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The Culture of *Sasi* In Babar Islands: Traditional and Church Wisdom

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Abstract

Sasi is a culture that is still practiced and preserved in Maluku province in general and in Babar islands in particular until today. *Sasi* is a form of prevention of taking natural resources both land and sea within a certain period to let them grow and develop. The Babar islands are known for two types of *Sasi*, the traditional and the church. Currently, the implementation of *Sasi* is more dominated by the church – the traditional *Sasi* is rarely implemented. *Sasi* provides some benefits both to the environment and community. These benefits include preserved natural resources before harvest, economy increase, public appreciation encouragement, build-up social interaction, and prevention of theft. The long-term application of *Sasi* consistently will develop positive values of each member in the community, such as (1) appreciation to the environment, (2) devoted to custom rules, and (3) intimacy and mutual share.

Keywords: *Sasi*, Babar Islands, Long-term application, Benefit.

The invented contribution: The benefits and long-term application of both traditional and church *Sasi* in small islands such as Babar islands.

ARTICLES**I. INTRODUCTION**

Customary international laws in a big number of small islands recently have received incredible attention [1] that was very closely associated with *Sasi* culture in Aru islands region of Maluku province. Current cultural and educational development system [2-18] using local wisdom deep research in Babar islands [2] have made a progress in developing local people in small islands like areas.

Cultural experiences and its development during history have shaped the current Indonesian culture [9-10]. Culture plays

important roles in our lives like education, consolidator, identity, entertainment, and many more.

A universal culture that is defined as emotional or social intelligence, as well as spiritual reflected in local cultural practices in both oral and written forms of knowledge and behavior is called local wisdom. It is built from generation to generation as a solution to every problem. The principal values in local wisdom have become a reference for the local community [7].

Babar Islands is rich with local wisdom which grows and becomes the characteristics of the community. They are (1) greetings, (2) Nyekora or Narera, (3) Neyolya and Nekoila, (4) Kalwedo, (5) Twa-Roona, (6) Nweleya, (7)

Sasi, (8) Barter, (9) Sopi as custom item, (10) Bamei and Balobe, (11) Niolilieta, (12) traditional songs, (13) tiarka (diarka), (14) traditional games, (15) wedding ritual, (16) traditional clothes, (17) helping out culture, etc [15,16].

Sasi, a typical culture of Maluku and Babar islands relates to the preservation of the environment and natural resources that are still well-preserved until today. *Sasi* has become one of the local wisdom in sustaining land and sea resources which are managed by traditional norms. Some traditional rituals must be done either in determining the opening and closing *Sasi*, the harvest, and penalty for the violator. *Lola* (a kind of local sea shell), *Taripang* (sea cucumber), *Batulaga*, and coconuts are *Sasi* items in Babar islands. This article will further discuss the implementation of the *Sasi* culture in Babar islands.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. According to Creswell's opinion [4], this research describes respondents' experiences and opinions about *Sasi*. The respondents are custom figures and community leaders in Babar Island who experience and practice *Sasi* to get strong understanding and perception about *Sasi* itself.

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III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Sasi* culture in Babar Island

Sasi is local wisdom that protects the sustainability of natural resources. There is a debate about the original word of *Sasi*. It is seen as a legal system [11] where it is one of the social resources or social capital of Maluku to create social harmony [12]. During *Sasi*, the people are forbidden to collect certain fruits [8] and take the items from the sea for a certain period determined by the government [3].

Sasi is well-known and applied in the daily life of Maluku and Southwest Maluku Regency. Nobody knows exactly when *Sasi* was practiced in Babar island. The people believe that it has been performed by their ancestors. In Southwest regency, *Sasi* is known by several terms. People in Kisar island call it *Lu Ira* (*Woirata*) and *Hewere* (*Meher*), *Nyertuyarna* in Romang Island, *Matoa* in Luang and Sermata islands, *Ner'ti*, in Babar and Wetang islands, and *Weira* in Masela island [13].

The following is the information from the interview with the community leaders in Babar island:

"*Sasi* or known as *Ner'ti* in west Babar is still existed and prevents taking farming and sea products in a certain period. It can be done based on the request of a family or clan and state government decision. The family request can do *Sasi* for their farming product (i.e. coconut). *Sasi* which is based on the demand of the clan is carried out in the possession of their clan. *Sasi* which is based on the state government's decision is done by natural results in territories ruled by the state. *Sasi* increases the economic for the villagers or the

landlords and keeps the natural resources from extinction.

