

# Sociological Review about *Ehat* Culture in the Preservation of Coconut Trees in The Island of Talaud

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Abstract: *Ehat* culture of the Talaud Island district is estimated to have existed since ancient time. However, it is not certain when this culture started. Now with the advancement of the society, the needs of the farmers are increasing, especially for their children's educational fees. The price of a young coconut is also higher than old coconut retailed or even after processed into copra (smoked or sun-dried coconut). With this change, is this culture still continuously preserved? Or is it started to shift? These are the questions that are going to be answered through this research. This study used a qualitative approach to describe how the *Ehat* culture implementation in the society. The data collection is performed through observations and interviews. The findings of the research indicate that the term *Ehat* is still widely known in the society, from the old to the younger generation. But as for how the *Ehat* was performed, especially for the punishment, can no longer be seen in daily life. In ancient time, the violators were punished by humiliation (social punishment). But now, the violators of *Ehat* are only fined with a fixed amount of money governed by the village rules formulated by the village government and the village elders. Nevertheless, even though the *Ehat* in its physical form (social punishment through humiliation) can no longer be observed in the society, but the educational value of *Ehat* in people's behavior can be felt in the social life in Talaud in general, and especially in the Village of Bantane. For example, if members of the society (youngsters or teenagers) are drunk as the result of drinking liquor, it is unlikely for them to disturb other people by making disturbing acts on the streets. If they do, the elders from each of their tribes will summon them and give heavy punishment to them. The *Ehat* culture in the form of social sanctions has assimilated into the daily life in the Talaud society. Although alcohol consumption is rather high in the Village of Bantane, there is hardly any commotion because of the shame inflicted from the social sanctions for the violators. In conclusion, *Ehat* still exists, but the advancement of the society has triggered the increasing needs of the farmers to accommodate their family's needs. Thus, the *Ehat* culture is adjusted to meet the advancement of the society and the needs of the farmers.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

*Ehat* is a customary law in the islands of Talaud Regency of North Sulawesi that governs the harvest period on land or in the sea. Specifically, on land, *Ehat* regulates Coconut trees harvest time. The customary law referred is: after the harvest period of Coconut, the members of the society are forbidden to climb and collect Coconuts even if the Coconut trees belong to themselves. The sanction for the violation of this customary law is that the hair of the violator will be shaved. Coconut husk will be hung on the violator's neck and the violator will be paraded around the village while shouting "*Jangan iko pa kita*

*ada pancuri kalapa di masa Ehat*" (don't copy what I did, I stole Coconut in the *Ehat* period).

In the society, there will always be orders and restrictions that apply to all members of the society with existing values and social norms as the basis. Norms and social values are not only as a guidance of behavior but also as a control that binds the community from doing social deviance. The referred control is the ability of norms or values that cause somebody or some group of people to obey it. If all members of the society are willing to comply with these rules (social values and norms), then it is almost certain that the social life will be in order, safe, and comfortable. But hoping that all members of the society acting according to the values and norms is

not easy. In a society, there will be some who obeys, and some who violates these rules, probably even some of us have broken those rules.

The *Ehat* culture has existed in the islands of Talaud since ancient times; even the customary elders are unable to ensure when this culture started. It is estimated that this culture has existed since the Colonial Era. It was intended to preserve the quality of the harvested coconuts and to make sure that the Coconut trees keep producing plenty of Coconut fruits.

Now that the time has changed, the needs of the Coconut farmers are getting bigger, especially for their children educational fees. The price of the young coconut is also higher than old coconut retailed or even after processed into copra (smoked or sun-dried coconut). With this change, is this culture still continuously preserved? Or is it started to shift? These are the question that is going to be answered through research.

## 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative-descriptive research which is intended to describe a phenomenon, whether in the present time or the past. There is no manipulation or use of free variables in this research but describes the condition as is, and the description can be individual, group, and can also by using numbers. The qualitative research comes from constructivism, which views reality as multifaceted, interactive, interpretative based on social experience. Thus, this study is classified as qualitative-interactive research as this research is an in-depth study using a direct data collection technique from people in its original environment and the researcher interprets the phenomena within (Sukmadinata, 2007:61).

The aim is to describe a group which becomes the subject of this study, which are the customary elders and the members of the society that are still performing the *Ehat* culture. And for that, data are collected by conducting a direct interview with the customary elders and members of the society that are related to the *Ehat* culture.

