

THE PRACTICE OF TABUT IN BENGKULU: A SHARED TRADITION OF SUNNI AND SHIA

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ABSTRACT

This study explains how the existence of Tabut is interpreted and how it has become a tradition in the Sunni community. It is important to understand how this ritual is maintained in the midst of the Sunni-Shia conflicts which continue to occur. The present study was qualitatively conducted using field research methods. The leaders of Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut (KKT) and those of Tabut Pembangunan were engaged as the participants of this study. The data collection techniques deployed interviews, observations, documentation, and literature reviews. The present study revealed that the existence of Tabut's tradition, which is claimed to be a tradition originated from Shia teachings, is able to maintain its presence in Bengkulu. This existence survives in the middle of Bengkulu's society that is predominantly Sunni. This tradition is capable of being a peaceful path between Sunni and Shia in Bengkulu because each succeeds in creating social interactions through the Tabut's tradition as human relations and the symbol they interpret. As an implication, this study highlights that religious and/or cultural activity can be mediums of social bondage in the midst of cultural diversity. This study is a reference for those with interests in anthropological, social, and religious fields.

Keywords: The Practice of Tabut; A Shared Tradition; Sunni And Shia Conflict; Bengkulu

INTRODUCTION

Islam is a universal religion crossing the dimensions of time and space in which it has also intermixed with diverse local traditions (Lubis, 2016). As a consequence, interactions between Islam and local tradition, in some ways, can present potential conflicts if such interactions are not interpreted wisely. When Islam mixes with local traditions, the resulting religious practice is different from one place to another. At first, Islam was born as a local product which was later generalized so that Islam became universal. Hence, the fact that Islam can cross the dimensions of time and space indicates that Islam is universal. Islam can also be a critique of local culture and Islam to some extent can also integrate into a local culture in which a local culture can be a form of wisdom of the Islamic adherents in understanding and performing Islam (Fitriyani, 2013).

In the concept of multiculturalism as delineated by Hoon (2017), different interpretations of Islam can be interpreted as the cause of diversity. A community's diverse conditions extend to plurality with respect to different religions, races, languages, and cultures (Hui, 2017; Rodríguez-izquierdo, 2018; Sarwari et al., 2017). Such differences can naturally trigger perspective conflicts. However, such conflicts can be avoided, as long as those of multicultural societies have a willingness to accept other different groups in a social system without disputing the differences among them (Strekalova-hughes, 2017; Warsah, 2020; Williams, 2015; Zhang & Han, 2019).

More deeply, diversity also exists even within a religious group (Erdogan & Okumuslar, 2020). For instance there are two major schools in Christianity, Protestantism and Catholicism (Gilks, 2007). The schools are even split into many other submovements and substreams. In the same vein, there are several schools of thought in Islam. In the aspect of Fiqh (knowledge and literature concerning Islamic law (Hassan & Benaicha, 2021)), there are Shafi'i, Hambali, Hanafi, and Maliki (Tan, 2014). If traced back to the Islamic history since the death of the prophet Muhammad PBUH, Islam has been politically divided into Sunnism and Shia. Each also has small groups with diverse sects (Finnbogason et al., 2019). In some areas, such diversities often trigger conflicts. Although the conflicts *per se* do not stem from a single factor, the differences in schools and sects often lead to making the conflicts more complicated and difficult to resolve. That is what happens between Sunni and Shia (Kayane, 2020).

The footprint of Shia in Indonesia has been widespread through almost the entire country from Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Aceh, Maluku, and more (Al-Hadar, 2015). Shia has been part of the ongoing history of Muslims

in Indonesia. Throughout history, Shia conflicts appeared in different time dimensions with all kinds of diversities. Historians from both Sunni and Shia circles respectively argued in different ways in explaining the history of Shia development. Each of them claimed their opinion was the most authentic and rational (Hasim, 2012). According to Hasim's (2012) explanation, Shia development in Indonesia experienced four waves. During the first wave, Shia entered Indonesia since the initial introduction of Islam into Indonesia through the early Islamic propagators from the Persians who lived in Gujarat. The second Shia wave was after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. The third wave was driven by Habib (Arab descendants/ Prophets) or Shias people who had received education at Qum University, Iran. Because the understanding of Shia had entered the realm of fiqh, at this stage the conflicts began to grow openly. The fourth wave was driven during the period when Shia people began to form an association, known as the Association of Indonesian Ahlul Congregation (in Indonesian acronym known as IJABI), established on July 1st, 2000. Thus, the existence of Shia was openly recognized by some of the Indonesian people. Shia ideology also gave birth to the *Ashura's* commemorative doctrine that was strongly fused in the traditions of the Indonesian archipelago so that it gave birth to the memorial (*takziah*) traditions in the archipelago of Indonesia such as *Bubur Suro* in Java, *Tabut* in Bengkulu, and *Kasan-Kusen's* Tradition in Aceh (Al-Hadar, 2015).