(Konny Mosse, a custom figure of Tapa village, Babar Island)

“*Sasi* attaches all the people in Babar island to prevent them from taking the natural resources during *Sasi* period. In Wetang, the traditional *Sasi* is conducted in Lakpona by the customs figure in traditional ways while church *Sasi* is done at church during the service leads by the pastor.”

(Yan Watimry, a custom figure in Wetang Island)

“*Sasi* (including in Luang and Sermatang) is a prohibition against the retrieval of goods (in farms or territories) in a particular period by the owner or by the state (village). It is done based on the request of an individual or the landlords. It is also can be done based on people initiative over the natural resources own by the village. Traditional and Church *Sasi* are most known by the people in Luang and Sermatang. The traditional *Sasi* is held in an old house of the head of the clan if they do *Sasi* for the garden or land. On the other hand, *Sasi* on the villagers’ initiative is conducted at the village hall by custom figures. The church *Sasi* is done at church through prayer request of an individual or family for their possession that is going to be *Sasi*.”

(Adolf Saleky, a community leader from Luang Island)

“*Sasi* is a culture that is still practiced in Dawelor, Dawera. It is a protection to the crops and seafood to be harvested at the

right time. *Sasi* is also intended to protect the plantation (coconut, orange, cassava, corn, etc) or seafood (Lola, Batulaga, Teripang, etc) from the unrighteous. Church *Sasi* is only applied in this village.”

(Saul Kapressy, a community leader from Dawelor Dawera)

“*Sasi* is a prohibition form of taking yields and seafood in a certain period as needed. It also protects the outcome of *Sasi*. Church *Sasi* is the only who applied and practiced in Masela island while traditional *Sasi* is no longer practiced. The interesting thing is, although *Sasi* Meti is done in a church way, the symbol of the traditional *Sasi* which is coconut leaves settled in the middle of Meti is used. *Sasi* has two principal values: (1) protects the rights of farm owners or landlords and (2) protects the natural resources to grow well before harvest.”

(Rev. V. Untailawan, a community leader from Masela Island)

From the explanation above, it is clear that *Sasi* is known as a prohibition from taking particular natural resources in a certain period. It is done by demand of an individual, a family, a clan, or a village toward their possessions. In Babar islands, *Sasi* which based on an individual, family, or a clan request, will be done toward their farming products such as coconut, orange, etc. *Sasi* is also done on Meti for the family land border. The village also can do *Sasi* for certain products in the possession of the village for example sea products, such as Taripang, Lola, Batu Laga, and so forth.

There are two types of *Sasi* in Babar islands, traditional *Sasi* and church *Sasi*.

Traditional *Sasi* is done traditionally while church *Sasi* is done during the Sunday worship at church. Currently, *Sasi* is dominated by church although there are still families or villages that carried out traditional *Sasi*. Both *Sasi* is done in two phases. First, closing *Sasi*, a ritual to declare the prohibition of taking products in *Sasi* Area. Second, opening *Sasi* to announce that the products are ready for harvest.

Moreover, there are two ways to inform the public regarding the existence of *Sasi*. In the traditional *Sasi*, the announcement of *Sasi* on-farm or land is be delivered orally by Marinyo (a messenger) during the event, then put the “coconut leaves” as the symbol of the *Sasi* process in *Sasi* area.

Figure 1. The Sign of Traditional *Sasi*.

In church *Sasi*, the information is delivered through church news during Sunday worship at church. Later, after church, the owner of the farm or landlord puts the board written “the Church *Sasi*” as an announcement to the public that the area is doing *Sasi*.

Figure 2. The Sign of Church *Sasi*.

Sasi is a system that prevents people to take or utilize certain resources at a particular time. *Sasi* provides several benefits for individuals, families, and villages. They are [13, 17]:

1. To secure natural resources preservation. Taking natural resources without restriction will result in extinction. Taking *Teripang* and *Lola* at the shore and in the ocean at a certain area without control leads to taking all the size which are not ready for harvest. It decreases the numbers of *Teripang* and *Lola* and will be extinct in a certain time. *Sasi* allows natural resources to remain preserved before being harvested, to grow optimally, remain sustainable, and balance the ecosystem.
2. To increase community income. The system of *Sasi* contributes to the production or availability of such resources so it can provide sustainable economic impact on the

