Singkretism in the Sea Tribe Community in the Riau Archipelago

1st Marisa Elsera
Sociology
Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji
Tanjungpinang,Indonesia
marisaelsera@umrah.ac.id

2nd Rini Afriani
History Education
Universitas Negeri Padang
Padang, Indonesia
riniafriani@fis.unp.ac.id

3rd Emmy Solina
Sociology
Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji
Tanjungpinang, Indonesia
emmysolina@umrah.ac.id

Abstract— **There are two concepts of religion in the worldview: world religion and local religion. The world religion paradigm dominates society, so the representation of local religion will always look primitive and strange. Local religions will always be illustrated with backwardness and world religions that become prototypes will be considered more modern. The paradigm of local religion that is placed as a conservative, animist, not dynamic teachings and practices and other accusations of pejorative terminology makes local religion considered a traditional value that must be modernized. This research uses the constructivism paradigm with qualitative methodology. The results of the study found forms of syncretism in the Sea Tribe community which can be seen from the form of their funeral which is given offerings, especially on sacred nights. In addition, they still believe in an object that is believed to have magical properties.**

Keywords— Religious Figure; Suku Laut; Mentoring; Syncretism

I. INTRODUCTION

Religion in the Sociological view is interpreted as a common social symptom and is one aspect of social life and becomes a social system of society and one of the elements of culture in society. Religion signifies a life that moves from primitive to ultra-modern. From a sociological perspective, humans are not only seen as social beings but also as religious beings. Religious humans are seen as part of the manifestation of a belief system. The form of religious beings is reflected in religious practices. Every human interaction, action and thought will be related to the belief system of religious teachings.

The values of religious teachings influence human religious behavior. The relationship between religion and religious behavior is the result of human dependence on supernatural forces. Therefore, in a sociological perspective, several efforts and aspects are significant in religion: Religious Belief, *Ritual* and Ceremony, Personal *Experience*, Moral *Community*. [1]

Public belief in religious values is formed from realities that are ultimately binding for each individual. In the discourse of religious studies, the phenomenon of human religiosity can be seen from various approaches. Religion is not only solely related to the normative teachings of revelation, but religion can also be seen from the historical perspective of the understanding and interpretation of a person or group of certain norms of religious teachings that are implemented in everyday life. Revelation is built, concocted, standardized and examined through a doctrinal-theological approach, while the historicity of human religiosity is examined through various studies of socio-religious approaches that are multi and interdisciplinary, both through sociological, anthropological, psychological and phenomenological approaches. Therefore, in this historical dimension, it is necessary to include a scientific (sociological) perspective in studying religion, or "*religion being scientific*". Munzarin and Yusuf in [2]

Religion explains that religion has a central position in primitive society, the reality is that although different totems represent the "secret" nature, the essence has the same meaning. Religion and belief are a unity as spiritual manifestations. [3]. The concept of religion in worldview is known to be twofold: world religion and local religion. There are six recognized religions in Indonesia, namely Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

The history of religious studies and its influence on local religions (Gill 1994; Irwin 1998; Urban 2001) argues that as long as the world religion paradigm continues to dominate society, representations of local religions will always appear primitive and strange. Local religions will always be illustrated with backwardness and the prototypical world religion will be considered more modern. The paradigm of local religions as conservative, animist, dynamic and other pejorative teachings and practices has led local religions to be regarded as traditional values that must be modernized. In fact, some people recognize it not as a religion but as a culture. Sir E.B. Taylor centered his thoughts on people's belief or faith in the supernatural. According to him, religion and belief are a unity as spiritual manifestations. [3]

Animism (the belief in the existence of a soul or spirit in every living and inanimate object) has been practiced by the people of the Sea Tribe for generations. Animism is a form of local religion. As a result of government policies requiring the people of Suku Laut to follow one of the six recognized religions in Indonesia as a prerequisite for obtaining administrative services such as identity cards and family cards, their local religion was converted to a recognized religion initiated to support government development programs.[4]

