ago, immigrants from China carried out trade with the people of the archipelago, and many of them settled on the banks of the Cisadene River. In historical records, they did a lot of cultural acculturations and interbreeding with indigenous people [5]. Today, the Cisadene riverside has become a multicultural and multi-ethnic area with a mix of cultures and religions [6]. Various cultural festivals are still held, such as the dragon boat festival by the Indonesian Chinese people. Multiple cultures and people's religious views on rivers are now starting to change with the emergence of modernity and metropolitan currents in their lives. The Cisadene River has many problems, such as pollution, water quality, and flooding. The government has made many efforts to prevent these problems, such as building dams and cleaning rivers [7] [8].

However, the issue has not been resolved because there are so many influences on this river. The river is surrounded by residential areas developing rapidly and growing into urban landscapes. This makes the river threatened with domestic waste. In addition, due to the development of the economy and the city's landscape, various factories and markets also stand near the river. Even worse, there is a final waste disposal site or landfill adjacent to the river. In 2020, there was an incident of garbage entering the river. These bad things also affect the river. The lack of water catchment areas and large waste make floods every year in several points of the Cisadene River. These various things indicate a strong bond and connection between the river and the

life of the surrounding community. Many of the problems in the Cisadane river come from the concept of development and modernity, such as the expansion of settlements and the construction of factories. There is a notion of modernity in this phenomenon. However, this does not mean that the view of the surrounding community over the Cisadane river is devoid of spirituality. There are times when people still respect and sanctify rivers, but they cannot treat them properly because of a lack of understanding of environmental conservation. Communities around the river still carry out celebratory rituals that are nuanced in entertainment and tourism, and spirituality. In the tradition of the Chinese people who live on the side bank of the river, the river's cleanliness is an essential thing for them. Dragon boat celebrations are very dependent on the quality of the river, so they feel they have a "calling" to protect the river. On the other hand, modernity is increasingly influencing human life. The river is no longer seen as sacred and supernatural but as material. So that human interaction with the river is limited to the economy and the sacred. There is a complex intertwined connection between humans and the river. In modern life and urban society, individual practices and thoughts are no longer dominated by a single source of religious value, but rather multiple sources of competing values. This does not indicate that religion is receding, but that it collaborates and transforms into a new form. Nancy Ammerman explains that:

Religious identities are often maintained and negotiated in surprising places. When we look for the "strength" of religion, we need to pay attention to the everyday places where life is being navigated, as well as to the presence of cultural assumptions that keep religion widely available beyond weekly worship services. It means paying attention to individual lives and choices but recognizing the socially embedded patterns in those choices [3, p. 222]. In daily human practices towards rivers and water, this is not profane at all. The urge to keep the river clean or to utilize water from the river sometimes arises from religious impulses that navigate daily behavior. The view of the harmony of nature from Confucianism and the cleanliness of half of the Faith manifests in the daily practices of individuals who sometimes do not feel that it comes from their spirituality. In modern life and daily behavior, religious and profane demarcations are increasingly blurred, and the mixing of the two is increasingly intense. To say that meanings and strategies of action are being negotiated is to recognize that there are multiple and overlapping layers, including religious ones, in the modern social world [3]. There is no society that is religiously vacuum, and few religious institutions can legally enforce moral sanctions. Yet amidst this immense cultural openness, religious rituals and symbols, experiences, and identities are preserved, borrowed, and recreated [4, p. 11].

There is another case about humans and rivers, namely the religious form of society near the Citarum river. Haryani Saptaningtyas (2021) examines the correlation between the concept of purification (Arabic: *thaharah*) in Islam and the polluted condition of the Citarum river [9]. There are thoughts on the sanctity of water and the

use of rivers to purify oneself in preparation for prayer. However, this concept is not fully manifested in river maintenance, where the Citarum river is severely polluted. From the study above, we can see that dilemmas arise in people's lives related to rivers. The community has a feeling to control the river and take advantage of it. Still, actually, there is a religious aspect where they believe that they must respect and preserve the river as a religious responsibility. There is a divine view of the river and how they treat it, but the act of polluting it is still being carried out. This action does not reflect the spiritual emptiness of the river but the defiance of their conscience over the sanctity of the river they realize and believe in.

The vision of nature in western society

Marjam DeGroot has studied the correlation between the Vision of Nature and public compliance with river management. Background studies on environmental issues are becoming increasingly important [10]. Lyn White explains that religion is the cause of the dominating view of nature. However, DeGroot sees that European society is no longer considered a society with a vision of dominating nature. Marjam DeGroot tries to see the phenomenon of environmental ethics and natural visas in a diverse and multicultural society. A Vision of Nature and the Relationship of Humans and Nature is a philosophical concept discussed by academics and philosophers. Still, de Groot wanted to see the idea emerge in ordinary society. Other than that. The study conducted also expands previous studies which only focused on one religion. In his research, he involved Christianity and other world religions such as Islam and Buddhism. One of the research sites is in Canada. The place was chosen because the people left behind had a diversity of cultures and religions such as Christianity, Native American beliefs, Islam, and Buddhism from Asian migrants [10]. DeGroot shows that people in the West no longer use the anthropocentric paradigm [10].

However, despite having a more ecocentric view, the people there have a weak response to the environmental crisis. According to DeGroot, this is due to the weak role of institutions and the failure of individuals to express public values. The community is considered too weak to practice its good intentions. According to De Groot, engineers have changed the view that nature can be used as a partnership. Even so, people don't like what engineers have to offer. This may be because the ecocentrism of society is not the same as that of the engineers. The community has an ecocentric view as evidenced by a vision of nature, guardian and partnership with nature. Even though the community accepts the paradigm of river management, they reject the various actions taken to treat the river. They see that the measures carried out are an unnatural form of action. Here we can see that ecocentrism has many meanings. What is considered pro-nature is not necessarily the same by other thoughts.

In addition, the dilemma that arises is that the community has an inadequate response to environmental crises even though they have a vision of ecological preservation and management. We can see that sometimes there are differences in views and practices. We must be aware that an individual's actions are determined by

the perceptions he has and are also greatly assisted by existing social conditions. Here, social analysis is also needed to understand individual cognition to see phenomena more clearly. Like the case in Indonesia, what Marjam DeGroot presented also shows a dilemma and a paradox. Western society does have an ecocentrism view that considers the sustainability of nature. However, the concept about dominating the nature seems appear in some extent. The exciting thing is that the community has a religious vision of nature. Still, on the other hand, they accept the view of river management, where there are forms of control and manipulation of the role and function of the river.

IV. CONCLUSION

Rivers cannot be separated from human life. Respect for rivers has been recorded in religious traditions and rituals in human history. In modern times, humans have a materialistic view of nature. This causes humans to see rivers as tools. This secular view influences the religious relationship between the community and the river. In the modern world, religiosity does not disappear but is transformed into a suitable form, namely the daily spirituality of ordinary people. This study reveals that the community has a dual view of the river. They judged that the river should benefit them. On the other hand, they still believe in the sacred in the river. Humans' acts of destroying nature are not a sign of losing the spirituality of the vision of nature, but a deviation from human actions (sins) on what they believe in.

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