

Between Religion and Local Culture: The Dynamics of Converts in Mentawai Society

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Abstract

This research aims to find the phenomenon of Muslim life that is still carried out in daily life because of ancestral customs that are still inherent and thick in the Mentawai community. The research method used in this study is qualitative using a descriptive analysis approach. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview technique with open-ended questions. This technique is used to give the informant the freedom to answer according to their understanding, knowledge, and experience. The collected data was then analyzed using qualitative data analysis of the Miles and Huberman technique through three stages, namely data reduction, data exposure, and conclusion drawing and verification. This research found the patterns or thought events of Mentawai Muslims that are still influenced by ancestral culture. The results of the above study show that there is a cultural syncretism between Islamic teachings and local customs that form unique characteristics in the religious practices of the Mentawai people. This is reflected in the rituals, traditions, and social norms that are carried out, which at the same time strengthen the cultural identity as well as the faith of Muslims in the region. These findings make an important contribution to understanding the dynamics of the relationship between religion and culture in the context of indigenous peoples, as well as their implications for the preservation of cultural heritage.

Keywords: Religion; Culture; Dynamic; Mentawai

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat fenomena kehidupan umat Islam yang masih dilakukan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari karena adat istiadat leluhur yang masih melekat dan kental dalam masyarakat Mentawai. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kualitatif dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan teknik wawancara semi terstruktur dengan pertanyaan bersifat terbuka. Teknik ini digunakan untuk memberikan kebebasan kepada informan menjawab sesuai dengan pemahaman, pengetahuan, dan pengalaman mereka. Data yang terkumpul kemudian dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis data kualitatif teknik Miles dan Huberman melalui tiga tahap yaitu reduksi data, paparan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan serta verifikasi. Penelitian ini menemukan pola atau peristiwa pemikiran umat Islam Mentawai yang masih dipengaruhi oleh budaya leluhur. Hasil penelitian di atas menunjukkan bahwa terdapat sinkretisme budaya antara ajaran Islam dan adat istiadat lokal yang membentuk karakteristik unik dalam praktik keagamaan masyarakat Mentawai. Hal ini tercermin dalam ritual, tradisi, dan norma sosial yang dijalankan, yang sekaligus memperkuat identitas budaya sekaligus keimanan umat Islam di wilayah tersebut. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi penting dalam memahami dinamika hubungan antara agama dan budaya dalam konteks masyarakat adat, serta implikasinya terhadap pelestarian warisan budaya.

Kata Kunci: Agama; Budaya; Dinamis; Mentawai

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INTRODUCTION

In Mentawai society, religious conversion often creates a dynamic between new beliefs embraced by converts and local culture that has been inherent for generations.¹ Converts face real challenges in adjusting to new religious teachings that sometimes conflict with the customs and cultural values of their ancestors.² This conflict does not only occur at the individual level, but also extends into social interactions with families and communities, where cultural practices such as customary rituals, social norms, and traditional belief systems are still highly respected and practiced.³ As a result, converts often face social pressures and identity dilemmas, between maintaining cultural heritage or fully adopting new religious values. This situation raises important questions about how they navigate this duality and how the Mentawai community as a whole respond to changing religious identities in the context of a strong local culture.

Even parents often feel that their children are forced to go to a predominantly Christian school because they have to memorize Christian prayers. For this reason, there should be government attention in this matter. Although there are Mentawai Muslim or non-Muslim children or converts who are taken to schools abroad such as Padang, Medan and even to the island of Java, they return after relearning the teachings of their ancestors. Then there is also the unique fact of the Mentawai people that underlie conflicts between groups and even religion. A remarkable adaptation occurred in which the layers of Mentawai identity were not lost in the adaptation to the Islamic faith. Islam with its teachings, and other formal religions, is considered to be *sasareu* (outsiders). The prohibition of consuming wild boar as part of Islamic rules is a *sareu* rule that is contrary to *Arat Mentawai*.⁴ Mentawai is also famous for his tattoos. Tattoos for them serve as specific symbols in the social unit, such as symbols of ethnicity, profession, and gender.⁵

The Mentawai Islands have 4 large islands, namely, Siberut Island, Sipora Island, North Pagai Island, South Pagai Island. It is known that the Mentawai Islands used to be a Muslim majority. Islam entered Mentawai in 1800 and then Christianity only entered in 1900, a difference of 200 years. But unfortunately, when in 2010 there was a tsunami in the Mentawai Islands, the Islamic Organization came to help at that time, when they found that many had apostatized and even the mosque became a pig breeding ground. So much so that there is a village called Kampung Berkah Illahi, which used to be 100% Islamic, and now the village is

¹ Kristiawan Indriyanto dan Dian Syahfitri, "Transpacific Environmental Imagination: Comparative Analysis of Indigeneity in The Healers and Burung Kayu," *SARE: Southeast Asian Review of English* 61, no. 2 (2024): 1–26.

