

Reframing Da'wah Communication: Communicative Accommodation and Legitimacy Construction among the Baduy Muslim Community

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Abstract	This study examines how da'wah communication is negotiated within the indigenous socio-cultural context of the Baduy Muslim community in Desa Kompol, Kanekes Village, Lebak Regency, Indonesia. Rather than conceptualizing da'wah as a process of unilateral religious transmission, the study approaches it as a culturally embedded communicative practice through which relational legitimacy, religious meaning, and communicative authority are continuously negotiated within indigenous symbolic systems. Employing an interpretive qualitative design, data were generated through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving eleven religious actors, including Muhammadiyah-affiliated da'i, NU-associated da'i, local religious leaders, and foundation-based volunteers engaged in da'wah activities among the Baduy Muslim community. The findings reveal three interconnected patterns. First, communication accommodation enables religious actors to negotiate relational access and legitimacy through sustained interpersonal engagement while remaining subject to indigenous customary authority. Second, indigenous symbols, rituals, and cultural meanings are selectively renegotiated within Islamic ethical frameworks through gradual symbolic accommodation rather than direct doctrinal confrontation. Third, religious legitimacy emerges through the interaction of relational engagement, institutional preparation, and ongoing negotiation with indigenous authority structures, making legitimacy conditional rather than permanently secured. The study contributes to intercultural communication and da'wah scholarship by demonstrating that religious communication in indigenous settings operates as a dynamic process of communicative accommodation, symbolic negotiation, and legitimacy construction rather than a linear transmission of religious doctrine.		
Keywords	da'wah communication; communication accommodation; indigenous converts; symbolic negotiation; intercultural communication.		
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1. INTRODUCTION

Da'wah has long been understood as the communication of Islamic teachings aimed at guiding individuals and communities toward spiritual and moral transformation. Contemporary scholarship, however, no longer views da'wah as a one-directional activity of religious preaching, but rather as a dialogical communicative process shaped by social interaction, cultural adaptation, and audience interpretation (Fanari dkk., 2025; Hanum & Baidawi, 2025; Kuiper, 2019). Within this perspective, communication becomes central because the effectiveness of da'wah depends not only on doctrinal



content but also on how religious messages are constructed, adapted, and interpreted within particular socio-cultural contexts (Holilah dkk., 2023). In plural societies such as Indonesia, where Islam historically developed through accommodation with local traditions, da'wah has functioned not merely as religious transmission but also as a cultural practice embedded within indigenous systems of meaning (Elvira dkk., 2023). Consequently, da'wah should be understood as a communicative process through which Islamic values are mediated and contextualized within local cultural realities.

The relationship between da'wah and culture becomes particularly significant within indigenous communities whose traditions function as frameworks for regulating spirituality, social order, and collective identity. Geertz's concept of culture as a "web of significance" remains relevant for understanding how communities interpret external influences, including religion, through culturally embedded symbolic systems. Recent studies further emphasize that indigenous traditions frequently operate as protective mechanisms that preserve ecological balance, communal solidarity, and ancestral values amid modernization and religious transformation (Iskandar & Iskandar, 2017). Among the Baduy community in Banten, cultural traditions function not merely as customary practices but also as symbolic boundaries that sustain communal harmony and cultural continuity. In such contexts, da'wah cannot rely solely on normative theological instruction because religious messages that neglect local wisdom risk being rejected as threats to indigenous identity and cultural legitimacy (Aini dkk., 2025).

Existing scholarship on Islam and the Baduy community has developed along three main research streams. The first examines religious conversion and identity formation among Baduy converts, showing how conversion reshapes religious identity and social relations within indigenous communities (Syukur dkk., 2021). The second investigates culturally accommodative da'wah, emphasizing the integration of local wisdom and cultural values to facilitate the acceptance of Islamic teachings while maintaining social harmony (Holilah dkk., 2023). The third explores discourse, religious authority, and cultural contestation in the Kanekes community, highlighting the negotiation of indigenous identity within broader socio-cultural and political contexts (Naziah & Dhona, 2021). Collectively, these studies provide important insights into conversion, cultural accommodation, and identity negotiation. However, they pay limited attention to the communicative mechanisms through which da'i reinterpret indigenous cultural symbols and values to construct Islamic meanings among Baduy converts. In particular, none of these studies examines how communication accommodation strategies and symbolic reinterpretation operate simultaneously in the production of religious legitimacy and identity transformation. This study addresses that gap by examining cultural da'wah through an integrated framework combining Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Geertz's interpretive approach to culture, and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, thereby explaining how accommodation, symbolic reinterpretation, and the negotiation of religious authority facilitate religious transformation while negotiating indigenous identity.

While dialogical communication conceptually involves reciprocal interaction between religious actors and audiences, in which audience interpretation shapes communicative outcomes, the present study focuses analytically on the communicative practices of da'i as the primary agents responsible for negotiating Islamic messages within indigenous cultural settings. Rather than examining audience interpretations of religious messages directly, this study investigates how communication accommodation and symbolic reinterpretation are formulated from the perspective of religious actors. Accordingly, the findings illuminate the communicative strategies through which da'i seek to establish legitimacy and negotiate cultural meanings, while recognizing that audience interpretation remains an important direction for future research.

To examine these communicative mechanisms, this study integrates Clifford Geertz's interpretive approach to culture, Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital to analyze how da'i negotiate Islamic teachings within the symbolic universe of Baduy culture. Geertz's interpretive approach provides a framework for understanding how Baduy traditions operate as culturally embedded systems of meaning through which religious messages are interpreted and socially negotiated (Geertz, 1973). Meanwhile, CAT explains how da'i adapt linguistic expressions, cultural symbols, and communicative strategies in order to reduce social distance, gain legitimacy, and foster acceptance among Baduy converts. Semiotic approaches to culture such as Geertz's tend to domesticate religion by reducing it to a system of meaning, thereby obscuring the disciplinary power and authorizing discourses through which particular religious interpretations come to be recognized as legitimate while others are marginalized (Asad, 1993).

