

## THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE PRACTICE OF *MOLONDHALO* TRADITION HELD BY THE GORONTALO ETHNIC COMMUNITY

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**Abstract:** *Molondhalo* is one of the traditions preserved by the Muslim community of Gorontalo. This tradition concerns “touching” the stomach of a pregnant woman at the seventh month of the pregnancy. In Javanese community, this tradition is called *Mitoni*, in *Acehnese Pensijuek*, in *Sundanese Tingkeban*, and in *Balinese community magedong-gedongan*. Within the *Molondhalo* ritual, there are cultural attributes, and recital of safety prayer (*ngadisalawati*) with a set of *hulante* and *polutube*. Some of these *molondalo* traditional practices gain critics from the outsider, i.e. puritan Muslims, because such a ritual practice exposes the *awrat* (part of the bodies that should be covered) and is said to have been influenced by Hinduism. This article is not intended to merely address those challenges, but also to show some of the theological arguments of this custom/tradition based on the interpretation of the philosophy of the Gorontaloese community: “*Adati hula-hulaa to sara’a, sara’a hula-hulaa to qur’an*” (Custom is based on shari’a, shari’a is based on the Qur’an).

**Keywords:** *Molondhalo*, theological argument, the Gorontalo Ethnic Community.

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## Introduction

GORONTALO is known as one of the regions rich in customs. Nearly all aspects of the life of the Gorontaloese have customary values that are highly respected by its people. For the Gorontaloese, customs and traditions are highly valued norms in their lives. These customs also nurture the strong faith in Allah the Glorified and Exalted (God) that has created human kinds with all of His perfectness. These customs have held human beings to always show good manners, positive behaviors and attitudes that are always based on good morality).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the role of customs for the Gorontalo society functions as a mean of guiding and directing all individuals, regardless of their social status and position, i.e. whether they are leaders, workers, members of society, businessman, political leaders, religious leaders, etc. in their daily lives. Thus, every activity would be meaningful and directed for a better result.<sup>2</sup>

Historically, the Gorontalo's custom was born through long assimilation processes. These processes are historical, dynamic-dialogic, because long before Islam became the official religion, the customs and tradition had been long practiced among the people of Gorontalo. The first accommodative process was during the King Amai's era when the proposal of "*syara topa-topango adat*", which means, "shari'a laws based on customs"<sup>3</sup> was introduced. This early philosophical statement shows the

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<sup>1</sup>Karim Pateda, "Keragaman Adat Gorontalo", in *Kumpulan Makalah Kongres Nasional Bahasa dan Adat Gorontalo I/ Collection of Papers from National Congress of Language and Customs of Gorontalo* (Gorontalo: Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, 2008), 134.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>S. R. Nur, "Beberapa Aspek Hukum Tata Kerajaan pada Masa Pemerintahan Eyato 1673-1679," *Dissertation*, (Ujung Pandang: UNHAS Press, 1979), 202. Based on this custom's formulation, Ibrahim Polontalo declares that Amai was the first Gorontaloese that embraced Islam. He was the king of Gorontalo that brought in Islam. He was the king that put the foundation for Gorontalo as an Islamic kingdom. In the history of Gorontalo, Amai was the first Sultan of Gorontalo Islamic Kingdom. Ibrahim Polontalo, *Peranan Tidi Lo Polopalo: Gorontalo dalam Pembinaan Kepribadian Suku Gorontalo* (Manado: FKPS IKIP Manado, 1968), 7.

customs domination over the shari'a laws. The second authoritative process of shari'a happened during the ruling era of King Matolodula Kiki (1550-1585). He was the son and the successor of King Amai. He created the philosophy of "*adati bula-bulaa to syaraa, syaraa bula-bulaa to adati*" which means "custom is based on shari'a."<sup>4</sup> If in the first formulation, the custom is the center, then in this second philosophical statement of the second king, both shari'a and customs have interdependency relation; both customs and shari'a are the center of thoughts. In certain boundaries, they are close to each other.

The third process happened during the Eyato King era (1673-1679) who proposed, "*adati bula-bulaa to saraa, saraa bula-bulaa to qur'ani*" which means, "custom is based on shari'a, and shari'a is based on al-Qur'an".<sup>5</sup> This statement is evaluative-validated. This means that the practiced customs are evaluated to find their customs' validation. The tools to measure the validation of the customs are shari'a that is based on the Qur'an. If in the first formulation, the customs are the center of thoughts, and in the second formulation, customs and shari'a have interdependency relationship, then in this last formulation, the Qur'an becomes the core of thoughts. The Qur'an is the utmost reference to evaluate and validate the customs. According to Ibrahim Polontalo, this third formulation proposed by Sultan Eyato is a linear thinking, which means that the customs have to have some legal basis, and that the source of this legal basis is the Qur'an, the book of Allah. This Eyato thought has given birth to a new Islamic cultural and civilization, the complete version of Islam or Islam Kaffah that developed the culture and civilization of Islam in Gorontalo Kingdom during the reign of Sultan Eyato.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>S. R. Nur, *Beberapa*, 221.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibrahim Polontalo, "Adat Bersendikan Syarak, Syarak Bersendikan Kitabullah sebagai Dasar Pengembangan Budaya dan Pelaksanaan Islam di Gorontalo," in *Membumikan Islam: Seminar Nasional Pengembangan Kebudayaan Islam Kawasan Timur Indonesia*, ed. Nani Tuloli (Gorontalo: Grafika Karya, 2004), 152-153.

The historicity of Islam Gorontalo (a dialog between Islam and local customs) produced an institutionalization of customs (*Adati pobupobutu*) such as, guest-welcoming gathering, *molondhalo*, *mopolihu lo limu* (flower bathing), *momeati* (allegiance ceremony), *mongubingo* (symbolic circumcision for female), and *tumbilotohe* (light festivals before the coming of *Id al-fitr*). These cultural traditions are often criticized by the puritan Muslims both Gorontaloese (the insider) and the non-Gorontaloese (the outsider). The philosophical formula of Gorontalo “*Adati hula-bulaa to saraa, saraa hula-bulaa to qur’ani*”, even though it is accepted, its theological authenticity is doubted in the implementation level. Theoretically, there is no problem with this philosophy. What is questioned is some customs and traditional practices that are considered “not in line” with the Islamic shari’a and the Qur’an. *Molondhalo* tradition is considered not Islamic because it shows the woman’s part of the body that should be covered (*awra*). *Polutube* (the incense burning pot) during the recital of the prayer is also considered to have some Hinduism elements.

