



Belawa as “Shasimi” in Riau Islands Province

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Abstract

Indonesia is a maritime country scattered by islands; archipelagos. Rich in cultural diversity ranging from ethnicity, tribe, race and language. There are 17499 islands spread from Sabang to Merauke, hundreds of regional languages to many customs of various regions. This study aims to reveal the existence of a typical coastal culture of the islands, namely the culture of processed raw squid fish. The habit of consuming processed raw fish is certainly familiar to both traditional and modern communities. Consumption of raw fish has been widely found in various places in the world in Asia, namely Japan there is sashimi, in Europe, namely Spain there is Ceviche de Calamares, in Korea there is Sannakji, and in Thailand there is Larb Pla Muk. The approach used in this study is a descriptive-qualitative study with a special case regarding culinary in Mensanak Village, Kitang Bidare District, Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province. This village with a small community inherits coastal culture, fishermen as the main livelihood of the local community in the Riau Islands region. The results of this study found that there is a habit of consuming raw fish made from squid mixed with natural spices and processed in a traditional way, they call it belawa, which is processed raw squid.

Keywords: Culture, Islands, Raw Squid Fish, Society

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with 17,499 islands, the largest archipelagic country in the world. The total area of the archipelago from Sabang to Merauke is around 5,180,053 km². Meanwhile, the area of Indonesian sea waters reaches up to 3,157,483 km² and the land area is around 1,922,570 km². In light of this definition, Indonesia's ocean is much wider than its land, thus Indonesia is a maritime country sprinkled with islands; archipelagos (BPS, 2020).

Riau Islands Province is one of the provinces in Indonesia that is relatively young compared to other provinces. Even so, it can be said to be a miniature of Indonesia in the sense that the area of its waters is not comparable to the area of land. The sea is wider than the land. The population is also diverse; many ethnicities. Malay, Sundanese, Javanese, Bugis, Batak and others. Another interesting



thing is the culinary culture in one of the regencies in the Riau Islands, namely in Mensak Village, Kitang Bidare District, Lingga Regency. Lingga Regency itself has an area of 2,205 km² with a population of 94,962 people spread across 13 sub-districts, 9 sub-districts and 75 villages (BPS Kepri, 2020).

There is a unique tradition in the coastal culture in Mensanak Village, Kitang Bidar District, Lingga Regency, namely raw squid fish dishes. This tradition has long been passed down from generation to generation and passed down from generation to generation until now. However, the culture of consuming raw squid fish dishes which were originally consumed by families as a side dish with rice in meals, has now changed to just a snack. No longer a staple food or as a side dish with rice. So that connoisseurs of this culinary are limited, only a few communities.

In the past, raw squid was used as a side dish for rice. This could be enjoyed by families, from mothers, fathers and children. This means that all groups enjoyed it; parents, middle-aged people to even small children. Now raw squid is no longer as popular as it used to be, consumption of raw squid is decreasing and not so popular. Only a few communities remain who are still loyal to processing raw squid. Raw fish dishes made from squid are called *belawa*. This habit still exists in limited circles in Mensanak Village, Kitang Bidare District, Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative design with a case approach to the main perpetrators of raw squid consumption, which aims to reveal the habits of consuming raw squid processed fish, based on in-depth interviews with research subjects. The criteria for research subjects are perpetrators and makers of raw squid processed fish culinary. The researcher uses a narrative strategy, namely data and information from individuals or groups of people are then narrated by the researcher in a narrative style about the lives of participants using the steps of the Miles & Huberman model, namely data analysis techniques with stages; data reduction, data display and conclusions (Creswell, 2010).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The habit of consuming fresh raw fish from both freshwater and saltwater seas has become part of the culinary heritage of several cultures around the world. In addition to offering a unique taste experience, this social practice is also a symbol of the thoroughness in selecting and preparing food ingredients. In recent years, the culture of eating raw fish has also spread to various countries around the world, producing new innovations and creating interesting flavor combinations. Along the way, the culture of eating raw fish continues to develop and adapt to the times, but still maintains and offers the essence of beauty, the pleasure of fresh and delicious food (Handayani et al., 2020).

Before consuming fresh raw fish directly, some people in the world have long known the culture of fermentation of fresh fish. The fermentation process is also raw, not through heat or heated by water, fresh fish is processed with salt and spices to keep it for a long time. This culinary processed fermentation product is made from meat and fish. The culture of fermenting meat and fish has long existed and is maintained until now. The archipelago has many fermented products such as shrimp paste, *peda*, *bekasam* and *nairura* which are processed raw fish (Mulyani et al., 2022).

Among the many raw fish that are processed directly mixed with herbs and spices and then served fresh is squid. This fish is found in many areas that have vast seas. In addition to having many genetic variations, squid is also easily spread and almost all over the world, there are squid in the sea. It is a marine mollusk that is widespread in the world. Squid in Indonesia is also quite abundant. Squid is included in the Animalia Kingdom, Mollusca Phylum, Cephalopoda Class, Teuthida Order, Myopsina Sub-order, Loliginidae Family, *Logilo* Genus and *Logilo* sp Species (Okutani, 2005).



