

## THE EMERGENCE OF NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT AND THREATS TO SOCIAL HARMONY IN KUPANG, EAST NUSA TENGGARA

Kunawi Basyir  
UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia  
E-mail: [kunawi@uinsby.ac.id](mailto:kunawi@uinsby.ac.id)

Suhermanto Ja'far  
UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia  
E-mail: [suhermanto.jafar@gmail.com](mailto:suhermanto.jafar@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** In the post-reformation era, a new situation of religious life has challenged the Indonesian people at large. Several conflicts arose in many areas to dispute socio-religious harmony. Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, is not an exception. In this area, the conflict occurs along with the presence of new religious groups within society. Through a phenomenological approach, this research deals with some religious groups, such as Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia (LDII), Gafatar, Ahmadiyah, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), and Khilafatul Muslimin in Kupang. These groups have grown significantly under social and state control which keep an eye on them, especially for every political goal concealed behind the movement. They are perceived as a threat to the existence of the government and the state.

**Keywords:** Religion; Islamic ideology; local belief; social laboratory; social harmony.

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## Introduction

Since the end of the New Order regime back in May 1998, religious life in Indonesia has entered a new chapter. One of the most notable attention is religious-based conflicts, which broke out everywhere. This phenomenon could be said to be “alien” for society. The fact that Indonesian indigenous culture emphasizes harmony among the diversity of ethnic, language, custom, and tradition has failed the people to anticipate what nightmare might come when the sun begins to set into the twilight.<sup>1</sup> Let alone the political, cultural, and economic factor, Indonesian citizens has a perception that the value of national ideology, Pancasila, hold harmonious living principles among the diverse society. However, when a state of relative freedom is much celebrated after the falling of Soeharto, the consequences of democracy have not yet fully applied.

This study aims to see religious life in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, by examining the existence of various Islamic new religious movements at the place. When discussing the case of religious life in Kupang, we could not ignore the tragedy of riots that broke out in November 1998. The people of Kupang call this tragedy as “the Gray November Event” (*Peristiwa November Kelabu*). Religious violence has become a very valuable lesson for the locals. Various social elements until now still distressed by how Kupang, which was originally known for its peaceful social life, can be suddenly filled with violence and conflicts.<sup>2</sup> Hence, religion in the context of post-reform Kupang is the locus of this research, with particular attention to the event mentioned.

Studies of religion always invite a debate related to how religion is defined. Moreover, Indonesia is known as a multicultural country, rich in diversity in all aspects of life. Religion indeed plays a key role in people's everyday life, it is a heartbeat of Indonesian communities. In this context, the definition of religion is highly contested. To follow Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, there are at least three categories of how religion is defined. First, *Expert Religion*; those who study religion and know the relevance of it in many contexts. Second, *Governed Religion*; which is religion as interpreted by those in power, such as the

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<sup>1</sup> For a more complete look at social harmonization in the field of religiosity in the historical frame of the forerunner to diversity in Indonesia can be seen in Niels Mulder, *Kepribadian Jawa dan Pembangunan* (Yogyakarta: Gajah Mada University Press, 1981), 12; J.D. Legge, *Indonesia* (Sidney: Prentice-Hall Australia press, 1980), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Mohammad Moa, *Interview*, 25 November 2015.

state, religious organization, and so on. Third, *Lived Religion*; that is religion as practiced by the communities in everyday life as well as its interaction with authority, sacred texts, rituals, and institution.<sup>3</sup>

Departing from this methodological concern, we conclude that defining religions matters because it can define the reality that the term represents. Despite Weber suggested that religion can only be defined when the research has been done,<sup>4</sup> scholars or researchers should choose the variety of definitions available at the beginning of the study to see what definition may fit the context and project.<sup>5</sup> Here, we choose to focus on religion as a social system by referring to the theory of Michael Meyer and Emile Durkheim. We saw that this definition is relevant to the phenomena that we have observed.

