

UDC 332

SELF-IDENTIFICATION OF SEA TRIBE**Elsera Marisa*, Wahyuni Sri, Syafitri Rahma, Arieta Siti, Niko Nikodemus**

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*E-mail: marisaelsera@umrah.ac.id**ABSTRACT**

Poverty has been a problem for the traditional community in isolated areas like Suku Laut in Kepulauan Riau. The solution relies on understanding the poor people and acknowledging the protection and fulfillment of their fundamentally social, economic, and political rights. This research investigated the Cultural Survival and the identity of the people of Suku Akit in Tanjungbalai Karimun Regency as the traditional community housed and occupied land. The method used in this research is qualitative, using a descriptive approach. The data collection technique is by observation, an interview, and documentation, with the concept of the traditional community of Suku Akit. Findings showed that cultural Survival and the identity of Suku Akit include the general description of the people of Suku Laut, maps, public facilities and social services, social institutions, traditions, livelihood changes, and survival strategies. In addition, the people of Suku Laut have several survival strategies; optimizing housing subsidies, tightening the relationships among the groups, reading nature's signs, taking formal education, and upgrading with the advancement of technology.

KEY WORDS

Cultural, survival, identity, isolation, Suku Laut.

Suku Laut or sea nomads are the tribes who dwell abroad on a boat or a raft. Today, several tribes of Suku Laut still live a nomadic life on their boat, but the ones in the Kepulauan Riau mostly have occupied houses on the land. The places they own by the government (The Ministry of the Social Affairs Republic of Indonesia) through the housing subsidy program. Nomadic life means a way of obtaining food. (Elsera et al., 2021). The people of Suku Laut are now not only searching for fish. In fact, in Lingga Regency, a group that they are not only searching for fish and hunting, but also doing other activities like gardening (rubber plants, fruits), collecting woods, and making a craft out of Mumbai leaves. (Elsera, 2019).

The people of Suku Laut have a kinship connection that is homogeneous and communal. In some cases, traditional leaders possess a vital role. As found in a Berakit village, Bintan regency, the traditional leader is the prominent leader. However, in some regions in Kepulauan Riau, traditional leaders hold unessential roles like the ones in Lingga regency or Karimun regency; although the community claim to have a formal leader, the leader does not play a significant role in their everyday life. Traditional leaders no longer take part in the collective decision of Suku Laut, but their existence is still respected. Instead, the local government is the official institution to facilitate the people

Table 1 – The Roles of Traditional Leaders of Suku Laut in the Kepulauan Riau

No	Names of Traditional Leaders	Roles
1	Azwar	Village elder of Suku Laut
2	Imbak	Village elder of Suku Laut
3	Leaders of Suku Laut, Asli and Akit	Village elders of Suku Laut

Source : Author, 2022.

Traditional institutions of Suku Laut are relatively simple. Though the conventional institution has long existed since colonialism, it has fewer roles in the community. The custom is only presented lightly in particular events like weddings or death ceremonies. The people of Suku Laut used to perform many rituals descended from now slowly faded away.

The land boundaries of Suku Laut are as simple as it is, using trees as marks. Meanwhile, some people have owned a land certificate of ownership.

The total of family heads of Suku Laut from different locations in the Kepulauan Riau shows that they live together with other tribes of Suku Laut. They live in one Region on average; no more than 50 family registers, including the total of houses in the group. The people of Suku Laut that inhabit several locations, usually own homes and no longer dwell abroad on a boat. The following table shows rural settlement patterns of Suku Laut in the Kepulauan Riau.

Table 2 – Rural Settlement Patterns of Suku Laut in the Kepulauan Riau

Regency/City	Sub-district	Village	Note
Karimun	Mepar	Karimun Anak	Housed
	Pongkar, Karimun	Desa Pongkar	Housed
	Kundur Barat, Kundur	Kundur Perayun	Housed
	Kundur Utara	Desa Tanjung Berlian	Housed
	Belat	Desa Sungai Asam	Housed

Source: initial exploration (Penjajagan) 2018.

Historically, the people of Suku Laut practice animism and do not have religion. However, after being housed and acculturation and receiving administrative service from the local government (sub-district and village), the people of Suku Laut practice religion (Elsera et al., 2022). The religion they follow depends on who approaches them and becomes the facilitator for them. This is why there are two churches there. The people of Suku Laut, who live in Desa Tanjungberlian, Kundur sub-district, Karimun Regency, follow Buddha after a monk in Tepekong, Tanjung Berlian, taught them about him.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research method is qualitative and uses a descriptive approach. This social science research method collects, words (spoken and written), and human actions. Researchers do not try to calculate or quantify the qualitative, so they do not look at numbers (Afrizal, 2014). Using a qualitative approach is to understand reality as a whole. The study used a descriptive type of research. Descriptive research describes a phenomenon or social reality related to the unit and problem under investigation.