This study takes that critique as an analytical point of departure rather than a limitation to be merely acknowledged. Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital is employed precisely to address what Geertz's framework leaves underexamined: it treats the interpretation of Islam among Baduy converts not as a neutral process of meaning-making but as a contested field in which da'i, customary leaders (*puun* and *jaro*), and converts negotiate unequal access to religious authority. Within this field, the capacity of a da'i to render Islamic teachings acceptable depends not only on symbolic interpretation but on the accumulation of social trust, cultural competence, and recognition from customary authorities, forms of capital that determine whose interpretation of acceptable Islam ultimately prevails. In this sense, Bourdieu's framework does not simply supplement Geertz's interpretive lens; it corrects its blind spot by foregrounding how the production of religious meaning is itself structured by relations of power. Through this integrated framework, da'wah is understood not merely as the transmission of Islamic doctrine but as a dialogical communicative practice shaped by symbolic interpretation, cultural adaptation, identity mediation, and the negotiation of religious legitimacy.

The Baduy are a Sundanese indigenous community inhabiting Kanekes Village, Lebak Regency, Banten Province, internally divided into Inner Baduy (*Tangtu*), who adhere most strictly to customary prohibitions, and Outer Baduy (*Panamping*), who observe a comparatively relaxed version of the same code. Both groups follow *Sunda Wiwitan*, the ancestral belief system centered on cosmological balance between humans and nature, and are governed by *adat*, the indigenous customary order from which *pikukuh* the binding customary law regulating religious practice and social life derives its authority; this authority is held by the *puun*, the highest spiritual-customary leader, and the *jaro*, the customary-administrative leader who manages external relations (AS dkk., 2020). Islam has intersected with Baduy society since the sixteenth-century expansion of the Sultanate of Banten, though conversion has remained limited because converts must leave customary territory under *pikukuh* (Arif dkk., 2023). Several resettlement hamlets have since developed for converts; this study focuses on Kompol Village, comprising the Baduy Muslim-Convert Cluster and the more recently formed Tauhid Muslim-Convert Hamlet, with approximately 417 residents across 100 households, alongside supplementary interviews in Nagara and Cicakal Girang.

The Baduy convert community constitutes a significant case for examining the cultural dimensions of da'wah because it represents an indigenous society negotiating between ancestral traditions, Islamic identity, and the pressures of modernization (Kurniawan, 2021). The presence of diverse da'i affiliated with informal cultural networks, Muhammadiyah initiatives, and philanthropic Islamic institutions demonstrates that da'wah within the Baduy context is neither singular nor purely institutional, but rather shaped by hybrid interactions among local legitimacy, organizational agendas, and communal

adaptation. At the same time, broader processes of religious and social change in Banten including the assertion of Islamic symbols in public space (Nisa, 2020) have shaped the wider socio-religious climate within which Baduy converts navigate identity transformation, positioning da'wah as a site where religious commitments, cultural traditions, and symbolic authority are continuously negotiated. Consequently, the Baduy case reflects broader tensions within Indonesian society concerning the relationship between religion, indigenous identity, and national integration.

This article argues that the interpretation of local cultural values within da'wah among Baduy converts should not be understood merely as a strategy of religious adaptation, but as an ongoing communicative process that reshapes both Islamic and indigenous identities. In this process, da'i do not simply disseminate Islamic doctrine; they selectively reinterpret local traditions, symbols, and social practices into culturally acceptable Islamic meanings. Practices considered inconsistent with Islamic teachings are not always rejected entirely, but are often transformed through accommodative communicative strategies that preserve social harmony while redirecting religious orientation. By focusing on how da'i reinterpret communal solidarity, ecological ethics, and local ritual practices within Islamic ethical frameworks, this study contributes to broader discussions on religion, communication, and cultural transformation in plural societies. More importantly, this article positions da'wah as a culturally embedded communicative practice that operates simultaneously as religious propagation, symbolic accommodation, and identity construction within indigenous communities in contemporary Indonesia.

Accordingly, this study aims to explain how da'wah communication is negotiated within the indigenous socio-cultural context of the Baduy Muslim community by examining three interconnected dimensions. First, it examines how religious actors employ communication accommodation strategies to negotiate relational engagement and legitimacy within the Baduy Muslim community. Second, it analyzes how indigenous symbols, rituals, and cultural meanings are communicatively renegotiated within Islamic ethical frameworks. Third, it explores how religious legitimacy is negotiated between da'i and indigenous authority structures in the practice of da'wah among the Baduy Muslim community.

2. METHODS

This study employs an interpretive qualitative design within the tradition of interpretive communication research to examine how da'wah communication is constructed, negotiated, and understood within indigenous social contexts. An interpretive qualitative approach is particularly appropriate because religious communication in indigenous communities involves context-dependent meanings, culturally embedded interpretations, and socially situated interactions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement. Rather than viewing da'wah as a process of message transmission alone, this study approaches it as a communicative practice through which religious meanings are negotiated within existing cultural systems.