² Hakan Emin Ozturk, "Exploring the Dynamics of Muslim Conversion in Ottawa: Processes, Challenges, and Social Integration" (PhD Thesis, Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa, 2025), <https://ruor.uottawa.ca/items/18b1ed0b-2257-495b-840b-3ceacf9e2ab7>.

³ Dewa Agung Gede Agung, Ahmad Munjin Nasih, dan Bayu Kurniawan, "Local wisdom as a model of interfaith communication in creating religious harmony in Indonesia," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 9 (2024): 100827.

⁴ Maskota Delfi, "Islam and Arat Sabulungan in Mentawai," *Al-Jami'ah* 51, no. 2 (2014): 475–99, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2013.512.475-499>.

⁵ R. Kurniawan, "Harmonization of Mentawai Society," *al-Qalb* 9(2) (2018): 111–118.

still called Kampung Berkah Illahi but it has been 100% apostasy.⁶ That is the situation of Islam there, because there is no observation from the outside world, there are no Muslims outside Mentawai who care about them, they apostatize and convert to Christianity who often go there to spread their religion. Now in Mentawai only 15% are Muslims. Based on the Central Statistics Agency, the Mentawai Islands district records that the majority of the population of the Mentawai Islands embraces Christianity, and the only district with a Christian majority is West Sumatra. Christians amounted to 77.59%, of which Protestants 48.50% and Catholics 29.09%. Then followers of Islam as much as 22.22% and others including 0.19% trust (data archived 2023). Of course, there are not many Formal Islamic Education Institutions available.

Research by Ahmad and Suryani (2015) shows that the relationship between the Mentawai people and Muslim traders from the west coast of Sumatra has been going on since the 17th century, mainly through barter trade activities such as the exchange of palm leaves, rattan, cloth, tobacco, machetes, and salt. The Bugis and Minangkabau traders who came to the Mentawai islands brought not only merchandise, but also the influence of Islam which slowly began to spread among the local population. According to Siregar (2018) research, the Mentawai people have established trade relations with the city of Tikus in the Pariaman district since 1621, marking the beginning of the entry of Islam into the region. Although there is no definitive record of when Muslim traders began to visit Mentawai on a regular basis, the cultural and religious impact they brought with them has been ingrained for up to five generations in the families of the local community (Nasution, 2020). These findings provide an important basis for understanding how the process of Islamic conversion in Mentawai is not only a religious phenomenon, but also part of the complex socio-cultural dynamics between religion and local customs.

According to research conducted by Lubis (2017), trade between Muslim traders from Bugis and Minangkabau with the Mentawai community has been going on for a long time and has become the main route for the spread of Islam in the archipelago. Lubis emphasized that this economic interaction is not only an exchange of goods, but also brings cultural and religious values that affect the social life of the Mentawai people. Meanwhile, research by Rahman (2019) reveals that the existence of Islam in the Mentawai community has been inherent for generations, where the influence of local customs is still strong and sometimes creates syncretism between Islamic teachings and ancestral traditions. This shows how the converts in Mentawai underwent a dynamic process of adaptation between their new faith and their local cultural identity. Research from Harahap (2021) also confirms that even though Islam has become the majority religion, traditional practices remain a strong foundation in the daily lives of the Mentawai people, so that the process of religious conversion becomes complex and full of social challenges.