Interestingly, although the majority of Muslims in Indonesia are Sunni, there exists a unique fact that in some areas of Indonesia the societies have traditions associated with Shia legacy. It is even more interesting that the organizers of such traditions are those of the Sunni Islamic community. In fact, those traditions have continued from generation to generation for centuries. In the midst of the increasing number of movements against Islamic minority groups such as Shia and Ahmadiyah in several regions in Indonesia, it did not dampen people's enthusiasm to carry out such traditions. Religious traditions and rituals in societies have been internalized in the entire history of human life. All religious traditions amid societies cannot actually be united under the same umbrella even though the assumption of their emergence could be recognized as derived from one divine value (Warsah, Cahyani, et al., 2019; Warsah & Imron, 2019). All traditions will move in line with the goals and missions of the religions' adherents. Each religion has the same right to live, and each has its own way of maintaining its traditions and identity (Baidhaw, 2007).

The context of *Tabut's* tradition in Bengkulu seems like a tradition influenced by a Shia ritual. This case is aligned with the socio-historical conditions of

the Sumatran area which came in contact with outside traditions from India, Persia, and Europe (Sofjan, 2012). For a long time, *Tabut's* tradition has been believed and carried out continuously as a ritual from generation to generation, especially by the descendants of *Tabut's* doers who established *Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut* (KKT) (Dahri, 2009; Sapsuha, 2013). *Tabut*, the traditional religious ceremony, is a social institution that is needed by the community in an effort to fulfill the obligations towards the ancestral heritage. *Tabut's* tradition is the most popular tradition among the people of Bengkulu City and is a characteristic of Bengkulu's society.

In its implementation, *Tabut's* tradition is plural in nature and not singular as a common impression notices. The impression that the celebrations of *Tabut's* tradition in Bengkulu are homogeneous has been formed in many people's perceptions. The plurality of *Tabut's* celebrations is reflected in the existence of several groups in which some of whom have different views in terms of *Tabut's* celebrations (Handayani, 2018).

The followers of *Tabut* strive to maintain the existence of the ritual's sacredness amid the provincial government's policies which regard *Tabut* only as a cultural commodity. This case can be seen from the condition that the performance of *Tabut Pembangunan* (a governmental program of *Tabut*) is regarded as discrimination by the followers of *Tabut*. The government seems to deny the existence of *Tabut's* ritual because it is only made a mere exhibition of arts and culture (Andoni, 2010). The difference in meaning to *Tabut's* ritual in Bengkulu is inseparable from the insistence of diverse views which have deep roots, but it cannot also be separated from political interests. The diverse views extend to cultural differences including religion and historical claims to the tradition. From these roots, each group has the legitimacy to claim they are not part of each other. This study explains how the existence of *Tabut* is interpreted so that it becomes a tradition in the Sunni community. It is important to understand how this ritual is maintained in the midst of the Sunni-Shia conflicts which continue to occur.

Previous studies on Sunni and Shia have been conducted and are more oriented towards analyses of detailed conflicts between Sunni and Shia (Abou-Zahab, 2017; Douai & Lauricella, 2014; Holtmann, 2014). However, limited prior studies were oriented towards addressing cultural traditions as the mediators to decrease the intensity of Sunni-Shia conflicts. The present study thus aims to explain how the existence of *Tabut* in Bengkulu is interpreted so that it becomes a tradition in the Sunni community. It is important to understand how this ritual is maintained in the midst of the Sunni-Shia conflicts which continue to occur. An ethnomethodology technique has been utilized to interpret social

actions and interactions taking place in the study field (Garfinkel, 1967).

The members, including the leaders of *Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut* (KKT) and those of *Tabut Pembangunan* as the community handled by the government, were engaged as the participants of this study. The data collection techniques deployed interviews, observations, documentation, and literature reviews as suggested by Bachri (2010) to present ethnomethodological data and make critically related argumentations. The data garnered from the aforesaid techniques were presented concomitantly as they had been properly synthesized and analyzed.

