SHALAWAT PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE:

Transforming Maulid Celebrations in Contemporary Indonesia

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RADBOUD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Proefschrift ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen

op gezag van de rector magnificus prof. dr. J.M. Sanders,

volgens besluit van het college voor promoties

in het openbaar te verdedigen op

woensdag 17 december 2025

om 10.30 uur precies

door

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geboren op 1 december 1982

te Sidoarjo, Indonesië

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Dissertation to obtain the degree of doctor

from Radboud University Nijmegen

on the authority of the Rector Magnificus prof. dr. J.M. Sanders,

according to the decision of the Doctorate Board

to be defended in public on

Wednesday, 17 December 2025

at 10:30 am

by

Muhammad As'ad

born on December 1, 1982

in Sidoarjo, Indonesia

THE TRANSLITERATION NOTES

This dissertation follows the transliteration system of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) for Arabic terms, ensuring consistency in presenting technical religious concepts and classical names. Exceptions are made for readability and local usage, such as using "dakwah," "shalawat," "halal," and "haram" instead of "daʿwa," "ṣalawāt," "ḥalāl," and "ḥarām," reflecting established Indonesian usage. Contemporary names and organisations are written according to their official or widely accepted Indonesian spellings, such as Munzir al-Musawa. All transliterated Arabic terms are italicised on first use, except those fully integrated into English or Indonesian.

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Introduction

Background

On a humid evening in September 2017, thousands gathered in the Surakarta town square for a *shalawat* performance led by Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf. The massive stage, complete with professional sound systems and dramatic lighting, created an atmosphere more reminiscent of a pop concert than a traditional religious gathering. As Habib Syech began singing Arabic prayers praising the Prophet Muhammad, the crowd moved in sync, many waving Indonesian flags alongside banners of their fan clubs. Government officials, including the district head and military commander, sat cross-legged on stage alongside religious leaders. This scene, where Islamic devotion merged seamlessly with entertainment and patriotic expression, represented a remarkable transformation of the traditional *maulid* celebration in contemporary Indonesia. More significantly, it revealed how religious communities in Surakarta had adapted their practices to build resilience against both Salafi criticism of traditional rituals and the influence of radical Islamic groups in a city known for hosting such movements.

This transformation of religious practice reflects the complex evolution of Indonesian Islam. Indonesia has long been known for its moderate Islamic tradition, particularly evident in its tolerant attitude towards local culture. Scholars (Johns, 1961; van Bruinessen, 1994; Woodward, 1988) attribute this moderation to Sufi preachers who first introduced Islam to the archipelago, creating what Ricklefs (2012, p. 7) terms a 'mystic synthesis' between Javanese values and Islamic teachings.

This synthesis produced distinctive religious traditions, including the *shalawat* performance, a form derived from the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*maulid*). The practice has been documented in Java since the time of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I (1755-1792) in the Yogyakarta Sultanate (Woodward, 2011, p. 171). However, this tradition of religious moderation and cultural adaptation faced new challenges after the fall of Suharto's New Order regime in 1998. Indonesia experienced a shift toward stricter interpretations of Islam, driven by rising Islamic radicalism (Fealy, 2004; van Bruinessen, 2002; Zachary, 2006). Political reforms created space for radical groups to emerge publicly, most notably Laskar Jihad, a Salafi-oriented militant organisation, which gained notoriety for its militant activities in the Moluccas (Hasan, 2006). The Salafi movement gained further momentum through Saudi funding, establishing numerous Islamic schools *(madrasah)* and boarding schools *(pesantren)* that helped disseminate their

puritanical interpretations of Islam (Jahroni, 2013). These developments marked what scholars term 'the conservative turn of Indonesian Islam' (Hefner, 2008; van Bruinessen, 2013).

In examining the challenges to the *maulid* celebration, from the Salafis and radical Islamic groups, it is important to recognise that these two phenomena have distinct orientations. As scholars have demonstrated (Thurston, 2016; Wagemakers, 2012; Wiktorowicz, 2006), Salafism encompasses diverse orientations, from quietist scholars focused purely on religious purification to political activists and militant jihadists. Salafi criticism of the maulid primarily arises from theological concerns about innovation (*bidʿa*) in religious practice, focusing on textual evidence from the Qurʾān, ḥadīth and canonical Salafi scholars to purify religious beliefs and practices through education (taʿlim) and peaceful preaching (dakwah). In contrast, radical Islamic movements in Indonesia, represented by groups like Laskar Jihad, pursue broader political and social transformation through revolutionary means, often legitimising violence, adopting rigid scriptural interpretations, and taking confrontational stances against the existing political system. As Alexander Thurston (2016) demonstrates in the Nigerian context, while there can be overlap between Salafi puritanism and Islamic radicalism, they represent distinct phenomena; Salafism primarily aims at religious purification through scholarly authority and educational methods, while radical movements seek dramatic political change, sometimes through militant action.

Despite these challenges, traditional practices like the maulid have not only survived but evolved creatively in response. Proponents have incorporated elements of popular culture to defend and promote their traditions, mobilising what I term 'public resilience' against critics through innovative cultural practices. By 'public resilience,' I refer to the community's capacity to continuously preserve *maulid* practices, sustain nonviolent and inclusive religious discourse, and actively reject radical ideologies. The most influential example is Habib Syech's Ahbabul Mustofa group, whose performances draw thousands across Indonesia. Their success has inspired similar groups throughout Surakarta and beyond, creating a movement that actively resists Salafi criticism through cultural expression while transforming traditional religious practices for contemporary contexts.

Maulid celebrations and popular culture: historical context

The *maulid* celebration, commemorating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, originated in eleventh-century Egypt under the Fatimid caliphate. According to Kaptein (1993a), this celebration emerged first among Shiite communities before

spreading throughout the Sunni Muslim world through the patronage of rulers and scholars. The practice faced early criticism from scholars like Tāj al-Dīn al-Fākihānī (d. 1331), who questioned its religious legitimacy. This critique was later intensified by Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (1703-1792), who strongly condemned the celebration as *bidʿa* (innovation), laying the foundation for subsequent Salafi opposition to the practice.

