

Sacred Values Of Cows In Kudus Society's View

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Abstract—This paper elaborates the tradition of Kudus society, a tradition sourced from the saying of Sunan Kudus, one of nine friends of God (wali) who spread Islam in Java island. At the time, Sunan Kudus prohibited Kudus society to slaughter cows as an act of tolerant and respect to Hinduism. His fatwa (Islamic legal pronouncement) then turned into a "sacred" tradition in Kudus society's view which is believed until today. Although, the understanding towards this tradition has shifted, but the majority of Kudus society still pays respect to cows. Another interesting thing is that the sacralization influences the economic activities of Kudus society. There is no traditional food that is usually made of beef. This proves that a tradition may influence the economic activity of a society.

Keyword—sacred, tolerance, culture, and tradition.

I. INTRODUCTION

A religion is not sufficiently defined and seen from perspective. Theological reason, which is claimed as the highest authority in being religious, is not strong enough to be relied upon. In its journey, rituals in religions precisely are based the living traditions in the society. One religion sometimes adopts traditions practiced by another. Along with the time, the adopted traditions transformed into rituals that are continuously practiced. This is in line with what Wilfred Cantwell Smith [1] says that the history of religions "is the history of man's participation in an evolving context of observable actualities".

The above statement confirms Smith thesis about the contribution of tradition to religion which he names "cumulative traditions". In this case, it is interesting to read the explanation of Smith:

"...the study of man's religious life has in the past been inadequate in so far as its concept of religion has neglected either the mundane or the transcendent element in what it has studied, and has been confused in so far as its concept has attempted to embrace both." [1]

Relating to Smith's statement, there are interesting symptoms in Kudus society. In the town of *kretek* (cigarette), people do not want to slaughter cows, either as a religious ritual of *Eid al-Adha* or other purposes, including marriages, etc. In the past, Sunan Kudus forbade the society to slaughter cows. According to Sri Indrahti [2], that was done in honor of the Hindus. In Hinduism, Hindus respect cows. They do not slaughter and eat cows. Up to now, Kudus society still uphold this teaching of not slaughtering cows, including the feast of the sacrifice.

Another reason why the Kudus society do not slaughter cows is in order to do what Sunan Kudus did. It is said, one day, Sunan Kudus felt thirsty, then a Hindu priest helped him with milk of cow. As an expression of gratitude, Sunan Kudus forbade his people to slaughter cows [2]. Another story told in Kudus society is that Sunan Kudus ordered a *bedug* (a traditional drum made of big wood and cow leather in both sides) to a Hindu priest in Kudus. He ordered an engraved *bedug* on the outside. After everything is done, Sunan Kudus got angry and slammed the *bedug* because it was not like what he ordered. The *bedug* was broken. Sunan Kudus was surprised because the carvings were actually in the *bedug* hole. Sunan Kudus was amazed and mentioned the priest as his teacher. To honor his Hindu teacher, Sunan Kudus forbade the Kudus people to slaughter cows. Instead, they are allowed to slaughter buffalos or goat.

Another story states that Sunan Kudus established a mosque, but the condition of the mosque was still quiet, no people went there. To get the people of Kudus to come to the mosque, Sunan Kudus brought cows and tied it in front of the mosque. In Hindu beliefs, cows are animals that are respected, so only certain people have cows, such as religious leaders. That's way, people flocked to the mosque, whose original purpose was to approach the rare cow. In the end, Sunan Kudus prohibited the slaughter of cows for Kudus society, although in the teachings of Muslims, cows are the kind of animals that are justified to be slaughtered and consumed. Until now, the people of Kudus still uphold the ban, even on the occasion of *Ied al-Adha*. This is a proof of submission to the advice that was said by Sunan Kudus at that time. In practice, the ban also affects Kudus' culinary, that is "soto Kudus". Soto Kudus has its own characteristics that is more identical with buffalo meat as its main ingredient rather than beef as like other Sotos [3].

A. Beliefs in Cows

In the Hindu tradition, cows are respected animal, like a god. Hindus put on flower arrangements around their necks. According to Mahatma Gandhi (*The World's Religions: 78*), a tribute to the cow has two objectives. First, symbolically, cows represent life outside of human beings. It means that humans also depend on life outside of human life. The worship to cows also means a way to improve good attitude toward others. The cow is the epitome of the center of humanity: to be respected, not to be killed, and not to be consumed. That's because cows are the epitome of the center of goodness. Second, in practice, cows have many

benefits. For example, it's waste or manure can be used as fuel, fertilizer, and others.