The data analysis adopted an interactive model (Miles et al., 2014). This model was used due to its detailed processes of data mapping and organization. Drawing upon this model, this study took on four elements of analysis: data collection, data mapping, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. As previously explained, data were garnered by interviews, observations, documentation, and literature reviews for the sake of reaching rich data on the ongoing discourse. Concerning data mapping, the data were condensed and grouped according to the emerging themes. The foregoing was useful for making it easier to present the data systematically, resting upon the focused discourse in an organized way. Pertinent to data presentation, the data were displayed systematically based on the theme-based groups. The data were further displayed by providing effective explanations alongside presenting some selected transcripts and discussing the data by making use of theoretical argumentations and interpretations. Lastly, the data were concluded comprehensively and representatively by considering the consistent linearity between the raw data and the condensed and grouped data.

SUNNI-SHIA CONFLICTS AS THE BACKGROUND OF TABUT-RELATED CONFLICTS

According to Mansoer (2016), conflicts occur due to four things. First, they are caused by differences in position and feelings of conflicting individuals. Second, due to differences in cultural backgrounds. Third, groups or individuals have different interests. Fourth, because of the rapid and sudden changes of values in the community.

Based on the explanation pertinent to conflicts above, it can be summarized that the issue which becomes the source of conflicts among the conflicting individuals or groups is due to different views and perceptions of matters. Such differences result in rifts among the group's relationships, changes in attitudes to individuals, and even the likelihood to conquer one of the parties involved in the conflicts (Mansoer, 2016; Schilling et al., 2018).

Conflicts between Shia and Sunni are the source of conflicts related to *Tabut* in Bengkulu. Actually, the conflicts between Shia and Sunni have occurred many times in Indonesia. An example of conflict between Shia and Sunni in Indonesia includes the conflict that occurred in Sampang, Madura. The conflict occurred or arose around 2006 and continued until 2012, culminating in the burning of the house of the local Shia leader (Ida & Dyson, 2015). The other example is the Shia-Sunni conflict that occurred in Bondowoso, caused by the IJABI resistance which was the culmination of community hatred towards Shia followers (Syaukani, 2009). Subsequently, in Yogyakarta (generally known to be very harmonious) in 2013, there was a clash between the Rausyan Fikr foundation that sheltered the Shia group with the community (Widyadara, 2015). This means that Sunni-Shia relations between the majority and minority in Indonesia occasionally experience friction and clashes. If we look globally, Sunni-Shia do have long roots of collision (Humaini, 2019), as the majority often puts pressure on the minority (Warsah et al., 2021).

In any particular civilization large traditions and small traditions exist (Warsah, Masduki, et al., 2019). This condition is often called the elite culture and popular culture. Large traditions refer to inheritance and collective knowledge that are universal, while small traditions represent the local traditions and indigenous knowledge (Hefni, 2013).

In the discourse of culture, there are commonly known three cultural materials: cultural manipulation, cultural behavior, and cultural artifacts. First, cultural manipulation is an effort of a person, a group, or a community in order to describe their attitudes, experiences, beliefs, and values with a planned and organized construction of the order (Idris, 2020). Second, cultural behavior is the behavior displayed by a group of communities. Cultural behavior is not identical to an individual's behavior, as it is behavior that can only be presented by certain groups in a particular community and society (Morganna et al., 2020). Third, cultural artifacts refer to man-made objects that provide information about the creation and use of culture. Artifacts can change from time to time in what they represent, how they emerge, and how and why they are used as cultural changes over time (Atha'na, 2010).

THE ESSENCE OF TABUT IN BENGKULU

Pertaining to the context of *Tabut's* tradition (Syiafril Sy, 2012) in Bengkulu, it is a tradition that is influenced by a Shia ritual (Daneshar, 2015). This is related to the socio-historical conditions of the Sumatran region that came in contact with outside traditions such as India, Persia, and Europe (Sofjan, 2012). This tradition has been believed since a long time ago, and has been passed down

continuously as a ritual carried out from generation to generation, especially by the descendants of the *Tabut*'s doers who established *Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut* (Dahri, 2009; Sapsuha, 2013). One of the members of *Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut* explained the following during the interview:

Tabut, the traditional religious ceremony, is a social institution that is needed by the community in an effort to fulfill the obligations towards the ancestral heritage. Tabut tradition is the most popular tradition among the people of Bengkulu City and is a characteristic of Bengkulu's society.