Although previous research has largely discussed the historical relationship between trade and the spread of Islam through economic interaction between Muslim traders and the Mentawai people, these studies have focused more on the historical aspects and the process of

⁶ UIN Imam, Bonjol Padang, and Correspondence Email, "Portrait of the Work of the Malaysian Islamic Youth in the Mentawai Islands," 1972, 122–28.

the entry of Islam into the Mentawai Islands. In addition, their main focus is more on the dynamics of the spread of Islam in general and the relationship between trade and the socio-cultural transformation of society. In contrast to the research, it focuses specifically on the experiences and social dynamics experienced by converts in Mentawai as they try to balance a new religious identity with a strong and thick local culture. This research highlights how the process of religious conversion is not only religious, but also involves conflict, adaptation, and negotiation of identity in the daily lives of modern Mentawai people. With this approach, this study fills the gap in the study of the direct interaction between the new religion and local culture from the perspective of the individual and the community undergoing the change.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. The reason for the use of the phenomenological approach in this study is because this study struggles to find out the problem of understanding the Islamic minority of Mentawai Muslims from cultural activities carried out by the local community. This is in line with Husserl's opinion that the phenomenological approach aims to analyze and analyze the inner life of individuals, namely the experiences of individuals regarding individual phenomena.⁷ *Purposive sampling* is a *non-probability* sampling technique in which researchers only select those subjects who meet the research objectives based on the researcher's beliefs.⁸

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview technique with open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview technique is used to give the informant the freedom to answer according to their understanding, knowledge and experience. Make by phone and face-to-face. The collected data was then analyzed using qualitative data analysis of the Miles and Huberman technique through three stages, namely *data reduction*, *data display*, and *conclusion drawing and verifying*. The data reduction process is carried out by simplifying and grouping the data obtained from the results of interviews with informants, and discarding unnecessary data. Then the data is presented in the form of narrative text systematically so that it is easy to understand. Then conclusions are drawn and verified to find the meaning of the desired data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mentawai People's Trust in the Handling of Funerals

According to the belief of the Mentawai people, the dead should not be buried because basically the holy land does not want to accept a sinful human body. When a person dies, according to the belief, the sabulungan must be laid to rest on the earth or under a lush tree that is still towering. Close family members must take care of the corpse such as bathing it and rubbing the body until the flesh is completely destroyed. When the flesh of the corpse has been

⁷ I. F. Wita, G., & Mursal, "No Title," *Journal of Humanities*, 06(2), no. Phenomenology in Social Studies A Study on the Construction of Meaning (2022), <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.22437>.

⁸ Warlan Sukandar et al., "JIHAD DA'WAH ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EXTENSION IN THE INTERIOR OF THE MENTAWAI ISLANDS WEST SUMATRA Preliminary Abstract Mentawai Islands Regency is one of the districts located in West Sumatra Province, Indonesia. This district is outside the island area" 06, no. 01 (2024).

destroyed, the bones must be brought back to a large house (*uma*) with the aim of keeping the spirits of the dead close and around their families.

This is still maintained and fought for from time to time. The tradition of absolute ancestors must be accepted without lawsuit so that it becomes the blood of the community for many years. So *Arat* (custom) has become a norm of life for the Mentawai Community, both personal, family and tribal.⁹ *Arat* for the Mentawai people is a sacred heritage because it was invented by their ancestors long ago and its preservation must be well maintained.¹⁰ Conduct that is contrary to *Arat* is called sin and all things that have never happened are called wickedness. Obeying *Arat* means volunteering to be guided by tradition which is the prime measure of every morality. *Arat* is also an alignment with the unifying world with *uma* (home) and a guarantee of a life of peace and tranquility.

Sikerei-style treatment that is not in line with Islamic law is also carried out by Mentawai Muslims even though they are Muslims. This traditional medicine ritual called *pabeteat* has benefits that are believed to be able to cure the diseases suffered, whether it is from natural factors or evil spirits. The Mentawai community is of the view that treating *Sikerei* with traditional medicine is considered more effective in curing the diseases suffered than modern medicine. *This Pabeteat* is to help the community in handling and curing the diseases they suffer.¹¹ This evil spirit can give illness to a person or commonly referred to as *kisei*.¹²

Here are some stages of treatment with *sikerei*. First, asking to be treated by *Sikerei* must be booked in advance, usually about 3-7 days before doing treatment. And we have to prepare the cost for treatment which is almost the same as going to the hospital. Second, for the ritual process, the removal of objects needed for the ritual and then arranged, who prepares these objects are mostly from the host and *Sikerei* also bring a set of ritual tools such as bells, leaves, and cigarettes. After that, *Sikerei* begins to cast spells, summoning spirits, and there is a transaction between *Sikerei* and the spirits. When the transaction is successful, *Sikerei* then dances while preparing dishes that will later be eaten together, including a portion for spirits. Now for this spirit to get a small but large share, take a little sweet potato, a little egg, a little pork, and a little other dish hes as well. And usually for these spirits are placed between wooden spacing in the house. And only then do they eat the dish together with a fair share.¹³