Apart from the critics toward the customs and tradition of the Gorontaloese, the interesting thing to be studied is the theological arguments of these customs and traditions. Because the tradition is the result of long historical dialogue process between Islam and customs, it can be ascertained that it has solid argumentative theological basis. This theological basis is implicit; therefore, it is important to find it. This writing is intended to find the theological arguments for the local traditions and customs, *molondhalo*, in Gorontalo. There are two methods used in this research, literature study and interview. The literature study is aimed to discover the normative and theological basis referring to the social *fiqh* and Islamic culture whereas the interview is intended to gain insight and theological arguments from the people who practiced and support the *molondhalo* traditions. We interviewed Ulama/Islamic Scholars and *qadi*<sup>7</sup>Gorontalo because they are knowledgeable about Islam

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<sup>7</sup>In the religious tradition in Gorontalo, *qadi* is an Islamic leader that serves all the religious activities both conducted by the ordinary people and the government. Politically, *qadi* is the partner of the district/city

and *molondbalu* customs.<sup>8</sup> These findings are useful to provide psychological-theological contents for the supporters and those who practiced the traditions. This study shows that what they have practiced has some basis and solid theological arguments (theoretical functions). There would be no discrediting and negative imaging of the customs and local tradition (practical functions). In addition, it lessens the gap and skepticism among Muslim groups concerning the assumption of disharmony between the shari'a and the customs and local traditions.

This is not the first writing on Gorontalo's customs. Previously, Ridwan Tohopi has conducted research entitled, "Local Islamic Tradition of the Gorontaloese in Celebration of the *Isrā Mi'rāj*." This is a descriptive research that describes the local culture of the Gorontaloese in the recital of the *Isrā Mi'rāj* story. His research is not intended to dig some theological basis.<sup>9</sup> The other research has been conducted by Ismail Puhi, entitled "Transformation of Shari'a Economics values in the customs and culture system of the Gorontalo Community." This

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government in every formal activity. Within the grand mosque (of each districts and city) the seats of the qāḍi is in the same line with the head of district or mayor during the Friday prayer and qāḍi's position is equal with them in formal ceremonies. The difference is only at the seating arrangement. The head of district or the mayor sits on the right hand side, meanwhile, the qāḍi sits on the left hand side. See Sofyan A.P. Kau, *Sejarah Sosial Ulama Gorontalo: Studi tentang Potret dan Peran Tokoh Islam di Gorontalo* (Gorontalo: Sultan Amai Press, 2014), 77.

<sup>8</sup>Those are K.H. Sukarno Taher, KH. Abdul Rasyid Kamaru, M.Pd.I. and KH. Aldes Ilahude. These three Islamic scholars are well known in Gorontalo for their ability in reading and understanding the traditional scholarly book known as the Yellow Book. The first scholar opened a study on *Sirr al-Asrār fīmā Yaḥtāj ilabī al-Abrār* by book of Syekh 'Abdul Qadir al-Jailani in his house, in addition to giving lectures. The latter are the qāḍis (Islamic judges) of Gorontalo city and Bonebolango District. The interview with K.H. Sukarno Taher was conducted on Saturday, August 29, 2015 at 04.0 pm. Meanwhile, the interview with KH. Abdul Rasyid Kamaru, M.Pd.I. and KH. Aldes Ilahude were conducted on Monday, August 31, 2015 at 08.00pm and Sunday, August 30, 2015 at 04.00 pm.

<sup>9</sup>The result of Ridwan Tohopi's research was published in *el-Harakah Journal*. See Ridwan Tohopi, "Tradisi Perayaan Isrā' Mi'raj dalam Budaya Islam Lokal Masyarakat Gorontalo," *el-Harakah*, Vol. 14 No. 1 (2012), 135-155.

research shows that there was transformation of shari'a economics values within the system of customs and culture of the Gorontaloese community as reflected in the application of *tayade* dan *pobulo'o*. The *tayade* (profit sharing) and *pobulo'o* (pawn) are stipulated in the shari'a economics system and are taken from the concepts of *mudharabah*, *musyarakah*, *muṣāra'ah*, *mukhābarah* and *musāqah*. The application of *Tayade* and *Pobulo'o* are commonly found in farming and agricultural sectors, meanwhile, *tayade* is only found in animal husbandry. This research was also intended to study the *tayade* and *pobulo'o* systems philosophically but did not go into studying the theological concepts.<sup>10</sup> These two studies are clearly not related to the focus of our research. Another research that relates to this present study was done by Mustakimah. Her dissertation's dissertation entitled "Molondhalo customs tradition in Gorontaloese community: A Philosophical study."<sup>11</sup> The dissertation focuses on three aspects (1) the implementation process of *molondhalo* custom, (2) the meaning of the *molondhalo* customs for Gorontaloese community, and (3) the description of the symbols used within the implementation of *molondhalo* custom. This research is a descriptive-philosophical study to describe the implementation of *molondhalo* custom ceremony and to give meaning on the symbols used in the implementation of *molondhalo*. However, it did not make theological arguments.

### **A Brief View on *Molondhalo* Custom and its Implementation**

Literally, *molondhalo* means touching the stomach. The practice of touching stomach is done to expecting mother who is in the 7 months of pregnancy of her first child. The *molondhalo* tradition is a pre custom ceremony in a series of customs for birth and teenage-hood that has been practiced for generations

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<sup>10</sup>See Ismail Puihi, "Nilai-Nilai Ekonomi Syariah dalam Sistem Adat dan Budaya Masyarakat Gorontalo" in *Islam Tradisi dan Kearifan Lokal Gorontalo*, ed. Zohra Yasin (Gorontalo: Sultan Amai, 2013), 49-88.

