Being Wana, Becoming an “Indigenous People”. Experimenting with Indigeneity in Central Sulawesi

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Publisher: Göttingen University Press
Place of publication: Göttingen University Press
Year of publication: 2013
Published on OpenEdition Books: 12 April 2017
Serie: Göttingen Studies in Cultural Property
Electronic ISBN: 9782821875487

Electronic reference
Introduction

The often quoted revival of *adat* (custom or tradition) in Indonesia is closely related to the international movement of indigenous peoples. The latter invoked the former. The Wana of Central Sulawesi decided to become indigenous in 2011, but did they also decide to become part of an international movement?

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1 While some data here apply more generally to Wana of Central Sulawesi, in the following I am concentrating on Wana living in and around Taronggo and Salisaro, Kecamatan Bungku Utara, Morowali. I have carried out fieldwork in this area for a total of about fourteen months, spread over a period of three years. I am deeply grateful to the members of the Wana communities in that area for their hospitality and patience, as well as to the residents of Taronggo.
Wana only recently became involved in the politics of the so-called masyarakat adat (adat communities) movement. The ongoing threat of land loss and forced resettlement, historically a well-known state of distress for Wana, led to new network-building with a local NGO from Palu, the province’s capital. This fresh-born relation initiated a novel form of agency, so far unknown to Wana. The embrace of their status as masyarakat adat brought with it a new vocabulary and attitude towards their status as a marginalised people, leading, on the one hand, to what might be called empowerment, but, on the other hand, causing several new forms of conflict. In this contribution, I will focus precisely on the politics of becoming masyarakat adat, its effects and complications, and how its outcome is deeply entangled with the religious beliefs and experiences of marginalisation. Based on field work conducted before and after the Wana redefined themselves as masyarakat adat, I will pay special attention to the dynamics of this change and reveal several complexities of what “empowerment through indigeneity” can mean.

At its beginning, the global movement of indigenous peoples was mainly formed in those countries that are dominated today by people of European descent, so-called settler societies. It was not until the 1990s that the global movement, with its roots in America and Australia, spread to Asia and Africa. However, the revival of local custom as a signifying marker of the indigenous people movement in Indonesia was also inaugurated by specific national processes related to the downfall of the Suharto regime in 1998 and the concurring democratisation and decentralisation. Furthermore, historical circumstances forming and extending the meanings of adat added to the specificity of Indonesia’s indigenous people movement. Last but not least, following Henley and Davidson (2008), it was the poor conditions under which minority groups had to face a marginalised standing under the politics of Suharto’s New Order regime. Due to these reasons, it would be too easy to reduce Indonesia’s adat revival to part of an indigenous movement that is primarily formed and directed through international discourse – on the contrary: “the current interest in adat is not just a national offshoot […]. The revival also reflects a specifically Indonesian ideological tradition in which land, community and custom […] provide the normative reference points for political struggles“ (Henley and Davidson 2008:849). One of the main players in the current adat movement is AMAN (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara), founded in 1999 after the first nationwide meeting of adat communities in Jakarta. These communities initiated AMAN out of their experience of marginalisation, for example, in the form of land loss or forced resettlement, during the Suharto era. With AMAN they formed a new weapon to fight for their rights, especially land rights, which were neglected and violated under the New Order regime. Engaging in the masyarakat adat movement and associating with AMAN or other NGOs triggered new, often conflict-laden, processes, socio-cultural change and shifting political constellations for these groups.

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2 I am aware of the fact that it is a critical and in some ways political decision to equate the term masyarakat adat with “indigenous people”. However, as Acciaioli, for example, has made clear, it is the term used by activists of the Indonesian movement and underlines its global connections. Therefore, I will use it in the same way, keeping in mind the inconsistencies and, therefore, problematics of using both terms as a synonym for each other (Acciaioli 2007:314).
Wana used the apparatus of the *masyarakat adat* initiative and entered the movement for exactly the same reasons: To fight for their land.

Although there were numerous criticisms attacking overly romanticised pictures of indigenous people tied closely to a pristine idea of the environment, in Central Sulawesi, as Tania Li has pointed out (2007b), AMAN activists in 2003 were still defenders of the popular picture of indigenous groups as the often quoted “ecologically noble savages” (Raymond 2007; Redford 1991). Activists stated, according to Li, “that there still exist communities in Indonesia living in harmony with their environment, possessed of indigenous ecological knowledge” (2007b:343). Furthermore, it was added that indigenous groups were sharing communal land tenure systems and would rely on independent, democratic forms of traditional autonomy, thereby portraying “an oasis in the middle of the desert” (Li ibid). In this sense, the idea of indigenous groups in Indonesia as not only “ecologically noble savages”, but also “self-organized people” reveals a national context in which the imagination of indigeneity is closely connected to local or countrywide experiences. For Li, the indigenous people movement or, better, the *masyarakat adat* idea presented [...] the direct inverse of everything that was problematic about New Order development: individualism, greed, ecological destruction, an emphasis on modernity understood as Westernisation, control by international financial institutions, burdensome debt, and the loss of national economic, political, and cultural autonomy glossed as globalisation.