When the disease is not cured, additional *sikerei people* are needed to treat it, so *the early sikerei* need to carry out soul alignment which is called by the Mentawai people as *Paruak*. *Paruak* is a harmony between *Sikerei* who do not know each other physically and spiritually. And for the process, it is to use special leaves as a physical and spiritual connecting tool by pouring it to fellow *Sikerei* chili sauce for the utterance of special mantras. So *Sikerei* who don't know each other are not allowed to eat one plate. What can be interpreted is that it is not

⁹ Zulfa Zulfa dan Rahmat Sewa Suraya, "Exploring the Role of Tattoo Discourse in Matotonan Village: Mentawai Tattoo Batik as an Effort to Preserve Tradition in Mentawai," *Journal of Pragmatics and Discourse Research* 4, no. 1 (2024): 78–89.

¹⁰ Syahril Syahril dkk., "Adaptation of Remote Indigenous Communities of Mentawai and Rupert Islands to National Religious Regulations," *Society* 13, no. 1 (2025): 388–401.

¹¹ Abdul Hayyial Ghifari, "Intercultural Communication of the Mentawai Tribe with the Minang Tribe on Siberut Island in Traditional Medicine Rituals" (Surakarta: UIN Mas Said Surakarta, 2023).

¹² Ghifari.

¹³ Ghifari.

allowed to share with each other. And this paruak applies specifically only to Sikerei, while if it is for other than Sikerei it can be called paruruk. This paruruk is a discussion that exists between fellow people who are not Sikerei. It is not arbitrary for a Sikerei to say a prayer, for example it is forbidden to say a prayer to eat if the food is not there, the meaning here is that Sikerei has a taboo that cannot just say a prayer unless the prayer is in front of him. because just like Islam, this sabulungan also has various kinds of prayers, such as the prayer of cutting chickens, the prayer of eating, and many other prayers.

Arat Sabulungan

Arat sabulungan is the embodiment of knowledge, beliefs, and traditions related to the natural, social, and cultural environment that govern all human relationships with nature.¹⁴ In fact, in a more extreme way, it can be said that arat sabulungan regulates the relationship between humans and humans, their environment, and the spiritual entities that rule the universe.¹⁵ In traditional events or *arat sabulungan* pigs are a must-have food. Wild boars (*Sus scrofa*) are an integral part of life in Mentawai as they are cared for on a daily basis and play an important role in practice¹⁶. Gerard Persoon has stated that wild boars are loved and loved by the Mentawai people and are definitely not an ordinary ritual consumption item.¹⁷ Boars are not only important for their protein and as offerings at ritual feasts, they are used in the payment of *alak togha* (dowry) or *tulou* (customary fines), in healing rituals by *Kerei* (Mentawai shamans) and in *centennial* feasts to celebrate the end of a long-standing dispute.¹⁸

The Siberut people often refer to cultures that incorporate their beliefs in everyday language as *Arat* (customs). This expression refers to a local belief based on the teachings of their ancestors, *Arat Sabulungan*. *Sabulungan* comes from the word *bulug* which refers to the leaves of the plant¹⁹. The use of leaves in traditional ceremonies combined with alluring dances and songs is the main element in traditional ceremonies. The leaves (and flowers) also serve as intermediaries in offerings to the spirits of the *uma*. Juniator Tulus, *Sabulungan* is understood as part of human behavior and it is believed that the spirit sees *buluat* (offering) as a medium of respect by which the person who gives the offering obtains good luck and avoids disaster²⁰. Their beliefs are based on the knowledge of their ancestors – a collection of values that maintain the balance of life commonly called *the Mentawai puaranan* (*Mentawai customary system*).²¹ As a *spin-off* of Mentawai, *Arat Sabulungan* is a philosophy of Mentawai life that is full of meaning. *Arat* is considered a sacred heritage and the basis of human life in

¹⁴ K. Glossanto, "Sabulungan in Cultural Identity Tension: A Study of the Religion of the Mentawai People in South Siberut," 2019.