<sup>11</sup>Mustakimah, "Tradisi Adat *Molondhalo* dalam Masyarakat Gorontalo: Suatu Kajian Filosofis," *Dissertation*, (Makasar: Universitas Islam Alauddin, 2013).

by the people of Gorontalo.<sup>12</sup> The *molondhalo* ceremony is held by the husband's family involving a *bulango* (traditional midwife), *imamu/batibi* (religious figures), two children and another pregnant woman.<sup>13</sup>

For the Gorontaloese, *molondhalo* tradition means as verbal and non-verbal statements from the husband's family party that signifies that this first pregnancy is mostly expected for the continuation of the offspring from a legal marriage without any discrimination of the baby sex. *Molondhalo* also serves as an announcement to both sides family that the wife's status is really sacred (read: virgin) and as motivation and advice for girls to protect themselves and their dignity. In addition to

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<sup>12</sup>Before *molondhalo* is conducted, another set of ceremony called *molone'o* and *modu'oto* is preceded. *Molone'o* is to find out the age of the pregnancy calculated from the last day of menstruation (*tiloyonga*), up to the first month of pregnancy. This is conducted by slowly massaging the pregnant woman's stomach using the middle fingers with both open palms. This event is marked with the prayer offering (*mongadisalawati*) on Friday. Meanwhile, *modu'oto* is to find out the age of the baby, calculated from the *molone'o*, when the fetus is three months old. This is done by gently massaging the mother's stomach using the palms on both sides of the mother's stomach. This event is also marked by prayer offering (*mongadisalawati*) on Friday morning before the dew evaporates. This period of time is considered as the perfect time when the mother's stomach is still soft to be massaged, and for the baby to stay in its position. This ceremony is conducted in the living room (*duledebu*), and during the massage, the expecting mother laid down on a white carpet. In this pre-ceremony, the husband and wife are not mandated to wear the traditional costumes; they can wear the Moslem's outfits, or batiks that expose their head side (batik *ota'u*). Farha Daulima, *Ragam Upacara Tradisional Daerah Gorontalo* (Gorontalo: Forum Suara Perempuan, 2006), 14-16.

<sup>13</sup>Specific requirements are made for the *bulango* in order to participate in this ceremony, unless the *bulango* is considered very capable, i.e. a Muslim who is knowledgeable about the age of pregnancy, the procession of *molondhalo* ceremony, reciting the prayers that have been traditionally passed down for such ceremony, and is acknowledged by the community as the traditional midwife. *Imam* or *batibi* is a leading figure in the religious ceremony that is capable of and fluent in reciting the prayers (*mo'odelo*). Meanwhile two children in this ceremony consist of a girl and a boy of 7 to 9 years old, whom both of their parents are still alive. Medi Botutihe and Farha Daulima, *Tata Cara Adat Kelahiran dan Keremajaan pada Masyarakat Adat Suku Gorontalo* (Gorontalo: Yayasan Fitrah, t. th.), 3.

that, the *molondhalo* ceremony is a manifestation of gratefulness to the God for His blessing to the man and his wife. Therefore, in *molondhalo* procession, *ngadisalawati* (safety prayer) is also offered as an expectation for the expecting mother to be blessed within easy and safe delivery process and for the baby to be born safely and healthily. Through this prayer, the husband and wife would feel more physically and mentally ready to welcome the baby.<sup>14</sup>

Before the *molondhalo* ceremony is held, twelve cultural stuffs are prepared. The first is *hulante*, a series of objects that consist of 3 litters of rice. Above the rice is placed seven nutmegs, seven cloves, seven eggs, seven *limututu* (lemon), and seven coins of IDR. 100.- previously the smaller coins were used. The second is a set of incense burning pot. This pot consists of one polu tube (place to put the burning coal), one bowl for *totabu* (incense), and a glass of drinking water with a close lid. The third is a set of grating stone (*botupongi'ila*), that is the stone to grate the turmeric mixed with limestone and cold water called "*alawahutilibi*". The fourth is a set of spitting pot "*tambaluoa*" or "*hukede*" and *pomama* (a place of areca nut). The fifth is 7 (seven) *toyopo* (meal place made from young coconut leaves filled with yellow rice, boiled eggs, fried chicken, and cakes as waffles), *kolombengi*, *apangi* etc and added with ripe bananas (*lututahumelitoataulutu lo hulonti'o*). The sixth is a set of food put in a tray that consists of a plate of *bilinthe* (a kind of fried rice mixed with chicken liver) a plate of whole fried chicken filled with boiled eggs, two bowls of hand washing water, two glasses of drinking water, and two spoons. The seventh is a three braided young coconut leaves (*tula-tulapidu*). The length of the braided coconut leaves is as big as the pregnant woman stomach. The eighth is "*bulowemalong'alo*" (opened areca nuts blossom). The ninth is a wholecoconut shell (*bu'awuhuli*). The tenth is a set of white mattress (*amongopeya-peya* or *ti'obu*). The eleventh is *pale yilulo* (*tilonda'o*), i.e. various rice made in red, yellow, green, black, and

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<sup>14</sup>Botutihe and Daulima, *Tata Cara*, 1-2.



white colors. The twelfth is a traditional weapon like a blade but tuck into its sheath.<sup>15</sup>

Following the complete preparation of the customs attributes is the marking (*bontbo*) by *bulango* using the *alanabutilibi* (grated turmeric mixed with lime stone and water). Parts of the body given marks (*bonthowaliyo*) are the forehead, neck, the area under the throat, shoulders, elbows, knees, and upper parts of the feet. Further, the expecting mother is laid down on the white mattress, her head is facing east, and then turning the west. A woman holds a pillow and guards her head and another woman guards her feet and her bended knees. Meanwhile, a boy who still has both parents (*payu lo limutu*) and a girl of 7 to 9 years old (*payu lo bulantalo*) sit on the left and right side of the expecting mother that would go through the *thonthalo* ceremony. Both of their hands are laid atop the pregnant woman stomach, right above the three braided coconut leaves belt.

