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## *Tabut*: Muharram Observances in the History of Bengkulu

**Abstrak:** *Budaya, sebagai produk dari sesuatu masyarakat, bisa berfungsi sebagai alat untuk mengekspresikan berbagai macam makna baik bagi masyarakat pendukungnya maupun pihak luar yang memiliki kepentingan dengan masyarakat tersebut. Ketika masyarakat, karena arus perubahan besar, dituntut untuk mendefinisikan kembali jati dirinya, atau ketika suatu pemerintahan, karena alasan politik, ingin menyampaikan suatu kebijaksanaan tertentu, budaya menjadi alat yang bisa membantu mencapai tujuan-tujuan itu. Dalam kerangka ini budayapun dihidupkan kembali dan direinterpretasi. Tetapi 'reinterpretasi' dan 'penghidupan kembali' suatu budaya akan lebih efektif jika budaya tersebut ada pada tahap kematian. Dengan kata lain budaya yang kuat sulit diinterpretasi, apalagi dihidupkan kembali. Tabut dalam artikel ini dipakai sebagai contoh kasus untuk menunjukkan bagaimana proses reinterpretasi ini dilakukan oleh suatu masyarakat, dalam hal ini masyarakat Bengkulu.*

*Pada awalnya Tabut adalah upacara agama yang biasa diadakan untuk memperingati hari kematian Husayn di Karbela. Kata 'tabut' sendiri dalam bahasa Arab diasosiasikan dengan peti mati. Dalam upacara tersebut memang tabut dimaksudkan sebagai representasi dari kuburan Husayn. Menurut sumber yang berasal dari Asia Selatan, miniatur kuburan ini pertama kali digunakan dalam peringatan kematian Husayn pada abad ke 14 atau 15. Ketika pada abad ke 17 Inggris menempatkan orang-orang India di Bengkulu untuk menjaga kepentingan dagang Inggris di sana, tradisi ini ikut terbawa.*

*Sulit dibuktikan apakah tradisi ini sudah dipraktikkan pada abad tersebut atau belum. Yang jelas William Marsden dan Sir Thomas Raffles, dua penulis*

yang ada di Bengkulu pada saat Bengkulu dikuasai Inggris, tidak menyinggung Tabut sama sekali. Dan walaupun memang tradisi ini sudah pernah dipraktikkan oleh penduduk Bengkulu sejak masa tersebut, pada 1914 Tabut digambarkan oleh van Ronkel sebagai tradisi yang hampir mati.

Walaupun penulis artikel ini tidak berusaha membuktikan secara historis benar-tidaknya pernyataan van Ronkel tersebut, dia dengan baik sekali menggunakan pendapat ini untuk menyampaikan satu pesan penting: kekuatan Tabut bagi masyarakat Bengkulu justeru terletak pada kenyataan bahwa tradisi itu hampir mati. Dengan kondisi yang demikian, Tabut menjadi tradisi yang sangat terbuka untuk direinterpretasi dan dihidupkan kembali.

Tapi kenapa masyarakat Bengkulu perlu menginterpretasi tradisi mereka? Pada dasarnya masyarakat Bengkulu merupakan masyarakat yang sangat beragam. Berbagai macam suku—antara lain Melayu, Bugis dan Minangkabau—hadir di sana. Bahkan pada masa kekuasaannya (1685-1825) Inggris membawa orang-orang luar Indonesia, dalam hal ini Cina dan India, ke Bengkulu. Dengan demikian yang disebut 'orang Bengkulu' bukanlah suatu kesatuan masyarakat yang utuh, tapi campuran dari berbagai macam unsur dengan bahasa dan budayanya sendiri. Karena bahasa asli yang semestinya menjadi salah satu perekat sosial tidak dimiliki oleh masyarakat Bengkulu, maka tidak heran kalau Tabut memiliki beban yang begitu berat. Ia digunakan sebagai wahana untuk menyatukan identitas mereka (atau untuk membayangkan bahwa mereka sebenarnya satu masyarakat, ingat *Imagine Communities*-nya Anderson). Untuk mengakomodasi fungsi baru tersebut, unsur agama dalam Tabut ditekan, sementara aspek lokal ditonjolkan sedemikian rupa sehingga ia sekarang dianggap sebagai budaya lokal.

Pada masa Orde Baru Tabut diberi tekanan baru. Dalam rangka membangun kebesaran bangsa Indonesia, Orde Baru berusaha membangkitkan budaya lokal. Di bawah yurisdiksi Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Tabut dipromosikan besar-besaran lewat publikasi pemerintah. Selain usaha ini mendukung pengembangan turisme, beberapa pesan negara juga bisa tersampaikan dengan baik. Idiologi negara Panca Sila, lambang burung garuda dan pesa-pesan pembangunan, misalnya, kini menjadi bagian dari upacara Tabut.

Usaha masyarakat lokal untuk menggunakan Tabut sebagai sarana pembentukan identitas dan ketetapan pemerintah Orde Baru untuk menggunakannya sebagai alat propaganda negara semakin menjauhkan Tabut dari asal-usulnya. Dengan kata lain Tabut tidak dikembangkan dalam rangka pengembangan tradisi Islam, tapi dimasukkan ke dalam kerangka pembangunan budaya lokal dan juga budaya bangsa. Tabut yang asalnya milik umat, kini menjadi bagian dari kekayaan bangsa.

## Tabot: Muharram Observances in the History of Bengkulu

خلاصة: قد تستخدم الثقافة بصفقتها نتاج المجتمع وسيلة للتعبير عن مختلف المعانى سواء فيما يتعلق بالمؤيدين لها أم غيرهم الذين لهم مصلحة فى إيجاد علاقة طيبة معهم. فعندما كان على مجتمع ما، نظرا لمقتضى التطورات أن يعيد النظر فى ذاتيته؛ أو عندما تحاول حكومة ما، بناء على مبررات سياسية أن تضع سياسة هذه الغايات، وفى هذا الاطار نشأ الاهتمام بإحياء الثقافة ويتم إعادة تفسيرها. على أن هذه العملية وهى إحياء الثقافة وإعادة تفسيرها لم تتحقق إلا فى الظروف التى وصلت فيها الثقافة إلى مرحلة الجمود. وبعبارة أخرى ان الثقافة التى مازالت على قيد الحياة تصعب إعادة تفسيرها فضلا عن إحيائها.

وموضوع التابوت (Tabot) الذى تتعرض له هذه المقالة يعد مثالا حيا لإلقاء الضوء على العملية تم فيها إعادة تفسير الثقافة فى مجتمع ما وهو فى هذا الصدد متجتمعا بينحكولو (Bengkulu).

كان التابوت فى البداية عبارة عن احتفال ديني أقيم لذكرى وفاة الحسين، أحد أبناء على ابن أبى طالب الامام الأول عند الشيعة، بكرىلاء. ويمثل التابوت قبر الحسين فى الاحتفال فعلا، وطبقا لأحدى المصادر من

آسيا الجنوبية بدأ استخدام الشكل المصغر لقبر الحسين في الاحتفال بذكرى وفاته في القرن الرابع عشر الميلادي أو الخامس عشر؛ وعندما وضعت بريطانيا الهنود في بينجكولو في القرن السابع عشر الميلادي لتأمين مصاخرها التجارية أتت بهذه التقاليد معهم.

ومن الصعوبة بمكان التحقيق ما إذا تم العمل فعلا بهذه التقاليد في ذلك الوقت أم لا؟، ولكن الواضح أن وليام مارسدين (William Marsden) وسير توماس رافليس (Thomas Raffles)، الكاتبان الإنجليزيان المتواجدان في بينجكولو عهد احتلال الانجليز عليها لم يشيرا إلى التابوت على الإطلاق. وحتى لو افترض أنه جرى العمل بها حينذاك فإن فان رونكيل (van Ronkel) وصف التابوت في سنة ١٩١٤م بأن من التقاليد التي تعرضت للموت أو كاد.

ورغم أن كاتب هذه المقالة لم يحاول أن يثبت ما إذا كان افتراض فان رونكيل صحيحا أم لا؟ إلا أنه نجح بشكل عبثي في استخدام ما افترضه لإبلاغ رسالة هامة هي: أن حياة التابوت بالنسبة للمجتمع البينجكولوي وقوته تكمن في هذه الحقيقة وهي أنه من التقاليد التي تعرضت للموت أو كاد. وهكذا فإن المجال مفتوح لإحيائه وإعادة تفسيره.

ولكن لماذا اضطر المجتمع البينجكولوي إلى تفسير تقاليدهم. وفي الحقيقة يعد هذا المجتمع أكثر المجتمعات تنوعا، فقد عاش فيه وما زال قبائل مختلفة منها الملايو والبوقس والمينانجكابو، بل لقد أتت بريطانيا بأناس من شعوب أخرى كالصين والهند عند احتلالها المنطقة سنة ١٦٨٣م. وعلى هذا فالإطلاق على المجتمع البينجكولوي لا يشير إلى وحدة ثقافية قائمة بذاتها بل مزيج من الأجناس لكل منها ثقافتها ولغتها الخاصة. وبما أن المجتمع لا

يملك اللغة الأصلية التي افترض أنها احدى الروابط الاجتماعية فلا عجب أن يزداد ثقل التابوت. فقد استخدم كوسيلة لتحديد هويتهم (أو لإعطاء صورة خيالية بأنهم مجتمع واحد على حد تعبير أندرسون). فمن أجل التكيف مع هذه الوظيفة الجديدة يتم الحد من دوره الديني بينما أبرز الجانب المحلي منه بحيث وصل الأمر إلى اعتباره ثقافة محلية.

وفى عهد نظام الحكم الجديد حاز التابوت على وظيفة جديدة. فمن أجل تحقيق التقدم الحضاري للشعب الاندونيسي قامت الحكومة بإحياء الثقافات المحلية، من خلال السلطان القضائي الخاص بوزارة التربية والثقافة قامت الحكومة على قدم وساق بأكثر دعاية للتابوت مستغلين بوسائل الاعلام الحكومية. وبالإضافة إلى أن هذه الجهود تمثل تأييدا لبرامج السياحة فإن الحكومة قد استغلتها لإبلاغ الرسالة الوطنية استغلالا جيدا. وكانت النتيجة أن ايدولوجية الدولة "البانجاسيلا" أي المبادئ الخمسة والنسر كشعار للدولة وكذلك الدعايات لتنشيط التنمية على سبيل المثال قد أصبحت جزءا لا يتجزأ عن احتفالات التابوت.

إن محاولة المجتمع المحلي لاستغلال التابوت كوسيلة لتوحيد هويتهم والقرار الصادر من حكومة نظام الحكم الجديد الذى يقتضى استغلال التابوت وسيلة للدعاية الوطنية قد زادا من بعد المسافة بين التابوت وأصوله. وبعبارة أخرى لم يتم إحياء التابوت فى إطار الحفاظ على النظم الاسلامية وتقاليدها بل أدخل فى إطار تنمية الثقافات المحلية والثقافة الوطنية أيضا. فالتابوت الذى كان للأمة الاسلامية أصلا قد صار جزءا من التراث الوطني.

