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Local Wisdom Of Tana Ai Ethnic As An Effort To Preserve Harmonious And Sustainable Environment In Ojang Village, Talibura District, Sikka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara

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Abstract-This study reveals the values of local wisdom of the Ethnic Tana Ai Ojang Village Talibura District, Sikka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, which are related to environmental preservation. Local wisdom of a community describes a collection of local ideas to explain a systematic action that is implemented for good deeds. The values of local wisdom of the Tana Ai ethnic group in Ojang Village describe the relationship of strong interdependence between humans and their natural environment. The study was conducted by Spry qualitative ethnographic approach. The result shows that changes in the values of life are due to the rapid development of science and technology which posed a threat to the values of local wisdom in environmental preservation efforts. Ethnic Tana Ai has its way to cultivate and protect the environment based on the values of local wisdom and still ensues to this day. Water and land continuously become an important and respected part of the concept of life in the Tana Ai ethnic culture. Various forms of ritual specifically for environmental preservation steadily run and become the identity of the Tana Ai ethnic. The strength of customary regulations that bind the entire Tana Ai Ethnic community becomes a living behavior to maintain harmony and preservation of nature and the environment as a source of life.

Keywords: Tana Ai, Local wisdom, Environmental preservation, Sikka Regency

Introduction

Ethnic studies related to local culture and wisdom are always interesting and issue curiosity. This is owing to the fact that the world is built from various structures and systems of ethnicities with culture and civilization in their respective environmental conditions. Each ethnic group builds its culture as an effort to face the challenges of nature and its survival of life. Indonesia is a multicultural country (Haedar, 2019; Mulia, 2019) because it is built from an integrated ethnic diversity which is then united because of the same historical background and desires in forming a nation and state. The bond as the Indonesian nation was strengthened by the sounding of the Youth Pledge on October 28, 1928. Moreover, each ethnic group has to have local knowledge which then became local wisdom as a basis for interaction between people and also interaction between humans and the natural surroundings. This is as

revealed by Sutikno, Hakim, Batoro, dan Riniwati (2018) that "... local culture is Values or behavior local communities in interacting with the environment in which they live wisely".

The relationship between humans and nature is like two sides of a coin that cannot be separated. Humans are an inseparable part of the universe. Therefore Anh (1985) explains "... humans must relate beautifully and harmoniously with the harmony of nature outside". From time to time, humans depend on nature as a source of life to obtain prosperity. Nature, the environment, and everything in it are substantial in human life that needs to be preserved and preserved in an effort to obtain a harmonious life between humans and nature itself, for now and generations to come. The values of local wisdom possessed by each ethnic group in the system of social life are explored in numerous studies. However, as much as any ethnic studies and local wisdom have been carried out, it has not been able to reach all the ethnic groups in the world. Among these studies were conducted by Sufia, Sumarmi, dan Amirudin (2016) who explained that the local beliefs of the community were able to preserve the environment related to water sources and soil fertility, farm, rice fields and the balance of the ecosystem. Furthermore, a study by Suhartini (2007) which examined the Community's Local Wisdom in natural resource management mentioned the importance of involving local communities to maintain ecological balance in a model called *Community Based Nature Resource Management*. Thamrin (2013) in his study about the Sakai ethnic community in Riau Province stated that indigenous peoples are very vulnerable to change. They are entitled to get forest products and manage them based on the customary law. These three studies clearly show how indigenous peoples in an ethnic region have a crucial role in protecting the environment.

Another study was carried out by Sinapoy (2018). In the research on the Moronene ethnic group in Bombana Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, it explained that the Moronene ethnic group fully utilized plants as a source of food, medicine, and traditional ceremonies. The Kongprasertamorn (2007) study for the people of Tambon Bangkhunsai Phetchaburi, Thailand, explained that the value of local wisdom is greatly beneficial for promoting environmental protection. Local wisdom is the heart of people's way of life because it includes ethical and moral values. Furthermore, Agung (2015) emphasized "... local wisdom... as the attempt of improving ... in reinforcing the students character of self identity". Moreover, local knowledge can also describe sustainability as revealed by Sandoval-Rivera (2020) as follows "... culture practices were identified that produce indigenous knowledge aligned with sustainability paradigm... regarding knowledge and values incorporated into the local world view that support behavior that promotes respect between people and protection toward the environment". Ethnic communities with local knowledge related to belief/religion contain ancient knowledge of wisdom values, for example, ethnicities that exist in the East Indian region (Kakoty, 2018). The research on Ethnic Tana Ai in Sikka District has also been carried out by Lewis (1989) related to words used for rituals, and another study by Lewis (1988) on Ethnic Tana Ai in Waibrama village.

Differs from the previous studies, this study is focused on the Ethnic Tana Ai in Ojang Village, Talibura District, East Nusa Tenggara. It aims to explore local knowledge and local wisdom relating to the efforts to preserve environmental sustainability that has not been adequately implemented. Local wisdom in an ethnic group becomes an important part of the survival of every ethnic in the world. Local wisdom is an abstraction of the ethnic community mind in addressing natural and environmental conditions to achieve harmony in life and life, not only in the present but has been thought of for the future sustainability. Some similarities about the concept of local wisdom in ethnic groups are not something that should be debated in this study but become a source and will clarify the description presented. This distinguishes from previous study, related to the land management sequences carried out by prioritizing religious and mutual cooperation spirit as well as traditional rituals that are still ongoing today.

