

Religious and Maritime Cultural Integration of the Suku Laut in Riau Islands, Indonesia

Marisa Elsera^{1,2}, Darsono Wisadirana², Ali Maksum², Anif Fatma Chawa², Sanggar Kanto², Ahmad Imron Rozuli², Iwan Nurhadi², Casiavera Casiavera¹, and Wengki Ariando^{3,4*}

¹Sosiologi, Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, Tanjungpinang, Indonesia

²Sosiologi, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia

³Research Centre for Culture and Society, National Research and Innovation Agency of The Republic of Indonesia, Indonesia

⁴Centre of Excellence on Migration and Development, Insitute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

Abstract. This paper aims to describe the integration of culture and religion in the Suku Laut community in the Riau Islands. Since the Indonesian government's policy of settling the Suku Laut, there have been significant changes in all aspects of their lives. Their adaptation has partly changed their culture and partly maintained it by integrating culture and religion. This research uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. The informant selection technique was carried out by purposive sampling. Data collection was carried out by means of observation, interviews, documentation. The research was conducted in Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province. The research was conducted in Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province. The results of this study show that cultural integration in the Suku Laut causes changes and adjustments in values, beliefs and attitudes to be more in line with Malay culture. The integration of culture and religion in the Suku Laut can be seen in cultural adaptation, social adjustment, cultural exchange, and cultural mixing of the Suku Laut and the Malay Tribe. Cultural integration can encourage cultural preservation and sustainability of the Suku Laut if done with respect for the rights of the Suku Laut. But conversely, it can risk marginalisation and loss of traditional identity if done without a sensitive approach.

1 Introduction

Social welfare is prioritised for remote communities. The implementation of social welfare is guaranteed in Law Number 6 of 1974 concerning Basic Provisions for Social Welfare. In Article 5, it is stated that several social problem criteria are the focus of attention such as poverty, neglect, disability, remoteness, and social disabilities. One of the social welfare programmes implemented is the 1993 Remote Community Welfare Programme (PKMT). PKMT aims to provide rehabilitation and social security for remote communities. Remote communities in Indonesia are scattered in several regions, some of which are; Baduy Tribe (Banten), Suku Laut (Riau Islands and Sumatra), Asmat Tribe (Papua), Dani Tribe (Papua), Dayak Tribe (Kalimantan), Korowai Tribe (Papua), Mentawai Tribe (West Sumatra), Nuaulu Tribe (Maluku), Rote Tribe (East Nusa Tenggara), Kubu Tribe (Sumatra).

Corresponding author : wengki.a@chula.ac.th

The Orang Laut, as one of the groups of people included in the category of Alienated Tribal Groups (KAT) in Indonesia, experienced the Remote Community Welfare Programme (PKMT) gradually starting in the 1990s. The programme made a big change in the lifestyle of the Orang Laut from nomadic to living on land like the majority of the Malay community [1]. The programme changed the settlement pattern of the nomadic Orang Laut living in kajang (sampans) to a settled land/coastal life [2]. Once landed, most of the The Suku Laut were found in the waters of Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province, Indonesia. The condition in 2024, identified as many as 2,779 people of the Suku Laut who have been landed. There are 32 locations of Suku Laut settlements in Lingga Regency. After being landed, the Suku Laut not only experienced changes in settlement patterns but also from various aspects such as religion, culture, social, politics, education, economy and health [3].

Government intervention has resulted in changes and integration of the Suku Laut in Indonesia. Integration occurred in almost every aspect of traditional Suku Laut life. After being resettled, the Suku Laut were faced with the pressure of adapting to the values and norms adopted by the majority of settled communities, particularly ethnic Malays as the largest community in the Riau Islands. Administrative demands seemed to pressurise the Suku Laut to have a residence card and civil registration, they had to have a residence card and family card. As a result of these administrative requirements, the Suku Laut are required to register marriages, births and deaths of family members and are obliged to have a formal religion. This is in stark contrast to their culture when they were nomadic. The changing culture can be seen in the religion and belief system. During nomadic times, the Laut tribe adhered to animism, but after settling down, their beliefs changed in accordance with the formal religion they chose [4]. The formal religion chosen is in accordance with the approach of religious leaders in the area [5]. Likewise, other traditional cultures of the Suku Laut are also integrated such as knowledge systems, languages, arts, economic systems, social systems and technology [6].

Cultural integration is the process of two or more cultures adapting, merging, interacting into a harmonious whole. The traditional cultural elements of the Suku Laut integrate with the culture of the Malay Tribe as the local community. These two cultures that meet and adapt to each other create valuable diversity. But of course, the process of cultural integration is not always easy and mutually respectful. There are times when the integration negates the traditional culture of the minority, thus eliminating their identity and creating marginalisation. On the other hand, integration can also bring tension.