According to Michel Meyer, religion is a belief system that contains some teachings which constitute human behavior both toward God and to the communities in which they live. That belief usually grows because there is a perception that people will eventually die.<sup>6</sup> In line with this, Emile Durkheim defined religion as a social system consisting of several beliefs practiced by the community in the form of rituals related to sacred matters, where it establishes a moral consciousness that is institutional in the setting of social life.<sup>7</sup> For Durkheim, beliefs and rituals are a prerequisite of the category of religion. Both cannot be excluded because they are fundamentals in the collective consciousness of society. Hence, with structural-functionalism, Durkheim attempts to look at society as a whole, including customs, norms, values, tradition, and institutions. Simply speaking, there is no such individual because, since the beginning, humans always bound to the communities.<sup>8</sup>

From here, it can be stated that religion is a belief system that is a reference in building social collective ties. Religion is a unifying social bond built on a doctrine that is believed to have a higher

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion*, (Princeton University Press, 2017), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, (Beacon Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Whitney A. Bauman, Richard R. Bohannon II, and K. J. O'Brien, (eds.), *Grounding Religion: A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology*, (Routledge, 2011), 20.

<sup>6</sup> M. Fikri, *Konflik Agama dan Konstruksi New Media: Kajian Kritis Pemberitaan Konflik Di Media Online* (Malang: Universitas Brawijaya Press, 2015), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 79.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, (Oxford Univ. Press), 1996.

position than humans. This doctrine is originated from something unseen that cannot be reached by the human senses, yet has a significant influence on human life. All religions have a belief in something that is considered “sacred” which is radically different from the “profane.” It is a supreme reality which is anonymous and impersonal, or what Durkheim termed as “totemic principles.”<sup>9</sup> Humans always try to respond to their existence by holding religious rituals following the traditions and culture in which they live. Thus, we argue that religion is a social institution in which contains a set of rules or norms of “the sacred” that must be obeyed by humans who live in a particular social community.

To develop a deeper understanding concerning the phenomena of religious life in Kupang within the scope of theoretical underpinnings mentioned above, this research intends to examine why and how new religious movements in East Nusa Tenggara intersect with the social behavior and practices of the local community. Thus, this study discussed several issues regarding (1) harmony built by local communities, (2) religious sects and movements that involved, and (3) patterns of relations between the government and communities in developing anti-religious discrimination in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara.

### **NTT and the Experiment of Building Harmony**

In the early post-reform period, not long after the riots in the capital city following the resignation of Soeharto as an immediate effect of mass demonstrations, and the celebrated “reborn” of democracy and freedom, the region of East Nusa Tenggara (henceforth NTT), became a concern as it was close to the territory of East Timor, which had just separated constitutionally from Indonesia. As one of the consequences, SARA-related riots have also occurred in this area.

In response to social conflicts that tore up this social life, the local government established a “social laboratory” which aims to be a place to establish inter-religious harmony in the city of Kupang. This social laboratory is a space where every religion can interact and dialogue about the problems faced to anticipate social conflicts caused by the friction of existing different religious understanding.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

Based on the information we got from several local officials, this social laboratory was considered very important because of how easily social conflict occurred in the early post-reformation era. The tragedy of May 1998 that occurred in Jakarta finally spread to various parts of the country such as Ambon (Maluku) and Poso (Central Sulawesi). Kupang itself has the experience of the conflict even though the current social conditions at the time are relatively conducive. There is no segregation between the Muslim and Christian communities, for example, as it happened in Ambon City.<sup>10</sup>

East Nusa Tenggara consists of 20 districts spread over small islands around the city of Kupang. NTT has different ethnic groups in Indonesia. Its population is 4,683,827 people.<sup>11</sup> Catholics occupy the first position in the order of the number of adherents of religion in NTT. Most of them live in Belu, Lembata, East Flores, Sikka, Ende, Ngaba, West Manggarai areas, and others. Christians are the second, where they domicile in the regions of West Sumba, East Sumba, South Central Timor, Alor, Rote Ndao, Central Sumba, Southwest Sumba, Sabu Raijua and Kupang City. While the Muslim community with a small percentage spread in the Ende district, East Flores, Kupang City, and West Manggarai Regency. The composition of religious adherents in NTT is as follows: Catholic (55.85%), Christian (34.29%), Muslim (9.64%), Hindus (0.21%) and Buddhists 0.01 %.<sup>12</sup>

