



Sundanese Ethnicity in Gorontalo: Transmigration, Diaspora, and the Formation of Associations, 1962-2011

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Abstract

This article examines the history of the Sundanese ethnic diaspora and transmigration in Gorontalo from 1962 to 2011, as well as the establishment of the Paguyuban Dadali Gorontalo. The research employs historical methods, including heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The findings reveal that this association was officially established on November 12, 1995, under the name Paguyuban Dadali Gorontalo, which was later changed to Paguyuban Warga Pasundan Gorontalo in 2011. This association continues to prioritize the principles of Pancasila and implements various programs to strengthen social bonds, enhance religious knowledge, and maintain the health of its members. The article concludes that the existence of Paguyuban Dadali Gorontalo plays a significant role in maintaining the presence of the Sundanese ethnic group, fostering harmonious relationships with the local community, and preserving the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

Keywords: *Diaspora; Transmigration; Sundanese Ethnicity; Paguyuban Dadali Gorontalo*

Introduction

The Sundanese are one of the largest ethnic groups on the island of Java, second only to the Javanese, who constitute the majority. Throughout their historical journey, the Sundanese people have made significant contributions to the Indonesian nation, both culturally and intellectually. These contributions have been made in tandem with the rapid pace of globalization, a logical consequence of advancements in science and technology, which has also brought about a revolution in the existence of both their ethnic identity and the Indonesian nation as a whole.

Aware of their large population and limited territory, and as an effort to improve their socio-economic conditions, several Sundanese groups have engaged in activities that could support their livelihood. The paths of diaspora and participation in the government's transmigration program to various regions in Indonesia have been seen as viable solutions to compensate for the limited income from daily activities, leading to a more sustainable and improved quality of life. Therefore, as the saying goes, "when there is no wood, rattan will do," these options became their primary choices.

In general, diaspora and migration, or transmigration, are long-standing phenomena that have been widely observed throughout the history of nations worldwide, including Indonesia. The term diaspora refers to a group of people who are dispersed across different parts of the world for various reasons, such as seeking better living conditions in new locations (Ahmad Jazali, 2017). This definition also applies to the diaspora undertaken by the Sundanese ethnic group.

The term "Sundanese" refers to individuals residing in the regions of West Java and Banten, historically known as Pasundan or Tatar Sunda. Culturally and ecologically, the Sundanese people typically inhabit mountainous areas, which has led to their being referred to as "mountain people" in the past (Indrawardana, 2012).

In 1962, the first group of Sundanese people arrived in Gorontalo, specifically in Sidodadi Village, Gorontalo Regency, as part of the 11th group in the transmigration program. This group departed from Bandung, stopped in Surabaya, and continued their journey by sea to Gorontalo Port. Upon arrival at Gorontalo Port, they traveled overland to Parungi Village, Gorontalo Regency, using large vehicles. Since then, the population of Sundanese people in Gorontalo has steadily increased and spread across various regions. Some migrated independently, while others ventured to seek economic opportunities in the area.

Based on the background above, the title of this research is formulated as *Sundanese Ethnicity in Gorontalo: Transmigration, Diaspora, and the Formation of Associations, 1962–2011*. Utilizing historical methods (Daliman, 2012; Sartono Kartodirdjo, 2017; Helius Sjamsudin, 2012; Sugeng Priyadi), this study aims to uncover the processes of diaspora, transmigration, and the formation of Sundanese community associations in Gorontalo. The establishment of these associations serves as a means to maintain their existence in their new homeland, Gorontalo.

The 1962 Sundanese Diaspora: An Initial Process

Transmigration in Gorontalo during the 1950s and 1960s exhibited unique characteristics. The placement process for transmigrants began with a request letter written by T.A. Lasahido, a coconut plantation entrepreneur from Sulawesi, who petitioned the Deputy Prime Minister, serving as the General Coordinator of the Transmigration Program, to send transmigrants from Java to Paguyaman, Gorontalo (Manay, 2016). Whether consciously or not, this process undoubtedly served as the initial catalyst for the flow of transmigration to Gorontalo, which also involved the Sundanese ethnic group as one of the participants, alongside the Javanese, receiving the same treatment (rights) from the government as other transmigrant communities in various regions of Indonesia (Yunus et al., 2023).

Several factors contributing to the diaspora and transmigration process of the Sundanese ethnic group in Gorontalo—apart from the process mentioned earlier—can be explained as follows: First, the geographical factor, where Gorontalo, still sparsely populated at the time, provided an impetus for the Sundanese to migrate to the region. Second, the presence of marital ties caused some Sundanese who had already settled in Gorontalo to be reluctant to return to their place of origin. Third, involvement in civil service, such as civil servants or state apparatuses being transferred to Gorontalo, also contributed to the settlement of the Sundanese ethnic group in the area (Interview with Abdul Rahmat, July 15, 2021).

As previously mentioned, the Sundanese ethnic group began arriving in Gorontalo in 1962 as part of the 11th transmigration group. Over time, the number of Sundanese in Gorontalo increased. To accommodate this growth, an association was established with the aim of bringing together Sundanese people residing in Gorontalo, whether they had migrated independently or through the government's transmigration program. Ultimately, in 1995, the association was officially founded under the name "Paguyuban Dadali Gorontalo" and later underwent a name change to "*Paguyuban Warga Pasundan Gorontalo*" in 2011.