¹⁵ T. Tresno, "Ute'Simagere (Skull for Spirits): Community Relations with Endemic Primates in Mentawai," 2017.

¹⁶ Delfi, "Islam and Arat Sabulungan in Mentawai."

¹⁷ Gerard Persoon, *The Importance of Sufficient Economy for Siberut Island*, in Gerard Persoon and Reimar Schefold (eds.), *Siberut Island* (Jakarta: Bhratara Karya Aksara, 1985), p. 75., t.t.).

¹⁸ Delfi, "Islam and Arat Sabulungan in Mentawai."

¹⁹ HermanStefano Sihombing, *Mentawai, Mentawai Tribal Culture* (Jakarta: Pradnya Paramita, 1979); Jakarta: Grafidian Jaya, 1986, t.t.).

²⁰ Juniator Tulus, *Simatak Siagailaggek and Simabesik: Social Relations in the Mentawai Community Medical System on Siberut Island* (Thesis presented at Andalas University, 2000, p. 66, t.t.).

²¹ Delfi, "Islam and Arat Sabulungan in Mentawai."

the family and *uma*. So *arat* symbolizes harmony with the world and a means to unite *uma* in a larger community with many *uma* members in Mentawai²².

Harmony with the world includes good relationships between human beings, in relation to nature, relationships with biotic matter (flora and fauna), with inanimate objects, natural occurrences, and with the spirit world. *Arat* as a guidance system inherited by the ancestors and is considered an important guide in life, especially for those involved in the communal life of the *uma*.²³ In Mentawai, *uma* represent a strong affiliation firstly with a familiar group of residents or clans, and second, their main communal longhouse that is central to the group's activities in various practices and rituals. *Uma* not only functions in group deliberations, but also as a gathering place when asking for spiritual guidance to heal sick members of society²⁴. Those who practiced *Arat Sabulungan* were previously threatened with imprisonment, but they still do so in the forest or in unknown places.

Arat Sabulungan considers that objects in nature contain spirits. The spirit is considered to have a life similar to that of humans, but not everyone has the ability to see and communicate with the visible and the invisible in the spirit realm. The leader who leads the custom is called *sikerai*. So *sekerai* is used in *uma* rituals and disease healing rituals. *Kerei* is the intermediary between the human world and the spirit world. There are many guardians or supernatural rulers, such as the celestial spirits known as *Saikamanua*.

The spirits in the forest area are called *Saikaleleu* or *Sibarakaleleu*. The spirits that live in and around the river are called *Saikaoinan* or *Sibarakaoinan*, while the spirits that live around the sea are called *Saikabagakoat*. The most important spirits are the earth-guarding spirits, known as *Teteu* and *Sigegeugeu*. Every human being also has a relationship with the spirit realm, and he strives to establish good relationships so that his life remains smooth. Connection with the spirit realm is maintained through various rituals and worship practices²⁵ is very good if good spirits are willing to dwell in the human body. If the good spirits are not happy with the good spirits, then the spirits will come out of the body which can result in death. Unhappy spirits can also leave the body for a while resulting in the person falling ill

According to the Mentawai people, there are two ways to positively influence the spirits. First, through ritual worship, and second, through the summoning spell of spirits through rituals that require certain objects. In *Arat Sabulungan*, it is believed that moving living things such as waterfalls, rivers, and winds, as well as inanimate inanimate objects such as stones and

²² Stefano Coronese, *Mentawai Tribe Culture* (Jakarta: Grafidian Jaya, 1986) p 36, t.t.).

²³ See Edwin M. Loeb, "A Mentawai Religious Cult," in *American Archaeology and Ethnology*, Vol. 25, No.2, Berkeley: University of California Press. 1929, pp.185-247 Coronese, *Mentawai Tribal Culture*, 1986; Reimar Schefold, "Traditional Culture Siberut," in Gerard Persoon and Reimar Schefold (eds.), *Siberut Island* (Jakarta: Bhratara Karya Aksara, 1985); Schefold, "Mentawai Equilibrium," 1985; Reimar Schefold, *LIA, The Great Ritual on the Mentawai Islands (Indonesia)* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1988); Ermayanti, "The Function of *Kerei*," 1988; and Yando R. Zakaria, "Crippling Development: Lessons from the Mentawai Islands," in *Stories From the Hometown of the Tribal Community, Official Religion and Development* (Yogyakarta: Student Library, 1996); Roza, "Uma in Life," 1997; Glenn Reeves, "Village, Cosmos, People," dalam *The Anthropology of the Mentawai Island. Halaman Utama: Anthropology of Mentawai Island*, 2000; and Bambang Rudito. "The Ceremony of the Function of Bebeitei *Uma* in the People of Mentawai *Ph.D. Thesis*, Depok: University of Indonesia, 2005.