Based on available statistics, we can see that the number of Muslim communities is far lower than Catholic and Christian, which is around ten percent of the total population. Those numbers spread in 22 districts/cities, where most Muslims are in Ende, Alor, and Flores mainland. They mostly live in coastal areas, while Muslims who live in cities such as Kupang are mostly migrants from Java who work as a trader in the local area.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, there is a tendency

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<sup>10</sup> Kustini and Zainal Abidin Eko Putro, "Dakwah Activities Among Muslim Minority and the Prevention of Hate Speech in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara", *Analisa: Jurnal of Social Science and Religion*, Vol. 2, No. 2, tahun 2017, 220; Muhammad Harvin Zuhdi, "Potential Islamic Radicalism and Terrorism in the Province of West Nusa Tenggara", *Abkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah*, Vol. 19, No. 1, year 2019, 144.

<sup>11</sup> The Central Statistics Agency of East Nusa Tenggara Province, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Dokumen Departemen Agama RI Propinsi Wilayah Nusa Tenggara Timur, tahun 2017.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

for Muslim communities from outside NTT to enter the area with the mission of proselytization. Most of them occupy remote areas in the NTT region as the target of preaching.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from the riots that had occurred, inter-religious harmony in Kupang was well maintained. A member of the Indonesian legislative assembly (DPR) from the Democratic Party (Partai Demokrat), Mahrus Munir, stated that NTT is one of many areas that can be an example in terms of inter-religious harmony in Indonesia. The Governor of NTT, Frans Lebu Raya, stated that tolerance among religious believers was quite conducive. The religious leaders in NTT communicate well, sharing information. More than that, religious leaders in the city of Kupang constantly voiced the invitation to live in harmony.<sup>15</sup>

The fact can be seen through how the construction of the house of worship does not cause significant problems to the local communities with a different religious orientation, where it can easily happen elsewhere. The government of NTT continues its commitment to maintaining peaceful coexistence among the variety of religious expression in many areas of Kupang. For example, in Ruteng, the Manggarai regency, there exists a grand mosque that stands in the center of the city. The small mosques also established in the surrounding environment of the Muslim community.

On 1<sup>st</sup> November of 2018, the NTT Government launched the “Sadar Kerukunan Village” program. The program aims to strengthen cooperation between religious believers in villages in the NTT region. They work primarily on religious issues, for example, jointly guarding and building houses of worship in their respective environments. They do community service together in cleaning up the church, mosque, and another house of worship.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kustini and Zainal Abidin Eko Putro, “Dakwah Activities Among Muslim Minority...,” 220.

<sup>15</sup> The statement by Frans Lebu Raya, Governor of East Nusa Tenggara, at the audiensi Tim UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya in the Kupang Governor Administration Office, NTT, 11 September 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Ahmad Sodli, “Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT)”, *Jurnal Analisa*, Vol XVI, No. 01, Januari - Juni 2009, 71; Aida Chomsah, “Desa Sadar Kerukunan Kabupaten Kupang Siap Launching”, (Makalah disampaikan di Kantor Wilayah Kementerian Agama Nusa Tenggara Timur, Kupang, 2018).

When this research was carried out, Catholics, Christians, and Muslims were working together to make fences and longevity plants at the location of the Evangelical Christian Church in Timor (GMIT) Ora Et Labora Tarus, painting the As-Sholihin Tarus Mosque, and also cleaning up the location of the Catholic Church Saint Simon Peter Tarus. This activity involved all the Mata Air Village community, representatives of the Kupang Regency Ministry of Religion Office, and representatives from the Kupang Regency Government.

### **The Variety of New Religious Movement in Kupang**

After the reformation era, there were several new sects or religious movements that emerge in East Nusa Tenggara. To limit the discussion, we choose to focus on the religious sects or movement as follows.