Research Method

Research is classified as qualitative research, due the data objects are in the forms of cultural contexts with descriptive data in the form of words from the informants, pictures, a series of sayings, custom poetries, proverbs, rhymes and also various forms of paragraphs, and other qualitative sources that are narrative-qualitative (Ahimsa-Putra, 2001; Creswell & Roth, 2016; Murchison, 2010; Spradley, 1997; Suyanto, 2015). As revealed by (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997), through qualitative research, it is expected to be able to produce an in-depth, complete, holistic and

comprehensive study of the speech, writing or behavior of individuals/groups of people or certain organizations in a context-setting (Suwarno, 2019). Qualitative research is generally used for research relating to the community in a particular region or setting with all its unique identity, human behavior, and organizational functions in society, social activities and so forth. The qualitative research method used in this study is meant for capturing the socio-cultural life of Tana Ai Ethnic in Ojang Village, Talibura District, Sikka Regency, and East Nusa Tenggara Province. Data collection is done by participant observation, in-depth interviews, study of images, and also study of supporting libraries. In this study, researchers used a qualitative approach as developed by Spradley (1997) who mentioned ethnography with 12 forward steps. The data were analyzed out with ethnographic analysis which consisted of domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, compound analysis and study of cultural themes with their specific work procedures.

Theoretical Overview

Ethnic Diversity in Indonesia

Indonesia is a nation-state that characterized by a plural society structure. Indonesian pluralism is characterized by the existence of various ethnic groups and each has unique ways of life or culture that prevail so that it reflects the distinction and separation between one ethnicity and another ethnicity. The differences that exist between ethnic cultures in Indonesia are essential differences caused by historical and cultural differences and are shown in the behavior of daily life as a form of adaptation to the environment (Suparlan, 1984). According to Drake (2019), Indonesia's national integration is multidimensional, complex and dynamic. Indonesia is a nation-state, as expressed by Suryadinata, Arifin, dan Ananta (2003) that Indonesia is a nation consisting of various ethnic groups. Therefore, Drake (2019) views the pillars of national integration based on the following:

National integration incorporates a number of different. First, common, integrative historical experiences obviously act as a cohesive force. Second, shared socialcultural attributes can help give a nation state its identity, distinguish it from Surrounding states and enable its citizens to feel a tense of unity. Third, interaction among the diverse peoples within a nation state promotes integration, especially among those who share various socio cultural attributes. Fourth, regional economic independence and sane measure of regional balance economics

The above theory confirms that national integration, especially Indonesia, is highly dependent on these four fundamentals which consist of historical/past experiences, socio-cultural, interaction, and dynamic economic activities. Indonesian society according to Nasikun (1987) is characterized by two unique features, **first**, a horizontal characteristic which is marked by the fact of social entities' existence based on ethnic, religious and regional difference, and **second**, vertically characteristic that is marked by the difference between the upper and lower layers.

The concept of ethnic and ethnicity is a combination of people who speak one language and have a common sense of identity. They have the same historical experience and usually interact with each other intensively and with high frequency (Koentjaraningrat, 1998). Furthermore, (Naroll et al., 1964) defines ethnic groups as a population that is biologically capable of breeding and surviving. An ethnic group has the same cultural values and a sense of togetherness in a cultural form, form their communication networks and interactions, also determine the characteristics of their groups that are accepted by other groups and can be distinguished from other populations groups. Moreover, ethnic identity in the statement of Sjamsudin (2008) refers to a person of a certain ethnic group with a sense of belonging in the mind, perception, and behavior. Cultural ties unite and bind all behaviors that will differentiate from other ethnic groups in responding to natural challenges. Cultural ties that are reflected in daily behavior become a driver for the life of an ethnic group (Sulistiyono, 2018).

Local Wisdom of an Ethnic Group

Local wisdom is often referred to as local knowledge, indigenous knowledge, traditional knowledge, (Suswandari, 2017; Wahyu, 2015) and various other designations. It is becoming an important issue in the midst of the rise of modern content in the current global era which is capitalist and consumerism (Mungmachon, 2012). This condition affects mentality, intellectuality, and culture and even sees traditional values as for local knowledge which is foreign to almost all young generations in the Southeast Asian region. Various forms and evidence of local wisdom of

certain ethnic groups have become the basis for the development of entrepreneurship in the current creative economy (Sutikno et al., 2018). For example, various types of traditional dances and philosophies, various foods with their distinctive identity, Batik as an authentic ethnic painting well developed, also woven cloth, Songket, and so on. The local wisdom of an ethnic group is a creative response to a local geographical, geopolitical, historical and situational situation (Suswandari, 2016). Indonesia is rich in local wisdom along with its ethnic and cultural diversity. Local wisdom is a way of life and knowledge of the community, as well as a variety of life strategies in the form of local community activities in answering various problems they face (Alfian, 2014). In the cultural context, local wisdom has a positive notion, preserved and valued as a reference norm to overcome the problems experienced by the community. Therefore, local wisdom as a local idea in a particular cultural area is often used as a basis for collective decision making in society. The values implied in local wisdom of ethnic groups in Indonesia lead strongly to educative values in an effort to create a balanced life between humans, humans with nature, humans and their creators. This has become a cultural behavior that has been passed down for generations.