²⁴ Christian Hammons, "Sakaliou: Reciprocal, Mimesis, and the Cultural Economy of Tradition in Siberut, Mentawai Islands, Indonesia" (Ph.D. presented at the University of Southern California. 2010), p. xvii, t.t.).

²⁵ Delfi, "Islam and Arat Sabulungan in Mentawai."

earth, have *simagre* (soul). This includes natural phenomena such as rainbows, thunder, and lightning. In addition, each object has spiritual power, which is comparable to the radiance of power called *bajou*.²⁶ In the end, *the Sabulungan* ritual is beneficial to restore the balance to the situation.

In *the arat sibalang*, which is *an ancestral custom*, it is always mandatory to have its typical food, namely pork. Through *the saareu* (way of life of outsiders), some of the Siberut Mentawai community has received *Sipuisilam*. The people of Siberut Mentawai who have embraced Islam do not always stay away from wild boars. Although there are some people who understand that for *Sipuisilam* eating wild boar meat is *haram* (haram), their understanding of the word *haram* is different from the understanding in *the sasareu of Sipuisilam*. Those who have embraced *the Sipuisilam* religion in Siberut often say that pork is indeed haram but on the other hand pork is *manam* (delicious).²⁷ *Sipuisilam* is a term that refers to a group of residents of Bumi Sikerei who embrace Islam.²⁸

A man who claims to be a Muslim, but he and his family all eat wild boars, and whenever there is a big feast in his *uma*, they always kill the wild boar and all the members of the *uma* eat it. He said: "I am indeed a follower of the Islamic Arat. In Siberut, we refer to people who adhere to Islamic Arat as *Sipuisilam*. I eat wild boars, my kids too. My whole family eats wild boar and my elderly father still likes to eat wild boar because I really like the meat even though my religion (Arat) is Islam. Arat Islam is my belief, but my body is different. My body is not my Arat (religion). So that means, don't throw away that 'delicious wild boar'. My body is Mentawai's body, so I eat wild boars. Wild boars are needed by my body. We raise wild boars and take care of them. We enjoy sago every day, but we also like to eat meat. It would be a shame if we didn't want to eat it. If we don't want to eat wild boar, why do we keep piglets? Sometimes we sell piglets when someone wants to buy them. Usually one wants to buy them when they hold *lia* (ritual ceremonies) for their clan or family. I eat wild boar because I love the meat so much.²⁹ Our religion (Arat) is Islam. We have Islamic names, and we have also been told that wild boars are haram. So, wild boars are forbidden, but also *manaam* (tasty). We don't eat haram wild boars, we just eat 'good wild boars'. It's a pity, if we don't eat a 'tasty wild boar', as *sasareu* says, we can't throw away the blessings we've received. If we did, it would be called *mubadhir* (abuse). It is not good to do something unnecessary.

The prohibition on wild boar consumption for Islamic believers in Siberut is difficult to understand, but it is even more difficult to enforce the eating rules because it is contrary to the eating habits of the Mentawai people. In fact, the Siberut Mentawai people consider the consumption of wild boars as a traditional part of Mentawai's identity.³⁰ In addition to traditional events/*Arat Sabulungan* also as a ritual medium; storage of animals with family

²⁶ Delphi.

²⁷ Delphi.

²⁸ Eka Putra Wirman et al., "The internalization of religious values in bumi Sikerei: Improving the worship areas for the younger generation of sipuisilam," *Transformation: Journal of Community Service* 19, no. 2 (2023): 223–36, <https://doi.org/10.20414/transformati.v19i2.6962>.

²⁹ Delfi, "Islam and Arat Sabulungan in Mentawai."

³⁰ Juniator Tulus, *Family Stories: Oral Traditions, Past Memories and Contemporary Land Conflicts in Mentawai-Indonesia* (Doctoral Thesis, Leiden University, 2012, p. 168., t.t.).

