

TOWANI TOLOTANG RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: A COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OF THE DYNAMICS AND RAMIFICATIONS OF INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS IN INDONESIA

Teguh Ahmad Asparill¹, Gabriel Durah Langoday², Dawid Bunikowski³, Arwanto Harimas Ginting⁴

ABSTRACT

Religious diversity in Indonesia poses significant challenges for local religions such as Towani Tolotang, which struggle to maintain their identity and religious freedom while demanding recognition in accordance with international legal principles on religious freedom. This study aims to investigate the challenges faced by the Towani Tolotang local religion and their implications for its survival. Utilizing a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach, this study examines various literature and ethnographic data to comprehend the sociocultural context of the Towani Tolotang community. The findings reveal that Towani Tolotang, a local faith that worships *Dewata Seuwae*, encountered discrimination and suppression during the crackdown on the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) through the TAP MPRS XXV/1966. Despite facing pressure to adopt one of the six officially recognized religions, the Towani Tolotang community persevered by incorporating some aspects of Hinduism into their practices. This dynamic resulted in a split within the community between those who adhered to their indigenous beliefs and those who adopted Islam. This research underscores the significance of religious freedom as an internationally recognized human right that is frequently overlooked in practice in Indonesia. Government policies and legal interpretations that tend to be theistic expose local religious beliefs, such as Towani Tolotang, to discrimination. This study concludes that the protection of religious rights for local faith communities must be improved through inclusive and non-discriminatory law enforcement.

Keywords: Towani Tolotang; International Freedom of Religion Law; Indigenous Religious

¹ Institut Pemerintahan Dalam Negeri (teguhahmad064@gmail.com)

² Institut Pemerintahan Dalam Negeri (gafellangoday@gmail.com)

³ University of Eastern Finland (dawid.bunikowski@uef.fi)

⁴ Institut Pemerintahan Dalam Negeri (arwantoharimasginting@ipdn.ac.id)

ABSTRAK

Keragaman agama di Indonesia menimbulkan tantangan yang signifikan bagi agama-agama lokal seperti Towani Tolotang, yang berjuang untuk mempertahankan identitas dan kebebasan beragama sambil menuntut pengakuan sesuai dengan prinsip-prinsip hukum internasional tentang kebebasan beragama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki tantangan-tantangan yang dihadapi oleh agama lokal Towani Tolotang dan implikasinya terhadap keberlangsungannya. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan etnografi, studi ini mengkaji berbagai literatur dan data etnografi untuk memahami konteks sosiokultural masyarakat Towani Tolotang. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa Towani Tolotang, sebuah kepercayaan lokal yang menyembah Dewata Seuwae, mengalami diskriminasi dan penindasan selama penumpasan Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) melalui TAP MPRS XXV/1966. Meskipun menghadapi tekanan untuk mengadopsi salah satu dari enam agama yang diakui secara resmi, komunitas Towani Tolotang tetap bertahan dengan memasukkan beberapa aspek Hindu ke dalam praktik-praktik mereka. Dinamika ini mengakibatkan perpecahan di dalam komunitas antara mereka yang menganut kepercayaan asli mereka dan mereka yang memeluk agama Islam. Penelitian ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya kebebasan beragama sebagai hak asasi manusia yang diakui secara internasional yang sering diabaikan dalam praktiknya di Indonesia. Kebijakan pemerintah dan interpretasi hukum yang cenderung teistik membuat kepercayaan agama lokal, seperti Towani Tolotang, mengalami diskriminasi. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa perlindungan hak beragama bagi komunitas penghayat kepercayaan lokal harus ditingkatkan melalui penegakan hukum yang inklusif dan tidak diskriminatif.

Kata Kunci: Towani Tolotang; Hukum Kebebasan Beragama Internasional; Agama Adat

1. INTRODUCTION

Religion plays a significant role in social life in Indonesia as it is seen as a system for establishing social norms and rules. With a country's diversity, differences arise that influence perceptions of religious norms that must be respected, sometimes conflicting with one another. Presidential Decree No. 1 of 1965 and Law No. 5 of 1969 mandated that only Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism be recognised in Indonesia (Ramaino et al., 2023). This recognition by the government provides a broad representative space for adherents of these six religions; for instance, in the executive realm, they have the opportunity to obtain adequate worship facilities as they have legitimacy in the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. Even during the first general election held in 1955, religions with the most adherents, such as Islam, Christianity, and Catholicism, had their own parties and succeeded in occupying constituent seats, including the Masyumi Party (Islam) with 119 seats, the Indonesian Christian Party with 16 seats, and the Catholic Party with 10 out of a total of 514 seats (van der Kroef, 1957). The six religions, namely Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, have a stronger presence in Indonesia due to the formation of several religious representation organisations, such as the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), Konferensi Wali Gereja Indonesia (KWGI), Persekutuan Gereja Indonesia (PGI), Majelis Tinggi Agama Kong Hu Chu Indonesia (MATAKIN), and Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI). This demonstrates the government's partiality

