

***Seba* Tradition and the Symbol of Identity Politics of the Baduy Tribe in Banten**

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research is to examine the meaning of *Seba* tradition performed by Baduy tribe in Banten. This research finds out that, 1) *Seba* tradition is carried out annually by the Baduy people not only as a symbol of giving a tribute to a ruler, as it is widely misunderstood in society. But *Seba* is a Baduy's tradition used as a symbol of their obedience toward *Batara Tunggal*, their believed supreme authority, and of their submission to national government as a protector, facility provider, and policy maker. 2) *Seba* is now being used as a mediation for identity politics by the Baduy people, both in the struggle to look for protection of Baduy's authentic tradition, the legality of Baduy's region, and recognition of Baduy's native religion. This finding reflects the theory of Emile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski, Robertson Smith, Anthur Radcliffe Brown, Brian Morris, John Middleton, and Van Peursen, regarding the function of religious rituals. Religious rituals do not only have cultural and religious functions, but also have social functions, such as to intensify the solidarity among members of the religious community.

Keywords: *Tradition, seba, baduy Banten, identity politics*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Baduy people, a native tribe in Banten, a province in the Western tip of Java islands, have three types of religious rituals they carried out every year, when the year's harvest time in the community is finished. These rituals are *Ngawalu*, *Ngalaksa*, and *Seba*.

For the Baduy, these rituals are one of their absolute obligations which must not be left out, let alone forgotten, forever. The rituals are bequeathed from their ancestors (*kokolot*), thus must be exercised and handed down from generation to generation, without exception.[1]

Among the three rituals, the *Seba* is considered as the peak. After the process of *Ngawalu* and *Ngalaksa* ceremonies is completed, a follow-up ceremony was immediately prepared, and for the Baduy community, the third ceremony is no less important than the two types of ceremonies mentioned above, which are sacred value. This type of ultimate ceremony is usually called the *Seba* ceremony.[2]

Seen from the term of language, the word "*Seba*" is also interpreted the same as the word "*Saba*", or "*Nyeba*", "*Nyaba*", or "*PaSeban*". According to the meaning of its language, the word "*Seba*" means "meeting". The term "*Nyeba*" means "to visit for a meeting," while the word "*PaSeban*" means "meeting place, discussing place."

In the Sundanese dictionary, this term means "greeting which contains understanding arrive in the context to

present *laksa* along with other crops to the national authorities". Actually the substance of this *Seba* ritual is the relationship activity of the Baduy traditional government to the national government such as the District Head, Regent to the Governor.

The sacred of *Seba* is still very thick. For the Baduy, this tradition must be preserved at any time. So, it is natural when the implementation of *Seba*, from the children, adolescent, even parents, men and women-without the slightest complaining of fatigue- seem does not want to miss even for a second that historic moment. Therefore, it is not surprising if the ritualism of the *Seba* tradition for the Baduy Society is always carried out royally.[3]

Not only a *Seba* tradition is carried out by the Baduy community who still adheres to their original religion, Sunda Wiwitan, but also it is together performed by Baduy societies which have become Muslims. This happened because they assumed that even though the people outside Baduy are entirely Muslim, this does not preclude a well relationship between the Baduy in the interior and the outside Baduy community.[4]

In the *Seba* ritual tradition, the various elements of the Baduy society-both Baduy Tangtu and the Companion-delegate their representatives to conduct the *Seba* to visit the national government (Camat, Regent, and Governor) in order to express gratitude and to convey the grievance experienced by the Baduy Society for one year. More simply, *Seba* for the Baduy community in addition as an

expression of gratitude, they also deem it as a means of "consultation" to the national government.[5]

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An outstanding anthropologist named Clifford Geertz (1973) asserted a definition of culture as follows: First, an orderly system of meanings and symbols. Second, a pattern of meanings historically transmitted contained in symbolic forms. Third, the symbolic instruments are to control behavior. Fourth, because the culture is a symbol system, the cultural process must be understood, translated, and interpreted.[6]

From Geertz's statement above, it can be concluded that culture will always experience transformation along with changes in human's perspective as a result of environmental changes. According to Irwan Abdullah, among the reasons of that cultural change; First, melting the boundaries of cultural. Previously, it is always bound by the clear physical boundaries. For example, *kebaya* clothing, *sungkeman*, shadow puppets, and *blangkon* are always identical with Javanese clothing or traditional *budaya* of Java. The physical boundaries such as *kebaya*, shadow puppets, *blangkon*, are always used as physical boundaries or symbols to be the basis in defining the existence of a culture especially when the physical anything is still considered the most important and decisive.

