Religion and Culture Encounters in Misool Raja Ampat: Marine Ritual Practice of Sasi Laut

Ismail Suardi Wekke¹, Diah Aghsari², Evizariza Evizariza³, Junaidi Junaidi⁴, & Nurlaila Harun⁵

¹Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAIN) Sorong, West Papua
E-mail: ismail@stain-sorong.ac.id
²Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAIN) Sorong, West Papua
E-mail: daghsari@stain-sorong.ac.id
³Department of Indonesian Studies, Faculty of Cultural Science, Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia
E-mail: evizariza@unilak.ac.id
⁴Department of Indonesian Studies, Faculty of Cultural Science, Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia
E-mail: junaidi@unilak.ac.id
⁵Faculty of Law, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia
E-mail: laila.harun@iain-manado.ac.id

Abstract: The acculturation of religion and culture in such a way are gradually accepted without causing the loss of the native culture in one community will influence the social process. When religion and culture arise and merged into one, it can be clear to be found in their rituals. This ethnography study on qualitative in nature was conducted to see how the existence, practices, and acculturation between local culture and Islam in, Sasi marine rituals in Misool Raja Ampat in West Papua Indonesia. Data collection was done through observation, in-depth interview including library research on community manuscript and local government database. Using snowball sampling technique, this study is able to gain solid information from native people in Misool that willing to take part as the informants. The informants in this study were found as influences native people in Misool community e.g; the head of Fafanlap village, community figures, female figures and youth figures. This study considers Misool community which still strongly maintains their cultures including sasi laut as a sign to start and stop harvesting the specific sea resources to maintain the sustainability of nature. The acculturation between the culture of Islam runs smoothly in changing the native mindset to eliminate the things that can cause syirik but did not eliminate the characteristics and the main part of the ritual of sasi laut.

Keywords: Sasi, Misool, Religion, and Culture

1. Introduction

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika or unity in diversity is the official motto to describe the chronicles of multicultural and religions that varies and ranging from Aceh to Papua which then united as the main part of the Republic of Indonesia. Hundreds of Ethnicities and thousands of sub-ethnics were recognized as Indigenous ethnics lived in Indonesia. Nevertheless, Islam, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian religions are also the element that enriching the state. These religions were believed as the way to bring them to the happy life, therefore these religions were officially recognized and protected in Indonesia.
None doubt that, religion and culture are elements that are closely related to human life because of the nature of human beings as servants and as social beings. Religion acts as a belief held by the man and governs his relationship with God. While culture is a way of life that develops, shared by a group of people, and pass from generation to generation. Seeing this as big picture Indonesia is famous for its religious and cultural diversity.

Religion and culture might be two different things however, they are strongly interrelated. The merging of these two things into one is called acculturation. Acculturation is a social process that arises when a certain group of human beings is confronted with elements of foreign culture in such a way that the elements of foreign culture are gradually accepted without causing the loss of the cultural nature itself. When religion and culture have merged into one, we can see them in their rituals.

The population of Indonesia according was estimated to reach 262 million in 2017. Among other islands and ethnicities in Indonesia, Papua is a unique island it was multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-religious region with a high influx of migration with, nevertheless Papua also recognized as an island with high frequently inter-ethnic conflict and demand for separation from the Republic of Indonesia. The thing that we also need to consider is the land of Papua seems one of the largest number of local ethnic groups in Indonesia, at least 261 ethnic groups, among all big islands in Indonesia [1].

Among places in Papua, Raja Ampat Regency seems one of the most interesting places to visit not only because its beautiful natural scenery but Raja Ampat also known as one of the richest places of cultural heritage. Located on the north-west tip of bird's head peninsula on the island of West Papua province, Raja Ampat, or the Four Kings, is an archipelago consisted of 1,500 small islands, shoals surrounding the five main islands of Waigeo, Kofiau, Salawati, Batanta, and Misool. The Raja Ampat archipelago is the part of impressive coral triangle which contains the richest marine biodiversity on earth. It covers more than 40,000 km² of land and sea, including in CenderawasihBay, the largest marine national park in Indonesia [1]. The population of Raja Ampat regency the Regency was more than 50,000 people, however, in the native who lives in Misool, which focus on this study only around 8,729 people, the distribution can be seen on the table below:

| No | District | Width (km²) | Population | Density |
|----|----------|-------------|------------|---------|
| 1  | Misool   | 318.7       | 1761       | 5.51    |
| 2  | South Misool | 469.1  | 3026       | 6.45    |
| 3  | West Misool | 203.1   | 1291       | 6.36    |
| 4  | East Misool | 403.1   | 2651       | 6.58    |