In this position, the *syara'a/imam/hatibi* (religious leader) asks the mother behind the curtain/the mother who holds the *lalantebula* (batik's covered mattress) the following questions: *mangolo bula?* (how many months?). This question is passed (?) to the *bulango* then the *bulango* replies, *oyintaolowo* (one, two) and so on. These answers are relied to the woman who holds the curtain (*podebu lo bula*) to the *syara'a* with a loud voice. This question is repeated three times. Then, the husband, who wears the traditional custom complete with its weapon, step around his wife's stomach three times while holding up his weapon and cuts the braided coconut leaves belt apart. The husband gets rid of the cut coconut leaves belt. Then the wife raises and walks to the front door (*lalantebula*) and together

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 3-5. A number of customs attributes/cultural things prepared during the *molondbalo* tradition are not "non-living things" that are empty of messages and meanings. In fact, they carried certain messages and symbols. 3 liters of rice within the *bulantbe* symbolizes the prosperity and fortune. Nutmegs and cloves represent the toughness in life. Nutmegs and cloves give prosperity from their fruits and they also represent health. Egg is the representation of human origin. *Limututu* or lime represents the fragrance of the state. Coins represent persistency and skills in fulfilling the needs of the family.

they go around the house once and throw the cut braided coconut leaves away. This symbolizes that the baby is expected to be safely born, and look for three ties, the custom, the shari'a, and *baala* as his or his/her guidance in life.<sup>16</sup>

Following the completion of the ceremony, the husband and wife return to their house, and they sit face to face feeding each other with *bilinthe* (a type of fried rice mixed with chicken liver). Before that, the husband takes out the eggs from the inside of the fried chicken. In the end, the safety prayer (*ngadisalamati*) is recited by *imam/hatibi* in front of the guests. This recital of prayers also ends the *molondhalo* procession. Before the guests return to their respected houses, the husband distributes charity to the people who work on the ceremony along with the distribution of *toyopo*.

### Pros and Cons over the *Molondhalo* Custom

There are at least two views on *molondhalo*. The first view rejects and criticizes the *molondhalo*. This view is held by several religious leaders and members of the society in Gorontalo (insider) and also by the academia from outside Gorontalo (outsider). Yusuf Lasaka, one of the religious leaders in Gorontalo views that basically the *molondhalo* tradition is against the Islamic teaching even though it is not entirely wrong.<sup>17</sup> According to Ibrahim Busala, *molondhalo* tradition is part of a Hindu culture that has been mixed up with Islamic values. Even 90% of the *molondhalo* procession is said to be against what has been mentioned in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Ibrahim Busala refers the Qur'an Surah al-Nūr (24): 30-31 and al-Aḥzāb (33): 59 as the order for Muslim women to cover up their *awrat* and to use *hijab*. In contrast, in the *molondhalo* tradition, the *awrat* of the pregnant mother is exposed.<sup>18</sup>

The criticism posed by Rahim Busala above is more intended for the procession of *molondhalo* tradition. In his view, the procession of *molondhalo* tradition is part of a

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>17</sup>Mustakimah, *Tradisi*, 210.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

Hinduism culture. This means that when Islam came to Gorontalo, there was already a Hindu religion embraced by the Gorontaloese. When Islam came, this tradition was not abandoned. Instead, it was maintained by adding some Islamic values. A different view is proposed by Sofyan A.P. Kau. In his book *Sejarah Sosial Ulama Gorontalo: Studi tentang Potret dan Peran Tokoh Islam di Gorontalo*, Kau explained that before Islam became the official religion, the people of Gorontalo were not familiar with the *polytheism*, animism and dynamism.<sup>19</sup> According to Wantogia- as cited by Olha S. Niode, since the very beginning of their history the people of Gorontalo believed in one supreme God. There is an old saying in Suwawane language<sup>20</sup> "taqurata to mitaniya Eyatu wawuloqutuwawuliyo" (one supreme God and God supremacy, God is one and really singular).<sup>21</sup> God in Gorontalo language is called "Eya". The word "Eya" is closed to the word "Esa" in Indonesian language (the word "esa" itself is derived from the Sanskrit language). The word "Eya" could also be derived from the Arabic language, "*īyāhu*" (only to Him). Apart from these semantics analysis, what is certain is that the word "Eya" refers to the supreme ruler of the universe, that is God. Therefore, when the word "Eya" is recited in every customs ceremony, people always point their fingers above. The index finger that points above during the mention of the word "Eya" implies God as the Supreme ruler.<sup>22</sup>

Wantogia argues that the people of Gorontalo never worship stones, mountains, trees, water, and other objects. They only believe in spirits that resides in mountains, stones, tree, and water.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the people of Gorontalo never worship gods and goddess. This assumption is strengthened by the

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<sup>19</sup>Kau, *Sejarah*, 13.

<sup>20</sup>Suwawaa is one of the region in Bone Bolango district that is well-known as Suwawa-sub-district. The lingua franca in Suwawane community is the Suwawa language, not Gorontaloese language. In Gorontalo, there are several languages such as Bune, Bulago, and Attinggola besides Gorontalo Language.

<sup>21</sup>Olha S. Niode, *Beranda Etika Gorontalo* (Manado: STAIN Manado Press, 2014), 12.

<sup>22</sup>Kau, *Sejarah*, 14.

<sup>23</sup>Niode, *Beranda*, 12-13.

current availability of traditional ceremony to call upon the spirits of the ancestors such as, *mo'oduliya* and *longgibila* ceremonies conducted in the remote area of Suwawa sub-district.<sup>24</sup> *Mo'oduliya* and *longgibila* represent husband and wife that are believed to be the ancestors of the Gorontaloese. The ceremony to call upon the spirit of the ancestors does not mean that they worship these ancestors. They call upon their spirits in order for those spirits to become the middle men (*wasilah*) for their wish to the Supreme God.<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting to note that the people of Gorontalo do not know other written language other than the Arabic writing system that was introduced by eight Islamic kings in Palasa Tomini. These eight kings came to accompany King Amai that had previously converted to Islam and married the Owutango Princess. Owutango is the daughter of the King Gumonjolo of the Islamic Palasa Kingdom in Tomini. This means that before the coming of Islam, the people of Gorontalo were not influenced by other cultures. No information was found concerning the Hinduism and Buddhism in Gorontalo before the Islam time. The belief they held on Eya (God) during pre-Islam time was more *firi* (pure). Therefore, the spread of Islam among the people of Gorontalo did not get any resistance. Islam was even easily embraced, even though during the king Amai time Islam was not yet the official religion of the kingdom. The smooth acceptance of Islam among people of Gorontalo happened due to the basic monotheism that had long been believed by people of Gorontalo.<sup>26</sup>

According to Mustakimah, the recital of safety prayers by the Imam (*batibi*) that is well-known as *ngadisalamati* within the *molondhalo* procession is considered as *'urf ṣaḥīḥ*, a tradition