Data through interviews, field notes, photographs, personal documents, notes or memos and official documents to describe the research subject. (Lexy J Moleong, 2018). The data collection technique is observation, an interview, and documentation. The informants of this research used the purposive mechanism. The indication observed in this research is the isolation of Suku Laut in the Kepulauan Riau. Therefore, the informants involved in this research are the native of Suku Laut in the Kepulauan Riau, public figures, traditional leaders of Suku Laut, and the Social Service of Kepulauan Riau province.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Kepulauan Riau is the 32nd province of Indonesia formed as per law No. 25/ 2002. The area has direct borders with the neighbouring countries. It is by Vietnam and Cambodia in the north; the province of Bangka Belitung Islands and Jambi in the south; Singapore, Malaysia, and mainland Riau in the west; Malaysia, Brunei, and the area of West Kalimantan in the east. According to Law No. 25/ 2002 about establishing the Kepulauan Riau, the total area is two hundred thousand fifty-one thousand eight hundred ten point seven one km² consisting of 10.595,41 km² of the sea. However, the details from the regency and city are unavailable. Therefore, based on the Ministry of Home Affairs Regulation No. 18/2005 code and the latest government administrative data with the changes of regulation of the Ministry of Home Affairs No.56/2015, the total land of the Kepulauan Riau is Eight Thousand Two Hundred One Point Seventy-two km², the specific details as follows:

Table 3 – The Kepulauan Riau' total land area as defined by the Ministry of Home Affairs Regulation No. 56/2015.

Regency/City	Land (km ²)
Bintan	1,318,21.
Karimun	912,75.
Natuna.	2,009,04.
Lingga	2,266,77.
Anambas	.590,14.
Batam	960,25.
Tanjungpinang	144,56.
Total	8,201,72.

Source: Regulation of the Ministry of Home Affairs No. 56/ 2015.

The Kepulauan Riau are the centre of Malay culture with several potencies of historical heritage and unique and wonderful Malay traditions. The authenticity of Malay culture is one kind of attraction. Historical areas throughout the islands possess sale value since the art inheritance and Malay culture hold value as tourist attractions in each Region. The assimilation and acculturation of Malay culture in the Kepulauan Riau have long occurred following the migration. There are at least 17 ethnic groups that occupy the Kepulauan Riau: Riau Malays, Sumatra Malays (outside Riau), Kalimantan Malays, Minangkabau, Javanese, Bugis, Batak, Sundanese, Acehnese, Balinese, Madura, Nias, Floresian, Dayak, Papua, Betawi, Ambon, and Chinese. Diversity has brought a valuable treasure to Malay culture, especially the language. Although the province is home to many ethnic groups, people speak Bahasa Melayu as an everyday language. The dialects differ from one another, following the locality distinction of the group in each Region. The variations of Malay culture also create a unique identity for Malay people that demonstrate openness and live with the principle of coexistence in diversity.

The motto 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika' (unity in diversity) is applied in the everyday life of Malays, creating multiculturalism. The characteristics of the Malays in the Kepulauan Riau are openness and the capability to accommodate differences, as shown from the acculturation. Therefore, it is no surprise when tracing; the elements and symbols recognized as Malay culture from non-Malay culture. For example, the traditional music of Melayu *ghazal* originated from the Arabian Peninsula. Although they for their openness, the Malays still hold their Malay identity. In Malay tradition, the aphorism 'Adat Bersendikan Syarak, and Syarak Bersendikan Kitabullah' implies that the Malay culture adheres to the principles of Islamic teachings.

On the other hand, Raja Ali Haji said in *Gurindam* twelve (1847) that 'Tak kan Melayu Hilang di Bumi' (Melayu will not disappear from the earth). This verse shows the Malays' belief in their traditions and culture. Their practices are significant, as demonstrated by sayings like "Better Your Child Dies, Do not Break Your Traditions" or "Better Your Wife Dies, Do not Break Your Traditions" (better your wife dies than your traditions). These sayings have been passed down from generation to generation and are very important to the Malays, whether they live on the islands of Riau or elsewhere.