#### **a. Gafatar (Gerakan Fajar Nusantara)**

Gafatar (Fajar Nusantara Movement) is a religious-based mass organization declared on January 21, 2012. This mass organization with a sun-bearing logo is chaired by Mahful Muis Tumanurung and is engaged in the social sector through popular economic movements, namely in the field of food security. This organization was initially brought by immigrants from Java, founded as a continuation of the Millah Abraham community and was the incarnation of Al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah led by Ahmad Musadeq, who claimed to be a Prophet. Al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah was once declared a banned organization by the Indonesian government.<sup>17</sup>

In a further development, the fate of this movement was not much different from its elder brother. This organization received a misguided label by the Aceh Ulema Consultative Council (MPU) and the North Maluku Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). The central government banned Gafatar through a letter from the Directorate General of Kesbangpol Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number 220/3657/D/III/2012 on November 20, 2012. The organization then changed its name to *Negara Karunia Tuhan Semesta Alam* (The Grace State of the Lord of the Universe). The government has warned their former management, members,

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<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Wildan, "Gerakan Fajar Nusantara (Gafatar): Krisis Ideologi dan Ancaman Kebangsaan", *Temali: Jurnal Pembangunan Sosial*, Volume 1, No. 1, (2018), 3.

followers, and sympathizers not to preach because their teachings are contrary to Islam.

Mahful Muis Tumanurung himself had served as chairman of Al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah in the South Sulawesi region. He and his followers were also arrested in 2007. They claim that Gafatar was founded solely to answer all the problems that are being faced by the Indonesian people so far. For him, this country has not been completely separated from colonialism. It has been more than sixty-seven years of independence but it has not been able to improve the welfare of its people.<sup>18</sup>

Based on the data we found, until 2018, this community has a number of 200 adherents that spread in Kupang, Larabata, and Lambata. Alimuddin was the leader of Gafatar, is an exodus from the East Kalimantan District of Kutai. He spread his religious understanding from Kutai to the district of Lembata. Previously, the movement led by Alimuddin has been disbanded by the local government. Whereas, the Gafatar community who lived in Kupang had only three people because the other twenty-seven members were returned to Kutai, East Kalimantan. Interestingly, they are not only Muslim but some are Catholic. The characteristics of their teachings are no different from the Gafatar which had been dissolved by the previous government. They believe in the truth of the pillars of Islam but they forbid their followers to carry it out.

### **b. Ahmadiyya**

The name Ahmadiyya is very popular, both in academia and in government affairs. Ahmadis believe Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet that comes after the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>19</sup> In 1980, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) issued a fatwa (religious order) against this movement and label it as heresy. They further strengthened their stands with another fatwa issued in 2005 which invites pros and cons from various parties. Many think that MUI violates civil rights in freedom of religion and belief. Not even a few claims that the MUI fatwa triggered violence because of the many

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<sup>18</sup> Fabian Januarius Kuwado, "Jejak Organisasi Gafatar di Indonesia", *Kompas*, 13 January 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Iskandar Zulkarnain, *Gerakan Ahmadiyah di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2011), 3.



houses of worship and the house of Ahmadiyya followers became the target of the mass rampage.<sup>20</sup>

The Ahmadiyya in NTT has a very small number of followers. They flourished in Alor Island, precisely in Wolwal Village, Southwest Alor. Although the amount of the follower is not large, the local government prevents the development of this movement. According to one of the apparatus involved, this group was disbanded because it was feared that it would disturb or trouble Muslims around them. According to him, this new religious movement has a very controversial belief which different from Islam in general. They believe in the existence of the last prophet besides Muhammad named Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

There were a raid and attack on the Ahmadiyya congregation that occurred. About twenty-four Ahmadiyya members in the Grepek Tanak Eat hamlet, Greneng village, East Sakra district, East Lombok district, East Nusa Tenggara, Saturday (19/5) driven out by a group of masses thought to be from the same region. Six houses and four motorbikes were destroyed. There were no fatalities or injuries in the incident that reportedly happened twice, including when the Ahmadiyya community had taken refuge in the East Lombok Police station.<sup>21</sup>