towards these six religions and confirms that the principle of pluralism only applies to them. In contrast, indigenous religions in Indonesia are often neglected and intimidated. These indigenous religions are spread across several islands, such as the Samin and Tengger religions in Java; the Kaharingan religion in Kalimantan; the Permalim religion in Sumatra; and the Ammatoa, Aluk Todolo, and Towani Tolotang religions in Sulawesi. Discrimination against indigenous religions is evident in the government's crackdown on the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) through the TAP MPRS XXV/1966 on the Dissolution of the PKI and the Prohibition of Spreading Communist Thoughts, Marxism, and Leninism. During this period, Indonesian society was driven by a deep sense of hatred towards the communist movement, which was the main mastermind of the 30 September PKI Movement (G30SPKI) with the intention of changing Pancasila and the constitution into a communist state (Citrawan & Putri, 2024). The tragic event caused political instability and killed high-ranking officers in the Indonesian National Army (TNI). The consequences of the government's actions against the PKI were also felt by followers of indigenous religious in Indonesia, as they were perceived to have unclear and atheist-like beliefs that were at odds with the principles of Pancasila's first tenet, "Belief in One God." Suspensions arose that local religious believers had been infiltrated and brainwashed by communist ideology, such as in the instance of three military operations in South Sulawesi led by Islamic organisations with the intention of eradicating local religious beliefs. These operations were known as Operation *Mappatoba*, aimed at eliminating the Bissu

(Bugis spiritual adepts), Operation *Tumbbu Tallua*, which targeted followers of local congregations, and Operation *Mappakainge*, which sought to eradicate the followers of the local religion Towani Tolotang (currently residing in Sidenreng Rappang Regency). The fate of Towani Tolotang's local religion shares similarities with the demise of local arts, which was eradicated because of their perceived association with Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA), a subsidiary of the PKI at the time. To streamline religious governance, the government mandated that indigenous religions select one of the six recognised religions as their permanent faith. Towani Tolotang chose Hinduism as its permanent religion during the New Order era. These events illustrate that the TAP MPRS XXV/1966 has had a detrimental impact on the existence of indigenous religions in Indonesia and has been a significant source of discrimination against them. The government's interference with religious matters reflects its desire to control indigenous religions that should be preserved. It is as if the government is a deity who grants or withholds opportunities for indigenous religious development. Although Towani Tolotang's local religion is registered as a culture rather than a religion in the state administration, it still endures today. Adherents of Towani Tolotang no longer experience intervention through violence or intimidation, but they face the dynamics of reformative existence, such as conversion and interfaith marriage. This article aims to investigate the dynamics experienced by the local religion of Towani Tolotang and reveal the implications of these dynamics on its existence.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology that adheres to a constructivist paradigm, which is rooted in the development of epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions that align with the socio-cultural context (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To reinforce the analytical evaluation, the researcher utilizes a qualitative ethnographic approach (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), which involves examining the Towani Tolotang ethnic group as a local religious belief in order to provide a description of ethnic culture as an instrument of religiosity, which is the object of this research. The data collection technique employed in this study involves a literature review, where the researcher collects, organizes, and analyzes information from a variety of sources, such as journals, news articles, books, and government reports. The author's analysis of this literature centers on the relevance of the references to the primary topic of the article, namely the dynamics of religious freedom and its impact on the local religion of Towani Tolotang. This analysis process is then utilized to categorize the crucial discussion of the research topic into several subtopics that facilitate data extraction and analysis. Ultimately, the findings of the study will be described in the form of a narrative review.