The Identity of Sea Tribe

Self-identity is an awareness of oneself that comes from observation and judgment, all aspects of self-concept as a complete whole, according to Stuart and Sundeen (Nurohman & Gunawan, 2019). Self-identity is a component of self-concept that allows the individual to maintain a consistent stance and therefore allows a person to occupy a stable position in his environment. The theory of identity negotiation from Stella Ting-Toomey (Dalil & Rahardjo, 2019) explains how people in indigenous systems interact with dominant cultural societies. Finally, Stuart Hall's Theory of Cultural Studies examines people's self-identity. It is necessary to be careful in approaching people who still uphold high cultural values so that the goal of empowerment and they do not feel disturbed. It is essential to carry out empowerment programs for the SAD community from the local government, the centre, and

the volunteers who assist SAD in improving welfare (Mardiyati & Gutomo, 2018). Human identity in the form of permanence fixed and seemingly unchanged. Whereas thinkers from Aristotle to Zygmunt Bauman assert that change becomes a fluid life necessity (Davis, 2008) in the following table:

Table 4 – An Overview of Human Self-Change

Identity	Step Estetik	Step Etis	Step Religious
Reps	The Sea Tribes people live a valueless life (without norms and values). The Sea Tribe society experienced a tense and desperate situation. Repetition works by repeating making the subject disappointed and despairing.	The Sea Tribesmen are at the ties of norms or laws. Loyalty, ethical compliance, and normative responsibility from the basis of relations for The Sea Tribesmen's Communities between individuals. Repetition works for ethical subjects caught up in the rules/laws.	The understanding of the subject is in submission to divine power. The paradox occurs because God's power cannot be understood by a ratio, but by faith. Repetition works because there is a purpose of human self-change for salvation.
Recollection	The subject changes because there is disappointment and despair. The Sea Tribesmen remember (anamneses), events in the past and seek to improve themselves.	The self-construction of the subject is on the human ethical condition. Recollection works in the trajectory of memories and present conditions	Closeness to God to eternity. Recollection works more on self-memory on absurdity.

Source: Authors, 2022.

Social Institutions of Suku Laut

Social institutions are the official system of social behaviour, integrated norms, and traditions that regulate conduct and instruments to fulfil the community's social needs. There are several social institutions connected to the people of Suku Laut in Karimun regency, described as follows:

The Economy

Suku Laut or sea nomads are the tribes who dwell abroad on a boat or a raft. Today, several tribes of Suku Laut still live a nomadic life on their boat, but the ones in the Kepulauan Riau mostly have occupied houses on the land. The places they own by the government (The Ministry of the Social Affairs Republic of Indonesia) through the housing subsidy program. Nomadic life means a way of obtaining food. The people of Suku Laut are now not only searching for fish. In fact, in Lingga Regency, a group that they are not only searching for fish and hunting, but also doing other activities like gardening (rubber plants, fruits), collecting woods, and making a craft out of Mumbai leaves. For example, they usually make a Rumbia roof to replace their house roof. At times, they sell it as per request. So hunting for fish, selling a Rumbia roof, collecting woods, and gardening are commonly the works to fulfil their needs.

The Politics and Traditional Institutions

A traditional leader is an individual who holds a high position and plays a significant role in a rural social structure in a particular area. The head of the village or traditional leader commonly accommodates administrative affairs like national identity card management and population data. A traditional leader is chosen based on his age and his knowledge. In some cases, they hold a decisive role. For instance, the conventional leader determines whether other people can visit the area or not. He also decides when to sail in a group. In addition, the traditional leader gives advice and consideration to an activity. If he disagrees, then the people will not proceed. Moreover, this also applies to government programs.

Traditional leaders often hold an important role, yet in some Kepulauan Riau, their role is less critical. Their existence may be unknown to some people and only recognized by a few people, such as in several locations in Lingga regency and Karimun regency. Even

though the community claims to have a traditional leader, the leader does not play a significant role in their everyday life. For example, traditional leaders no longer take part in the collective decision of Suku Laut, but their existence is still respected. Instead, the local government is the official institution to facilitate the people.

The people of Suku Lau slowly leave their ancestral rituals. The wedding ceremony used to be performed in tradition and not conformed to the religion because they were not familiar with religion and had not attached faith in their identity. Based on information obtained from the people of Desa Sungai Limau, Karimun Regency, in tradition. The bride and groom's parents met, and if they approved, the two families would invite their neighbors the next day to join the feast. This process was a way to announce the marriage, let the people around them know, and avoid suspicion.

