



THE BADUY EXPERIENCE OF DIVINITY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY¹

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Abstract: This study examines how the Baduy community's experience of divinity informs ecological sustainability. It asks how spiritual belief, customary law, and everyday practice shape Baduy modes of conserving nature. The study uses a qualitative fieldwork design supported by library research. Data were collected through systematic observation, in-depth interviews with selected members of the inner and outer Baduy, and local government official in Lebak District, Banten, Indonesia. Informants were selected purposively for their knowledge of Baduy religious practice, customary authority, and environmental management. The data were analyzed through a philosophical phenomenological approach by identifying recurring themes in the informants' lived experiences and interpreting them in relation to ecotheological perspectives, especially Seyyed Hossein Nasr's critique of the separation between nature and the sacred. The findings show that Baduy Divine experience is embodied in customary rules, agricultural practices, forest zoning, simplicity, and restraint in the use of natural resources. The article argues that the Baduy case contributes to religious ecology by showing how an indigenous tradition and its interaction with Islamic concepts offer a concrete example of religiously grounded ecological ethics.

Keywords: Religious Ecology, Indigenous Knowledge, Divine Experience, Baduy, Sustainability.

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Introduction

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR, in *Man and Nature*, controversially argues that modern paradigm treats nature instrumentally, detached from ethical responsibility. His critique is not simply a rejection of science. Rather, it is a warning that scientific knowledge can become destructive when it is detached from a sacred view of reality.² For Nasr, one of the central dangers in modern ecological thought is the separation of humanity and nature from their spiritual foundation.

This concern remains relevant to current climate debates. The 2018 U.S. National Climate Assessment reports that climate change is already affecting ecosystems, infrastructure, health, and livelihoods. Reports from the World Economic Forum also indicate that many workers across the world face increasing exposure to extreme heat.³ The United Nations, through the IPCC, has emphasized that climate change is real, largely driven by human activity, and affects multiple aspects of human life. These reports show that environmental degradation is not only a scientific or policy issue; it also raises ethical questions.⁴

Fritjof Capra links the ecological crisis to mechanistic and fragmented ways of understanding reality in modern Western culture and science. This worldview is often associated with Cartesian philosophy, which separates mind and matter into two distinct domains.⁵ A human being is understood as a composite of mind (*res cogitans*) and body (*res extensa*), with each aspect possessing its own intrinsic validity. Such dualism has influenced

² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Chicago: ABC International, 1997), 18.

³ Simon Torkington, "More than 70% of the Global Workforce Is at Risk from Severe Heat," accessed August 17, 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/08/extreme-heat-workers-climate-health>.

⁴ Valerie Masson-Delmotte and At All, eds., *IPCC, 2021: Summary for Policymakers*. In: *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157896.001>.

⁵ Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (Massachusetts: Shambala Publication, Inc, 1975), 22-23.

modern views of human beings, nature, and knowledge. In this perspective, nature is often treated as an object to be controlled rather than as a living reality with ethical and spiritual significance.⁶

As a result, a significant portion of humanity perceives itself as a solitary and alienated entity, leading to a disjunction between the mind and the body. On a broader scale, the separation, conflict, and animosity that arise between humanity and the cosmos can be attributed to a mechanistic and dualistic perspective.⁷ This framework is useful for understanding environmental problems; however, it should not be regarded as their sole explanation.

The ecological crisis should therefore be understood not only as a technical problem but also as a problem of values, worldview, and responsibility. In Indonesia, air and soil pollution, deforestation, and limited access to clean water are shaped by economic development, political decisions, cultural change, and historical processes.⁸ The climate crisis in Indonesia can be traced back to a profound transformation of modern civilization that commenced in the mid-19th century.⁹

Nasr offers a spiritual critique of this crisis. He argues that modern thought often separates nature from its Divine source. When nature is no longer viewed as connected to the Divine, human beings may lose their sense of ethical responsibility toward the environment.¹⁰ This argument provides an important basis for

⁶ Abdulkader Cassim Mahomed, "Sources of Dualism in Modern Rationalist Thought: Implications for Islamic Economics," *Methodology of Islamic Economics: Problems and Solutions*, no. September (2019): 277–314, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429320804-12>.

⁷ Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, "The Eclipse of the Soul and the Rise of the Ecological Crisis," *Spirituality Studies* 8, no. 2 (2022): 34–55.

⁸ Yusdani and Januariansyah Arfaizar, "The Environmental Crisis in the Perspective of Contemporary Islamic Studies in Indonesia," *Russian Law Journal* XI, no. 5 (2023): 412–27, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/the-environmental-crisis-in-the-perspective-of-contemporary-islamic-studies-in-indonesia>.

⁹ Devi Itawan, "Colonialism and Climate Crisis: The Root of Environmental Changes and the Rise of Environmental Awareness in Indonesia," *Indonesian Historical Studies* 6, no. 2 (2023): 192–205, <https://doi.org/10.14710/ihis.v6i2.16037>.

¹⁰ Ahmad Sururi, Arqom Kuswanjono, and Agus Himmawan Utomo, "Ecological Sufism Concepts in the Thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr," *Research*,

examining how religious and spiritual traditions can support ecological awareness.

This article is relevant to Islamic studies for three reasons. First, the field of Islamic studies has increasingly included questions of ecology, ethics, and Muslim engagement with indigenous communities. Second, Nasr's Islamic ecotheology provides a conceptual lens for interpreting the spiritual roots of ecological responsibility. Third, although the Baduy community lives within a broader Indonesian Muslim society, the majority of outer Baduy are.¹¹ They have historical and cultural interactions with Islamic concepts, including the idea of one Supreme Being and local forms of shahada. The article does not claim that Sunda Wiwitan is Islam. Instead, it examines how the Baduy case can enrich Islamic ecological reflection by placing Islamic ecotheology in dialogue with indigenous religious knowledge.

In this study, the term Divine experience refers to lived awareness of the sacred as expressed through belief in *Batara Tunggal*, reverence for ancestors, ritual obligations, customary restrictions, and daily practices of restraint. This operational definition allows the article to move beyond metaphysical claims and examine observable practices such as forest protection, agricultural discipline, and communal obedience to customary law.