Second, the cultural transformation is caused by the existence of spatial politics and cultural significance. The meaning of a symbol is also engendered by a changing power structure. This happens because according to Irwan Abdullah, however, a culture cannot be easily separated from the space where the culture is built, maintained, and preserved, or even changed.[7]

By the existence of interest of different authority, so the space that is a place of culture has undergone a new re-definition in line with the growth of modern lifestyles that are directly preceded by transformation in spatial design. In the past, the cultural centers take control and voice in determining the character of a social space, and then with a different interest, the state have to take over the role by redefining space to match with its orientation interests.[8]

Third, when the hegemony of the political interests of power occurs, the coercion of the meaning of space and a cultural identity simultaneously occur.[9] The public position which is reluctant to follow the authority's wish is separated into small groups which are also diverse in interpreting space and the meaning of cultural identity.[10] As a result of this condition, they miss the past memory or according to Irwan Abdullah they interest to do replication for ethnicity by the different parameter which is not based on the same local values, but on the same interest and importance from them who have different origins.[11] Irwan Abdullah gives an example if previously believed that the Parents' good or bad attitude will be inherited to their child, the now we do not amaze if it is different According to him, quoting Miller's expression which says that not only the factor of forming and determining values

is parents, but already also on other outside institutions of the family as the environment.

The contestation among various institutions is very intensive, causing individual to become an object and commodity of different interests. Those who are subordinated also participate in the contestation in the form of deconstructive interpretation or a defiance toward definition of space and meaning of *badaya* identity done by the hegemony of the holder of authority.[12]

Without a conflict of interest, it is so difficult imagined that will be created an awareness of systematic transformation to a more developed social system. Therefore, understanding cultural products have to be begun by redefining that culture, not as a generic culture (which is a hereditary guideline), but must be made as a differential culture (which is negotiated in the overall social interaction). The culture is not a legacy hereditary divided or practiced collectively, but it becomes a more conditional culture whose its existence depends on the character of power and the change relationships from the time to time. The effort to knit a culture has been in a full interest space from the parties who take part in the process. Therefore, the symbols indicating a culture are a vehicle for conception, a culture providing intellectual elements and social processes. In another definition, the cultural symbols are object, event, speech sounds, or texts forms which are given meaning by human.[13]

If referring to the explanation of that identity politics, then what is the *Seba* tradition carried out by the Baduy to now purely an obligation of ancestral teachings which must be performed every year, is there another motivation in the behind of celebration of the *Seba* symbol? Then what exactly is the meaning of *Seba* itself? How do Baduy understand *Seba*? These are among themes of the major problem that will be revealed in this study.[14]

3. RECOGNIZING THE BADUY SOCIETY

Recognizing the Baduy's history is quite complicated. This is because there are several versions, each of which is conflicting.

3.1. The Baduy Societ's Perspective

The mention of them as Baduy or Urang Baduy as commonly done by outsiders or researchers is actually not liked by them. They prefer to call themselves as *Urang Kanekes*, *Urang Rawayan*, or more specifically by referring to their original villages such as *Urang Cibeo*, *Urang Cikartawana*, *Urang Tangtu*, or *Urang Panamping*. Then the question is where does the mention of the term Baduy come from? According to Hoevell, their mentioning as Baduy is first named by outsiders of Baduy who have been Islam. This mention is suspected as a ridicule term to them (Baduy) based on several reasons, namely primitive, nomadic life, dependence to nature, making them equated with the lives of Baduy or people in

the Arab region. By this reason, the term Baduy is standardized and better known than the term the tribe or Kanekes.[15]

According to Pleyte, the word "Baduy" itself has unique characteristics as Sundanese words as; *tuluy*, *aduy*, *uruy*. In another reference, their call by the term Baduy is first mentioned by the Dutchmen when conducting colonization in Indonesia. The Dutchmen call them by term as *badoe'i*, *badoej*, *badoewi*, *Urang Kanekes* and *Urang Rawayan*.

The mention of the terms above is based on the some reasons; First, the term Baduy arises because it is derived from the name of a Baduy mountain which is now a place of their residence. This reason is afterwards rejected because the mention of the mountain being a Baduy mountain appears after they open the forestry area to be a settlement. Secondly, the term Baduy is from the word Buddha which later changed to be Baduy. Third, there are also those who say that the term Baduy is from the word "Baduyut" because in this place, there are many overgrown by *Baduyut* trees like banyan tree. Fourth, another opinion also arises that the mention of Baduy is taken from the Arabic Baduy "the word *Badu* or *Badawu*" which means sand sea. According to researchers, this reason is not right. The terminology of the Baduy term with the existence of tribe in Arabic is not based on the similarity of the term definition, but based on the similarity of life pattern, namely moving (nomadic) from a place to another following the existence of a place of life necessity supply or the existence of food.