In anthropological context, the concept of local wisdom is interpreted as knowledge that comes from the culture of the local community, which is unique, relates to nature, adapts to the ecological system, dynamic, and open to new knowledge (Wahyu, 2015). Local wisdom is a typical cultural expression. The local wisdom of an ethnic group contains values, ethics, norms, rules, and skills of a community that is necessary for responding to the challenges and sustainability of human life. Local wisdom can be a creative answer to local geographical, geopolitical, historical, and incidental situation. Erica-Irine Daes (Adimihardja, 2008) states that to determine the meaning of local knowledge systems and local communities can refer to certain territorial settlements that have languages, social organizations, economic systems, beliefs and specific values of other communities. Even oftentimes, local wisdom is used as *local decision making*, as is applied in the field of natural resource management and various other social activities (Adimihardja, 2008). Local wisdom as decision making binds all ethnic supporters. It becomes unwritten regulations and results in severe social sanctions when violations occur. Thus, the values of wisdom can be the basis for the formation of a harmonious society, both among fellow members of the community, with local leaders and of course with the natural situation and the environment.

The main characteristic of local wisdom is not only related to the values of authenticity but also in a certain locality or territorial aspects, both supported by original knowledge systems and those that have adapted to external values. Local wisdom in general can be in the form of poetry, proverbs, poetry, wise words full of philosophy, expressions in songs, forms of dance, cultural rites in respect of nature, cultural rites at marriage, birth, death, and others. In today's Globalization and technological development, it is very possible to have blurred the limits of the importance of local wisdom in the interaction of fellow humans with nature. The new value of life in a material-based global era changes the behavior of humans to strive for full of profit and prevent loss which increasingly makes the area of moral and mental interaction unclear. Humans and humanity are more pursued to follow a sense of worldly pleasure and satisfaction that is characterized by material abundance and existence in various social media with the support of global technology. The hedonist lifestyle in urban areas has begun to penetrate and threaten rural areas in certain ethnicities which are generally still strong in supporting and practicing the values of their local wisdom in maintaining harmony in their lives. The global condition has become a double-edged knife in efforts to preserve the environment through the practice of the values of local wisdom as a genuine cultural heritage that teaches good values for good.

Environmental Preservation

In many social studies, the environment is the space occupied by humans along with other living creatures on earth. The environment is a source of life as well as a source of challenges for humanity. People are striving to be able to create knowledge and technology in overcoming various problems and providing convenience for their lives. Law of Republic of Indonesia Number 23 of 1997 explains that the environment is a unitary space with all its objects, power, conditions, and living things, including humans and their behavior, which affect the survival and welfare of humans and other living things. The Law on Environmental Conservation is stated as an integrated effort to preserve the function of the environment which includes policies on the arrangement, utilization, development, maintenance, recovery, supervision and control of the environment. (Thamrin, 2013). Furthermore, Emil Salim asserted that objects, conditions, conditions, and influences in the space we occupy affect living things including human life. Thus, since humans were created on this earth, the Creator has placed them in an existing environment. The human mission is to study, utilize and maintain its sustainability. This condition has become part of the local cultural values of various ethnic groups in Indonesia which have extraordinary local knowledge to preserve the environment and

sustainability. However, many factors that later led to human behavior to dominate and then cause damage to nature and also the life of humanity.

There are three human behaviors that damage the environment, namely: (1) human population growth; (2) excessive consumption of natural resources: forests, fisheries, rivers, and so on, and; (3) air, water and land pollution. Daly and Cobb (in Dermawan, 2018) argued that :

"...humans treat the earth "as if it was liquidation in business," which the future is not valued. People overgrow, consume excessively and over pollute. These perpetrators who damage the environment deny the general belief that we must conserve the earth in a good atmosphere for future generations ".

In everyday life, humans uncontrollably and unconsciously squander energy inefficiently. For example, excessive use of electricity and water, felling wood in a reckless/illegal manner, and not followed by efforts to replant, recklessly disposing of plastic waste, the habit of littering into rivers, destruction of the river environment and marine life, excessive use chemicals for agriculture and so on. These things are collective neglect that will have a big impact on human life in the future. In other words, there is inter-generation neglect where people ignore the future because they can benefit now, making the burden of future generations.

