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Historical Analysis of Changes in the Social Structure of Sago Farmers in the Traditional Community

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Abstract

This research examines the transformation of the social structure of sago farmers among the To Limola Indigenous community in Sassa Village, Baebunta Subdistrict, North Luwu Regency. Sago functions not only as a primary food source but also as a crucial element of the local social and cultural system. However, modernization, agrarian policies, and market penetration have significantly altered production patterns and social relations. Employing a social history approach, this study traces the dynamics of collective labor in the masambe tradition, social stratification based on land ownership and noble genealogical symbols (balailo), and the transformations brought by industrial technology and the younger generation's economic orientation. The findings indicate that sago ownership has long been closely tied to social status and symbolic capital, while technological and market developments have produced new forms of stratification rooted in capital ownership. Nevertheless, collective values endure through sumambe rama (mutual cooperation) practices that sustain internal solidarity. This study highlights that shifts in the To Limola social structure are driven not merely by economic factors but by the complex interplay between customary systems, agrarian politics, and modernization.

Introduction

The sago palm is thought to have originated in Maluku or Papua. Some even say it originated specifically in the Sentani region of Papua. It then spread throughout Southeast Asia, the Pacific, East Asia, and South Asia. Sago cultivation in Southeast Asia and the West Pacific is as ancient as the use of dates in Mesopotamia. According to Ong (1977), sago has been known since 1200, based on records in Chinese writings. For example, Marco Polo discovered sago in Sumatra in 1298, and sago factories in Malacca were recorded in 1416. However, older records can be seen in the reliefs of Borobudur Temple, along with other plants such as coconut palms, sugar palms, and lontar palms. Sago palms are immortalized in temple carvings from the Syailendra Dynasty, built in the 8th century, around 778 AD (Radite, 2018).

Besides Maluku and Papua, sago also thrives in Sulawesi. Sago is used as a source of carbohydrates and as a raw material for other foods (Kadir, Syam & Ramli, 2022). Human demand for carbohydrates makes sago an important food source, its consumption and utilization having been traced back to the pre-Srivijaya period, from the 2nd to 5th centuries AD (Vita, 2017). In North Luwu, sago is not only used as a food ingredient. Indigenous people use sago palm fronds as walls for traditional houses called gamacca (Haruna, Amin & Lestari, 2022).

One indigenous community that still actively manages sago plantations is the To Limola community in Sassa Village. In practice, they use a management system known as pasambe

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tabaro. The social structure of these indigenous communities has undergone significant changes due to economic development, agrarian policies, and modernization (Ghosh & Banerjee, 2024; Li et al., 2023; Sharma, 2024). Sassa Village, Baebunta District, North Luwu Regency, is one of the areas with a long tradition of sago cultivation. Sago is not only a primary food source but also plays a vital role in the social and cultural systems of local indigenous communities (Bappelitbangda Sulsel, 2018). However, in recent decades, agrarian changes and economic transformation have impacted production patterns and social relations among sago farmers (Sabagalet et al., 2026; Rukmana et al., 2026; Miki et al., 2026).

Previous research has shown that modernization in sago processing has impacted shifts in labor systems and land ownership in several areas, including North Luwu Regency (eprints.unm.ac.id, 2021). Furthermore, government policies related to natural resource management have also influenced changes in ownership patterns and access to sago agricultural land (Ditjenbun.pertanian.go.id, 2021). Frequent agrarian conflicts between indigenous communities and the government over the determination of forest areas have also been a factor accelerating social change in indigenous communities dependent on sago (Komnas HAM, 2016).

Attention to the importance of sago in maintaining local food security has increased in the past decade (Fitriani et al., 2023; Alhaqi, 2024; Timisela et al., 2022). In a study conducted by Arbi, Nur, and Fatmawati (2020), sago is seen as an alternative carbohydrate source with strategic value, especially in addressing the global food crisis and climate change. In addition to its superior resilience to marginal land conditions, sago also possesses high ecological value due to its ability to maintain water balance and conserve soil (Mampholo et al., 2024; Atikah et al., 2026). Therefore, the preservation and development of sago cultivation in regions such as Sulawesi is highly relevant, not only from an economic perspective but also from an ecological and social perspective. This research aligns with efforts to revitalize local food crops based on local wisdom, which are a focus of sustainable development policies (Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020; Mulyoutami, Sambuaga & Roshetko, 2021).