Fieldwork was conducted in Desa Kompol, Kanekes Village, Lebak Regency, Banten Province, Indonesia, particularly in Kampung Tauhid and surrounding Baduy Muslim settlements. The study focuses on communicative interactions between religious actors and the Baduy Muslim community within this socio-cultural setting. The study focuses on da'i who are actively involved in religious preaching activities within the Baduy Muslim community, emphasizing communicative interaction, cultural engagement, and everyday accommodation practices rather than formal religious institutions. The Baduy community was selected because it represents an indigenous social setting in which Islamic

communication intersects with customary norms, traditional authority structures, and ongoing processes of cultural transformation. Fieldwork was carried out in two phases. The first phase, conducted over approximately two weeks in March 2025, involved in-person fieldwork in Desa Kompol, comprising direct interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The second phase, conducted in July 2025, consisted of follow-up interviews carried out remotely via WhatsApp with selected informants to verify preliminary findings and clarify emerging analytical categories.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) active involvement in da'wah activities within the Baduy Muslim community; (2) direct engagement with local cultural traditions and indigenous social practices; and (3) the ability to explain communicative strategies and cultural adaptation processes in religious interaction. Informants were not selected to represent demographic variation but rather to reflect different communicative positions within the da'wah process. Muhammadiyah and NU da'i, local Muslim leaders, and foundation-based religious actors occupy distinct roles in the production, mediation, and interpretation of religious communication within the Baduy Muslim community. The objective of sampling was therefore analytical saturation rather than demographic representation, ensuring that recurring communicative patterns could be identified across different da'wah contexts. The study intentionally focused on religious actors because its objective was to examine communicative strategies employed by da'i rather than the lived experiences of Baduy converts. Consequently, the findings describe the perspectives of religious actors regarding communicative accommodation, symbolic negotiation, and legitimacy rather than the perceptions of converts themselves.

A total of eleven informants participated in this study, comprising one Vice Secretary of LDK PP Muhammadiyah, four Muhammadiyah-affiliated da'i, one Secretary of LD PBNU, three NU-affiliated da'i, one penghulu of Kampung Tauhid, and one da'i from Yayasan Pelangi Ilmu Pelita Iman (IMSAN). Together, these informants represented diverse communicative roles within the da'wah process, ranging from organizational leadership to grassroots religious engagement. Notably, two informants (Informant 4 and Informant 10) are themselves Baduy converts who subsequently became da'i, offering a perspective informed by lived experience of conversion in addition to their current role as religious actors.

Data collection continued until analytical saturation was achieved, as indicated by the recurrence of themes and the absence of substantively new information across interviews and observations. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants consent and transcribed verbatim prior to analysis. Because the study did not seek to investigate the lived experiences of Baduy converts as a primary research focus, indigenous customary leaders such as the puun and jaro were not included as informants. While two informants who are themselves Baduy converts (Informant 4 and Informant 10) offer some grounding in convert experience, their current positioning as da'i means their accounts still primarily reflect the perspective of religious actors rather than that of converts more broadly or of indigenous customary authorities. Consequently, interpretations concerning indigenous authority structures are derived primarily from the accounts of religious actors and are corroborated through participant observation and documentary evidence.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews explored communicative experiences, perceptions of local cultural norms, interpretations of indigenous traditions, processes of gaining or losing community acceptance, negotiations of religious meaning, and strategies employed by da'i in religious interaction. Participant observation was conducted during religious gatherings, informal community interactions, educational

activities, and everyday social encounters in order to capture naturally occurring communicative practices within their social context. Documentation was used to complement field data through organizational reports, field notes, community records, and institutional documents relevant to da'wah activities, thereby strengthening triangulation across data sources (Flick, 2018).

The analytical framework integrates Clifford Geertz's interpretive theory of culture, Howard Giles Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. Geertz conceptualizes culture as a system of symbols and meanings through which individuals interpret reality and organize social life, whereas CAT explains how communicators adjust communicative behaviors and interactional strategies in response to social and cultural differences in order to facilitate understanding and reduce social distance. The analysis draws on the original formulation of accommodation as a strategic adjustment of communicative behavior (Giles, 1973), together with the subsequent elaboration of convergence, divergence, and maintenance as distinct communicative strategies (Giles & Ogay, 2007), providing the conceptual grounding for the fine-grained distinctions applied throughout the findings (Giles, 2016). Although these frameworks originate from different intellectual traditions, their integration is analytically complementary and methodologically justified. Geertz's interpretive perspective provides a framework for understanding how local cultural meanings and customary values shape social interaction, whereas CAT explains how communicators strategically adapt their communicative behavior in response to those cultural expectations. By combining these perspectives, the study bridges the analysis of indigenous meaning systems with the communicative processes through which da'i negotiate and accommodate religious meanings in everyday da'wah interaction.

Within the analysis, Communication Accommodation Theory primarily informed the examination of communicative accommodation and relational engagement, whereas Geertz's interpretive perspective guided the analysis of symbolic negotiation. These perspectives were subsequently integrated to explain how religious legitimacy was negotiated within indigenous authority structures. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital was employed as a sensitizing analytical concept to examine how religious authority was recognized, negotiated, and sustained through interactions between religious actors and indigenous authority structures, as reflected in interview narratives, observations, and documentary evidence. Indicators of symbolic capital included community acceptance, access to customary spaces, recognition by indigenous authorities, and the accumulation and conversion of religious capital, including religious knowledge, institutional affiliation, and sustained engagement with the community, into socially recognized religious authority within the Baduy social field.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Within this iterative process, interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary materials were coded through a theory-guided interpretive procedure. First, interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary materials were coded to identify recurring communicative patterns within da'wah activities. Second, Geertz's interpretive framework was employed to examine how cultural meanings, local symbols, and indigenous worldviews structured communicative interaction and influenced the reception of religious messages. Third, Communication Accommodation Theory was applied to analyze how da'i adjusted communicative strategies, interactional styles, and religious explanations in response to local cultural expectations and social norms. Fourth, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital was applied to interpret how religious actors accumulated and converted religious capital into socially recognized authority within the Baduy social field, using the analytical indicators described above. Rather than functioning merely as background

references, these theoretical perspectives served as analytical tools that guided category construction and the interpretation of empirical material.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source triangulation by comparing data across interviews, observations, and documentary sources, as well as across different categories of informants. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process to minimize researcher bias, particularly given the sensitivity of indigenous traditions and religious transformation. Ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality of informants, and respect for local cultural norms during fieldwork. This study does not aim to produce statistical generalizations regarding indigenous communities or religious conversion processes. The findings are interpretive and context-bound, explaining communicative mechanisms rather than generating generalizable claims. Consequently, the contribution of this research lies in providing an analytical explanation of how da'wah communication operates through accommodation, symbolic negotiation, and meaning-making within a specific socio-cultural context.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Communication Accommodation and Relational Engagement