Wade-Benzoni(Dermawan, 2018), argues that this neglect occurs because of the damage created by humans and will be a problem for future generations. This is a cognitive, affective and psychomotor process that justifies behavior that damages the environment. Egocentrism becomes part of the emergence of environmental neglect behavior due to the insistence on personal needs driven by uncontrolled global culture. Global values related to the concepts of capitalism and liberalism spur every human to enjoy what is provided by nature in excessively. This is in line with the credo of modern life called *carpe diem* (enjoy this world) as opposed to *momentomorry* (always remembering life after death). In this era, it is called the hedonism concept of life. **Hedonism** is a view of life that assumes that people will become happy by seeking as much happiness as possible and avoiding painful feelings whenever possible. **Hedonism** is a theory or view that pleasure is the purpose of life and human action. This condition is very relevant to environmental damage, as the environment becomes a tool to meet the needs and pleasure of human life. The emergence of hedonism in society has more negative impacts because it tends to be selfish, lack of empathy for the social environment, tries to achieve pleasure, by all means. It rationalizes or justifies their pleasure, even when the pleasure is contrary to legal and social norms. Human in this life ⁶⁹ do everything to fulfill their pleasure, they are indifferent if it might hurt others. In another aspect, the value of living in harmony with nature and the environment has been developed by the ancestors as local intelligence in almost every ethnicity in Indonesia faces a great challenge. This local intelligence has provided signs, instructions, and learning of life in the form of local knowledge which is then often referred to as local wisdom or in historical and anthropological perspectives called ecological intelligence (Supriatna, 2016).(Supriatna, 2016).

The ecological intelligence of humankind has been formed since they developed their lives and settled in their chosen environment. They place themselves as part of nature that is interconnected with one another. Therefore, ecological intelligence that emerges as local wisdom becomes a foundation to create systems for the continuity of good life. Various myths were raised as an effort to limit human lust that is not limited in utilizing nature and its environment. For example, in Sundanese society, there is the myth of *leuweng ban, leuwengtipan*(Supriatna, 2016) to preserve the forest. In Javanese society, there is the urip myth *mung mampirngombe*, which means that life is only temporary, so there is no need to be excessive. It means, when it comes to benefit from the environment, humans need to use it wisely and not over consume.

⁷⁵ There is so much local wisdom of various ethnic groups in Indonesia that addresses conservational efforts to manage natural resources and the environment in the language of modern social science. In general, traditional communities are familiar with the conditions of the surrounding environment. They have well-honed senses to be able to read the signs of nature. For example, in hunting communities, they have local wisdom with a high sense of smell and great hearing related to animals that can be targeted by hunting and animal sounds that may threaten their safety. In the marine community, local intelligence is associated with natural signs related to activities at the sea and its

surroundings. In this connection, the concept to strengthen the basic principles of environmental management is based on local wisdom, as stated Nababandalam Suhartini (2007) as follows: a) the respect that drives the emergence of a sense of harmony in human relations with the natural surroundings. In this condition, traditional societies place themselves as part of nature. They committed not to cause damage to nature, b) The sense of shared ownership of what is provided by the universe. This concept encourages them to feel shared ownership, which then taking care of the universe together from the possibility of various disturbances from outsiders, c) the ability to solve various problems encountered by utilizing the existing natural resources. For example, the use of natural materials as medicine, so natural materials as a source of problem resolution, d) establish various customary rules to secure natural resources as a common property from excessive use. This is manifested in customary institutions and laws that govern all aspects of life in a particular social entity, e) establishing mechanisms for equitable harvesting to prevent inequality, social envy, social outrage and prevent theft or the use of natural resources outside of applicable customary provisions, f) The emergence of adaptive knowledge with various forms of simple technology that is suitable with local natural conditions. For example the discovery of rice milling tools, traditional corn milling and so on.

Research Findings And Discussion

The Description of Tana Ai Ethnic in Ojang Village

Ethnic Tana Ai is one of several ethnic/sub-ethnic groups in Sikka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Sikka Regency, in which the capital is in Maumere, is one of eight districts on Flores Island. Sikka Regency has a lot of natural resources and unique cultural customs and is currently one of the most talked-about local and foreign tourist destinations. Other regencies on Flores Island that are also interesting are: Manggarai Regency with the capital in Ruteng, West Manggarai Regency with the capital in Labuan Bajo, East Manggarai Regency with the capital is in Borong, Nagekeo Regency with the capital in Mbay, Ngada Regency with the capital in Bajawa, Ende with the capital in Ende, East Flores Regency (Flotim) with the capital in Larantuka. These eight districts on Flores Island, are now important magnets for foreign and domestic tourists due to the natural beauty and uniqueness of their customs and cultural rituals, including the unique way of life for their supporting ethnic groups.

Sikka Regency is home to ethnic Tana Ai and often stated as a mini Indonesia due to the diversity of structure and social system that builds the regency. This is the outcome of the long process of the history of Sikka Regency to the present. In the context of colonization, Sikka Regency was first occupied by the Portuguese who had established their power in the 15th century. The influence of colonization was evident in several ethnic groups in Sikka Regency. The spread of Catholicism that became a hallmark of Portuguese colonization in all parts of the world is also taking place in this district. Then, the mention of someone by the name fam (family) in the Portuguese model is mostly found in ethnic groups in Sikka Regency. These fam names are almost similar to fam names in Timor Leste, Philippines, and also in some Portuguese colonies in South America such as Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Peru, and others. Furthermore, some types of dance, certain terms in language, food names and so on also indicate the influence of the Portuguese. In its development, Sikka Regency was also influenced by the Islamic kingdom, particularly from several Islamic kingdoms from Sulawesi (Gowa Kingdom) and Maluku (Ternate and Tidore Kingdom) and Bima Kingdom as part of the Gowa Kingdom in South Sulawesi. This condition then adds to the diversity/plurality of the population in Sikka Regency both in terms of ethnicity, race, and culture. This condition continued to develop from the Dutch colonial period and Japan until Sikka Regency established as part of the Republic of Indonesia when the independence declared. The economic and social development in Sikka Regency has become important traction for various other ethnic groups to come and then look for a new life in this place. Therefore, Sikka Regency is inhabited by various ethnic groups in Indonesia, complete with a diversity of religions and cultures and continues to live together with various other ethnicities with high tolerance levels.