## Introduction

**T***abut* is the name given to the commemoration of Muharram as it is observed in Bengkulu, Indonesia. The basic traditions connected with its observance have their origins in Muslim India. However the *Tabut* has, over the course of its development in Bengkulu, absorbed and incorporated various local elements. Recently the “*Tabut Festival*” has come to be seen as a symbol of ‘local Bengkulu culture’, this reinterpretation facilitating the easy absorption of this potentially disruptive<sup>1</sup> happening into the fold of acceptable and even desirable ‘local cultural heritage’ as defined by the present Indonesian government.<sup>2</sup>

The city of Bengkulu is an ethnically diverse center with a population of roughly 85,000.<sup>3</sup> This includes Malays, with regional immigrants from the southern areas of Serawak, Pasemah, Kuar/Mulak, from the Rejang of the Bukit Barisan region, the Muko-Muko from the north, and the nearby island of Enggano. To this mixture were later added numbers of Buginese, Minangkabau, and more recently, as a result of government transmigration programs, larger numbers of Javanese.<sup>4</sup> Of non-Indonesian ethnic groups the principal are Chinese, as well as a considerable number of descendants from mixed marriages between Indian immigrants and the local population of more regional ethnicities. The two ‘non-Indonesian’ groups are historically related through their place in the development of the city under its British administration which lasted from 1685-1825.<sup>5</sup> During this period, ‘Bencoolen’ became an ethnically diverse settlement in which the various elements (native, European, Chinese, and Indian) were related through a complex web of inter-dependence. The way in which this situation first took shape can be gleaned from the following excerpt from a dispatch from Fort York (Bengkulu) to Madras in 1686. There we read:

This place if can be kept by y<sup>e</sup> English noe Doubt but may prove very advantageous to (the) R<sup>o</sup> Hono<sup>ble</sup> Comp<sup>ys</sup> & may in time prove as famous as Bantam. But until that the Chinesses, who are y<sup>e</sup> only tradeing men & the upholders of Batavia, are assured that wee are able to defend our Selves aga<sup>inst</sup> an enemy, wee must (not) expect them here, & w<sup>ith</sup>out them Never must wee expect any considerable trade,... Soe that I heartily wish for a recruite, that brute thereof May reach to Batavia to encourage y<sup>e</sup> Chenesses to come here, who will bring the most mony into the Hono<sup>ble</sup> Comp<sup>ys</sup> Coffers. (sic.)

These various ethnic groups living together in the city have developed their own unique yet composite culture through which to define themselves as *orang Bengkulu*, or Bengkulunese.<sup>8</sup> This synthetic category has been defined in an official gazetteer of Indonesia thus:



“Bengkulunes” originally came from many different ethnic groups among which one can find descendants of Minangkabau, Aceh, Bugis, Banten, and Javanese. There are also descendants of Sepoy soldiers from India who are the ones who brought the arts of *Tabut*. However they all use a Minangkabau dialect of Malay. It is for this reason that there is such a dialect named Minangkabau-Bengkulu and also one known as Melayu-Bengkulu.<sup>9</sup>

This population of Bengkulunes inhabits a province with little claim to national prominence other than its being the location where the largest flower in the world, the *Rafflesia Arnoldi* is most commonly found.<sup>10</sup> Aside from this, however, the city is overtaken for ten days each year for the celebration of the *Tabut*—and observance which, as we shall see, has become something of what Benedict Anderson has termed an “icon of ethnicity”<sup>11</sup> and a prime symbol of Bengkulu as it has been redefined in the cultural politics of New Order Indonesia.

The precise origins of the *Tabut* are unclear but its foundation can be traced through several cultural areas throughout the Muslim world. The word (*tabut*) itself is mentioned twice in the Qur’an, but in contexts removed considerably from those related to the present-day festival. It first appears in *al-Baqara*: 248, where *al-tabût* is used in reference to the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere this same term designates the vessel in which the infant Moses was placed in order to float down the river to safety from Pharaoh.<sup>13</sup> However for our purposes, *Tabut*<sup>14</sup> is best understood with specific reference to the Muharram observances which commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad at Karbala, Iraq in 680.<sup>15</sup>

Commonly the Arabic word *tabût* is defined simply as: “box, case,... casket, or coffin...”<sup>16</sup> And indeed in other places where processional Muharram observances are held, such as in Pakistan, the word is used to refer to coffins representing those of Husayn and sometimes also other martyrs of Karbala.<sup>17</sup> More closely related to its Bengkulu context, *Taboot* is defined in Yule and Burnell’s Glossary of Anglo-Indian terms<sup>18</sup> thus:

*Taboot*, s. The name applied in India to a kind of shrine, or model of a Mahomedan Mausoleum, of flimsy material, intended to represent the tomb of Husain at Kerbela, which is carried in procession during the Moharram.<sup>19</sup>

According to some South Asian traditions, “The use of these miniature tombs (*ta’ziyah*)... dates from the time of Amir Timur (A.D. 1336-1405), who on his return from Karbala made a model of Husain’s tomb.”<sup>20</sup> The stories of Timur’s bringing the *ta’ziyah* tradition to South Asia is reported in such texts as the *Tazk-e Timuri* although the authority of such stories has been questioned by scholars both Muslim and non.<sup>21</sup>

## Textual Tradition

The textual tradition surrounding Muharram throughout the Muslim world is immense, and it is reported that the Cerulli collection of the Vatican Library alone contains some 1,055 texts.<sup>22</sup> Some of these are in the form of dramatic scripts, while others consist of poetry or mourning songs to be recited during various parts of Muharram observances.<sup>23</sup> In an early twentieth century study of the *Tabut* in Bengkulu, van Ronkel transcribes some similar verses (*marato*) which he compares to the *marsijeh* of Bengali tradition.<sup>24</sup> This appears to be a functional equivalent of the *maqal* found in some other regions of the Malay-Islamic world. In his study of the *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah*, L.F. Brakel finds the first part of that epic to be a *maqal* and further writes that, "The preservation of this technical term in some MSS of the Malay H.M.H., and the fact that it is quite applicable to the first part of that text, both bear witness to the possibility of such a recitation being known in early Indonesian Islam."<sup>25</sup>

In addition to this are a number of other Malay texts related to the events commemorated during the month of Muharram. Perhaps the most well known is *Cerita dari Tabut*, manuscript #1158 of the National Library in Jakarta.<sup>27</sup> This text consists of a brief synopsis of the *Tabut* as observed in Bengkulu as well as notes on its historio-hagiographical background. In fact, its general tone seems to mark it as a product written at the specific request of a foreign scholar or colonial official; as it seems to have been employed by O.L. Helfrich in 1888.<sup>28</sup> Among other texts more indirectly concerned with the *Tabut*, but nonetheless dealing with the events of Karbala include the *Hikajat Hasan dan Hoesajn* which exists in at least two recensions listed in a supplemental list of Minangkabau manuscripts at the *Museum van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*.<sup>29</sup> This work contains several incidents from the Imams' childhood which are reminiscent of those found in the *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah* mentioned above. Neither of these works, however seem to have been involved in Muharram observances in Bengkulu. As Professor Brakel informs us, "The H.M.H. knows nothing of *tabut* processions, and so on, but mentions only fasting, weeping, food-offerings and the *bubur*."

One later work that does seem to 'know of the *tabut*' is the *Hikayat Perintah Negeri Bengkulu* of Ahmad Rijaluddin.<sup>30</sup> In this work mention is made of the *Tabut* celebration which seems to indicate a degree of familiarity with such celebrations in the early nineteenth century Anglo-Indian world. The author also rather frequently describes things as look-

ing “like a tabut,”<sup>31</sup> and he frequently uses this comparison to describe everything from Hindu temples to bathing tanks.<sup>32</sup> The *Hikayat* includes some short descriptions of Indian Muharram celebrations as well as accounts of Hindu festivities in which the author sees some similarity. Of the former he writes:

Now I shall tell you about the festivities of Muharram, when all sorts of entertainments are put on by the Indian Muslims and splendid *tabuts* are constructed on which the Nawab Khanjir Kahn spends thousands of rupees. On the tenth of the month, the *tabuts* are taken to Karbala field. In this field there is a very large tank to which the *tabuts* are taken, accompanied by crowds of men and women, I can assure you.<sup>33</sup>

It is, however, unclear whether this familiarity came from the author's earlier experience in the British-controlled ports of the Malay world or his subsequent time spent in Anglo-India.

### Description<sup>34</sup>

On the night before the first of Muharram a small procession is made from each village to a special place nearby which represents Karbala<sup>35</sup> and then proceeds on to a small shrine called a *gergah*<sup>36</sup> which is dedicated to Syech Burhanuddin—the Sepoy traditionally accredited with the introduction of the *Tabut* traditions to Bengkulu.<sup>37</sup> The procession usually consists of only a handful of people whom, shortly after sunset prayers, go to the place representative of Karbala and gather a small mound of earth<sup>38</sup> (about the size of a coconut), which is ceremonially placed within the *gergah* where it remains until the tenth of Muharram.<sup>39</sup> Shortly after the installation of the soil within the *gergah*, a small group of descendants of Syech Burhanuddin visit the *gergah* to offer Arabic prayers (*du'a*), incense, and a mixture of strong coffee and spiced water known as *air serobot*.

While this small group of men connected with Bengkulu's older *tabut* families recite their *du'a*, most of the rest of the town is making their way towards the park nearby the governor's residence in the city center. There local forms of music and dance are performed on a floodlit stage provided by the provincial government.<sup>40</sup> Considerable pride is taken in these performances which are usually organized into competitions between groups representing the city's various neighborhoods, and every afternoon in the weeks leading up to the celebration these groups can be found in yards and vacant lots throughout the town practicing for their moment in the spotlights of the *Tabut* Festival stage.

On second Muharram, the 'official' construction of the *bangsal*, or first *tabut* is commenced. Once construction of this first *tabut* is underway, one can see them being built in nearly every neighborhood of Bengkulu during the days which follow. The *tabut* themselves are actually cenotaphs built atop pushcarts and decorated with various motifs. One of the most prominent of which is a representation of Husayn riding atop the winged steed Buraq, Muhammad's mount during his "night journey" (*mi`raj*) through the heavens to within "two bow's lengths" of God.<sup>41</sup> In Indonesia (i.e. in Bengkulu and Pariaman) effigies of Buraq are often found adorning the *tabut* that are paraded through the streets.<sup>42</sup>

On the evening of third Muharram, *ikan-ikan* and *burung-burung* dances are held for enjoyment and to raise money to complete the construction of the *tabut*.<sup>43</sup> These consist of wandering troupes carrying large effigies of birds or fish<sup>44</sup> with which they dance to the accompaniment of drums, bells, and violins or flutes— which is sometimes amplified by makeshift sound systems on wooden push-carts.<sup>45</sup> The troupes compass the neighborhoods collecting money for the construction of the *tabut*. When they find the home of a willing donor, they stop for a performance: the music intensifies, and one of the group begins dancing with the bamboo and paper bird or fish frame covering his head and torso. He is soon joined by others dancing around him with their hands in the air. Generally a crowd follows these minstrels from house to house with those who choose not to dance forming a crowded ring around those who do, thus contributing nonetheless with much shouting and clapping of hands.

On the night of fourth Muharram, the *Burung-Burung* and *Ikan-Ikan* dances continue throughout the neighborhoods of Bengkulu. All this occurs on the 'unofficial' side of the *Tabut* festivities. However, meanwhile, as part of the official program— in recent years geared toward attracting tourism<sup>46</sup> — other musical performances are being held on the floodlit stage in the center of town.<sup>47</sup> This evening's music program features several local *Gamat* groups; a local style of Malay music performed with violins, accordions, and drums.

On the morning of 5 Muharram a small group assembles later in the day for another ceremony not on the official calendar of events. After mid-afternoon prayers is held a ceremony called the *duduk penja*, in which the standards (*penja*)<sup>48</sup> and other materials used in the *Tabut* observances are ritually cleaned and prepared for use. In preparation for this ceremony, straw mats were placed on the ground immediately before the

*gergah* where ceremonial functionaries were to sit and perform their duties. Three men, all claiming descent from Syech Burhanuddin, are in charge of the proceedings. After taking their places on the mats, one of them removed the wooden panel before the door of the *gergah*. Once this was placed aside, he reached in to retrieve a small charcoal burner for incense which he placed before him on the mat and lit. Soon an aged and tattered six-sided basket containing the *penja* is opened and its contents are removed. These *penja* are metal standards of an outstretched hand which in traditional Shi'ite iconography are used to represent the five pure members of the Prophet's household.