(Li 2007b:343)

Of course, the problem behind these assumptions, in local as well as in international debates, is complex. While Li speaks about the “difficulty of locating the perfect *adat* subject” (Li 2007b), the same accounts for global discourse, where a general definition of indigenous people is a highly political and tricky issue (see the chapters by Göcke and Cabrera, this volume; see also Dove 2006; Hodgson 2002; Kuper 2003; Pelican 2009), leaving “anthropologists anxious about the concept” (Dove 2006:194) of indigeneity itself. This anthropological “over-concern” concerning the definition of indigeneity led Dove to the following question: “What do we make of the extraordinary coincidence that anthropology (and the social sciences) began to critique the concept of indigeneity at the very time that it was being legitimised by mainstream global organizations like the United Nations and the International Labour Organization?” (Dove 2007:147-148).

In this essay, I will try, therefore, to avoid a discussion of what the *adat* movement means on a national or international scale or in terms of definition. Instead, I will focus on the “art and politics of being Wana, becoming *masyarakat adat*”, a phrase I have borrowed in part from Jane Atkinson, who worked among northern Wana and wrote the ingenious monograph “The arts and politics of Wana shamanship” (1989), as well as from Dorothy Hodgson with her recent book on Maasai indigeneity titled “Being
Maasai, becoming indigenous” (2011). In combining these two titles, the current theme of recent Wana involvement in a movement becomes apparent and makes clear their ongoing positioning (Hodgson 2011) between culture and discourse.

The debate on indigeneity and, to quote Li, “the discourse of adat is a political force” (2007b:338). Adat can be an important source of power for historically marginalised people, as the Wana of Central Sulawesi are. One first must get access to this political force, however, and then must learn to handle it. It is a force Wana people did not possess until recently. As swidden farmers living in the uplands of Central Sulawesi, the Wana are often described as “primitive” people who “better fit the bill” (Li 2000:162) of the “real indigenous”. They could probably easily be described as a “perfect adat subject” (see above). However, they were not spotted by the brokers of the indigenous people’s movement until recently.

The process of reframing their identity, which was based for so long on ethnicity and religion, to embrace a new identity as indigenous people (Hodgson 2011:3) is rather a current process whose effects are not fully assessable at this point.

Ethnographic Setting

The Wana ethnic group is located in Central Sulawesi, living in an area covering the realms of three administrative districts (kabupaten): Morowali, Banggai and Poso. Most people talking about the Wana ethnic group in Kabupaten Morowali generally refer to those Wana living in the Cagar Alam Morowali (Nature Reserve) – the largest nature reserve in Central Sulawesi, covering an area of 225,000 ha of the eastern peninsula. The anthropologist Michael Alvard describes those Wana living in the upland area of the Cagar Alam in an article from 2000 as “rather remote” compared to their coastal neighbours: “They have maintained relative isolation from much of the outside world, and most adults speak no or very little Indonesian, have little or no interaction with the cash economy, and maintain a traditional religious belief system” (Alvard 2000b:429).

More than ten years after Alvard’s research, I was confronted with a different picture. Isolation was still a matter for consideration, but mainly for geographic and infrastructural reasons. Wana living inside the Cagar Alam frequently visit villages outside its boundaries, mainly to sell resin or rattan. The resin trade has a long history for Wana (Atkinson 1989:264) and plays an important part in their current economy, effecting intense interaction with people outside the nature reserve.

Although the amount of research focusing on the Wana remains low, the attention paid by outsiders towards Wana inside the reserve is noteworthy: A number of tourists,

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3 Apart from Jane Atkinson, who did research in the Upper Bongka region, and Michael Alvard, who conducted research on hunting practices and sustainability among Wana of Posangke (2000a; 2000b), an M.A. thesis by Cynthia Riccardi (1999) deals with agriculture among the Wana of Kayupoli, focusing mainly on the documentation of the swidden cycle. Additionally, there are two short articles by the environmental activist and current governmental representative Jabar Lahadji dealing with minority rights and the impact of reserve zones on the Wana (1999; 2008). The extensive work by the Dutch missionary Albert Kruyt, published in 1930, offers highly valuable insights in historical conditions among the Wana (Kruyt 1930). Regarding literature on my specific research area, there is
Taronggo is located within an ocean of oil palms. Photo: A.-T. Grumblies 2011

tourist guides, a local NGO, documentary filmmakers, and anthropologists have occasionally been visiting Wana within the reserve. Nevertheless, visitors generally almost never concentrate on Wana living outside the reserve’s borders. One such area is Salisarao, located east of Kayupoli and south of Posangke (both Wana settlements within the reserve) and north of the village of Taronggo. Salisarao Wana, although conveniently located for tourist interest, i.e. only a couple of kilometres hiking upland from road-accessed Taronggo, have never before been visited by non-Indonesians, nor do Indonesians pay attention to the area. An informant from Kolonodale told me that Salisarao Wana were “too modern” for tourist or NGO means and are believed to “have moved away too far from their ancestors’ way of living”. This is a common argument tied to the indigeneity discourse, where “the spurious calculus of authenticity and cultural purity” denies an indigenous status to those who do not fit the “stereotypical ‘feathers-and-beads’ expectations [and who] often find themselves stigmatised as ‘half-breeds’, ‘assimilated’, or even ‘imposters’” (Cadena and Starn 2007a:9). My source referred to the opportunity for Wana living outside the reserve’s borders to be able to engage in a different agricultural system, for example, growing cash crops, coconut trees or, more recently, cocoa, since the nature reserve’s

only the work by Alvard on the Posangke area; no research has yet been conducted on Salisarao or Taronggo.