The tensions created by marginalisation can be seen in the refusal of the Suku Laut to be resettled in the 1990s. Even after the houses were built, some of the Suku Laut continued to live nomadic lives in the kajang. In 2024, many Suku Laut settlements were still without electricity. This has led to social jealousy with the local community. [7] views government policies as coercive in the context of social and economic pressures and assimilation policies. The top-down nature of government policy in relation to the Suku Laut has resulted in changes in almost all areas of life.

The integration of the Suku Laut is a result of the implementation of the Remote Community Welfare Program (PKMT). This was a top-down program that objectified citizens [8–10]. From 1970 to 1980 it was implemented and briefly continued under a different program name, namely the Community Social Welfare Improvement Program (PKSMT) [8,11,12]. PKMT and PKSMT were implemented under the legal basis of Presidential Decree of the Republic of Indonesia Number 111 of 1999 concerning Social Welfare Development of Remote Indigenous Communities, Minister of Social Affairs

Regulation Number 12 of 2015 concerning the Implementation of Presidential Regulation Number 186 of 2014 concerning Social Empowerment of Remote Indigenous Communities. These policies made a major change in the lifestyle of the Orang Laut from nomadic to living on land like the majority of the Malay community [3].

The Suku Laut were originally animistic, then the government attempted to integrate the Orang Laut into the local Malay community through various policies that may contain coercion in the context of social pressure, economic and assimilation policies [7]. The top-down nature of government policy towards the Suku Laut has resulted in changes in almost all areas of life. The Suku Laut needs to adapt, adjust and assimilate cultural elements. The adjustments that the Suku Laut have experienced have been found in the aspects of education and language [13], health [14] economy [15], job diversification[16,17] settlement patterns [18], government policies [19], culture [20] and religion [21]. However, policies to land spiritual freedom [22], gender relations [23] social norms [24] and third-party intervention [5]. Based on the previous research above, the adjustment process can influence each other, bringing together various cohesive cultural elements, some of which end in alienation and conflict.

The resettled The Suku Laut are going through a process of adjustment. Most are quite successful in making adjustments, with a few deciding to return to their old nomadic habitats and lifestyles. Most of those who accepted the government's program to resettle the The Suku Laut experienced a difficult process of adaptation to various aspects of life. The most difficult adaptations were socio-cultural adaptations and religious adaptations. This affects the cultural and religious integration of the Suku Laut and local Malays. This article will discuss the religious and cultural integration of the Suku Laut in Lingga Regency, Riau Islands

2 Theory

The process of merging and integrating in society might turn out to be rather similar, but that of cultural and religious integration is quite different with regard to focus and scope. Cultural integration covers the unification and interaction of various cultural elements: language, customs, traditions, values, art, social norms. It involves aspects of everyday life. Cultural integration is intended to make up a society that is in harmony, which coexists and respects each other through their efforts to enrich their respective cultures. Religious integration involves the meeting and interaction of various religious elements, such as beliefs, rituals, ways of worship, and many other moral codes that the various religious groups possess. It embodies aspects of spiritual beliefs and practice, worship, observance of holy days, and religious doctrine. The goal is to create tolerance and understanding between religious communities and peaceful coexistence and mutual respect [25].

The approach utilized in the present study is that of the rational choice concept in religion. In the case of religion, the theory of rational choice is basically used to comprehend religion from an economic model where the unit of analysis is generally macro. Rational choice theory is a perspective that views every religion, or for that matter, every denomination within a particular religion, as competing against others for the most worshippers possible. One notable figure to emerge in this thinking is Roney Stark. Indeed, Stark himself. This is opposed by the rational choice theory, which contests that people turn to religion because they can see that religion is able to provide them with some sort of benefit or reward. They join religious groups and movements that will provide them with rewards. According to this theory, religious movements that have a definite profile and offer a large

amount of rewards and will achieve a lot of support, as opposed to religious movements that have few rewards.

Rational choice theory explains the reasons why people convert using the using the assumption that individuals will choose the most maximised benefit. In answer to the question of the rationality of a person's religious choice, rational choice theorists propose a compensator proposition theory proposes a compensator proposition. Religion must be a rational activity because the existence of compensators. Humans need religion to get a better life. This belief is believed by 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 individu.

