

# Church *Sasi*: Beyond Religion Boundaries

## Study of Religious Anthropology

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**Abstract**— This paper discusses the understanding of Christian and Muslim communities about the Church *Sasi* in the Protestant Church of Maluku (GPM), Maneoratu Congregation, which is actualized in their daily lives. The Church *Sasi* can be used as a means of encountering Christian and Muslim communities to solve their common problem like internal conflicts between people from the same and different faiths, resulting from the corps stealing behavior. The church *sasi* is done every the third week of the month, followed by both Christian and Muslim communities. Based on the results of research conducted in Negeri Maneoratu, for 1 month, it was found that first, *Sasi* Church is a sacred ritual for Christian and Muslim communities, as those in Negeri Maneoratu are actually afraid to violate it. They believe that by doing so they will get punishment from Allah. The impact is the loss of internal conflict. Second, church *sasi* serves as a reconsolidation and reconciliation media by Christian and Muslim communities, so they are not easily influence by issues that can trigger a conflict. The impact is ongoing peace. And third, Christian and Muslim communities can enjoy good harvests, as they have changed their behavior. Another impact is that shared prosperity can be realized. The research was conducted by using the Anthropology of Religion, with qualitative method as a medium to obtain data in order to answer the problems studied, with Negeri Maneoratu, Telutih District, Central Maluku Regency serves as research site.

**Keywords**—*sasi*, church, reconsoliation, reconciliation, peace.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The reality existing in Protestant Church of Maluku (GPM) Maneoratu congregation is a tendency to steal the coconut, durian, chocolate, and banana, by people in *Negeri* Maneoratu. This issue triggers suspicion among people, both Muslim and Christian communities, so that internal conflicts frequently happen and disturb the peace of the people in *Negeri* Maneoratu. In fact, a serene, safe, and peaceful community is the dream of all people, so the effort to realize the situation is needed.

The above issues are interesting to discuss, because Maneoratu GPM congregation is a congregation who had just returned from the refugee camp in 2006, after the 1999 social

conflict and who got to re-encounter the Muslim community domiciled in *Negeri* Maneoratu. Hence, the harmonious relationship between members of the Church and the Muslim community in Maneoratu must be well established to prevent another conflict among Maneoratu society. That is why, the church *sasi* can be used as a solution for the preventing internal conflict due to the stealing behavior, because *sasi* performed by Saniri *Negeri* has no impact on the settlement of the matter concerned.

The research of *sasi* has been done by some previous researchers, like Reny. H. Nendissa, who examined the existence of customary institutions in the implementation of Sea *Sasi* Law in Central Maluku. For Reny, customary institutions play an important role to supervise the process of law enforcement, for generating positive impact in the process of management and environmental conservation.[1] Furthermore, Ismail Suardi Wekke, studied Mosque and Customary *Sasi*: Environmental Conservation Practices of Muslim Minorities in Raja Ampat. His research aimed at exploring the relationship between the mosque and the society in Raja Ampat in which the result shows that religion becomes a rule synergized with the needs of society.[2] Then, Akhmad Solihin, examined the sea cucumber *sasi* as a conservation effort in building the Coastal Village. For him, *sasi* is one of the local wisdoms that continues to be preserved and utilized for coastal resource management process.[3] The research is in line with Edi Setiyono, that management in the coastal areas can be done by Community-Based Management (CBM), through *Awig-Awig* in East Lombok and *Sasi* in Central Maluku. The result is that CBM can function as a basis for the Government to empower communities in managing and preserving nature in order to remain sustainable for the next generation.[4]

Based on previous studies, it is illustrated that those differ from what comes to writer's concern; first the church *sasi* studied here focused on the theft issue which triggers suspicion among the people and has an impact on internal conflicts within *Negeri* Maneoratu congregation; and second, the author's approach is the Anthropology of Religion.