4 The filmmakers Gerard Nougarol and Martine Journet have produced a number of outstanding documentaries on Wana shamanism, for example, “Indo Pino” (2002) and “Gods and Satans” (2004).
restrictions do not apply to them. Their involvement in cash crop cultivation and the decreasing importance of the “traditional” swidden farming cycle has led outsiders, such as the source in Kolonodale, to come to the conclusion that Salisarao Wana are less “backward” than their semi-nomadic neighbours within the reserve. Planting cash crops seems to have a significant impact on perceptions of indigeneity. As Li states for the Lauje in the Western part of Central Sulawesi, growing cocoa has turned them from “primitives” into “real farmers’ building up a long-term investment” (2002b:421). Since cocoa has “the lure of modernity” (Li 2002b:421), Salisarao Wana have become for some, i.e. tourists, their inner-reserve relatives, or, as the source stated above, too modern.

**Marginalisation**

For others, however, such as their neighbours living in the lowlands or state officials, Salisarao Wana still remain in the marginalised stance they experienced even before colonial times (Atkinson 1979; Kruyt 1930). Explanations can be found in a multiplicity of reasons, all related to each other and of relevance to the Indonesian adat discourse. One reason is religious affiliation. According to state ideology, adherence to one of the six officially recognised “world-religions” functions as a marker of modern citizenship; religion is further “associated in nationalist culture with education, cosmopolitan orientation, sophistication, and progress” (Atkinson 1979:688). Moreover, “Wana failings to match the ideal of a progressive citizenry are summed up for nationalist Indonesians in the fact that the Wana lack a religion” (Atkinson 1979:688). Most upland Wana have successfully managed to resist conversion attempts with which they were confronted from the colonial side, lowland neighbour side or contemporary missionaries. In addition, as Saputra insists: “[H]ome grown animism has always been given a devil’s image” (Saputra 2012). In this regard, religious conversion to either Christianity or Islam is an important matter for perceptions of “civilizational modernity”, since Taronggo, the geographically closest full administrative village, is inhabited by an interreligious community, where non-converted Wana, Wana who have converted to a “world religion”, and other Christians and Muslims live together. In this interreligious context, Atkinson’s analysis of how Wana religion is shaped alongside this outside pressure, although written long before the downfall of Suharto’s regime, remains meaningful today: Wana

are acutely aware of and sensitive to the way they are regarded by others more powerful than themselves. What they call agama [religion] Wana represents a self-consciously constructed response to the judgments of the dominant society.

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5 In the following I will use the term Wana from a religious perspective. There are also Christian and Muslim Wana living in Taronggo, but in this essay, I will apply the term only to those Wana who have so far resisted religious conversion.
This response builds on the images of what constitutes a religion that the Wana have received in their dealings with Muslims and Christians.

(Atkinson 1988:53)

Apart from Salisarao Wana’s reliance on their belief, an important aspect distinguishing between “modern” and “backward” citizens remains the reliance of most Wana on swidden agriculture, their non-centralised housing situation, their language and their lack of proficiency of Bahasa Indonesia, the official state language, and their remote location. Hence, Salisarao Wana can easily be described as an “indigenous group”.

By the time I entered the field in 2010, it seemed that Wana had not heard of the opportunity of empowerment by claiming status as indigenous people. They presented themselves to me, the anthropologist, as a marginalised people who had no chance of overcoming their status. Of course, Wana had and have their own strategies of resistance, their own “weapons of the weak” to speak with Scott’s words (1985). But their resistance was a rather subtle notion of “tentative resistance” (Scott 1998:289); it was an everyday form of boycotting or ignoring government or other institutions that were disadvantageous to Wana.

Wana in the uplands, as well as Wana living in the interreligious community of Taronggo, never seemed to openly challenge the government or other oppressors; they showed no obvious motivation to directly and openly oppose the processes of marginalisation. Avoidance of direct confrontation seemed to be a historically congruent matter among Wana.

The Dutch missionary Albert Kruyt, who wrote an early account on the Wana (1930), and Jane Atkinson came to the conclusion that the Wana were historically generally rather “shy victims” than heroes:

Timidity [among the Wana] had its roots in the endemic regional warfare of the nineteenth century. In the regional game of headhunting the Wana were often the heads, the victims of neighboring peoples [...]. Although the imposition of Dutch rule in the region at the beginning of this century put an end to raiding, it inaugurated a new form of local terrorism.