B. Geographic of Kudus

Kudus is a town located in Central Java. The previous name of this area is Loram. Sunan Kudus changed the name to Kudus. Etymologically, Kudus is from Arabic word, *Al Quds* meaning holy. Because the tongue of the people of Java was hard to pronounce the Arabic version, *Al Quds*, then it is said Kudus with Javanese accent.[1]

Prior the arrival of Islam, Kudus was a center of Buddhism and Hinduism. This is proved by the relics of ancient religious building in Kudus. Kudus has several sub-districts and villages with different characteristics among communities of each sub-districts. The sub-districts are Kauman, Kejaksan, Langgar Dalem, Janggalan, Sunggingan, and Demangan. Kauman is inhabited by islamic scholars and religious people. The area is located nearby Kudus mosque. Meanwhile, Kajeksan village is derived from the word *jeksa* meaning prosecutor. Here lived prosecutors at the time. Langgar Dalem is the area where Sunan Kudus' house was located. Janggalan is where Mbah Jenggal lived. Meanwhile, Demangan is derived from the word *demang*. *Demang* was an occupation. The devision of residents was based on who and what group who inhabited a certain area [1].

C. Phenomenon in Society

Until now, the tradition of not slaughtering cows in the Kudus area is firmly held by most of its people. In general, they assume that the Sunan Kudus' command is far more valuable than the label that cows are allowed to be consumed in Islamic doctrine. So, they do not consume beef because it is forbidden, but due to other aspects closely related to social relations, including relationships with former people, namely Sunan Kudus.

Given this fact, there is a shift; something which was formerly held firmly due to the command of Sunan Kudus not to slaughter cows, now, little by little, although in general they still hesitate to break the word, there are some who have dared to slaughter cows openly.

That some communities in Kudus Regency have begun to shift the paradigm is a real proof that the tradition which was established by Sunan Kudus is not a dead thing, especially Muhammadiyah people. Tradition runs based on times and the development of logic that lead people to think more rationally. Although, existing practice in the field proves that most of the sacrificial rituals of slaughter, for example, at the feast of Eid al-Adha, are still dominated by slaughtering buffalo and goats.

Apart from the shifting views of society on the sacred cow, the people of Kudus have always respected and performed what is called custom by society not to slaughter cows. When viewed from the Mircea Eliade or Eliade's view, animals have become "The Sacred".

Eliade through his work *The Sacred and The Profane* (1957) explains that the steps taken for the first time

determine us in understanding a religion. For him, the sacred is eternal, full of substance and reality. And on the contrary the profane is easily lost [4].

In the view of the Kudus society who honored cows, the cow becomes a sacred and respected as a symbol of tolerance that is still preserved and respected there. This is in line with Eliade's view that the purpose of symbols is very simple, namely to make people to always fulfill their social responsibilities. With the community taboos on the matter, the cow has become the common rule of the Kudus community that contains the social content to not violate it, although in the next development there are already some people who have different perspective.

For Eliade, every object has two dimensions; one object can be just an ordinary object that has no meaning and on the other side it has meaning. For example, one ordinary stone can become sacred one day. This sacred process is called by Eliade the "sacred dialectic" [4]. Kaaba which is highly purified and exalted by Muslims, was just a large piece of stone, but because of the *hierophany*, the structure of stones become so sacred to all Muslims in the world.

Similar to Kaaba, cows in Kudus are essentially ordinary cows that have no special or sacredness in the Muslim community. But, with the dialectics and history that occurred in the Sunan Kudus period, eventually cows become a sacred animal that is respected and forbidden to slaughter. The sacredness is certainly because of the sacred touch, in this case is the word of Sunan Kudus commanding not to kill/slaughter cows for any purpose.

Other perspectives can also be used in looking at this phenomenon of Kudus community. Sigmund Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1913) showing us that society can survive if they can subdue their personal desires on rules and limitations determined by society [4].

Totem was defined by Freud as a religious system as well as a social system. As a religious system, it consists of a relationship of mutual respect between a person and his totem, and as a social system it consists of mutual obligations between group members and against other tribes [5]. Totem itself is identified in certain animals that should not be killed or eaten, but humans must raise them and take care of them.

The cow phenomenon in the Kudus community can be regarded as Totem seen from the definition of totem as an animal that should not be killed, and as a social system in which the community is obliged to respect the sacredness of the cow. Although in Islam there is no prohibition on the slaughter of cows, but because in the Kudus community there has been a kind of common rules that violating it means creating taboo and should be avoided. The cow in the Kudus community is generally not totemism, which is worshiped, but only for the honor of not slaughtering it.

Thus the slaughter of the cow is taboo. Freud interpreted taboos in two opposite directions, on the other hand taboo means holy, sacred, and on the other side means strange, dangerous and forbidden. The taboos are contained in the

concept of guarding, especially expressed in the prohibition and restriction [5].

The restriction or ban on the slaughter of cows in the Kudus community is a taboo, as Wundt has interpreted taboo in Freud as the oldest unwritten code of human law. Therefore, if contextualized, then, this tradition is in accordance with the code of the Kudus community that is not written as a legal rule of prohibition of slaughtering cows.

D. The Sacredness of Cows and Economic Tradition

The sacredness of cows in the Kudus society has also impact on the economic tradition prevailing in the society. When in Kudus, it will be found many culinary reflecting on respect for cows, for example buffalo Soto and buffalo satay, as the symbol of tolerance in the society.