Furthermore, various studies indicate that modernization without considering local social structures can disrupt customary traditions and collective values (Nurdin & Sahide, 2017; Sahide et al., 2021; Nain et al., 2025). In Sassa Village, where sago management systems have been passed down through generations, external interventions, such as investment projects or the designation of production forest areas, often create tensions between the community and the state. This has led to the erosion of traditional social structures and a decline in the participation of younger generations in sago farming activities. A study by Lumban-Gaol, Sahide, and Supratman (2019) confirms that agrarian policies that do not recognize indigenous peoples' rights are often the main triggers of social transformation that harm local groups. Therefore, research into the dynamics of changes in the social structure of sago farmers is crucial, not only for documenting the social history of indigenous communities but also as a basis for formulating policies that are responsive to the needs and sustainability of local communities.

Methods

This research uses a social history approach, supported by a gender history framework, to analyze the dynamics of prostitution practices in Makassar City during the post-colonial period (1945–1980). This approach was chosen because the study focuses on marginalized social practices and the power relations formed within them, particularly within the context of state policy, social structure, and the construction of gender identity. Methodologically, this research employs a historical method, consisting of four main stages: heuristics (data collection), source

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criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The heuristic stage was conducted by collecting primary sources such as local government archives (e.g., social service reports and mayoral decrees), local media reports from the period studied (Pedoman Rakyat, Fajar), and oral interviews with informants with historical knowledge of prostitution and its changes in Makassar City. Secondary sources include academic literature discussing the history of prostitution, social policy, and gender studies. The source criticism stage was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the data through cross-verification, given that the issue of prostitution is often shrouded in moral bias and obscurity in official documents. Sources were assessed based on the historical context of their production, institutional ideologies, and narrative positions on sex workers. In the interpretation stage, data were analyzed using the concept of gender as a social construct (Rubin, 2006; Smith, 2015), as well as theories of sexuality and colonial power (Stoler, 2016). This framework was used to understand how the bodies of female sex workers are interpreted, controlled, and negotiated within the postcolonial urban landscape. The research also considered the perspective of sexuality as a cultural commodity (Bernstein, 2007), which positions prostitution not merely as an economic practice but also as an arena for identity politics and public morality. The research was conducted through data triangulation between documents, media, and interviews to strengthen historical validity. Interviews were conducted ethically and in-depth, taking into account the sensitivity of the topic and the safety of informants. The final outcome of this process is a critical historiography that not only explains the spatial changes and forms of prostitution in Makassar but also demonstrates how these practices are closely linked to changes in urban governance, social control, and the formation of discourses about women in postcolonial society.

Results and Discussion

Overview of Sassa Village

According to local traditional leaders, the Limola people have lived in Sassa Village since 1938, and some versions also suggest that the To Limola sub-ethnic group existed long before that date. Sassa Village is considered one of the oldest villages in North Luwu Regency. The Language Development and Fostering Agency (2019: 137) notes that the To Limola sub-ethnic group only speaks the Limola language in two hamlets within Sassa Village: Sassa and Makumpa. Sassa Village itself has eleven hamlets: Sabbang Loang, Salu Langgara, Kumbari, Makumpa, Sassa, Salaparan, Batang Tobarani, Sedayu, W Sari, and Tanah Merah (Sassa Village Government, 2021: 5).

The area of Baebunta District is approximately 203.16 km². The largest village is Sassa, with an area of 56.48 km², or approximately 27.80 percent of the total area of all villages in Baebunta District. The smallest village is Salassa, with an area of 2.33 km², or approximately 1.15 percent of the total area of Baebunta District. Sassa Village consists of 11 hamlets: Sabbang Loang, Salu Langgara, Kumbari, Makumpa, Sassa, Pulao, Salaparan, Benteng Tobarani, Sedayu, and Waringin Sari. The population is 3,599, comprising 1,808 males and 1,791 females, in 826 families. The topography of Sassa Village generally consists of highlands and hilly areas at an elevation of approximately 60.2 meters above sea level.