(Atkinson 1989:263)

In this last sentence, Atkinson refers to Wana resettlements forced by the various governments – a fact already mentioned by Kruyt:

The To Wana have been a much disturbed folk. [...] Peace did not become their share either, when the [Netherlands] government put its powerful hand on them. In the beginning of the occupation the administrative government supposed that these shy people would get to know order and law most easily if they were forced to live near the coast. But the people did not wish that with
the result [...] that many patrols of soldiers were sent repeatedly into this land to draw the people down to the coast. [...] The misery of these people must have been great. Of those who had let themselves be forced to settle near the coast, many died.

(Kruyt 1930:403-4, translated by A.G.)

Forced resettlements remain a government objective which Wana are all too much aware of; I will return to this aspect later. Pressure experienced through the colonial government still plays a major part in historical accounts shared by the Wana today. Atkinson describes Wana “timidity” as rooted in early warfare activities. Historical experiences of being disadvantaged during fighting regimes led to an open self-victimisation: “Wana openly acknowledge their cowardice as a people” (1989:262).

“Timidity” has remained an important point of self-reference, embodied in a self-marginalisation process deeply entangled with a millenarian cosmological perspective. In the following section, I will elaborate further on cosmological narratives to demonstrate why the Wana are reluctant to resist.

**Cosmological Narratives**

In Wana cosmological narratives, also called *katuntu* (Wana language, called Bahasa Taa: BT), it becomes clear how important the current state of marginality is for their prospective future. The Wana see their land as the navel of the world, *pusen tana* (BT). *Pusen tana* is, furthermore, the source of *baraka* (BT, power), *kasugi* (BT, wealth) and *pagansani* (BT, knowledge). In the past, it is told, there was a golden age, called *tempo baraka* (BT) – a time of magical and powerful knowledge when the Wana region was inhabited by the *taw baraka* (BT), powerful people. All Wana were able to access and use these sources of power through, as Atkinson has shown, *wali m panto’o* (BT), meaning “the becoming of the word” in Atkinson’s translation (1989:43). One would just need to close his or her eyes, for example, speak the spell *adi adi* (BT) and the wished-for object would appear (see also Atkinson 1989:43). However, in Atkinson’s words, “the golden age was not to last”. One day, a special group of Wana, the *taw baraka*, decided to leave the earth and go to another place at the end of the world. Their departure demarcated the end of the Golden Age and opened up a new age of poverty where “powerful knowledge is no longer a commonplace but limited to a very few”, and ordinary Wana were left behind, “powerless, poor and limited in their

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6 Atkinson (1989:44) calls these stories of a time when wishes would become true katuntu. During my research, the meaning of katuntu appeared to be extended to all stories of a magical and powerful past.
access to knowledge” (Atkinson 1989:44). Magical knowledge, wealth or power were no longer accessible to the Wana people. Therefore, Wana often present themselves today as a poor and pitiful people, caught in a marginal stance. Nevertheless, there is hope. The Wana believe that one day, their powerful allies, the taw baraka, will return to pusen tana and introduce a new Golden Era for them. In the meantime, it is essential for Wana not to break out of their current state of misery. Only those Wana who remain in the current powerless state of pity and have not converted to another religion will be rewarded by the returning taw baraka (see also Atkinson 1989:44).

In this cultural construction, marginality is cosmologically constituted as a temporary condition. A breakout is, however, possible with the help of the taw baraka, expected to come back one day. This explanation becomes crucial for the marginalised status of the Wana when talking about resistance and empowerment, as I will show in the following. Furthermore, this condition as pitiful people, continuously displaying their own people with the words kita taw be’a, meaning something similar to “we are a stupid people”, is another explanation for Wana “timidity”, or at least for their reluctance concerning open resistance strategies.7

Organised or open resistance, in accounts told by my informants, was not a matter of concern in Salisarao or Taronggo meetings. Instead, the refusal to meet with state officials or missionaries, returning to, staying in or hiding in the upland regions were the common strategies to deal with outside pressure. Pratt highlights the role of physical isolation in this relation: “Remoteness, when activated as a force, almost inevitably translates into difference and a perceived absence of assimilation. It can also generate a narrative of refusal of a presumed invitation to assimilate” (2007:402).

Nevertheless, this pattern was soon to change. By the year 2011, during my research stay, the Salisarao Wana were confronted with the danger of land loss and the urgent pressure from the local government to resettle to a centralised village. These risky developments inaugurated the process of becoming “indigenous”, or what can also be called becoming masyarakat adat.

A Chronology of Becoming Indigenous

Similar to many other regions in Indonesia, Central Sulawesi is home to a growing number of palm oil companies among many others. PT Kurnia Luwuk Sejati, a national palm oil company from the Eastern part of Central Sulawesi (Luwuk, Kabupaten Banggai), has continuously bought land in the area around Taronggo, beginning in 1997/8. Nesting between the mountainous uplands to the north, the Cagar Alam to the west and partly east, as well as a river and other settlements to the east, Taronggo today is encapsulated in an oil palm plantation, reaching out from the south. Seen from above, Taronggo appears like an island in an oil palm ocean.