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<sup>24</sup>Currently, the Suwawa Sub-district has become part of Bone Bolango district, which was previously part of Gorontalo District. After the establishment of Gorontalo Province (Gorontalo was previously only District Gorontalo and City of Gorontalo under the Sulawesi Utara Province), Gorontalo district was divided into four other district, Boalemo, Pohuwato, Gorontalo Utara, and Bone Bolango Districts.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Kau, *Sejarah*, 15.

practiced among the people and is not against the *naş*. It does not get rid of the goodness and it does not bring something bad.<sup>27</sup> Other than that, it can only be identified as Hinduism practices. Even though basically each procession and cultural things used in the procession hold some positive values, this ceremony is considered a must among the society with its implementation that cannot be considered easy and cheap in term of expenses.<sup>28</sup>

It appears that Mustakimah's reference to Hinduism practices is the presence of incense provided in front of the *hatibi (imam)* when he recites the *ngadisalawati* and *hulanthe* as a form of offering. Further, she states that all the cultural things prepared during this ceremony appeared to be wasteful because they have no influence over the prayers and the expectation of the family toward the safety of the mother and the baby. This kind of rituals is not approved by Islam.<sup>29</sup> Mustakimah did not differentiate and separate between cultural things that have functional meaning and prayers that have transcendental-theological dimension. Moreover, it is assumed that those cultural things influence the prayers or have influence on the safety of the mother and the baby. This simplistic thinking is again showed by Mustakimah when she firmly stated that the traditional outfits worn during the ceremony are not Islamic by referring to the textual meaning of the Qur'an Sura al-Nūr (24): 30-31. Unfortunately Mustakimah could not map which part of the traditional outfit worn during the *molondhalo* procession that is not Islamic.

The critics above are quite different from the second opinion that accepts and support the *molondhalo* custom. Abdul Gias Suluni, one of the prominent figures of Gorontalo society, offers his opinion that this tradition is the reflection of the Gorontalo community. He said that this tradition is not against the Islamic teaching because during the procession, the Qur'an is recited in the form of prayers to

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<sup>27</sup>Abdul Wahhāb Khallāf, *Ilmu Ushul Fiqhi*, translated by Moh. Zuhri and Ahmad Qarib (Semarang: Dina Utama, 1994), 123.

<sup>28</sup>Mustakimah, *Tradisi*, 215.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

God in order that both mother and the baby are safe and blessed. In the same vein, Saleh Tobuhu who also views that the *molondhalo* tradition is no less than a form of hope and prayers from the family to Allah for Him to bless and safe the mother and the baby, and to ease the birth process later.<sup>30</sup> The same opinion is also stated by Nani Tuloli, D.K. Usman, and Demsi Usman. It is said that the implementation of *molondhalo* tradition is a manifestation of the customs of Gorontalone community based on shari'a and that this shari'a is based on the Holy Book of Allah. Thus, the implementation of this custom according to them is solely for the purpose of respecting and upholding the customs of Gorontalo that have long been practiced by their ancestors.<sup>31</sup>

### Critical Reinterpretation on *Molondhalo* Custom

Among other criticism on the *molondhalo* procession is exposing woman's stomach in front of guests. This is considered as an act of opening up one's *awrat*. Stomach is considered as part of the *awrat* that cannot be seen others except for the *muḥrim*—a person who is entitled to see it. As guests are not *muḥrim*s, they are not allowed to do so. In the view of experts of Islamic law, *awrat* is parts of human body that in principle cannot be seen unless there are emergency or urgent needs.<sup>32</sup> This means that within a normal condition *awrat* cannot be displayed to and seen by others. However, it is allowed to be seen only under certain conditions. These certain conditions are included into emergency and urgent situations. In normal circumstances, an open *awrat* can bring shame for the person and others who see it. Oftentimes, *awrat* can bring in sexual desire. At this point, therefore, *awrat* is considered as something that is not appropriate to be exhibited. It not only brings shame but also triggers sexual desire.

Related to the *molondhalo* procession, the question is: Does the big stomach of the pregnant women induce the sexual desire

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 210-211.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 211.

<sup>32</sup>M. Quraish Shihab, *Jilbab Pakaian Wanita Muslimah Pandangan Ulama Masa Lalu dan Cendekiawan Kontemporer* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2005), 44.

of the guests? Is there any shame in the face of the pregnant woman during the *molondbalo* procession? To date, there has been no bad information reported pertaining to the bad impact of *molondbalo* procession either sexually or morally. Therefore, the process is not considered as an event to exhibit the *awrat* of the pregnant mother as Mustakimah understood. *Molondbalo* is a futuristic process that expresses a soul-deep expectation on the future of the baby and for the collective security of both husband and wife. The analogy for this is *ṭawaf* (one fundamental ritual element of the hajj). When men and women mix together during their *ṭawaf* around the Ka'bah, they bump into each other. It is a ritual process in which spiritual situation and condition are tangled and bringing together the soul of the servants with their Creator. Therefore, *ṭawaf* was never understood as exhibition of freedom between men and women to touch each other.

Hence, it is important for us to be able to differentiate between soul expression and material as the medium of expression. For a Muslim, kissing the *hajar aswad/the black stone in Ka'bah* does not mean worshipping the stone itself but rather it is the expression of their obedience and love to the Prophet's commands. This is analogous with a young man who kisses his lover's handkerchief. His act is considered not worshipping the handkerchief but rather it is his soul-deep expression of longing for his lover. This line of thought can be used in reading each procession either religious ceremony or cultural ceremony. The objective of this model of thought is to describe the phenomenon as the object of research; and not judging those phenomena. Therefore, a researcher is different from a mufti. A researcher tries to explain a phenomenon using a set of theories whereas a mufti often judges a phenomenon. The latter tends to think in black and white while the former attempts to explain the underlying reason for such a black and white phenomenon.