The culture of respecting cows according to the definition of Casson[6] saying that culture can be interpreted as a system of cultural values held together by certain public entities that may be different from the value of other public entities (*The Subjective Theory of Value*). In his work titled *Cultural Determinants of Economic Performance* published in 1993 [8]. Casson is very attentive to the influence of cultural factors both in business organizations as well as its influence in the macro economy. The article outlines the cultural elements that characterize the societal entities, then compared with each other so that it looks how the conditions of the cultural elements influenced on economic performance.

The respect of the local communities towards cows become codes of economic and cultural activities done by society. Culture impacts on the performance of the economy. Five key factors of culture contribute to economic development; scientific differentiation, high tension, atomism, high trust and judgment[6].

In its development, there is an interesting phenomenon and facts in the community; the dialogue of tradition that meets several religions. The prohibition of slaughtering cows as a respected animal in the Hindu community is continued by people with different religious beliefs in Kudus, namely Islam. What Wilfred Cantwell Smith says about the "cumulative tradition", at this point, finds its relevance. Society does not feel awkward and reject ideas made in the past. Instead, they feel responsible for preserving the decree that has been inherited by its predecessors.

Two versions of the prohibition of slaughtering cows in Kudu; first, the ban is devoted to the original descendant of Sunan Kudus. Secondly, the prohibition is understood as a validity for every Kudus citizen, in general. It relates to the words of Sunan Kudus stating that the ban is intended to *tedakturun*(descendant or heir).

In the midst of these deep-rooted traditions, there are some who wish to revise the views that have been followed by most of the Kudus community. Among them, as told by AkhrisSaifudinNajib [7], a resident LoramKulon, Jati, Kudus. Akmal said that the Muhammadiyah people began to

slaughter cows in any celebration including at the feast of Eid al-Adha. The goal is that the traditions that are being followed by most people are not regarded as a final decision in the ritual of religion. Because, at the grassroots level, there is a view that the cow is not allowed to be slaughtered is a final decision. It can not be denied also that the area LoramKulon is the base of Muhammadiyah in Kudus. Unlike the Muhammadiyah people, the Nahdlatul Ulama followers still uphold the teachings of Sunan Kudus.

Khoirudin Abdullah said the similar idea [7]. The man who was born in Kesambi, Kudus said that some people in his village start to slaughter cows, whether used as processed materials for private events or in the celebration of Eid al-Adha. However, Zuhri added, only the newcomers who dare to break the tradition that has been entrenched in the community. In more extreme cases, certain circles invite a butcher from outside the city of Kudus to slaughter cows.

Another story comes from FinaNadiya. The girl born in JatiWetan, Jati Kudus, said that the tradition of not slaughtering a cow is still guarded in her village. However, many communities maintain cows as their economic commodities, including sellers. The cultural dialogue raises major questions for the writer that religious ritual is not purely produced by the religion itself. At one time, one religion borrows another religious tradition, with different aims and expectations.

E. New Forms of Cultures

The fact that Kudus society are not allowed to slaughter cows generates many new cultures. Especially with regard to the use of matters relating to the traditions of Kudus associated with Islam.

First, *bedug* in mosques are mostly made from raw material of buffalo skin, not cows. This is natural because the majority of animals slaughtered are buffalo. Second, typical food in Kudus in the form of soup is also produced using buffalo meat, in contrast to other areas that use beef as its main ingredient. Third, in connection with that, other celebrations held by the general public also use beef as its main side dish. Such as when organizing marriages, circumcisions, and other events. All of those facts indirectly create an economic trend that comes from the words said by Sunan Kudus saying that Islamic society is not allowed to slaughter cows to respect the beliefs of Hindus at that time.

This is in line with the Smith's [1] statement that "*some persons are more important for the cumulative tradition than others*". If it is withdrawn to the case of the ban on the slaughter of cows, the influence of Sunan Kudus, as a respected person in the region, proves that policies, including those closely related to religious rituals and beliefs, can be adopted and do not matter the society.

This explicitly says that the acceptance of a tradition of a community by another community that has different beliefs can be accomplished if there is a role performed by certain people. Namely people who are also respected by the community. The assimilation of traditions which, in the

beginning, was not known even considered strange, became a common grounded tradition. In fact, if there is a community violating the command, it will get a reprimand from certain parties.

The heap of tradition is overlapping because it is followed by other traditions, so it is difficult for people to distinguish which one came first. The difficulties arise because the community is not too concerned with the development of mixing of various traditions. These traditions were adopted and born as a new form of tradition. Although, it can not be said that the new tradition is not an entirely new tradition, but a mixed tradition of contending traditions.

Various facts that the authors have described above further confirm the statement of Smith [1] that "*the tradition was what is was until it was changed by the creative activity*". The ongoing contestation forming its own culture in each village, in the end, will determine the future. How will this "religion" practice last? Will in the next ten or fifty years the ethical prohibition of the slaughtering cows in Kudus will still survive or disappear. Smith's [1] assertion assures that everything will revive us once again that the clash and the course of history will determine how much change will continue or recur. Smith says that "The cumulative tradition is holy historical; but history is not closed system, since as agent within it stands man, his spirit in some degree open the transcendent."

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