7 Atkinson refers to the strategy of dealing with pressure from outside in the form of fleeing as more complex than Kruyt suggested. She points to a more organised form of resistance, also encompassing the practice of disappearing into the forest, but backed up by leaders who “were thought to have special access to information about the fate of the Wana land” (1989:319).
Numerous Wana complain that they have been illegitimately disowned from the land they were holding around Taronggo. False promises by company and local governments left many Wana without any compensation. As a consequence, available land had become extremely scarce in the Taronggo area in 2010, though PT Kurnia had high intentions for expansion. The new target for plantation development was found in the upland area north of Taronggo: the area of Salisarao.

The company’s and local government’s joint plan became more and more pressing. More than 100 Wana households were currently located in the approach region of Salisarao. A new project was formulated for those Wana living in Salisaro: All families were to be resettled to a new village that was still to be built. The plans were presented to me by government officials and company affiliates with great enthusiasm, offering Wana the opportunity to live in a modern setting, a village with road access, a school and a church. Government and company ignored the fact that Wana living in Salisarao were not only practicing swidden agriculture on their land, but had also been successfully planting cocoa for more than 15 years. A resettlement would have made them landless peasants, left without the opportunity of independent cash crop cultivation and/or a subsistence economy. Furthermore, road access was not desired by the community, neither was the construction of a church.

Resettlement programmes in the name of development during the New Order regime were a common picture in Indonesia, to quote Li’s account from 1999: “[t]he target group is expected to move from isolation and backwardness to the status of ‘ordinary villagers’ culturally normalised and enmeshed in the regular system of village administration and national development” (1999:302). Through the resettlement of Salisarao Wana, government and company would have easily killed two birds with one stone: Succeeding with the expansion of the plantation (thereby more profit for the kabupaten) and letting Wana become part of the Indonesian mainstream, making them “civilized people” with all the attending attributes.

As I mentioned earlier, the Wana have had several historical experiences with resettlement programmes. Taronggo itself was built as such an action by the Dutch government at the beginning of the 20th century. At the beginning without success: Kruyt describes Taronggo as an uninhabited village, a proof of Wana strategies of resisting resettlement initiatives by the colonial government: “This new village, and all the other villages that I have visited later on, clearly shows that the To Wana have remained faithful to their old habit of living scattered on their fields. […] I did not even meet a dog or chicken in some villages on my journey through this land” (Kruyt 1930:406-7; translation A.G.). Up to today, Wana have more or less silently boycotted resettlement strategies. A recent resettlement site close to Taronggo, now a part of the village called Rio Tinto, was built after a landslide in 2007. However, except for a small Christian group that has settled there and has opened up an orphanage for Wana people, only two or three Wana families have settled there permanently. Most Wana have returned to the uplands, leaving behind an abandoned settlement, a witness to failed resettlement goals.

Nevertheless, this pattern or (successful) strategy of subtle resistance would not have worked against the new resettlement plan in 2011. The fear of actual land loss made the situation extremely threatening for Salisarao Wana. How could they defend
themselves against the (as it seemed) overwhelming power of government and company?

The biggest problem, the Wana stated, was the lack of information about their rights to their land. When local government and PT Kurnia officials spread the word that the Wana had no legal ownership of their land or their crops, everyone believed it, since, and here again I quote Li: “The legal standing of any of these ‘rules’ would certainly be disputed by legal experts on customary land rights. But in the absence of countervailing knowledge and support, a headman’s bullying is sufficient to unsettle villagers who are isolated and unsure of their ground” (Li 2007:b:342).

One might argue that the situation after 1998 should look different, with regional autonomy laws actually strengthening local communities. However, authors such as Erb et al. argue that decentralisation and regionalism has not always worked in favour of masyarakat adat who “are still not being given the kind of autonomy that they desire, to design and arrange their own culture and communities” (2005:150). One example is the invention of the BPD (village representative body, Badan Perwakilan Desa), mentioned in the regional autonomy law no. 22 of 1999. This group of people is supposed to watch over the kepala desa (village head) and to make sure that local custom and adat is respected and protected; “to make the rules of the desa; to make sure that the needs and desires of the population are heard; and to make sure that the local village government acts properly and does its job”. By this means, the BPD is an attempt to put an end to KKN (abbreviation for corruption, collusion and nepotism) and to guarantee local participation. However, Erb et al. give a warning concerning the role of the BPD: As a counterpart to the kepala desa, the BPD will remain the target of the former, who if “he still wants to be involved in corruption, etc., will do his best to keep control of power in the village and obstruct the BPD” (2005:170). To come to my point here: The head of the BPD (Ketua BPD) in Taronggo is also the kepala desa’s father! So much for the end of KKN in Taronggo. What has changed after the end of the New Order regime is the law, but without access to it (or knowledge about it), the situation for Salisarao Wana after 1998 had not changed much.

What was needed was legal advice. The Wana searched for this among their, what I call, “powerful friends”. Let me briefly explain why I chose this, I believe, rather provocative term. Dorothy Hodgson describes her situation as an anthropologist entangled in a Maasai indigenous movement with a position as an interlocutor. She does so to refuse a position as a “collaborator”, as Les Field has argued, in an attempt to bring together academic working and collaboration with peripheral communities (Field 1999:195; see also Hodgson 2011:15). Hodgson, however, describes her situation instead as a:

scholar who shares her ideas and work with Maasai activists and organizations in ongoing, constructive, and perhaps, even occasionally contentious dialogues and debates in an effort to inform and shape their policies and practices, without directly aligning myself with one group or faction of the movement.