The debate over *maulid*'s legitimacy gained new dimensions in the early twentieth century through Islamic reformists, particularly Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935). While maintaining that *maulid* constituted *bidʿa*, Riḍā suggested the practice might be acceptable if stripped of elements deemed problematic such as fabricated stories about the Prophet (Schussman, 1998, p. 229). His nuanced criticism profoundly influenced Indonesian reformist organisations, especially Muhammadiyah, shaping their approach to traditional practices in ways that continue to resonate today.

In the Indonesian context, these debates emerged primarily through returning students from the Middle East, particularly the reformist youth group *(kaum muda)*. These young scholars challenged established practices of the elderly group *(kaum tua)* who followed the Shāfiʿī school of law, creating tensions that would shape Indonesian Islam for decades to come. Early reformist organisations like Muhammadiyah adopted a measured approach, modifying rather than rejecting *maulid* practices. Their critique focused specifically on certain elements like standing (*qiyām*) during celebrations, while maintaining the broader tradition of commemorating the Prophet's birthday (see Chapter 1). This relatively tolerant stance shifted markedly in the post-1998 era (following Indonesia's democratic reforms), when the rise of Saudi-funded Salafi institutions and the emergence of groups like Laskar Jihad led to more fundamental challenges to traditional practices. The Salafi movement's growing influence through Islamic schools *(madrasah)* and boarding schools *(pesantren)* intensified criticism of local Islamic traditions, particularly targeting the *maulid* celebration (see Chapter 2).

The Hadhrami community, especially the BāʿAlawī, maintained and adapted their *maulid* traditions despite mounting criticism. Their experience in preserving these practices while adapting to contemporary challenges provided crucial foundations for subsequent transformations of the *maulid* celebration. This adaptation became particularly evident in Surakarta, where figures like Habib Anis bin ʿAlwi al-Habsyi preserved traditions that would later inspire innovative approaches to religious performance (see Chapter 3).

In recent decades, popular culture has emerged as a powerful medium for religious expression across the Islamic world. This trend is particularly evident in the phenomenon of 'art with mission' *(al-fann al-hādif)* in Egypt, where music and media actively promote pious lifestyles (van Nieuwkerk, 2011b). Similarly, Indonesia has witnessed the rise of Islamic cultural industries, from music to cinema, serving both devotional and social purposes (Heryanto, 2008). The transformation of *maulid* celebrations into large-scale *shalawat* performances highlights this broader pattern. Through innovative use of staging, music, and media, Habib Syech's Ahbabul Mustofa group has created new spaces for religious expression that resonate deeply with contemporary audiences while maintaining traditional spiritual elements (see Chapter 4).

This creative adoption of popular culture has proven remarkably effective in resisting criticism while building community resilience. As El-Hamamsy and Soliman (2013, p. 7) observe, popular culture in the Middle East and North Africa functions as 'a form of cultural resistance against different forms of global and local dominance'. The success of these adaptations in Surakarta led to the municipality's declaration of *'Solo kota shalawat'*, institutionalising support for these cultural innovations and inspiring similar groups throughout the region (see Chapter 5). The performers have developed innovative strategies to cultivate both pious and patriotic sensibilities among participants, creating a distinctive form of religious expression that effectively counters radical interpretations of Islam (see Chapter 6). These efforts have significantly shaped participants' understanding and practice of Islam, demonstrating how traditional religious practices can meaningfully adapt to contemporary contexts while maintaining their spiritual essence (see Chapter 7).

Research focus and question

The study has three primary aims: firstly, to provide detailed historical analysis of arguments for and against the *maulid* celebration; secondly, to examine its transformation from ritual practice to popular culture; and thirdly, to analyse how this transformation functions as cultural resistance against both *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism in the city of Surakarta.

In examining these three issues, the thesis addresses the central question: in how far and in which ways do *shalawat* performances in contemporary Indonesia contest Islamic radicalism?

To address this main question, the thesis poses the following sub-questions:

1. What are the main arguments of the pros and cons of the *maulid* celebration? How did the debate develop from twentieth-century Indonesia onwards until today?
2. How and why did the *maulid* celebration transform in the twenty-first century into a form of popular culture, and to what extent does popular culture play a role in the acceptance and popularity of *maulid* celebrations among young Muslims?
3. In how far did the *maulid* celebration become a form of cultural resistance against Islamic radicalism and provide the participants of the *maulid* with an alternative to Islamic radicalism?
4. How do the *shalawat* activists try to tackle *maulid* criticism and combat Islamic radicalism? What kind of alternative discourse and practice did they want to develop?
5. What are the motivations of the participants to attend the *shalawat* performance? To what extent were the participants affected by the performers' effort to create 'public resilience' against Islamic radicalism?

Literature review

Scholarship on the maulid celebration in Indonesia is limited, with the notable exception of Nico Kaptein's work, which focuses on debates between Kaum Muda (reformists) and Kaum Tua (followers of the Shāfiʿī school of law) regarding the practice of standing (berdiri) during maulid celebrations in the early twentieth century (Kaptein, 1993b). Beyond this contribution, no other research has specifically examined the *maulid*.

The maulid celebration is often described in academic works as a preserved tradition. Muhaimin's research on Islamic traditions in Cirebon notes that *maulid* manifests as an annual celebration called *gerebeg maulud*, held by three royal courts *(Kraton)*: *Kasepuhan*, *Kanoman* and *Kacirebonan*. This festival attracts significant attendance from throughout the Cirebon district (Muhaimin, 2006).