3 Methods

This research uses qualitative research methods. The research approach it uses is descriptive. Qualitative research methods are methods used by social sciences in collecting and analysing data in the form of words (oral or written) and human actions. Researchers do not try to calculate or quantify the qualitative data that has been obtained [26]. The reason for using qualitative methods is to understand reality as a whole. A descriptive approach is research that describes a phenomenon or social reality related to the units and problems under study. In order to collect data, it is done through the process of interviews, field notes, photographs, personal documents, notes or memos and official documents to describe the research subject. [27]. The reason qualitative research and descriptive research types are used in this study is to analyse how the cultural and religious intergation of the Suku Laut with the Malay Community in Lingga Regency. The limitation in this research is in the research locus, namely in the settlement of the Suku Laut of Temiang Pesisir Sub-district. There are two locations of the Suku Laut, namely in Kampung Baru and on Senang Island. The research was conducted in June-July 2024. Data were obtained through structured interviews based on interview guidelines, participation, observation, and documentation. In determining informants, this research uses purposive sampling technique or determines in advance the criteria of informants. The criteria for informants in this study are as follows:

1. Tribes of the Sea who have lived in the settlement since at least 2015 until now. This criterion was chosen because the Suku Laut in Lingga Regency began to be resettled from the 1990s until 2015. After 2015, there was no further programme to resettle the Suku Laut, except in 2023 when there was an expansion/addition of houses for the settled Suku Laut. The house expansion/addition was built in front of their old house.
2. The Suku Laut who actively practice religious worship in accordance with officially recognised religions in Indonesia. This criterion is used to determine the religious integrity of the Suku Laut when they were animists until they had a formal religion.
3. At least 25 -70 years old. This criterion was chosen because 1990-2015 was the period when the government resettled the Suku Laut. So that the minimum age of the informant at that time was 15 years old and was capable enough to provide an explanation of the cultural integration he experienced when he was nomadic until now. Including perspectives from younger or recently settled individuals can provide additional insights. This age range is the best representative for understanding cultural integration.

4 Discussion

Cultural integration is the process of interaction, mutual influence and bringing together the various cultural elements of a society into a larger, cohesive whole. This process can involve adjustment, adaptation and assimilation of cultural elements such as language, customs, values, norms and social practices.

The Suku Laut experienced a process of cultural integration following the PMKT and PKMST policies that began in the 1990s. The forms of cultural integration experienced by the Suku Laut can be seen in several aspects below:

4.1 Cultural Adaptation of the Suku Laut

Social adaptation is the process by which individuals or groups make gradual adjustments to changes in the social environment such as changes in behaviour, habits and values to conform to new social norms and demands. Historically, social adaptation to the external environment has been undertaken by the Suku Laut since the start of the furlough programme. The following are the traditional to modern adaptations faced by the Suku Laut:

4.1.1 *Cultural Adaptation and Social Adjustment*

Originally isolated from the mainland population, the Indonesian government often refers to the Suku Laut as an alienated tribal group (KAT). They lived nomadically in kajang (canoes) in groups before the 1990s. The Suku Laut moves from coastal waters and small islands in the Riau Islands, Indonesia. The Suku Laut is known as an accomplished sailor. The sea is the centre of their economic, social and cultural life.

The nomadic lifestyle of the Suku Laut is often called 'sea nomads' who move between the waters of Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia. The culture and traditions of the Suku Laut differ greatly from those of the local Malay community. The language of the sea people belongs to the Malay language group, but they often have different variations or dialects of Malay.

While still living a nomadic life, the Suku Laut relies on Kajang (boats) for mobility. Extreme weather and high sea waves often become obstacles and threats when living in Kajang. At least twice a year, the Suku Laut must survive the north wind and south wind seasons. The Kajang, which the Suku Laut use as a means of transport as well as a house, is often carried away by the wind and even capsizes if the wind is strong. In the end, during the north and south winds, the Suku Laut will take refuge on small islands that are safe enough from the threat of the wind. During the south and north winds, the Suku Laut cannot fish. They only utilise the spare food that has been stored in the kajang. If they are lucky, they can get food from the forest. These conditions occur for the duration of the north wind and south wind and may vary depending on geographical location and specific weather conditions. This is recognised by Jang, a Suku Laut:

'We are constrained by the weather, if it is the south wind or north wind season then we leave the kajang and move to nearby islands. We stay there for weeks, until the wind is normal. From a young age, we are used to that,' says Jang.