Once these objects are out of the basket, they are sprinkled with water and placed in the bucket of water to which milk and *air serobat* are now added. In this mixture, the *penja* soak and are stirred around to be ritually cleansed. They are then rinsed again in a bucket of cold water to which cut limes have been added. After the *penja* are carefully removed and dried, long bamboo poles are brought in and laid down so that their ornamental, five-fingered ends (*jari-jari*) are within easy reach of the functionaries. Four of these five fingers (the middle being excluded) are then tipped with the cut limes from the *penja*-soaking bucket.

One of the functionaries then affixes a three-pointed standard to the center finger of the *jari-jari* with green and yellow thread. Next, several straw and yellow-cloth sleeved "arms" or stands are taken from the basket and attached to the bottoms of the small *penja*. The assembled pieces are then placed on the white cloth-box stands. Once these racks of *penja* are assembled they are wrapped in white muslin cloth and bound in yellow string before being draped over with thin garlands of greens. These *penja* packets are then distributed to members of certain families having traditional connections with the *Tabut* and who have custodianship of them for the remainder of the festival.

Six bamboo poles are then brought in and flags<sup>49</sup> from the *penja* basket are tied to their ends.<sup>50</sup> After this, the ceremonial utensils are taken away, the *penja* racks are moved out, and it is time for *keliling-keliling*. This is a small procession of the *penja* racks, platters of food, the *jari-jari*, flags, sugar-cane stalks, and small banana trees which are carried in circumambulation around the *gergah* seven times. When this is finished, the trees and flags are set in the four postholes at the corners of the *gergah*; each point containing one flag, one banana tree, and one stalk of sugar cane. The crowd is sometimes very enthusiastic about this part of the ceremony and uproot more trees than are necessary to carry with them in their circumambulations.

After the corners have been so decorated, the racks and the *penja* basket are placed within the *gergah* where they remain while the food platters are taken to a nearby elevated porch from where portions of *nasi kebuli* and *imping* are frantically distributed in a frenzied feast. The ceremonies of *duduk penja* are usually finished around the time of sunset prayers.

On the night of fifth Muharram is the first *beruji dol* or "Battle of the Drums," and the *dol*<sup>51</sup> drum groups from different areas of town assemble in what seem like war camps.<sup>52</sup> There, bonfires are lit and used to heat the *dol*; warming the air inside them to create convections which intensify their sound. Around these blazes, drums are pounded and people dance and shout while the atmosphere grows thick with excitement.<sup>53</sup> After some time spent warming up, the camps are ready to mobilize to visit their rivals in other parts of the city. This mobilization is often aided by trucks which carry the heavy *dol* and throngs of people through the streets. However, this is only part of a procession which includes dozens of people walking or dancing between the trucks. The entire mission is lead by a row of young men carrying the flags and *jari-jari*. Immediately behind them are several others walking while playing smaller drums known as *tasa*<sup>54</sup> and sometimes bells. This is accompanied by the thunder of *dol* as they are played in the open beds of trucks. These vehicles are packed not only with the *dol* and their players, but also with folks dancing and others sitting atop the cab and walls who tear leaves from the trees they pass under to wave as banners.

This procession stops briefly at each simple *gergah*<sup>55</sup> it passes to dance and rehear the *tasa* at roadside fires. However, the primary purpose of these pauses was to salute the *gergah* that is passed. This is done by those carrying the *jari-jari* at the head of the procession. One by one, they turn to the side of the road, and as they approach the *gergah*, they tilt their poles so that their *jari-jari* touch those of the *gergah* visited (which stand atop a similar pole beside it). As they touch, one cries out "*Assalamu alaikum*" and the crowd him responds, "*Wa 'alaikum salam.*" This is done at every *gergah* visited.<sup>56</sup>

The procession of the first night's *beruji dol* eventually arrives at Berkas where the *dol* are unloaded from the trucks and carried with bamboo poles down a narrow road to the grassy, seaside clearing near the *gergah* of Syech Burhanuddin. There, this visiting army of *dol* and accompanying entourage met with a similar force based there and much pounding of drums and dancing ensued. Amid the noise and confusion, a small procession followed those bearing the *jari-jari* to the *gergah* where the



standards were touched together in salute before this small procession. After the short visit to the *gergah*, all dance and pound drums beneath the stars and slender palms for a while before moving back to the road where the trucks await. There the *dol* are loaded back on to the trucks and the procession continues on as before through the city.

The evening of 8 Muharram is known as the night of *sorban*, when the *coki* are escorted with flags and *jari-jari* to the stage in the park. *Coki* have been described as "small *tabut*" but are usually not constructed in the same stupa-fashion.<sup>57</sup> They usually take the shape of small portable 'shrines' made of paper, cardboard, &c. and colorfully decorated with paper and flowers.<sup>58</sup> They are placed about chest high on small carts and used to carry the ceremonially wrapped "*penja*-packets" to the center of town on this evening. The *coki* from each area are brought into the park and form a row in front of the stage where more exhibitions in the form of local dance and music competitions are held.

The evening of ninth Muharram is known as *Arak Gedang*. On this evening the *tabut* are brought from their neighborhoods to the park where they are lined up before the stage. On this evening, groups performing various forms of music and dance (e.g., *Musik Dol*, *Gamat*, *Ikan-ikan*) in the evenings previous perform their music and dances on stage. There are also several masquers on hand to excite the crowd to dancing after they have become anaesthetized by the long-winded series of official speeches given over the sound system in place for the music.

On the morning of 10 Muharram, the *Tabut* are brought to the governor's residence before the park.<sup>59</sup> There, they form a line with the *Tabut* from Berkas, the oldest, in the lead position. Before the assembly of *tabut* and local dignitaries seated on the governor's porch, *dol* are beaten and a dance is struck up which is mostly joined in by members of the old *tabut* families and various local officials. From here begins the procession of *tabut* to 'Karbala' where they are disposed of. However, before the procession begins, the crowd is once again subject to a barrage of speeches by various officials sheltering themselves in the shade of the governor's porch. Once this great font of hot wind is exhausted, the procession begins. *Dol* music is heard and before the oldest *Tabut* young folks carrying the flags and *jari-jari* and a line of men dressed in the long, white robes of *Shayeks* lead the procession pass the governor's house and through town to Karbala.<sup>60</sup> In Bengkulu, Karbala is actually a cemetery containing the grave of Syech Burhanuddin, a Sepoy soldier traditionally credited with the introduction of *Tabut* to the region.<sup>61</sup>

On this day, this cemetery is packed with people, most of whom are

barefoot, having removed their shoes before entering such holy ground. There, offerings are made of strong coffee, *air serobat*, and incense while Arabic prayers are offered. Sometimes during the course of these rituals some spectators become 'possessed' (*kemasukan*) or enter into trance states, thus requiring the attention of the ritual specialist present in order to be returned to normal. Such occurrences seemed to be even more numerous during 1998 than in previous years.

After this, the *Berkas Tabut*, bearing the *penja* packet from Syech Burhanuddin's *gergah* there is brought near. The *penja* are taken from the *Tabut* to the grave before some of the crowd begin dismantling the *Tabut*, often throwing its paper flower decorations to the children that are present. While they are doing that, a small group of functionaries from the *duduk penja* begin disassembling the *penja* packet and replacing its components in the old basket from which they were taken on 5 Muharram. Later what remnant of the food offerings,<sup>62</sup> coffee, and *air serobat* are distributed (as far as they last) amongst the crowd while the frame of the *tabut* is discarded in an empty lot nearby. Then much of the crowd disperses, but quite a few remain, sitting in the shade of an ancient tree in the center of the cemetery, enjoying a simple beverage and picnic.

Much of this may look familiar to those familiar with the Muslim culture of South Asia, and it is there that we find the origins of the *Tabut* as it is observed in western Sumatra. The major connection between these two areas throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth century is not to be found in some common "Indianized" cultural sub-stratum,<sup>63</sup> but rather in the policies of the British East India Company, whose coastal Sumatran settlements were linked to their administration of the sub-continent. To understand how this is so, we will briefly examine the history of the region since its first contact with the British in the seventeenth century.

## History

The history of the *Tabut* in Bengkulu is inextricably intertwined with that of the English East India Company in Sumatra. Thus a brief summary of British colonial history in the region may be of some use here. The earliest record we have of any British activity in the area comes from an account of the Frigate Zant which landed at Silebar, just to the south of the present day city of Bengkulu in 1668. There an attempt was made to establish a British trading post, though the negotiations went nowhere as the British were "unable to converse with the natives for want of interpreters."<sup>64</sup>



Later, after being expelled from Bantam in 1682,<sup>65</sup> the British factories in the archipelago scrambled to re-establish themselves and maintain their position in the highly profitable pepper trade. In the following year on 1 August, the king granted a commission enabling them to attempt reclamation of their fort there.<sup>66</sup> However after several setbacks, the British soon decided against this policy and chose instead to establish themselves elsewhere in the region for the continuation of their pepper ventures. They first set their sights on Acheen (Aceh) where they planned to arrange a treaty with the sultan which would provide them with trading privileges in the Muslim sultanate on the northern tip of Sumatra. In 1684 two British officials from Madras<sup>67</sup> were sent to the court of Sultana Zaqiyat al-Din Inayat Shah<sup>68</sup> but were refused permission to revive a factory that they had established earlier in the century and since neglected. Nevertheless, their mission was not a complete failure. For at Aceh, Ord and Cawley were approached by rulers from the West Sumatran districts of Barus<sup>69</sup> and Pariaman<sup>70</sup> who offered them a monopoly of their pepper trade and land on which to build fortifications in return for protection from the Dutch. These parties then went together to Madras where they concluded a treaty which was to establish a British factory at Pariaman. However for a combination of several reasons when the British returned to Sumatra they did not settle at Pariaman but at a spot which they called 'Bencoolen, situated some 300 miles to the south.'<sup>71</sup> Although Ord's Deputy<sup>72</sup> attempted to justify this violation of the contract with Pariaman and the relocation of the British settlement on the Island, the Directors of the Company were not pleased. The negative attitude of the Company towards the Bencoolen which was established at this point seems not to have been considerably assuaged over the 140 years following, during which the Company controlled the site. This is evidenced by the derogatory descriptions found in numerous epistles, both official and personal, written by British officials serving in the region. It was said at that time that the local inhabitants themselves thought of the place as a *tanah mati* (dead land).<sup>73</sup> When Raffles arrived there in 1818, "the district was saturated with malaria; the officials underpaid, corrupt, and without hope; the Malays, suffering under the iniquitous system of forced culture, disaffected and hostile."<sup>74</sup>

We know that at least part of the population of the area was Muslim by 1685, the time of the establishment of the British at Bencoolen. For in the original 'contracts of friendship' between the British and the local leaders Patte Nagarakiddul and Patte Rangaitta the latter were asked to, "swear upon y<sup>e</sup> Alcoran to be true & faithfull to y<sup>e</sup> Right

Hon<sup>ble</sup> Comp<sup>a</sup> and to assist & help us again<sup>st</sup> all our adversares... (sic.)”<sup>75</sup> Furthermore in the documents recording the first landing of the English at ‘Bancoolen’ we find evidence of their frustration over the fact that they had to wait several weeks to obtain a load of pepper because the “Country people” would not bring any down during the month of Ramadhan.

Shortly after this time,<sup>76</sup> a group of Indian Sepoy troops was landed at nearby Indrapour, and we hear of similar arrivals at the new settlements at Manjuta<sup>77</sup> and Batang-Kapas in the following year.<sup>78</sup> It was also in 1686, on 12 April, that the East India Company came under a new, revised charter.<sup>79</sup> Included in one of its articles was the declaration of martial law at Pariaman; a policy change that would presumably require an increased security force. However the records that I have had access to are not conclusive as to whether or not more Sepoys were stationed on the west coast of Sumatra as a result of this decision.