### II. METHODOLOGY

The approach of Anthropology of Religion is an approach that emphasizes the reality and empirical aspect, and the relationship that exists between human thoughts, attitudes and behavior in relation to God, in order to generate a

collective consciousness of society about the importance of religion in social life, thereby reducing or eliminating the potential of tension or antagonism in society.[5]

The method used by the writer for data collection was a qualitative research method, having located in *Negeri Maneoratu*, Telutih District, Central Maluku Regency, and lasted for one month, which was in November of 2017. Furthermore, the writer conducted a descriptive analysis of the data.[6]

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

#### A. Research Context

This research took place in *Negeri Maneoratu*, Telutih District, Central Maluku Regency, with population of 375 people. The population consists of three religions, which are Protestantism, Catholicism and Islam, with the majority is Christians, but *Negeri Maneoratu* is surrounded by Islamic areas such as *Negeri Tehua* and *Laimu*, whose population is larger than in *Negeri Maneoratu*.

The relationships between these three communities are quite good after the 1999 social conflict, as evidenced by the involvement of the Muslim community in activities organized by the Christian Community, and vice versa. This relationship becomes an opportunity for *Negeri Maneoratu* society to do all their activities without fear and anxiety, and the relationship can continue to be nurtured and maintained by this society. Thus, the internal conflicts must be anticipated for irresponsible parties not to take opportunities.

#### B. Concept of Sasi Church

Frank Cooley conceptualized *sasi* as a prohibition season to pick up certain fruits on land and take certain yields from the sea during a certain period of time set by the Government Affairs.[7] Furthermore, according to Nendisa, *sasi* is a prohibition related to the protection and utilization of coastal and terrestrial functions.[1] Thus, it can be said that *sasi* is a customary practice to prohibit the community, both individual and communal in order not to take and process/exploit (exploitation) the natural environment; either on land or at sea, for any purpose, within a certain period of time.

The above concept is also used to define the *sasi* church so as to be interpreted as a prohibition from God to humans for not taking and cultivating the natural environment for certain purposes within a certain time, based on the decision made by the Church Leader with the community/congregation.

#### C. Church Sasi: Beyond Religion Boundaries

##### 1) Sasi Closing Ritual

*Sasi* Church in *Negeri Maneoratu* takes place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in Sunday worship. The process is as follows: on Saturday, people who want to apply *sasi* on their plants bring

those to the church. The *sasi* plants are prayed by the Assembly of the Church. The plants are placed on the table provided on the front side of the pulpit.

Then, before the intercessory prayer, the priest from the pulpit tells the congregation that "today, Sunday the (date) will be held a *sasi* closing of the plants (the type of plant and location mentioned) which belong to the Mr./ Mrs./family (name and clan of the man/families mentioned)". After which the pastor invited the father/mother/family to take part in front of the table where the plants are placed, and the priest comes down from the pulpit to the table where the plants are placed.

Then, the *sasi* closing process is done by: the priest reads the selected biblical text, then lifts each plant where *sasi* will be applied to and says "as the Servant of Jesus Christ, today, Sunday the (date), I close the *sasi* over the plant (mentioning the type of plant and its location) the property of the Mr/Mrs/family (name and clan of father/mother/family), in the name of God: Father on Heaven and Earth, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit" which is then followed by a process of binding to the plants. Furthermore, the owner of the *sasi* plant gives offerings, returns to the seat, as well as the priest returns to the pulpit. After the service is finished, the Assembly of the Church with the owners of the plants goes to the location to give the sign of the cross on the plant where *sasi* has been applied to, so it is known by the people who cross the location.

##### 2) Views of Christians and Muslims about *Sasi*

###### a) Christian

*Sasi* church in *Negeri Maneoratu* began from October 2017 until now, as a solution to solve the theft problem that often happens. As stated by the Chairman of the Assembly of *Maneoratu* GPM Congregation (Rev. F.H), "church *sasi* should be done so that members of the church who often steal can repent, so as not to trigger conflict in the congregation."<sup>1</sup> *Sasi* church was held after obtaining approval with the Board of Assembly of GPM *Maneoratu* Congregation through a meeting, which took place in October 2017. Then *sasi* church was held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> week, in Sunday congregation worship. The thinking illustrates that, the church as a social institution can settle the congregation to behave and act; either within a small scope (church) or in a large scope (society).[8] In addition, the church *sasi* is done as a form of preservation to the local wisdom values of the society, which has been known and practiced long ago. Behind the local wisdom, God works in it, before the presence of missionaries to teach Christianity to the local community.[9]