Table 1. Population Density of Misool Raja Ampat

The majority of native Misool population live in a community that spreads in four districts as shown in the table below:

| No | District | Capital of District |
|----|----------|---------------------|
| 1  | Misool   | Waigama             |
| 2  | South Misool | Dabatan       |
| 3  | West Misool | Lilintah          |
| 4  | East Misool | Foley             |

Table 2. District at Misool Raja Ampat
2. Misool Island Natives

Misool, meaning ‘a house on the sea’, is one of four large islands of Raja Ampat, West Papua, Indonesia. Its area covers 2,034 km$^2$. Its highest point is on 535 meters, its main city is Waigama, and it lies on the coordinates of 1°53’41”S 130°5’1”E [2]. Misool island is located in Misool district, Raja Ampat, and directly adjacent to the Seram Sea. This area lies in the bird's head of West Papua and is close to the city of Sorong. Misool is divided into two parts, namely South-east Misool and West Misool.

Misool Island is best known for its unique culture, customs, marine, culinary and terrestrial diversity. This area is included in the world's coral triangle having a variety of ornamental fish found in the ocean in which about 75% of ornamental fish and the world's coral triangle are also found in Misool area. Misool area also has a very large open sea that becomes the path of large animals, such as whales and octopus [3].

Even though, Misool Island also has potential on coal mines but mostly the worker was not from native Misool. Economic activities done by the community are livelihood-oriented to support per capita income. Socio-economic activities managed by the community leader were dominated by fishing activities where this area is rich with fishery resources. In addition, agro-tourism business is also developed in Misool since it is one of a series of islands in Raja Ampat that has beautiful sea and one of the best diving spots in the world.

The habit of gotong-royong or works as a together until now is still maintain in various aspects of their community life. The habit can be seen in activities such as in the activities of cleaning the village, processing of agricultural land, customary marriage party, circumcision, and so forth. A very prominent habit is also shown in the lives of local people, namely in receiving guests or if there are visiting immigrants. The attitude shown by the local community characterizes a strong togetherness and kinship in giving appreciation to the outsider that attached to their community. This attitude still maintained, considering the tribes and customs that have been mingled in Misool certainly can provide opportunities for information and communication. To enter that can directly or indirectly influence the behavior of the community without leaving the existing cultural values.

Due to its geographical conditions of Misool, sea transportation become the native favorite options to reach the place just as marine life to support their needs. Therefore rituals relating to marine somehow bond their daily activities. As a result, cultural and religions have contributed a significantly on their marine ritual on how, why and when they do the rituals. The native people of Misool Island are predominantly Muslims and still perform rituals related to religious, cultural and maritime affairs that performed in a festive season in specific time such as sasi laut festive season.

In the sasi laut, festive season, performed by Misool native people every year is a marine ritual which conducted in two sessions namely buka sasi and tutup sasi. Buka sasi is held when the west wind blows around November, while tutup sasi is done around May. (Kartini Limalol/personal interview: if-KL.12’:53”). Buka sasi laut is held before the harvest of the seafood, that is, around November or December. Meanwhile, a ritual of tutup sasi laut is held about 6 months after the ritual of buka sasi laut, which is, around May every year. During every session many rituals performed by the native including katinting and oar competitions which make the sasi laut get their crowd.

According to Misool community leader, Sasi in Misool means oath to not to take the sea resources for sustainability. This is an ancient way as well as their local genius to support the sustainable use of their natural resources in Raja Ampat territory. In the culture of sasi, there is a customary ban for catching and fishing seafood for a year. The community is then allowed to collectively catch the seafood after the break. So there is a shared commitment to not catching certain species of marine resources and giving them time to increase their quantities and flourish, for examples, bia kapa, lola, natural snails, lobsters, batu laga, and sea cucumbers. (Abdul Rasyid Wainsya/ Personal Interview: im-ARW.2’:11”).
Therefore, this study considers it the main issues of interest to be studied in this research, to see how the existence of marine rituals in the community of Misool? The focus of this study consisting three main issues: First, how is the history of marine rituals in Misool Raja Ampat society? Second, how is the practice of marine rituals in Misool Raja Ampat society? Third, how are Islamic values acculturated with local culture in their ritual practice?