In the midst of this diversity, there are five most well-known ethnic groups, namely, Sikka Krowe, Lio, Tana Ai, Palue and Tidung. Sikka Krowe (Lewis & Mandalangi, 2008) is the highest populated ethnic group and almost inhabits all regions of Sikka Regency. The Sikka Krowe ethnic group had a strong Portuguese influence because the history began with the existence of the Sikka Kingdom and the first church in the region. Ethnic Lio (Orinbao, 1992),

originally from Ende Regency, domiciled in the West Sikka Regency. Ethnic Tana Ai (Lewis, 1988), located at the eastern end of Sikka Regency, borders with East Flores Regency. Ethnic Palue (Manalu, Erfan, & Sunarso, 2015) is a separate ethnic group residing on Palue Island in the North of Flores Island. Ethnic Tidung (Keling, 2015) is an ethnic Muslim group coming from various ethnic groups from Sulawesi Island and residing in the coastal area.

The Tana Ai ethnic group inhabits the easternmost part of Sikka Regency, bordering the East Flores Regency. They are predicted to have migrated from areas in the Maluku region. The Tana Ai ethnic group is also divided into various sub-ethnic groups related to their domicile. The Tana Ai ethnic group in the village (in Sikka language is called Natar) Ojang, Talibura District is in a mountainous area with dense and well-preserved forests. To reach Ojang village takes approximately four hours from the City of Maumere to the east by taking a winding road and even crossing a river without a bridge. Next to Ojang Village is the East Flores Regency. More details can be observed in the following map below.

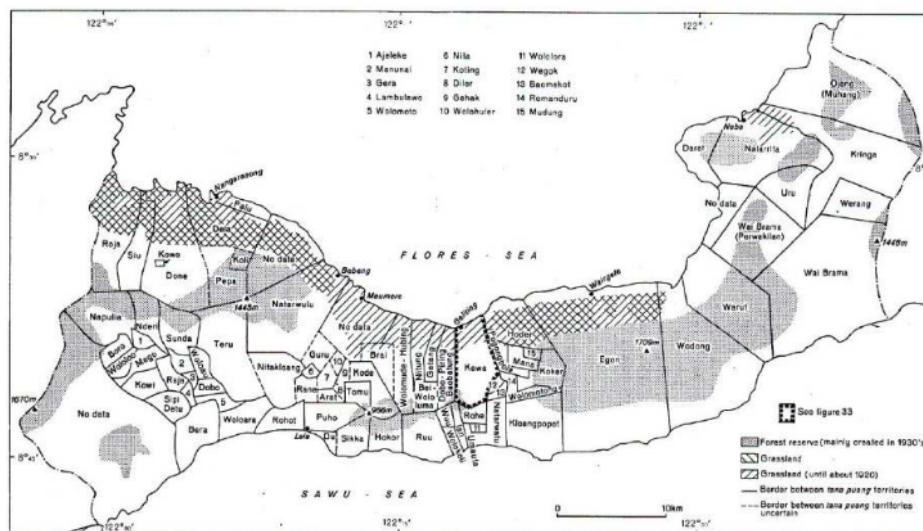


Fig.32 Sikka (excluding the islands): chief traditional territories (*tana*) of the 'lord of the earth' (*tana puang*)

Figure 1. Sikka: Chief Traditional Territories (Tana) of The Lord of The Erath.

Source: Prior, J. (2015). *Hukum Adat dan Hukum Positif Berseberangan: Mana Peran Teologi Kristen? Catatan dari Pulau Flores.*

Based on this picture, the Ojang Village area located at the east end and directly bordered by the area of East Flores Regency. Therefore, there are many similarities between the ethnic culture of Ojang Village and several villages in East Flores. Even the language used is also the language of Tana Ai Lamaholot, which is used in East Flores. On the map, there are twelve natar/villages in the Talibura District area namely: Ojang, Timu Tawa, Hikong, Kinga, Bangkoo, Wailamung, Lewomada, Darat Gunung, Drat Pantai, Talibura, Nangahale (Daniel, 61 Tahun, 2019). In tracing the cultural and ethnic patterns of Tana Ai, it still relies on oral sources with narratives believed to be the inspiration of the ancestors. Therefore, the customary elder or what is called *Tana Puang*, is not just anyone. *Tana Puang* is specially chosen people and has a variety of features that are not owned by people in general (CK, 69 Tahun, 2019). For example, healing the sick, reconciling warring people, and other customary matters. The Tana Ai

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ethnic in Ojang village upholds its customs. For instance, in the land acquisition starts from the opening of a new garden to the harvest period is always accompanied by holding traditional rituals. In this activity, the *Tana Puang* has a very significant role..