Mustakimah did not use this model of thought in his criticism toward the *molondbalo*. He also did not explain the phenomenon on *molondbalo* practices using a set of cultural acculturation theory to find out the pattern of relations between

Islam and culture.<sup>33</sup> Mustakimah did not use the cultural acculturation theory as his tools of analysis to describe it but rather he went straight to oppose it. Referring to the legal opinion, Mustakimah stated that within the procession of *molondhalo* tradition, there were ambiguity and paradox. On the one hand the imam/*batibi* recites the Qur'anic verses, the *shalawat* (prayer to the Prophet), and some prayers. On the other hand it uses incense—the symbolism of animism, during the process. The same is true with the exhibition of a mother's stomach that is considered as an offense to the Islamic teaching. Therefore, regardless of the recitation of the Qur'an and the praise of Shalawat to the Prophet, when the procession is not based on the framework of '*urf al-ṣaḥīḥ*' it is considered as a mistake, which is not allowed in Islam.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, he suggested that in *molondhalo* procession, the incense set should not be included due to its animism practice. While the pregnant woman should not be laid down in the open room or in front of the guests that are not her *muḥrim*. She can be laid down in the bedroom. If it should be done in the living room, it is better to put a curtain to prevent a direct exposure to the pregnant woman's *awrat*.<sup>35</sup> Here, Mustaqimah posed as a doctor who gives medicine prescription and not as anthropologic who detects phenomenon. Therefore, there were no substantive-functional explanation on why the incense is there and why the pregnant woman is laid outside her chamber.

### Symbolic Interpretation: Theological-Esoteric Arguments

Each text has its own meaning. *Molondhalo* is part of "living text." Therefore, the interpretation upon this text has to be esoteric to find its symbolic meanings. Hence, those symbolic meanings can be easily read through the practice of customs and

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<sup>33</sup>There are at least three patterns of relation between religion and culture, namely: adaptation, integration, and negotiation. Further read Imam Muhsin, *Al-Qur'an dan Budaya Jawa* (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2013), 178-216. On practical acculturation theory, please see Hidayat, *Akulturasī Islam dan Budaya Melayu* (Jakarta: LITBANG Kemenag, 2009).

<sup>34</sup>Mustakimah, *Tradisi*, 217-218.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.



customs attributes. Customs and customs attributes contain moral expectations and messages. The first one is explicit while the latter is implicit. This means that the symbolic meanings of custom practice can be easily understood because they are visible, while as regards the custom's attributes, even though they are visible, the objectives are often not visible. However, the message carried by that attribute is obviously important. In other words, it is not sufficient to interpret the customs attribute from the cultural goods. It has to go deeper into the message carried by those attributes. Therefore, the substantive meaning is more implicit.

In the implementation of *molondhalo* what is explicit is the touching of the stomach of a pregnant woman. It is conducted when the pregnancy is seven months old. *Molondhalo* does not mean to ensure what is inside the woman's womb, neither is it to find out the sex type of the baby. According to KH. Sukarno Tahirada, there are three functions of *molondhalo*. *First*, to ensure that indeed there is a baby within the womb. Based on local experience, sometimes a pregnant woman does not always bear baby. The baby sometimes disappears. *Second*, to ensure that the baby has a valid genealogical father. Therefore, during the *molondhalo* procession, the father and mother (husband and wife) have to wear the traditional wedding outfit as a proof that the baby is the product of a legal wedlock. Hence, this is the reason behind the *molondhalo* ceremony that is conducted in the wife's house attended by the wife and husband's family just like a wedding ceremony. Their presence is a form of testimony, similar to that of wedding. *Third*, to find out whether the baby is the product of a legal marriage or not. This means that the *molondhalo* tradition is a form of cultural protection to ensure that pregnancy would not happen unless it is done under a legal marriage.

We argue that *molondhalo* is a form of circumspection to treat the pregnant mother and her baby. The pregnant mother has to take care of her pregnancy and the baby. Taking care of pregnancy is manifested in many ways, such as eating balanced meals, and taking sufficient rest. Therefore, the pregnant mother is laid down in living room (*doledebu*) during the *molondhalo*

*procession*. The procession signifies the importance of her taking a break from jobs outside the bedroom. If she has to work, she should perform light works and she should not do heavy jobs outside her house. If she works in her house, her works is limited to the middle area of the house (the living room/*doledebu*).

Taking care of her pregnancy also means taking care of the baby that she bears, physically and mentally. The mental purity of the mother and the baby are symbolized by laying down the mother in a white mattress (*amongopeya-peya* or *ti'ohu*). A pregnant mother has to clean her body and soul. In the belief of Muslim Gorontaloese, mother's bad attitudes and behaviors will influence the physical formation of the baby. We maintain that this "belief" is only one of the "ways and methods" to show the mental purity of a pregnant mother.

According to KH. Aldes Ilahude, the implementation of *molondhalo* conducted during the 7 old month pregnancy is close to delivery time. On the 7<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy, the husband and wife are reminded to prepare all the needs for the birth of their baby. The objective of this procession is to express gratitude and safety prayers to welcome the most awaited child.

A number of things that become the customs attribute to those related to plants and flora that enhance the relation of human and nature. Those customs show the importance of building a cosmological harmony. Nature is the gift from God to be wisely used for our life. This means that, substantially, the local tradition of Gorontalo teaches trilogy of life, i.e. human, nature, and God. These three things are an integral part that cannot be separated in the Theology-cosmology concept. Therefore, it is understandable that the *ngadisalawati* tradition within all customs ceremony in Gorontalo is not negating the customs' attributes. Hence, *ngadisalawati* becomes part of the religious teaching. The customs things are the cultural products. Thus, a set of incense burning pot that consists of *polutube*, a bowl of *totabu*, and a glass of closed lid drinking water used during the *ngadisalawati* functions no more than the cultural accessory. As an accessory, it has no positive correlation with

the prayer to be granted (*maqbul*). In other word, a prayer is granted or not is not determined by *polutube* and *totabu*.

According to KH. Abdul Rasyid Kamaru, M.Pd.I. and KH. Aldes Ilahude, *dupa* (incense) used during the *ngadisalamati* procession works as air freshener. The existence of incense during the prayer procession is *wasilah*, said KH. Sukarno Taher. The urgency of *wasilah* insisted in Q.S al-Maidah: 35. Philosophically, KH. Sukarno Taher added that human is nurtured by nature. Nature consists of the earth, water, air, and fire. These four elements are manifested in prayer, standing firm is fire, *rukuk* is air, prostrating is water, and sitting is earth. In a prayer procession, other than incense *totabu*, there is also “*alama*” (a type of incense made from eaglewood), a glass of drinking water and *polutube*. *Alama* is the symbolic form of earth, a glass of water as the symbol of water; inhaling and exhaling of breathes as form of air, and *polutube* as the symbol of fire.