Indications of the persecution towards Ahmadiyya followers have been anticipated since March 2018. The community who attacked them has reported Ahmadiyya to the police and local government. Setara Institute noted that there were some dialogues between citizens and officials, including threats-nuance dialogues by certain groups who demanded the follower of Ahmadiyya to quit from their beliefs or would be threatened with expulsion. The incident of the attack and expulsion to the Ahmadiyya community in East Lombok, East Nusa Tenggara is similar to the eviction that occurred in Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara in 2006. After that persecution, cases continued in several other regions in Indonesia, including Bangka, Sumbawa, and East Nusa Tenggara.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>21</sup> Cahyo Pamungkas, "Mencari Bentuk Rekonsiliasi Intra-Agama: Analisis terhadap Pengungsi Syiah Sampang dan Ahmadiyah Mataram", *Epistémé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Juni 2018. 114; Abdul Aziz, "Kronologi Penyerangan Jemaat Ahmadiyah di Lombok Timur, NTB", *Kompas* (20 May 2018).

### c. LDII (Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia)

During the VII National Conference in Jakarta on July 21-29, 2005, the Indonesian Ulema Council had recommended that religious sects such as LDII (Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute) and Ahmadiyya should receive strict attention and action because both movement were considered disturbing public peace. According to MUI, these two organizations have deviated from Islamic teachings.

In 2007, KH. Ma'ruf Amin, the chairman of MUI, requested that the deviations and controversies raised by LDII (such as disbelieving and defiling other Muslims) be stopped. Responding to this, Chairman of the LDII DPP, Abdullah Syam, said that the accusations against LDII were not fundamental. According to Syam, if there is a difference in the way of worship then it is normal, as there is a difference between NU and Muhammadiyah.<sup>22</sup>

### d. Shia

The existence of Shiite groups in Kupang, NTT, is not much different from the fate of Shiites in other regions in Indonesia. They still get a negative stigma from the local community. Among the MUI members, there are pros and cons associated with its existence, such as the Shiite case in Sampang, Madura.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, it is only natural that besides the Ahmadiyya and LDII, the concern of the Kupang government is the Shiite group. Based on data compiled by the local Ministry of Religion office, this Shiite community has a lot of activities in Bonipol village. Many complaints from the local people against this community. For example, when the Shiite group proposed to fill a sermon at the local mosque, the community refused immediately.

One of the Shiite communities in NTT comes from a wave of refugees from the Middle East to Australia who was caught by the local government. They are protected by UNHCR and allowed to carry out their missionary activities to the community. This Shiite community numbered around 60 people, and the majority of them live in the city of Kupang.

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<sup>22</sup> "MUI Klarifikasi Lebel Sesat LDII", *Tempo* (Tuesday, 6 March 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad Babul Ulum, *Kesesatan Sunni-Syi'ah: Respon atas Polemik Republika*, (Depok: Aksara Pustaka, 2013), 8.

#### e. Jemaat Muslimin Hisbullah

The name of the Jemaat Muslimin Hisbullah (Hezbollah Muslim Congregation) seems to be different from the other movement. This is because there are not popular enough in the community as well as in social media. However, the local government pays attention to these groups due to allegations that they are identical to religious organizations that have been banned previously by the government.

Based on our observations, this religious-based mass organization is headquartered in the At-Taqwa Mosque, Al-Muhajirun 2 Village, Waowala Village, Ile Ape District, Lembata Regency. They are an ordinary organization that has no heretical indications as per heretical criteria issued by the MUI on November 6, 2007. The name Hezbollah has nothing to do with the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon.

This is in line with what was conveyed by Muhammad Moa, head of the Sharia Guidance Section of the local Office of the Ministry of Religion, who said that the suspicion of the government and the community against the teachings of this organization was groundless.<sup>24</sup>

#### f. Khilafatul Muslimin

In West Manggarai Regency, there is also a sect or religious movement which establishes itself as *Khilafatul Muslimin*. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of West Manggarai Regency rejects it because it is suspected to have links to ISIS. Moreover, they use the term “Khilafah.”