3. Method

This ethnography study in qualitative research was conducted at Misool Raja Ampat in West-Papua Indonesia. This location is a typical region where *sasi* becomes part of rituals that influences their everyday life. Data collection was done through observation, in-depth interview including library research on community manuscript and local government database. Using snowball sampling technique, this study is able to gain solid information from native people in Misool that willing to be the informants. The informants in this study were found as influences people in Misool community e.g; a head of Misool Fafanlap village, Misool community figures, female figures in Misool, and Misool youth figures.

4. Results and Discussion

This section will present the results of the analysis found in the study. In this section, the first section starts out with the history, and philosophy beyond Sasi marine rituals in Misool Raja Ampat as this is the focus of the study. Then, it moves on to the discussion of the ritual which covers the concept of *Sasi* itself, and finally, discussing how Islamic values acculturated with local culture in their ritual practice.

4.1 The Philosophy behind Sasi

The meaning of *sasi laut*, according to Misool society, *sasi* means oath. Further, *sasi* which contains two meanings, namely ritual practice for the sea and as an application for permit or legality of the area that is sustained by the custom of the local community. *Sasi laut* is a ritual performed by the Misool community as a sign to start or stop the fishing session. *Sasi laut* is done with the intent and purpose to get the results of their fishing is abundant and in line with expectations. Misool community itself believes when they go to sea, the success depends on a ritual of *sasi laut* itself. (Munawir Haris /im-MH. 4'11")

Furthermore, according to Abdul Rasyid Wainsyaf to one of the leading figures in Misool, *Sasi laut* is derived from the language of Misool, means oath (witness). All the people in Misool do *sasi laut* when going to sea. *Sasi laut* is done when the west wind blows, around November, and ends when the south wind blows around May*. *Sasi laut* is something that has become a mandatory ritual for the Misool community before harvesting the sea. The intended sea products e.g: *bia kapa*, *lola*, natural snails, *batu laga*, lobsters, and sea cucumbers. (im-ARW.17'12”). The same data also found a similar from Agung Saleh Bahalle a youth figure in Kampung Fafanlap however, this study also seems that it was also strategy to prevent an illegal fishing trip due to its fantastic price, stated that *bia kapa* grows at a depth of 15 meters, grows in the roots of bahar, and the texture is very sharp. The selling price of *bia kapa* is about IDR 15,000 per kilogram. *Lola* is a conical shell. *Lola* is sold at the price of IDR 40,000 to IDR 80,000 per kilogram. Moreover, a natural snail is a type of snail that within a period of 5 (five) years can produce natural pearls. The price range for natural snails is ranging from IDR 80,000 to over IDR 200,000 per kilogram. *Batu laga* is stone-like shells. These shells can be camouflaged with the surrounding rocks making it difficult to distinguish. *Batu laga* can be sold for IDR 120,000 to IDR 200,000 per kilogram. Lobster is a sea product that can be sold for around IDR 250,000 per kilogram. Meanwhile, sea cucumbers are oval-shaped marine products such as plantains and are valued at very high, namely around IDR 180,000 to IDR 1,000,000 per kilogram. (im-ASB. 24'21”).
Approximately 85% of the total Raja Ampat Regency is the sea, especially Misool area [4]. Much of this area is covered by seawater, consequently many native people to have livelihoods as fishermen. Yet when many go to sea, a way is needed to limit society to not do it excessively. The data in the study underlined that the need for regeneration of abundant biodiversity has led to sasi laut. The philosophy merely on try to respecting and asking for permission from the Creator through sasi laut ritual as well as natural sustainability. So, sasi laut is also aimed at preserving the seafood, giving time for the seafood to grow larger and the result will be more. (Irsyah/ im-I.14*:21”)

4.2 The concept of Sasi: The ritual

Ritual of sasi laut becomes sign and symbol of the start of the seafaring season in Misool area. The native believes that by performing sasi laut, their marine products will increase as well as prosperity and serenity will always cover them. Therefore, Misool community will not start the activity to go to sea before sasi laut has been performed by traditional/ religion leaders. Sasi laut is divided into two stages, namely ritual of buka sasi laut and ritual of tutup sasi laut. These sasi laut rituals fall into the calendrical rites category. Calendrical rites are periodic and predictable rituals based on weather or air changes, such as agricultural, marine, and other social works [5]. Sasi laut is carried out when the rainy season starts. There is an element of adjustment to weather conditions or seasons in the implementation of the ritual. Typically, the implementation of sasi laut is referring to the lunar calendar system according to the habits of the Misool community. Sasi laut is also a ritual that is strongly associated with agricultural and marine activities.