The presence of Sepoy troops in Bencoolen is almost as old as the British presence there itself, as one of the many chronic problems facing the British stationed there was that of security. Indeed, as early as the first year of their occupation it was noted that:

Wee think it not convenient to entertain any of the Mallays as Souldiers, for being such pfidious People, as by dayly experience wee finde them to bee, wee Should only furnish them w<sup>th</sup> armes to doe our Selves an injury.<sup>80</sup>

This concern was in no way diminished during the early eighteenth century as we see from a dispatch of 1705, wherein the council of York Fort (Bencoolen) refused to reduce the number of soldiers stationed there, “not being willing, as they said, to have their throats cut.”<sup>81</sup> Things continued on in a similar vein through the revolt of 1719 when Fort Marlborough was captured and the British were driven into the sea by a local uprising.<sup>82</sup> Similar incidents plagued Bencoolen throughout its administration by the British culminating in the 1805 murder of Resident Thomas Parr, in a midnight attack on his home by a group of Malays.

Not only soldiers but other Indians as well were brought to Bencoolen under the British administration, as we find reports that in the early eighteenth century, Resident Joseph Collett, “encouraged country traders from Bengal as well as Madras,” to move to the West Sumatran Settlement.<sup>83</sup> We have a brief sketch of the situation of the Indian immigrants there early in the following century from the writings of Benjamin Heyne, a surgeon and naturalist working for the

Company at Madras who visited Sumatra in 1812. In his remarks on 'Benkulen Society,' he writes:

There are a number of Bengalese settled here, as handicraftsmen and servants. All tailors and washermen at Marlborough are of this description... The Bengalese here are mostly, if not all, Mussulmen, and intermarry with the Malays; and soon lose themselves so far, that their progeny look, act, and speak like other Malays...<sup>84</sup>

Yet another source of Indian immigration into the region came only towards the end of the British administration of Bencoolen—the transportation of Indian convicts. Around 1787,<sup>85</sup> Bencoolen became a penal colony for convicts from Bengal and other parts of British India.<sup>86</sup> Bastin informs us that the initial importation consisted of about a hundred persons,<sup>87</sup> but that by 1823 there were between 800-900 convicts employed on public works and in the cultivation of spices in the Fort Marlborough districts.<sup>88</sup> The greatest increase in convicts came under the residency of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles<sup>89</sup> who introduced significant reforms in the penal system in British Southeast Asia<sup>90</sup> and laid the groundwork for the liberal systems that were later established in Penang, Malacca, and Singapore.<sup>91</sup> On 20 December, 1823 Raffles wrote to Government informing them on the convict population of Bencoolen, "The convicts now at Bencoolen amount to 800 or 900, and the number is gradually increasing. They are natives of Bengal and Madras; that is to say of those presidencies."<sup>92</sup>

We do not have any direct evidence of the participation of these convicts in the *Tabut* observances of Bengkulu, but it is well-known that Indian prisoners in similar institutions in Southeast Asia were active participants in Muharram processions. Frequent mention is made of "taboot" processions being held by the "Kling"<sup>93</sup> community in Singapore, a significant portion of which arrived there as convicts under the British system of penal colonies.<sup>94</sup> Often such references are in connection with legal problems and government attempts to ban such proceedings, such as in 1842 when the angered 'Klings' reacted with a general strike from work.<sup>95</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, problems relating to these processions prompted government action, and in 1842 the Penang police "had forbidden the 'Tabut' to be carried around the town."<sup>96</sup> The apparent crisis escalated to the point that in October of 1855 the Resident Councillor of Singapore advised the Governor that the celebration of Muharram festivals be prohibited. However for various political reasons this suggestion was never fully implemented.<sup>97</sup>

## Previous Scholarship

During the British administration of Bencoolen, it was home not only to traders, military personnel, and convicts, but also to some of the most recognized orientalist of British Southeast Asia including William Marsden and Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles.<sup>98</sup> It is surprising that Marsden makes no mention of the *Tabut* in his magnum opus—the encyclopedic *History of Sumatra*,<sup>99</sup> although he served in the secretariat at Fort Marlborough (Bengkulu) for eight years.<sup>100</sup> That such an acute observer would overlook so vivid a spectacle as the *Tabut* festival<sup>101</sup> seems strange and tempts one to believe that perhaps the celebration was unknown in Bengkulu during the time of Marsden's residency there. However, this may also be due to the fact that, as a theme of his *History*, Marsden was preoccupied with discovering and reporting on the 'original' culture of the 'True Malays'<sup>102</sup> and therefore may have intentionally overlooked things such as the *Tabut* which he would most likely have associated with the 'Mohammedan' rituals of the Indian troops stationed there. Nonetheless, even in his *Dictionary of the Malayan Language*, he defines *tabut* simply as: "Pers. the ark of the covenant delivered by God to the prophet Adam, and from him transmitted to Moses,"<sup>103</sup> making no reference to it in relation to the observances in Bengkulu. Neither is mention of the *Tabut* to be found from the pen of Raffles, usually an excruciatingly acute observer of local cultures. However, perhaps because of the relatively recent nature of Indian immigration and the transfer of *Tabut* tradition to the area, Raffles would not have thought of it as a local phenomenon and thus he may not have considered it fitting material to include in his studies of things Malay. Here it is interesting to note that the first scholarly discussions of the subject came only after the Dutch took control of the region in 1825, and for them it may have seemed a more established part of the local cultural scene.<sup>104</sup> It is, for instance, described in some detail in the third volume of Buddingh's *Reizen...* with particular mention of the collection of money for the *tabut*'s construction and the *duduk penja* observances.<sup>105</sup>

Other instances of literary description or even mention of the *Tabut* are few and far between. In the Perpustakaan Nasional in Jakarta is an unsigned and undated manuscript simply entitled *Cerita dari tabut*,<sup>106</sup> written in Malay with Arabic characters. This text formed the basis for a descriptive article by the Dutch scholar O.L. Helfrich in 1888.<sup>107</sup> After this, a small flurry of commentary by other Dutch scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries<sup>108</sup> was concluded with an epilogue by the eminent turn-of-the-century orientalist Phillipus Samuel van Ronkel in 1914.<sup>109</sup>

### Rebirth of *Tabut* Tradition

At the conclusion of his article on the *Tabut*, van Ronkel remarked that it was a dying tradition.<sup>110</sup> However, this pronouncement may have been a bit premature for over recent years the *Tabut* has become a major event and shown signs of vibrant growth. This curious resurgence of *Tabut* tradition confronts us with some intriguing issues connected with its ritual development which have significant implications for both local communal identity and the elaboration of the New Order political culture in Indonesia. Both of these dimensions of the *Tabut* tradition's recent renaissance are closely linked to the activities of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan) who have in recent years produced a number of publications on the *Tabut*.<sup>111</sup>

When we compare the present *Tabut* festival with earlier reports we have of its observance we notice some very significant changes, pointing to an interpretation of the *Tabut* as an example of what Eric Hobsbawn has termed "the invention of tradition."<sup>112</sup> Hobsbawn notes that the invention of tradition seems especially prevalent in societies undergoing rapid transformation, such as those found in the industrialized world over the past two-hundred years. He writes that during such times, a kind of cultural "adaptation... (takes) place for old uses in new conditions and by using old models for new purposes."<sup>113</sup> Thus in the 'invention' of the *Tabut*, familiar patterns were revived and reinterpreted in order to create new traditions. New Order policies reinterpret the traditions surrounding *Tabut* to emphasize not some spiritual connection with the House of the Prophet (as is the case with some Muharram observances elsewhere in the world), but with a sense of nationalistic pride as it is elaborated in the New Order's interpretation of the national slogan: "Unity in Diversity".<sup>114</sup>

Such a reinterpretation could not have had much of an effect on a tradition that was thriving on its own—which would on the inertia of its own momentum be somewhat resistant to such tampering. This is where the importance of van Ronkel's remarks about the near eclipse of *Tabut* tradition earlier in this century becomes evident, for such a break in the effective historical continuity of a tradition is, according to Hobsbawn, a prerequisite to movements for its revival.<sup>115</sup> Such a process of 'revival' is viewed by Hobsbawn as one of the characteristic components of many invented traditions.<sup>116</sup>

Hobsbawn and Ranger look at how ritual "invents" tradition in order to afford a sense of legitimized continuity with the past and to experience tradition as fixed.<sup>117</sup> In the perception of a ritual's structure as

“fixed” lies the prestige of tradition and in this prestige lies its power. This type of process is one that Steven Sangren finds to be nothing less than the “cultural construction of history.”<sup>118</sup> The revival of *Tabut* tradition has, to a great extent, been a phenomenon of New Order Indonesian political culture. It is but one example of a national effort to increase awareness of local cultures as a means of appreciating national greatness. The goal, as stated in official publications, is so that, “Indonesians themselves are able to better understand and develop their own cultures toward strengthening the unification and unity of Indonesia.”<sup>119</sup>

This idea of national greatness embodied in the diversity of its local cultures is the prime focus of another of the New Order’s cultural undertakings—*Taman Mini Indonesia Indah*<sup>120</sup>—a cultural theme park whose foundations lay in the inspiration that First Lady Ibu Tien Suharto received during a visit to Disneyland. The central focal point of this park is a man-made lagoon in which are landscaped replicas of all the nation’s major islands. Around this lagoon are pavilions representing each of Indonesia’s various regions with examples of traditional art, architecture, &c.<sup>121</sup> It is a monstrous New Order project aimed at developing “a feeling of togetherness and mutual understanding between one region and another,”<sup>122</sup> and “to encourage a deep understanding and implementation of Pancasila (the Five Principles) in the Indonesian state.”<sup>123</sup> This is all done to “promote public admiration and strengthen affection for this country and its endless cultural variety.”<sup>124</sup> Taman Mini thus plays an important role in the New Order’s reconceptualizing of local traditions as it employs symbols of framed regional cultures as evidence of national greatness.

These regional cultures all fall under the jurisdiction of the national Ministry of Education and Culture,<sup>125</sup> which has greatly facilitated the revival/invention of *Tabut* tradition. Recent programs undertaken by this department such as the *Project for the Research and Registration of Local Cultures*<sup>126</sup> and *Project for the Inventory and Documentation of Local Cultures*<sup>127</sup> have been directed at, as one government publication reads, “the mining and enrichment of regional cultures”<sup>128</sup> so that these regional cultures could be “cultivated and revived”.<sup>129</sup> The organizational structure of these programs is designed to define these local cultures as examples of ‘cultural diversity’ while at the same time fixing them firmly within a unified national framework. In doing this, these projects produced several publications dealing specifically with the *Tabut* as a manifestation of ‘Bengkulunese’ culture.<sup>130</sup> The *Tabut* also got special mention in other department publications on related areas such as music and



dance<sup>131</sup>, and from the 1970's on, the *Tabut* was specifically mentioned in relation to "Bengkulu culture" in national census reports and gazetteers such as *Indonesia Membangun*—the classifications of this genre being defined during the colonial era has important implications for the way in which it currently images its information.<sup>132</sup>

Hobsbawm suggests that the prevalent type of invented traditions of the period since the industrial revolution is that which serves in "establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities."<sup>133</sup> This very phrasing is predicative of Benedict Anderson's model of "Imagined Communities". Although Anderson's primary concern is with the development and spread of nationalism, several of his ideas in this book are applicable to smaller scale communities as well. The setting for the *Tabut* Festival is a case in point. As a basically colonially-created entity, Bengkulu has little to point to as a unified community other than the fact that its various elements—"Malay", "Indian", and "Chinese"<sup>134</sup>—were brought together by the British during their administration of the area.