Regarding the Ethnic Tana Ai, by(Lewis, 1988)stated as follows:

“...Ata Tana Ai is a branch of Sikka people in Eastern Flores. Tana Ai is a mountainous region and high valley ... and is located on the border of East Flores Regency ... Ata Tana Ai is the third community group in Sikka. Sikka people in the middle and coastal area called them Ata Tana Ai or the people from the forestland. ... because the land they inhabit in the mountain slopes and valleys is more covered by forest than the land in central Sikka which has experienced extensive deforestation.”

The term **Tana Ai** is interpreted as a bond with the motherland(Basyir, 2009). **Tana Ai** can be interpreted as wood or plants or forests. **Tana** is also interpreted as land/territory/country/earth. Furthermore, the information obtained from DDT informants, 66 years (2019) stated that:DDT, 66 tahun (2019)menyatakan bahwa:

“...quoting from Fr. Piet Pitu, SVD from STFTK Ledalero, it is stated that Tana Ai means Paddy Land. Rice or paddy area or rice barn. The word Ai/Are comes from the South Maluku Key Timu language and from the Lio language which means paddy or rice...”.

The Tana Ai ethnic group settled and spread in the eastern mountains of Sikka Regency. It is a lush forest area with various types of plants that are well preserved. The Tana Ai settlement is physically isolated. This situation eludes them to get influence from outside, especially related to political mastery in the past (the Dutch colonial period) which influenced their ascendancy. The Tana Aiterritory now covers the area between Mount Egon in the West, Mount Wuko and Lewotobi in the East, north of the Flores Sea and south of the Savu Sea(DDT, 66 Tahun, 2019). The Tana Ai cultural area covers the regions of Mount Egon/Mapitara to Mount Ilimandiri in Larantuka, East Flores, which is expressed in traditional language as follows: "*olangalangamin, pu'anwawaMapiapin wain Tara gatalamen*". This means Mapitara builds identity, *sapedaaretallemandire, jajiretawai Oka lolondewa*. It means that our living area starts from Mapitara and builds an identity to Mount Ilimandiri and the Oka valley in the East there which has been the promised land, namely unity and unity of two-way triangles "(DDT, 66 Tahun, 2019).

Ethnic Tana Ai in Ojang Village speaks the Sikka language with Tana Ai dialect, in addition to the Muhan language which is similar to the Lamaholot language used by the community in East Flores Regency. Muhan language is spoken by the Tana Ai ethnic group in the villages of Lewomada, Wailamun, Nebe, Bangkoor, Kringa, Ojan, Timutawa and Hikong. The language is also spoken by Tana Ai groups in Boru, Hokeng, Watubuku, Riangbaring, Taabana, DuangBawasarana, and its surroundings. The Sikka Krowe dialect of Tana Ai is used by the Tana Ai groups in the villages of Nebe, Bangkoor, Mountain Land, Coastal Land, Talibura, Tuabao, Runut, Watudiran, Tanahikong, Ilimedo, Tanarawa, Pruda and Ojandetung in Wulangitan District, East Flores Regency(Suswandari & Astuti, 2020; Tapo, n.d.).

Before the Dutch boundary assertion in 1904, the Tana Ai area was part of the Larantuka Kingdom. However, since the geographical position of the ethnic is in a mountain range, and there were differences in language, customs as well as long distances from Larantuka so that Tana Ai ethnic affiliation with Larantuka was not substantial and always opposed by the Kingdom of Sikka (Lewis, 1988). The Sikka people always perceive that the Tana Ai are mountain people so they are isolated and not receiving enough benefit from development. However, Tana Ai people have extraordinary physical strength, for example, they can walk on foot to carry out economic activities from their village to Talibura region within one day and return the same day.

The striking exclusivity of the Tana Ai ethnicity is not entirely due to the physical isolation, but rather leads to the existence of social boundaries between the people of Sikka Regency as part of the historical process behind it (Lewis, 1988). The Tana Ai people have always lived in a number of loosely organized dominant areas called *Tana*. Lewis (1988)sertaSuswandari dan Astuti (2020), it is stated as follows :

“..... the word Tana has many meanings. Tana is the earth itself, the half of the universe that can be understood, can be known, can be cultivated by humans, and is a complement to the divine world. Tana is the soil and substrate upon which are various configurations of the center, periphery, and boundaries of the human. Tana is the substance of the earth, the rocks and the mountains were made from the land, and it also enlivens plants and forests. This word is used to refer to Tana Ai's physical landscape, region or place“.

The statement above confirms that the mountainous region is a typical residence for most of the Tana Ai Ethnic, including those in Ojang Village, with the cool mountain atmosphere with the water that continues to flow despite the drought. This indicates that the people of Ojang Village have their own local knowledge to preserve their natural preservation for the prosperity of their lives. The people of Tana Ai in Ojang Village generally work as subsistence farmers, hunters, and cultivated processors. Their economic order is based on a system of farming alternating between rice and corn, with occasional small-scale farming in the form of copra and coffee, which is then brought to the market in Talibura District. They opened agricultural land and plantations in the hilly areas that occur during the rainy season. Other income from the Tana Ai Ethnic in Ojang Village also includes the harvest of cashew, coconut, candlenut, to fulfill their daily needs. Tana Ai's ethnic residential area is very broad. It gives the possibility for agriculture and hunting. Palawija plants have always planted there. In the past, they used to live nomadically, but now they live permanently and food for their daily needs is fulfilled. In Ojang Village, cashew trees flourish. In the forest, there are so many hardwoods and various forms of tubers as a staple food, also various kinds of rice and corn. Pigs become important livestock for the people of Ojang Village due to its relation to traditional ceremonies and also the fulfillment of their nutrition. The atmosphere of Ojang Village is very cool, with neatly arranged settlements even though built with simple materials. The women of Ojang Village have weaving skills with a typical Tana Ai motif, which is different from the motif in Lio in Ende, Maumere, or Palue.