(Hodgson 2011:15)

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8 Law no. 22, Passage 104. Translation taken from Erb et al. (2005:170).
With this intention, I fully agree with her positioning as an interlocutor, but during my research it became very clear to me that I was not regarded by my informants as simply that. The people I met, lived with, engaged in interviews, and so on perceived of me as a person with significant power – something they lacked substantially while facing the threat of land loss. It was very clear for them that I would serve as their “powerful friend” in times of struggle. Aligning myself with one group or one side of the protest was a decision that I had to make – but it was also already made for me by my Wana interlocutors.

In the beginning, actual and less subtle resistance started with the idea to make a signature list signed by all willing members of Salisaroa and Taronggo Wana – an idea for which I was responsible. Of course, I was worried about my own positioning as an anthropologist, but eventually I was regarded as a person with resources, knowledge and networks, hence I answered many questions and tried to help with information the best I could. In the end, the signature list was somehow the beginning of “open” Wana resistance. What followed were informal gatherings, long discussions with neighbours about opportunities and chances. Then finally, the local government and PT Kurnia organised a community meeting with Salisaroa Wana, initially planned to happen in the upland area; but instead, Salisaroa Wana pressed for a meeting in lowland Taronggo, where they hoped for support from their “more educated” village neighbours. Instead of waiting for the officials to hike up to the mountains, Salisaroa Wana hiked down to meet them in the village community hall. It took a long time waiting for them. It was a Sunday and the kepala desa, the elected village head, had spontaneously decided to attend the church service with an unofficial gathering afterwards. The word spread that he was not brave enough to face his upland citizens within the “realm of the law”. People believed an upland meeting would have encouraged kepala desa and the company towards further lies and manipulations. The upland as a realm of the uncivilised, the primitive, where the state border seems to become blurry and fuzzy, would have functioned as lawless, thus stateless, hinterland. In the end, the meeting was helped by the severe delay, and had positive consequences: the plan for the plantation’s expansion was terminated.

Nevertheless, although the success was celebrated, Salisaroa Wana did not trust the decision. As time passed, more and more people became intimidated by the official’s “helping hands”. The local head of the company himself told me that the moment I returned to Germany, the expansion and resettlement plans would immediately restart again. Therefore, due to the ongoing threat of land loss, the Wana searched for more “powerful friends”. They found them among the members of the NGO, Yayasan Merah Putih.

During my research stay, I had once mentioned the NGO, Yayasan Merah Putih, to my informants. This NGO is located in Palu, Central Sulawesi’s capital, and had already been working with Wana from the Bulang area on the northern coast of Central Sulawesi. Among other things, they had helped those Northern Wana to fight a resettlement plan in that area. Furthermore, they had implemented a special form of school to promote at least some education for Wana people in the area, the sikola lipu, named after the local word for Wana settlements. This form of school system is self-
organised by NGO-trained Wana individuals and focuses on basic skills, such as reading, writing and mathematics.\footnote{For a description of Bulang Wana (Kabupaten Tojo Una Una) and their entanglement with YMP, see the work of Nasution Camang (2003).}

I mentioned the NGO and its school only in passing, but the interest it raised among Salisarao Wana was astonishing. Insufficient education is for Wana people, another explanation for their marginalisation. Those Wana living in the mountains are too far away from the village infrastructure to be part of the state school system. Lowland Wana within the village of Taronggo go to school, but are not very enthusiastic about it, since both teacher and the curriculum are very oriented towards Christian values. Praying and singing are regarded as tools to press Wana children towards religious conversion.

The idea of a Wana school “free from religion” was stuck in many heads and I noticed my interlocutors often kept discussing this topic until sunrise. Finally, in March 2011, they wrote a short letter to the Yayasan Merah Putih explaining their situation with the palm oil company and pleading for further help. Three months later, two Wana were invited to meet with the NGO members in Palu. Meanwhile, in July 2011, I left for Germany and kept out of the dynamics between the NGO and Wana.

**Suddenly Masyarakat Adat**

By the time I returned to the field in March 2012, something had changed. I was welcomed, not by my usual welcome committee, but by “members of a masyarakat adat”. I had left the field site with the Wana not knowing what the term masyarakat adat actually meant or how it was connected to the indigenous people’s movement. Wana in Taronggo and Salisarao had not much of an idea about their rights and how special their situation was. Similar to other upland groups in Central Sulawesi, they had not heard about a movement in Indonesia, neither had they heard, at least the vast majority of them, of AMAN. As Li highlights: “Most Central Sulawesi villagers are not aware of definitional debates among activists and scholars taking place in the provincial capital Palu and in other urban centers” (2007b:345). To this point, Wana had not been part of a political movement of indigenous people, but the new and ongoing interaction with Yayasan Merah Putih had made them become part of the movement. Suddenly they were masyarakat adat.