Mark Woodward's 'Java, Indonesia, and Islam' dedicates a chapter to *maulid* celebrations in Yogyakarta. Similar to Cirebon's gerebeg ritual, Yogyakarta's *gerebeg maulud* represents the Javanese kingdom's adaptation of *maulid* rituals, lasting one month annually (Woodward, 2011). Herman Beck's article 'Islamic Purity at Odds with Javanese Identity' shares Woodward's focus but emphasises reformist Muslim discourse, particularly Muhammadiyah leaders' perspectives on

gerebeg maulud (Beck, 1995). Notably, despite being a reformist organisation, Muhammadiyah does not oppose the festival, owing to its leaders' deep connections with Javanese culture. These four works on Indonesian *maulid* are now considered classic texts. Few subsequent studies have examined either the celebration itself or the discourses surrounding it. This study thus addresses a significant gap in scholarship on Indonesian *maulid*.

Furthermore, this research enriches the study of Islam and popular culture in Indonesia. Only three monographs have specifically addressed this topic. The first, edited by David Harnish and Anne K. Rasmussen (2011), illustrates various forms of music and performance incorporating Islam. They argue that throughout Indonesian history, music has served both as religious ritual and as a medium 'to spread knowledge and ideology' (Harnish & Rasmussen, 2011, p. 12). Rasmussen's subsequent work (2010), 'Women, the Recited Qur'an and Islamic Music in Indonesia', examines Indonesian Islam through music and Qur'ānic recitation, particularly highlighting women's roles. She shows how women have played a pivotal role in the Islamisation of Indonesia, particularly through their engagement in music and Qur'ānic recitation (Rasmussen, 2010, p. 211). While chapter 5 of this thesis confirms Rasmussen's findings regarding the importance of women's groups, it differs in that these groups employ musical instruments rather than solely vocal performance.

The second significant work is 'Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia' (Weintraub, 2011), which examines Muslims' engagement with music, cinema, novels, magazines, the internet and other media. Weintraub (2011, p. 1) argues that Islam and popular culture in these contexts are mutually reinforcing, deriving power from Islam's localised and flexible nature in both regions. The volume includes several analyses of Indonesian Islamic popular culture, including Bart Barendregt's examination of *Nasyid*, an emerging Islamic music genre shaped by the intersection of popular culture, politics and piety (Barendregt, 2011, pp. 235-256). The collection explores increasing expressions of Islamic piety in both countries.

A third key text, 'Performance, Popular Culture and Piety in Muslim Southeast Asia' (Daniels, 2013), also explores performance and popular culture but emphasises piety more explicitly. Daniels (2013, p. 7) explains that pious Islamic discourses are expressed through public cultural forms and their associated signs and symbols, which in turn shape and mediate everyday life and social processes. Like Weintraub's volume, this work portrays society's increasing piety and its

connections with popular culture, highlighting piety's growing influence on social and political landscapes (Daniels, 2013, p. 7).

While these studies have examined the intersection of Islam and popular culture primarily through artistic and performative expressions, recent scholarship has explored how this intersection extends to media platforms that blend entertainment with religious messaging. These studies are relevant to understanding how *shalawat* performances navigate the boundaries between traditional religious practices and modern entertainment formats.

Najib Kailani and Sunarwoto (2019) examine the phenomenon of Islamic televangelism in Indonesia, highlighting how new religious actors have emerged through contemporary media such as television and the internet. These preachers differ significantly from traditional Islamic authorities; rather than relying solely on formal religious education, many originate from secular educational backgrounds and adopt informal, youth-friendly styles. Their popularity among urban Muslim audiences demonstrates not the decline but the adaptive transformation of traditional religious authority in response to new media landscapes. This adaptation illustrates the fluid boundary between traditional forms of religious expression and contemporary cultural practices, underscoring religion's resilience in negotiating modernity.

Sunarwoto's (2016) research on radio *dakwah* in Surakarta provides particularly valuable context for this study, examining how religious content is disseminated through popular media in the same geographical setting. His work shows how radio stations function as cultural platforms where religious ideas are communicated and popularised. Through sermon broadcasts and interactive programming, these stations create spaces where Islam is experienced as both religious instruction and entertainment. This blending of religious content with media formats has parallels with the transformation of *maulid* into *shalawat* performances, as both represent efforts to make religious practices more accessible and engaging to contemporary audiences.

Recent scholarship further highlights how *habaib*, Hadhrami Arab descendants claiming lineage from the Prophet Muhammad, have strategically utilised their genealogical status and Arab identity in contemporary *dakwah* in Indonesia. Syamsul Rijal (2017; 2020) shows that, responding to Salafi-Wahhabi critiques of traditional rituals like *maulid*, these *habaib* strengthened their authority through connections to scholarly networks in Hadhramaut, Yemen, deliberately countering Saudi-based Salafi dominance. Employing performative elements such as Arab-

influenced attire, *habaib* attract large, young, urban audiences to *dakwah* gatherings like Nurul Mustofa and Majelis Rasulullah.

This research builds on previous scholarship concerning the *maulid* celebration, Islamic popular culture, and the role of Hadhrami descendants, whilst addressing the limited attention given to how traditional religious rituals transform into forms of popular culture through performance and spectacle.

Whilst scholarship on the *maulid* celebration in Indonesia remains primarily focused on historical debates between reformists and traditionalists or royal court adaptations, and studies of Islamic popular culture have examined various media platforms that blend entertainment with religious messaging, this research offers a more comprehensive analysis of the intersection between traditional ritual, cultural adaptation and resistance to radical ideologies. Although recent scholarship has documented how young *habaib* utilise their genealogical status in contemporary Indonesian *dakwah*, this study uniquely examines how *maulid* celebrations evolve into *shalawat* performances in Surakarta's complex religious landscape.

Through introducing the concept of "public resilience", expanding beyond Hirschkind's counterpublic framework, this research demonstrates how religious communities maintain traditional practices through cooperation with state institutions rather than opposition. Through extensive ethnographic fieldwork documenting both performers' innovative strategies and participants' responses, this thesis contributes significantly to our understanding of how Islamic communities navigate challenges from puritanical critics whilst building communal strength through cultural expression that remains ritually meaningful yet culturally relevant.

Theoretical framework

This section outlines the theoretical frameworks employed in this thesis, drawing on discursive tradition, contestation of religious authority, popular culture, public resilience, and the festivalisation of religious ritual to analyse data collected from both fieldwork and library research.