Social Structure of the To Limola Indigenous Community

In the traditions and folklore of the To Limola indigenous community, the nobility (balailo) with the title to manurung are viewed as the center of civilization. Five balailo occupy the regions of Baebunta, Kapuli, Patikala, Masamba, and Rompu, with the inauguration ceremony centered in Baebunta. After three nights of traditional ceremonies, the balailo are escorted to their respective territories to assume leadership duties. In addition to the balailo structure, several other customary positions support social life, including the wolang (minister of foreign

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affairs/liaison with the makole), tomainawa, sando (religious leader), and pongaro (agriculture). The presence of these positions demonstrates a complex customary government system, in which the distribution of roles is structured to meet the collective needs of the community.

The rules of inheritance of customary positions emphasize the importance of lineage. Marriage to a slave, for example, automatically precludes the person and their descendants from holding customary positions. This demonstrates that social stratification in the To Limola community is not solely determined by economic factors or formal education, but rather is rooted in customary legitimacy and genealogical symbols. Eriksen (2018) emphasized that social stratification in indigenous communities is often built on symbolic relationships between descent, status, and cosmological legitimacy, not simply on the distribution of material resources.

To Limola customary leadership is also unique in that it does not recognize the term "former." A retired leader remains respected as a balailo, known as balailo todi. This practice allows for succession or rotation in traditional ceremonies without diminishing the authority of the position. Thus, customary leadership is understood as an inherent and sacred status (embedded authority) rather than simply an administrative position. This aligns with Kuipers' (2020) view that customary leadership in many traditional Southeast Asian communities is rooted in genealogical symbols and spirituality, thus continuing to be respected even after its administrative function has ended.

In the To Limola social structure, each figure has a distinct but complementary role in maintaining order and the continuity of communal life. The Balailo serves as the village leader and the highest decision-maker in the community, with the primary responsibility of maintaining a conducive atmosphere. The Tomainawa serves as the primary recipient of community complaints, which are then forwarded to the Balailo, ensuring that issues receive hierarchical attention. The Wola acts as a spokesperson, bridging the relationship between the village community and the government outside the region.

Furthermore, the Sando holds spiritual responsibilities, particularly in offering prayers and performing traditional and religious rituals. The Kaunan serves as a loyal follower of the nobility, strengthening the leader's social standing. While the Pongaro's role is not fully documented, it is believed that they played a role in village security and order.

In daily practice in the past, the Balailo was often treated with high respect, for example, by delivering or bringing food or harvests to the community during various activities. This shows the very central position of the balailo in the social structure of To Limola, while also reflecting the authority of traditional leadership rooted in the legitimacy of local customs and cosmology.

Sago as a Source of Life and Its Relationship with the To Limola Indigenous Community

The informant, born in Sassa on August 8, 1988, began learning about the tradition of masumambe, or processing sago palms into tabaro, at the age of 16, while still in high school. He acquired this knowledge from his father through collective work practices. According to him, this work is impossible to do individually due to its arduous nature and the need for cooperation, both in felling the sago palms, making the filters, and preparing the processing site to ensure a level surface for optimal results. This pattern of skill inheritance reflects the transmission of local knowledge, which generally occurs through hands-on practice within families and communities (Berkes, 2018; Saifuddin & Aris, 2022; Waty et al., 2025; Perbawasari et al., 2023).

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In daily practice, sago processing typically involves parents and close relatives (e.g., in-laws), with a workforce of around three people. The sago palms harvested are generally not owned by the family themselves but are harvested with the permission of the landowner. Profit-sharing arrangements vary: some are paid in cash, around Rp150,000–200,000, while others are paid in sago, calculated on average at five balabba. This mechanism demonstrates that the sago economy in Sassa still operates within a subsistence framework based on social relations, where the value of labor is not solely measured in money, but also through the exchange of goods and mutual agreements (Scott, 2021; Sugianto, 2025; Loewe et al., 2025).