The Ownership and System of the Territory

The people of Suku Laut, who live in several locations on land, usually own a house and no longer dwell abroad on a boat. However, some family registers in some locations have not yet owned a house because they were newly married couples who lived with their parents when the subsidy program was issued. One place usually consists of 2-4 members of the family. The land boundaries of Suku Laut are as simple as it is, using trees as marks. However, some of them have owned land certificates of ownership.

Religion, Faith, and Belief

Historically, the people of Suku Laut practice animism and do not have religion. However, after being housed and acculturation and receiving administrative service from the local government (sub-district and village), the people of Suku Laut practice religion. The faith they follow depends on who approaches them and becomes the facilitator for them. There are two churches in village Perayun, Kundur sub-district, Karimun regency, where the people of Suku Laut converted to Catholicism under the guidance of an excommunicated priest who lived nearby. Suku Laut, a village in the Kundur sub-district of the Karimun Regency, follows Budha after a monk in Tepekong, Tanjung Berlian, enlightened them.

The Healthcare

The people of Suku Laut have yet to receive benefits from the health facility due to: (1) long distance to reach health care centres such as hospitals, public health centres, and public health sub-centre. (2) Most people of Suku Laut still believe in shamans and village midwives. It is because they believe that the shaman will cure the illness. Moreover, if the shaman suggests going to the doctor because their health condition is serious, they will go to the health centres. (3) The medical officer of health is sometimes unavailable at the public health sub-centre. Besides, the doctor, a midwife, and nurse would not come to their house in an emergency.

Education and Technological Knowledge

Children of Suku Laut in the Kepulauan Riau have attended elementary and middle schools. However, it does not represent the majority. Many children quit school, and some have never attended school due to the long distance (in some places, it is on a different island). Another reason is that the people of Suku Laut have not acknowledged the importance of school.

Family Relationship

The social interaction of Suku Laut in the Kepulauan Riau with other people is limited. Because their location is far from the city, they have difficult access and mobility. They only leave home for specific reasons, such as work, illness, and shopping. Living in a group and staying far away from other groups make less interaction with other tribes—additionally, the residential patterns centred on the locations closest to their source of income. Meanwhile, the interaction among the people of Suku Laut is strong. They have more intense face-to-face social contact within the group compared to the interaction they have with the people outside the group.

The Social Relations and Networks

The people of Suku Laut are homogenous; they were born and raised there. They occupy the place from generation to generation. As they live in a group, the interaction mainly occurs only among their people. They may leave the village for certain occasions when it is urgent or essential, or the other party would visit them. They must go out when they need to go shopping or hunt fish. Such a condition does not make the people of Suku Laut withdrawn because they have opened themselves to the outside world; however, the interaction to work and life needs. The people of Suku Laut build networking at a slow pace. Only a few develop a network with the people outside the community. However, they attempt to make the network, so when one person of Suku Laut sells his catches to *toke* (business owner), the others will do the same thing and then do it gradually.

Analysis of Human Resources Development

Through reconstruction, they tried to improve Suku Laut's human resources. Today, found from four locations in initial exploration in the Kepulauan Riau, the people of Suku Laut as the administrative staff in the sub-district office of Karimun regency. As explained by Camat Belat, the recruitment of the people of Suku Laut motivates the other members of Suku Laut to take the chance on self-developing. Thus, people will develop revolutionarily and evolutionarily.

Analysis of Management and Natural Resources Utilization

One of the common characteristics of indigenous peoples is that they rely heavily on nature. As their basic needs from heart, they hunt in the woods, sea, and rivers using traditional tools. Unfortunately, the natural management model has yet to be found, while the conventional model is vulnerable to natural changes such as wind direction changes, weather, and seasons. Most people of Suku Laut who live in the Kepulauan Riau depend much on the sea and forest, especially when it is close to their location. The people of Suku Laut are well-known for their spear hunting. They catch fish, shrimp, squids, and crabs in the sea. The men hunt in the woods when they do not see anything in the ocean. They hunt animals like boar, deer, and mouse deer.

However, these animals are difficult to find nowadays. So the other alternative will be finding tree worms. The people needed to cut the stem to collect tree worms, and later they would cook and consume them. The people of Suku Laut gather wood to make firewood or sell them. They usually wait for orders before selling them. The people from neighbouring villages sometimes purchase the firewood collected from the woods or dried plants around the swamp.

