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From respected hermits to ordinary citizens: The conversion of the Baduy, ethnicity, and politics of religion in Indonesia (1977 - 2019)
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Summary

The Baduy community is a Sundanese ethnic group which lives in the *desa* of Kanekes, Banten province (Java, Indonesië). The Baduy embrace the religion of Sunda Wiwitan that teaches them that they are hermits. As hermits, they must (1) protect the sanctuary of Sasaka Pusaka Buana, (2) protect the sanctuary of Sasaka Domas, (3) take care of kings and guide the nobles, (4) become hermits in Kanekes (5) *kalanjakan kapundayan* (hunt lesser mousedeads, deer, squirrels, and fish); and (6) *ngukus ngawalu muja ngalaksa* (perform the ceremonies of burning fragrance and *kawalu*, do veneration and make a *laksa*, a kind of noodle).

The earliest source on the Baduy is from C.L. Blume in 1822. Since that year up to now, many books and articles on the Baduy have been written. The earlier sources tried to explain the origin of the Baduy and many aspects of their life. Since the 1970s observers began to mention that the Baduy faced the problem of access to land and questioned the possibility of relocating some of them out of the *adat* land. For years, books and articles have discussed various aspects of the Baduy community. But they forget to mention that there have been more than 1,000 Baduy converted to Islam and more than a hundred to Christianity. My research aims to explain this phenomenon by asking this core question: why did the Baduy leave their religion?

To answer that question and other related questions I did fieldwork for several months in 2017 and 2019. This research covers the period of 1977-2019, namely from the year of the acceptance of the resettlement programme until two years after the Constitutional Court approved the lawsuit against the laws on the Administration of Population. To explain why the Baduy left their religion, I

utilise Rambo's theory of conversion which pays attention to the (1) context; (2) crisis; (3) quest; (4) encounter; (5) interaction; (6) commitment; and (7) consequences, of conversion.

From my research I conclude that the Baduy left their religion because of these interconnected aspects: (1) the concepts in Sunda Wiwitan and the Baduy's ethnicity, (2) the limited size of their *adat* land, (3) the population growth, (4) Islamic and Christian missionary activities, and (5) the politics of development and religion in Indonesia. Let us look at these aspects in more detail.

Sunda Wiwitan teaches that the Baduy are hermits. As hermits, they must live in the *adat* land and avoid development and features of modernity. Problems appear when the number of the population keeps increasing while the size of their land is constant, namely 5,136.58 hectares. Around 3,000 hectares are covered by a protected forest and the rest is used for housing and agricultural fields. If this remaining part of the land was divided evenly among 11,172 Baduy individuals (in 2010), each person would have about 0.45 hectare. While the population is increasing and the people are not allowed by the *adat* to develop new techniques and use modern tools of farming, the access to land is becoming scarce. Because of these problems, the Baduy have managed non-Baduy's fields since at least the 1950s. This choice has made them far beyond the control of their leaders and made them closer to non-Baduy's lifestyle in terms of development and modernity.

These conditions were accelerated by the politics of development and religion in Indonesia. After Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945, the government tried to develop the nation through, among others, transmigration and resettlement programmes. Until 2005 around 142,984 families, mostly from Java, were relocated to more sparsely populated islands. An effort to resettle the so-called "isolated societies", like the Baduy, had been begun since 1951. A more serious attempt was done in 1974 after the government issued the law No.6/1974 on Social Welfare. From 1977-1999 there were no less than 600 Baduy families joining the resettlement programme. This decision caused the problem of identity among the Baduy who participated in the resettlement programme where the *adat* leaders no longer recognised them as Baduy.

The fact that the Baduy in the resettlement villages were no longer recognised by the *adat* leaders was in line with the government's hope. Therefore, it would be possible for the government to develop their social and economic life and to change their religion from Sunda Wiwitan to "monotheistic views". By "monotheistic views" the government means Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Related to this term, in Indonesia, there are the so-called "recognised" and "non-recognised" religions. The first

term includes the six religions and the second refers to various belief systems, including local religions. Even though these terms are used, there is no single law that mentions this categorisation. The government and people often base this categorisation on the law No.1/1965 on religious blasphemy. In this law, the six religions are mentioned as religions that are embraced by the majorities. So, this law is nothing to do with the recognition of religions in Indonesia.