Development studies recognize the two views of classical modernization and new modernisation when it comes to traditional values. The first view assumes that traditional values will hinder modernization and therefore need to be removed. This may also be the Indonesian government's benchmark for its policy of laying off the Sea Tribe. Meanwhile, the second view believes that traditional values are good for supporting development. [5]

Previous research on the people of the Sea Tribe found that they still have a life that is quite adherent to customs even though they have embraced world religions. [6]. [7]

Their welfare level is still below standard despite being resettled on the mainland.[8]

In religious practice, the Sea Tribe is influenced by both local and world religions. [9]This shows a symptom of religious syncretism, which is the process of combining a variety of beliefs or religious traditions. This article will discuss syncretism in the Suku Laut community.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research uses the constructivism paradigm with qualitative methodology. Qualitative research is one of the social science research methods that analyses data in the form of words, both oral and written, human behavior. [10] The reason for using qualitative is to better understand reality as a whole.

The type of research is descriptive, which describes social reality or phenomena related to the units and problems studied. Data are collected by the process of interviews, field notes, photographs, personal documents, notes or memos and official documents to describe the research subject. [11] Qualitative research and descriptive research types are used because they want to explain religious syncretism in the Sea Tribe community in the Riau Islands.

The selection of informants was based on *purposive sampling* using the following criteria:

a) The Sea Tribe community in the Riau Archipelago Province, especially Lingga Regency has been settled for at least 5 years.
b) Sea tribes that have had strong interactions with religious leaders for at least 5 years.
c) Religious leaders (Ustadz, Pastor, Priest and Monk) who assist the Sea Tribe community in the Riau Archipelago Province.

There are three data collection techniques, namely observation, interviews and supporting documentation to obtain data on the practice of syncretism of the Sea Tribe community on Senang Island. The data analysis technique uses Miles and Huberman in [12], namely with the stages of data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing so that answers are obtained about the religious syncretism of the Sea Tribe community.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Most of the Sea Tribe communities in the Riau Islands have experienced changes in settlement patterns. Whereas the early arrival of the Sea Tribe communities in the Riau Islands involved living in canoes, since the 1980s they have gradually been landed. The effect of "landing" the Sea Tribe communities was that they lost their culture of living nomadically on boats which the people of the Sea Tribe known as Kajang. Not only that, all aspects of their lives have changed, including culture and religion. This article will discuss the religious practices of the Sea Tribe people, which tend to lead to syncretism.

Current Situation of Sea Tribe.

The Sea Tribe on Senang Island, Temiang Pesisir Sub-district, Lingga Regency initially lived nomadically in boat (Kajang). Their current condition has adjusted their lifestyle after settling down. Through the Ministry of Social Affairs programme, the sea tribe community received 27 houses occupied by 34 family heads. Their residence on Senang Island is fairly exclusive because it is only occupied by 119 sea tribes. Here is a picture of the place where the sea tribe people live on Senang Island:

Figure 1 Sea Tribe Housing on the Senang Island, Temiang Pesisir Sub-district
Source: primary data. 2020

It is in these houses that the sea tribe people have lived for the past few years. Although they have settled on land, the people of the sea tribe on the Senang Island are continue working as fishermen. they still use simple fishing gear. The daily life of the sea tribe community is filled with fishing, social and religious activities. They built a church with the help of church foundation funding on Senang Island. every Sunday they will worship there accompanied by a pastor. The pastor is an outsider sent by the church foundation to accompany the worship of the sea tribe community for the past few years. here is a picture of the activities of the sea tribe community before worshiping at the church:

Figure 2 Activities of the Sea Tribe community before worshiping at the church
Source: primary data. 2020

Religious Practices of the Sea Peoples

"Syncretism is in syncretism the process of mixing various elements of schools or understandings so that the results obtained in different abstract forms in search of harmony, balance. Syncretism is a nontheological term" [13]

The practice of syncretism can be seen in the fusion of the teachings of the world religions now practised by the Sea Peoples with animist culture as follows:

   1.   The Tradition of Praying for Ancestors

An ancestor is a deceased ancestor/family member. In the Sea Tribe community, dead people are buried religiously.