3. RESULT

The History of Towani Tolotang Indigenous Religious

The Wajo Kingdom in 1582 witnessed the arrival of the Towani community during the reign of La Mungkace. The community was known as Towani, which is derived from the words "*To*" (referring to people) and "*Wani*" (referring to the Wani area), indicating that the people originated from Wani. At this point, Islam was gaining popularity throughout the region, with the exception of the Towani community area (Satrianegara et al., 2021). They believed that the advent of Islam in Wajo threatened their beliefs' validity. To mitigate this conflict, the Wajo royal family took the approach of marrying a Towani princess named I Goliga to a Wajo prince. However, the Towani people continue to insist on embracing Islam. As a result, they opted to leave the Wani area and move to other areas. This act is referred to as *Malleko Dapureng* (lifting all the contents of the kitchen), which the Towani people interpret as a permanent relocation and a vow never to return. *Malleko Dapureng* is also seen as an expression of resistance and rejection by the Towani community towards the Islamic movement and the Wajo Kingdom. Following this incident, I Goliga's daughter also departed from the Wajo Kingdom and chose to settle with her community in the Sidenreng Kingdom, which was led by I Pabbere. The period during which the Towani community migrated to the Sidenreng Kingdom gave rise to the term Tolotang. This term originated when the King of Sidenreng instructed his servants to summon the Towani people, saying "*Olliirenga Taulotangnge Pasa'e*" (all the people who live in the southern part of the market), as the Towani community initially settled in the vicinity of the market (Sitoto & Akkas, 2021). Because of the customs of the inhabitants of the Sidenreng Kingdom,

who refer to the Towani community as Tolotang, this community regards the term as a new identity that is advantageous and serves as a symbol of their acceptance of the new social circle. Consequently, they opted to change their nickname to Towani Tolotang. This phenomenon has been termed "The Circuit of Culture" by sociologists and researchers in the field of culture, who describe it as a process by which majority groups label minority communities, leading to the internalisation of these labels by migrants (Perreault, 2023). Towani Tolotang is regarded as a local religion, as it continues to uphold the teachings of the past, which revolve around the worship of a deity known as *Dewata Seuwae* (God Almighty), who is believed to have the power to determine one's fate (*Patotoe*). La Panaungi and I Pabbere were the founders of this faith. Towani Tolotang's fundamental principles are based on five key beliefs: 1) Belief in *Dewata Seuwae*; 2) belief in the day of Judgement; 3) belief in an afterlife; 4) belief in the revelation of *Dewata Seuwae*; and 5) belief in the sacred scripture of Lontara, which is evident in the worship of wells, rocks, and ancestral graves (Hamid, 2022). Owing to its firm convictions, Towani Tolotang is generally regarded as a local faith. It comprises two main factions: the *Benteng* group, consisting of those who have converted to Islam, and the Towani Tolotang group, which upholds traditional Tolotang beliefs. The primary distinction between these two groups is the customs associated with marriage and death ceremonies. The *Benteng* group adheres to Islamic law on matters concerning marriage and death ceremonies, while the Towani Tolotang group conducts weddings in the presence of *Uwa'*, their spiritual leader, and wraps the deceased in

betel leaves during funeral rites. Notably, the Towani Tolotang community is officially registered as practising Hinduism, unlike the Benteng group, who unequivocally identified as Muslims (Maidin, 2017). The *Sipulung* ceremony, an annual event held by the Towani Tolotang community to honour their ancestors, took place at Parinyamen Hill in South Sulawesi Province. The local religion of the Towani Tolotang community continues to thrive in Amparita Village, Tellu Limpoe District, and the Sidenreng Rappang Regency. Community members communicate in the Bugis language in their daily lives, despite the challenging accessibility of Sidenreng Rappang.

The Dynamics of Religious Freedom for Adherents of the Towani Tolotang Indigenous Religious

Administratively, Towani Tolotang is an integral part of Hinduism and classified as a branch of religion. However, before embracing Hinduism as their main religion, the Towani Tolotang community faced a tragedy of violence and intimidation during the New Order era when they were targeted as alleged sympathisers of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). This persecution was motivated by the events of the 30 September PKI Movement, which aimed to establish a fully communist state and eliminate the influence of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. In response, the government issued TAP MPRS XXV/1966 as a policy that supported the massacre of PKI sympathisers. The general public mistakenly assumed that local religious communities, including Towani Tolotang, were part of the PKI sympathisers, as they