Discursive tradition

This thesis utilises Talal Asad's concept of 'discursive tradition' to examine Islamic beliefs and practices, with a primary focus on the evolution of maulid criticism. According to Asad (2009, p. 20), when investigating Islamic practice, "one should

begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth." Asad further observes that the Qur'ān and ḥadīth are always contextualised within the past, present, and future of Islamic practices. He defines an Islamic discursive tradition as "a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, concerning a particular Islamic practice in the present" (Asad, 2009, p. 20). This concept is valuable for exploring how different Muslim groups authenticate religious practices based on their understanding of what is correct in Islam.

A key advantage of the discursive tradition approach is that it does not require the researcher to judge a practice as correct or incorrect. Instead, it allows for an examination of how discourses of authenticity, or orthodoxy, are shaped by the arguments of various groups, their political positions, and power relations. These factors collectively determine which discourse becomes dominant in a specific time and place. The dominant discourse is consequently recognised as 'orthodoxy.' As Asad explains, "orthodoxy is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship, the relationship of power to truth. Wherever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy" (Asad, 2009, p. 22). This framework will be applied in Chapter 2 to analyse changes in the reformist Muhammadiyah organisation's stance on the *maulid* celebration.

Contestation of religious authority

In addition to Asad's framework, this thesis employs Muhammad Qasim Zaman's theory of contestation of religious authority. Zaman (2009, p. 21) examines how different religious actors assert, maintain and challenge interpretive authority in modern Muslim societies. His framework articulates how religious authority is not simply inherited but actively negotiated through various mechanisms - from traditional religious institutions to modern media platforms. In the context of Indonesian Islam, this theoretical perspective proves especially valuable in analysing how reformist Muslims (*kaum muda*) in early twentieth century Indonesia challenged established religious practices of traditional scholars (*kaum tua*) through emerging print media, and how Salafi groups later asserted their interpretive authority through Saudi-funded educational institutions (*madrasah* and *pesantren*).

The theory is particularly relevant for examining how different groups - traditional Shāfiʿī scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*), reformists, and Salafis - have contested the legitimacy of

maulid celebrations. According to Zaman (2009, p. 206), these contestations often intensify during periods of social and political transformation, as new forms of media and education create opportunities for challenges to existing religious authority. This theoretical insight helps explain why debates over *maulid* practices intensified both in early twentieth century print media and in post-1998 Indonesia with the rise of Salafi institutions (see Chapters 1 and 2). Zaman's framework thus complements Asad's concept of discursive tradition by highlighting how religious authority is actively negotiated through educational institutions, media networks, and cultural practices.

Popular culture

Talal Asad's (2009) framework of discursive tradition is useful to analyse the change of maulid criticism in Indonesian history. However, with regard to examining the new style of maulid in the form of shalawat performance, it is less suited. This thesis will use popular culture theory in Chapter 4 to explore how the maulid shifted into a more attractive style. Defining popular culture is difficult. Dominic Strinati (2004, p. xiv) describes phenomena that can be called popular culture, such as films, television programmes, or sports events that differ according to the socio-historical context. Therefore, he contends that there is no single and exclusive definition of popular culture. This understanding is similar to John Storey's (2009), one of the most important scholars who try to define popular culture comprehensively. Storey categorises popular culture into six forms. According to Storey (2009, p. 1), popular culture is mostly defined in contrast to other conceptual categories such as folk culture, mass culture, dominant culture, etc., and is 'depending on how it is used, quite different areas of inquiry and forms of theoretical definition focus are suggested' (Storey, 2009, p. 1).

These different categories can be seen in the following six definitions of popular culture proposed by Storey. The first is a culture that is widely favoured by many people. It can be in the format of books, cassettes, CDs or DVDs. This also includes attendance at concerts, sports programmes or celebrations (Storey, 2009, p. 5). The second is a culture that is the opposite of high culture. In this understanding, any culture that fails to meet the requirement of high culture is defined as popular culture. The third is popular culture as mass culture, meaning, according to Storey, that popular culture is a commercial culture intended for mass consumption. The fourth definition is a popular culture that comes originally from 'the people'. Included in this term is folk culture: 'a culture of the people for the people' (Storey, 2009, p. 9). The fifth is a definition from Antonio Gramsci who refers to popular culture as a culture used for the struggle of a subordinate group to resist a

dominant one (Bennett, 2009, p. 96). The sixth definition of popular culture is derived from the postmodernist debate on culture and identity. In this understanding, popular culture is no longer inferior to high culture because according to the postmodernists, there is no distinction between high and popular culture (Storey, 2009, p. 12).

In the context of Muslim society, especially in my case study on the *shalawat* performance, each definition of popular culture as classified by Storey could be applied. Most likely, the first definition (well-liked by many people) and the third definition (commercialised culture) can be used to interpret the phenomenon of *shalawat* performance: the *shalawat* performances are attended by thousands of people and distributed massively through the production of CDs and can be watched through online media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. Several scholars working on the Middle East have shown that popular culture becomes 'a form of cultural resistance against different forms of global and local dominance' (El-Hamamsy & Soliman, 2013, p. 7). Furthermore, van Nieuwkerk, LeVine and Stokes (2016) state that not only can popular culture mobilise resistance, but it can work in many ways, from criticising and resisting the regime in power to supporting it or being used by regimes to bolster power.

The other definitions of popular culture are less applicable to analyse the phenomenon of *shalawat* performance in the Indonesian context. The second definition of a culture that is the opposite of high culture is problematic to be used. This polarisation of high and low culture mostly emerged in the Western context (van Nieuwkerk et al., 2016); therefore, it is questionable whether this definition fits within the cultural context of Indonesia. The same reservation applies to the sixth definition of popular culture as it derives from the first one. Thus, this thesis primarily adopts Storey's definitions of popular culture as well-liked by many people, mass culture, and a site of resistance.