*Khilafatul Muslimin* was founded in 2003 by Muhtar Hadiyono. This group now has around 700 followers with different backgrounds, consisting of 670 farmers, 5 traders, and 5 private employees,<sup>25</sup> and also PNS (civil servants)/TNI (Indonesian Army). This organization is scattered in the mainland region of Flores. According to local authorities, the *Khilafatul Muslimin* wanted to establish a Khilafah government in which the system would be led by a caliph. From some of the confessions of a former member of the *Khilafatul Muslimin*, this organization view that those who are outside of them are deviant (*taghut*). They want to implement the Khilafah

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<sup>24</sup> Muhammad Moa, *Interview*, 10 May 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Religion of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Regional Office, 7.

government system in West Manggarai as the second center of government after Lampung.

*Khilafatul Muslimin* expanded its movement to remote areas in Indonesia, such as NTT and various regions such as West Manggarai Regency and Labuan Bajo. Although they do not have so many followers, the existence of this community has received attention from the local community. They consider *Khilafatul Muslimin* as radical and synonymous with the ISIS movement. This is in line with the movement in Lampung, as stated by Ilham Mundzir that this organization is a metamorphosis of ISIS in Indonesia.<sup>26</sup>

### **g. HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia)**

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) became one of the groups that received the attention of the Kupang government, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). As popularly known, HTI is considered to teach Khilafah that is contrary to Pancasila and NKRI. In Kupang, HTI was chaired by Said Made Amin with a total membership of about 22 KK (Family Card). Most of them live around the Oesapa area, East Raya Kupang. The embryo of the HTI network in Kupang has long been formed.

Based on the information obtained by us, the management and members of HTI in Kupang are scattered in several places and several institutions, both government and private agencies. Some of their members work as lecturers, doctors, teachers, and others. The HTI activists have spread not only in the city of Kupang but also in Alor. On this island, three individual food vendors in Lipa Market are listed as local HTI administrators. To deal with matters related to the organization that will undermine the state ideology, the Kupang City Administration and its officials take preventive measures by embracing and fostering them to be loyal to the ideology of Pancasila.

As an example case, an HTI member once filed a file to obtain permission to conduct activities in Kupang City. However, because the activities were considered contrary to the state ideology, the application was canceled. From this case, the local government began to be careful in responding to the existence of the organization and maintain the security and order associated with existing religious

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<sup>26</sup> Ilham Mundzir, "Sikap Muslim Terhadap Modernitas: Kasus Gerakan Khilafatul Muslimin di Lampung", *Afkaruna: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (2013), 46.

organizations. The prevention steps taken by the government officials are by giving understanding to the local community about the values of nationality, Pancasila, and the Unitary Republic of Indonesia. Meanwhile, to deal with members of the community who have been contaminated with religious organizations banned by the central government, the local government acts to bring order and accompany them until they recognize the ideology of Pancasila as the basis of the state.

Several actions reject the existence of HTI, for example by the Ansor Youth Movement (*Gerakan Pemuda Ansor*) and its *Banser*. In the speech delivered by Abdul Muis as the coordinator of the action, he stated that the condition of harmony and tolerance among religious believers had been running for quite a long time. Therefore, this condition cannot be tarnished by the presence of HTI in Kupang. Pancasila, Unity in Diversity, and the love for the Homeland are fixed prices.<sup>27</sup>

#### **h. Jehovah's Witnesses**

Jehovah's Witnesses are religious sects or schools of thought which were popular in early 2010 in Indonesia. The existence of this religious movement was officially banned by the Indonesian government, through the Attorney General Decree No. 129/JA/12/1976. But the ban was later lifted by Marzuki Darusman through the Decree of Indonesian Attorney General, No. 225/A/JA/06/2001 dated June 1, 2001. Because of these two opposite decrees, the presence of Jehovah's Witnesses organizations remains exists in certain areas.

Besides the Islamic religious sects, the Jehovah's Witnesses also received the attention of the local government. Many adherents of this sect live in Oepura Village, Maulafa District, Kupang City. According to information that we got from the local Catholic Community and Christian Guidance of the Ministry of Religion, the existence of this sect received sharp attention from the community. As many as 34 churches denominations have rejected its existence because it is considered disturbing Christians and their teachings regarded contrary to Christian teachings in general.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Nasih Nasrullah, "GP Ansor: Pergerakan Eks HTI Masih Beroperasi di NTT", *Republika* (5 November, 2019), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Paulus K, *Interview*, 27 November 2018.