Previous studies have examined the Baduy community from several perspectives. Some works focus on Baduy belief systems, including studies by Sodikin,¹² and Abdurrahman Misno Bambang Prawiro.¹³ Other studies discuss environmental conservation, local wisdom, customary law, and ecological practices, including works

Society and Development 9, no. 10 (2020): e5769108611, <https://doi.org/10.33448/rsd-v9i10.8611>.

¹¹ Abdul Syukur et al., "Muslim Baduy : Conversion and Changing Identity and Tradition," *Jurnal Penelitian* 18, no. 2 (2021): 181–96.

¹² Sodikin Sodikin, "Understanding the Concept of Sunda Wiwitan Religion in the Baduy Community in Indonesia Related to Environmental Management," *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies* 02, no. 12 (2022): 742–49, <https://doi.org/10.55677/ijssers/v02i12y2022-06>.

¹³ Abdurrahman Misno Bambang Prawiro, "Baduy Pluralism: From Myth To Reality," *Al-Albab* 2, no. 1 (2013): 111–24, <https://doi.org/10.24260/alalbab.v2i1.27>.

by Umi Rozah,¹⁴ Bifanca Allya Kenedy and Ifan Deffinika,¹⁵ Donna Asteria et al.,¹⁶ Gista Septriantri Putri et al.,¹⁷ Bagja Waluya et al.,¹⁸ Rizka Fauzan and Erlina Wijayanti,¹⁹ Afifatul A. et al.,²⁰ and Kirana Nurul Arifiani.²¹

Although these studies provide valuable insights, many of them focus mainly on belief systems, governance, social organization, customary law, or environmental management. Studies on Baduy belief often use historical or theological approaches. The role of religious experience in shaping ecological responsibility, environmental preservation, and ecological balance remains under explored.

¹⁴ Umi Rozah, "Environmental Maintenance through the Application of Adat (Criminal) Sanctions on Baduy Communities," *Indian Journal of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology* 15, no. 2 (2021): 1206–13, <https://doi.org/10.37506/ijfmt.v15i2.14485>.

¹⁵ Biffanca Allya Kenedy and Ifan Deffinika, "Environmental Adaptation of Indigenous People: Baduy community's Local Wisdom in Environmental Management," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 1066, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1066/1/012017>.

¹⁶ Donna Asteria et al., "Adat Law and Culture: The Local Authority Elements of Baduy community on Environment Preservation," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 716, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/716/1/012049>.

¹⁷ Gista Septriantri Putri et al., "Conservation of Organic Agricultural Systems in Ethno-Agricultural Lexicons (Ethnolinguistic Study in Baduy Traditional Village)," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, no. November (2019), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3431167>.

¹⁸ Bagja Waluya et al., "Cultural Ecology and Environmental Education: Lesson Learned from Baduy Indigenous Community," *Indonesian Journal of Geography* 55, no. 1 (2023): 88–97, <https://doi.org/10.22146/ijg.77203>.

¹⁹ Waluya et al.

²⁰ Afifatul A'la et al., "The Belief System Serves as a Disaster Mitigation Mechanism to Preserve the Local Wisdom of the Baduy community," *INFERENSI: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 17, no. 1 (2023): 45–58, <https://doi.org/10.18326/infsl3.v17i1.45-58>.

²¹ Kirana Nurul Arifiani et al., "Review: Local Wisdom of Baduy People (South Banten, Indonesia) in Environmental Conservation," *Asian Journal of Ethnobiology* 2, no. 2 (2019): 92–107, <https://doi.org/10.13057/asianjethnobiol/y020204>.

Nurul Hakim's study of cultural and spiritual values of forests is especially important for this article.²² Hakim identifies material, historical, symbolic, aesthetic, and spiritual values in the Baduy landscape.

This article develops that insight by examining how spiritual value becomes ecological practice. It asks how Divine experience is translated into concrete acts of conservation, restraint, and sustainable land use. The main research questions are: (1) How do Baduy religious beliefs and Divine experiences shape their understanding of nature? (2) How are these beliefs embodied in everyday ecological practices? (3) How do the Baduy maintain, adapt, or negotiate these practices in response to modern social and technological pressures? By addressing these questions, the article contributes to religious ecology, Islamic ecotheology, and the study of indigenous environmental ethics.

This study is qualitative in nature combining fieldwork and library research. The fieldwork was conducted among the Baduy community in Lebak Regency, Banten, with attention to both Inner Baduy and Outer Baduy settings. Library research was used to examine previous scholarship on Baduy belief,²³ indigenous knowledge, environmental conservation, Islamic ecotheology, and philosophical approaches to nature.

The study reformulates the assumption that Baduy divine experience influences ecological practices and environmental sustainability into research questions that can be examined through field data.²⁴ The central question is how Baduy Divine experience is expressed in ecological practices. Supporting questions concern the meaning of nature in Baduy belief, the role of customary authority in conservation, and the ways the community respond to modern change.

²² Nurul Hakim, "Cultural and Spiritual Values of Forests In Baduy Region, Banten, Indonesia," *Wageningen University*, 2006.

²³ Heting Chu, "Research Methods in Library and Information Science: A Content Analysis," *Library and Information Science Research* 37, no. 1 (2015): 36–41, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2014.09.003>.

²⁴ Debra Nestel et al., "In-Depth Interviews," *Healthcare Simulation Research: A Practical Guide*, no. 2019 (2019): 1–368, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26837-4>.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling.²⁵ The selection was based on their direct knowledge of Baduy belief, ritual practice, customary law, forest use, agriculture, and local governance. The interviewees included five informants from the Inner Baduy community, two informants from the Outer Baduy community, and one local government official in Lebak Regency. It was intended to capture both stricter and more adaptive forms of Baduy religious and ecological practice.

Data were collected through three techniques namely systematic observation, in-depth interviews and reviewed documents and previous studies to contextualize the field findings within broader debates on religious ecology and indigenous knowledge.