shared the belief that they did not have a clear god, and were thus equated with communist groups who did not care about the role of religion in life. In the aftermath of this tragedy, the government of Sidenreng Rappang Regency (formerly the Kingdom of Sidenreng) issued a decree on 4 February 1966 which sought to undermine the existence of the Towani Tolotang religion. The decree stated that: 1) Towani Tolotang is not a religion; 2) Every Towani Tolotang adherent must perform marriage or divorce using Islamic Shari'a and do so at the Office of Religious Affairs in accordance with the provisions of Law No. 22/1964 and Law No. 23/1953 (Aripin, 2023). Furthermore, the regent's instructions, as outlined in letters AGA/21/1/VII/1996 and AGA/2/II/II/1996, directed all Towani Tolotang followers in each sub-district to conduct marriages in accordance with Islamic law and to refrain from performing the customary rituals that they had previously practiced (Hs et al., 2020). This predicament intensified when the local administration issued a radio gram frequency, T/100/1966, which unequivocally instructed the Towani Tolotang community to opt for one of the six religious doctrines approved by the central government. This development can be linked to the Ideological Repressive State Apparatus perspective, which involves government control and supervision of the Towani Tolotang community through threats and penalties (Mayrudin & Zulfiana, 2017). At the same time, Towani Tolotang adherents began to remove their basic rights and were persecuted. This placed them in the social role of the *homo sacer*, a subject that is defined and excluded by law. Following pressure from the local government, the

Towani Tolotang community submitted complaints to the central government by sending letters to the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly (MPRS) and the Presidium of the Ampera Cabinet in Jakarta. The community also sent representatives, led by Tayyeb and Makkutengeng, to high-ranking state officials. Consequently, the central government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, issued the letter DEPAG/B/III/3/1519 on 22 July 1966 instructing all government components not to force indigenous religions to choose a particular religion (Elihami, 2022). Furthermore, the Ministry of Religious Affairs evaluated the religious customs and beliefs of the Towani Tolotang community in collaboration with the Director General of Community Development. The ultimate decision was drawn up based on the provisions outlined in Decree Number 6 of 1966, which declared Towani Tolotang an essential component of Hinduism (Iskandar, 2019). This study focuses on Towani Tolotang's religious practices, which resemble those of Hinduism in their emphasis on offerings in every religious ceremony. For instance, the *Mappenre' Nanre* ceremony conducted by Towani Tolotang is intended to deliver prayers to *Dewata Seuwae* by providing offerings, such as food and beverages, much like the Hindu practice of visiting a temple. However, the decision to allow this religious ceremony was eventually rejected by the local government, led by the Regent of the Sidenreng Rappang Regency and the Governor of South Sulawesi Province. They sent a letter to the Attorney General's Office to dissolve the Towani Tolotang community, which was also supported by volunteer organisations such as Kesatuan Aksi Pemuda dan Pelajar

Indonesia (KAPPI) and Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah (PERTI). The issue sparked a range of opinions, with some parties advocating for the preservation of Towani Tolotang's religious practices, whereas others believed it necessary to disband the community. Eventually, in 1967, the Commander of the XIV Hasanuddin Military Region Command in Makassar issued decree number 010/05/PPD/1967, which declared that the Ministry of Religious Affairs decree number 6 of 1966 was no longer valid in South Sulawesi Province, thereby effectively disbanding the Towani Tolotang community (Segara et al., 2020). On the one hand, the Commander of the XIV Hasanuddin Military Region issued a decree that disregards Article 29, Paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution, which pertains to freedom of religion. This unilateral action was motivated by the anti-communist movement as the military and community believed that Towani Tolotang's survival would sow new seeds of communism. The *Mappakainge* military operation was conducted to locate and eradicate the Towani Tolotang community's religious practices, even if it required immoral acts, such as exhuming the graves of their relatives and burying them according to Islamic law. Some Towani Tolotang adherents converted to Islam under intense pressure and mental weakness, giving rise to a new group called the *Benteng*. Meanwhile, those who remained loyal to their beliefs opted to administer Hinduism, but continued to practice the customs of their faith.