Financial analysis and basic needs fulfillment

The people of Suku Laut are now not only searching for fish. In fact, in Lingga Regency, a group that they are not only searching for fish and hunting, but also doing other activities like gardening (rubber plants, fruits), collecting woods, and making a craft out of Rumbia leaves. They usually make Rumbia roofs to replace their house roof. At times, they sell it as per request. Hunting for fish, selling Rumbia roofs, collecting woods, and gardening are commonly the works to fulfil their needs. The following table describes the occupations of the people of Suku Laut:

Table 5 – The Occupations of the People of Suku Laut

No	Occupations at sea	Occupation on land
1	Hunting in the sea on a boat using a spear	Hunting in the forest
2	Fishing	Making charcoal
3	Coral planting	Selling
4	Labor	Manual labourer in the harbour, a labourer in a factory and Honorary sub-district head

Source: Primary Data (Data Primer) 2019.

The Transition

With the development of a new era, changes occur gradually. Similarly, the transition in traditions has also happened to the people of Suku Laut in Desa Sungai Asam. The significant growth by the settlement pattern in which the people no longer lived nomadic lives and other habits slowly changed due to the transition. The people of Suku Laut built a raft to sail on the ocean as their ancestors did. The people of Suku Laut also created a civilization by building *Sapau* houses (resting lodges). As time passed, they made a village Sungai Asam. The name derives from the palm trees (*Eleiodoxa Conferta*/Asam Paya) that grow in the area. In earlier times, the people of Suku Laut studied in primary school (*Sekolah Rakyat*) and believed in animism, but now they have religions.

Based on the findings, the people of Suku Laut came from the maternal lineage of Sungai Kampar, the female who married a Chinese. The child was born as the indigenous Suku Laut. The number of people of Suku Laut increased over time, and they created a civilization in the Lingga regency. Then, they dispersed to other regions such as Batam, Karimun, Bintan, Tanjungpinang, and Pulau Tujuh. Society made them learn religion from religious figures, although some remain faithful to their old belief. As for marriage, the people of Suku Laut married people from another community from the place they stopped by. They attract men or women they want to marry without deciding their religion.

The Livelihood Changes

The rural settlement patterns have shifted from nomadic to sedentary. It also transforms the system of livelihood of Suku Laut. People now are learning to use new tools; even though the devices are still manually operated, shapes and purposes have. The shift occurs as new knowledge comes from the outside after the indigenous Suku Laut welcomes the newcomers who married their people. Most people of Suku Laut are fishermen or do other activities related to the sea. They even go fishing at night as a habit. They believe that if they go fishing at night, they will catch fish more easily. They float on the boat (*Kajang*) and use a spear to catch fish. They only can go home until they haul, and if not, they will have to sleep on the raft.

CONCLUSION

Cultural Survival is a strategy to survive. Through the findings, we conclude that the people of Suku Laut, Desa Sungai Asam, and Tanjungbalai Karimun regency have several methods to stay:

- Optimization of housing subsidy; making maximal use of housing subsidy by working not at sea because it is easier to interact with the people on the land. Even though the houses by the government and the certificate after they own land, they only have building permits and not exclusive ownership rights. The subsidy stopped in 2006 and has not continued to this year;
- Tightening the relationship among the groups; the kinship of the indigenous people in the Belat sub-district is vital, whether the relationship within the tribe or with other tribes. Social connections have long. That is why they encourage, help, and cooperate;
- Reading nature's signs: the indigenous people read nature's signs, such as wind direction, to survive. They know when the ocean has terrible weather. They also know how to weaken the fish and catch them easily. They possess scripture that contains the knowledge of reading nature. The tools they use depend on what and how they want to see. For example, when they want to catch crabs, they use *Pento* (trap), *Bubu* (wired-fish trap), *Injap* or *Gancu* (hook), and *Jala*. They buy the tools and learn to use them;
- Taking formal education, many people of Sungai Asam attend schools (elementary school, middle school, and high school). Some continue their education at the college in Karimun. The outcome of formal education is that they have more job opportunities. Some people now work as teachers, the staff at the sub-district office and village;

- Upgrading with the technological advancement, the people of Sungai Asam use technology in their daily life, such as TV, Handphone, and other electronics using low amperage.

The result of research, there are several suggestions which need to improve in the future: the house fit for human habitation with toilet and water container, tools for sailing, education facility and staff, health care facility, electricity and clean water, guidance for creativity, individual, family and environment health counselling, and education guidance.

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