The study adopts a philosophical-phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is employed as a way of interpreting how informants experience and give meaning to nature, the Divine, ancestors, rituals, and customary obligations.²⁶ Philosophical interpretation is used to relate these meanings to ecotheological concepts, especially Nasr's view that the ecological crisis is rooted partly in the loss of a sacred understanding of nature.²⁷

The data analysis followed four steps. First, interview notes, observations, and relevant literature were organized according to the key themes. Second, the themes were compared across Inner Baduy, Outer Baduy, and local government perspectives. Third, the field data were interpreted in relation to ecotheology,²⁸ indigenous environmental ethics, and prior Baduy studies. Fourth,

²⁵ Steve Campbell et al., "Purposive Sampling: Complex or Simple? Research Case Examples," *Journal of Research in Nursing* 25, no. 8 (2020): 652–61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206>.

²⁶ Isaac Tuffour, "A Critical Overview of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: A Contemporary Qualitative Research Approach," *Journal of Healthcare Communications* 02, no. 04 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4172/2472-1654.100093>.

²⁷ Sururi, Kuswanjono, and Utomo, "Ecological Sufism Concepts in the Thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr."

²⁸ Robert Jackson, "A Retrospective Introduction to Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach," *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education* 7, no. 1 (2016): 149–60, <https://doi.org/10.1515/dcse-2016-0011>.

the analysis identified the article's main argument: Baduy ecological sustainability is sustained not only by practical rules but also by a religious worldview that gives moral and sacred meaning to restraint.

To strengthen credibility, the study used triangulation among interviews, observation, and literature.²⁹ Statements from informants were interpreted alongside observed practices, customary norms, and previous research. The study also recognizes its limitations. It does not claim to represent every Baduy individual or every variation of Baduy practice. Rather, it focuses on the relationship between Divine experience and ecological sustainability.

Theoretical Framework: Islamic Ecotheology and Indigenous Religious Ecology

The theoretical framework of this article brings Nasr's Islamic ecotheology into dialogue with Baduy indigenous religious ecology. Nasr argues that the ecological crisis is inseparable from the desacralization of nature and knowledge.³⁰ In this view, nature is not simply matter available for human use; it is a sign of the Divine and a field of moral responsibility. This perspective is relevant for Islamic studies because it connects tawhid, cosmology, and ethics.

At the same time, the Baduy case shows that ecological responsibility can also be grounded in indigenous religious experience. The Baduy's practices reveal a comparable concern: nature is sacred, human desire must be restrained, and social order depends on obedience to a higher moral authority.³¹ The comparison is not intended to reduce Baduy beliefs to Islamic doctrine. Rather, it shows how Islamic ecotheology can learn from

²⁹ Robert Sinclair, "From A Coherence Theory to Triangulation: The Stanford Conversations and Davidson's Externalism," *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* 99, no. 99 (2026): 477–507.

³⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 44-48.

³¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and The Order of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 63-66.

and converse with local religious traditions preserving ecological balance. Such framework guides the analysis below.

The Baduy Community and Its Beliefs

In a publication disseminated by the Environmental and Forestry Service (LHK) of the Province of Banten, it is articulated that there are two distinct legal community groups within the Province of Banten. The initial group comprises the Baduy people, while the subsequent group is identified as the Kesepuhan customary community. The term Baduy refers to a community residing in the geographical vicinity of the Kendeng mountains, specifically within Kanekes, Leuwidamar, and Cebeo village, situated in Lebak Regency, Banten, which constitutes a segment of the ethnic demographic within the Republic of Indonesia.³² Consequently, references to the Kanekes, Leuwidamar, and Cebeo communities are synonymous with those of the Baduy people. Furthermore, this community is also recognized as the Rawayan community, which consists of a faction of Sundanese individuals who have chosen to seclude themselves from contemporary societal influences.³³ They are designated as Rawayan due to their habitation in proximity to the Rawayan River. For the purposes of this study, the term Baduy will be employed in a general sense, encompassing the focal point of research.

Historically, the Baduy community has been divided into two groups, namely the Inner Baduy (*Baduy Dalam*) and the Outer Baduy (*Baduy Luar*).³⁴ The classification of the inner Baduy community pertains to those located in Kanekes, Cibeo, and Cikartawana who maintain a strong commitment to preserving their traditions and customs while eschewing modernization in all its manifestations. Conversely, the outer Baduy populace consists

³² *Profil Masyarakat Hukum Adat Dan Kearifan Lokal Di Provinsi Banten (Kajian Kearifan Lokal Dalam Pelestarian Lingkungan Hidup Dan Hutan)* (Banten: Dinas Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan Provinsi Banten, 2017).

³³ Ahamd Edwar, Mifayhul Ulfah, and Maratusyolihat, "Keagamaan Suku Baduy Lebak Banten: Antara Islam Dan Islam Sunda Wiwitan" 3, no. 1 (2021): 39–54.

³⁴ Syukur et al., "Muslim Baduy: Conversion and Changing Identity and Tradition."

of individuals who do not exhibit resistance to modernity and adhere to alternative religious practices such as Islam.³⁵

C.M. Pleyte, a Dutch historian, as quoted by Kusnaka Adminhardja, indicates that the progenitors of the Baduy people, who inhabited the areas surrounding Mount Kendeng, originated from Bogor, which functioned as the epicenter of the Padjadjaran Kingdom. Following the defeat of the Padjadjaran Kingdom, those who opposed subjugation under the Islamic Sultanate subsequently retreated into the forested regions and established settlements at the base of Mount Kendeng.³⁶ These historical occurrences lead to the conclusion that the descendants of the Padjadjaran Kingdom are comprised of the senapatis and courtiers who remained loyal to the monarchy and sought refuge in the forests. This event transpired in the 12th century under the reign of King Prabu Bramaiya Maisa Tandraman.