Sago is seen as a relatively easy-to-grow crop. Although initially planted, it subsequently reproduces naturally through shoots, thus becoming a ubiquitous food source in the lives of the Sassa people. Furthermore, sago is viewed not only as a source of calories but also as a symbol of ecological identity. In many Southeast Asian societies, staple food crops are often treated as part of social and cosmological kinship, extending beyond economic functions (Ellen, 2019; Dove, 2022; Cohn et al., 2025).

This cosmological dimension is also evident in mourning rites. The mourning community is given a special head mark and is prohibited from consuming sago throughout the ceremony (Dakurah et al., 2025). This prohibition is understood as a form of respect for sago, which, in Sassa oral tradition, is believed to have a kinship relationship with humans. The cultivation of sago symbolizes life because it is a primary food source (Moshawih et al., 2025; Kadir et al., 2022; Fetriyuna et al., 2024). This practice emphasizes the close bond between humans and nature from an ecocosmological perspective among indigenous communities. Ellen (2019) emphasized that staple food crops in indigenous communities are not only treated as commodities, but also as symbols of kinship and collective identity (Loppies, 2026; Iswari et al., 2025; Sokoy et al., 2026).

Furthermore, another informant stated that he began working with sago at the age of 13, while still in elementary school. This initial knowledge came from his uncle, who introduced him to the basic methods of processing sago palms into tabaro. The process is always carried out in shifts, never alone. The principle of collective work is prominent: whoever invites, will be accompanied, so this activity always takes place together. At that time, sago processing was carried out traditionally, requiring significant labor and long hours (Busthanul et al., 2025; Fachrizal et al., 2022).

In the 1960s, the main challenge lay in the distance between the felling location and the pressing area. Sago palms were typically felled far from the pressing area, requiring the trunks to be cut into one-meter-long pieces, and the starch (tamu') transported to the pressing area. This process requires coordination: someone is tasked with stripping the trunks with an axe, while informants are more often involved in the harvesting process.

In terms of ownership, sago palms are generally owned by others. The processing process is carried out at the owner's request, and upon completion, workers receive a certain share of the harvest. One tree typically yields two to three sago palms ready for processing. Interestingly, there is no specific ritual before felling. Instead, the trees are inspected for natural signs, such as sumaka (a kind of tree), pangangkurang (a kind of tree), and kuli kaju (a kind of tree).

The division of labor also demonstrates a gendered dimension. Wives are not directly involved in the work but are limited to preparing and bringing food to the workers. This pattern indicates a gender-based division of labor, which aligns with the findings of several studies that traditional food production activities in Indonesia tend to be dominated by men, while women play a domestic or supporting role (Widjono et al., 2020).

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Learning to process sago also occurs in stages according to age. Elementary school children typically only help in the initial stages, such as squeezing the sago. As they enter adolescence, particularly in junior high school, they begin to be fully involved in the entire masambe process. The sequence of masambe activities generally begins with establishing a tamu (pressing area), followed by mamparra (cleaning the trunk), making new ceng (a new container), felling the tree, and finally processing the sago into tabaro (a sago palm). These activities involve not only the immediate family but also other community members. In trade practices, one balabba weighs an average of around 12 kilograms. This unit is used as a standard measure for sago distribution and transactions at the local level.

Traditional Tools and Local Technological Changes in Masambe

In the Masambe tradition, the tools used not only serve as technical tools but also reflect the community's relationship with the surrounding environment. Most of the tools are made from readily available natural materials, particularly the fronds, leaves, and wood of the sago palm. This demonstrates that the community has long developed simple yet effective appropriate technology.

One example is the panusu, a tool used to drill holes in sago palm trunks to test their starch content. Initially, panusu were made from sharpened wood, as this material was abundantly available in the surrounding forests. However, over time, panusu were replaced with stronger and more durable iron. This shift in materials reflects the blending of traditional technology with modern influences.