At the time of my return to the field, the enthusiasm of the Wana was great. Hiking up through the Salisarao mountains, I was surprised to find magazines and leaflets of various NGOs, information material concerning palm oil and indigenous groups all over the world in almost every household. Additionally, DVDs on land loss, environmental degradation and indigenous rights were watched repeatedly in the village. Numerous Wana had participated in meetings with the NGO, and once, even the bupati (administrative head of the kabupaten) had welcomed them. At that point, it seemed that the plan for the plantation’s expansion in the area of Salisarao had been finally terminated.
Among other things, these new developments had in some ways changed some people’s impressions of being marginalised. Similar to changes Li had discovered during interviews she conducted in 2001 and 2003 with her informants claiming to have “learned to talk bravely” from his NGO allies” (Li 2007b:346), many of my interlocutors also claimed an improved self-confidence when talking to government officials or outsiders, using the Indonesian language, “being able to speak to power” (Jackson and Warren 2005:557); although not always fluent, they did not feel as shy (mea, BT) as before. Further developments were, for example, that informants stated they were no longer afraid of the government, but had now experienced how to behave berani (courageous). They had learned about their rights and stated now to know how to engage in a discussion with officials. Of course, this was not the same for all Wana. Those people who were in closer contact with NGO allies evidently profited the most in terms of how to behave and react in discussions with officials, “belajar berpolitik”, while others were still very hesitant and reluctant towards the new processes.

The most central change came in the form of the so eagerly wished for school sikola lipu. The NGO had given in to this urgent wish. On a visit to Taronggo, they had trained six locals as teachers in a two-day workshop. Two of them were sent to Palu for further training. After that, a group of very enthusiastic Wana had built a large house in the Salisarao mountains to be used as a school building. Then finally, in April 2012, the first day of the new school started. More than 50 children and around 15
adults arrived, some of them hiking for more than two hours. Scheduled twice or three times a week, the school functions as an important sign of self-determination for Wana people. For them, it is part of becoming *masyarakat adat*. It is part of expressing agency.\(^{10}\)

### Problems

Nevertheless, the politics of representation were not without any problems. The process of “being Wana, becoming indigenous” led, on the one hand, to some empowerment; on the other hand, several new problems occurred. The concept of *masyarakat adat* was or is not understood, imagined and used by Wana people in a uniform way. New sources of knowledge and new “powerful friends” led to new power constellations. There occurred, for example, a problem between the old leaders and the new leaders. Wana who had developed closer ties to the NGO and/or now took a position as a new kind of leader are regarded with a sense of distrust by some individuals. Their motivations are sometimes unclear to the rest of the community. It happened that Wana who had travelled to Palu adopted a new language filled with NGO vocabulary that was incomprehensible for their upland families and produced a sense of distance.

Furthermore, former leaders, although respected elders, were worried about their status, as they were now often left out of discussions and informal meetings due to allegations of corruption. These new developments prompted among some of them a repositioning towards government officials, while simultaneously functioning as administrative representatives of the *suku* (Bl, ethnic group) Wana. Tyson notes the same dynamic: “a return to *adat* has, in many places, been found to perpetuate clientelism by creating ‘opportunities for powerful groups to advance their interests in the name of a revival of distinct traditions’” (Tyson 2011:660).

Distrust became, furthermore, a matter of concern related to those teaching at the sikola lipu. From the Wana side, the teachers, although most of them Wana themselves, are assumed by some to receive money from the NGO, profiting a great deal from the school’s institution. This source of jealousy makes the internal solidarity hard to sustain. The non-Wana community of Taronggo perceives of Wana teachers as a source of trouble. The common opinion in Taronggo is that the school itself is illegal, since it has so far not been acknowledged by the state, nor does the curriculum include religious teachings.

Pressure on teachers is very high, especially on converted Wana teachers, who are distrusted by non-converted Wana and disapproved of through their Christian or Muslim community. During the first four weeks of the school’s inauguration, four of the teachers resigned and were replaced by other, non-trained Wana. Religion, therefore, remained a matter of concern, although the school was celebrated as a sekolah tanpa agama, a school without religion. A number of Wana were suspicious of the school and assumed that there was a Christian or Muslim missionary background.

\(^{10}\) In addition, YMP and other NGOs are currently working on a PERDA (Peraturan Daerah), a regional regulation, for the Kabupaten Morowali, to monitor the protection and recognition of Wana people and their rights (see also Li 2007b:346).
connected to the school. Wana have historically experienced strong religious pressure from their neighbours and the government to convert to Christianity or Islam, as mentioned above. Therefore, many Wana still do not fully trust the NGO – or the anthropologist – to be free of religious intentions.

Connected to religious concerns, another worry becomes relevant: Some of my informants were reluctant to become involved in the movement due to cosmological reasons. Here, I come back to what I introduced at the beginning as the cosmological grounds of marginalisation. According to Wana belief, breaking out of their current pitiful condition could make the Wana no longer suitable for the expected Golden Age predicted in Wana cosmological narratives. Wana who were to become rich and powerful, even educated, due to their new empowerment, would no longer fit the bill of the pitiful people who are to be rewarded with salvation by their spiritual friends, the *taw baraka*. Some Wana fear they will no longer be proper candidates for the *taw baraka* once they have left marginality behind. This consternation leads to further mixed feelings among upland and lowland Wana towards the new political positioning as *masyarakat adat*. Hirtz reminds us that it takes an idea of difference to enter the indigeneity category, “it takes modern means to become traditional, to be indigenous” (Hirtz 2003:889). It is this modernity that blocks the way towards salvation.