The area of "Bengkulu" itself was demarcated by the British during their official census and the classification was continued under the Dutch colonial authority<sup>135</sup> and later by the independent Indonesian government. In this respect, Bengkulu is not unlike some other areas of Indonesia which were originally and primarily defined as geographical references and not necessarily as ethno-linguistic or cultural referents to their inhabitants. However as the colonial census came to use this term as a category,<sup>136</sup> it established the format upon which such an area could be administered. Thus over time the categories created by the colonial census classification system came to be taken as realities in and of themselves by becoming legitimized through sheer repetition. As Anderson writes: The new demographic topography put down deep social and institutional roots as the colonial state multiplied its size and functions. Guided by its imagined map it organized the new educational, juridical, public-health, police, and immigration bureaucracies it was building on the principle of ethno-racial hierarchies which were, however, always understood in terms of parallel series.<sup>137</sup>

In the case of Bengkulu we have a vivid example of what Anderson describes as the way in which categories devised by "the (confusedly) classifying mind of the colonial state"<sup>138</sup> came to take on an aura of reality. While such categorizations may give form to administrative units, and even make them appear to be fixed forms, the content of these colonially created categories is much less clearly defined: "Who am I?"—I

am a “Bengkulunes,” but, “What is a “Bengkulunes?...” In this area of self-definition within pre-defined categories, ritual and tradition may become important;<sup>139</sup> for around such rituals and traditions, conceptions of identity can form.

Throughout *Imagined Communities*, Anderson points to the importance of language in the development of national identity. In the creation of “Bengkulunes” language did play a part, but not as great as it had in other instances of communal identity formation. Those imagining themselves as Bengkulunes sought to latch onto something more than one of many dialects of Malay as the primary symbol of identity. They eventually (and only very recently) came to pass this great symbolic burden onto the *Tabut*, and onto this primary symbol have let the other symbols of “Bengkulunes” attach themselves<sup>140</sup> — at least for the duration of the annual festival.<sup>141</sup>

Some examples of such clustered symbols of “Bengkulunes” include a *tabut* built upon a model Bengkulu *rumah adat* (traditional-style house) with a *Rafflesia* flower brightly painted on the front gable. This *Rafflesia* motif is also found on more “traditional” *tabut* such as those built upon effigies of *Buraq*.<sup>142</sup> Both of these examples come from *tabut* which are not simple cenotaphs, but rather penta-peaked with four smaller points surrounding the central structure. The reason for the popularity of this style of *tabut* construction in recent years has been explained to me in several ways, including reports that it represents the “five pillars” of Islam. However the most frequent explanation is that the five peaks represent Pancasila, the official state ideology of Indonesia. This interpretation is especially convincing when applied to such particular examples as a 1991 *tabut* of five peaks built upon the back of a large, golden Garuda, the mythical mount of the Hindu deity Visnu and symbol for the modern Republic of Indonesia.

In such aspects we can view the *Tabut* a true cultural fair in which cultural symbols of identity can be exhibited and communicated to both local participants and outside observers. In fact it is officially proclaimed to be so in authoritative government organs such as Bengkulu’s daily newspaper, *Harian Semarak*,<sup>143</sup> where during the 1992 *Tabut* festivities, a front-page lead article proclaimed that the *Tabut* was, “just like Festival Sriwijaya in South Sumatra and the Lake Toba Festival in North Sumatra... a tourist promotion for those areas. (who have succeeded in promoting their local cultures at national and international levels).”<sup>144</sup> Thus the *Tabut* can be seen functioning in a way not unlike the created community pavilions at Taman Mini where several very presentable



aspects of culture, such as traditional architecture and wedding clothes, are presented to both members and outsiders alike as a display of and attempt at communication of identity.

As the tradition developed as a means of imagining the community of Bengkulu, it underwent significant changes of both content and form. Hobsbawn notes that while invented traditions often put great emphasis on specific practices, the values which these practices are used to symbolize are often but vaguely defined, that is "Their significance lay precisely in their undefined universality."<sup>145</sup> In order for such an undefined universality to be achieved, the *Tabut* had first to be separated from its earlier religious associations. In such '(re-)invented traditions' as those of the *Tabut*, religious elements that may have cosmologically established one's place in the universe are down-played in favor of the more immediate concerns of defining one's self in relation to other parallel categories within the segmented (post-)colonial schemata of ethno-linguistic hierarchies. In this way the *Tabut* was gradually stripped of its more religious and potentially disruptive<sup>146</sup> associations and instead was evolved into a kind of local cultural fair. Thus, for our present context, it may be said that the *Tabut* has, to a considerable extent, ceased to be a specifically religious ritual and been intentionally modified in order to become "simply" a cultural performance.<sup>147</sup>

We find a very clear statement of just such an intent in the pronouncement of the former provincial governor of Bengkulu, Razie Jachya, in an article that appeared on the front page of Bengkulu's largest daily newspaper on the fifth of Muharram, 1992. There printed are the words he pronounced upon the opening of the *Tabut* festivities earlier that week:

The ceremonies of *Tabut* are not religious services, but only a means for the preservation and development of local culture. Do not mix-up the *Tabut* with religion.<sup>148</sup>

This emphasizing local, cultural aspects (which according to the state ideology reflect national greatness) rather than religious ones is perhaps a step towards creating a nation-centric rather than *umma*-centric rhetoric, stressing more of a connection with the Republic of Indonesia rather than with Islam. However, we must be careful not to read into this a case of antagonism between the government and Islam, but rather an attempt at an inclusive cultural definition applicable to all religious groups in Bengkulu.

ployed in it. As has been remarked on above, a similar sense of ambiguity is also present in the case of the *Tabut* Festival. Bell contends that such ambiguity necessarily precludes any sort of "control by virtue of any consensus based on shared beliefs," and "also suggest(s) that ritualized activities do *not* promote belief or conviction."<sup>155</sup> While she acknowledges that ritualization can promote social solidarity, she also realizes that this is not necessarily the case.<sup>156</sup> Bell maintains that ritualization is not simply a way of enforcing common beliefs or instilling a dominant ideology, but argues rather that the process of ritualization is primarily a strategy for the construction of power relationships effective within particular social organizations.<sup>157</sup> Such a dynamic is particularly evident in the case of the *Tabut* and its recent resurgence as its arena of power relationships has expanded from one limited internally to the community of transplanted Sepoy soldiers at Fort Marlborough, to that of Bengkulu in general, and further to the place of Bengkulu within a larger national framework.<sup>158</sup>

The study of such phenomena requires an approach that allows us to investigate different kinds of activity without first restricting our analysis by placing it within any particular genre. This is precisely what is advocated by Grimes, who writes:

We do not begin by asking, Is this ritual or drama or politics? Rather, we ask, to what extent are the actions that compose the genre— whatever it is— stylized, repeated, and so on? Thus we are enabled to explore all kinds of composite, borderline, or anomalous activities such as ritual drama, civil ceremony, military parades, and museum openings.<sup>159</sup>

This calls our attention to the sometimes arbitrary orientation of what is considered "ritual" and thus opens new avenues of exploration as to the roles of subjectivity and collectivity in the continuance of behavioral patterns and the re-invention of tradition. That is, in reference to such traditions as the *Tabut*, we need not make such sharp distinctions between its earlier function as "religious" ritual, and its contemporary manifestations as a political-cultural event. An approach that places events such as that of our present example along a continuum of ritualized action rather than arbitrarily dividing it up into such analytical categories as "sacred" and "civic," provides us with an orientation for the study of ritual which may become increasingly useful in the examination other observances as the worldwide explosion of ethnicity searches for means of further symbolic elaboration.

## Endnotes

1. As history has shown it to be in India, Singapore, and the Granada riots of 1884. Indeed precedence for such disruptions during the observance of Muharram are recorded as early as 352 H./ 963 C.E., when public mourning observances were announced in Baghdad by the Buyid ruler Muizz ad-Dawla. It is reported that at that time, in reaction to the Shi'ite mourning observances and the accompanying cursing of Husayn's murderers, "The Sunnis reacted with processions of their own in which Ali was denigrated for his defeat at the battle of 'the Camel.' This was re-enacted in the streets of Baghdad by costumed characters mounted on camels and horses. Bloody riots between the participants of these two opposing processions were recorded by historians even after the Shi'a Buyids." (Chelkowski 1985: 20) It is also known, for example, that during the 1930's in Iran, Reza Shah restricted Muharram observances for fear that, "these powerful public displays could easily be converted into massive political demonstrations." (Ibid., 24) This is in fact precisely what happened during the revolution of 1978-1979. Reports of *Tabut* observances growing violent can even be found in the history of Bengkulu, where various groups of celebrants met in nightly *benji* (battle of the drums), and in their excitement, slashed the drum skins of opposing groups.
2. Ample evidence of this can be seen in the number of Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (Ministry of Education and Culture) publications on the subject, its prominent position in tourist brochures of the area, the exhibits in the local museum, and the highly visible provincial government involvement in the festivities.
3. Latest census information available, see *Indonesia Membangun*, II: 927.
4. *Indonesia Membangun*, II: 926.
5. Further evidence of this policy to encourage Chinese immigration exists from documents of 1689 (Milburn, II: 339), and 1696. (Danvers, 417) This was a constant of British colonial policy in Southeast Asia that was continued for over a century, as is seen from Raffles' remark that, "...the speculative industry of the Chinese, have given a stimulus and direction to the energies of the maritime and commercial states." (Raffles, xi. In his Introduction to John Leyden's *Malay Annals*, 1821.)
6. A task which would involve both European administration and manpower supplied by Indian Sepoy soldiers.
7. Bastin 1965: 32.
8. An English term actually employed by the local government—e.g. in the bilingual pamphlet: *Perayaan Tabut Bengkulu/The Ceremony of Tabut Bengkulu*. Diterbitkan oleh/Issued by: Biro Hubungan Masyarakat Setwilda Tingkat I Bengkulu (Public Relation Bureau, Governor's Office of Bengkulu Province, 1991.
9. *Indonesia Membangun* II: 929. On Melayu-Bengkulu see also: *Monografi Daerah Bengkulu*, I: 49ff.
10. Also known locally as *bunga bangkai* (the corpse-flower) on account of its stench, the *Rafflesia* has become a prime symbol of the province and is prominently displayed upon tourist brochures, government educational and cultural materials, and even the buses that connect Bengkulu to other parts of Sumatra and, via ferry, to Jakarta.
11. Anderson, Benedict R. O'G.. "Cartoons and Monuments: The Evolution of Political Communication in the New Order," *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990. p. 182.
12. This same terminology is used in standard translations of the Bible into Indonesian.

- e.g.: *Keluaran* (Exodus), 37: 1 ff.
13. *al-Qur'an*, 20: 39. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, this vessel is denoted by the same name used of the Ark of Noah.
  14. *Tabut* with a capital "T" will be used to refer to the entire complex of tradition surrounding the commemoration of Muharram in Bengkulu, whereas *tabut* will be used with more specific reference to the decorated cenotaphs carried in procession during the annual observances.
  15. On 10 October/10 Muharram, 61 H..
  16. Wehr, 88.
  17. We have the following description of *tabut* carried in recent processions in Karachi: "Usually they are draped in a white cloth which has been painted with splotches of red paint to simulate the blood of the martyrs. Sometimes symbols of the battle of Karbala are added to the *tabut*. Cardboard arrows, or a black turban, a symbol of the head of Husayn and the authority of the Prophet's family, may be attached to the sides of the coffin." (Schubel, 111-112).
  18. *Hobson-Jobson*, 1886.
  19. Yule & Burnell, 675. This definition is linked to a similar, and more extensive, one given in the same volume for *Tazee* (*ta'ziya*); as *tabut* are known in some parts of India and elsewhere.
 