Similarly, panimbu and kapopa, both of which function as containers or means of transport, are made from sago palm fronds, a natural material that is lightweight, malleable, and environmentally friendly. Despite their simplicity, these tools are designed to meet the practical needs of the community. However, some of these functions are now being replaced by more durable plastic containers or synthetic sacks, signaling a shift in societal orientation from nature-based independence to dependence on market products.

Tools with heavier functions, such as the sambe and axe, have also undergone significant development. The sambe was originally made entirely of wood, but to increase its usability, the tip was later fitted with iron. This innovation demonstrates the community's ability to adapt to limited natural materials while utilizing metals introduced through trade routes. Meanwhile, the axe, a purely iron tool, demonstrates how more advanced metallurgical technology was adopted into everyday work.

The most obvious transformation is seen in the kua and sumaka. Kua, once made from hollowed-out wood or large, hollowed-out logs, are now often replaced with tarpaulin. This material change is not simply a practical choice but also reflects a shift in mindset: from nature-based technology requiring specialized skills to the use of fast and instant industrial materials. The same applies to the sumaka, a tool for squeezing sago starch. While previously woven from sago leaves, the sago palm fronds are now more commonly used because they are considered stronger and more durable. In some cases, communities have even begun using synthetic fabrics as substitutes.

These changes in the materials and forms of masambe tools demonstrate the dialectic between tradition and modernity. On the one hand, the use of natural materials emphasizes local wisdom in utilizing environmental resources without damaging them. On the other hand, the introduction of industrial materials demonstrates how sago communities adapt to market trends and the need for efficiency. This shift also marks the emergence of a new relationship: owners of machinery or capital become dominant, while independence based on traditional skills is gradually marginalized.

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Thus, traditional masambe tools are not merely instruments of labor, but also represent the long journey of local technology (Saleem et al., 2025; Laraswati et al., 2026; Masamba et al., 2024). From handcrafted fronds, wood, and leaves, to practical and fast-acting metals and industrial materials, each tool tells a story of changes in lifestyles, social relations, and the community's perspective on nature and the economy (Hanandini, 2024; Jiwasiddi et al., 2024; Alamineh et al., 2023).

The Process of Making Sago for Trading

Processing sago until it is ready for sale involves several structured stages. Each stage has a specific function and is carried out sequentially to produce sago starch suitable for consumption and sale. The sequence of activities is as follows:

Mapatokana (Making Kua)

The initial stage begins with mapatokana, which involves constructing a special container to hold the pressed sago starch. This container, called a kua, was previously made from hollow wood, but now more commonly uses tarpaulin for its practicality. (Jusman, Interview)

Building a Dam

Next, a small dam is built to collect water for the pressing process. The availability of clean water is crucial, as it is the primary medium for separating the starch from the sago tree fibers. (Jusman)

Cutting the Sago Tree

Mature sago trees are then felled. Determining whether a tree is ready for harvest is usually done after examining its starch content, for example using a traditional tool like a panusu.

Removing the Bark

The bark of the felled sago trunk is removed using an axe or machete. The tough bark must be removed first to make crushing the inside of the trunk easier.

Crushing the Sago Trunk

The inside of the sago trunk is crushed to extract the starch. In the past, this was done using a sambe, a traditional tool with a wooden handle and a metal tip. Nowadays, people prefer to use a crusher because it is considered faster and more efficient.

Mamparra (Squeezing Sago Starch)

After crushing, the powdered sago trunk is squeezed to extract the starch. This pressing process is called mamparra and is carried out using a sumaka, a traditional pressing tool originally made from woven sago leaves or fronds.

Collecting the Pressed Sago Starch

The squeezed sago starch is then collected in a container. This process requires precision to ensure the collected starch does not mix with the coarse fibers.

Fermentation and Storage in Balabba

The collected starch is left to settle for approximately three days. Afterward, the starch sediment is removed, compacted, and placed in containers called balabba. These balabba are then transported to the market for sale.

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Economic Dynamics of Sago Farmers in the To Limola Indigenous Community

Sago products are typically packaged in balabba units in the Sassa community. Each balabba weighs between 12 and 20 kilograms, depending on size, with the packaging composed of 13–15 sago leaves and approximately the length of an adult's arm. This packaging system is not only practical but also serves as a standard measurement in local trade.