This section examines how access to the Baduy community was negotiated by religious actors from Muhammadiyah, NU, and community-based Islamic initiatives. Field observations and interview data describe the communicative strategies these actors employed when engaging with a culturally regulated indigenous environment, as well as the boundaries that shaped and at times constrained that engagement.

Muhammadiyah's da'wah among the Baduy was characterized by gradual educational engagement. Rather than immediately correcting local beliefs or practices, religious actors prioritized trust-building, emotional proximity, and sustained interaction within everyday community life, allowing interpersonal relationships to develop before introducing Islamic teachings. As one informant explained, "Prinsipnya Muhammadiyah itu masuknya tidak langsung mengatakan ini salah, ini tidak boleh. Tapi memberikan pendidikan dengan pelan-pelan dulu, setelah mereka benar-benar terbuka hatinya" (Informant 1, Vice Secretary of LDK PP Muhammadiyah). Other informants similarly described trust-building and patient educational engagement as essential conditions for effective da'wah, indicating that Muhammadiyah emphasized relational acceptance as a prerequisite for religious instruction rather than pursuing immediate doctrinal persuasion.

While pursuing the same objective of relational acceptance, NU achieved it through a somewhat different communicative pathway. Interview narratives indicate that programs such as Da'i Nusantara under the Lembaga Dakwah PBNU emphasized cultural immersion by integrating religious actors into existing patterns of community life rather than initiating formal missionary activities (Informant 7, Secretary of LD PBNU). NU da'i frequently participated in village meetings, communal discussions, religious celebrations, and other forms of interpersonal interaction already embedded within local social practices.

Relational engagement was also manifested through *dakwah bil hal* practical assistance, health-related support, educational guidance, and communal service before discussing theological matters directly (Informant 2, Dai LDK PP Muhammadiyah; Informant 5, Dai Muhammadiyah in Cicakal Girang). Accounts from Yayasan Pelita Iman indicate that religious actors frequently joined agricultural work, participated in communal infrastructure projects, organized sports activities, and contributed to village-based cooperation initiatives (Informant 11, foundation volunteer). These interactional practices

positioned religious actors not as distant ideological authorities but as socially embedded members of the community, generating opportunities for interpersonal familiarity that formal preaching alone could not achieve.

Informants explained that access to the Baduy traditional territory was not formally prohibited by indigenous authorities such as the *puun* and *jaro*. Rather, acceptance depended on how visitors engaged with the community. Religious actors were generally welcomed when they approached local residents through respectful everyday interaction and participation in communal life, rather than by initiating formal preaching or foregrounding formal religious instruction. Opportunities for religious engagement therefore developed gradually through informal conversation, shared activities, and mutual familiarity. For example, during one visit that coincided with Friday prayer, Muhammadiyah da'i joined local residents in prayer because returning to the lowland mosque was impractical. Rather than treating the occasion as an opportunity for immediate religious instruction, they used it to interact informally with community members and strengthen interpersonal relationships, allowing religious communication to develop naturally over time.

Acceptance was neither immediate nor uniform. Interview data reveal that when Ustaz Kasja first began his activities in Kompol, his presence was initially met with resistance rather than acceptance (Informant 4, Dai LDK PP Muhammadiyah). This early rejection was closely tied to his residence's proximity to both the Baduy customary territory and Kampung Tauhid, which created suspicion regarding the purpose of his presence. Over time, as sustained interaction continued, relations gradually normalized and the earlier resistance subsided. A further boundary emerged around customary spatial norms. This restriction was described by Ustaz Kasja (Informant 4, Dai LDK PP Muhammadiyah) and, separately, by a local community member during an informal field conversation in Baduy Dalam. Within the Baduy traditional territory, one may not pass directly in front of the house of the *puun* or of any figure regarded as influential and to be shown deference. The convergence of these accounts, from a religious actor and from a member of the indigenous community itself, lends additional credibility to this norm as a genuinely observed customary practice rather than solely a da'i-mediated description. Taken together, the findings indicate that access to the Baduy community was negotiated primarily through relational engagement rather than doctrinal persuasion, although such acceptance remained conditional upon continued respect for customary authority and indigenous social boundaries.

This pattern can be interpreted through Communication Accommodation Theory, particularly the concept of convergence (Giles, 2016). The relational strategies adopted by Muhammadiyah, NU, and community-based Islamic actors exemplify convergence, whereby communicators deliberately adjusted their interactional behaviour to reduce social distance and foster acceptance within the Baduy community. Rather than emphasizing religious authority, they participated in communal activities, engaged in informal dialogue, practiced dakwah *bil hal*, and maintained a continuous presence in everyday village life. These communicative adjustments were directed toward establishing trust and relational legitimacy before any religious communication could occur, demonstrating that convergence in this context extended beyond linguistic adaptation to include long-term social participation and interpersonal engagement.

