



FACULTY OF EDUCATION & GRADUATE SCHOOL
YOGYAKARTA STATE UNIVERSITY, INDONESIA

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SASI CULTURE: AN EFFORT TO MAINTENANCE PRESERVING MOTHER EARTH A Cultural Approach on Christian Religious Education to Preserve Mother Earth in Maluku

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1. Introduction

The Moluccan tradition like 'sasi' is one of the socio-religious life aspects which has undergone major change due to cultural cocountering. Historically showed that the Europeans (Dutch) culture and Christianity had constructed a hegemony in almost every local culture in the Moluccas, including its values and religions. Most Moluccans has accepted Christianity and European culture as their new religion and culture. The consequence is the cultural change, to extend of extinction. This is observable in sasi tradition, which had been present in Moluccan society to prevent environmental crisis, which is now changed to Christianity style according to the Bible. This is caused by they belief that the sasi tradition has magical elements which is inappropriate according to Christianity.

The consequence of this cultural change is that Moluccan Christians now use biblical approach as a way to resolve environmental problem, for example using Genesis 1:28 and also some other chapters as preaches at church and lessons at school as an approach to resolve environmental problems. However, these approaches has not made any change to the environmental problems faced in Maluku. The crisis incidents are still facing an incline, inland or offshore, has cause by illegal logging, illegal fishing, new buildings, for capitalism etc.

According to some numbers in the Ministry of Environment, only about 43% of rainforests in the Moluccas survive out of 5,9 million ha.¹ The damage is caused by illegal logging, shifting agriculture, mining, ozon use, or capitalism, which is manifested as continuous deforestation, and resulting in environmental damage, as well as a decline in water quality. The Moluccan sea of an area of 658.294,69 km² has natural resources for example seaweed, fishes, corals, clams, pearl, mangrove. These now have become endangered local asset as the result of extraction using explosives which caused decline in seawater quality and ecosystem damage in shore area, a reduce in biodiversity and energy supply (Far-Far, 2005).

As a result from the aforementioned cases, the Indonesian government published the Act. No 23 year 1997 about environmental management to establish an environment-based development for Indonesia. Based on this act, the government also created a masterplan for environmental building in the Moluccas for twenty years (2000-2025), as written in basic Moluccan development, one is to preserve the environment to prevent damage and to continue supporting humanity from one generation to another (Kenbauw, 2004: 1).

The effort to resolve environmental crisis in the Moluccas has gained local government support, and the locals have revived the 'sasi' tradition as one of strategic way to manage environmental crisis. The reason behind is that Moluccans have already known a social code from long time to manage environment known as 'sasi' practise, which was used in the past as a code for the inhabitants and gave positive results in environmental and natural resource protection. The Moluccans have respect for the tradition because it is considered to have religious and spiritual force, which will give goodness to anyone with loyalty and piety, and punishment (illness, death) to anyone going against it. It shows that tradition is one of the most important in Moluccas, which is acting as an act, norms and law in ordering the society (Colley, 1987: 106). Thus tradition as an important meaning in socio-religious and administrative life in the Moluccas.

One of the factors in solving environmental crisis is education, both formal and informal. The formal education is one of the nation's principle to build an educated society. Educated society also takes part in environmental problems, hence the society should get information and education about environmental crisis. Thus educational institution has a strategic role as a media of communication and education for the society about environmental problems, especially for young students. When schools act as a media, it would be interesting to see the teaching of religion. Religious education is a part of the whole learning process at school intending to help students building their characters and understanding their relations to their Creator, humanity, and nature.

In religious education in this case, the Christianity which deals with the relation of humans with the nature, so, the environmental crisis

¹ The Data was collected from the Environmental Ministry data base 2014. p.1

is an important topic in religious teaching in the Moluccas. But the implementation of the curriculum about nature always refers to biblical values, which is rich in western theology and culture, without taking into accounts the Moluccan cultural dimension, which has positive and normative cultural value and was once a normative standard in Moluccas before the arrival of Christianity. These values is inappropriate in Christian education as it is considered as taboo.

This study will talk about the sasi tradition as an academic discourse and offer it to be a part of the Christian religious education as an alternative way to solve the problem of human responsibility to the nature. Thus, the problems discussed in this paper relates strongly with religious values in the sasi tradition, including the ritual process and its symbol it would be a part of Christian Religious education.