Sasi laut can also be classified into categories of political rites, rituals constructed, exhibited, and promoted by political institutions, such as kings, states, and village heads. Thus, sasilaut is not merely regarded as calenderical rites, but can also be categorized as politic rites. Further, Ritual of sasi laut can be predicted, precisely when the rainy season arrives. Although frequent weather changes, the rainy season always falls around November each year and sasi laut ritual is also held around November. This calendar is based on the Misool calendar system calculated according to the state or shape of the moon.

In ancient times, long before Islamic values attached to them, the timing of sasi laut was determined by customary leaders themselves, without any intervention from others, even from the government. Customary leaders first interact with gods, while asking the blessing. However, the current schedule of sasi laut adjusted to the rainy season is sometimes uncertain and the time is set unilaterally by the local government. The ritual seems to involving many people, sasilaut ritual and also requires funds that are not small in number, to buy materials, equipment, and ritual needs. The ritual materials and tools used in sasi laut are, among others, sasi rope, colorful flags, drums or tifa (traditional rectangular instruments made of special wood and animal skin), bond-shaped rice, young coconut flowers, coconut water, banana, sticky rice and all kinds of fruits, and others.

All kinds of ritual equipment and materials have different meanings and functions, such as sasi flags, strings, and betel nuts. Flags are symbols of protection against all dangers that are or will threaten the seafood, as well as a symbol of God's protection for the welfare and prosperity of the community. A round sasi rope is used with a length of 5 meters and golden color, while the betel nut is believed to be a sacred plant brought by their parents earlier. In addition, betel leaves become a complementary material must available in the ritual. In addition to the materials and tools that must exist in sasi laut ritual, Misool community also handed out artifacts and ritual attractions as a form of entertainment and tourism for the community [5]. The usual artifacts are human-shaped stone, gold-plated ropes, spear guns, and so on. Whereas one type of ritual attraction that is considered interesting and inviting admiration in the ritual of sasi laut is a trance dance. Artifacts and attractions performed initially have only magical and religious values, but now it can serve as the entertainment and tourism aspect for the newcomers.
4.3 Local Culture and Islamic Acculturation

Sasi laut has existed long ago, no one knows exactly when it was the first time the native performed it. Some said that sasi laut has existed for thousands of years ago, and some said since when native Misool began to go to sea. But there is one thing for sure, namely that sasi laut already existed before Islam entered in Misool area. Sasi laut, before the native accepted Islam, was implemented in order to honor the leaders and God(s) and then also to ask permission to the residents or unseen creatures residing in the area. This ritual was led by the customary heads and all aspects of society were involved in it. They believed that if they have asked for permission when going to sea, they will be protected.

Sasi laut ritual was originally practiced by native Misool who still believed that their creation are gods and everything had to be dedicated to gods. After Islam entered Papua around the 15th century, sasi laut then changed in its designation, process, and function. The point is, in the ancient times sasi laut was addressed to Gods, but after the entry of Islam, sasi laut was addressed to the Almighty, Allah SWT. Then, there were also some changes in the practice of this ritual. In the past, this ritual was supplemented with offerings for the Gods and the sea. Meanwhile, now it only uses a dry wooden tree tied with betel nut with colorful clothes, and a flag to indicate that the ritual has been opened. In addition, the function of sasi laut somehow has been changing. Before Islam came in, there had been pros and cons in the community about the ritual. Islam then came to merging with the marine rituals by straightening and at the same time changing the mindset of the native without attached to any element of polytheism. Changes in mindset merely caused by the level of understanding and knowledge of the public who began to open with issues of difference and tolerance. Thus, Islam entered and instilled Islamic values, such as salawat to Prophet Muhammad SAW, prayer to facilitate good fortune, and prayer for salvation.

In practice, sasi laut ritual at Misool is headed by a Misool tribal chief and is attended also by all administrators of customary institutions, government, and local communities. Yasin Wainsyaf (head of Kampung Fafanlap) recounted that in the implementation of sasi laut several years ago, he came to the ritual venue with the Vice Regent of Raja Ampat and the community, both those who participated and who just came to witnessed the ritual procession. The government and the public must be present because the effects and benefits of sasi laut ritual will return to them in many ways, (im-YW. 4:1’). When the sasi laut ritual is performed, the descendants of traditional leaders make contact and direct interaction with God(s), so that they can know all the wishes and desires of God. Before dealing with or interacting with Him, the necessary conditions must be fulfilled, such as offerings of fruits, betel leaves, incense, coconut flowers and leaves, and much more to be provided. All that preparation is for God [5]. The existence of sasi laut in Misool community became a symbol of prosperity for the people. Sasi is considered as one of ritual worship to God, as well as a sign of respect and gratitude of society for the blessings revealed by.