To honour their deceased family members, the Sea Tribe community makes offerings at their funeral. This is the case at the funeral of the Sea Tribe community on Senang Island, Lingga Regency, the majority of whom are Catholic. Catholic religious practices in general do not contain teachings on honouring ancestors/deceased people. Although it is not in the teachings, respect for the ancestors themselves does not contradict the teachings of the Catholic Church which does teach that acts of mercy are not only limited to neighbours who are still alive in this world but also to those who have preceded us from this world, especially our parents and relatives, which is shown by burying them and praying for the salvation of their souls, especially in Holy Mass.

This condition is of course different in every settlement point of the Sea Tribe. As expressed by [14], religious diversity was identified as a barrier to empowerment programmes for the *Orang Suku Laut*. Some social programmes are very specific in providing assistance to followers of certain religions, which create social inequalities.

The tradition of praying for ancestors has developed over generations. Emile Durkheim called it a product of history including morality and religion. Therefore, society is seen as having no transcendent meaning and is part of nature and it is scientifically studied. [15]

   2.   Believing in Magic and Jampi

The people of the Sea Tribe are known for their magic, jampi and traditional medicine. There is not only the Sea Tribe internally believe in their magical abilities, but also Malay people who seek treatment from them. Although they have embraced the world religion, the people of the Sea Tribe have not forgotten their original culture.

The Sea Tribe is known to have a belief in mermaid tears. They usually hunt for mermaid tears, believed to be water for charms that captivate people's hearts.

The beliefs of the Sea Tribe community above are in accordance with Sir E.B. Taylor's view that these beliefs are community beliefs. It is believed to be an evolution of religion where people believe that there are spirits that are capable of doing things that humans cannot do. Based on this belief, the spirits became the object of human respect and worship with various religious ceremonies.   This belief is what Taylor later called Animism. [1]

   3.   Spirit Summoning Tradition

A tradition that the people of the Sea Tribe still maintain is the invocation of supernatural beings in medicine and in fishing. They believe that their ancestors' ability to summon supernatural spirits will help them face difficulties, such as treatment with the help of supernatural beings and getting more catches with the help of supernatural beings. Involving the supernatural in daily life is common and often done among the Sea Tribe Community in the Riau Islands.

The lack of fading of local religious teachings in the Suku Laut community is due to the ability to evoke feelings of respect and affirmation of their traditional values. [15] mentions that all that is sacred is the ability to evoke feelings of awe and it has the power to compel (in regulating) human behaviour and the power to reinforce moral values for its adherents.

Syncretism as a Form of Sacredness of Local Religious Values

Syncretism is a result of two different cultural/religious elements meeting and influencing each other. The causal relationship or mutual influence will result in mixing cultures, races and religious practices. The impact is not only syncretism but also acculturation and assimilation.

The explanation for acculturation is a concept where people experience cultural mixing without eliminating the original culture. Meanwhile, assimilation is a fusion that produces a new culture.

When the Sea Peoples arrived in the Riau Islands, they were met by the Malay people who had a diverse culture. The traditional belief of the Sea Tribe is the tradition of belief in spirits, which is the essence of their beliefs, influenced by Confucian teachings that prioritise filial piety to parents and ancestors.

Such beliefs have not been eradicated even though they have now embraced government-recognised religions such as Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism.

It is like the case in Senang Island, Lingga Regency, which is one of the Sea Tribe settlements in the Riau Islands, the community adheres to a param singritism between the local religion of animism and the world religions of Catholicism and Islam.

Senang Island is Temiang Village is inhabited by 30 households and 119 people (data from the Social Service of Lingga Regency in 2021). According to information from the Sea Tribe community there, most of them, namely 29 heads of families (KK) adhere to Catholicism while 1 family adheres to Islam. Religious practices conduct worship according to the Catholic faith and the pillars of Islam.