As documented from an old manuscript saved by the members of *Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut*, the Sipai people who were regarded as *Tabut*'s followers were initially part of the Shia community in Bengkulu. The *Tabut*'s tradition was used as a momentum to remember Hussein's death in Padang Karbala (he was brutally killed by Yazid, a tyrannical ruler of the Umayyads). But today, the Sipai's descendants who carry out this ritual do not show the religious expression of Shia. Regardless of the debate concerning the origin of this ritual, Bengkulu's people generally accept this tradition properly (Handayani, 2018).

Besides *Tabut*, in several places of Indonesia, there are also similar traditions such as *Kasan Kusen* in Aceh, *Tabuik* in Pariaman (Mason, 2016), *Hari Arbain* in West Java Pagelang, and the *Suro*'s tradition in the Javanese community. However, unlike others, a leader of *Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut* explained the following during the interview:

Tabut in Bengkulu lasts longer with its authenticity, whereas in other places such similar traditions have commonly begun to be abandoned by the related community, except for the Suro's tradition which is still mostly practiced by Javanese people. However, the purpose of Suro's tradition has changed and not been identical to a tradition of mourning, but a tradition of welcoming the year of Hijri.

Almost, the same tradition as *Tabut* in Bengkulu, *Tabuik* in Pariaman of West Sumatra experiences changes (Ekasari, 2012), and the traditions of *Kasan Kusen* in Aceh, *Suro* and *Hari Arbain* also look different (Utomo, 2010).

In reality, this tradition is very influential and cannot be separated in the life of the Sipai's community and the community of Bengkulu in general. Throughout history, *Tabut* has become an important part of the lives of Bengkulu's society, both the Sipai's community and that of Bengkulu in general. The celebration of the *Tabut* also has an impact on various aspects of people's lives, ranging

from social, economic, religious, to cultural aspects, and so on (Dahri, 2009). As observed during the preparation of *Tabut's* celebration, although the Sipai's community is a minority, they are still able to maintain the existence of the ritual. According to Lubis (2016), a minority group is a category of people with the recognition of race, religion, or ethnic traits that occupy positions with low respect and obtain unequal basic services. This is where multiculturalism shows accommodation, in which the majority gives room for the minority to express their beliefs and traditions (Warsah, Masduki, et al., 2019).

As documented during the study, *Tabut* is a religious tradition carried out every 1st to 10th Muharram. There are many things indicating its religious value. To name a few, those of *Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut* (KKT) interpret the *Tabut* tradition in an effort to commemorate and pray for all who were martyrs in Padang Karbala, especially Husein and ahlul bait. *Tabut* is the commemoration of Mourning the death of Husein bin Abu Talib who was killed by Yazid bin Muawiyah (Handayani, 2018). Besides commemorating the Islamic New Year, for generations, this tradition has been continuously carried out by the *Tabut's* followers in Bengkulu. *Tabut* is undertaken through 13 ritual activities (Syiafril Sy, 2012), namely: prayer for the sake of Allah's salvation, *ambik tanah*, *duduk penja*, *malam menjara*, *meradai*, *arak penja*, *arak seroban*, *hari gam*, *Tabut naik pangkek*, *arak gendang*, *soja*, *Tabut tebuang*, and *mencuci penja*. All of them have sacred meanings, especially for the members of *Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut* who continue to maintain *Tabut's* rituals from generation to generation (Anindita, 2013).

THE INTERPRETATION OF TABUT

Different from the other group commonly known as the *Tabut* Cultural Harmony (in Indonesian acronym as Ketab) which only follows the rituals of *Tabut Besanding* and *Tabut Tebuang*, a member of *Tabut* Cultural Harmony defines *Tabut* as follows:

As a culture that must be released from the beliefs indicated by the polytheists and affiliated with Shia. Getting support from the government, they are more focused on managing the Tabut Pembangunan as a cultural commodity as one of the tourism destinations.

The growing news of mass media about the chaos between *Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut* and the government occurred when the *Tabut's* followers regarded *Tabut* as a sacred cultural insight, and it needed to be known by many people. It was because the activities of *Tabut's* Bengkulu were categorized as one of the

world's cultures by the West Sumatra's Cultural Value Conservation Agency. *Tabut* must be intensively promoted even to the national level. In addition, *Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut* refused the funding of 200 million Rupiahs from Bengkulu's Provincial Government because they were disappointed that Bengkulu's Provincial Government seemed unconcerned about the efforts of *Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut* that tried to maintain the sacred value of *Tabut's* rituals. This showed the government's neglect of the *Tabut's* cultural development.