2. The Meaning of Sasi

"Sasi" is not considered as a forbidden or permanent imperative word, but only a temporary prohibition. According to Lokollo, 'sasi' had caused a polemic in literature among Dutch writers who gave a law meaning in 'sasi' practise. Residen Riedel stated that 'sasi' comes from the word 'sanction' (penalties). Furthermore, Lokkolo said that the word 'sasi' is older than the Malay language in the Moluccas.² 'Sasi' in Indonesian dictionary means *'sanksi or sanction/penalties*. Moelino dkk: 1988).

'Sasi' means prohibition, and it means a traditional rule accepted by the Moluccans to preserve the environment. Thus 'sasi' could be interpreted as traditional rule among the Moluccans in preserving the mother earth. Even though it is known by different names in each region in the Moluccas, the word 'sasi' already exists since long time ago and still existing, preserved by one generation to another until today, even it was prohibited during colonialism and christianity times. Along with history, 'sasi' keeps evolving together with other social rules in order to protect the environment (Sahasilawane, 2004: 1).

The 'sasi' tradition is a prohibition in which there is a confession of the Moluccans of the God's protection. Damamain: 1997: 223). Cooley stated that 'sasi' acts as a shield for the village to keep the food supply safe, based on the knowledge of the food chain in land and sea. According to history, 'sasi' contradicts the common belief in society that the natural resources belong to all (Colley: 1961). When a system of region near the shore is

established, the rule of property changed. The relation between one and its property is a religious one rather than economic, which means that the owner should be responsible to protect his belongings as personal ones. Thus, some specific signs are made and placed to the belongings to sign its owner. The signs could be some plant or wood, shaped as a symbol.

3. Sasi Tradition among Moluccans

The 'sasi' tradition practised in the Moluccas is the 'state sasi' kewang (forest patrol). The 'state sasi' or 'kewang sasi' is initiated by the government. The night before 'sasi', all the 'kewang' officers and head gather at the King's place in traditional clothes. The 'kewang' came to 'baileo'³ to take a vow. As the kewang head and officers arrive in "Baileo", they surround 'batu pamali'(sacred stone)⁴. The head of 'kewang' (Police forestry) and the local spokes person which called 'maweng (traditional priest) sit in the center the baileo. The maweng and kewang lead a mass prayer whilst kneeling on the 'batupamali' which looks like a table (Lahbukay dkk:) The prayer is recited in local language, for example in the middle Moluccas, the 'sasi' prayer is therefore;

Great God, in the of heaven and earth, the sun and the moon, the morning and the evening star, give us fish, fruits, animal, and all good things. Deliver us from all that is evil, from serpents, from illnesses and from the like (Cooley, 1961: 274).

This prayer means to worship God who has provided the fish, fruits, animals and all the good things. This is a media for the Moluccans to exercise their acknowledgement of the existence of God and the authority and deity in their life.

This also explains that the Moluccans regards God in their cultural perspective as their saviour and protector from the evil surrounding them. Hence the Moluccans already know the concept of God even before Christianity and other religions came to them (Bourdieu, 1983:).⁵ In other words since along time ago Mollucan People has been the system of believe before the Christianity came to

² J Lokkolo, *Hukum Sasi di Maluku Suatu Potret Bina mulia Pedesaan yang dicari oleh Pemerintah*, Disampaikan pada Disnatalies ke 25 UNPATTI.

³Baileo is traditional house for gathering in the tribe. Baileo is also a symbol of power for the Moluccans. Every village in the Moluccas has baileo where tribunal events are being held at. Baileo also has sacred value in the tradition.

⁴BatuPamale is a sacred table-shaped altar made of stone.

⁵The statement is following the argument of Cooley in His dissertation on the title Altar and Throne, where in it his mention about the indigenous religion to express the traditional culture of Molucan society.

Mollucas. This is in line with Geertz' concept of religion where he says; religion is a system symbol which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, 1973).

According to Geertz, the aforementioned prayer is a way of communication between human and God through the 'sasi' tradition as a representation of vertical relation to God. Like Geertz, Sasi also can be seen by Bourdieu perspective as the cultural symbolic having the cultural stronger for Mollucan people preserving the environmental from the crisis. Meanwhile, by Bourdieu perspective the environmental crisis in Mollucas can be said as a field (cf. Bourdieu, 1983). The environmental crisis in Mollucas as field needed support of the Mollucan people to change the crisis and sasi as cultural symbolic is potential to support it, because in the Mollucan cultural tradition, sasi have the strengthening to bound the Mollucan ancestor as the creator and they descendant.

The strengthening of the sasi can be seen by the statement after the prayer which is spoke according to local language like:

Silo mese! Silo mese tupalouhaha, silo amamukuil hala lae. Hala amamukuil silta tuli, silta wawan.