The findings also reveal that accommodation was neither automatic nor unidirectional. The initial rejection experienced by Kasja illustrates divergence, in which members of the indigenous community maintained interactional distance when an outsider's presence was perceived as potentially challenging established communal boundaries. Suspicion arising from his proximity to both the

customary territory and Kampung Tauhid delayed relational acceptance despite his continued efforts to engage with local residents. Likewise, the prohibition against passing directly in front of the houses of the *puun* and other respected customary figures represents a form of maintenance, whereby culturally significant interactional norms and symbolic spatial hierarchies were preserved even after positive relationships had developed. Together, these findings indicate that communicative accommodation within the Baduy community was selective rather than comprehensive: convergence facilitated relational access to everyday social life, whereas maintenance ensured the continued authority of indigenous institutions and customary boundaries.

These findings complement historical accounts of Islamization in Java that describe the spread of Islam as occurring through accommodation of existing cultural institutions rather than their immediate replacement (Muhaimin, 2006; Ricklefs, 2006; Woodward, 1989). They also resonate with studies of da'wah and intercultural communication in the Baduy community describing religious engagement as facilitated through cultural sensitivity and relationship-building (Holilah dkk., 2023), and with scholarship on religious discourse within Kanekes customary territory showing that external religious interaction remains continuously regulated through customary authority and spatial norms (Hanum & Baidawi, 2025; Naziah & Dhona, 2021). Where the present findings extend this literature is in showing that relational access and boundary maintenance operated simultaneously rather than sequentially, broadening existing applications of Communication Accommodation Theory by demonstrating that, in indigenous religious contexts, accommodation is best understood as the dynamic interplay of convergence, divergence, and maintenance rather than convergence alone. Building on this account of how access was gained, negotiated, and bounded, the following section examines how Islamic meanings were subsequently reconstructed through indigenous symbolic systems.

3.2 Symbolic Negotiation and the Reconstruction of Religious Meaning

Field observations and interview data show that Islamic da'wah within the Baduy convert community engaged indigenous rituals, sacred objects, and systems of belief through sustained communicative interaction rather than direct doctrinal confrontation. The following cases illustrate how religious meanings were gradually renegotiated across funeral practices, sacred sites, ritual offerings, and everyday belief systems.

One illustration of this process emerged in funeral-related practices involving the use of coconut trees for preparing communal meals. Although the practice held customary and symbolic significance, Muhammadiyah da'i gradually introduced jackfruit as an alternative while emphasizing practical considerations, including environmental sustainability and economic efficiency. As he explained, "kami tidak langsung melarang, tetapi pelan-pelan mengganti dengan nangka." Rather than abolishing the communal practice itself, they encouraged gradual changes in how its significance was understood, allowing practical adaptations to occur without disrupting the broader social function of the ritual (Informant 2, Dai LDK PP Muhammadiyah).

Batu Nagara had long been regarded by some community members as a sacred site associated with spiritual blessing, where people sought blessings, sustenance, or even a spouse. As he noted, "orang datang ke Batu Nagara untuk mencari berkah" (Informant 2, Dai LDK PP Muhammadiyah). Rather than directly condemning these beliefs, Muhammadiyah actors gradually redirected spiritual orientation toward Islamic tawhid through sermons, informal conversation, and sustained interpersonal engagement. This pattern of investing specific natural sites with spiritual agency reflects a broader Sundanese cosmological structure in which certain places function as points of mediation

between the human and unseen realms (Wessing, 1978).

Comparable processes were reported in the *ngalaksa* ritual, in which offerings made from rice flour were traditionally deposited at sacred locations as part of ancestral obligations. Rather than demanding the immediate abandonment of these practices, Muhammadiyah da'i reported gradually introducing explanations concerning worship, divine authority, and the distinction between cultural tradition and religious devotion. A parallel pattern on the NU side explained that Islamic teaching was delivered through communal occasions already recognized within village life. As he explained, "kadang disuatu acara, kadang di masjid, ada tahlilan, peringatan PHBI, isra' mi'raj, maulidan, Muharram, dan ada acara di hajatan disitulah kita sampaikan dakwahnya" (Informant 8, Dai NU), indicating that tahlilan, maulid, and collective religious commemorations functioned as existing communicative platforms into which Islamic messages were folded rather than replaced.

Symbolic negotiation also extended beyond ritual practices into everyday systems of belief. Many converts were reported to have previously maintained beliefs concerning unlucky days, customary prohibitions, and fears of misfortune associated with particular times or activities. Rather than dismissing these beliefs outright, religious actors gradually introduced Islamic perspectives emphasizing divine decree rather than symbolic associations with particular times or events. As he explained, "kalau menurut Islam semua hari itu baik" (Informant 3, Dai LDK PP Muhammadiyah).

Not every symbolic practice followed the same trajectory of reinterpretation, and the case of *angklung* illustrates that divergent outcomes could emerge across different convert settlements. Among the Baduy, *angklung*, locally known as *Angklung Buhun*, constitutes a sacred musical tradition historically bound to the rice-planting cycle, performed to accompany key stages of cultivation from land preparation through harvest, and regarded not merely as a musical accompaniment but as a spiritually charged medium believed to strengthen harmony between the community, nature, and ancestral and divine forces (Hanifah & Putra, 2024). This close binding of ritual practice to the agricultural cycle is consistent with the broader Sundanese cosmological pattern documented by (Wessing, 1978), in which ritual acts are understood as constitutive of practical efficacy rather than as symbolic accompaniments to it. This sacred and ritually bounded character helps explain why, unlike funeral practices or ritual offerings discussed above, informants described *angklung* as considerably more resistant to reinterpretation within an Islamic framework.