However, the Baduy community contests the authenticity of these historical narratives and documentation. The Baduy people assert that they have inhabited the region of Kanekes village and several adjacent villages at the base of Mount Kendeng since the initial descent of their forebear, the prophet Adam, to Earth. They hold the conviction that Kanekes serves as the epicenter of the Earth, the very locus of human genesis. Consequently, in alignment with this belief, they refer to themselves collectively as *Tangtu*, or *urang Tangtu*,³⁷ a term derived from Sanskrit denoting 'forerunner.' This conviction has been corroborated and recognized by the informants, like Jakri,³⁸ Abah Anung,³⁹ Abah Mutsyid,⁴⁰ and Naipah,⁴¹ whom we consulted during our research.

³⁵ Syukur et al.

³⁶ Kusnaka Adimihardja, "Orang Baduy Di Banten Selatan: Manusia Air Pemelihara Sungai," *Antropologi Indonesia* 61 (2000): 47–60.

³⁷ Faishal Agil Al Munawar, "Social Change in Baduy Society from the Perspective of Auguste Comte's Three Stages of Law," *Journal of Progressive Law and Legal Studies* 2, no. 03 (2024): 189–209, <https://doi.org/10.59653/jppls.v2i03.1038>.

³⁸ Interview with Jakri, 20 August 2022.

³⁹ Interview with Abah Anung, 20 August 2022.

⁴⁰ Interview with Abah Mutsyid, 11 July 2023.

⁴¹ Interview with Abah Mutsyid.

In addition to their belief that the prophet Adam constitutes the primordial human ancestor of the Baduy people and originates from Kanekes, they designate their belief system or religion with the term *Sunda Wiwitan*. This identity ostensibly reflects the notion that this belief represents the most ancient tradition among the Sundanese populace. In the context of archaic Sundanese literature, *Sunda Wiwitan* signifies a transformation in nomenclature pertaining to the religious practice embraced by the Padjadjaran dynasty, which governed the Sundanese ethnic region of West Java, referred to at that time as the "Tatar Pasundan" territory.⁴²

Based on the description and elucidation, it can be inferred that the Baduy community, along with their belief system known as *Sunda Wiwitan*, has existed since the establishment of the Padjadjaran Kingdom, which was inaugurated in 1482 AD by the inaugural monarch, Sri Baduga Maharaja. The geographical domain of this kingdom encompasses Banten, Bogor, Priangan, and the Cirebon region. The belief framework, referred to as *Sunda Wiwitan*, emerged and flourished among the indigenous populace residing within the precincts of the Padjadjaran kingdom. Furthermore, historical documentation indicates that a considerable portion of the Sundanese population adheres to alternative belief systems, specifically Hinduism and Buddhism.⁴³ Consequently, *Sunda Wiwitan*, in its structural and practical manifestations, exhibits resemblances and shared elements with Hindu and Buddhist traditions, whilst still retaining distinctive characteristics referred to as *Tangtu*.

After the Padjadjaran kingdom's defeat in conflict with the Islamic sultanate of Banten, under the leadership of Maulana Hasanuddin, the Baduy community was consequently subsumed

⁴² Hisam Ahyani, Jagad Rayana, and Ahmad Hapidin, "Tatanan Keyakinan Masyarakat Sunda (Sunda Wiwitan) Di Era 4.0," *Al-Tsaqafa: Jurnal Ilmiah Peradaban Islam* 18, no. 1 (2021): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.15575/al-tsaqafa.v18i1.12331>.

⁴³ A J Suryani, *From Respected Hermits to Ordinary Citizens: The Conversion of the Baduy, Ethnicity, and Politics of Religion in Indonesia (1977-2019)* (Leiden: Universiteit Leiden, 2021), <https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A3146571/download>.

under his dominion. Theoretically, it has been posited that the philosophical outlook and ideology of each sovereign or governing body exert a substantial influence on the perspectives and systems prevailing among the populace under their jurisdiction. This phenomenon similarly transpired among the Baduy people during their subjugation to the Islamic sultanate of Banten, wherein the *Sunda Wiwitan* faith became intermingled with Islamic tenets. Thus, the foundational beliefs of the Baduy populace, which are rooted in pre-Islamic animism, exhibit contemporary religious practices also permeated by influences from Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.⁴⁴

One of the fundamental tenets of the *Sunda Wiwitan* belief system, which is practiced by the Baduy community shows reverence toward their ancestral spirits (*lelembut*), as an embodiment of their forebears. According to their traditional worldview, the spirit or *lelembut* resides to the south of the settlement, in proximity to the Cijung and Cisimeut springs, a location they have designated as "*Arca Domas*".⁴⁵ They posit that the ancestral spirits (*lelembut*) are the catalysts for the emergence and revitalization of all phenomena that exist, with the most exalted among the *lelembut* being referred to as *Batara Tunggal*.

Batara Tunggal is believed to have originated in human history, coexisting with the Baduy people, ultimately experiencing death in *ngahiang* (disappearance). Furthermore, the Baduy people maintain the belief that their ancestors, along with the *Pu'un* (traditional leaders), represent the direct lineage of *Batara Tunggal*, who is also referred to as *Batara Seda Niskala* (the Invisible God). They profess belief in *Sang Hyang Keres*a (the Almighty) or *Nu Ngersakeun* (the One who Wills) as the custodian of ultimate authority. A further parallel is observed in the Baduy people's conviction in a singular deity, whom they identify as *Gusti nu Maha Agung*, *Gusti nu Maha Suci*, or *Sang Hyang Tunggal*.

⁴⁴ Sodikin, "Understanding the Concept of Sunda Wiwitan Religion in the Baduy Community in Indonesia Related to Environmental Management."

⁴⁵ Sodikin.

Nevertheless, concerning prophethood, their belief is confined solely to prophet Adam.⁴⁶

When compared with Islamic doctrines, the belief system of *Batara Tunggal* aligns with the foundational Islamic tenet, which posits the belief in a singular deity. This indicates that the religious principles of the Baduy community, which are deeply rooted in cultural practices are recognized as indigenous religious doctrines and exhibit parallels with Islamic teachings.⁴⁷ This observed congruence is corroborated by findings from interviews and firsthand observations. Jakri,⁴⁸ Abah Mutsyid,⁴⁹ and Nipah,⁵⁰ a representative of the Inner Baduy, articulated that the Baduy community venerates the Supreme Being, asserting that "*the Baduy community believes in the existence of God Almighty (Allah)*".