Counterpublic and public resilience

Concerning the use of popular culture as resistance, it is imperative to introduce the concept of counterpublic as coined by Charles Hirschkind (2006). In his work on cassette sermons in Egypt, Hirschkind (2006, p. 117) defines counterpublic as 'a domain of discourse and practice in which sensibilities are cultivated that stand in a disjunctive relationship to the public sphere of the nation and its media instruments'. In his work, Hirschkind shows that cassette sermons have become a part of popular culture and have the capability of instilling certain religious

sensibilities that were 'in tension with the moral and political exigencies and modes of self-identification of national citizenship' (Hirschkind, 2006, p. 117).

Hirschkind's concept of counterpublic complements similar terms that are conceptualised by Nancy Fraser (1990) and Michael Warner (2002). Fraser criticises Habermas' concept of public sphere because it tends to be elitist and marginalising other social groups - women, the working class and people of colour. These groups then created a counterpublic by circulating counter-discourses which formulated their interests, needs and identities (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). Confirming Fraser, Warner (2002, p. 86) argues that counterpublics emerge not only because it is subaltern but 'maintains at some level conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status'. This statement implies that a counterpublic action can appear when members of one group feel marginalised and in need of defending themselves.

The difference between Fraser and Warner's concept of counterpublic on the one hand and Hirschkind's on the other hand lies in the fact that the former two only focus on the deliberative aspect of the public sphere, while the latter added disciplinary aspects along with deliberation. As conceptualised by Hirschkind, the disciplinary element is applied in the form of ethical speech in which sensibilities are cultivated and developed into Islamic virtues. Hirschkind's conceptualisation of counterpublic has two elements: practice and discourse.

Unlike the Egyptian context, where cassette sermon preachers opposed state interests, *shalawat* performers in Surakarta counter Salafi religious sensibilities and radical Islamic teachings while maintaining an adjunctive relationship with the public sphere, as evidenced by municipal endorsement (see Chapters 5–7). Resilience here refers to the ability of performers and participants to use existing traditions and rituals to respond to critics and prohibitions of the practice they hold dear (see Chapter 4).

In his work 'The Ethical Soundscape', Hirschkind elaborates on the notion of counterpublic by examining how listening to cassette sermons effectively cultivates people's religious dispositions and sensibilities to counter certain state discourses and practices. In Surakarta, the groups of *shalawat* performance have similar intentions to instil dispositions by which they can resist and be resilient against the criticism of the Salafis through their performances. This is one of the important aspects of Hirschkind's counterpublic that manifests throughout the case studies presented in Chapters 4–7.

The creation of a counterpublic through cassette sermons and *shalawat* performances shares similar elements. Another similarity lies in the Egyptian and Indonesian contexts, both Sunni Muslim societies where the authority of *ʿulamāʾ* or preachers is substantial. In Surakarta (Chapter 7), respondents consistently follow the statements (or *fatwa*) of *shalawat* preachers in relation to Salafi criticism. This obedience relates to the doctrine of *taqlīd* (conformity to one of the four madhhabs, i.e., Ḥanafī, Ḥanbalī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī) (Kaptein, 2004). For *shalawat* participants, *taqlīd* means accepting the authority of preachers aligned with the Shāfiʿī madhhab rather than the Salafis.

Taking similarities but also differences into account, I propose to use the concept of public resilience rather than counterpublic. The *shalawat* performance in Surakarta is not a counterpublic against state dominance, but it is a public effort to resist Salafi criticism through practices and discourses analysed by Hirschkind.

In this study, public resilience is defined as a public effort by *shalawat* performers and participants to resist ideas from radical Islamic movements by cultivating discourses and practices and instilling dispositions through their performances. *Shalawat* preachers cultivate practices that challenge Salafi sensibilities, while participants continually attend performances, further strengthening their resilience (see Chapters 6–7). This framework guides the analysis across the following chapters, examining transformation of practices, institutional support, alternative discourses, and participant experiences.

Festivalisation of religious ritual

Besides the framework of public resilience, which is useful to analyse the efforts of the shalawat performers who try to tackle and combat the influence of Islamic radical groups, the theory of festivalisation of religious ritual will be applied in Chapter 5. The framework helps understand why the district government declared Surakarta as the city of shalawat. Regarding the term festivalisation, there are several definitions. One is put forward by Lucyna Przybylska (2015), who defines festivalisation as the incorporation of elements characteristic of festivals into new events. Another useful definition is provided by Emmanuel Negrier (2015, p. 19), who states that festivalisation is "the process by which cultural activity, previously presented in a regular, ongoing pattern or season, is reconfigured to form a new event." Furthermore, Przybylska (2015, p. 172) concludes that festivalisation is a celebration of cultural, religious and social elements that unite social groups.

From the above definitions, festivalisation is a reconfiguration of a festival into a new model. A point I would like to focus on is Anne Rasmussen's conception (2010, p. 125; 2001, p. 45) of festivalisation of religion. She describes festivalisation of religion as a "religious praxis framed as public spectacle." She explains that festivalisation of religion can be characterised as a mixture of religious ritual and entertainment, dogma and information, as well as piety and politics. This conceptualisation aligns with Alessandro Falassi's (1987) understanding of festival as a periodically recurrent social occasion that serves to 'renounce and then announce culture', simultaneously deconstructing and reconstructing community identity. Falassi's framework suggests that such festivalisation processes function as a mechanism for community renewal while adapting traditional practices to contemporary contexts.

Considering Rasmussen's explanation and Negrier's description, festivalisation of a religious ritual is a combination of religious ritual, entertainment, economy and politics.