The Practice of Local Wisdom as an Effort for Environmental Preservation

Ethnic Tana Ai in Ojang Village has a rich local knowledge, including local knowledge related to efforts to preserve the environment and natural resources. The belief in various ethnic groups on Flores Island is that they perceive the land as an important "heirloom" inherited from their ancestors. They live because of the land, which in their language is called *tana amin*, *moretamin* which means our land, our life (PL, 47 Tahun, 2019). In the Tana Ai ethnic beliefs, the forest is described as the dwelling place of ancestral spirits which should not be destroyed (CH, 50 Tahun, 2019). The Tana Ai Ethnic in Ojang village believes in abstinence, prohibition, and respectful attitude toward the ancestors and the Divine Creator of the Universe. Customary violations are Based on the teachings of the ancestors that they believe, the traditional territory of Tana Ai is divided into zones of traditional houses, which are a sanctuary for springs and places to perform various other ceremonial ceremonies. Their local wisdom is part of their efforts to maintain a balance between human life in society and forest sustainability. Some forestry zones are referred to by certain terms to provide limits on their usage (Rosary, 2019). For example:

- (1) *opiduenobahoat* means the boundaries of the area for forest usage. The Ojang villagers are not allowed to cross the boundaries to open a new land.
- (2) *opieakaretinuartiny* means forest utilization area. The forests area may be used as a source of life.
- (3) *rointuntuantaden* means the protected area. There are some forest areas that are very tightly protected and cannot be touched by the community at any given time.
- (4) *wairpuanterangmatan* means the area of springs and rivers. Water is perceived as a source of life.
- (5) *nitupitunoanwol* means the forest where traditional ceremonies are carried out.
- (6) *hokenwolonwatusogebuwot dan tanahbemok* means the forest that may be managed by residents to meet their needs. The forest management is carried out with mutual cooperation and always bound to certain farming times determined by custom.
- (7) *watusogeterangPu'an, hokenwolonblungewair* means the patronage of springs. In the belief of Ojang Village, water is believed to be the source of life, therefore, it needs to be maintained. Fertile forests are the best water

keepers. Therefore, before cutting down trees in the Ojang Village, there are special rituals that must be performed. There are even customary fines that must be paid if there are residents who cut trees without accordance with the provisions. Lives are at stake for residents who violate the customary rules.

Salah satu ungkapan adat yang terkait dengan upaya penjagaan hutan sebagai berikut (Rosary, 2019):

**Bluworetawatuwaru papa resakaurledun
Kojak wuakwatu Blida ai buranago
Liman rahawaibahan
Watulailo'an**

Meaning: in this area ⁶⁷ it is prohibited to cut down trees. If they violate the rules, they must replant the tree and slaughter pigs to restore the damaged environment. If they do not take the sanction and ignore it, they will lose their life.

As the traditional expression, Ethnic Tana Ai highly respects the forest as a source of life. Therefore, the forest area in the Tana Ai community's knowledge is divided into several functions as follows (Basyir, 2009):

- a) prohibited forest or covered forest (*uinwaturtuan loran*). This forest is included in the customary management area, not everyone can enter the forest. This forest is a water source. Therefore, this forest is always preserved,
- b) forest for shifting farming (*opikaretutuntepan*) is used for growing corn, rice, and vegetables except steep cliff areas which is hunting grounds and believed the dwelling of fine spirit,
- c) forests for traditional rainmaking ceremony, to request for better harvests, for protection from pests and natural hazards. Usually marked with large boulders which located by the river,
- d) forests as residential areas, i.e. areas that can be used as residential areas for local communities. Ojang Village residents are arranged like housing in the city which is close together, clean, and neatly arranged,
- e) *kroang Kleren* which is a traditional meeting place and livestock herding ground,
- f) recreational forest, which is a forest that is used as a recreation area that is currently being developed by local governments as part of a form of the creative economy and on a mission to develop the rural economy,
- g) rivers for fishing, i.e. river areas, streams, ponds, lakes where fish breed well.

Customary ceremonies/rituals (Basyir, 2009) organized by Ethnic Tana Ai are related to efforts to preserve the environment and environmental balance, are as follows:

- a) **Rau Ekak** Ceremony, which is the offering of food to the spirits of ancestors to maintain the habitation and farms from natural and human disturbance. The ceremony is held in a special place (*mahe*).
- b) **Pendinginantanah**, ceremony, which is carried out after burning the forest to open new farmland, asking for fertility and good harvests.
- c) **Pau blatantobotoko**, a ceremony for people who experience prolonged illness due to making a mistake.
- d) **Patinenihindolo**, a ceremony conducted at the beginning of the opening of the farmland.
- e) **Patineniuranwair**, a ceremony for rainmaking.