The affiliation of the Baduy community with Islam becomes increasingly pronounced, particularly through the shahada they employ.⁵¹ Within Baduy customary beliefs, there exist two distinct forms of *shahada*: the shahada of Inner Baduy and the *shahada* of Outer Baduy. The shahada of Outer Baduy, referred to as the shahada of Sunda Wiwitan, is conveyed to Puun as a demonstration of fidelity to Baduy customs, akin to an individual proclaiming their desire to embrace Islam. Conversely, the *shahada* of Outer Baduy is utilized by the Baduy community when engaging in matrimonial rites in accordance with Islamic traditions. They solely recite the *shahada*, while the acknowledgment of the other pillars of Islam and the obligation of prayer as mandated in Islam remains unfamiliar to them.⁵² Indeed, due to this resemblance, they designate their beliefs with the term *Slam Sunda Wiwitan*; a unique religious framework intended for

⁴⁶ Adimihardja, "Orang Baduy Di Banten Selatan: Manusia Air Pemeliharaan Sungai."

⁴⁷ Interview with Abah Anung.

⁴⁸ Interview with Jakri.

⁴⁹ Interview with Abah Mutsyid.

⁵⁰ Interview with Nipah, 25 August 2023.

⁵¹ Suidat Suidat et al., "Nilai-Nilai Keislaman Dalam Sistem Kepercayaan Sunda Wiwitan Suku Baduy Banten," *Jurnal Citizenship Virtues* 3, no. 2 (2023): 615–20, <https://doi.org/10.37640/jcv.v3i2.1878>.

⁵² Interview with Abah Anung.

the Baduy populace that is not disseminated beyond the confines of Baduy.⁵³ At a basic level, the beliefs of the Baduy exhibit a close affinity with Islam. Furthermore, the usage of the term "*Slam*" bears a striking resemblance to "Islam."

The similarity was substantiated by Abah Anung and Ahdi, leaders of the Outer Baduy community, who articulated that "*the teachings of ancestors here are analogous to the doctrines of the Islamic faith. Issues of this nature are nearly identical to those encountered by Muslims.*"⁵⁴ The distinction, as they elucidated, resides solely in the absence of sacred texts, or Divine revelations, akin to those present in Islam, as well as the lack of prophets;

"It is merely that the teachings of *karuhun* do not possess a centralized authority comparable to that found in Islam, Christianity, and other religious traditions. The crux of the matter is that the teachings of *karuhun* lack a definitive 'handle' (handle). Consequently, there exists no reinforcement in the form of a symbol that encapsulates this *karuhun* teaching".⁵⁵

Despite the absence of formalized institutions and sacred texts akin to those of Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism, the Baduy populace adheres rigorously to the directives of their chief and the accompanying teachings. The teachings and mandates of the chief function as sacred scripture within the social framework and are seamlessly integrated into the quotidian existence of the Baduy individuals. Those who transgress these norms are subject to sanctions, which may include ritual cleansing, purification, or punitive measures.⁵⁶ The intent of the cleansing ritual is to eliminate the source of impurity from the offender's inner self and their surrounding environment. Two forms of sanctions must be endured. First, the transgressor is segregated from their customary living environment. Second, their citizenship status is annulled.

⁵³ Kiki Muhamad Hakiki, "Keislaman Suku Baduy Banten: Antara Islam Dan Slam Sunda Wiwitan," *Refleksi* 14, no. 1 (2018): 25–54, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ref.v14i1.9576>.

⁵⁴ Interview with Ahdi, 25 July 2022.

⁵⁵ Interview with Abah Anung.

⁵⁶ Al Munawar, "Social Change in Baduy Society from the Perspective of Auguste Comte's Three Stages of Law."

The Baduy community and the Concept of Nature

The Baduy community perceives the Divine entity, *Batara Tunggal*, as the architect of the cosmos. This belief resembles the Islamic belief in God as Creator.⁵⁷ In accordance with the foundational creation narrative of the Baduy people, "the cosmos was initially devoid of form, after which the Divine extracted a portion of soil from the Earth to shape Adam. From the rib of Adam, Eve was subsequently formed."⁵⁸ Furthermore, the Baduy community posits that the prophet Adam epitomizes the inaugural act of human creation, which transpired at *Sasaka Domas*. *Sasaka Domas* is characterized as a structure that resembles a terraced or tiered *punden berunduk* with seven distinct levels.⁵⁹ The term *Domas* signifies sacredness or holiness. *Sasaka Domas* is revered as a hallowed site, imbued with sanctity, where ancestral spirits are believed to convene, thus serving as the *qibla* for spiritual worship.

From this foundational creation narrative, the Baduy society maintains the belief that the first human to inhabit the Earth resided in Kanekes, regarded as the epicenter of the universe, the navel of the Earth. Consequently, they perform rituals at *Sasaka Domas* as a manifestation of veneration toward the spirits of their forebears, referred to as *karuhun*.⁶⁰ The Baduy people perceive themselves as descendants of an ancient lineage, while the external world is conceptualized as emerging from their progeny. This hierarchical belief system imbues them with a profound sense of duty toward the stewardship of nature and the perpetuation of human existence on the planet.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Fadhilah Khunaeni, "Spirituality in the Philosophical Thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr," *Ulumuna* 20, no. 2 (2016): 373–94, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v20i2.812>.

⁵⁸ Interview with Abah Mutsyid.

⁵⁹ Ira Indrawardana, "Berketuhanan Dalam Perspektif Kepercayaan Sunda Wiwitan," *Melintas* 30, no. 1 (2014): 105, <https://doi.org/10.26593/mel.v30i1.1284.105-118>.

⁶⁰ Rikza Fauzan, "The Internalization of Kanekes Community's Ecological Awareness as Local History," in *The 6th International Seminar on Social Studies and History Education (ISSHE) 2021*, 2021, 368–76.

⁶¹ Interview with Nipah.