'Sasi is strong and adat law is higher than everything. 'Sasi is from one end of the vilage to the other, from land into the sea'

The strong of sasi like the statement above has describing the universal values for Mollucan people. It is the same with Bourdieu opinion about Doxa. Bourdieu said that Doxa is the particular truth has forced to be universal truth (Jenkins, 1992). Sasi as Doxa has functionist to bound the Mollucan people and force them to obey for the sasi practice in their live. As the Doxa, sasi Statement need the legalizing to legitimate sasi as symbolic power has authority. The process of legalizing has showed by "kewang" (the forest police) thumps his feet three times in the center of baileo, marking the legitimacy of sasi. This is a symbolistic act exerted by the council of the tribe to announce the existence of human and cosmical structure (Eliade, 1974: 63). The ceremony conducted in the center of the baileo as a symbolical sacred region announces the divine or cosmic reality, to bond a relationship between human and divinity (Eliade, 1974: 63). This is bond strengthens the 'sasi'

The kewang then continues he practise by sounding the 'tahuri' (musical instrument from

snail) seven times at the sacred stone, then they head to the roads agreed upon. They sound the Tahuri successively before the 'sasi' is read:⁷

The 'sasi' is strong with our ancestors, All what is in the sea is covered as a sign that All in the sea and inland. Could not be extracted in a specific amount of time.

This statement shows that 'sasi' has a power and legitimacy from the custom law. Thus 'sasi' is legit to be practised. This statement also explains the area of 'sasi' which consist of the sea and the land. After reciting the 'sasi', the spoke person thumps his feet three times to the ground around the baileo as a symbol that 'sasi' is on from that on. The act of thumping the feet three times to the ground has a symbolical meaning that there is a cosmological sense through culture as a form of the union of human existence and the (Alliade), 1974: 63).

The 'sasi' recited loudly for the society to know and ends with a bold warning to the agreed sasi law as a common norms. The warning is:⁸

Who throws a stone would get it back upon him, who defy the rule, the rule will defy him.

The bold warning at the end of the 'sasi' reminds the Moluccans to the effect of the authority of the 'sasi'. The statement is a consequence to everyone who is not obeying 'sasi' rule. In other words, this is a metaphors to remind the Moluccans about the power of adat rule. The statement above also to describe the strengthening of sasi as doxa, so that, the people must be obey and doing well sasi practice, because the consequence of disobedience its hard like the statement above which is showed by illness or dead.

After finishing, all the kewang go back to the place of the head kewang and do prayers before going back home. The morning after, each kewang departs to the forest to plant 'sasi' signs. These signs are placed on the most passed roads. The plants planted with 'sasi' signs are usually coconuts, canary, pala, snakefruit, etc. Everything has a 'sasi' sign according to the local characteristics. These signs are called 'matakao' in middle Moluccan language. 'Matakao' has various forms, for example the Nollots use nine pieces of coconut leaves, according to their namely 'Patsiwa'.⁹ After the ceremony, the kewangs also use 'kewang' proof: wearing a red handkerchief tied on the head and carrying 'tahuri' while on duty on 'sasi' area.

⁷ Interview Report with Traditional leader, in Mollucas, January 2015.

⁸ Interview report with Traditional leader, in Mollucas February 2015.

⁹ Patsiwa in Central Moluccan language is nine group and it is close connecting with the forming of traditionally village process in archais period.

⁶ Interview report with the traditional leader in Mollucas, January, 2015.

4. Sasi As a Law To Protect The Environment

'Sasi' which has a meaning of 'sanction' is a traditional law applied by the Moluccans from long time ago until present day to protect the environment. Zeemmer (1995) said that the 'sasi' rules are mostly concerning on bordering the personages allowed to enter a restricted zone, which is spiritually bordered. Benda and Backman, et al (1995) stated that the main idea of the prohibition of extracting natural resources is to keep the balance of the nature, human and the spiritual universe, whereas inobedience would result in spiritual and social punishment.

When someone breaks the 'sasi' law and spotted by a 'kewang', kewang will give him punishment. Besides the spiritual punishment which manifest as illness or death, other social punishment is also given, for example to pay some fines or physical punishment (work) for two weeks. The 'sasi' punishment is executed periodically to educate the society about keeping and protecting the environment which should be passed to the next generation. Thus practising 'sasi' is essential for the Moluccans because it has educational value to them.

5. Benefits of Sasi and 'Sasi' punishment.

The benefits of 'sasi' are:

1. All the plants (fruits, sea creatures, etc) could give optimum result with high quality because it is extracted at a given time. The sea creatures could also still procreate to revitalize its life chain.
2. Prevent or reduce thievery inland or at sea.
3. Respect among personnel towards the environment while trying to protect and cherish it.
4. As a neuter agent and reduce conflicts on local food supplies.