Furthermore, Mr. J.R (member of society), said that "I am happy with the existence of the church *sasi* so that theft within *Negeri* and congregation does not happen again, because so far, theft has been an issue for Christians and Muslims."<sup>2</sup> According to Ms. T (Member of the Church), "church *sasi* is done by church so that congregation members get afraid of taking or stealing crops that are not their own, and the conflicts between Christians and Muslims in *Negeri*

<sup>1</sup> Interview in Pastori, Retrieved on November 15, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Interview at home, on November 17, 2017

Maneoratu will not happen anymore.<sup>3</sup> Based on the informant's point of view, it is illustrated that the church *sasi* is understood as a medium for preventing the thieves from stealing in the *Negeri/Community* of GPM Maneoratu, because the community/congregation is afraid of God's punishment. It is influenced by the religious behavior of the people who see church *sasi* with a sacred value, as it is held during the church worship, so it is witnessed by the worship participants and God who has the people and all of His creations.

Then, the view conveyed by Mr. M. T (Chairman of Saniri *Negeri* Maneoratu) mentioned that "the current church *sasi*, can take away suspicions among Christians and Muslims, because the crops from the community can be harvested well."<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Mr. Raja revealed that "I am happy with the church's decision to conduct church *sasi*, because it helps the government of the country to resolve internal conflicts resulting from the theft that frequently occurs."<sup>5</sup> This view illustrates that, the *negeri* government understands that the role and function of the church is not only ritualistic, but the church also provides solutions to existing social problems.

#### b) Muslims

Since the church *sasi* was held in Maneoratu GPM congregation, the Muslim community of Maneoratu also brought their crops to church, because their crops were often stolen which then affects their crops. To that end, the writer conducted interviews with Muslim communities who brought their crops to harmonize.

Mr. L.I (member of society) said that "*sasi* church currently carried out is very good, because it can reduce or eliminate stealing behavior in *Negeri* Maneoratu, so I also bring my crops *sasi* church so that the crop is not stolen." Later, Mr. L.H (member of society) also said "when I know that church *sasi* has been done, I am very happy, because Christian and Muslims will be afraid in stealing crops which have been in *sasi* process, so it takes away our suspicions."<sup>6</sup> Then, according to Ms Hj. I, (member of the congregation), "I am very happy with church *sasi* performed by the church, so that frequent fights can be avoided, as there will be no more suspicion among the Muslim and Christian communities in *Negeri* Maneoratu."<sup>7</sup>

The informant's views aforementioned illustrate that the church *sasi* is well understood by Muslim community, as a medium to change the behavior of society in a better direction; from stealing behavior to stop stealing. It is also for internal conflicts between communities not to happen anymore. Furthermore, the Muslim community sees that the church is very inclusive, since the church *sasi* is not only for Christians but for Muslims. In addition, Muslims are also very inclusive, as they are willing to bring their plants to the church.

<sup>3</sup> Interview at home, on November 18, 2017

<sup>4</sup> Interview at home, on November 21, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Interview at home, on November 19, 2017

<sup>6</sup> Interview at home, on November 27, 2017

<sup>7</sup> Interview at home, on November 29, 2017

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above results and discussions, the conclusions are: *first*, *Sasi* Church is a sacred ritual by Christian and Muslim communities, so those communities in *Negeri* Maneoratu is afraid to violate it, because it will bring in punishment from Allah. It encourages people to behave well in society. Secondly, the church *sasi* performed in Maneoratu GPM congregation, goes beyond the religion boundaries, meaning that church *sasi* held in the church involves Christian and Muslim communities, or in other words, Christian and Muslim communities show an inclusive life in religious process in *Negeri* Maneoratu, giving impact on peaceful living among them. And third, church *sasi* can be used as a medium of reconciliation, so that Christian and Muslim communities are not easily provoked by provocative issues that can lead to conflict among them, so that security, peace and prosperity can continue to foster.

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