Based on cosmological principles, the mention of the Baduy community is intrinsically linked to the concept of nature itself. The term 'nature' in this context encompasses their habitat, the interactions they engage in with the natural world, and the surrounding environment, which includes agricultural zones, and the constraints placed upon the utilization of natural resources. Consequently, the existence of the Baduy people is fundamentally intertwined with nature itself.⁶² Their cycles of life and death are perpetually contingent upon the natural world.

The Baduy understanding of environmental preservation is reflected in the belief framework of *Kasepuhan* (ancestral traditions and practices),⁶³ which derives its knowledge and guidance from *Batara Tunggal* following acts of prayer, supplication, and meditation. This belief system has been transmitted through oral traditions from the ancestors of the Baduy populace, imparted from one generation to the next. A key aspect of these teachings' mandates that every individual of the Baduy community is responsible for safeguarding nature and coexisting harmoniously with it. The tenets of *Kasepuhan* encourage acceptance of what has been provided, refrain from seeking excess, and avoid excessive elation.⁶⁴

Furthermore, it compels the Baduy to exhibit fidelity to *Batara Tunggal* by engaging in *Tapa* (religious practices aimed at fostering closeness to the Divine). Hence, the Baduy community diligently participates in *tapa* (ascetic practices) to uphold the equilibrium of the Earth. *Tapa* transcends mere meditative solitude, embodying the principle of "working diligently and speaking sparingly."⁶⁵ Therefore, For the Baduy, agricultural labor constitutes a form of

⁶² Mella Ismelina Farmas Rahayu, Anthon F. Susanto, and Liya Sukma Muliya, "Religious-Cosmic Based Philosophical Foundation of Environmental Development Law in Sundanese Local Wisdom," *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 12, no. 4 (2018): 523–35.

⁶³ *Profil Masyarakat Hukum Adat Dan Kearifan Lokal Di Provinsi Banten (Kajian Kearifan Lokal Dalam Pelestarian Lingkungan Hidup Dan Hutan)*.

⁶⁴ Ahyani, Rayana, and Hapidin, "Tatanan Keyakinan Masyarakat Sunda (Sunda Wiwitan) Di Era 4.0."

⁶⁵ Waluya et al., "Cultural Ecology and Environmental Education: Lesson Learned from Baduy Indigenous Community."

tapa. Their agricultural endeavors are not solely for the cultivation of rice but also serve as a religious observance.⁶⁶ Collectively, these beliefs are referred to by them as the *Sunda Wiwitan Slam Religion*.

The elders of the Baduy community articulated to researchers their teachings as follows: “Mountains must not be destroyed, valleys must not be damaged, prohibitions must not be violated, great-grandmothers must not be changed, long must not be cut, short must not be joined, what is not must be eliminated, what is not must be denied, and what is right must be justified”.⁶⁷ In accordance with these teachings, they consistently identify themselves as an integral part of nature and the surrounding environment. Nature is regarded as an ancestral trust, which must be safeguarded by every individual within the Baduy community to ensure that these resources remain unscathed.

In practical application, the Inner Baduy people categorize nature or forests into four distinct segments.⁶⁸ The first segment is designated as *Leuweung* cover or alternatively referred to as *Leuweung kolot* or *geledegan* (closed jungle or forest), which pertains to forested land whose authenticity remains intact; its habitat and vegetation have yet to be disturbed. This area is classified as a prohibited forest, wherein any encroachment, habitation, or exploration is strictly forbidden. Any individual who endeavors to enter or disrupt the integrity of the forest will encounter *kabendon* (*kuwalat*), calamity, or malevolence.⁶⁹ This belief is upheld and enacted by the entirety of the Baduy community.

The second category is referred to as entrusted *Leuweung*, which denotes the territory that is believed to be entrusted by the *karuhun*, originating from their ancestors. This domain permits visitation, exploration and habitation. Nevertheless, individuals seeking to use the land must first secure authorization from the traditional elder, and subsequently, the *karuhun* must receive guidance, known as *wangsit*, to proceed with land clearance.

⁶⁶ Edwar, Ulfah, and Maratusyolihat, “Keagamaan Suku Baduy Lebak Banten: Antara Islam Dan Islam Sunda Wiwitan.”

⁶⁷ Interview with Jakri.

⁶⁸ *Profil Masyarakat Hukum Adat Dan Kearifan Lokal Di Provinsi Banten (Kajian Kearifan Lokal Dalam Pelestarian Lingkungan Hidup Dan Hutan)*.

⁶⁹ Interview with Abah Mutsyid.

Similarly, the act of clearing and utilizing the land must be conducted only to the extent deemed necessary and with the express permission of the elderly.⁷⁰ For the Baduy community, The directives issued by traditional leaders are regarded as binding obligations, rendering them non-negotiable and obligatory.⁷¹ It is imperative for every member of the Baduy community to adhere to and execute these commands.

The third category is termed *awisan leuweung*, or *leuweung garapan*, also known as *sampalan*, which signifies a designated reserve forest area intended for future residential and agricultural purposes.⁷² The fourth category is designated as *sampalan leuweung*, which refers to cultivable territory typically utilized for habitation and agricultural practices. Although this region is available for use, it is imperative that such utilization is contingent upon the permission of the elderly.⁷³ Certain arboreal species are permissible for utilization in residential construction, including the *puspa*, *kisereh*, and tide trees. Government, as confirmed by the Head of the People's Welfare Section of Lebak Regency, Banten, Iyan Fitriyana,⁷⁴ fully supports the division of forests, customs and areas of the Baduy community above.

Conversely, other forest-derived products that may be appropriated pertain to medicinal flora, such as agarwood and incense trees, which serve as instruments for traditional rituals; the rattan plant is employed in the fabrication of diverse culinary implements and additional artifacts, including *kaneron* (traditional rattan bags).⁷⁵ These restrictions, in conjunction with the enactment of experiential knowledge derived from the belief

⁷⁰ Interview with Jakri.

⁷¹ Umi Rozah, "Environmental Maintenance through the Application of Adat (Criminal) Sanctions on Baduy Communities."

⁷² Interview with Nipah.