In the 1960s, processing a single sago palm could take up to three days, with an average yield of ten balabba. These balabba were then sold to nearby markets such as Masamba, Kappuna, and Sabbang. The distance to the markets was up to eight kilometers, and residents could usually only carry two balabba at a time. In the early 1960s, the price of one balabba was around Rp150, rising to Rp250 in the early 1970s (1972–1973).

Entering the 1990s, sago trade patterns began to change. While in previous decades, communities sold their processed sago directly to the market, this period saw the emergence of a role for intermediaries who purchased sago from the community and then resold it. The price of balabba in the early 1990s was around IDR 3,500, rising to IDR 10,000 in 2012. From 1991–1993, communities still had to walk to bring their processed sago to market, earning around IDR 150–200, equivalent to the price of a pack of Gudang Garam cigarettes at the time.

In the 2010s, sago prices continued to rise. In 2010, balabba prices were around IDR 15,000, while in 2018, they had reached IDR 35,000. These price fluctuations demonstrate that the local economy of the Sassa community is inextricably linked to broader market dynamics, even though production remains community-based (Li, 2014). Well-known receivers in the community include Saripa, Sarjan, Pa' Nanni, and Pa' Diani, who act as liaisons between sago processors and the market.

In daily practice, the community typically carries two balabbas on a single trip to the market. This activity occurs approximately three times a week, making sago a regular source of income. Nowadays, in addition to balabba packaging, sago is also marketed in sacks. The average selling price for a sack is IDR 50,000, while balabba packaging can reach IDR 60,000. If sold through a receiver, the price can even rise to IDR 80,000 per balabba.

This development indicates that the sago trade in Sassa has undergone a transformation from a subsistence model based on local needs to a system more connected to regional markets. Price fluctuations, the involvement of receivers, and the diversification of packaging mark the integration of the sago economy into a broader market network, without eliminating the social and mutual cooperation dimensions that underpin production at the community level.

Changing the Social Structure of Sago Farmers in the To Limola Indigenous Community

The sago production process demonstrates the importance of the family. Wives are not only involved in domestic chores such as cooking, but also help transport the sago starch to the processing facility. In daily practice, parents and close relatives (in-laws) typically participate in the work, with a limited workforce of around three people. This pattern demonstrates that sago processing has long been built on the basis of collective work within the family.

Ownership of sago trees generally rests with others, not the processors. The work is carried out with the permission of the tree owners through a profit-sharing mechanism. After processing the sago, the owner receives approximately 2–5 balabba from each tree, while the remainder goes to the workers. This situation demonstrates social stratification: land or sago tree owners hold a higher position because they obtain the harvest without directly engaging in the hard work. This phenomenon is reminiscent of past practices when balailo (To Manurung nobles) also received a share of the sago as a sign of respect for their position as village leaders. Sago ownership has thus long been closely linked to social status.

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Land or sago tree owners hold a higher position because they obtain the harvest without directly engaging in the hard work. This phenomenon is reminiscent of past practices when balailo (To Manurung nobles) also received a share of sago as a form of respect for their position as village leaders. Thus, sago ownership has long been closely linked to social status.

Within Bourdieu's symbolic capital theory, ownership of land or sago trees not only serves as economic capital but also strengthens the symbolic capital held by the nobility. Their status as balailo legitimizes them to receive a share of the sago harvest without having to work in the field. In everyday practice, this respect is not perceived as an injustice, but rather as part of an ingrained social order. In other words, the nobility's receipt of a share of sago is seen as normal because it carries a symbol of leadership and honor.

Ethnographically, this relationship is evident in the way communities refer to sago trees or plots based on their particular noble lineage. Ownership identity not only signifies economic rights but also serves as a marker of family history and legitimacy of status. Folklore and collective memory often link the origins of sago ownership to the services of noble ancestors in clearing land or leading the community. Thus, sago became a kind of "social archive" that preserved the memory of the power relations between the nobility and the common people.