Field observation in Kampung Tauhid indicated that *angklung* was no longer used among converts there, suggesting that the practice had been discontinued altogether rather than retained in a reinterpreted form. A different account emerged from an informant based in Kampung Nagara, who described *angklung* as originally understood by the community as constituting an act of prayer rather than merely accompanying one "anggapannya *angklung* itu doa. Kalau menentang tidak mungkin" (Informant 3, Dai LDK PP Muhammadiyah). According to this informant, the instrument's inseparability from its ritual and devotional function made it initially resistant to reinterpretation.

Notably, however, this same informant's account suggests that the meaning of *angklung* has in fact shifted over time in Kampung Nagara, from an act of prayer toward a secular framing as an ordinary musical art form marking the harvest season, rather than remaining fixed as an unresolvable case of maintenance. Taken together, these accounts suggest two distinct pathways through which a symbolically resistant practice could nonetheless be resolved: outright discontinuation, as observed in Kampung Tauhid, and gradual secularization of meaning while the practice itself was retained, as described in Kampung Nagara. This indicates that *angklung* was not simply a fixed limit-case of symbolic accommodation, but rather a practice whose resistance to reinterpretation as religious

meaning could still be resolved through alternative communicative outcomes, whether by ending the practice or by reclassifying it outside the domain of worship altogether.

The angklung case also illustrates the analytical limits of purely semiotic approaches to culture (Asad, 1993). A Geertzian reading alone would frame angklung's resistance as a matter of meaning: the instrument's form and its devotional content were too tightly fused to be separated through reinterpretation. Yet this framing risks obscuring a further question, namely who held the authority to determine whether angklung counted as sacred worship or merely cultural art in the first place. Read through Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, the two divergent outcomes across Kampung Tauhid and Kampung Nagara suggest that this determination was not settled by the inherent nature of the practice alone, but through the differential capital available to religious actors and communities in each setting to authorize one classification over the other. In Kampung Tauhid, discontinuation reflects a setting in which da'i and converts held sufficient standing to end the practice outright. In Kampung Nagara, by contrast, only a partial reclassification from prayer to art was achievable, suggesting that the authority to redefine angklung as purely cultural remained more contested there. Angklung thus exemplifies Asad's point that what counts as religious versus cultural is itself a product of authorizing discourse and relations of power, rather than a stable property of the practice waiting to be interpreted.

A further boundary case concerned agrarian practice. Many converts continued to stay overnight in field huts during planting seasons despite having permanent houses, a practice that was generally described as reflecting the continuation of Baduy agrarian tradition rather than ongoing adherence to former religious belief. However, one informant suggested that this distinction was not always clear-cut, observing that "tidak semua yang seperti itu, ada yang sudah tidak melakukannya, namun tetap saja kebanyakannya masih ada saja yang terbawa dengan adat mereka" (Informant 4, Dai LDK PP Muhammadiyah).

Taken together, these cases suggest that Muhammadiyah and NU religious actors distinguished indigenous practices according to their perceived religious significance. Practices that these actors interpreted as involving worship or spiritual mediation, such as beliefs surrounding Batu Nagara, were gradually discouraged, whereas practices regarded as primarily cultural were more readily retained or reinterpreted within an Islamic framework. This process, as reported by informants, was gradual, selective, and not uniformly successful. Angklung illustrates that even where reinterpretation as religious meaning proved resistant, alternative resolutions, whether discontinuation or secular reclassification, remained available, while the persistence of field-hut lodging shows that even cultural reclassification could remain contested rather than settled. These classifications reflect the distinctions made by the da'i informants between practices they regarded as cultural and those they regarded as religious; converts themselves were not asked to make this distinction.

These findings can be interpreted through Geertz's conception of culture as a system of meanings through which people understand reality and organize social life (Geertz, 1973). From this perspective, Muhammadiyah and NU religious actors sought to reinterpret indigenous cultural forms within Islamic religious understandings rather than replacing them outright. Berger and Luckmann's concept of the social construction of reality further explains how these reconstructed meanings were communicatively reinforced through repeated interaction rather than direct coercion.

From a broader perspective, the results complement studies of Islamization in Java and Sunda that describe religious change as occurring through reinterpretation of existing ritual traditions rather than their immediate elimination and resonate with ethnographic studies of the Baduy community showing that indigenous customs continue to structure social life despite ongoing religious

transformation (Arif dkk., 2023; AS dkk., 2020). They also accord with studies of religious discourse and cultural communication in Kanekes, which demonstrate that indigenous symbolic systems and customary authority continue to shape how Islamic meanings are negotiated (Hanum & Baidawi, 2025; Holilah dkk., 2023; Naziah & Dhona, 2021).

The present findings extend this literature by showing that symbolic reclassification was neither automatic nor uniform: while informants described several indigenous symbols as having been successfully reinterpreted within an Islamic ethical framework, *angklung* followed a different trajectory across locations, being discontinued altogether in one setting and secularized in meaning in another, indicating that resistance to religious reinterpretation did not necessarily result in the practice's unchanged persistence, but could instead be resolved through elimination or reclassification outside the religious domain. It should be noted that these interpretations of symbolic change are derived from the accounts of da'i rather than from the perspectives of Baduy converts themselves. Consequently, the findings document how religious actors perceived and interpreted the outcomes of their communicative efforts, rather than providing direct evidence of how converts themselves understood or internalized these reconstructed meanings. Building on this account of symbolic negotiation, the following section examines how religious authority itself was established and who was recognized as entitled to speak on Islam within indigenous Baduy society.