Planning Stage for the Formation of the Association

The initial idea for establishing this association came from a Sundanese merchant residing in Gorontalo. The merchant recognized the challenges of locating and gathering the Sundanese community at that time, particularly due to the limitations in technology. Initially, he discovered an association named *Paguyuban Silih Asih*, but this association consisted only of elite officials, such as military personnel, police officers, and other state officials (Interview with Matin Mahmudin, July 10, 2021).

The primary goal of this merchant was to establish an association that could gather Sundanese people in Gorontalo and strengthen the relationships among members of the Sundanese community and the native Gorontalo residents. The first person he discussed this idea with was Mr. Asep Solihin, a military police officer. Mr. Asep suggested that the merchant first obtain permission from the Commander of Military District 1304 Gorontalo, led by Lieutenant Colonel of Infantry Wawan Ridwan, given that at that time, during the New Order era, the armed forces and the police were still unified under the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) (Interview with Matin Mahmudin, July 10, 2021).

However, Mr. Asep Solihin had already requested permission from the Commander of Military District 1304 by visiting his residence. Initially, the commander did not grant permission, considering the heightened political tensions near the end of President Soeharto's second term. This reluctance stemmed from concerns about potential uprisings from certain groups that could destabilize the government at that time (Interview with Matin Mahmudin, July 10, 2021).

The following day, the military police officer informed the merchant that the idea of establishing the association had not received approval from the Commander of Military District 1304 Gorontalo. In response, the merchant decided to formally request permission from the Commander of Military District 1304 Gorontalo, Lieutenant Colonel of Infantry Wawan Ridwan, as the previous communication had been informal. The merchant visited the commander's residence accompanied by Mr. Edi, a cattle farmer from Lakeya Village, and Mr. Adji Subadri, a journalist from Radio Republik Indonesia Gorontalo. Although the military police officer accompanied them, he did not enter the commander's residence (Interview with Matin Mahmudin, July 10, 2021).

During the meeting, the commander inquired about the basis for establishing the association. The merchant explained that the association was founded on the principles of kinship, not politics. The purpose was to gather Sundanese people in Gorontalo so that they would not feel isolated and to ensure that they remained connected to their homeland while preserving Sundanese culture and strengthening the relationship between the Sundanese and Gorontalo communities. The merchant also emphasized that there was no political agenda within the association, but rather, it was purely intended to uphold diversity and unity in accordance with the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) (Interview with Matin Mahmudin, July 10, 2021).

After a lengthy discussion, the commander finally granted permission to establish the association on November 12, 1995. Following this approval, the merchant approached the Head of the State Treasury Empowerment Office (KPKN), Mr. Djadjat Darodjat, to confirm the founding date of the association. At that time, the association did not yet have a name or members, so the Head of KPKN advised him to seek out and gather Sundanese members residing in Gorontalo (Interview with Matin Mahmudin, July 10, 2021).

The recruitment of members was conducted through word of mouth, letters, and public telephones, given the limited availability of mobile phones at that time. Once the members were gathered, the first meeting was held on November 29, 1995, to discuss the name of the association. The members included the general public, civil servants, military personnel, police officers, and religious scholars, as the majority of Sundanese in Gorontalo were Muslims. During the meeting, several names were proposed, including *Komara* and *Dadali*. After a debate, the name *Dadali* was chosen because, in Sundanese,

it means *Garuda*, symbolizing the presence of Sundanese people throughout Indonesia, including in Gorontalo. *Dadali* is also an acronym for "Wanda Sunda Aseli," which translates to "The True Face of the Sundanese People" (Interview with Odang Royani, July 5, 2021).

Although it is an association representing one of Indonesia's ethnic groups, *Paguyuban Dadali Gorontalo* continues to prioritize the principles of Pancasila. Its members are expected to adhere to the first principle (belief in one God), the second principle (humanity), the third principle (unity), the fourth principle (democracy), and the fifth principle (justice). The application of these Pancasila principles aims to maintain the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia through the *Paguyuban Dadali Gorontalo*.

The initial programs of *Paguyuban Dadali Gorontalo* included: first, a social gathering (arisan) to strengthen social ties among Sundanese residents in Gorontalo; second, religious study sessions (pengajian) to address illiteracy in reading and writing the Qur'an and to practice Islamic teachings, as the majority of the Sundanese community is Muslim; third, football activities to promote health and strengthen the relationships among association members (Interview with Odang Royani, July 5, 2021).

Conclusion

In 1952, the Indonesian government launched a transmigration program targeting remote areas, including Gorontalo. Gorontalo became one of the destinations for transmigrants, inhabited by both Sundanese and Javanese ethnic groups. There were 11 waves of transmigrant arrivals, and in 1962, the 11th wave brought the Sundanese ethnic group who settled in Bandung Rejo Village. Over time, the population of the Sundanese in this area continued to grow. To maintain their legitimacy and existence in the new land, an association was established to bring together Sundanese people living in Gorontalo, whether they came through migration or transmigration. This association was founded in 1995 under the name *Paguyuban Dadali Gorontalo*, and in 2011, it was renamed *Paguyuban Warga Pasundan Gorontalo*.

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List of Informants

1. Matin Mahmudin

Interview conducted on July 10, 2021.

2. Abdul Rahmat

Interview conducted on July 15, 2021.

3. Odang Royani

Interview conducted on July 5, 2021.

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