Based on interviews with the several tribe elders (traditional personage) and the Baduy society, related to the history of the origin of the Baduy tribe, they believe that the origin of the Baduy community comes from the descendant of *Batara Cikal* who is one of the seven Gods or *Batara* delegated to come and to maintain earth.

3.2. Historian's Perspective

Historians have different perspective concerning Baduy history. The first version states that the early history of the Baduys come from the *Padjajaran* kingdom as stated in the first record of 1822 about the Baduy tribe written by a botanist named C.L. Blumen. According to history, at least the 12th and 13th century AD, the *Padjajaran* kingdom controlled the entire *Pasundan* land, covering from *Banten*, *Bogor*, *Priangan* to *Cirebon*. At that time, the *Padjajaran* kingdom was dominated by the king, named Prabu Bramaiya Maisatandraman, or better recognized as Prabu Siliwangi.[16]

When there was a battle around the 17th century AD between the *Banten* kingdom versus the *Sunda* kingdom, which was by then led by Prabu *Pucuk Umun* (a descendant of Prabu Siliwangi), in which the latter suffered a bad defeat. Because of it, the Parbu *Pucuk Umun* and several of his troops fled to the deep forest area. From it, then they lived permanently and breed into a community which is now called the Baduy.

The second version is different from that first opinion. This second opinion appears from Van Tricht, a doctor

who had conducted research in Baduy in 1928. According to him, the Baduy community is not derived from the remnants of the *Padjajaran* kingdom escaping, but the natives from that area who have a strong resistance to the outside influences. Van Tricht's opinion is almost the same as the opinion believed by the Baduy society who say that they are the elected community, given the task by the king to carry out the *mandala* (holy area) in the *kabuyutan* (a place of worship to the ancestors) *Jati Sunda*, or native *Sunda* or *Sunda Wiwitan*, which is now inhabited by the Baduy society.[17]

The third version, when we try to compare between the Baduys' historical belief with the historians' finding (archaeologists, humanists, and historians) there is contrast or even contradictory. According to historical records, based on the synthesis of the discovery of the inscription, Sailors' records from Portuguese and Chinese, as well as folklore about the *Tatar Sunda*, the existence of the Baduy tribe is associated by the existence of the Sunda Kingdom which before its collapse in the 16th century was centered in *Pakuan Pajajaran* (around Bogor now).

According to historians' records, before the establishment of the Sultanate of Banten by Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin in the western tip of the island of Java, Banten was one of the most important parts of the *Sunda* Kingdom. At that time, the Banten region is a fairly large trading port, the *Karangantu* Port. The *Ciujung* river, which is tipped in the Baduy area and passes through the districts of *Lebak* and *Serang*, can be navigated by the various types of boats, and is very crowded to be used as a means of transportation to carry agricultural products from the hinterland of Banten. Observing this condition, the ruler of that region (South Banten), namely the Prince Pucuk Umum considers that the conservation of the river needs to be maintained. For that reason, then he orders a very well-trained royal special force to guard and to manage the heavily forested and hilly areas in the *Kendeng* Mountain region.

4. SEBA AND THE MEDIATION OF BADYU'S IDENTITY POLITICS

Based on the study of several sources, identity politics can be identified as the influence of several factors; First, identity politics is a form of resistance toward socio-economic change caused by modernization, globalization, and industrialization. Secondly, aside as form of resistance to social and economic transformation, identity politics is also born as a result of being influenced by the particular local and historical context in which that identity politics arises. Third, the identity politics is born as a reaction toward or the product of the hegemony process of dominant groups as the State. Fourth, identity politics is also born due to political situation and conditions of global and international. In the face of globalization, the traditional boundaries separating tribes, cultures, religions and countries seem to disappear. Tribal identity, customary norms, even negative images are often embedded in

communities such as the Baduy. Therefore, these various issues are resisted by Baduy through the *Seba* tradition.[18]

The existence of Baduy community is still maintained up to now. Although the location of the Baduy's area is not far from the city center of this country (read: Jakarta), but the authenticity of their culture still feels very thick. What causes it all is none other than the strong compliance of the Baduy society preserving the culture inherited from their ancestors. In addition, till now, the Baduys are still diligent to communicate with outside communities especially with the government in order to establish friendship so that the government is also involved in protecting the Baduy's nature. The one of the most common forms of communication carried out by the Baduy is the *Seba* traditional ritual once a year. For the Baduy, not only *Seba* is a compulsory ritual which must be performed routinely, but also *Seba* is a symbol of communication between the Baduy and the outside world.