- owner or the community. It helps the resources to grow ideally to have better size and quality in the harvest and bring high economic impact to the community.
3. The existence of *Sasi* will impact the community appreciation to the environment. Natural resources and the environment will be maintained and preserved by the time for the opening *Sasi*.
 4. To increase interaction and social relations among people. During the opening of *Sasi*, when the harvest is abundant, the owner needs people to help him out. The interaction and social relation will be more developed between the owner and the surroundings. In *Sasi* Meti done by a family, people are even invited to join and take part in the harvest after the opening. The social relationship becomes closer as it brings joy to all who involved in that event.
 5. To prevent taking the natural resources and sea product from the theft. The Babar people believe that those who take the farm or seafood products who are being *Sasi* will be punished by the Almighty.

In *Sasi* system, some rules bind the people, the owner or products that are being *Sasi*. The rule prevents taking the products during *Sasi*. During the closing, the people are forbidden to take or consume natural resources and will be punished if breaking the rule. The penalty in Babar island is varied according to the following explanation from the respondents.

“Any break of *Sasi*, in taking results on-farm or plantation area will be penalized. The penalty will be set by the customary elders with payment using Basta cloth, gold, or animals.”

(Y. M, custom figure of Wetang Island)

“During traditional *Sasi* in Luang Sermatang, the prayer by customary elders contains punishments to those who break the *Sasi* by mentioning their names in the prayer. For example, there will be stomachache, blood vomiting, *etc* for those who steal the *Sasi* products. If the sea products are stolen, then they will have an accident in the sea. If these penalties are experienced, they must immediately encounter with the owner or lawyer, apologize, and do a customary ritual to seek forgiveness.”

(A. S, Luang Island community figure)

“Anyone who takes the farm or sea products which are being *Sasi* will be fined. If someone takes them secretly, it will be announced in the news on Sunday service at church and regular service. If someone takes and doesn't confess, therefore he will be prayer request of the assembly of the congregation.”

(S. K, a community leader of Dawelor Dawera)

3.2. The Procedure and *Sasi* Ritual in Babar Island

3.2.1. The Ritual of Traditional *Sasi*

Closing *Sasi* Ceremony

Traditional *Sasi* is done based on the agreement of the villagers (*lek*). It is started with a preparation ritual where all the villagers are in a traditional house (in Babar island, Wetang and Dawera Dawelor which is called *Lakpona*, in Masela island it is called *Im*). The custom elderly prepares all the offerings that will be presented. They are:

- (1) *Sopi* poured in shell
- (2) A set of betel and betel nut
- (3) A roll of tobacco.

All the materials are put into *Nyiru* (a flat round container to put the groceries) while saying the spell in their language (regarded as prayer), the customary chairman presents it to the spirits of ancestors and pleads that they should keep the sea products from those who would take or damage the sea.

After all the materials are complete, the chairman and all the villagers go to the shore to do worship ritual. The chairman drinks some of *Sopi* from the shell and pours the rest into the sea. Next, he throws one by one of the things in the *Nyiru*. This ritual of feeding and drinking the ancestors is believed as a pledge that the ancestors receive it and will take care of the sea products who have been kept.

After the *Sasi Meti* and Coconut, the area is marked with coconut leaves tied to a small tree and plugged in the middle of the coconut area. Meanwhile, the mark of *Sasi Meti* is small wooden trees or small tree stalks or coconut leaves tied to wood and plugged in the middle of *Meti*.

The materials of closing *Sasi* ritual in Luang and Sermatang islands are quite different from other villages in Babar islands. This is based on respondents' explanation as follows:

There are three main materials for doing *Sasi* of plantation products: *Sopi*, betel nut, and red ginger. *Sopi* is used in the ritual. Before it starts, the chairman lifts a glass of *Sopi* by explaining the purpose of the ritual and then drink it. After that, pass it to all who are involved in the ritual as a bound of fraternity and joint commitment. He then says the

customary prayer. The process is ended by planting the red ginger in the corner of the plantation area and putting betel nut in the middle. Furthermore, the sign of "coconut leaf" is planted in the *Sasi* of the plantation.

If *Meti* and sea territory are in *Sasi*, the materials used are *sopi* and black stone. When the procession is done, the black stone is placed in the area of *Meti* where the "coconut leaf" is plugged as a sign that the *Meti* and the land area in the *Sasi*.