The problem concerning *Tabut's* ritual was getting more serious when this ritual was claimed to be a legacy of Shia. As the majority of the Bengkulu's community was Sunni, these two religious groups always legitimized that their teachings and beliefs were the absolute truth. So, they closed themselves to different teachings despite being part of the same religion. When Islam came into contact with a particular culture, religious understanding and practices emerged could not be separated from that culture. Then, the understanding of these religious teachings formed various religious expressions such as the appearance of rites, institutions, religious modes, and certain religious organizations (which were very possible between one group and another having different social identities (Mustamir, 2015)).

The ideological truth in the majority group is sometimes forced through governmental instruments, potentially through legal products, policies, government, or social instruments. The dominance of interpretation of religious teachings by the majority religious group becomes the main means to form public discourse. Resting upon the mastery of the religious interpretation as well, truth is reproduced so that the country gives its legitimacy. As a result, the government often acts to represent the aspirations of the majority group. The government even shelters behind the slogan of neutrality when carrying out violent practices against the minority group (Wahyudi & Wahid, 2015).

As highlighted in the above view, this condition even occurred in the implementation of *Tabut's* rituals in Bengkulu. In practice, the implementation of *Tabut's* rituals was divided into two, the *Tabut's* rituals and the *Tabut Pembangunan*. The government held *Tabut Pembangunan* in which there was a competition and the *Tabut's* festival as the festival of arts and culture which only aimed at raising cultural commodities. This condition was set as if it was as desirable by all people.

If connected with Karl Marx's theory pertinent to the reality of life which is always related to the concept of capitalism (the new economic life system of profits and markets), Karl Marx uses the concept of ideology in explaining how capitalists defend and protect their economic interests in dealing with crisis

situations (Branston & Stafford, 2003). The concept of ideology plays a pivotal role in explaining the patterns of power used by the government in eliminating the sacred values of *Tabut*. This is also aligned with Gramsci's hegemony theory which positions the government as a complex practical activity and in line with the theory of power in the form of policies and legal products to emphasize the ideology of the dominant majority group (Wahyudi & Wahid, 2015). However, in the dominant ideologies such as Gramsci's concept, it does not predominantly affect the social structure because diversity is ultimately relative (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

Since the government of Bengkulu was involved in implementing *Tabut's* tradition, it morphed into a cultural festival with all the existing tourist activities. Thus, the *Tabut's* ceremony for the people of Bengkulu contains two objectives. First, to welcome the Islamic New Year. Second to commemorate the heroic story and the death of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Husen Bin Ali, who died in Padang Karbela, Iraq (Marhayati, 2016). This means that there is a compromise between different meanings.

DEALING WITH TABUT-RELATED CONFLICTS

Initially, the change in *Tabut's* tradition was not organized, and that it then became organized seemed to be an appropriate step in anticipating the influence of time's changes, whereas the management of *Tabut* was aimed to maintain its sacred ritual tradition. To be able to survive in the face of time's changes that occur, it was considered necessary to have an ability to develop the present conditions more dynamically than those of the previous era. Openness to all changes is needed in order to be able to adjust to developments. Actually, what is needed to survive in the face of changes is not just adjustment but rather the ability to anticipate changes that are expected to occur in the future (Marhayati, 2016).

According to Gumay, *Tabut's* ceremony could actually cultivate an excessive individual culture which in principle does not conform to the philosophy of Pancasila. However, from the standpoint of regional culture and the culture of the Indonesian people generally, *Tabut's* tradition can be used as one form of regional art that has its own potential in the agenda of Indonesia's cultural richness (Marhayati, 2016).

The meaning of *Tabut's* ritual above is associated with pluralism as a theory that includes differences in ideas and identity, and also as stated by Gramsci, and is influenced by economic, political, military, and symbolic forces. Pluralism in the Gramscian context is a floating free of power, and it must

also be understood how these forces can construct differences in ideas and identities, especially in the culture of society (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

The interpretation of *Tabut* through the Gramscian pluralism approach can be understood by positioning the Bengkulu's government as the holder of political and economic power, which in turn gives rise to *Tabut Pembangunan* as a tourism commodity. As the foregoing, the aim is to improve the community's economy.

Keluarga Kerukunan Tabut as the sole authority of the *Tabut* ceremony's rituals must show professionalism in every *Tabut's* organization. It is especially in terms of maintaining the sacredness of the ceremony that has been directed and at the same time trying to make this ceremony a spectacle awaited by the general public. This interpretation is important as a way to maintain *Tabut's* tradition as locally indigenous in order that it is not isolated from the supporting community, as well as to be able to maintain its sacredness (Marhayati, 2016).