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 The History of *Ehat* Culture

In the effort to find out the history of Coconut *Ehat* culture, the writer has examined the sample of this

research which is Bantane Village in the district of Rainis. The writer has done interviews with the chief of Bantane Village and other customary elders who are presumably able to provide accurate information regarding the history of *Ehat*. The result of the interviews is not very satisfying. They know that *Ehat* had existed since their childhood. When the informants were in their childhood, on a couple of occasions, they saw how the violators of *Ehat* were humiliated by being paraded around the village while shouting: "*Jangan iko pa kita ada pancuri kalapa di masa Ehat*" (don't copy what I did, I stole Coconut in the *Ehat* period). In recent time, the *Ehat* culture is still practiced, but they do not see that there are members of the society being paraded around the village. According to them, the sanction to *Ehat* violators has been replaced with fines with amount as regulated by the Bantane Village Regulation about Programs and Customary Rules of Bantane Village of 2007 clause 10 verse 2 that states a) Anyone who produces copra in the period when *Ehat* is closed (still not opened) will be fined with Rp. 250.000 (two hundred and fifty thousand rupiah). b) Anyone who intentionally or unintentionally carries Coconut fruit with the intention of selling it or for family usage while in *Ehat*/closed period is subject to fine of Rp.100.000 (one hundred thousand rupiahs).

### 3.2 *Ehat* in the Ancient Time

Coconut *Ehat* in Bantane Village in the ancient time is a form of an unwritten customary law. Even so, the supervision of *Ehat* violation is pretty strict. Whoever caught violating the rule will be immediately processed and sanctioned by parading them around the village and shouting words as described in the earlier section. Before the Islands of Talaud expanded into Regency (in the year of 2000), *Ehat* is held every year (three times a year), but it is rare for people to violate it. It is because of a high level of obedience from the members of the society to the customary rules. Together, the members of the community preserve the tradition, reminding each other in the society. In addition, another supporting factor that supports the implementation of this custom is that the living cost and children educational fee for the Coconut farmers' family is still small. Thus, for Coconut farmers that rely solely on the revenue from the coconut harvest (copra) are still in the "safe" level until the next harvest period.

### 3.3 *Ehat* in Present Time

Currently, after the Islands of Talaud are expanded into Island of Talaud Regency, access to remote villages due to unopened or unpaved roads is now entering a new era where road access has been opened and paved. The rapidly growing telecommunication era seems to require everyone to own a mobile phone (handphone). Thus, in addition to the household needs, families are now burdened with additional need to buy mobile phone devices and credit. Children who previously need only to have a secondary education are now motivated to continue their study to College, at least one that located in Manado (UNIMA or UNSRAT, Polytechnic, or other private universities). All of it requires presumably more money than the coconut harvest result which remains unchanged.

The household needs are increasing while income stays unchanged tempts the coconut plant owners to glance at the coconut fruits that are on the trees even though the *Ehat* period is still not opened. The *Ehat* rule that is regulated in the village rules which states that violator of *Ehat* is penalized with Rp. 250.000 if they produce copra is thought to be a small amount of money for a family that is in need of money.

From the interviews with the customary elders in the Village of Bantane, it is known that the *Ehat* period is no longer three months long, but is reduced to only two months. The adjustment of the duration of *Ehat* is based on the consideration of the members of society needs for their children education funding. It means that *Ehat* was not intended to preserve the quality of the coconut fruits, but a rule meant to exhibit the power of the customary elders in regulating the social life in the society. So, it is safe to assume that the Coconut *Ehat* culture in the Village of Bantane will be fading in the future and may even just become a memory.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Customary Law is a rule that binds customary community members to control their behaviors to follow the traditional rules. Customary laws which related with ethics and aesthetics are usually more lasting compared to those related to the economy. The rules that are related to ethics and aesthetics in the Village of Bantane is like ban in using “*golpi*” or shorts/trunks during church worships or column worships, while coconut *Ehat* rule which restricts the coconut harvest activity is related to the livelihood of the coconut farmer's family. They need funding for

their children education, but at the same time, they are not allowed to harvest their coconut to be sold or processed as copra. Realizing the problems that the members of their society are facing, the customary elders are not turning away from their community members. They looked at those obstacles wisely. Rules that were strict are loosened. The sanctions that were initially humiliated now lightened with a penalty of some amount of money. *Ehat* that was previously set to three months now is shortened to only two months.

Thus, the development of civilization has eroded the customary values that were earlier strict, because of a shift in values and needs, and as long as it does not violate higher norm which is the religious norm, the customary law can be adjusted to follow the needs of the society. Therefore, *Ehat* is not erased from the order of the community life of the Village of Bantane, but it is adjusted to the current condition in the society. *Ehat* is fading not because it is deemed unsatisfactory in the society. Not because of lack in the formulation, and not because there is a conflict of interests between the customary elders and the farmers who own the coconut trees. But *Ehat* faded solely because of the rapid changes in the way of life that causes the needs of the farmers to increase regarding their daily live financing. It is also realized by the customary elders in which some of them are also farmers who own coconut trees. The irresolute action from the customary elders in administering sanction to the violators of *Ehat* is not because of their inability in administering it, but solely because of their tolerant demeanor as a violation to *Ehat* culture is not an offense that inflicts harm on others, but it is purely a violation of an agreement. The form should be completed and signed by one author on behalf of all the other authors.

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