The substantial values from 'sasi' are:

1. One's legal right to extract natural resources
 - a. Respect one's right to prevent theft.
 - b. Protecting the environment for commonwealth.
 - c. Urge to grow plants and promote revitalization to the environment.
 - d. Prevent conflicts among ethnics.

Similar to other customs, an offense to the rule would result in a punishment. When a violation occurs, the 'kewang' would act as a judge and give punishment. According to the 'kewang's observation, the offender would be given punishment based on the local or adat law, usually in the form of paying fine or social work like cleaning the traditional houses or church. The execution of 'sasi' violation is held periodically every two weeks as a ceremony to protect the

environment from further destruction. Besides, it is also to educate the society to be more aware of the environment as a legacy to the next generation.

Besides the described punishment, there are also other means of punishment, which is spiritual punishment coming from the spirit of the ancestors. The punishment manifest as an illness or death. This means that the Moluccans believe that if someone is sick or die then a violation to the nature had been committed. Hence it is very rare to find a 'sasi' violation. If there is one, then it would be triggered by factors such as poverty, laziness, or the immensity of 'sasi'-protected area which results in the limited patrol area or time for the 'kewang'.

6. Moluccans and Christian Religious Education

The Moluccans who practise 'sasi' are christians, and this is an undeniable fact. The Moluccans have already known Christianity since the 16th century when the Dutch came around 1605-1949 (Colley, 1987: 106). This brings a heavy influence to the society as it indicates that the indigeneous tradition is not the only rule applied but also religion law. Hence a noted Christian scholar said that Christianity in the Moluccas is like 'kue lapis' or layered cake.¹⁰ This metaphors is used to illustrate the religion in Moluccas as it is a combination of indigeneous ethnic religion and the modern christianity.

In order to protect the nature, not only the 'state sasi' apply but also the religion, which exist in the 'biblical perspective'. Contradictory to the facts mentioned above, the religion has major role in forming Moluccan personality, but on the other hand, as a traditional Moluccan society, they do not want that their tradition or legacy be forgotten, even when Christianity came to the Moluccas, traditional law is considered as taboo. The missionaries' belief that 'sasi' is a taboo thing resulted in denial towards any indigeneous tradition. The Christian missionaries has showing their religious doctrine as the *doxa*, in that case, the concept of 'taboo' related to "sasi" is implementation of the practical *doxa* in the Christian religious practices, even though the sasi practice having the values to protect the nature from the environmental damage, keeping the harvest (forest and sea) from the thief, but it was rejected by the Christian doctrine.

The impact of the fact above, Indonesia national curriculum for Christian religious education talks about the relationship between human and nature and how they do to protect it from the damage, it was not using the cultural

¹⁰ This statement comes from Dr. Piet Tanamal, a lecturer of History of the Church and Islam in Faculty of Theology, Universitas Kristen Indonesia Maluku.

symbolic like *sasi* as the effort to protect it but using the teaching material concerns on the biblical perspective of what it means by Genesis 1: 28, (Imamat 25: 1-22) as a source to teach human culture to preserving mother earth. As a result, 'culture' in the Moluccas eventhough having the positive values within, which were regarded as reference to rule the life including preserving the mother nature is disregarded and discarded as teaching material at schools. In the teaching process, the teachers show the students about human responsibility to protect the nature from destruction and crisis, and how to solve these problems by curriculum based on biblical using, without combining or elaborating with traditional culture to explain human responsibility to the earth as a whole.¹¹ In my opinion, the combination of the biblical approach and the traditional culture would be important and benefit the teachers in implementing the Christian religious education curriculum at school to students, which are mainly Moluccans who are familiar with the local tradition. Besides, the implementation of Moluccan-based curriculum would help students to understand their culture and identity.

Hence the local culture-based christian education in the Moluccas would be a connecting link between religion and culture which was separated, to the extend of alienating of Moluccan tradition. Even the missionarists and theological system in the Moluccas banned the local culture and tradition, affecting the Christian education curriculum, the Moluccans themselves believe that the tradition, religion, ancestors and God have power and authority in ruling the human life and nature as a whole. The Moluccans realize that the culture and tradition are created by humans or ancestors by the divine intervention from God, hence 'sasi' as one of the cultural practise should be preserved from one generation to another. Hence forth, the 'sasi' tradition is one of God's will as a creator of the universe and man should abide. This is a solution as an effort of the Moluccans to preserve their cultural heritage created by their ancestors while at the same time acknowledging that 'sasi' as an expression of belief to God as a creator. This is an indication of a transformation that a culture should not be regarded as a taboo, but there are positive and constructive values as ethos and pathos in every single life aspects in the Moluccas. This is an illustration of Moluccans characteristics' view on the merge between the culture and religion where the both of them are used as a way of God as a savior of the universe.