*members; payment of dowry conditions; and the tradition of fines.*³¹ Then also for the payment of *bride-price (alak toga)*, the payment of customary fines (*tulou*) and also for healing rituals by shamans (*kerei*) and peace parties (*paabad*).³²

Seeing this phenomenon to overcome things like the above, many individuals and institutions recruited several native Mentawai children who were *maullaf* to be schooled in the edge land. Tanah tepi is a term to indicate the city of Padang, Pariaman.³³ Some even went to school outside the Mentawai area, such as in Padang, Medan, Bogor, Jakarta, and Banjarmasin.³⁴ The sending of Mentawai's best sons to be schooled outside of Mentawai began in 1978.³⁵ In addition, to strengthen converts, many provide assistance in the form of food, clothing, cows during the Qurbani holiday, giving gifts and others. The Padang Da'wah Council sent seven cows to Sipora, Muara Siberut, and Muara Sikabalan. He has also sent six rolls of carpets or prayer mats to Mentawai, precisely in North and South Siberut, three rolls each. The other three rolls were sent to Sipora.³⁶

He also brought a shipment in the form of Eid packages from *Urang Awak* donations in Tanah Abang, Jakarta. The Eid packages were in the form of 111 sarongs, 132 mukenah packages in addition to 80 new Muslim women's fabrics. Also he brought an *amp* from the congregation of the Al-Azhar Kebayoran Mosque. This Eid package was distributed directly at the end of Ramadan, covering the areas of Mongonpoula, Muara Sikabalan in North Siberut, Bettumonga, Mapadegat, Tuapejat, Matobe', and Sioban in Sipora and in Muara Siberut, as well as Sikakap. There was also a Yamaha 15 PK boat engine to Drs. Syarbaini as the Head of KUA Siberut District.³⁷ There are even Islamic boarding schools that go directly to Mentawai such as the Darul 'ulum Islamic boarding school whose homecoming goes directly to the location.³⁸ By holding regular recitations or lectures. *The second* approach is education, namely by holding training for imams and khatib, training for Qur'an teachers, and Conversion Coaching. The Offer approach is with the delivery of outstanding students.³⁹

Converts for Mentawai

Converts are conceptually interpreted as people who have just converted from one religion (e.g.; Christians, Protestants, Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians) converted to Islam. Converts receive a lot of attention from various circles, such as education practitioners.⁴⁰ The attention of experts on converts is focused on four things, first, Islamic religious guidance and

³¹ Maskota Delfi, "Sipusilam in the Blanket of Arat Sabulungan Adherents of Islam Mentawai in Siberut," *Al-ulum* 12, no. 1 (2012): 4-7.

³² Delphi.

³³ Deepest Taileleu, "COMMUNICATION METHOD D A ' WAH PERSUASIVE BUYA M AS ' OED ABIDIN IN INSTILLING ISLAMIC VALUES IN THE PEOPLE OF TAILLELEU-" 2, no. 2 (2019): 21-44.

³⁴ Arham, "interview" (t.t.).

³⁵ Taileleu, "COMMUNICATION METHOD D A ' WAH PERSUASIVE BUYA M AS ' OED ABIDIN IN INSTILLING ISLAMIC VALUES IN THE PEOPLE OF TAILLELEU-."

³⁶ Taileleu.

³⁷ Taileleu.

³⁸ Pondok Pesanten et al., "https://jurnal-stidnatsir.ac.id/index.php/dakwah/article/view/42" 2, no. 1 (2019): 21-48.

³⁹ Pesanten et al.

⁴⁰ Fitri Alrasi, Nurul Shalihin, and Duski Samad, "Natural Patterns as a Strategy for the Religious Development of Mentawai Converts" 9, no. 2 (2022): 132-44.

guidance programs for converts and religious commitment to converts. Second, the strategy of Islamic da'wah for converts held by Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah mass organizations. Third, religious conversion and interaction of the converts' community. Fourth, the study is related to the problems of converts.⁴¹ Psychological conditions are one of the causes of the shock felt by converts caused by several factors such as family and society that are not supportive.⁴²