In addition, there are still forms of traditional rituals as a model of local wisdom that carried out by the indigenous people of Tana Ai. The rituals are related to techniques and steps for land management, as conveyed by (Basyir, 2009) and reinforced by informants; CK, 68 years old (2019) and CH, 50 years old (2019) are as follow:

- a) *Lohor Blopur*, the offerings for ancestral spirits so the farm can be harvested successfully.
- b) *Patinroin*, the sign of farmland and is carried out on the first day of farming, led by the leader of the ethnic.
- c) *Diri Mipin*, the dream which give signal if land can be used or not.
- d) *Proi Holin*, the initial stage of clearing a forest that is opened to become a farmland.
- e) *Holo roan*, a bamboo torch to burn the forest that will be used as a farmland. Every person involved must eat betel nut that has been prepared and sprayed it out on the torch.

- f) *Tege*, the cleaning of the remaining wood from burning.
- g) *DuenDure Leen Leepeng*, the division of farmland boundaries between one another.
- h) *Blatan Tana*, the land cooling which accompanied by chanting custom poetries.
- i) *PaharWini*, the preparation and cooling of seeds, accompanied by a prayer to the spirits of the ancestors so that the seeds can grow well.
- j) *Mula ai Pua*, the planting ceremony accompanied by chanting of traditional poetries.
- k) *Pati papa hewar*, the plant is already growing during the rainy season, a ceremony is held to honor the spirits of the ancestors.
- l) *Rape watar*, corn harvesting ceremony.
- m) *Porunahu*, rice harvest ceremony.
- n) *MesuNalu*, cleaning rice from the stalk.

A number of rites related to the land arrangement for the Tana Ai ethnic in Ojang Village have been integrated into their daily life activities. They are generally very obedient to what have become customary rules. Violation of customary rules brings bitter consequences both socially and religiously that lead to death, and distribution or land use, steps for land use for agriculture, and various forms of traditional ceremonies as mentioned above are binding on all Tana Ai ethnic communities in fulfilling their needs without exception. In addition, there are also traditional forms of art related to environmental preservation, including dances such as *Wai Alu*, *Gong IlinPuan*, and *Labit* to express gratitude for the success of the harvest (CH, 68 Tahun, 2019; CK, 50 Tahun, 2019). Local knowledge which later became local wisdom for the Ethnic Tana Ai in Ojang Village was obtained from their struggle to establish the forest as an important part of their life cycle. The social system that is still attached and the many customary regulations give birth to a peaceful and harmonious life in this village. Based on the various models of local knowledge of the Tana Ai Ethnic that have been mentioned above becomes a [65](#) view that the Tana Ai indigenous community has its own intelligence in maintaining harmony between meeting [the needs of human life](#), keeping [the availability of natural resources](#) while maintaining its balance. They are well aware that forests must be protected because the forests protect the soil from erosion, plants are needed for traditional ceremonies, and the forests provide materials for houses, as well as for hunting. Therefore, in the diversity of ethnic in Sikka Regency, the indigenous person of Tana Ai is identified as a very strong community in protecting the forest and the area around the spring. This condition is accompanied by various forms of prohibition/taboo so that the forest is always maintained, therefore the community is never lacking in water and living prosperously.

Conclusion

The ethnic culture [20](#) Tana Ai in Ojang Village is a tangible manifestation of the strength of the creation, taste, and work of all clans in an effort to meet the needs of living both physically and spiritually. It is manifested in a harmonious and balanced relationship between humans, their environment and the Supreme Being Ina Nian Tana Wawa, AmaLeroWulan Reta or Mother earth Father of heaven towards a prosperous life (epanpleteblinmahak) in the world. They are very religious and love their customs. The spirit of solidarity is so high and always maintains harmonious communication between humans, the environment and Amapu as the highest form. The prohibition and customary sanctions are decisive for the continuation of preservation of forests and water in the Ojang village's traditional territory. All people in Ojang Village obey customary restrictions such as cutting down trees in the covered forest or in certain areas, clearing land without following the regulations, or taking forest products beyond the specified capacity. Therefore, the condition of the forest in Ojang village still looks green with soothing lush trees. Even dried wood or fallen branches should not be taken carelessly. The emotional bond between the ethnic people of Tana Ai with their ancestral land is very high. Since they have faith that land and water have been providing them food and drink and bringing them together in harmony. Therefore, the land and water and the environment must be protected. In their traditional beliefs, every member of the Ojang Village community must have the ability to recognize and listen to the land. Land management is seen as a technology and the art of listening to the will of plants and wisdom to sense the desires of these plants. The value of mutual cooperation, deliberation and consensus, mutual respect, and love for the environment in the Tana Ai Ethnic in Ojang village is strongly bound in the traditional provisions that have united them. The problem that they are facing today is the power of globalism which continues to slowly lunge in their lives. Through various scientific studies that continue to be [38](#) formed to a wide audience, they can be a direction of good synergy between the desire for change and the strength of local wisdom values that exist in the Tana Ai in Ojang Village.

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