**Tazee**, n. A.-P.-H.-*ta'ziya*, 'mourning for the dead.' In India the word is specially applied to the representations, in flimsy material, of the tombs of Hussein and Hassan which are carried in the Muharram processions. In Persia it seems to be applied to the whole of the mystery-play which is presented at that season. The word has been carried to the W. Indies by the coolies, whose great festival (whether they be Mahommedans or Hindus) the Muharram has become. And the attempt to carry the **Tazeeas** through one of the towns of Trinidad, in spite of orders to the contrary, led in the end of 1884 to a sad catastrophe. (Ibid., 687-88)
  20. Crooke, n.1 in Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali, 18.
  21. Including the Pakistani scholar, Allama Ali Naqi Naqvi in his *Azadari*, p. 128. Related in Schubel, 110.
  22. Chelkowski 1988: 22.
  23. Abu Jafar. *Muslim Festivals in Bangladesh*. Dacca: Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1980. pp. 11 ff.
  24. van Ronkel 1914: 342 ff.
  25. "a Shi'ite literary genre, denoting a tale to be recited in remembrance of the martyrdom of Hasan and Husain," (Brakel 1975: 58). This may have an Indian affiliation in the *Badistan* of the Hindu *Jatra* in which people gather to hear the recitation of the *masiya*, "which inculcates the principles of Hinduism..." HPNB, 116-117.
  26. Brakel 1975: 58.
  27. Listed in van Ronkel's *Catalogus der Maleische Handschriften in het Museum van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* as #CCCXXXIV, p. 255.
  28. Cf. (van Ronkel 1909: 255); (Roedjati Soemardjito, n.d.); (Brakel 1975: 61-62).
  29. (van Ronkel 1909: 488-92/ #DCCCXC & #DCCCXCI) Although the language used in them is rather more Malay than Minangkabau.
  30. *Ahmad Rijaluddin's Hikayat Perintah Negeri Bengkulu*, (C. Skinner, ed.). *Bibliotheca Indonesica* XXII, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982. Hereafter cited as: HPNB.
  31. HPNB, 99-100.
  32. HPNB, 114-14, & 132-133.
  33. HPNB, 136-7.

34. The following description is based primarily upon my own notes from observations made during July 1992 (Muharram 1413), supplemented with those from two other visits to Bengkulu coinciding with the *Tabut* observances of 1991 and 1998 (Muharram 1412 and 1419, respectively). Here it should also be noted that over this time period the *Tabut* observances have experienced a considerable increase in both government support and popular attendance. The central stage at the center of the 'official' program has become both larger and more elaborate, and the crowds present to view the proceedings there, and the final procession from there to Karbala on 10 Muharram, continue to grow from year to year.
35. Such 'local Karbalas' are also the destinations of Muharram processions in India. Syed Husain Ali Jaffri. "Muharram Ceremonies in India," in Peter J. Chelkowski (ed.) *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*. New York: New York University Press, 1979. p. 224.
36. Referred to as "doerga" in older sources such as (Helfrich 1888). This may reveal a link to the *dargah* of the Indian subcontinent, being centers of devotion dedicated to Muslim saints (Syech Burhanuddin in the case of Bengkulu). For more on *dargah* see the essays collected in: Troll, Christian W. (ed.). *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History, and Significance*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989.
37. He is also sometimes identified with the saint of the same name buried further up the coast at Pariaman, where the *Tabut* (*Tabuik*) is also observed. However the latter's origins are generally traced to the ruling houses of Aceh (Havids Tanjung, 10) or Pagaruyung (Syaf Amirzaid, 1) rather than to the ranks of Sepoys. For his role in the Islamization of Minangkabau lands, see (Joustra 1923: 138 ff.) Popular practices at his grave in Pariaman were recorded and criticized by HAMKA in his *Sedjarah Islam di Sumatera* (pp. 24 ff.).
38. The earth from Karbala, or from places ritually associated with the plain of martyrs plays an important part in Shi'ite ritual throughout the Muslim world. Tablets made from such clay are a common souvenir brought home by pilgrims from their visits to Husayn's grave—and some Shi'ites in Persia and Iraq have been known to touch their heads to such tablets at each *sujud* during their daily prayers. (Donaldson, 89) The present author knows families in Lahore whose prized possession is a *tasbeh* made from this clay which is said to turn blood-red during each Muharram. In some regions of Iraq and Iran an auspicious form of Shi'ite burial includes: "a necklace of clay beads around his neck, a clay ringer on the forefinger of his right hand, an armband of clay on each of his arms, and a little of the dust that is swept from the tomb should be bound in a cloth and gripped in his right hand, and it well if the sheet, in which the body is wrapped for burial, should have the words of the Koran written upon it with this clay." (Ibid., 90)

In many variants of South and Southeast Asian Muharram tradition, small amounts of earth are used to represent soil from the battlefield of Karbala. The text of one Muharram drama recorded by Pelly in the mid-nineteenth century quotes Husain himself as saying, "The dust raised in the field of such battles is as highly esteemed by me, O sister, as the philosopher's stone was, in former times, by the alchemists, and the soil of Karbala is the sure remedy of my inward pains." (Pelly, 86) According to other traditions, a small jar of earth was given to the Prophet by Jibrail which forecast the death of the former's beloved grandson by turning to blood. This is a fairly widespread story which can be found in the Malay recension of the *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyah*. (Brakel 1975: 62) In her study of Barus, also on the west coast of Sumatra, Jane Drakard points to a possible link between this rite

- and the earth/water weighing motif as found in the Hilir chronicle and elsewhere in Malay literary tradition. (Drakard, 75)
39. Some groups take two bunches, placing the other within the *tabut* itself. (see: "Menutup Rangkaian Festival *Tabut* 1992")
  40. Categories of these competitions include: Musik *Dol*, Gamat, Tari Oli, and of course, the fish dance (*ikan-ikan*)...
  41. This apparent misconnection of characters from two very distinct stories of Muslim tradition is in no way peculiar to Bengkulu, as we find links between Husayn's martyrdom and the *mi'raj* documented elsewhere such as the Sindh, where we find such poetical references as:
 

The Prince has made his me'raj on the ground of Kerbela,  
The Shah's horse has gained the rank of Buraq...  
and,  
Today the Shah of Kerbela has mounted his horse,  
Just as though Mustafa were mounting the Buraq today.

 (Schimmel 1979: 212-213) Elsewhere Pelly records Husayn's ride on a "winged steed," although here named "zú'l janáh" and not Buraq. (Pelly, 85)
  42. In Pakistan, an actual living animal takes the place of this representation and is called *Zuljináb*. These horses are paraded riderless through the streets during Muharram processions (*julus*) with saddles painted to resemble blood-stains and with arrows and swords protruding from them. (Schubel, 109)
  43. However in Pariaman, the local government has abolished this practice and the funds are instead collected from financially successful Pariaman emigrants, many of whom return home for the annual festivities. (Basril Basyar: 11)
  44. It remains a matter of mere speculation as to any links between the bird and animal elements in Bengkulu's Muharram tradition and similar manifestations of such imagery in other parts of the Muslim world. Older people of Bengkulu have told me that there used to be "elephant" and "tiger" variations on these dances which are no longer performed (similar situation in parts of India, *vide* Hollister, 176). In the Middle East are recorded instances of men dressed as tigers during Muharram observances, "to represent the lion said to have guarded the body of al-Husayn...." (Arberry 1969: vol. II, plate 10b) Professor Schimmel (1979: 220) relates some Sindhi verses which read: "Three communities have wept for Hassan, for Mir Hussein:  
Men in the house, Animals in the wilderness, Angels in the height,  
Birds have beaten themselves: the beloved ones have gone away..."
  45. A transcription of the music accompanying the *ikan-ikan* (fish) dance can be found in *Ensiklopedi Musik dan Tari Daerah Bengkulu*, p. 68.
  46. The case of Bengkulu, however, is not the only instance in which one can find the government attempting to promote colorful Muharram observances as tourist attractions with a potential to boost the local economy. For an example of such a case in Trinidad, see: Korom (March 1993).
  47. In 1998, there were also performances of the *Kupu-kupu* (butterfly) and *Buaya Putih* (White Crocodile) in this setting, both of which were considered by the committee as included within the *ikan-ikan* genre.
  48. In the introductory notes to his edition of the *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah*, L.F. Brakel informs us: the hand (*panjah*, Pers: *panje*) which is traditionally carried around in the procession and which represents a fertility symbol is apparently associated with Husayn's hand, which was cut off after the battle of Karbala. (Brakel 1975: 62)
  49. Illustrations of such banners (*alam*) can be found in (Helfrich 1888: figs. #7 & 8,



facing p. 192).

50. These flags attached to the 'alam' are found in Muharram processions throughout the Muslim world. With specific reference to an observance in Iran, Peter Chelkowski notes, "Procession participants carry green banners representing the color of the Islam prophet (sic.), red flags representing blood and injustice, black flags for mourning, and white flags, signifying readiness for sacrifice and martyrdom." (Chelkowski 1985: 24)
51. A large drum made by stretching cowhide across a section of hollowed palm-tree trunk which is played using two sticks with cloth-padded tips. Also known as *nagara*, the *dhul* is an instrument popular in India. (Pohan, 15 ff.) The leading *dol* musical group in Bengkulu is that headed by Bapak Salam ZA of Pondok Besi, who is also considered to be one of the foremost local experts on *Tabut* tradition.
52. I was often informed by older members of the Bengkulu community that in times past, the *beruji dol* was occasioned by actual confrontations between the members of the different *kelompok*s. Chelkowski also reports that in Iran, sections of the procession represented various divisions of the town, or guilds. Sometimes there were battles between the detachments mimicking Karbala, or even the settling of actual feuds among the districts. (Chelkowski 1985: 22)
53. Similar scenes are found before Ashurkana in parts of India and reportedly also in Aceh, where the month of Muharram is sometimes referred to as *Bulan Apui*, or "Month of the Fires." (Baried Baroroh, 76)
54. A small shallow drum traditionally made of wood covered with goat-skin and played with two thin straps of rattan. Following a recent innovation, many are now made by stretching the goat-skin over a shallow metal pan. (Pohan, 19) Similar instruments are known as *tasha* in Jammu, Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. (*Ensiklopedi Musik dan Tari Daerah Bengkulu*, 95)
55. In addition to the two 'permanent' cement *gergah* in Berkas and behind the fort, numerous 'temporary' ones are constructed of bamboo, thatch, and plastic traps for the duration of the *Tabut* observances. In 1992, there were seventeen *gergah* in Bengkulu, the spread of which to more outlying areas possibly reflecting the incorporation of larger portions of the cities populations into the 'Festival' as well as general urban expansion.
56. A similar salutation is made at the *dargah* along the routes of Muharram processions in some parts of India. (Hollister, 171) Photographs of the same type of procession held in the Caribbean can be found in Korom & Chelkowski (1993).
57. It is possible that the term used for this construction is related to a homophone defined in Yule and Burnell's glossary. There we find an entry running thus:

Choky, s. Hind. *chauki*, which in all its senses is probably connected with Skt. *chatur*, 'four,' whence *chatushka* 'of four,' 'four-sided,' &c. a. (Perhaps first a shed resting on four posts)... also a station of planking bearers...

c. 1590. "Mounting guard is called in Hindi *Chauki*."—Ain, 257.

b. A chair. This use is almost peculiar to the Bengal Presidency. Dr. John Muir cites it in this sense as a Hindi word which has no resemblance to the Sanskrit vocable. Mr. Grouse, however, connects it with *chatur*, 'four' (*Ind. Antiq.*, i. 105)...

*Chau* is the common form of 'four' in composition, e.g. *chaubandi* ('four fastening') the complete shoeing of a horse; *chaupabra* ('four watches') all night long; *chaupar*, 'a quadruped'; *chaukat* and *chaukhat* ('four timbers') a frame (of a door, &c.). So *chauki* seems to have been used for a square framed stool and thence a chair.