4. DISCUSSION

Examining the Relationship between Towani Tolotang's Religious Dynamics

and the International Legal Principle of Freedom of Religion

Since the closing of World War II, freedom of religion has been recognized as an indisputable right that all citizens must possess. While Article 2 of the United Nations Charter does not explicitly mention this right, it does assert that the United Nations strives to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination based on race, sex, language, or religion. Despite this, freedom of religion has been increasingly affirmed by the development of national and regional treaties in various countries. A concrete instance of this can be seen in Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which claims that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Scolnicov, 2010). This declaration was reinforced by the establishment of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The international legal system has long recognized the importance of religious freedom, as evidenced by the United Nations Declaration on Religious Freedom (UDF) in 1981. This declaration was formulated to emphasize the previously established principles of religious freedom (Granqvist, 2003a). Indonesia ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as part of its reform agenda following the end of the New Order dictatorship (Marshall, 2018). However, despite these efforts, there have been numerous instances of human rights

violations owing to the hasty nature of the ratification process. The Indonesian government has since emphasized its commitment to upholding religious freedom, as seen in Articles 28E Paragraph (1), 29 Paragraph (1), and 29 Paragraph (2) of the revised 1945 Constitution (Lems, 2010). Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how effectively these measures will prevent future violations. The shortcoming of these articles is that none offer unlimited guarantees to adherents, similar to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). This is why local religions and beliefs in Indonesia from the old order period until the beginning of the reformation period were still free from discrimination and violence. The Indonesian government should emphasize its commitment to ratify the ICCPR and International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) by reviewing General Comment Number 22 of the Human Rights Committee (HCR), which specifically protects all adherents of theistic, atheistic, and non-theistic local religions. Despite this, the First Precept of Pancasila can be seen as a justification for discriminating against local religious beliefs, as the government recognizes only six religions: Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. In the provision of public services, religious beliefs such as Towani Tolotang often lack safeguards and exceptional public services. One instance of this is marriage in Indonesia, which is regulated by Article 2 Paragraph (1) of Law Number 1 Year 1974 concerning marriage (Bagir, 2014). According to this law, a valid marriage must follow the rules and regulations of the six main religions in Indonesia under the auspices of the

Ministry of Religion. This illustrates a disparity between international law and legislation in Indonesia regarding freedom of religion. Furthermore, the implementation of the ICCPR, monitored by the HCR, mandates that the principle of freedom of religion must be universal and inclusive of all religions, including non-believers. Nevertheless, reviewing institutions in Indonesia, especially the Constitutional Court, tends to adopt a theistic religious perspective. This is exemplified in Law Number 1 of the 1965 PNPS, Article 1, which prohibits the practice of any belief that diverges from the main teachings of religion in Indonesia (Simandjuntak et al., 2018). Moreover, they argue that revoking the law might lead to public unrest, as it could trigger horizontal conflict and hostility in diverse layers of society, as per Constitutional Court Decision Number 56/PUU-XV/2012:530 (Platzdasch & Hui, 2013). Additionally, Constitutional Court Decision Number 56/PUU-XV/2017:533 exacerbates the situation for followers of local religions such as Towani Tolotang, as it posits that religious interpretation cannot contradict the religious principle, namely, the holy book (Yunazwardi & Nabila, 2021). The potential danger to the indigenous religions of Indonesia is significant, considering that they are not rooted in sacred texts, unlike other faiths. Instead, they are shaped by historical traditions and customs of the local region.

Implications for the Social and Political Life of the Towani Tolotang Indigenous Religious Believers

The Towani Tolotang religious community in the Sidenreng Rappang Regency is renowned for its high level of tolerance

and solidarity. These values are deeply ingrained in their social lives as they are seen as expressions of awareness and kindness. The community's moment of tolerance is exemplified by its willingness to help build a mosque near their settlement. Meanwhile, solidarity is demonstrated through the practice of setting up a tent (*sarapo'*) for a wedding ceremony (*mappabotting*), which requires cooperation owing to its complex installation and decoration process. Towani Tolotang adherents have developed a habit of helping one another, motivated by a sense of reciprocity and the assumption that they too will have a wedding in the future. Most Towani Tolotang adherents are farmers and traders, which necessitates social interaction within the community structure. This harmony has significant implications for the existence of Towani Tolotang's local religion, which does not use intimidation or violence, unlike the era of the New Order and suppression of communism in Indonesia. However, the rampant phenomenon of religious conversion has slowly eroded these values. Etymologically, religious conversion refers to repentance, conversion, and change of religion, which can be categorised into two types: Volitional and Self-Surrender (Granqvist, 2003b). The process of religious conversion can take many forms, one of which is the gradual transformation of religious practices, known as the volitional type. In contrast, the self-surrender type occurs spontaneously as a result of mystical pressure. Towani Tolotang adherents become converted, or subjects who have experienced religious conversion. According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs in the Sidenreng Rappang Regency, there are an