This categorisation has huge consequences. Firstly, the six official religions are managed by the Ministry of Religion (Depag), while belief systems are managed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Furthermore, in 1978 the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) issued the decision No. IV/MPR/1978 which declared that belief systems are not religions and the government must prevent them from becoming a religion. Moreover, the Depag issued decisions No. 70/1978 and No.77/ 1978 that were then compiled in a new joint regulation between the Depag and the Department of Home Affairs No. 1/BER/MDN-MAG/1979 on the Guidelines for Religious Outreach and Foreign Aid to Religious Organisations in Indonesia. Article 4 of the regulation mentions that religious proselytisation may not be directed at people who already embrace an official *religion*. Because local religions are not considered as a religion, this article meant that missionaries could target and convert the adherents of local religions.

Responding to the teaching of their religions on the mission and the politics of religion in Indonesia, Muslims and Christians perform missionary activities among communities of belief systems throughout Indonesia and compete to get more converts from them. The Muslim and Christian missionaries also entered the Baduy community. From the Muslim's side, besides independent preachers, they are affiliated with the Body of Special Missions (*Lembaga Dakwah Khusus*/ LDK) of Muhammadiyah, Al Washliyah of Medan, Jamaah Tabligh, Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII), and Pesantren Al-Amin of Ciboaleger. The LDK of Muhammadiyah even had a connection with *Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami* (the Muslim World League) in Saudi Arabia and the foundation of *Ihya' at-Turath al-Islami* in Kuwait.

The Muslims are active in doing missionary work among the Baduy, and even claim that Islam is the only religion entitled to perform the mission, because of the following connections between Muslims and the Baduy: (1) Cicakal Girang in the Baduy land is a Muslim village that is believed to date back to the 16th century, (2) the Outer Baduy proclaim the *shahāda* (the confession of faith) in front of a Muslim official (*āmil*) when they will marry, (3) Baduy men are circumcised and they believe that this practice is from Islam, (4) the marriage rules, such as the practice of *'idda*, are similar to the teaching of Islam. Because of these connections, the *jaro pamarentah* Saija even states that the Baduy are

Muslim, but their Islam is different from Islam of the majority.

Like Muslims, the Christians were also interested in doing missionary work among the Baduys and converting them to Christianity. The first Christian missionary among the Baduy was F.L. Anthing (1820-1883) who succeeded in converting at least one Baduy family. In 1961 there was Detmar Scheunemann from the Indonesian Bible Institute, but he did not succeed. Afterwards, in the resettlement period, there were quite a lot missionaries coming to the resettlement villages. Among them were Ismail Amaloh (from Timor Timur) who was a member of “Youth with a Mission” (YWAM), a Christian missionary organisation that is based in the US; Anturi (Bandung), Kharel Budiman Silitonga (Medan), and Bambang Sigit Waluyo (Purwodadi). Two Baduy, Windu Nur Gojali and Kokom, even became a pastor and missionary. Besides, because the root of the Baduy’s problem is access to land, the Muslim and Christian missionaries also compete to buy land for the (future) converts.

Because of these interconnected aspects, many Baduy left the Baduy land, joined the resettlement programme, and converted to Islam or Christianity. The number of converts was not fixed because some of them changed their religion again after they converted. The patterns of their conversion which I have encountered during this research were from (1) Sunda Wiwitan to Islam, (2) from Sunda Wiwitan to Christianity, (3) from Sunda Wiwitan to Christianity and then to Islam, (4) from Sunda Wiwitan to Islam and then to Christianity, (5) from Sunda Wiwitan to Islam and reverted to Sunda Wiwitan, (6) from Sunda Wiwitan to Islam, reverted to Sunda Wiwitan and reconverted to Islam.

Eventually, from the Baduy’s conversion narratives, it can be concluded that their conversion was a process of becoming citizens of the Republic of Indonesia. This process started with the belief that the Baduy were hermits. Problems appeared when the number of the population kept increasing, while the size of the adat land was limited and remained constant. Facing these problems, the Baduy then changed their view that they were not only hermits but also citizens. By becoming citizens they built a right-obligation relation with the state. They asked the state/government to protect them and they would follow the government by, for example, participating in the General Elections that were previously considered taboo. Many of them also joined the resettlement programme and converted to Islam or Christianity, two among the six “recognised” religions in Indonesia. Abandoning isolated societies and converting to one of the six religions were important aspects of the agenda of the resettlement programme which aimed, amongst other things, at including these communities into the mainstream of Indonesian society.