Some things that concern the Christian community regarding the existence of Jehovah's Witnesses are the teachings that do not recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and do not recognize the Trinity as their theology. At this point, the church represented by Ps. Mery said that the teachings that were believed by the followers of Jehovah's Witnesses were only for private use and not for the public. Indeed, they have the right to religious freedom. Yet, they received a threat from the mainstream denominations that if they published aggressively their teachings amid the Christian community in general, their action would be reported to the authorities.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Concern of the State**

In Indonesia, the government is responsible for the religious life of its citizens, including to maintain harmony among the diversity of religious expression and the freedom to believe in one of many. In this context, the NTT provincial government is worried about the many religious sects that exist in its region. This concern, for example, can be seen in the country's fear of the religious vulnerability of the people's faith.

According to several government employees, the people of NTT, especially followers of Islam, have a low level of religious understanding and live on small islands. They are considered to be vulnerable hence can be easily influenced by new ideas and thoughts. Even, in a wider scope, such phenomena of growing religious sects could have an impact on the existing social order and the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) can generally be said to be a vulnerable area infiltrated by deviant streams of religious sects and movement.

The emergence and development of religious sects in NTT are not similar to the emergence of the first creed on the island of Java, where the confluence of various beliefs eventually forms a syncretic pattern of beliefs. In NTT, the emergence and development of religious movement were not caused by mutual dialogue between Islam and local culture, but because of the impact of modernization and ideological political conditions in Indonesia.

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<sup>29</sup> Sinode GMT, "Tokoh Lintas Agama Antisipasi Ajaran Saksi Yehova dan Rencana Penarikan Guru PNS", in <https://sinodegmit.or.id/tokoh-lintas-agama-antisipasi-ajaran-saksi-yehova-dan-rencana-penarikan-guru-pns/> (accessed on 14 May 2020).

This concern can be justified if we consider the existence of religious education institutions. For example, the existence of Islamic boarding schools (*Pondok Pesantren*) in these locations is still relatively small. The absence of the significant role of pesantren because of the lack in numbers, we argue, becomes one of the fundamental aspects regarding how new religious sects and movements can be easily spread to NTT. This fact can be compared to the case in Java, where because there is so many pesantren that, the new Islamic religious sects and movement find it difficult to develop.

From some of the above explanation, we can illustrate that the existence and development of religious schools in the local areas are caused by several things. First, the lack of effectiveness of religious da'wah or the weakness of religious formation. Second, the lack of Islamic educational institutions based on religious moderation such as pesantren, madrasa, congregation-based education (*majlis taklim*), and others. Third, the political conditions in Indonesia lately are characterized by religious-political ideology so that their development has an impact on regions in Indonesia, especially remote areas such as Eastern Indonesia. Fourth, there is globalization and information that is sweeping across all countries in the world. We cannot avoid this so that we all should increase our potentials, such as educational potential, local regulations, and legislation. Fifth, the economic factor such as poverty, which we think is the most urgent aspect that the local government must be immediately addressed. The problem of poverty will have an impact on other social problems, such as the mistrust of the community towards the government that would make them do anything outside of legal control.

## Conclusion

The existence of new religious sects and movement in the city of Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, is experiencing growth and development that is not as fast as many people have been worried about. This can be seen from the low number of adherents, which is an average of fewer than 70 people. We argue that this happens because local people and governments quickly take the policy to control and accompany the existence of these streams. They are always in coordination with related parties such as MUI, Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Police, as well as religious figures. They make

efforts to supervise the activities carried out by these religious organizations.

Besides, the teachings developed by several religious sects in Kupang are not much different from the mainstream religious organization in Indonesia. For example, the HTI and the *Khilafatul Muslimin* are identified as promoting the Khilafah system. Likewise, LDII, Gafatar, and Ahmadiyya, all of them have no characteristic of localities. They teach their beliefs to their members in particular and are closed to the outside community.

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