estimated 20,000 Towani Tolotang adherents. Despite this, the phenomenon of religious conversion is still evident, as in 2016, 136 people converted to Islam, and the following year, 71 people were recorded as having converted (Hariyono & Fitriani, 2022). The annual occurrence of religious conversion is a phenomenon that is not consistent in terms of the number of individuals who convert. The majority of Towani Tolotang converts to Islam tend to have a weak belief in the practices of the Towani Tolotang religion. Kinship support significantly influences this conversion phenomenon, allowing individuals to focus on practising Islam, regardless of differences within their families. Even in the case of *Uwa'* (spiritual leaders) converting to Islam, their conversion is supported by *Uwa's* tolerance of diversity, which allows Towani Tolotang believers to choose their own spiritual path without coercion. One of the actions that can stimulate the phenomenon of religious conversion is the aith marriage between Towani Tolotang adherents and adherents of Islam, with mutual sympathy and a heterogeneous social environment influencing converts to marry Muslims. The religious conversion experienced by Towani Tolotang adherents today is of the Volitional Type because it is not based on coercion and tends to be gradual. In contrast, during the era of the New Order and the suppression of communism, religious conversion was of the self-surrender type, carried out through intimidation and persecution. Although the existence of Towani Tolotang is nominally reduced due to the phenomenon of religious conversion, it also has a political impact because the Towani Tolotang mass is increasing due to bilateral relations and beliefs in the values of tolerance.

Consequently, the followers of Towani Tolotang adhere to structured organisations in order to safeguard their minority rights in the Sidenreng Rappang Regency. The presence of Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI) as a religious organisation in the region has brought about significant changes, enabling Towani Tolotang adherents to establish connections with those in positions of power. This potential was leveraged by some Towani Tolotang adherents to enter the realm of local politics, where they gained advantages in terms of both mass and identity. In 2009, two seats in the Regional House of Representatives of Sidenreng Rappang Regency were designated for Towani Tolotang representation, although these seats were occupied by political party representatives (Qodir, 2014). From 2019 to 2024, Paleppang M, an adherent of Towani Tolotang, held a position as a member of the Sidenreng Rappang Regency Regional People's Representative Council, representing the Golongan Karya Party (Golkar) (Lezen Id, 2019). Towani Tolotang possesses sufficient political influence to uphold its rights and obligations. However, this political potential may also lead to the emergence of internal conflicts, such as adherents vie for power and engaging in violent struggles. For instance, when a *Uwa'*, who is regarded as part of an elite group, endeavours to run for the legislature and represents the interests of Towani Tolotang (Kayyisa, 2023). On the contrary, there are other members of the *Uwa* who aspire to hold political office. This situation inevitably leads to conflicts of interest and an internal strife. This is unavoidable because each member of the *Uwa'* has their own group of supporters

and will pass on their position to their progeny. Towani Tolotang's leadership is closed and hereditary (Haryum, 2021). The perpetuation of power within the socio-religious framework of Towani Tolotang's adherents is likely to emerge as a potent instrument for augmenting political support. Consequently, the cohesion of Towani Tolotang followers in their resistance to external threats might be undermined by political machinery and divergent interests. This implies that Towani Tolotang's survival may be imperilled by intra-group strife.

5. CONCLUSION

Towani Tolotang is a local religious belief system that worships *Dewata Seuwae* (God Almighty) with the aim of determining one's fate (*Patotoe*). Towani Tolotang's adherents migrated to the Sidenreng Kingdom (Sidenreng Rappang Regency) from the Wajo Kingdom due to widespread Islamisation. The discrimination against Towani Tolotang's local religion is evident in the crackdown on the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) through the issuance of TAP MPRS XXV/1966 on the Dissolution of the PKI and the Prohibition of Spreading Communist Thoughts, Marxism, and Leninism. Through the *Mappakainge* military operation, Towani Tolotang's adherents were forced to abandon their religious beliefs and practices and embrace Islam. However, the Towani Tolotang community still wanted to maintain its existence by sending letters to the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly (MPRS) and the Presidium of the Ampera Cabinet in Jakarta. The Towani Tolotang community sent representatives led by Tayyeb and