The culture of nomadic living in the kajang has been experienced by the Suku Laut since childhood until they were gradually landed in 1990. Jang feels that the nomadic life was different from the sedentary life now. Jang feels that there are negative and positive sides to living a settled life now. On the negative side, Jang feels that their children no longer recognise Kajang as the place where their parents and ancestors lived. Likewise, their original traditions have begun to erode. For example, after a child gets married, he or she will live in a new sampan. Marriages are conducted among the Suku Laut. There are rituals that are

performed but lost after being sent home. Traditional medicine and jampi from the Suku Laut have also been lost. On the other hand, the positive impact of living a sedentary life is that the Suku Laut can be protected from the threat of bad weather and their basic needs are fulfilled. However, integrating into the new culture involved a process of interaction with the local Malay community that was not easy.

The Suku Laut live in traditional ways and are rarely integrated with communities on land. Some of the Suku Laut still maintain their culture and traditions despite being under the pressure of social change. Others have experienced cultural loss due to the integration of two cultures. Change and integration face many difficulties because the process of adaptation is not easy. The adaptation referred to in this article is the process of individuals or groups in adjusting to a new social environment gradually. It involves changing behaviours, habits and values to fit the new social norms and demands. The Suku Laut experience cultural adaptation, which can be seen in the changes in behaviour, values, norms and daily practices that they seek to better suit their new environment. The Suku Laut adopted the habits, customs and social norms of the local Malay Community so that the Suku Laut could interact and integrate in their new environment. This can be seen in the efforts made by the Suku Laut in Kampung Baru, Tajur Biru Village, Temiang Pesisir Sub-district, Lingga Regency. The Suku Laut is quite capable of interacting with the local Malay Community at this time. However, this does not mean that the Suku Laut never experienced a difficult time when they were initially resettled. They experienced cultural shock as a result of a significant change in life from nomadic to sedentary.

When they were first resettled in 2013, the Suku Laut in Kampung Baru were not immediately able to interact with local Malays. The Orang Laut often faced stigma and discrimination due to their unique way of life and cultural differences with the Malay community. They experienced ostracisation. The Suku Laut used to be ridiculed if they used the language of the Suku Laut. Their nomadic, boat-based way of life is often considered unconventional by land-based communities, so they may be seen as an unstable or disorganised group. They also have economic limitations that make them sometimes feel patronised by other communities. In addition, the Suku Laut do not go to school, so they are perceived as backward or undeveloped. There are also negative stereotypes circulating about the Suku Laut, such as the notion that they are thieves or untrustworthy. These stereotypes were often unfounded but influenced how the Malay Community viewed the Suku Laut.

A few years after being resettled, the Tribe's adaptation went fairly smoothly. Most of the Suku Laut were able to adapt to their new environment. The Tribe's adaptation to a new life was initially forced, with the Tribe having to shop for their daily needs in Tajur Biru Village and therefore having to interact with the villagers. Over time, the tribe was encouraged to send their children to school in the village, resulting in more frequent mobility. Cultural adaptation eventually occurred voluntarily or in response to changes in the social, economic and environmental conditions of 49 households with 171 members of the Suku Laut and the Malay community. Geographical conditions also contributed to the integration of the Suku Laut and the Malay community. The distance between the Suku Laut settlement in Kampung Baru and the Malay community in Tajur Biru village can be travelled in 7-10 minutes by rowing canoe. This condition facilitates the mobility of the Suku Laut to the village.

Adaptation involves the Suku Laut changing or adjusting their values, beliefs and attitudes to be more in line with Malay culture. This can involve adjustments in terms of views on family, work, religion and social life. Adaptation in terms of daily practices and

habits comes in the form of adjustments to dress, diet, socialising and lifestyle. Adaptation of the Suku Laut is done in forming relationships and social networks with the Malay community, understanding social dynamics and participating in community activities. Cultural adaptation can take place on many levels, from superficial adjustments such as learning a new language to deep changes in identity and values. This process can take time.

Cultural adaptation of the Suku Laut sometimes results in individuals or groups being able to maintain their own cultural identity while still being able to function and participate effectively in the new culture. While some have adopted aspects of Malay culture to facilitate integration, others have retained their own cultural identity. One culture that the Suku Laut still maintains is the use of traditional fishing gear. The Suku Laut uses Serampang as a fishing tool.

Social adjustment refers to the ability of individuals or groups to interact and adjust to the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in a social context. Social adjustment often involves the development of social skills, emotional control and acceptance within a group or society. Cultural adjustment in the Suku Laut is a complex process that reflects the Suku Laut's interaction with the Malay Community. During the face of environmental change and resettlement, the Suku Laut began to adopt new practices such as Malay language skills. This was done so that they could adjust to the Malay community so that it was easier to interact. This behaviour was acknowledged by Abah Tamin, a Suku Laut:

‘We used to be unacceptable to the Malays. When we came to Tajur, we were seen as long. We were laughed at. Not many Malays wanted to mix with us. Now it's not so bad, because we are good at Malay. When we used to speak our language, we were insulted by the Malay people. Finally we learned Malay,’ explained Abah Tamin in an interview on 19 July 2024.