The Sea Tribe communities in the Riau Islands are commonly referred to as *Orang Laut, Suku Asli, Suku Akit, Suku Duano*. They are socially and culturally local, relatively small, closed, underdeveloped, homogeneous, scattered, mobile, or sedentary.

Syncretism in society arises from what is in human experience that gives birth to the idea of a sacred world. Because it is related to collectivity, several important elements are always present in the religious phenomenon of society, namely the *beliefs* system and the implementation of religious rites. Thus, the relationship between religion and society shows a very close interdependence.

The local religion of the Sea Peoples cannot simply disappear even though they have adopted a recognised religion in Indonesia, it must be seen as the symbolic essence and symbolic meaning of these expressions.

This was answered by Durkheim through the results of his research in "*The Elementary Form of Religious* Life". to Aboriginal people in Australia in viewing religious teachings. It was concluded that "*In reality there are no religions which are false, all are in true in their own fashion*" meaning (in reality there are no false religions, all are true in their own way).

Transition from Local Religion to World Religion

Government policy as outlined Presidential Regulation No. 186 of 2014 about the Empowerment of Social Communities in Remote Indigenous Communities,2014) and then regulates its implementation in the impact on religious practice in the Sea Tribe community as described above is a rational choice. The study of rational choice in choosing and practicing religion is the theoretical foundation used to understand religion from an economic model.

The people of the Sea Tribe made a rational choice to choose the religion they believed in. It is also a rational choice for them to continue with their culture and worshipping their ancestors, especially on holy nights. They serve cups and plates containing food at the graves of their Catholic ancestors on Senang Island. Some put statues on the graves of their ancestor who they know are muslims even though idols are prohibited in Islam.

One figure who plays an important role in rational choice thinking is Roney Stark. The People of *Suku Laut* choose the religion they believe now based on the benefits and rewards of choosing religion. For example, they choose a particular religion because they have been approached by religious leaders who often provide them with material and non-material assistance.

Through Stark's thinking, that reality fits with rational choice theory where individuals turn to religion because they see that it gives them some sort of benefit or reward. They will join religious groups and movements that will provide them with rewards. As a result, religious movement that have a definite profile and offer a large number of rewards will achieve more support than religious with few rewards.

Rational choice theory explains the reasons why someone converts by using the assumption that individuals will choose the maximum benefit. To answer the questions of the rationally of a person's religious choice, rational choice theorists propose a compensator proposition. Religion must be a rational activity because of the compensator. Humans need religion to get a better life. This belief is believed because of the existence of a compensator, namely God who will reward human worship activities. If rational action is to achieve goals with minimal costs, one can argue that individuals will tend to live a decent and good life without the involvement of religion.

IV. CONCLUSION

The people of the Sea Tribe experience religious and cultural syncretism. The practice of syncretism can be seen in the fusion of the teachings of the world religions now practised by the Sea Peoples with animist culture as follows:

1. The Tradition of Praying for Ancestors
2. Believing in Magick and Jampi
3. Spirit Summoning Tradition

The Sea Tribe in Senang Island, Lingga Regency, Riau Islands, follows a singritism between the local religion of animism and the world religions of Catholicism and Islam. The people of the Sea Tribe made a rational choice to choose the religion they believed in. It is also a rational choice for them to continue their culture and worshipping their ancestors, especially on holy nights. They serve cups and plates containing food at the graves of their Catholic ancestors on Senang Island. Some put statues on the graves of their ancestor who they know are muslims even though idols are prohibited in Islam.

REFERENCE

[1] T. Rambe, S. M. Sari, and N. Rambe, "Ragam Ekspresi Beragama: Agama dalam Perspektif Sosiologi," *Studia Sosia Religia*, vol. 4, no. 1, May 2021, doi: 10.51900/ssr.v4i1.9553.

[2] R. Mahmud, "Social as Sacred dalam Perspektif Emile Durheim," *Tasamuh*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 101–116, Jun. 2018, doi: https://doi.org/10.20414/tasamuh.v15i2.214.