What, then, is the purpose of the festivalisation of a religious ritual? Taieb Belghazi (2006) in his article 'Festivalisation of Urban Space in Morocco' argues that there are generally three purposes of a festival: cultural, political and economic. Regarding culture, festivals are seen as an important component in cultural development. This is associated, for instance, with traditional music festivals. According to Belghazi (2006, p. 101), a festival of a certain genre of music may contribute to increasing the number of musical bands in that area or bands participating in the same festival the following year. The political purpose views festivals as a useful tool for political purposes. In this view, governments or other political forces use festivals to promote their interests in upholding a dominant political system (Belghazi, 2006, p. 99). The economic purpose relates to viewing festivals as opportunities for creating jobs and stimulating economic development. This connects to most festivals attracting tourists. Therefore, a festival can be used for "enhancement and promotion of the image of the city" (Belghazi, 2006, p. 98). This focus on tourism has commodified culture, particularly *shalawat*, transforming religious rituals into "something that can be priced, bought, and sold" (Greenwood, 1989, p. 130). Eventually, this aspect transformed the shalawat into what Manning (1992, p. 291) called "a spectacle" or "a large-scale" extravagant cultural production replete with striking visual imagery and dramatic action that is watched by a mass audience. This transformation into spectacle reflects what Falassi (1987, p. 4) terms 'rites of conspicuous display', which are ritual performances where sacred elements are made visible and accessible to broader audiences, serving both communicative and community building functions. Accordingly, we should add entertainment to

the three purposes of festivalisation described by Belghazi. This new purpose connects with tourism and cultural commodification and emphasises tourist appeal to attract mass audiences. This brings us to four aspects of festivalisation of religious rituals: culture, economy, politics and entertainment. However, following Falassi's perspective, this festivalisation should not be viewed merely as commodification, but as a complex process of cultural renewal where communities reaffirm their shared worldview while adapting to contemporary social dynamics.

The perception of *shalawat* as a form of entertainment has sparked disagreements among performers. To understand this dynamic, Asef Bayat's (2007) concepts of the *paradigm of power* and the *politics of fun* offer valuable analytical tools. According to Bayat, "fun also presupposes a powerful paradigm, a set of presumptions about self, society, and life that might compete with and undermine the legitimising ideology of doctrinal power when these ideologies happen to be too narrow, rigid, and exclusive to accommodate ethics of fun" (Bayat, 2007, p. 435).

This theoretical framework helps us analyse how different *shalawat* groups navigate the tension between maintaining spiritual focus *(khushūʿ)* and incorporating elements of entertainment. While some groups emphasise traditional ritual aspects and limit entertainment to preserve religious authority, others adopt more flexible approaches that balance devotional and entertainment elements. Together with Belghazi's framework of festivalisation purposes, which include cultural, political, economic, and entertainment dimensions, and Falassi's understanding of festivals as mechanisms of community renewal, Bayat's concepts provide a robust framework for understanding how religious rituals are transformed into public festivals while maintaining a balance between religious essence and popular appeal.

Method and procedures

This study combines historical and ethnographic research. I collected data through literature study and fieldwork. For the literature study, I used library collections of twentieth- and twenty-first-century publications on the *maulid* celebration. In particular, I examined the reformist magazine *Suara Muhammadiyah* (the voice of the Muhammadiyah), first published in 1915. I also collected and analysed offline and online publications, especially from the twenty-first century, related to *maulid* criticism.

I conducted fieldwork through participant observation and interviews with performers and participants of five *shalawat* groups in Surakarta from July 2017 to

February 2018. The groups are Ahbabul Mustofa, Jamuro, Jamuri, al-Hidayah, and Jampi Sanubari. Ahbabul Mustofa (and Habib Syech) is the most influential *shalawat* group in the city, and their success influenced the establishment of other groups. The other groups were founded after and inspired by Habib Syech's performance style. I chose these five groups because they actively perform and promote *maulid* and *shalawat* in Surakarta. During my fieldwork, I attended 28 *shalawat* performances, documenting observations in detailed fieldnotes, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

I interviewed 20 performers and 40 participants across the five *shalawat* groups. I selected performers based on their active involvement as singers or percussion players. For participants, I used purposive sampling based on age and gender to ensure comprehensive coverage of experiences. My sample included 21 female interlocutors between 19 and 69 years old (average age 42) and 19 male interlocutors between 16 and 60 years old (average age 38). The higher number of female interlocutors reflects the composition of Jamuri, which consists exclusively of female performers and participants.

I conducted interviews in both Indonesian and Javanese languages. Each interview was audio-recorded, lasting 20-60 minutes, then transcribed and translated into English. I analysed the data using Atlas.ti software, employing a three-step coding technique: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

For open coding, I identified specific statements from interviews. For instance, when asking participants how performers respond to *maulid* criticism, I received several distinct answers ranging from "directly criticise the *maulid* criticism" to "simply ignore the criticism." In axial coding, I grouped these responses into two main categories: "direct response to *maulid* criticism" and "indirect response to *maulid* criticism." Through selective coding, I connected these categories into more general code "strategies for responding to *maulid* criticism." This connection process revealed a spectrum of approaches within the community, from direct confrontation to subtle persuasion to complete avoidance, showing how participants position themselves against critics.

The fieldwork presented both opportunities and challenges. My childhood exposure to *maulid* celebrations, though limited to spectating rather than active participation, provided helpful background knowledge about rituals and locations. While accessing general performances and participants was straightforward, interviewing female participants required careful navigation of gender boundaries. I

conducted these interviews after performances to respect both physical segregation and participants' engagement with the programme.

Accessing key performers, particularly Habib Syech, proved challenging without insider connections. After two months without success, an opportunity arose when I assisted an American researcher who needed translation help. This connection facilitated access to Habib Syech, enabling me to observe stage performances, conduct interviews, and interact with *rebana* players and backing vocalists. These interactions deepened my understanding of both the performances and their critics, revealing how performers mobilise *maulid* movements to counter Salafi criticism and radical Islamic teaching.

Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation comprises seven chapters that trace the transformation of *maulid* celebrations in contemporary Indonesia. Chapter One unpacks the criticisms of *maulid* by presenting three key elements: theological arguments against the practice, critiques of four common *maulid* practices, and the evolution of *maulid* criticism in Indonesian Islamic discourse from the twentieth to twenty-first century, with particular focus on Muhammadiyah's changing stance.