The Suku Laut learnt and used the Malay language or local dialect to communicate more effectively and understand the local social and cultural context. Informant Tamin considered this a successful way to interact with the Malay community. While some of the Suku Laut have become confident in interacting with the Malay community, others still find it difficult to initiate communication with people outside the Suku Laut and need an intermediary. This difficulty was recognised by Informant Salemah, who said that the Suku Laut found it difficult to establish communication with the Malay community because they could not speak Indonesian or Malay.

‘Many (Suku Laut) don't understand Indonesian. We use the dialect of the Suku Laut, so if you want to talk to the Malay people, it is rather difficult to understand and discuss it. Finally, if there is business with the village and sub-district people, the head of RT 09, Pak Amuzil, will help. If you talk to the Malay, it is usually Murah (Suku Laut),’ said Salemah in an interview on 19 July 2024.

According to informants, the Suku Laut have experienced cultural adaptation while living in Kampung Baru. They learnt the Malay language in order to integrate with the local community. The use of language plays an important role in cultural integration enabling one to communicate more effectively, understand deeper social and cultural contexts and enhance co-operation and mutual respect between cultural groups. Although they face challenges in maintaining their original cultural identity, this process also allows them to integrate new values without completely abandoning their heritage as a marine community. This adjustment often involves negotiating between maintaining traditions and meeting practical needs, creating a hybrid identity that reflects broader social dynamics. In this way, the Suku

Laut demonstrate resilience and creativity in adapting, while still endeavouring to maintain the values that have become an integral part of their lives. Members of different cultural groups learn to coexist, respect differences and interact harmoniously within the larger society.

4.1.2 Cultural Exchange

The exchange of ideas, art, language and technology between the Suku Laut and the Malay people of Riau Islands has significantly enriched the cultural life of both groups. Interactions that took place through trade, marriage and social activities allowed the Suku Laut to adopt elements of Malay culture, such as art, dance and language that expanded the way they expressed their identity. Murah, a Suku Laut informant, recognised this:

‘Going to the same primary school as the Malays made us learn the Malay dialect, Malay art and the Malay way of doing business. We learn faster when we interact with the Malays. Not all of them like to be friends with us, but from those who want to be friends, we also learn to utilise technology.’

Conversely, the Malays also gained new insights into seafaring traditions, natural knowledge and fishing techniques from the Suku Laut. This process creates a dynamic synergy, where cultural values and practices interact with each other and form a richer and more diverse shared identity. The Malay community learnt traditional medicine from the Suku Laut and learnt how to weave kajang. The cultural life of the Suku Laut is increasingly colourful, creating a harmonious fabric that reflects the region's cultural diversity and variety.

4.1.3 Cultural Blending

The process by which cultural differences gradually fade away, and society becomes more culturally homogeneous. Cultural assimilation of the Suku Laut describes the process by which differences between their cultural traditions and practices and those of other communities gradually fade away, creating greater cultural homogeneity. In the context of interaction with the Malay community, the Suku Laut began to adopt new cultural elements such as language, dress and social customs that were previously absent from their traditions. This process often occurred through mutual influence in daily activities, education and social exchanges that enabled the absorption of new values. While this assimilation brings benefits in terms of integration and access to wider resources, it also poses challenges in the preservation of the original identity and cultural heritage of the Suku Laut. As a result, the Suku Laut communities are at a shifting point where they must strike a balance between maintaining their traditions and adapting to increasingly homogenised cultural dynamics.

4.2 Adaptation of Traditional Religion to Formal Religion

Traditional Religion is the belief of a particular community for generations. It is deeply rooted in customs, myths and rituals relating to nature, ancestral spirits and supernatural forces. Traditional teachings in religion are often integrated into daily actions. Adherents of traditional religions believe that nature is sacred and must be honoured. Traditional religions usually do not have written scriptures, but rely on oral and symbolism in their delivery. Formal religion, on the other hand, is an organised belief system with a clear structure including doctrines, rules and rituals set by religious institutions. Formal religions usually have holy books as guides and are propagated through religious institutions such as churches, mosques and temples. The teachings in formal religions are more often codified and regulated by religious leaders or religious authorities such as priests, scholars or imams. Further

explanation on the adaptation of traditional religion to formal religion in the Suku Laut can be found below:

4.2.1 Nomadic Animist Practices of the Suku Laut

The Suku Laut have strong animist beliefs, where they believe that ancestral spirits and supernatural beings govern the universe. They perform various rituals to honour these spirits and ask for protection and good luck. Cultural integration can happen naturally through everyday interactions, or it can be promoted through government policies and programmes that support social inclusion, multicultural education and respect for cultural diversity. The Suku Laut are required to choose their beliefs. They were given the option to choose one of the religions that prevailed in Indonesia at the time: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism and Hinduism. The traditional beliefs of the Suku Laut usually involve the worship of ancestral spirits and the forces of nature. They often perform rituals to ask for protection and good luck in their daily lives, especially in relation to their activities as fishermen. Here are the rituals performed by the Suku Laut:

- ***Sea Rituals***

As a community that lives from the sea, they often hold ceremonies and offerings for the sea gods or sea spirits. These rituals are performed to ask for safety when sailing and good luck in catching fish. Sea rituals performed by the Suku Laut are an important part of their lives that are closely related to nature and the sea.

- ***Offering Rituals***

Suku Laut often make offerings to sea spirits or sea gods to ask for protection and good luck. These offerings may include food, flowers or other symbolic objects thrown into the sea. Sea bathing rituals are performed to spiritually cleanse oneself and ask for blessings from the sea. This is usually done at certain times that are considered sacred.

- ***Fishing Rituals***

Before going to sea, the fishermen of the Suku Laut perform a special ceremony to ask permission from the sea spirits and ask to be given an abundant catch of fish and safety while at sea.

- ***First Fishing Ritual***

When catching fish for the first time in a certain period or season, they perform a thanksgiving ceremony as a sign of gratitude to the sea for the sustenance provided.

- ***Exorcising Evil Spirits Ritual***

To expel evil spirits or negative energies that are believed to interfere with their lives, the Suku Laut perform rituals using prayers and sacred objects. These rituals often involve spiritual leaders or local shamans.

- ***Boat Cleaning Rituals***

Before the boat is used for fishing, there is a special ritual to spiritually cleanse the boat. This involves sprinkling holy water or blessing the boat to ensure it is safe from the interference of evil spirits and provide protection during sailing.

- *Thanksgiving Ritual*

When returning from the sea with a bountiful catch, the Suku Laut holds a thanksgiving as a form of gratitude to the spirits of the sea. This thanksgiving is often followed by a feast involving the whole community, with traditional food and dances.

- *Healing Rituals*

Sea water is considered to have healing powers. In this ritual, a sick person is taken to the sea and bathed in seawater while prayers and healing spells are performed by a spiritual leader.

4.2.2 Introduction of Formal Religion at the Time of Settlement

The Suku Laut first became aware of formal religion when they settled on the coast/land. Religious leaders approached them and began to introduce the teachings of formal religion, with some even accompanying them and living in their settlements for a period of years. Although the Suku Laut settlements in Lingga Regency coexist with the Malay community, which is identifiably Muslim, Islam is not the majority religion of the Suku Laut. The majority of the Suku Laut in Kampung Baru are Christian. Christian missionaries have introduced Christianity to the Suku Laut. Some members of this community embraced Christianity and adopted practices such as weekly services, Christmas and Easter celebrations, and baptism. Small churches may be established in their communities, and missionary activities often include education and health services. Meanwhile, the majority of the Suku Laut on Senang Island are Catholic.

4.2.3 Integration of Traditional Religion into Formal Religion

The Suku Laut combine elements of their traditional beliefs with the teachings of the official religion. For example, they may continue to perform traditional ceremonies alongside formal religious services. This is the case for the Suku Laut on Senang Island who have converted to Islam. Syncretism can be seen in the use of a statue on the grave of a Muslim. The statue is embedded in the tomb as a substitute for a headstone. The Orang Suku Laut believe that the grave was made because the person buried had embraced Islam. This statement was expressed by Muli, a Suku Lautman as follows:

‘This is the grave of a Muslim, there was a family who converted to Islam. When he died we buried him and put a statue on it to signify that he was a Muslim. It's different from the other graves where they put a cross because they died as Catholics,’ said Muli, Suku Laut of Pulau Senang. (interviewed 19 July 2024)

Muli further explained that in the graves of Muslims, plates and glasses are placed, which are used as containers for the food and drinks served to the dead who are buried there. This is done because of the Suku Laut people's belief in the spirits of deceased ancestors so that they do not come in their dreams.

‘Usually if we are visited in our dreams, we will provide food and drink the next day. If we don't, we will feel guilty and continue to dream’ (interviewed 19 July 2024).