(A. S, Luang Island community figure)

The opening ceremony of *Sasi*

The culmination of the opening ceremony of *Sasi* is determined in two ways that follow the agreed time or adjust the sea products. Besides, the traditional *Sasi* can be considered complete and the result can be harvested if there is an urgent need to be addressed immediately. During the emergency, the chairman will hold a discussion to agree on the opening of customs clearance without violating the rules.

The opening ceremony begins with gathering all the people in *Lakpona*. Then, the chairman takes all the materials provided:

- (1) *Sopi* poured in the shell
- (2) A set of betel and areca nut
- (3) One-roll tobacco

While pronouncing spells in their language, the chairman and the people go to **the low tide area (*meti*)**. Next, he takes *sopi* and says the spells then drinks some of it and pour the rest of it into the water and follow by the things in *nyiru*. These things are the offerings for the ancestors who have kept and preserved the sea products during the traditional *Sasi* [17].

3.2.2. The Church Sasi Ritual

The Closing Ceremony of Sasi

The development of Christianity in Babar Island affects the way people do *Sasi*. It is done in a church way. The owner of the coconut area informs the location of doing *Sasi* to the leader of the church who will lead the procession. At Sunday worship, the assembly of the Church will inform the congregation and confirm it by prayer lead by the priest. Later, the owner of *Meti* or plantation area puts a sign of *Sasi* at the location, so that villagers and other citizens know and obey. As an offering of the church, the owner of a *meti* or an area of coconuts includes a certain amount of money in the offering box.

The Opening Ceremony of Sasi

The opening process is similar to the closing where the owner reports the leader of the church that the farm or garden or area of *Sasi* is ready to open and harvest. On Sunday service, the assembly informs through the church news and the priest will deliver the opening prayer. After church, the owner removes the sign and continue to do the harvest.

3.2.3. The Values of Sasi Culture in Babar Island

Respect the environment

The efforts to preserve the natural resources indicate that human needs the environment. The prohibition to take the plantation products and sea products in a certain period is a way of controlling and preserve the natural resources as well as a smart way in respecting the nature as a living and allow them to grow [13]. In other words, *Sasi* allows people not to behave randomly but builds a harmonious relationship with the natural environment which is also part

of God's creature. Therefore, the human cannot live alone and needs other creatures to sustain life. The balance of the environment will be disrupted if living creatures damage one another. However, the community should treat nature properly and wisely. A great respect for nature that has contributed hospitalities to Southwest Maluku society is shown by the custom leaders, the heads of villages, church leaders, the rich, and the next generation with an intention of understanding the existence of natural environment as a part of their lives and transmit it to the people around them [15].

Obey the traditional rules

Sasi is a traditional rule that sets the connection between human and nature or human and human. As a traditional rule, some requirements have been made and agreed between the custom leaders, church, and the community. The agreements should be maintained and implemented by people without custom institution guidance. The people understand not to take the result of *Sasi* from the beginning until the end of *Sasi* procession. This indicates that the people in Babar island respect and obey the rules in doing *Sasi*. They believe that what has been entwined traditionally or in a Christian way has the power to weigh down those who break it [13].

The obedience of Babar island community toward the rules and the penalty of *Sasi* is not happening in its way. Many people have felt the impact they received if they took the coconut or sea product during *Sasi*. It indirectly becomes a lesson for those who follow the rules. This attitude gradually becomes a character of society. This value leads people to obey and follow every rule.

Togetherness and Mutual Sharing.

Sasi done by a family or a clan is opened, all the people in that village or the neighboring village are given a chance to take the products in *Sasi* area. The traditional law of Maluku island defined the area of *Meti* is from shore until the limit of adult diving skill. When *Sasi* is opened for taking fish, shrimp, octopus, and others similar to them, the products taken belong to the person who acquired it. However, if the products are *Lola*, *Batulaga*, and *Teripang* which have economic value, the products are divided into two, 50% for the people who took and 50% for the owner of *Sasi*. This is a form of life sharing in togetherness.

IV. CONCLUSION

Sasi is a prohibition to harvest certain resources (marine or land) in a certain period. *Sasi* aims to manage the result of planting and fishing in a certain territory, either yard or plantation area which gets the same treatment. The traditional laws are effective and make the people are not daring to take the results before time. The existence of *Sasi* brings a better quality of the ecosystem and natural resources. The *Sasi* products are well-preserved. *Sasi* brings a positive view for the people in Babar islands.

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare that they have no conflicts in all of their scientific collaboration.

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