⁷³ Interview with Abah Mutsyid.

⁷⁴ Interview with Iyan Fitriyana, 10 November 2023.

⁷⁵ Ahmad Maftuh Sujana, "Pikukuh: Kajian Historis Kearifan Lokal Pitutur Dalam Literasi Keagamaan Masyarakat Adat Baduy," *Historia: Jurnal Pendidik Dan Peneliti Sejarah* 3, no. 2 (2020): 81–92, <https://doi.org/10.17509/historia.v3i2.24347>.

system, also serve the purpose of contemplating the sustainability or conservation of the natural environment.

Nature conservation and ecological sustainability, as conceptualized through the Divine experience embraced by the Baduy community, fundamentally entails the perspective that nature serves as a manifestation, illumination, and creation of God or the Tunggal Batara. Furthermore, it posits that every human being occupies an equivalent position to nature in its entirety, signifying that individuals are God's creations and share identical dimensions and elements with the entirety of creation and nature.⁷⁶ Nature and humanity are perceived as an inseparable unity.⁷⁷ Consequently, in this context, the treatment and perception of nature are regarded as synonymous with the contemplation of oneself.

The above philosophical tenets are also manifested in their agricultural practices; the Divine dimension is consistently acknowledged at the commencement of farming activities, throughout the cultivation process, and during the harvesting phase. Prior to engaging in agricultural endeavors, they routinely seek Divine guidance concerning the appropriate timing and optimal locations for cultivation. This ritualistic practice is conducted by their leader, known as *Pu'un*.⁷⁸ The presence of the Divine is also evident in teachings encompassing social dimensions, including mandates for altruism, camaraderie, and mutual assistance. Conversely, prohibitions are established against engaging in extramarital sexual relations (adultery), theft, smoking, and any actions deemed unacceptable by cultural norms.

⁷⁶ Syafwan Rozi, "Understanding the Concept of Ecosufism: Harmony and the Relationship of God, Nature and Humans in Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Arabi," *Ulumuna* 23, no. 2 (2019): 242–65, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v23i1.354>.

⁷⁷ Riki Saputra, "Religion and the Spiritual Crisis of Modern Human Being in the Perspective of Huston Smith's Perennial Philosophy," *Al-Albab* 5, no. 2 (2016): 197, <https://doi.org/10.24260/alalbab.v5i2.395>.

⁷⁸ Mega Halmahera et al., "Local Wisdom Pikukuh Sapuluh Suku Baduy Dalam Konservasi Lingkungan Budaya Desa Kanekes," *Jurnal Geo Image (Spatial-Ecological-Regional)* 8, no. 1 (2019): 80–88, <http://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/geoimage>.

For the Baduy people, forests are regarded as sacred and are strictly prohibited from human exploitation. The Baduy consistently strives to maintain equilibrium with the natural world. For five centuries, they have succeeded in preserving their traditions and ensuring ecological balance through methodologies informed by ancestral guidance.⁷⁹ The forest holds significant importance in their religious rituals, serving as the abode of ancestors, whom the Baduy hold in high esteem.

The Principle of Simple Living

In addition to the doctrinal teachings regarding faith in God Almighty is the belief emphasizing the significance of a frugal lifestyle. This doctrine is of paramount importance to the Baduy people, necessitating both adherence and practical application. These principles are manifested in their exclusive use of black and white attire, accompanied by a prohibition on the adornment of jewelry, particularly for women.⁸⁰ This doctrine is intricately linked to the preservation of the environment.⁸¹

This assertion was corroborated by Jakri, a venerable elder of the Inner Baduy community, who articulated that their choice of clothing is closely tied to the availability of natural resources. This implies that materials derived from nature and readily accessible within their immediate environment are utilized. In accordance with Jakri's expression, "*it suffices to originate from one's own labor or suffice with one's own efforts.*"⁸² These garments are products of the manual labor of the Baduy people, originating from nature, utilized by humanity, and ultimately returning to nature.

The Baduy people are typically barefoot, and use traditional garments crafted from coarse textile, deliberately eschewing matters associated with excessive materialism or worldly desires, instead adhering to guidelines and principles imbued with wisdom and meaning. They lead a life characterized by simplicity

⁷⁹ Hakim, "Cultural and Spiritual Values of Forests In Baduy Region, Banten, Indonesia."

⁸⁰ Interview with Nipah.

⁸¹ Interview with Abah Mutsyid.

⁸² Interview with Jakri.

and a profound respect for the natural world. They generally refrain from the use of additives or preservatives in their culinary practices, thereby preserving both the authenticity and nutritional integrity of their sustenance. The Baduy community possesses a distinctive culinary tradition that mirrors their lifestyle and the natural ingredients that are abundantly available in their surroundings.⁸³ They tend to consume simple yet nutritious foods.

The principles and teachings centered around simplicity are referred to as ethical values, which are additionally interconnected with sincerity, humility, and generosity. Values opposed to these principles include greed, arrogance, and ignorance. All these characteristics are intrinsically related to both human and environmental dimensions.⁸⁴ Through the application of this principle of simplicity, the Baduy people are adept at safeguarding the environment.

As articulated by Jakri,⁸⁵ Nipah,⁸⁶ and Abah Mutsyid,⁸⁷ The *Kawalu* ritual spans three consecutive months, specifically *Kawalu* 1, *Kawalu* 2, and *Kawalu* 3, during which fasting occurs for one day each month. This tradition is observed with the singular intention of purifying oneself from malevolent desires. Upon the conclusion of the fast, a collective meal takes place. This ritual serves to fortify social and familial bonds. Furthermore, the ceremony of '*Kawalu*' represents an expression of gratitude directed towards *Sang Hyang Karesa* for the annual success of the rice harvest. This practice is consistently upheld by each member of the Inner Baduy community and prevails to this day.

Prior to the execution of the *Kawalu* ritual, an additional ceremony known as *Ngalanjak* is conducted, which involves the pursuit of squirrels and mouse deer over a consecutive week in the forest. This undertaking is succeeded by the *Ngalaksa* activities,

⁸³ Bismihayati Bismihayati et al., "Perspective of the Baduy Community in Utilizing Health Services," *Science and Environmental Journal for Postgraduate* 5, no. 2 (2023): 160–71, <https://doi.org/10.24036/senjop.v5i2.211>.