Makkutengeng to high-ranking state officials. As a result, the central government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, issued a letter DEPAG/B/III/3/1519 on 22 July 196, instructing all government components not to force indigenous religions to choose a particular religion. Additionally, the Ministry of Religious Affairs conducted an assessment of the religious practices of the Towani Tolotang community through the Director General of Community Development, and the final result was based on Decree Number 6 of 1966, which declared Towani Tolotang as an integral part of Hinduism. The decision faced resistance from those who followed Towani Tolotang as it was seen as an erasure of their beliefs. Additionally, the military was opposed to the decision because of concerns about potential communist influences within the local religion. The Towani Tolotang religion presents a genuine obstacle to the universal human right to religious freedom, as defined by international law. Despite Indonesia's ratification of both the ICCPR and ICESCR, the effective application of these freedoms remains hindered, especially in relation to safeguarding local religious practices, such as Towani Tolotang. The ongoing dispute between international law, which upholds the principle of unrestricted religious freedom, and domestic regulations, which commonly prioritize the six recognized religions, demands a more robust dedication from the Indonesian government to guarantee fair treatment and adequate protection for all citizens, including followers of indigenous religious beliefs, according to the established human rights standards in the United Nations. These dynamics have implications for

Towani Tolotang followers, particularly in terms of group division between those who maintain their beliefs and are affiliated with Hinduism or *Benteng* and those who have converted to Islam. Towani Tolotang's religious conversion during the communism crackdown era was of the Self Surrender type, characterized by intimidation and persecution. Nowadays, religious conversion is more likely to be of the Volitional Type, as it is done gradually and without coercion due to support from family members in interfaith marriages. This increases the number of Towani Tolotang followers and strengthens bilateral relations, which has political

implications. Towani Tolotang followers use this political potential to nominate members of the Regional House of Representatives in order to protect religious rights. However, this also opens up the potential for conflicts of interest and internal conflicts within Towani Tolotang, as the influential spiritual leaders, known as the elite *Uwa'*, compete for power.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The present article was authored by Teguh Ahmad Asparill and Gabriel Durah Langoday, and was derived from the final paper of the "Good governance, the rule of law and religious freedom as approaches to sustainable development in the Global South" short course program, which was organized and supervised by Dr. Dawid Bunikowski from the University of Eastern Finland. The authors express their heartfelt gratitude to the Finnish University Partnership for International Development (UNIPID) for their support with this program. The responsibility for the content lies solely in the authors.

7. REFERENCES

- Aripin, N. A. (2023). *Penganut Ajaran Tolotang dan Masa Lalu Dipersekusi Negara*. Washilah. <https://washilah.com/2023/01/penganut-ajaran-tolotang-dan-masa-lalu-dipersekusi-negara/>
- Bagir, Z. A. (2014). Advocacy for religious freedom in democratizing Indonesia. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 12(4), 27–39. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2014.976084>
- Citrawan, H., & Putri, G. C. (2024). Law, Memory, and Silence: The Case of Anti-Communism Laws in Indonesia. *The Age of Human Rights Journal*, 22, e8021–e8021. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.17561/tahrj.v22.8021>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. Sage publications.
- Elihami, E. (2022). Describing of Ethnopedagogical Leadership Contribution to Towani Tolotang Community Based on Local Wisdom Values in Elementary Schools. *Mahaguru: Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar*, 3(1), 55–60. <https://doi.org/10.33487/mgr.v3i1.3316>