There are at least two squid-like species, namely cuttlefish and octopus. Although similar but not the same, if squid is longer than cuttlefish, let alone octopus which tends to be round and short (Wulandari, 2018). Squid and cuttlefish both have diamond-like fins, octopus does not have fins, it tends to be like an eight-legged bubble equipped with a swimming membrane (Budiyanto and Sugiarto, 1997).

In addition, squid, cuttlefish and octopus all have body defense weapons, this is common like other fish. However, it is different from other fish. When facing predators or predators, squid will release dark or even black ink to trick predators so they can hide from the enemy's attack (Jereb and Roper, 2006).

Based on the custom, in many culinary, this black ink is often cooked as a mainstay menu with the popular term *sotong* cooked black, meaning along with its ink. And it turns out that most people like to consume squid and cuttlefish along with its ink, because the content in squid ink contains melanin granules (black pigment), melanin is naturally a melano protein containing 10-15% protein as good as the protein found in meat (Astawan, 2008). In addition, the content in squid ink also contains other contents such as glycosaminoglycans, fats and essential amino acids in the form of lysine, arginine, leucine and phenylalanine (Agusandi et al., 2013).

This raw and fresh culinary dish or dish of squid, cuttlefish and octopus has indeed gone global. This means that almost all continents have a culture or habit of consuming raw squid. Among others, in Japan there is *Sashimi Ika*, which is thin slices of raw squid served with soy sauce, mixed with wasabi and ginger as pickles (Tsuji, S, 1980). Then in Korea there is *Sannakji*, which is raw squid that is still alive, thinly sliced and served with spicy sauce (Park, H, 2018). While in Thailand there is something called *Larb Pla Muk*, this is a raw squid salad with a mixture of spicy spices mixed with herbs and nuts (Thompson, D, 2010).

There are raw squid dishes in Europe, including in Italy there is *Crudo di Calamari*, which is thin slices of raw squid, served with a mixture of olive oil, lemon and salt (Hazan, M, 1973). Likewise in Spain there is *Ceviche de Calamares*, raw squid soaked in lemon or orange juice with additional spices and vegetables (Roden, C, 2012). While in Peru there is *Ceviche de Calamar*, which is raw squid soaked in lemon or orange juice with additional spices and mixed with vegetables (Presilla, M. E, 2013). *Ceviche de Calamar* is also found in Mexico using fresher raw squid and very spicy spices (Lopez, B., & Cabral, J, 2019). *Poisson Cru de Poulpe* is a processed raw squid marinated in coconut milk and lemon juice with additional spices and vegetables, found on the island of Tahiti, French Polynesia (Pernet, J-P, 2008).

Likewise in the Riau Islands, namely in *Mensanak Village*, *Kitang Bidare District*. There is a serving of raw squid fish that is processed traditionally and naturally called *belawa*. *Belawa* is made from raw squid fish with the following processing process; First, remove the contents of the stomach of fresh squid fish then wash it clean, but the ink is not thrown away but put into the processed mixture. Second, after being clean, the fresh raw squid fish is then cut into small pieces. Third, then soaked in lime juice for approximately 10-15 minutes. Third, the soaked raw squid fish is then mixed with shallots and fresh chilies.

The habit of consuming *belawa* in the coastal culture of the islands has long been going on and is maintained until now. *Belawa* processors and connoisseurs are now not as popular as before. This is likely after the entry of modern culture in the form of many new foods that are present in the community. So that it has an impact on most of the community leaving the consumption of this *belawa*. In the past, *belawa* was loved by all groups, now only certain people are still loyal to processing and enjoying this *belawa*, even though *belawa* is actually "sashimi" in the Riau Islands.



4. CONCLUSION

Thus, based on the results of the study, belawa for the people of the Riau Islands is like sashimi for the people of Japan. Culinary preparations made from raw squid have indeed been very popular, throughout the world for a long time. However, what is interesting about belawa is that it is processed simply, naturally and traditionally. If the ink is not used in processing sashimi, then in belawa, the raw squid ink is the mixture. This simple process certainly involves long-standing customs. Belawa is not always made from raw squid, it can also be made from other sea fish. However, people often make belawa from raw squid as a side dish when eating with rice. Research on belawa is seen from the case of the belawa lover community and is studied from a cultural perspective, so it is very important to conduct further research related to this belawa, it must also be studied scientifically in terms of health and nutritional content when consumed raw with its ink. If the approach is complete, then belawa can be preserved and even promoted as an alternative culinary specialty of coastal culture. It is not without reason, considering the basic ingredients and strategic geography in the Riau Islands, it is very possible to promote belawa as a culinary specialty of the Riau Islands coastal culture. Belawa as "sashimi" in the Riau Islands.

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