I believe that the implementation of Christian religious education curriculum is connected to the relation between man and the nature, therefore it

should consider the traditional values such as 'sasi'. The 'sasi' tradition together with the ethics and norms could contribute to the implementation of Christian religious education curriculum. There is element of vertical relation between man and God inside the prayers included in the practice, also acknowledgement of God's deity as a creator, savior and protector from danger. The 'sasi' tradition teaches people to worship and obey to God. The horizontal relation expressed in 'sasi' are for example; respecting other's right, preventing theft, preserving the nature, preventing internal and external conflict.

The implementation of christian education in man's responsibility towards nature could adopt the values in, 'sasi' and elaborate it with biblical-based christianity values. In other words, teachers should consider a process of contextualization where a dialectics between the bible and the culture is formed. The bible itself is created based on men's experience and cultur, which is then expressed as a form of belief in God, and how God exist in the universe. In the bible, Israel's ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, including its culture, is a media to represent God's existence. Hence there is no reason to refuse the 'sasi' tradition as a part of theological process in the Moluccas, so the 'sasi' could be used as a teaching material in to explain that God use the ancestors of Moluccans through 'sasi' as a way to protect the nature from destruction.

Dialectica process between the bible and Moluccan culture which appear by Christian religious education curriculum which accommodate both of are as a content of studies at school about human responsibility to the nature. It also can be expressing the moluccan identity on one hand as religious identity and on the other hand as cultural identity. Relating to the dialectica process Bergers said that:

The fundamental dialectic process of society consists of three moment, or steps these are externalization, objectivation and internalization. Only of these three moments are understood together can an empirically adequate view of society be maintained. Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and mental of men. Objectivation is the attainment by the product of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. Internalization is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness (Berger, 1991: 4).

Berger understanding that values and norms as a human produces is a result of spiritual journey of human life. "Sasi" is a media for Moluccan people

¹¹ Interview Report with a Teacher of Christian religious education in Molucas January, 2015.

representing and actualizing their self as cultural society and religiosity by externalization, objectification and internalization. Three of are will be gained in dialectica process which is appears by Christian religious education curriculum at school. It is not only important to teach the student care and responsible for nature but also as the media for them to learn and how to construct identity.

7. Conclusion

After the lengthy explanation on 'sasi', I would like to end the paper by presenting several conclusions and suggestions:

7.1 Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper is:

1. The Moluccans are cultural society, where the cultural values are heritages from the ancestors and need to be preserved for the next generations because it has many ethical and moral values which act as a rule in the social system. Hence tradition doesnot contradict the bible, but the traditional values arevery relevant to the bible.
2. The 'sasi' traditionas a theological facility in the Moluccas. By practicing 'sasi', the Moluccans could run their role as both traditional and religious society in interpreting the great mandate "have power and rule the world" in a reational realization as an implication of God's messenger as a man.
3. The 'sasi' practice as a ritual has two dimentions, one as a cultural preservation and the second as a way to developpeace and order focused on enforcement of one's right of belonging.
4. The 'sasi' tradition in the eyes of the Moluccans is an effort to make good and fair use of the nature rationally and responsibly. Traditional society in the Moluccas believe that God has created the Earth and the sky, hence the Earth belongs to Him. TheEarth belongs to God and is under His power, deity, and protection.
5. The Moluccans realize that they are destined to live in the Moluccas with the tradition and heritage from their ancestors which is under God's control. The 'sasi' is symbolization of the Moluccas where culture and tradition is a way to express belief of God's deity, henceforth culture and tradition must be preserved.
6. The Christian education is orientated to theological concept from the western theology, hence the local culture is considered as taboo and receives no place in Christian education.

7.2 Suggestions

According to the conclusions, I would like to formulate several suggestions:

1. Sasi is a a cultural production of Mollucan ancestor, on one hand has function as the rule to preserving Mother earth from the crisis. On the other hand as media for Mollucan society construction their identity as a religious society and cultural society. Therefore it should be preserved.
2. The Christian religious education curriculum should accommodate the local culture as a part of teaching material when concerning human responsibility to the nature. Its very important on one hand as a symbol of contextualized theology where student learn about their responsibility to the nature by culture and bible. On the other hand it is a media for them to learn construct identity as religious society and cultural society.

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