3.3 Negotiating Religious Authority in Indigenous Settings

Religious authority within the Baduy community was not automatically derived from institutional affiliation or formal religious credentials alone. Da'i informants across Muhammadiyah and NU consistently described their own acceptance as something that had to be built, rather than granted, through two distinct routes: sustained interpersonal relationships in the field, and institutional preparation prior to deployment. The following cases illustrate how religious actors positioned themselves as legitimate speakers within existing indigenous authority structures, and how that legitimacy was, at times, only partially achieved. These cases can be read through Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, which frames legitimacy not as something formally granted but as something accumulated through the conversion of cultural competence, social trust, and institutional standing into forms of authority recognized within the Baduy social field.

Informants consistently described indigenous authority structures, including the *puun, jaro*, and customary elders, as continuing to regulate interactions between external religious actors and local communities. Da'i unfamiliar with local custom struggled to gain a foothold, whereas da'i of Baduy descent were more readily accepted "karena orang baduy asli yang masuk, karena orang lain itu resisten dan susah karena tidak paham dengan budaya disitu" (Informant 1, Vice Secretary of LDK PP Muhammadiyah). Participating in tahlilan and customary gatherings was similarly described as a way of ensuring that a dai's presence would not be read as imposing "agama Muhammadiyah" from outside (Informant 2, Dai LDK PP Muhammadiyah). In Bourdieusian terms, Baduy descent functioned as a form of cultural capital already recognized within the field, granting immediate entry that outsider da'i had to accumulate gradually through sustained participation in customary life.

Legitimacy was also pursued institutionally, prior to fieldwork itself. NU's approach was described as requiring cultural preparation before a da'i is deployed to any community, since "da'i itu dilepas langsung turun itu tidak boleh, harus ada pembekalan," guided by the principle "kena ikannya tapi ga keruh" engaging a community without disturbing its existing order (Informant 7, Secretary of LDPBNU). This was paired with formal competency standardization for da'i and da'iyah, indicating

that, for NU, legitimacy was treated partly as an organizational responsibility to prepare actors for indigenous settings, rather than something built solely through improvisation in the field. This institutional preparation constituted a distinct route of capital accumulation: rather than being built through direct field presence alone, legitimacy was pre-converted at the organizational level into a form of institutional capital that da'i could subsequently draw upon when entering the community.

Legitimacy built through sustained institutional contribution was described as gradually converting suspicion into trust: villagers who had once discarded qurban meat out of fear of forced conversion later came to expect and request it (Informant 4, Dai LDK PP Muhammadiyah). A comparable pattern was reported through cooperation with the *jaro*, with monthly rotating study circles described as consistently supported by local government and encountering no direct rejection (Informant 8, Dai NU). These accounts illustrate the gradual conversion of social capital, accumulated through sustained presence and demonstrated reliability, into symbolic capital recognized by both community members and customary authorities as legitimate religious standing.

Legitimacy was not, however, always sustained once achieved. An informal literacy program run with converts in Cicakal Girang was discovered and shut down by the ketua adat in 2010 "tahun 2010 itu ketauan sama ketua adat mungkin ada yang melaporkan, jadi ditutup lagi, dan sekarang tidak ada yang belajar lagi" and the same informant acknowledged that he had "belum berhasil untuk mengislamkan orang baduy" in his own area, attributing this to the stricter requirement there that conversion entail full separation from adat (Informant 5, Dai Muhammadiyah in Cicakal Girang). A related but distinct limitation was documented across 18 kampung where residents had converted through the shahada alone but received no follow-up religious instruction: legitimacy in the sense of formal conversion had been reached, but not sustained through ongoing accommodation (Informant 10, Dai NU). Taken together, these cases indicate that indigenous authorities could actively constrain or withdraw access once granted, while religious institutions themselves sometimes failed to convert initial acceptance into durable legitimacy. Read through Bourdieu's framework, the closure of the literacy program represents not merely a loss of access but a withdrawal of symbolic capital by the *pium*, the dominant authority within the Baduy field with the power to recognize or revoke a dai's accumulated standing; the failure of shahada alone to translate into sustained legitimacy across the eighteen kampung similarly indicates that formal conversion generated only a partial and unstable form of capital, one that required continuous reinvestment through ongoing accommodation to be retained.

These contrasting cases also suggest that communicative accommodation did not unfold uniformly across Baduy settings. Whereas relational engagement in Kompol and Kampung Tauhid gradually enabled religious actors to establish interpersonal trust and normalize everyday religious interaction, conditions in Cicakal Girang remained considerably more restrictive. Informants described stronger customary regulation, including the closure of literacy activities and the expectation that conversion required a clearer separation from adat, thereby limiting both access and the long-term consolidation of religious legitimacy. Rather than representing inconsistent findings, these contrasting cases indicate that the effectiveness of communicative accommodation remained contingent upon local configurations of customary authority and the varying degrees of openness found across different Baduy communities. It should be noted that these accounts describe legitimacy as perceived and reported by da'i and organizational officials themselves, as no Baduy community members, converts, or adat authorities were directly interviewed to confirm how they evaluated these religious actors. The findings in this theme therefore describe da'i communicative strategies and their self-assessed reception, not verified audience judgments, a limitation addressed further in the Methods discussion.

Building on the convergence, divergence, and maintenance dynamics established in the preceding section, these findings extend that framework from the question of access to the question of legitimacy. Convergence and institutional preparation could secure an initial foothold, but legitimacy itself remained conditional and reversible, subject to withdrawal by indigenous authorities and to erosion when institutional follow-through was not sustained. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital clarifies why this reversibility occurs: because legitimacy was never permanently transferred but only provisionally recognized by the dominant authorities of the Baduy field, its persistence depended on continued reinvestment rather than a one-time achievement. This is consistent with findings on the traditional authority of kiai in Indonesia, which similarly show that religious legitimacy in rural and culturally distinct settings is strengthened through the convergence of two channels, cultural and social recognition earned through sustained community presence, and structural recognition granted by formal institutions, rather than through either channel alone (Faisal dkk., 2022), and with Geertz's interpretive view of authority as emerging through engagement with locally meaningful symbolic systems rather than through the imposition of external credentials (Geertz, 1973).