As symbolic forms, a set of things and attributes to the *ngadisalamati* are *wasilah* (intermediary). In this context, KH. Sukarno Taher based his argument on the command of the prophet, “*Kun ma’a al-Lāhi, wa in lam takun ma’a al-Lāhi kun ma’a mā ‘alayh*” (try to ask directly to Allah, if you are not able, go through those close to Allah). As these four elements have no sin, these elements are close to Allah. Human is the prominent creation of Allah, however due to their sins, and hence these four elements acts as the passage to Allah. Another evidence on the importance of *wasilah* is Ka’bah. Kabah is the *wasilah* even though hajj is meant for Allah. KH. Sukarno Taher admits that incense can also be found in other religion, however, the meaning is different.

The prayer to ask for safety is universal and not local. Therefore, the *ngadisalamati* is not only conducted by the Muslim people of Gorontalo but also by others too with different names. The Javanese, for instance, do the same thing with different customs’ attributes, which means the message carried is also different. Within the Javanese Muslim tradition, every occurrence of change in the cycle of human life, the safety prayer called *wilujengan* is conducted. The objectives are to ask for safety and happiness in life. The foods and things used in

this ritual symbolize the relation between the self and God. These things are the expressions of comprehension and understanding of the “untouched reality” hence becoming “very close.” The symbols in those rituals means that Allah is always present and always involves, “unites” in the self. These ritual symbols are understood as the self is *tajalli* or non-separable part of the Allah.<sup>36</sup>

In *molondhalo* ritual there is a set of food to put within *toyopo* (a place made of young coconut leaves) that consists of yellow rice, boiled egg, fried chicken and cakes known as *wapili*, *kolombengi*, *apangi* etc, plus ripe bananas from the type of *lututabulimito* or *lutu lo bulonti'o*. Similar meal preparation is also found in the ritual of Javanese Islam that is called as *ubarampe*. According to Suwardi Endraswara, this is the actualization of thoughts, wants, and feelings of the doers to make themselves closer to God. The efforts to approach God through giving a ritual charity, e.g. *kenduri*, and these kinds of celebration, indeed are the accumulations of abstract cultures.<sup>37</sup> In Mohammad Sholikhin's view, all these are intended as the efforts of spiritual negotiation, hence, all the magic things are believed above human.<sup>38</sup>

Normatively and theologically, *molondhalo* custom has an argumentative basis in the social fiqh. Sahal Mahfudh in *Wajah Baru Fikih Pesantren* argues that the implementation of several ritual ceremonies such as, *neloni*, *mitoni* and *nyambung tumuh* for a woman's pregnancy that has reached three months and seventh months are allowed. The argument for this is that during those ceremonies the charity is well practiced. This is mentioned in the Qur'an Sura al-A'raf (7): 189,<sup>39</sup> which implicitly describes the

<sup>36</sup>Muhammad Sholikhin, *Ritual dan Tradisi Islam Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Narasi, 2010), 49.

<sup>37</sup>Suwardi Endraswara, *Mistik Kejawaen Sinkretisme, Simbolisme dan Sufisme dalam Budaya Spritual Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Narasi, 2003), 195.

<sup>38</sup>Sholikhin, *Ritual*, 50.

<sup>39</sup>Text of the ayah:

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ إِلَيْهَا فَلَمَّا تَغَشَّاهَا حَمَلَتْ حَمْلًا خَفِيًّا فَمَرَّتْ بِهِ فَلَمَّا أَثْقَلَتْ دَعَوَا اللَّهَ رَبَّهُمَا لَئِنْ آتَيْنَا صَالِحًا لَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ.

example of Adam and Eve who felt the burden of the babies that she carried and ask for Allah's mercy to be given good children. The essence of *selamatan* is as one of the action called as *walimatul ma'dabah* in fiqh. The practice is manifested in the form of meal charity provided for the neighbors as the expression of gratitude, such as birthday, hardship during critical times, etc. These actions are taken in order to get close to Allah, i.e. hoping that Allah will grant their wish, such as health and longevity. According to the description of *Qalyubi* book, giving charity during the critical time, such as during pregnancy, is important. Moreover, according to a hadith that charity can evade danger and disaster.<sup>40</sup>

In *molondhalo* custom, giving charity is typically done by providing meals in a form of *bulanthe*. *Hulante* is a meal of yellow rice and chicken that consists of 25 *walimah* (meals). According to KH. Sukarno Taher, the 25<sup>th</sup> *walimah* is a symbol of the 25<sup>th</sup> prophet. These 25 *walimabs* are distributed to the poor as a form of charity to help ease their lives. This practice is in line with the example given by the Qur'an and the Hadith. Within the hadith it was mentioned that the heaven misses four groups of people, one of them is those who feed the hungry people. Therefore, *walimah* or providing meals is usually done at 10.00 am when people start to feel hungry. Meanwhile, on the third ayah of the Al-Ma'un it is firmly mentioned that those who did not feed the poor are liars who lie about their religion. In addition to meals, within the *walimah* there is also money. Both are intended as *tabaruk*, that is expecting bless and mercy from Allah so the delivery process will be eased. Hence, *bulanthe* is meant as a charity and share of blessing with others. Meanwhile, helping others by giving them food is a form of human empathy taught in Islam.

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*"It is He who has created you from a single person (Adam) and (then) He has created from him his wife [Hawwa(Eve)], in order that he might enjoy the pleasure of living with her. When he (a polytheist from Adam's offspring) had sexual relation with her (a polytheist wife) Mustakimah became pregnant and Mustakimah carried it lightly. Then when it became heavy, they both invoked Allah, their Lord (saying): If You give us a Shalih (good in every aspect) child, we shall indeed be among the grateful".*

<sup>40</sup>KH. MA. Sahal Mahfudh, *Wajah Baru Fikih Pesantren* (Jakarta: Citra Pustaka & KMF Jakarta, 2004), 206-207.