In this context, another paradox becomes apparent: On the one hand, the solution to the current problem lies, according to the movement, in the recognition of being *masyarakat adat*. This implies, however, recognition of the nation-state as such, but: “Why should *masyarakat adat* demand recognition from a state whose claims to sovereignty they wish to challenge?” (Li 2001:653). Based on this contradictory appeal, the act of playing by the rule of the state, adopting its strategies, the legitimacy of the state receives acknowledgment by those who initially had the aim of challenging it (Li 2001; Tyson 2011). The ambivalence of this potential expected to lie behind the idea of recognition (Tyson 2011:670) is further traceable in the difficulty Wana see in recognising the state (see above). In their millenarian and experience-based perspective, recognition of the Indonesian nation-state has never been a goal of Wana political positioning.

These are just some examples of consequences which occurred entering the *masyarakat adat* movement. Becoming indigenous in Taronggo is a highly political decision and its consequences are, up to this moment, not fully visible. The process of becoming *masyarakat adat* saved the Wana from land loss, but led to several new problematic constellations. The challenges of being recognised as indigenous are manifold.

**Discussion**

The process of becoming indigenous not only produced and produces new power constellations among the Wana, but also interethnically and interreligiously. The new positioning the Wana have taken is, however, a state of articulation others have made, or as Li formulates: “Those who demand that their rights to be acknowledged must fill the places of recognition that others provide” (Li 2001:653). In this respect, their
repositioning closer towards NGO allies gave them the opportunity to resist the resettlement project, which is a common reason in Indonesia to enter the movement. It gave them a school to provide education according to their own wishes and needs. However, it also meant they would become more visible on the political stage. It further meant they could one day break out of their marginalised status. A status they need to keep, at least in some sense, to enter their millenarian idea of a new Golden Era. This has led to serious concern among Wana families living in the uplands.

Wana becoming indigenous is a development exemplary for other groups becoming part of the indigenous people movement: “Individuals and communities that have been attracted to the masyarakat adat movement have found there a language, a sense of solidarity, and a set of allies that have helped them articulate and advance their claims, especially claims against the state for control over ancestral lands” (Li 2007b:346). They have not, however, suddenly transformed, as Hodgson states for the Maasai, “from peripheral minority groups with little political recognition or power vis-à-vis their nation-states to transnational activists with formidable international lobbies and leverage” (Hodgson 2011:2). Instead, the Wana used an expanding transnational structure dedicated to strengthening the position of indigenous people and used it for their own needs. They had not heard much about the adat discourse in the past, the debate was mainly held in cities and far away from the people it affects. They had no idea how it could be applied to them or whether they would count as “indigenous”. Nevertheless, in the fight for their land, it became a tool of resistance and a marker of a new identity that explained at least part of their marginalisation to them. However, as I have outlined, the Wana becoming masyarakat adat led to processes of cultural transformation and social change and its full extent has, to this moment in time, not yet become assessable.

Cadena and Starn remind us of the global character that underlines indigeneity; for them it “is a worldwide field of governance, subjectivities, and knowledge […]. Indigeneity itself materializes in an intricate dynamic among converging and competing agendas, visions, and interests that transpire at local, national, and global levels” (Cadena and Starn 2007a:12). Albeit indigeneity was and is celebrated by most scholars and activists as an international movement, the example of the Wana becoming indigenous reveals, in the first place, the importance of actual local aspirations and circumstances. Wana had no interest in becoming part of the international or even national movement or to become recognised as indigenous. Instead, they were in search of allies, “powerful friends” to help them deal with their concrete situation as uplander citizens of the Indonesian nation-state that continues to form the political, economic and social conditions and preconditions in which Wana have to find, rearrange and formulate their positioning.

The idea of indigeneity in Indonesia emerges through the lure of resisting unequal power relations. Sangaji concludes from his insider perspective that, in the case of Central Sulawesi, the masyarakat adat initiative “is in the first place a reaction to restricted and unjust forms of economic development” (Sangaji 2007:333).

The Wana have become indigenous for the same reasons. Whether the development initiated was something they had expected or even wished for is a critical question, the problems stated above testify to the far reaching consequences their
decision had. Pratt reminds us: “The process of becoming indigenous [...] does not end when one acquires the label. It begins there” (Pratt 2007:399). The Wana are no victims in this movement, however, they are creative agents of their culture who, against the background of complex and hybrid dynamics and dimensions of marginality, are constantly renegotiating and reformulating their position as an upland group. Some use the discursive powers revealed by the politics of becoming masyarakat adat and turn them to their own use, some will eventually turn away from the label and return, some in a metaphorical, some in an actual sense, to the uplands, waiting for the taw baraka, while others will keep on searching for new strategies.