- Granqvist, P. (2003a). Attachment Theory and Religious Conversions: A Review and a Resolution of the Classic and Contemporary Paradigm Chasm. *Review of Religious Research*, 45(2), 172–187. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512581>
- Granqvist, P. (2003b). Attachment Theory and Religious Conversions: A Review and a Resolution of the Classic and Contemporary Paradigm Chasm. *Review of Religious Research*, 45(2), 172–187. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512581>
- Hamid, A. (2022). Internalisasi Konsep Cycle Relation Model pada Komunitas Agama Lokal di Indonesia (Perspektif Sosial, Ekonomi dan Politik pada Kepercayaan Towani Tolotang, Aluk Todolo dan Patuntung di Sulawesi Selatan). *Jurnal Masyarakat Dan Budaya*, 24(2). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.55981/jmb.2022.1486>
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2019). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. Routledge.
- Hariyono, S., & Fitriani, H. N. (2022). Aktivisme Arsip dalam Konsep Keberagaman dengan Mengedepankan Perkembangan Pendidikan dan Ilmu Pengetahuan di Indonesia. *Khazanah: Jurnal Pengembangan Kearsipan*, 15(2), 193–211. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22146/khazanah.74880>
- Haryum, M. (2021). *Relasi Kuasa Antar Uwa' pada Komunitas Masyarakat Tolotang di Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang*. Universitas Hasanuddin.
- Hs, M. A., Shofiyullah, M. Z., & Amiruddin, Z. (2020). Relasi Filosofis Islam Nusantara dengan Hindu Nusantara dalam Hindu Tolotang di Kabupaten Sidrap Sulawesi Selatan. *Harmoni*, 19(2), 353–367.
- Iskandar, J. (2019). Kepercayaan Komunitas Towani Tolotang. *Al-Tadabbur*, 5(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.46339/altadabbur.v5i1.97>
- Kayyisa, A. (2023). *Penyelesaian Sengketa Waris melalui Pemangku Adat Towani Tolotang di Kabupaten Sidrap*. Universitas Hasanuddin.
- Lems, H. (2010). 'Freedom of Religion' In Indonesia: Some Thoughts from an International Perspective. In *Freedom of Religion* (pp. 89–107). Brill. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004158078.i-269>
- Lezen Id. (2019). *Profil Calon Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang*. Info Pemilu.
- Maidin, A. M. R. (2017). *Model Kepemimpinan Uwatta dalam Komunitas Tolotang Benteng* (Vol. 1). Universitas Negeri Makassar.
- Marshall, P. (2018). The Ambiguities of Religious Freedom in Indonesia. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 16(1), 85–96. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2018.1433588>
- Mayrudin, Y. M., & Zulfiana, N. H. (2017). Construction of Ideological State Apparatus in the New Order Regime Against Communism in Indonesia. *JILS*, 2, 113. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15294/jils.v2i02.19436>
- Perreault, M. F. (2023). Book Reviews: Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices by Stuart Hall. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 100(4), 1009–1011. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990231175689>
- Platzdasch, B., & Hui, Y. F. (2013). Religious Freedom in Contemporary Indonesia: The Case of Ahmadiyah. *Encountering Islam: The Politics of Religious Identities in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS).

- Qodir, Z. (2014). Hak Politik Kaum Minoritas Towani Tolotang di Sulawesi Selatan. *Unisia*, 36(81), 179–197.
- Ramaino, A. S., Najosan, M., & Tamon, M. L. (2023). History of Confessional Religion in Indonesia. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 10(3), 143–151. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v10i3.4436>
- Satrianegara, M. F., Juhannis, H., Lagu, A. M. H. R., & Alam, S. (2021). Cultural Traditional and Special Rituals Related to the Health in Bugis Ethnic Indonesia. *Gaceta Sanitaria*, 35, S56–S58. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.gaceta.2020.12.016>
- Scolnicov, A. (2010). *The Right to Religious Freedom in International Law: Between Group Rights and Individual rights*. Routledge.
- Segara, I. N. Y., Gunarta, I. K., Putrawan, I. N. A., & Brahman, I. M. A. (2020). *Hindu Alukta: Sejarah, Keberadaan, Aktivitas, dan Dinamikanya di Tana Toraja, Sulawesi Selatan*. Palewa Sari.
- Simandjuntak, M. E., Suroto, V., Setianto, B. D., & Sarwo, Y. B. (2018). *Religion-Based Conflict Resolution: A Critical Review on the Regulations of Social Conflict Management in Indonesia within Human Rights Protection's Framework*.
- Sitoto, S., & Akkas, A. (2021). Symbolic meanings in the ritual speech of Pattomateang ceremony of Towani Tolotang community in Ampatita Village, Sidrap Regency, South Sulawesi: An anthropolinguistic study. *International Congress of Indonesian Linguistics Society (KIMLI 2021)*, 163–169. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211226.033>
- Van der Kroef, J. M. (1957). Indonesia's First National Election: A Sociological Analysis. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 16(3), 237–249. <https://doi.org/http://www.jstor.org/stable/3484650>
- Yunazwardi, M. I., & Nabila, A. (2021). Implementasi Norma Internasional mengenai Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan di Indonesia. *Indonesian Perspective*, 6(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14710/ip.v6i1.37510>