Based on Muli's statement, it can be concluded that the food and drink provided is meaningful as a dish for the spirits of the deceased Suku Laut. Despite being a Muslim, Muli believes that making offerings and placing statues in the grave are part of the Suku Laut tradition, which is carried out not only on religious holidays but also after experiencing

dreams. The grave of the Muslim Suku Laut looks strikingly different from the other graves. The Catholic Suku Laut's grave has a large cross, while the Muslim Suku Laut's grave has a statue. Here is a picture of a Muslim grave on Senang Island:



Fig. 1. Tomb of a Muslim Suku Laut

Islam teaches the belief that only Allah has the right to be worshipped. Placing statues/ idols on the graves of Muslims is not allowed because it is considered shirk. Islam only teaches its adherents to worship Allah SWT without any mixture of belief elements such as animism, polytheism or worship of ancestral spirits that are often found in traditional religions. Syncretism in Islam is strictly prohibited. This is because any tendency to mix Islamic traditions with elements of traditional religions would be seen as a form of worship of Allah, which consists of spirits, demons or other gods. In addition to rejecting idols, Islam also rejects traditional local practices such as spirit worship or the use of offerings as they are seen as violating the principle of monotheism even though they may be considered part of the local culture or traditional religion.

The practice of placing statues/idols on Muslim graves is a practice of syncretism that reflects their adaptation and flexibility in accepting new influences while maintaining their Suku Laut cultural identity. The religious practices of the Suku Laut are diverse and can differ from one community to another, depending on external influences and their level of integration with wider society.

The practice of syncretism is also evident in the Catholic graves on Senang Island. [28] Catholic Suku Laut provide offerings to the tomb on Catholic holidays. In addition, offerings are also presented when living families dream of their deceased relatives. They believe that providing offerings at the grave will make the deceased more peaceful. In addition, the provision of offerings at the tomb is believed to drive away spirits that will disturb the village. The offerings placed at the tomb can be seen in the following picture:



Fig. 2. Tombs with food and drink offerings

Offerings at Catholic cemeteries are a form of syncretism, where traditional beliefs are mixed with formal religious institutions. The offerings, usually in the form of food, flowers or symbolic objects, are not official Catholic teachings but local cultural roots that signify respect for the ancestors by the Coefficients. Sesajen is something traditionally associated with traditional religions or animism by way of giving something to the spirits of carnism or food which is then offered to gain blessings or protection and even safety or peace for the spirit of the deceased. The practice of syncretism is also found in the Suku Laut's belief not to replace broken crosses on graves. In Catholic culture, caring for graves and ensuring religious symbols such as crosses are in good condition reflects respect for the deceased. Broken or damaged crosses can be replaced to reflect the values of sanctity and propriety in the final resting place. Here is an example of a broken cross at a Suku Laut grave:



Fig. 3. Broken crosses at the Suku Laut tombs

Based on the confession of Suku Laut Muli, the practice of syncretism between traditional religion and formal religion is followed by some Suku Laut on Pulau Senang. Some of the teenagers take turns to do church services, especially when the priest is not in Pulau Senang on Sundays. Some of the children and teenagers are sent to Catholic schools run by foundations such as Yayasan Tunas Karya. The integration between formal Catholic education and the Suku Laut community helps to improve the living standards of the Suku Laut.

The integration of traditional religion and formal religion has several benefits for the Suku Laut, namely as a preservation of local cultural values, namely efforts to maintain and maintain the traditions, culture and social practices of the Suku Laut that have been passed down from generation to generation so that they are not lost by change so that the next generation is still able to continue the cultural heritage of the ancestors without being influenced by external culture. They can maintain traditional religious practices while still following formal religious teachings. Another benefit is that the spiritual life of the Suku Laut is more balanced and harmonious. The integration of traditional and formal religion by the Suku Laut was accepted by the dominant formal religious group without abandoning the entire traditional heritage. The integration of traditional religion into formal religion opens access to institutional support from the government, religious foundations and other community organisations.

On the other hand, the negative impact of integrating traditional religions with formal religions can eliminate the identity of the Suku Laut such as rituals, customs and ancestral beliefs. In addition, the integration process often creates divisions within the community, especially if there are members who prefer to maintain traditional religion rather than accept formal religion. Value conflicts, social tensions or even ostracisation of dissenting groups. Another impact is the replacement of traditional leadership by formal religious leadership, which creates power dynamics. Integration can also create dependence on external religious structures, such as religious leaders, formal religious teachings and assistance from formal religious authorities that are not always aligned with the specific needs of the Suku Laut.