As a form of grateful expression and public thanks to the creator, sasilaut ritual, the preparation of offerings foods and fruits addressed to God(s) who live on land and at sea. This is long before Islam accepted by the native in Misool the sasi performing starts in a specific day according to the nature sign. However, according to Yasin Wainsyaf (head of Misool village) said that sasi laut ritual, after Islam came, is held on Friday, but begins with a joint prayer on Thursday night. After the Maghrib prayer on Thursday night, the drums (Tifa) will be beaten repeatedly as a marker to the community when a joint prayer will be performed. Each family will bring 1 (one) food tray to the mosque or village hall, then hold a prayer together led by the village leader. After that, the whole community will eat together in the mosque. Then on the next day, the ritual sasi laut will be carried out by placing timai on the beach, then praying. After that, everybody allowed to harvest sea resources that had been banned before buka sasi laut, namely bia kapa, lola, natural snail, batu laga, lobster, and sea cucumber. After 6 months, tutup sasi laut will be held, which is around May. Tutup sasi laut is characterized by sticking coconut leaves on the beach. This sasi laut ritual procedure is not directed to gods, but the hope is directed to Allah SWT. ( im-YW.15*:25”)
Furthermore, Abdul Rasyid Wainsyaf stated that the ritual of *buka sasi laut* is marked with betel nut tied with colorful cloth and then planted in. Such a ritual does not contain offerings but is done just by praying together for ease of fortune and for salvation. The changes that occur in *sasi laut* ritual is an acculturation between the culture of Misool community with Islam. Islam entered and changed the mindset of the people, eliminated the things that can cause *shirk*, but did not eliminate the characteristics and the main part of the ritual of *sasi laut*. (im-ARW.17*:27")

5. Conclusion

Misool is an exotic island located in Raja Ampat, West Papua, Indonesia. This area is best known as a tourism destination, it a rich in fishery resources which strongly influence the Socio-economic activities of the naïve Misool. The native was dominated by fishermen with their marine activities. Further, agro-tourism in business scale recently is also developed in Misool since it is one of a series of islands in Raja Ampat the best diving spots in the world. The native with their unique culture was found also attracted the international and local tourist to come and experience the native cultural chronicles. The native hospitality and their culture seems supports the tourism campaign so far. Their unique cultures including *gotong-royong* and welcoming guests which they preserve until now are still inherent in various aspects of community life attract the crowd. The native were remarkable, their habits can be seen in many activities such as in the activities of cleaning the village, processing of agricultural land, customary marriage party, circumcision, including their famous marine ritual *Sasi* which they held every year.

Misool community seems still strongly holding cultures they have, including *sasi laut*. *Sasi laut* is a ritual performed by Misool community as a sign to start and stop harvesting the specific sea resources. Ritual of *sasi laut* in Misool has existed long ago, even before Islam entered in Misool area. The need for regeneration of abundant biodiversity led to this *sasi laut* ritual. In addition, respecting and asking permission from the Creator is a philosophy of this marine ritual. As for some of the seafood referred to in this ritual are *bia kapa*, *lola*, natural snail, *batu laga*, lobster and sea cucumber.

*Sasi laut* before the coming of Islam was performed in order to respect their leaders and their Gods. After Islam entered Papua around the 15th century, *sasi laut* then changed in "designation" and "process", where in the ancient times *sasi laut* was addressed to Gods, then it changed to address to the Almighty, Allah SWT. Further, some changes in the practice of this ritual. In the past, it was supplemented with offerings for the Gods and the sea, nowadays, it only uses a dry wooden tree tied with betel nut and colorful cloth, and a flag to indicate that the *sasi laut* has been opened.

Moreover, instilled Islamic rituals and values, such as salawat to Prophet Muhammad SAW, prayer facilitate good fortune, and prayer for salvation. The ritual was found no longer containing offerings and sacrifice but is done just by praying together for ease of fortune and for salvation. The changes that occur in *sasi laut* ritual is an acculturation between the culture of Misool community with Islam. The acculturation between the culture of Islam runs smoothly in changing the native mindset to eliminate the things that can cause syirik, however it does not eliminate the characteristics and the main part of the *sasi laut*.

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