1772. "Don't throw yourself back into your burra **chokey**, and tell me it won't go..."—W. Hastings to G. Vansittart in 238. (Yule & Burnell, 158)

These objects may have parallels with objects carried Pakistani Muharram processions known as *palna*. These are representations of the cradle of the infant 'Ali Asghar whom tradition relates was also slaughtered at Karbala. Schubel reports that these *palna* are commonly carried in Muharram processions in Karachi and are particularly popular with women. (Schubel, 112) The word *coki* itself, as used in Bengkulu, also suggest some possible connection to the *chowk* on which the *tadjah* (*tabut*) are placed during Muharram observances on Trinidad. (Korom & Chelkowski 1993: 12)

58. These may correspond to the *mendhi* "tabernacles" seen on seventh night of Muharram observances in parts of India. (Hollister, 171) The official word from the Ministry of Education and Culture is that they "denote the turban of Husayn". (*Perayaan Tabut Bengkulu/The Ceremony of Tabut Bengkulu*. Bengkulu: Biro Hubungan Masyarakat Setwilida Tingkat I Bengkulu, 1991)
59. In 1998, this event was held on the large stage in the nearby park due to the considerably larger crowds. Furthermore, the sending off of the final *tabut* procession did not commence until mid-day; as a group of local 'experts' had determined that the final procession of the *tabut* to their ultimate place of disposal had 'traditionally' not begun until after noontime prayers.
60. In the early nineteenth century Malay travelogue of his visit to Calcutta, Ahmad Rijaluddin describes a street known as '*Karbala Rasta*' (a.k.a. Mauli Ali Rasta), by telling us that: "When the Islamic month of Muharram comes around, this street is indescribably crowded; for the whole ten days there is no let up in the many types of entertainments going on there, and such a din that nothing can be heard because of the tremendous noise made by the drums, oboes, kettle-drums, trumpets, flutes and fifes and so on—that's how it is. When the ten days are up and they are about to cast away the *tabuts*, it is even more crowded; there are all manner of entertainments there and thousands of *tabuts*. The people bearing the *tabuts* go in procession to *Karbala field*, as it is called, a great surge people." (HIPNB, 72-75.)
61. According to some traditions he also played a major role in the Islamization of Bengkulu and was responsible for the construction of the famous "roofless mosque" at Nala. ("Ulama India Sebarkan Ajaran Islam di Bengkulu," *Jayakarta*: 28 Juni, 1990).
62. Including a kind of porridge reminiscent of the kinds served throughout the Muslim world on this day. See: Tirtokoesoemo, "De Boeboer Soeran," & Hooykas-van Leeuwen Boomkamp, "Over de Oorspronkelijke Beteekenis van het Asjoerafeest."
63. As is the case with other parts of the region which were home to Hindu/Buddhist civilizations some centuries previous. See: Coedès, G. *The Indianized States of South-east Asia*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1971.
64. Danvers, 415.
65. Milburn, I: xxxvi.
66. Ibid.
67. William Cawley and Ralph Ord. Although little biographical information is available on Mr. Cawley we do have reports that Mr. Ord, a former schoolteacher of European children in Madras, was poisoned by the Dutch and died at Sumatra in 1686. (Bastin 1965: xi)
68. Referred to by Marsden (*History*, 449) as simply "*Anayet-shah*," she is the third of a succession of queens who ruled Aceh during the seventeenth century. In connection



- with her Marsden relates an intriguing bit of trivia that, while of questionable verity, may nonetheless contain some important information on the perceptions of female rulers in the north Sumatran sultanate. He writes: "The persons who were on this occasion presented to her express their suspicions, which were suggested to them by a doubt prevailing amongst the inhabitants, that this sovereign was not a real queen, but a eunuch dressed up in female apparel, and imposed on the public by the artifices of the *orang kayas*. But as such a cheat, though managed with every semblance of reality (which they observe was the case) could not be carried on for any number of years without detection, and as the same idea does not appear to have been entertained at any other period, it is probable that they were mistaken in their surmise." (Ibid.) Aceh was not the only East Indian Muslim state ruled by a queen at this time, for we also know that the Malayo-Muslim port of Patani (located in what is now southern Thailand) was also ruled by a succession of queens. (Teeuw & Wyatt, *Hikayat Patani*).
69. A port on the west coast of the island in former times frequented for the procurement of high-quality camphor. An interesting study of the region's historiographical traditions can be found in Drakard (1990). Today it is most widely known as the birthplace of the celebrated seventeenth century Malay Sufi poet Hamzah Fansuri. For a biographical sketch of this mystic and English translations of some of his work see Drewes & Brakel (1986).
  70. A west Sumatran port which is another location known for its observance of a *Tabut*-style celebration of *Ashura*. This Pariaman variant of the *Tabut* is known locally as *Tabuik*. This place had an earlier (sixteenth century) relationship with the area around Bengkulu as an intermediate port from which pepper and forest products from the south were transhipped to Europe. (*Indonesia Membangun* II: 935) The British were formally invited to settle there in June 1751, by the Sultan of Minangkabau. (Danvers, 421)
  71. (Bastin 1965: xii); See also Marsden (*History*, 450 ff.)
  72. Benjamin Bloome.
  73. Ibid.
  74. (Würtzburg, 428) Such an image of Bengkulu as a dismal place of exile was maintained under the Dutch who banished Sentot Alibasyah Prawiranegara — who was active in both Pangerang Diponegoro's and the Padri uprisings— here in the early nineteenth century. (Firdaus Burhan, 198) Bengkulu maintained this function even into this century as can be seen from the fact that it was here that Soekarno was exiled in the late thirties. (Vlekke, 384)
  75. Bastin 1965: 8.
  76. Evidence of other Indian connection with Bengkulu can be found as early as 1685, when the British arrived there wrote to Madras requesting "Mussooloes wth Macquaes" (A kind of surf-boat from the Coromandel coast and fishermen from Cape Comorin to man them— Bastin, 11). However, I have been unable to find any evidence that their request was honored by the Directors of the Company.
  77. Located just south of Indrapura. Maps bearing the names which the East India Company used in reference to these ports in earlier centuries can be found in the plates included in Milburn's *Oriental Commerce*, (1813).
  78. Milburn, II: 339.
  79. Milburn, I: xxvii.
  80. Bastin 1965: 14.
  81. Danvers, 418.

82. Milburn, II: 3.
83. Furber, 237. We also find mention of traders from Malabar arriving at Bengkulu in the *Asal-Oesoel Bangkahulu*, Pasal 32. This manuscript exists in two copies listed in van Ronkel's *Catalogus...* as numbers CCCLXVII (Bat. Gen./Ml. 143) & CCCLXVIII (Bat. Gen./Ml. 148). He identifies them as being "identical" but there are actually several variations, the most immediately apparent being that the former is written in the Arabic and the latter in the Latin script. The cataloger has mistakenly recorded that both were in the Latin script and that the *silsila* of Sungai Lemau was attached to the former, where it is actually appended to the latter. (van Ronkel 1909: 280)
84. Heyne, 386; Quoted in (Bastin 1965: 142-43).
85. (Bastin 1965:, n. 108) Or 1797, according to Sir Stamford Raffles in a letter to the Court of Directors of 27 April, 1818. (Published in Lady Raffles' *Memoir...*, 298.)
86. McNair, 1. The author reminds us that this is about the same time that Australia became a site of transportation for English convicts.
87. Bastin 1965: n. 108.
88. From a letter dated 20 December of that year from Sir Stamford Raffles to Government; quoted in McNair, 7.
89. Numerous biographies have been written on Raffles, the first of which being completed by his widow in 1830 and most subsequent works draw heavily upon this source. These include *The Life of Sir Stamford Raffles*, by Demetrius Charles Boulger; *Sir Stamford Raffles*, by Hugh Edward Egerton; *Raffles : 1781-1826*, by R. Copeland; *Raffles of the Eastern Isles*, by Würtzburg; *Raffles of Singapore*, by Emily Hahn; and *Raffles*, by Maurice Collis. However, most of these devote far more attention to his 'greater' accomplishments such as the founding of Singapore and the administration of the British interregnum of Java than to his work in Bencoolen. A recent anecdotal biography which splices historical materials with modern local (Southeast Asian) impressions of Raffles while drawing intriguing parallels between Raffles and Soekarno is *The Duke of Puddledock*, by Nigel Barley.
90. The earliest document we have pertaining to such reforms of the colonial penal system is a letter from Raffles at Bencoolen to Government in 1818:
- The object of punishment as far as it affects the parties must be the reclaiming them from their bad habits, but I much question whether the practice hitherto pursued has been productive of that effect...
- I conceive that some advantage would arise from affording inducements to good conduct by holding out the prospect of again becoming useful members of society, and freeing themselves from the disabilities under which they labour...
- I would suggest the propriety of the chief authority being vested with a discretionary power of freeing such men as conduct themselves well from the obligation of service and permitting them to settle in the place and resume the privileges of citizenship...
- While a convict remains unmarried and kept to daily labour very little confidence can be placed in him, and his services are rendered with so much tardiness and dissatisfaction that they are of little or no value; but he no sooner marries and forms a small settlement than he becomes a kind of colonist, and if allowed to follow his inclinations he seldom feels inclined to return to his native country...
- (Raffles to Government, 1818. Reproduced in Lady Raffles' *Memoir...*, pp. 297-299; later quoted in McNair, 4-6).
91. McNair, 4ff.

92. Raffles to Government, 20 December 1823: Quoted in McNair, 7.
93. Usually used in reference to Indians originating from the Coromandel coast; the South Indian *Telinga* or *Kalinga* peoples. However this term was often used by Malays and Javanese as a general term referring to people from all of India. These same people were often referred to as *Chuliabs* by the British! (Würtzburg, 671) Raffles notes: "Many of the books and popular narratives of the Malays I find to have been rendered from the *Kaling* language, a term by which they call all the popular dialects on the Coromandel Coast." (Raffles to the Honourable P. Dundas; 6 July, 1806; quoted in Lady Raffles' *Memoir...*, 11).
94. A nineteenth century report from Singapore remarks that, "Even those who were still serving sentences were, at these times of festival, 'accustomed to enjoy a degree of license strangely inconsistent with their condition... their procession the noisiest to be seen on the public streets.'" (Blythe, 84)
95. Buckley, 375.
96. *Ibid.*, 83.
97. *Ibid.*, 84.
98. According to Wilkinson, these two scholars, "...placed the settlement in the forefront of Malay research." (Wilkinson 1938: 132)
99. Marsden, William. *The History of Sumatra*. Oxford University Press: Kuala Lumpur, 1966.
100. That is from 1771-1779. (Bastin 1965: xx)
101. Of course there is no way to be sure just how much of a 'spectacle' earlier observance of the *Tabut* may have been in Bencoolen. However, judging from reports in other British colonies where variants of it were present it generally attracted notice.
102. Marsden *History*, 43 ff. He chose as his 'standard' the Rejang who inhabit the mountain district just outside of Bengkulu. To this day, the observance of *Tabut* is not recognized by them and is viewed as a 'city' festival with its associations to foreign Muslims from India.
103. Marsden *Dictionary*, 62. The fact that he traces its etymology to Persian and not to Arabic may indicate that he was familiar with the term more through literary sources such as the *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyah* than through any personal observance of the festival.
104. Snouck, *Acehmesie*; Helfrich, van Ronkel, &c.
105. Buddingh, S.A.. *Neêrlands-Oost-Indië, Reizen over Java, Madura, Macassar, enz.* (3 dln.) Rotterdam: M. Wijt & Zonen, 1859, 1860, 1861. vol. III, pp. 136-137.
106. *Cerita dari tabut*, 1158/PN— listed in van Ronkel (1909) as: CCCXXXIV: *Tjaritera Taboet*— Bat. Gen. 145, 22x17 cm., 8 Bl. 16r. "Bijzonderheden uit het leven van Hoesajn en zijn sneuvelen op de vlakte van Kerbela in verband gebracht met het Taboetfeest. Het handschrift, dat eene zeer slechte spelling heeft, is verdeeld in tien zeer kleine paragrafen, als voorbeeld der gebrekkige spelling deene het aan §1 voorafgaande:  
*ada satu orang laki2... tabut.* (p. 255.)
107. Helfrich, O.C. et al. "Het Hasan-Hosein- of Taboet-feest te Benkoelen," *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie / Archives Internationales d'Ethnographie*. Leiden: Brill, 1888. pp. 191-6.
108. e.g.: Delprat, Th. "Viering van het Moharram- of Hassan-Hoessein-feest," *Eigen Haard*; geïllustreerd volkstijdschrift, Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1889. pp. 480-484 (Ills.); Veth, P.J. "Hassan-Hosein- of Taboetfeest," *Internationales Archiv für*