In interpreting the *Tabut's* ritual carried out by the *Tabut's* followers, if linked to the concept of Gramsci's pluralism theory, as part of the floating free of power such as the government, the *Tabut's* followers also have the power to shape their ideas and identities. In this case, that was demonstrated through symbolic power to maintain the sacredness of the rituals.

Pluralism has a couple of positive aspects. First, it promotes people to increase respect for certain ethnicities, races, religions, and other groups, and also encourages them to develop their own values and culture. No one has the right to obstruct this development as everyone is protected by law. Therefore, everyone is free and not bound by oppression or controlled by others with different cultural backgrounds. Everyone holds the right to live and develop their traditions and culture. Some social and cultural systems or institutions may coexist. Optimal relations between the members of different cultures are possible without obstacles from the hierarchy and bureaucracy (Bakti, 2013).

In the Gramscian perspective, pluralism means freedom in determining various kinds of discourse but remains within the scope of the influencing forces (political, economic, military, and symbolic forces). These forces are used by Gramsci as the understanding of how ideas and identities are able to provide freedom from one meaning over another (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

Besides offering the concept of ideology, Gramsci also offers alternative discourses and lived cultures. Discourse explains about how one value and identity work together, both with verbal and nonverbal media so as to shape reality. In the meantime, the concept of lived cultures emerged from the power

of the dominant assumptions in the form of material existence including cultural practices and rituals (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

In connection with *Tabut*, the sacred values therein in the form of symbols and prayer sequences succeeded in constructing cultural practices and rituals in the perception of *Tabut*'s followers. According to them, the ritual's sacredness must be maintained. So, such an effort formed their social identity. Finally, the distinction between the *Tabut*'s followers and the government is the diversity of ideologies and identities, which have ethnic and religious links in the context of discourse and lived cultures.

In a multicultural view, the continuous implementation of *Tabut* with all its sacredness gives a real depiction of accommodative principles. The majority in multicultural society provides accommodation for the minority to retain their traditional values. Besides, in the case of *Tabut*, there was a minority's effort to be open to making various adjustments to social conditions.

As observed during the study, even though there was a conflict in the interpretation of *Tabut*, the two groups did not establish a partition. Looking at the Sunni-Shia phenomenon in Bengkulu, it shows that social interactions are going well, and each of which has a strong value. This phenomenon aligns with what was stated by Herbert Blumer about social interactions which are interpreted as dynamic social relations. The intended social relationship is a relationship between one individual and another, between one group and the other group, and between groups and individuals. In such interactions, there is also a symbol, where the symbol is interpreted as something whose value or meaning is given to it by those who use it.

Such a process of social interactions according to Herbert Blumer is when humans act on something based on the meaning that something has for humans. Then, the meaning that something has comes from the interaction between a person and fellow people. Other meanings are the meanings that are not permanent but can be changed. Changes to meanings can occur through the process of interpretation by people when they encounter something. Social interaction can also occur if there is social contact and communication between two individuals or groups. Social contact is the first stage of social relations, and communication is the delivery of information and the provision of interpretations and reactions to the information conveyed.

CONCLUSION

Drawing upon a field research method to explain how the existence of *Tabut* in Bengkulu is interpreted so that it becomes a tradition in the Sunni

community, the present study revealed that the existence of Tabut's tradition which is claimed to be a tradition originated from Shia teachings is able to maintain its presence in Bengkulu. This existence survives in the middle of Bengkulu's society that is predominantly Sunni. This tradition is capable of being a peaceful path between Sunni and Shia in Bengkulu because each of them succeeds in creating social interactions through the Tabut's tradition as human relations and the symbol they interpret. This study contributes to being a reference in literature, addressing the role of a religious and cultural tradition as a mediator to decrease the existing religious, cultural, and perspectives conflicts amidst societies.

However, this study is not free from limitations. The specific and regional context, Tabut in Bengkulu City, brought in this study is only an example of a cultural tradition which becomes the mediator to decrease Sunni-Shia conflicts. Thus, this study, with such qualitative nature, cannot be generalized across wider contexts. It is recommended that further studies be conducted by addressing several forms of cultural traditions to cope with Sunni-Shia conflicts. Such involvement of various cultural traditions can pave the way for the studies to scientifically confirm and make a generalization across contexts that not only *Tabut* but also other traditions can help decrease Sunni-Shia conflicts.

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