Chapter Two maps how Islamic radicalism and *maulid* criticism re-emerged after Suharto's fall in May 1998. The chapter explores Purist Salafis' critiques, studying their print and online publications to understand how their arguments took shape in the post-2000 era as Islamic radicalism gained prominence.

Chapter Three illuminates the dynamics between Hadhrami groups regarding *maulid* celebrations. It reveals how *Sayyid* and non-*Sayyid* groups developed distinct positions on *maulid*. The BāʿAlawī support the practice, while Al-Irsyad historically questioned specific elements without condemning the celebration entirely. The chapter chronicles how Al-Irsyad split into two groups - Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah maintaining this moderate stance and Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad adopting stricter Salafi positions declaring *maulid* as *bidʿa*. Despite these criticisms, the chapter showcases how the BāʿAlawī community in Surakarta maintains their *maulid* traditions.

Chapter Four documents how Habib Syech transformed *maulid* into popular culture in Surakarta. Drawing on John Storey's theoretical framework, it explores how he developed a stunning performance style that attracts mass audiences. Given

Surakarta's reputation as a centre of Islamic radicalism, the chapter identifies how this popularisation serves to counter *maulid* criticism.

Chapter Five uncovers two developments: the emergence of groups following Habib Syech's model and Surakarta's declaration as the 'city of *shalawat*'. Through observing five *shalawat* groups, it highlights their connections to Habib Syech's approach. The chapter then traces how municipal authorities embraced *shalawat* performances to transform the city's image from a centre of radicalism to one of peace and harmony.

Chapter Six details how *shalawat* groups counter both *maulid* criticism and radical Islamic influence. Through studying performers' views and their use of sermons and songs, it reveals how they create 'public resilience' by cultivating pious and patriotic sensibilities among participants, directly opposing radical Islamic discourses in Surakarta.

Chapter Seven explores participants' perspectives through two lenses: their motivations for attending performances and their responses to performers' efforts to build public resilience. The findings reveal three key motivations: piety, entertainment, and social interaction, while showing how performers successfully influence participants to support *maulid* celebrations despite criticism and reject Islamic radicalism.

Chapter 1[1]

Contesting maulid

Introduction

Indonesian Muslims widely celebrate the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (maulid), observed annually as a national holiday on the 12th day of Rabīʿ al-Awwal. Celebrations range from official ceremonies at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta to cultural events in local villages. Government programmes typically feature speeches by officials and sermons by prominent preachers (kiai), while cultural events include diverse activities such as the recitation of maulid texts and performances of songs praising the Prophet (shalawat).

However, certain Islamic groups have criticised maulid celebrations, arguing that neither the Prophet Muhammad nor his companions observed such commemorations. They assert that adhering strictly to the practices of the first three generations of Muslims (al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ) is more respectful (Abu Muʾawiyah, 2007; Buchari, 2013; Jawas, 2009; Ibn Bāz, 2007). This chapter argues that Salafi and Islamic reformist criticisms of the *maulid* originate from three theological arguments: the requirement of authenticity, the prohibition of innovation *(bidʿa)*, and concerns about excessive veneration leading to idolatry.

This chapter analyses these theological arguments, examines specific maulid practices they address, and traces the historical emergence and evolution of this discourse in twentieth-century Indonesia. Drawing on Talal Asad's concept of discursive tradition (Asad, 2009) and Muhammad Qasim Zaman's theory of contestation of religious authority (Zaman, 2009), the chapter explores how debates over maulid reflect deeper struggles over religious interpretation, authority, and the shaping of Islamic practices in contemporary Indonesia. These theoretical perspectives enable us to understand not only the content of the criticisms but also the dynamics of how religious traditions are negotiated and how authority is asserted and contested within the Muslim community.

In this chapter, I discuss these criticisms and classify them under two major positions within Indonesian Islamic discourse: Salafism and Islamic reformism. Salafism calls for the complete rejection of the celebration, whereas Islamic reformists may permit the *maulid* under certain strict conditions.

Salafism is an Islamic movement advocating a literal and strict interpretation of religious texts. It emphasises absolute adherence to *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God) and rejects personal interpretation of sacred texts (Wiktorowicz, 2006, p. 207). Salafis consider only the Qurʾān, the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and deeds

(ḥadīth), and the consensus of the first three generations of Muslims *(al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ)* as legitimate sources for legal and theological guidance (Lauzière, 2016, p. 8). They aim to purify Islam by eliminating what they view as innovations *(bid'a)*, striving to return to what they consider the pure practices of the early Muslim community (Meijer, 2017). Influenced significantly by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792), Salafism lacks a centralised organisation and operates through various groups and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), each with its own independent approach. Researchers such as Noorhaidi Hasan (2006), Din Wahid (2014), and Sunarwoto (2016) have categorised the Salafi groups in Indonesia into several variants, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

By contrast, Islamic reformism also advocates returning to direct interpretation of the Qurʾān and ḥadīth, but differs from Salafism by challenging the unquestioned authority of traditional Islamic scholars *('ulamāʾ)* and legal schools *(madhāhib)*. Reformism embraces rational interpretations and encourages individual reasoning *(ijtihād)* in interpreting sacred texts, drawing inspiration from figures such as Jamal al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839–1897), Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905), and Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935) (Sharabi, 1970, p. 24).

Scholars have employed various terms to describe Islamic reformism. Charles Adams (1933, p. 1) refers to it as Islamic modernism, describing it as an effort to adapt Islam from rigid orthodoxy to modern life. Deliar Noer (1973) uses modernism and reformism interchangeably. However, this thesis prefers the term 'Islamic reformism' over 'Islamic modernism.' Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), who pioneered these ideas, accepted certain modern Western concepts but within limits. He advocated social and political reform alongside religious reform, a stance endorsed by his disciple, Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), who argued that combining all three was key to successful reformation (Sharabi, 1970, p. 29). The term 'Islamic modernism' risks equating Islam with modernism, a notion neither 'Abduh nor Riḍā fully embraced. In Indonesia, 'Islamic reformism' often refers to organisations like Muhammadiyah and Persatuan Islam (Persis).