⁸⁴ Saputra, "Religion and the Spiritual Crisis of Modern Human Being in the Perspective of Huston Smith'S Perennial Philosophy."

⁸⁵ Interview with Jakri.

⁸⁶ Interview with Nipah.

⁸⁷ Interview With Abah Mutsyid.

which occur during the months of *Kahiji* and *Katiga*. The ritualistic activity culminates in a familial gathering within a communal hall, where participants share a meal that is preceded by prayers and worship directed towards God Almighty,⁸⁸ facilitated by a spiritual leader, commonly referred to as *Pu'un*.

The final ritual is *Seba*, conducted on an annual basis, wherein the harvested crops are presented to the Governor of Banten. This practice functions as a form of almsgiving, symbolizing an offering and an expression of allegiance to the governing authority, accompanied by a sentiment of joy due to successful cultivation. During this ceremony, members of the Baduy community traverse barefoot while carrying and delivering their crops, which include rice, *palawija* (the second harvest), and fruits, to the local government, represented by the Lebak Regent (*ibu gede* or big mother) and the Governor of Banten (*bapa gede* or big father), as a manifestation of obedience to the ruler and as an expression of gratitude for the bountiful harvest. The term 'Saba' in Sundanese denotes the action of visiting or journeying to distant locales.⁸⁹

Finally, the findings derived from interviews and observations indicate that they do not engage in the hoarding of their agricultural output. Consequently, their agricultural practices are rooted in traditional methods, specifically shifting cultivation, which entails relocating from one plot to another for farming purposes, refraining from the continuous utilization of the same land, and abstaining from the application of chemical fertilizers. This approach allows the previously utilized land an opportunity to recuperate.

An additional strategy employed by the Inner Baduy community to uphold their cultural teachings and traditions while ensuring ecological sustainability involves the prohibition of electronic devices and the restriction on intermarriage with individuals outside the Baduy community, as well as the non-enrollment of their children and descendants in formal

⁸⁸ Interview with Hamdani, 2 August 2022.

⁸⁹ Bagja Waluya et al., "Tourism Revitalization Based on Local Wisdom in 'Saba Budaya' of Baduy," *Jurnal Geografi Gea* 22, no. 1 (2022), <https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/gea>.

educational institutions, including elementary, middle, high schools, or universities.⁹⁰ Should any members pursue formal education, they are rendered unable to reside within the inner Baduy milieu. For the Inner Baduy community, nature is regarded not as a resource to be exploited indiscriminately, but rather as a Divine endowment that must be preserved for the benefit of future generations. Ecological wisdom is acknowledged as both individual and collective knowledge that is derived from introspection on intergenerational and intercultural experiences.

Modernity, Adaptation, and Ecological Negotiation

The Baduy experience of divinity should not be understood as static or isolated from change. Field interviews and previous studies indicate that the Baduy live within increasing contact with tourism, markets, state administration, mobile communication, and surrounding Muslim communities. These pressures create practical challenges for maintaining customary restrictions, especially in the Outer Baduy area, where contact with modern institutions is more visible.

The Inner Baduy respond to modernity mainly through restriction. They maintain prohibitions on electronic devices, electric lighting, formal schooling, and marriage outside the community. These restrictions function not only as cultural boundaries but also as ecological safeguards.

The Outer Baduy show a more flexible pattern. They interact more openly with visitors, government programs, markets, and surrounding religious communities. This does not mean that they abandon Baduy identity. Rather, they negotiate between customary obligations and practical needs. Some compromises occur in clothing, trade, travel, and communication, but core values such as respect for customary authority, forest protection, and ritual obligations remain important.

This distinction between Inner and Outer Baduy is analytically significant. It shows that ecological sustainability is maintained through both strict preservation and selective adaptation. The Baduy case should not be romanticized as an untouched tradition.

⁹⁰ Interview with Hamdani.

Its importance lies in the way religious values, customary law, and social discipline continue to organize ecological practice under changing conditions.

From the perspective of Islamic ecotheology, this negotiation is important because it shows that ecological ethics must be lived within historical realities. Nasr's critique of modernity helps explain why unlimited consumption and desacralized views of nature are destructive. The Baduy case adds an empirical dimension: sacred ecological values survive when they are institutionalized in daily habits, communal sanctions, and shared narratives of responsibility.

Conclusion

This article argues that the Baduy community's ecological sustainability is grounded in a religious worldview that links nature, customary law, and Divine experience.

The findings show that Baduy environmental ethics operate through everyday discipline rather than abstract doctrine alone. The sacred meaning of nature becomes visible in concrete practices: forests are protected through customary prohibitions, agricultural land is used with restraint, rituals reinforce gratitude and purification, and simplicity limits excessive consumption. These practices demonstrate how religious experience can become a practical foundation for ecological sustainability.

The article also contributes to Islamic studies by placing Nasr's Islamic ecotheology in dialogue with Baduy indigenous religious ecology. The Baduy case confirms Nasr's broader insight that environmental destruction is connected to the loss of a sacred view of nature. However, it also extends the discussion by showing how a local indigenous tradition, situated in an Indonesian Islamicate context, sustains ecological responsibility through customary institutions and lived practice.

At the same time, the Baduy case should not be romanticized. The community faces modern pressures from tourism, markets, technology, formal administration, and wider social interaction. The Inner Baduy respond through stricter customary restrictions, while The Outer Baduy negotiate more flexible forms of adaptation.

The study recommends further research on three areas: comparative studies between Baduy ecological ethics and Islamic environmental movements in Indonesia; deeper ethnographic research on generational change among Inner and Outer Baduy communities; and policy-oriented research on how indigenous ecological knowledge can inform sustainable development without reducing sacred traditions to technical environmental tools. The main contribution of this article is to show that Divine experience, when embodied in communal practice, can become a durable source of ecological responsibility.

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