Taken together, these three themes suggest that communicative accommodation in indigenous da'wah is not a linear sequence through which access naturally leads to acceptance and ultimately to legitimacy. Rather, relational access, symbolic negotiation, and legitimacy continuously shaped one another throughout the interaction between religious actors and indigenous communities. Accommodation therefore emerged not as a completed achievement, but as an ongoing communicative process whose outcomes remained contingent upon indigenous authority, cultural interpretation, and sustained interpersonal engagement.

4. CONCLUSION

This study answers the research question by showing that da'wah communication among Baduy converts functions not as the transmission of Islamic teachings, but as an ongoing process of cultural negotiation through which da'i secure standing, reconstruct religious meaning, and establish legitimacy, a process that indigenous authorities can constrain or withdraw as readily as they can grant. Da'i achieve this standing not through doctrinal assertion but through sustained relational engagement, symbolic reinterpretation, and institutional preparation, positioning da'wah as a bounded negotiation rather than a linear process of religious transmission. Rather than representing a permanent outcome of successful communication, legitimacy emerged as a conditional achievement that required continuous relational maintenance and could be weakened or withdrawn when accommodation was no longer sustained.

The study contributes to intercultural and religious communication scholarship by demonstrating that accommodative da'wah in indigenous settings extends beyond linguistic or interactional adaptation to include the ongoing negotiation of symbolic meaning and cultural legitimacy. By integrating Communication Accommodation Theory, Geertz's interpretive perspective, and Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital, the study shows that communicative convergence and cultural interpretation operate jointly rather than sequentially: religious actors could reinterpret indigenous symbols only to the extent that customary authorities had already granted them relational standing, and that standing itself remained subject to renegotiation through divergence and maintenance. These findings extend existing scholarship by conceptualizing da'wah in indigenous settings not as a linear process culminating in acceptance, but as a bounded and continuously renegotiated achievement. More broadly, these findings suggest a refinement to Communication Accommodation Theory when applied

to indigenous religious contexts. Rather than conceptualizing accommodation primarily as a unidirectional process of convergence toward mutual understanding, the Baduy case indicates that convergence, divergence, and maintenance operates simultaneously and recursively as communicative responses to culturally regulated authority structures. Accommodation therefore emerges not as a completed adjustment but as an ongoing negotiation in which symbolic legitimacy is continuously negotiated within indigenous authority structures. This refinement broadens the explanatory scope of Communication Accommodation Theory by demonstrating that accommodation in indigenous religious contexts is shaped not only by communicative adjustment but also by culturally regulated relations of authority and recognition. The findings also indicate that symbolic accommodation is not universally achievable, as certain indigenous symbols remained resistant to reinterpretation despite sustained communicative engagement, thereby illustrating the limits of accommodative da'wah within culturally regulated settings.

Practically, the findings suggest that da'wah initiatives in culturally strong indigenous communities are unlikely to succeed through the efforts of individual da'i alone. The closure of the literacy program in Cicakal Girang and the absence of sustained religious follow-up in several post-shahada communities demonstrate that long-term communicative legitimacy depends on coordinated support among religious organizations, local government, and customary authorities, particularly in sustaining educational and community-based engagement beyond initial conversion. These findings further indicate that institutional preparation alone is insufficient unless accompanied by sustained relational engagement capable of maintaining symbolic legitimacy over time. Institutional preparation and sustained interpersonal engagement should therefore be treated as complementary rather than substitutable strategies for religious organizations operating in similar settings. This study has three limitations that should inform how its findings are read and extended. First, all informants represent the perspectives of religious actors, officials, or affiliated volunteers rather than Baduy converts more broadly. Although two informants (Informant 4 and Informant 10) are themselves Baduy converts who became da'i, their accounts reflect their current standing as religious actors rather than the experience of lay converts who did not take on this role. Consequently, the findings concerning how converts evaluate religious actors or reinterpret ritual meaning remain perceptual claims reported primarily by da'i, not claims verified against accounts provided by Baduy converts who remained outside religious leadership positions.

Future research should therefore place Baduy converts at the center of data collection to examine directly how they experience, interpret, and negotiate accommodative da'wah communication. Including customary leaders such as the *jaro* or other *adat* authorities would also provide a valuable comparative perspective on how communicative legitimacy is negotiated from both religious and indigenous viewpoints. Second, fieldwork was conducted across two relatively short phases, an initial two-week period of in-person engagement in March 2025 followed by remote follow-up interviews conducted via WhatsApp in July 2025, limiting observation of the long-term communicative processes this study theorizes, particularly the gradual, multi-year renegotiation of legitimacy and symbolic meaning described by informants. The reliance on remote interviews during the second phase further limited opportunities for participant observation during this stage of data collection. Longitudinal or repeated-visit fieldwork would allow future studies to trace how access, meaning, and legitimacy shift over extended periods rather than being reconstructed retrospectively through informant recollection. Third, the findings reflect the specific socio-cultural context of Desa Kompol, particularly its Kampung Tauhid Mualaf settlement and related da'i networks, and should not be assumed to represent other

Baduy settlements with different historical and cultural dynamics, such as Cicakal Girang or Cirogol, where informants themselves reported markedly different levels of acceptance and access. Comparative studies across multiple Baduy communities are needed to clarify which patterns identified here are context-specific and which reflect more general dynamics of da'wah within customary authority structures.

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