The development of the times brought significant changes through the introduction of industrial materials and sago processing technology. The owner of the sago squeezing machine was now considered the "boss" because he controlled the capital and means of production. This shift gave rise to a new relationship: the capital owner occupied a dominant position, while the community's traditional skills were gradually marginalized. This transformation also demonstrated how the sago community adapted to market trends and demands for production efficiency.

The social structure also changed at the generational level. While in the past, masambe (sago processing) was the primary occupation, it is no longer a priority today. The low economic value of sago has led many young people to choose other, more promising, occupations. Economic orientation has shifted from a subsistence basis to a preference for waged or market-based employment.

Despite these dynamics, the Sassa community maintains the tradition of sumambe rama, a collective work performed to meet immediate needs, such as at weddings or funerals. This practice of mutual cooperation demonstrates the continuity of the collectivity values inherent in indigenous communities. As Scott (2021) points out, collective work within indigenous communities not only strengthens internal solidarity but also serves as a mechanism for more equitable distribution of socio-economic burdens. Thus, despite changes brought about by industrialization and the market, the To Limola indigenous people maintain the foundations of social solidarity inherited from their ancestors.

Traditionally, sago palm ownership was closely linked to the social status of the balailo nobility, who enjoyed customary and symbolic legitimacy as the center of To Limola civilization. Sago ownership was not only an economic aspect but also a symbolic asset that strengthened the nobility's social position within the customary hierarchy. The practice of inheriting land and sago palm ownership played a significant role in social stratification based on lineage and genealogical legitimacy.

However, with the advent of modernization and industrial technology, particularly sago presses, there has been a shift in social dominance from the traditional nobility to new capitalists. The owners of sago presses now dominate the social structure, controlling the means of production and economic capital, replacing traditional authority based on customary status.

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Economic and social changes are also felt at the generational level. The involvement of younger generations in sago processing has significantly declined. This is due to a shift in economic orientation from subsistence to wage employment in other sectors deemed more promising. Consequently, the role of masambe is no longer a top priority for the younger generation, resulting in a decline in the regeneration of traditional knowledge and collective practices.

Despite significant changes in ownership and economic orientation, the value of collectivity remains intact through the practice of gotong royong (mutual cooperation) (sumambe rama). This practice serves as a social mechanism that strengthens internal community solidarity, particularly during important social moments such as traditional ceremonies, weddings, and mourning. Sumambe rama serves as a foundation for maintaining social cohesion amidst economic and technological transformations.

Changes in social structures also give rise to tensions and conflicts, particularly related to agrarian policies and forest management, which impact access to and control over sago resources. Agrarian conflicts between indigenous communities and the state are triggering the accelerated disruption of traditional social structures. Furthermore, changes in social identity occur through internal community negotiations regarding social status, ownership legitimacy, and the role of customary law, which are increasingly transforming in line with economic dynamics and modernity.

Conclusion

This research shows that sago, for the To Limola indigenous community in Sassa Village, serves not only as a food source but also as a symbol of social and cultural identity. The practice of sago processing (masambe) demonstrates the strong value of collective work, the transmission of knowledge between generations, and its connection to local rituals and cosmology. Ownership of land or sago palms has historically had a symbolic dimension closely linked to the social status of the nobility (balailo), where receiving a share of the sago is seen as a legitimate source of leadership. This aligns with Bourdieu's symbolic capital theory, which asserts that ownership carries not only economic value but also strengthens the owner's social and cultural position.

Changes in social structure are evident with the introduction of modern technology, shifts in land ownership, and the transformation of the market-based economy. Owners of sago presses now occupy dominant positions, replacing traditional authority based on nobility. Furthermore, the involvement of younger generations in masambe activities is declining as economic orientation shifts toward other, more financially rewarding occupations. Nevertheless, the practice of sumambe rama, which emphasizes collective work, remains a foundation of social solidarity. Thus, the transformation of the social structure of sago farmers in Sassa Village demonstrates the dialectic between tradition and modernity. Sago remains a "social archive" that preserves collective memory, identity, and power relations, even as the practices and values surrounding it continue to adapt to changing times. This research emphasizes the importance of viewing sago not only within an economic framework but also within broader social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions.

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