Quoted from the 2015 republika, the Mentawai people said that when they were schooled, they embraced Islam, but after returning to Mentawai they returned to Christianity again. Even their parents said, *we don't mind our children being schooled in Islamic boarding schools or where, when they were in school, they are Muslim, now they have converted to Christianity again, it doesn't matter. In Mentawai, it is a common problem, he said*" (Republika 2015). Mahrus Salam's record also illustrates that in Mentawai, people easily change religions. The apostasy of converts is not a strange event in Mentawai, people can go back and forth here. This is greatly influenced by the 80 percent non-Muslim environment and the very strong teachings of their ancestors.⁴³ The development of Islamization in Mentawai is still very low, the number of preachers in terms of number is still lacking, including funds that are not supportive. Most of the Mentawai converts did not understand Islam well, so they easily converted to their original religion. The Islamization that occurred in Mentawai did not necessarily keep converts away from the habit of eating pork, because for them pork was used as a standard of dignity/honor in a family. This is important because pigs determine the social status of the community.⁴⁴

The portrait of the dynamics of converts' lives in the Mentawai Islands raises concerns, including the existence of converts who have returned to apostasy. The lack of conversion coaching from the existing da'i, besides that there is also a small number of da'i. The next problem is the inadequate quality of da'i in delivering da'wah, especially for converts.⁴⁵ Talking converts in Mentawai is like a toy for them, the important thing is that the goal is achieved for several reasons. *First*, converts to Islam are not because of the vocation of the soul but because of the marriage factor. When the household they built did not last long and ended in divorce, then they left Islam and returned to the old religion and even their children were once brought into apostasy. Or because of the death of the wife or husband also apostatizes with his child directly.

The phenomenon of converting back apostasy with regard to family members who convert, automatically parents or other family members show an unhappy attitude, the form of displeasure is by withdrawing all existing inheritances. The problem that arises is that converts start a new life with a makeshift economy. Conditions like this, there are converts who are unable to survive long with economic conditions as they are so that they return to apostasy.

⁴¹ Alrasi, Shalihin, and Samad.

⁴² Alrasi, Shalihin, and Samad.

⁴³ Alrasi, Shalihin, and Samad.

⁴⁴ Nelmaya Nelmaya and Deswalantri Deswalantri, "The Problem of Da'wah and Islamization in the Mentawai Islands," *Fuaduna Journal: Journal of Religious and Community Studies* 5, no. 1 (2021): 35, <https://doi.org/10.30983/fuaduna.v5i1.4260>.

⁴⁵ Nur Kholis dan Imas Maesaroh, "Proceedings of the 2012 ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ISLAMIC STUDIES," 2012.

Third, converts return to apostasy because they want to expect something different. Like hoping to get special help and attention from other Muslims. This hope was not found as expected, the path of apostasy as a solution was not fulfilled. Fourth, another reason for converts to apostatize is because they feel excluded by their brothers and the society where they live. When converts transact and socialize, they always feel marginalized. As a result, converts are unable to survive for a long time and then return to apostasy. The internal causes of converts becoming apostates are weak faith and low religious understanding.

CONCLUSION

Even the more trusted sikerai-style treatment is more effective for healing when compared to modern medicine. Meanwhile, in terms of the implementation or process of treatment that is not in line with Islamic teachings, such as requiring a joint meal after the recitation of the mantra is finished with the cooking of the pig as medicine. In addition, many Mentawai people have returned to apostasy for various reasons. Including arat sibalungan which is certainly contrary to the teachings of Islam, because in the ritual of arat sibalungan people usually eat pork which is said to be haram but the taste is not haram. As the Mentawai people say, Islam is my religion but not my body.

When they return to Mentawai, they usually return to Mentawai customs. Making Sipuisilam an option based on the principle of freedom in Arat Sabulungan for the people of Mentawai. In Siberut, the Mentawai Islamic group has built its own identity. The habit of consuming wild boars is very strong, not only because the animal plays an important role in various rituals and communal practices, but also because of the ancestral myths and spirits associated with wild boars. In addition to the understanding that every object has a soul and a spirit (supernatural power that radiates), it is difficult for the Mentawai people to stay away from wild boars, let alone call them dirty animals as commonly interpreted according to the Quran. Saying that wild boars are dirty or haram is considered by many Mentawai to be an insult to the existence and creation of such animals. In the minds of the Mentawai people, causing insults can endanger the existence of Mentawai identity.

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