[3] S. Jurdi and A. K. Djaya, *Awal mula sosiologi modern: kerangka epistemologi, metodologi, dan perubahan sosial prespektif ibn Khaldun*, 1st ed., vol. 1. Bantul: Kreasi Wacana, 2012. Accessed: Mar. 06, 2023. [Online]. Available: https://opac.perpusnas.go.id/DetailOpac.aspx?id=875002

[4] M. Elsera *et al.*, "Sosialisasi Administrasi Kependudukan Bagi Suku Laut di Kabupaten Lingga," *Takzim : Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 40–47, Nov. 2021, doi: 10.31629/TAKZIMJPM.V1I1.3842.

[5] M. Elsera and O. Adhayanto, "Budaya Tradisi Sebagai Kekuatan Komunitas Adat Terpencil," *Jurnal Archipelago*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 11–20, Dec. 2022, Accessed: Dec. 17, 2022. [Online]. Available: https://archipelago.barenlitbang-kepri.id/index.php/JA/article/view/1

[6] M. Elsera, "Suku Laut di Dusun Linau Batu Desa Tanjungkelit, Kabupaten Lingga Provinsi Kepri," *Sosioglobal : Jurnal Pemikiran dan Penelitian Sosiologi*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 1–19, Jul. 2019, doi: 10.24198/JSG.V3I2.21054.

[7] M. Elsera, H. Hanim, Casiavera, and A. Valentina, "Kehidupan Sosial dan Budaya Suku Laut di Pulau

Senang, Kabupaten Lingga," *Jurnal Masyarakat Maritim*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 1–7, Jun. 2022, doi: 10.31629/JMM.V6I1.4413.

[8]   M. Elsera, G. Y. Yahya, E. Oprasmani, Casiavera, and Syakila, "Eksistensi Suku Laut (Suku Akit) di Dusun Bangsal Ujung, Desa Sungai Asam, Kabupaten Tanjungbalai Karimun, Provinsi Kepulauan Riau," *Jurnal Sosiologi Andalas*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 81–93, Oct. 2021, doi: https://doi.org/10.25077/jsa.7.2.81-93.2021.

[9]   M. Elsera, N. Rahmawati, and A. Valentina, "Intervensi Masyarakat Suku Laut oleh Tokoh Agama di Kepulauan Riau," *journal.lasigo.org*, 2022, Accessed: Nov. 14, 2022. [Online]. Available: https://journal.lasigo.org/index.php/IJRS/article/view/266

[10]   Afrizal, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, Edisi 3., vol. 1. Jakarta: Raja Grafindo, 2014. Accessed: Jun. 16, 2022.

[11]   L. J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, 38th ed. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2018. Accessed: Jun. 18, 2022. [Online]. Available: https://opac.perpusnas.go.id/DetailOpac.aspx?id=1133305

[12]   Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif dan R & D*. Bandung: Alfabeta, 2014.

[13]   H. M. D. Amin, *Islam dan Kebudayaan Jawa*, 1st ed. Newyork: Gama Media, 2002.

[14]   W. Ariando, "Orang Suku Laut Kepulauan Riau dalam Realita Pembangunan dan Kebijakan Daerah," Balai Pelestarian Nilai Budaya Kepulauan Riau. Accessed: Mar. 06, 2023. [Online]. Available: https://kebudayaan.kemdikbud.go.id/bpnbkepri/orang-suku-laut-kepulauan-riau-dalam-realita-pembangunan-dan-kebijakan-daerah/

[15]   E. Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, vol. 1. Macmillan Education UK, 1982. doi: 10.1007/978-1-349-16939-9.

[16]   *PERPRES No. 186 Tahun 2014 tentang Pemberdayaan Sosial Terhadap Komunitas Adat Terpencil*. Indonesia: JDIH BPK RI, 2014. Accessed: Mar. 06, 2023. [Online]. Available: https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Home/Details/41705/perpres-no-186-tahun-2014