KH. Abdul Rasyid Kamaru and KH. Aldes were of the opinion that *bulante* is a form of gratitude toward all the blessings of Allah. Pregnancy that is much awaited by man and wife is such an enormous gift from Allah. Therefore, the goods provided within the *bulante* are derived from fragrant plants. Philosophically this means that, according to the author, the selection of the best natural ingredients is an expression of good soul and a harmony between the nature and human. Meanwhile, the selection of fragrant plants symbolizes the expectation statement that the baby would bring joy to the family name. As if the importance of good things are ingrained from the time when the baby is still in his or her mother's womb.

The burning of incense (Gorontalo: *polutube and totabu*) in *ngadisalamwati* ritual ceremonies cannot be said as the influence of Hinduism. Besides the fact that historically Hindu has never been introduced in Gorontalo, the Gorontalo people also never had a belief that the incense has something to do with the prayers recommended in Islam. Unlike the practices of incense in some parts of Java,<sup>41</sup> then for Muslim Gorontaloese, it is perceived as the symbol of the prayer's journey to the presence of Allah. With the nice smelling-incense smoke, it is expected that the prayers that are being recited, can go high as the smoke does till it reaches the presence of Allah. Therefore, the assumption that the smoke of the incense brings the prayers to the presence of Allah is a false assumption. This assumption often becomes the point of criticism and accusation as hypocrisy from the puritan Muslims.

KH. Abdul Rasyid Kamaru and KH. Aldes admit that the presence of incense is only intended as room air fresheners. Hence, this tradition is not a new thing in Islamic history because at the time of prophet Ibrahim as, burning incense had become a common practice. During the time of the prophet Mohammad Saw, burning incense was often replaced with using fragrances that classified as "fragrance that Allah likes." Both incense and fragrance have the same essence, that is, to get closer to Allah.<sup>42</sup> It is mentioned in a hadith: "*Anas r.a recited that*

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<sup>41</sup>Sholikhin, *Ritual*, 50.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

*the Prophet Saw had once come to the house of Ummu Sulaim and had wanted to take a nap in her house. Ummu Sulaim then placed a mattress made of skin as the prophet's sleeping mat. During his sleep, he had sweated a lot. Ummu Sulaim then collected the prophet's sweat and mixed it with some fragrance and put it into small bottles. Then the Prophet asks Ummu Sulaim: "What is this?" Ummu Sulaim answers: "Your Sweat o Prophet, I mixed with my perfume".*<sup>43</sup> This hadith shows that perfume during the Prophet's time has been used as one of healing product. According to many scholars' of hadith, Ummu Sulaim used the mixed of the Prophet's sweat and the fragrance to treat ill children. This hadith has given an important meaning on the use of perfume or fragrance in a ritual (this hadith mentioned about healing) that has been done since the Prophet Mohammad time at the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and the prophet has agreed to it. Therefore, fragrance or perfume is also recommended to be used in shari'a rituals. It was mentioned in a hadith, "As reported by Aisyahra. She said: I had put some fragrance in the body of the Prophet when he wants to put on his ibram's cloth for ibram and when he wants to do the taballul and before he goes tawaf in Baitullah."<sup>44</sup>

Contextualization of fragrance usage can be done when one is taking shower, putting on clothes, doing hajj, *tayammum* (ablution using dust instead of water), and almost all other worshipping rituals in Islam. Therefore, as an activity that uses ritual and spirituals symbols it is not a less rational activity. Hence it is not something that is being made up, or *bid'ah*. Because, within this ritual, there is a deep meaning to scare away the devil that always try to seduce human. This ritual is also intended to minimize bad things either from human beings or demons.<sup>45</sup>

We contend that *molondhalo* tradition is an expression of the expectation for the safety of the mother and her baby, as well as a form of gratitude for the presence of the child. Therefore, during the pregnancy there are prayers offered and charity given.

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<sup>43</sup>Abī al-Ḥusain Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Naisābūrī al-Imām Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Taḥqīq Abū al-Fadhl al-Dimyāṭī (Beirut: Dār al-Bayān al-‘Arabī, 2006), 1128, ḥadīth no. 2332.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 555, ḥadīth no. 1189.

<sup>45</sup>Sholikhin, *Ritual*, 52.

*Ngadisalamati* is a set of prayers offered for the safety of the mother and the baby. In addition to that, the 7<sup>th</sup> month pregnancy is a vulnerable stage in the pregnancy, thus, a spiritual “touch” is needed. Prayers are spiritual touch for the safety of the mother and her baby. In other words, *molondhalo* tradition is a spiritual expression of the Gorontalo Muslim to Allah. Meanwhile, the cultural things and giving charity in the form of *Toyopo* and 25 *walimah* function a means of gaining safety. This practices is in line with the hadith which stated that: “Indeed charity can extinguishes Allah’s anger, and prevent from bad death”.<sup>46</sup> This means that other than praying, charity is also a means to gain safety. Therefore, the existence of cultural stuffs in *molondhalo* procession that was later distributed to those deserve to receive is a form of charity to avert danger. Therefore, *ngadisalamati* and distribution of *toyopo* are not new innovations in religion, rather, it is one way to appreciate the Prophet’s teaching in a more practical way, i.e. easily understood, and can be done by all.

## Conclusion

Understanding a custom or local tradition cannot be merely done by normative approach because tradition is not a religion, but rather it is an expression of diversity that based on the religious values. Nor tradition is a prayer. Rather, it is cultural interpretation in which religious values are contained in it. These religious values and based are also found in the *molondhalo* custom tradition. Therefore, understanding this custom tradition cannot be done by referring it back to the textual statement of the authoritative religious source, but rather by putting it philosophically and theologically on its contextual position. Traditions/customs – including *molondhalo* – are not things that are spontaneously formed. They have gone through a long process of dialectic-dialogic between religious and culture. The historical-evolutionary process between the ideal demand of the religious text and the local cultural reality, and negotiation between both has created a harmony. Custom is the form of this

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<sup>46</sup>Ahmad ibn Sa’id Khamis al-Anbali, *Terapi Sedekah untuk Kesembuhan* (Solo: Pustala Iltizam, 2011), 56.



harmony. Therefore, between the two (religious and culture) they don't negate each other, rather they complete each other. Religion is the soul and culture is the body. It is the responsibility of the religious scholar to find the soul (read: the essence) within the body (customs). *Wa al-Lāh a'lām bi al-ṣawāb*.

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