5 Conclusion

The integration of traditional and formal religions among the Suku Laut of Senang Island has been beneficial in improving their standard of living and spiritual life. While the integration of religion and culture provides opportunities for the preservation of local cultural values and access to institutional support, it also has negative impacts such as loss of cultural identity, potential divisions within the community, and dependence on external religious structures. Therefore, it is important that some sort of balance be found to maintain the rich cultural heritage and follow the pursuits of religious teaching so that the Sea People may progress without losing their identity.

Recommendations on the dynamics of cultural integration that can help indigenous people of the Suku Laut:

1. Universities and schools can collaborate in the development of school curricula which cover local cultural values and traditional practices in order to raise the awareness of young people about their cultural heritage.
2. Activating participation of the people of Suku Laut and strengthening the role of Suku Laut leaders in the decision-making process.
3. Advocating the rights of and culture of Suku Laut.

4. Develop a policy that provides institutional support to indigenous peoples in terms of access to resources, skills building, and employment opportunities that respect their value orientation.
5. Promote interfaith dialogue and cooperation of the formal and traditional leaders, and strive to create understanding and tolerance in looking at the integration practices and values to both faith systems.
6. More comprehensive government policy is needed to protect the rights of the Suku Laut as indigenous peoples.
7. Encourage the government to provide financial and technical support to initiatives proposed by indigenous communities to preserve culture and hone local leadership skills.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji for funding this article.

References

1. C. Chou, TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia **4**, 265 (2016)
2. C. Chou, *Indonesian Sea Nomads*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2005)
3. M. Elsera and O. Adhayanto, Jurnal Archipelago **1**, 11 (2022)
4. E. Marisa, A. Rini, and S. Tri, in *BIO Web Conf* (EAI, 2023), p. 05001
5. M. Elsera, N. Rahmawati, and A. Valentina, Journal.Lasigo.Org (2022)
6. M. Elsera, H. Hanim, Casiavera, and A. Valentina, Jurnal Masyarakat Maritim **6**, 1 (2022)
7. S. Azar, *Dinamika Kehidupan Suku Laut Di Pulau Bertam, Kepulauan Riau Tahun 1988-2021*, Universitas Andalas, 2022
8. M. Colchester, Ecologist **16**, 89 (1986)
9. Mubyarto, Kompas 4 (1995)
10. V. Wee and C. Chou, Bijdr Taal Land Volkenkd **153**, 527 (1997)
11. L. Lenhart, *Orang Suku Laut Identity* (Tribal Communitis in the Malay Wold 293, 2002)
12. F. Yanto, Jurnal Ilmiah Dikdaya **9**, 244 (2019)
13. W. Tan, Jurnal IUS Kajian Hukum Dan Keadilan **9**, (2021)
14. R. Syafitri, S. Wahyuni, and M. Elsera, in *AIP Conf Proc* (AIP Conference Proceedings, Tanjungpinang, 2023)
15. S. Faisal, M. Elsera, and S. Wahyuni, *Sistem Perekonomian Masyarakat Suku Laut Pulau Lipan*, Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, 2019
16. M. Elsera, G. Y. Yahya, E. Oprasmani, Casiavera, and Syakila, Jurnal Sosiologi Andalas **7**, 81 (2021)
17. M. Elsera, D. Wisadirana, W. E. Kuswandoro, A. F. Chawa, Casiavera, and E. Oprasmani, Buletin Ilmiah Marina Sosial Ekonomi Kelautan Dan Perikanan **10**, 41 (2024)
18. M. Elsera, Sosioglobal : Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Penelitian Sosiologi **3**, 1 (2019)
19. N. Winarti, *Suku Laut Dan Kebijakan Pendidikan* (2021)
20. L. Lenhart, Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land-En Volkenkunde/Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia **153**, 577 (1997)

21. W. Rudi and T. L. Hatmoko, In *Theos : Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Theologi* **2**, 49 (2022)
22. Elmustian, F. L.N, Suarman, and R. Melay, in *Nternational Seminar and Annual Meeting BKS-PTN Wilayah Barat* (2018), pp. 201–204
23. S. Wahyuni and E. Solina, *Jurnal Sosiologi Dialektika* **16**, 34 (2021)
24. S. A. Suwarlan, L. Y. Lai, and I. Said, *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning* **18**, 703 (2023)
25. E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. In *Social Theory Re-Wired* (Routledge, 2016)
26. Afrizal, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, Edisi 3 (Raja Grafindo, Jakarta, 2014)
27. L. J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, 38th ed. (PT Remaja Rosdakarya, Bandung, 2018)
28. M. Elsera, R. Afriani, and E. Solina, in *International Conference Social-Humanities in Maritime and Border Area* (Atlantis Press, Tanjungpinang, 2023), pp. 1–2