In essence, human's knowledge is symbolic knowledge. The main function of those symbols is to facilitate communication. Human's communication is not only with each other, but also with beings outside themselves, which are supernatural, in order to protect a balance in their natural life. When humans communicate with each other always expressed by the words, it is as a form of symbolic action. However, if humans communicate with other creatures as in rituals, then their communication is symbolic. Thus, those symbols cannot be separated from religion, because religion is a system and symbols which humans communicate with nature in the world. In other words, through ceremonies or *slametan*, humans can express the ideas through symbolic actions. According to Ahimsa-Putra, symbol is everything interpreted, or in other words something will be meaningful if given meaning. According to Yudha Triguna, etymologically symbol is a thing or condition which is an understanding of the object. The manifestation and characteristic of symbols are not limited to physical cues, but can also manifest in the use of words, namely sound symbols containing common meaning and standard. A symbol is a phenomenon associated with a certain phenomenon from a different context. In religion, the symbol system is used by human (through science system) as a medium to communicate with their world.[8]

Actually, the symbolic interaction is an activity that is human's characteristic, namely communication or exchange of symbols given meaning. A symbol is a medium used by someone to convey their thoughts or feelings to others.[17]

According to Miller, as quoted by Ritzer and Goodman (2008), describes the five functions of symbol; first, symbol allows people to relate to the material and the social world because by the symbols, they can give name, make categories, and remember the objects encounter; Second, the symbol increases people's ability to perceive the environment; Third, symbol increases the ability to think; Fourth, symbol enhance people's ability to solve problems; and Fifth, the use of symbol allows actor to surpass their own time, space and even personality. In

other words, a symbol is representations of a message communicated to the public.

For Baduy, *Seba* is actually not limited to annual rituals which must be performed. However, it also contains media or the communication symbols between the Baduy and outsiders. In *Seba* ritual, there are many symbols that are prerequisite for meaning. Those can be proven by the messages or the wishes conveyed by the Baduy residents every time *Seba* done.

The community of Baduy tribe defends their ethnic identity through a identity politics of the *Seba* ritual movement because it is motivated by the desire to keep and preserve their ethnic and cultural identity, which originates from the Baduy culture, *Sunda Wiwitan* religion, and their ancestral's traditions.[15]

There are several reasons why the Baduy carries various messages in every *Seba* ritual. Among those reasons are, first, the identity politics of *Seba* ritual arises as defense of Baduy culture from the implementation of a culture politics. The New Order or also called Indonesianization politics, which in its implementation has marginalized the elements of traditional Baduy culture. Second, the identity politics of *Seba* ritual appears as defense form of Baduy culture and *Sunda Wiwitan* religion from the powerful current of modernization and globalization. Third, the identity politics of *Seba* ritual arises as form of defense and eternal of Baduy cultural identity as a tourism commodity developed by the local government. Fourth, the identity politics of *Seba* ritual emerges as form of defense and purification of Baduy ethnic cultural identity from presence of nonBaduy ethnic community who bring the various cultural and religious symbols respectively so that it is feared to be a threat to the purification of Baduy ethnic cultural identity.

From the above expression, it can be concluded that *Seba* is an identity political movement, because in that movement contains political actions to priority for society members', because it has the same identity or.[13]

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this research, it can be concluded that the *Seba* ritual conducted by the Baduy every year is originally a form of giving tribute to the ruler (king) as a symbol of submission to *Batara Tunggal* as the highest ruler of this nature and obedience to the kingdom or the legal government as guardian of this nature. *Seba* has now turned to be a symbol of nationalism and not giving tribute as originally meaning of *Seba* in the history of the *Sunda* kingdom.

In addition, *Seba* is also a type of religious ceremony as a communication media between fellow humans, humans and objects (nature), and between the real world and the invisible world. The three rituals as *Ngawalu*, *Ngalaksa*, and *Seba* are a reflection of the harmonious relationship between *Batara Tunggal*, humans, and nature.

Other than it, motivation of the Baduy people to do the *Seba* tradition is not only for fulfilling the sacred annual obligation as explained above, but also behind it, *Seba* is

now used as a media for Baduy's identity political communication, both in the struggle to protect the authenticity of Baduy tradition, the search for protection of Baduy's region, and the struggle search for recognition of Baduy's original religious identity.

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