- Ethnographie*; Archives Internationales d'Ethnography, (Leiden: Brill) vol. 3 (1890) pp. 194-5; Pol, C. van der. "De Hassan-Hoessin-feesten in Nederlandsch-Indië," *Vragen van den dag; maandschrift voor nederland en koloniën op het gebied van staathuishoudkunde en staatsleven, natuurwetenschappen enz.*, Amsterdam: van Looy. 16 (1901) pp. 223-246.
109. van Ronkel, Ph. S.. "Nadere gegevens omtrent het Hasan-Hoesain feest," *Tijdschrift voor Indische taal-, land- en volkenkunde*, (Deel LVI). Batavia: Albrecht & Co., 1914. pp. 334-345.
110. van Ronkel 1914: 344
111. e.g.: *Memperkenalkan Propinsi Bengkulu di Indonesia*. Bengkulu: Pemerintah Propinsi Daerah Tingkat I Bengkulu, 1977.
- Adat Istiadat Daerah Bengkulu*. Pusat Penelitian Sejarah dan Budaya, Proyek Penelitian dan Pencatatan Kebudayaan Daerah, Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1977/1978. Fakhri Bustaman, *Naskah Kesenian Tradisional "Tabut" di Daerah Bengkulu*. Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Propinsi Bengkulu, 1980. Pohan, Ronald. *Experimentasi Seni Musik Dol dan Tasa di Bengkulu*. Proyek Pengembangan Kesenian Bengkulu, Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Kantor Wilayah Propinsi Bengkulu, 1986/1987. Badrul Munir Hamidy, Editor. *Upacara Tradisional Daerah Bengkulu: Upacara Tabut di Kotamadya Bengkulu*. Bagian Proyek Inventarisasi dan Pembinaan Nilai Nilai Budaya Daerah Bengkulu, Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1991/1992.
112. Hobsbawn defines this as: "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past." (Hobsbawn, Eric. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", in *The Invention of Tradition*, Edited by Eric Hobsbawn & Terence Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
113. Hobsbawn, 5.
114. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.
115. The degree to which this "break" in the continuity of *Tabut* tradition was a total cessation of ritualized activity during the first ten days of Muharram is difficult to determine using the historical materials available. Its noticeable absence from mention in the press or scholarly publications from the middle of this century suggest that large-scale public observances had, if not totally disappeared, at least diminished considerably in size. However, the persistence of small-scale ritualized traditions (such as the *duduk penja* and the nightly visits to the *gergah* offering prayers, coffee, and *air sobat*) which have for the most part remained untouched by the Ministry of Education and Culture suggest that at least some recognition of the *Tabut's* significance had been maintained.
116. "Indeed, the very appearance of movements for the defense or revival of traditions... indicates such a break (in their effective historical continuity)." (Hobsbawn, 7-8), "Such movements... can never develop or even preserve a living past,... but must become 'invented tradition'." (Hobsbawn, 8)
117. Hobsbawn, Eric and Terence Ranger, editors. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983. p. 1.
118. Sangren, P. Steven. *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987. pp. 207-15.
119. *Apa dan Siapa Indonesia Indah*, 7.

120. The conception and administration of this park would make an interesting topic of research in and of itself. A good place for beginning such an undertaking might be with the substantial "official" literature on the subject printed by the Indonesian government and associated agencies. A particularly intriguing sample from this genre is: *Apa dan Siapa Indonesia Indah*. Jakarta: Yayasan Harapan Kita, 1975, (English Translation: *What and Who in Beautiful Indonesia*, 1978). a weighty volume filled with color photos, certificates of appreciation to those who contributed to the Taman Mini project, and bound in red velvet for distribution to V.I.P. during the elaborate opening ceremony festivities for the park. In addition to this are several other titles including: *Kenang-kenangan Peresmian Pembukaan Taman Mini Indonesia Indah: 20 April, 1975*. Jakarta: Pengelolaan Perusahaan Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, 1976. *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah Dalam Satu Dasawarsa*. Jakarta: Departemen Penerangan Republik Indonesia, 1986. *Taman Mini Dalam Perkembangannya*. Jakarta: Pusat Informasi Budaya dan Wisata, 1986. Suradi HP., Sutrisno Kutoyo, Masjkuri, Wahyuningsih, & TA. Sukrani. *Sejarah Taman Mini Indonesia Indah*. Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Sejarah Nasional 1989.

Here I would like to thank Professor John Pemberton, who, during a summer seminar under his direction at the University of Washington in 1993 first stimulated my interest and attention to the political and cultural significance of Taman Mini.

121. These are precisely the models upon which the New Order has come to define local culture— in terms of traditional architectural styles and wedding clothes. This seems an even more concretized manifestation of an orientation which Singer first called our attention to in his "The Cultural Pattern of Indian Civilization." (1955) There he writes, "Whenever Madras Brahmins... wished to exhibit to me some features of Hinduism, they always referred me to, or invited me to see, a particular rite or ceremony in the life cycle, in a temple festival, or in the general sphere of religious and cultural performances." Such a conception of ritual as cultural performance presupposes that "culture can come encapsulated in discrete performances to be exhibited to outsiders as well as participants," and that "such performances are the most concrete parts of cultural structure." (Singer 1959) However as we find in the case of Taman Mini, such performances are not the "most" concrete parts, but that "Culture" (with a capital "C") can become even more concretized in the form of material artifacts. For further discussion of Singer's point, see Geertz (1973: 113ff.) & Bell (1992: 37ff.)
122. K.H. Dr. Idham Chalid, Chairman of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia, in his opening statement in: *Apa dan Siapa Indonesia Indah*, 11.
123. Ibid.
124. *Apa dan Siapa ...*, 152.
125. Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
126. *Proyek Penelitian dan Pencatatan Kebudayaan Daerah*.
127. *Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Kebudayaan Daerah*.
128. "The Development of Indonesian Culture," in *Apa dan Siapa...*, 18.
129. Ibid., 17.
130. Milburn, II: 339.
131. e.g.: *Ensiklopedi Musik dan Tari Daerah Bengkulu*. Proyek Penelitian dan Pencatatan Kebudayaan Daerah, 1977/1978. *Monografi Daerah Bengkulu*. Disusun oleh: Team

- Monografi Daerah Bengkulu. Proyek Pengembangan Media Kebudayaan Ditjen Kebudayaan Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 1983.
132. See: Anderson (1991), especially chapter 10, "Census, Map, Museum."
  133. Hobsbawn, 9.
  134. Each of these being a complexly imagined community in and of itself.
  135. As: "Resedentie Bengkoeloe."
  136. Anderson 1991: 165.
  137. *Ibid.*, 169.
  138. *Ibid.*, 165.
  139. That is, for the case of the present analysis. We must, however, keep in mind that the "importance" of ritual can never be so reductionalistically reduced to any one aspect.
  140. This could be clearly observed in the speech delivered by the governor of the province during the official closing ceremony of *Tabut* 1998, in which he very deliberately linked the *tabut* to other aspects of Bengkulu's geographic blessings (waterfalls, beaches, &c.) and historical heritage— with particular attention to the recent reconstruction/ renovation of the house of Fatmawati, the wife of Soekarno and the Indonesian 'Besty Ross'. All of these were grouped together under the rubric of potential tourist attractions bringing a sense of pride to the province.
  141. A similar situation has developed on a smaller scale at Pariaman, which in 1987 was officially proclaimed an "administrative city" (*kota administratif*) with its sights set on developing into a municipality (*kotamadya*) of its own— a similar process to that through which Bengkulu became a province. There too Syekh Burhanuddin and the *Tabut* traditions ascribed to him are coming to play a prominent role in defining the "distinctive local culture" of the area. (Amir, 54-55.) In fact, the *Tabut* in Pariaman had previously "disappeared" for over a decade because it was a "terrible arena for conflict." However, when Anas Malik became *Bupati* (Regent) of the area, he revived and "improved" the *Tabut* to function as a "non-fossil fuel commodity" for "tradition, tourism, and development." ("Hoyak-Hoyak Hosen, Hooi...," pp. 53-54.) Back in Bengkulu, the *Tabut* continues to experience increased popularity as a primary symbol of local identity. In recent years a number of *tabut*-like monuments have been constructed at roundabouts and in parks in various parts of the city, and even a number of government offices in town have their gateways decorated with poured-cement statuary in the form of *tabut*.
  142. In more recent years, this same *Rafflesia* motif has appeared painted on the skins of the large drums (*dol*) used in *Tabut* observances and has also been incorporated into the patterns of *basurek*— the specialized local form of *batik* which has traditionally employed characters from the Arabic script in its designs.
  143. The subtitle of this newspaper is, "Membela dan Mengamalkan Pancasila"—"Defend and Secure the Official State Ideology."
  144. "*Tabut* Bukan Upacara Keagamaan."
  145. Hobsbawn, 11. Such a "undefined universality" increases the degree to which individual participants are able to attribute "multiple meanings" to the same ritualized activity. For a discussion of this within the context of Muharram tradition in Trinidad, see Chelkowski & Korom: "Community Process and the Performance of Muharram Observances in Trinidad," (1993).
  146. Such Muharram observances have created administrative problems in several areas in the former British Empire such as the infamous "Hosay Riot" in 1884. (Singh 1988) Closer to our area of focus, the approach of Muharram caused great anxiety

- for colonial officials in Singapore throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (See, for example. Buckley 1902) Even in Bengkulu disturbances were not altogether unknown as can be gleaned from stories of the rather rowdy *beruji dol* of days gone by that are still remembered by older members of the community.
147. As I have often been told by those directly involved, the *Tabut* is now "pertunjukan kebudayaan saja."
  148. "Perayaan *Tabut* bukanlah ibadah tetapi semata-mata merupakan upaya untuk melestarikan dan mengembangkan budaya daerah. Jangan mencampur-adukkan *Tabut* dengan agama." ("*Tabut* Bukan Upacara Keagamaan," *Harian Semarang: Membela dan Mengamalkan Pancasila*. Tahun ke-6, No. 246. Senin, 6 Juli, 1992. p. 1. (continued on p. 12))
  149. As has also been an issue elsewhere such as in Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi. see: Volkman, 1990.
  150. "Unity in Diversity"
  151. Bell, 122-23.
  152. *Apa dan Siapa...*, 18.
  153. *Ibid.*, 19.
  154. Grimes, 8.
  155. Bell, 186.
  156. "...particularly in a fairly homogenous group with general recognition of key symbols, where a sense of unity can be achieved through consent to the forms, and where most subgroups benefit in some way from the simultaneous integration and differentiation of the social order." (Bell, 216)
  157. *Ibid.*, 197.
  158. Such an approach may be marked as "functionalist", and thus incur criticism from several fronts in a number of disciplines. However, several of these criticisms may be avoided by refining some common perceptions of Functionalism, following in the lines of Robert Merton (in his "Manifest and Latent Functions") and Ernest Nagel ("A Formalization of Functionalism"), among others. By freeing ourselves from such profitless postulates as Universal Functionalism and Indispensability, while at the same time recognizing the independence of Functionalism from any particular ideology, we may yet find some value in what Ernest Gellner has termed "moderate Functionalism, or Functionalism as a method." (Gellner, 119)
  159. Grimes, 15.



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