This chapter addresses several questions: What are the main arguments of proponents and opponents of *maulid*? Why do critics reject it, and when and how did this discourse emerge in Indonesia? To answer these questions, the chapter begins by identifying three theological arguments against *maulid*: the requirement of authenticity, the prohibition of *bid'a*, and the condemnation of excessive veneration. Next, I examine four *maulid* practices targeted by these arguments: serving food, standing up (*qiyām*), reciting *maulid* texts, and using musical instruments. While Salafis oppose these practices entirely, reformists may accept

them under strict conditions. To provide a balanced perspective, arguments from *maulid* proponents are also presented.

The chapter concludes by examining the emergence of *maulid* criticism in twentieth-century Indonesia through Talal Asad's concept of discursive tradition and Muhammad Qasim Zaman's theory of contestation of religious authority. Asad's framework (2009) analyses how Islamic practices like *maulid* relate to the Qurʾān and ḥadīth, exposing power dynamics and interpretive struggles. Meanwhile, Zaman's theory (2009) explains how different religious actors assert authority and challenge established interpretations. Together, these perspectives offer a robust framework for understanding the evolution of *maulid* criticism in Indonesia and the factors shaping this discourse.

1.1. Theological arguments opposing maulid

This section explains three theological arguments used by the Salafis: the requirement of authenticity, the prohibition of innovation (*bidʿa*), and the condemnation of excessive veneration and idolatry.

1.1.1. Requirement of authenticity

As discussed in the introduction, Salafis rely on the Qurʾān and ḥadīth to determine whether a religious tradition is authentic. A tradition must have textual evidence (*dalīl*) to be considered valid. *Dalīl* refers to proof derived directly from the Qurʾān or ḥadīth. Based on this principle, the Salafis argue that any religious practice not explicitly mentioned in these sources cannot be considered legitimate, as it implies the Prophet neither performed nor permitted it. This approach is, for the Salafis, the most straightforward method of validating religious rituals.

The implementation of this concept has two key consequences. First, Salafis believe in one absolute truth derived from a literal and unaltered understanding of the Qurʾān and ḥadīth. Second, they claim that Salafism represents the correct interpretation of Islam, as it strictly adheres to the practices performed by the Prophet.

This claim, in turn, provides grounds for Salafis to accuse other Islamic groups of misunderstanding Islam. They frequently label these groups as hypocritical, inaccurate, heretical (*bidʿa*), or, in extreme cases, unbelievers (*kufr*). Regarding the *maulid*, Salafis use the concept of authenticity as evidence (*dalīl*) to oppose its

celebration. Critics often argue that the stories in *maulid* books are fabricated and lack any authentic basis in the Qurʾān or ḥadīth.

1.1.2. Prohibition of innovation (bidʿa)

The second theological argument is the prohibition of innovation (bidʿa), defined as any practice not authenticated in the Qurʾān, ḥadīth, or by the Prophet's companions. Salafis consider bidʿa a grave sin, worse than other major sins (Salafi Publication, 2010). They argue that Islam has been polluted by innovations and seek to restore its purity (Wagemakers, 2016). A Salafi scholar, Sālih al-Munajjid (2016) argues that practising *bidʿa* leads to punishment in hellfire, citing the following ḥadīth:

> "In his *khutbah*, the Messenger of Allah used to praise Allah. The worst of things are those that are newly invented; every newly-invented thing is an innovation and every innovation is going astray, and every going astray is in the Fire" (Al-Khattab, 2007, p. 438).

This ḥadīth underscores that any religious practice must conform to the Qurʾān and ḥadīth, as innovations lead to misguidance and punishment. Salafis thus view themselves as true Muslims while labelling others as 'people of innovation' *(ahl al-bidʿa)* (Haykel, 2009, p. 42).

This principle is frequently used to condemn the maulid. For instance, the prominent Salafi scholar ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Bāz (1910–1999) criticised maulid celebrations for three reasons. First, the Prophet and his companions never celebrated anyone's birthday, making maulid an innovation. Second, Muslims already have two established annual celebrations: the festival of breaking the fast (ʿid al-fiṭr) and the festival of sacrifice (ʿid al-aḍḥā). Introducing a new celebration without textual basis constitutes bidʿa. Third, Ibn Bāz argued that true love for the Prophet is shown through adherence to his words and deeds, not by celebrating his birthday (Ibn Bāz, 2005).

However, this Salafi stance on bidʿa is not universally accepted. Followers of the Shāfiʿī school of Islamic law (madhhab) argue that innovation is not inherently negative. According to al-Shāfiʿī (767–820), innovations can be classified as good (bidʿa maḥmūda) or bad (bidʿa al-ḍalāla) (Fierro, 1992, p. 205). Al-Shāfiʿī maintained that innovations should be evaluated based on their compatibility with Islamic principles. To support this view, he cited a ḥadīth where ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb referred to the congregational Tarawih prayers during Ramadan as an "excellent

innovation," suggesting that new practices can be acceptable if they are in accordance with Islamic teachings (Ukeles, 2006, p. 78).

Jalaluddin al-Suyūtī, a renowned Egyptian Shāfiʿī jurist (1445–1505), echoed this perspective, asserting that the maulid is a beneficial innovation rewarded by God. However, Salafis reject this classification, arguing that no innovation (bidʿa ḥasanah) can be deemed good. For them, the ḥadīth stating "every new thing is an innovation (bidʿa), every innovation is an error (dalāla), and every error [ends up] in hellfire" is definitive and comprehensive (Duderija, 2011, p. 60). Thus, any practice not performed by the Prophet, including maulid, is deemed illegitimate and prohibited.

For opponents of the celebration, reading maulid books is forbidden due to the celebration's status, which they categorise as an innovation (bidʿa). This view is expressed by the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Iftā (al-Lajnah al-Dāʾimah lil-Buhūth al-ʿIlmiyyah wal-Iftāʾ), commonly known as Dār al-Iftāʾ. Dār al-Iftāʾ is a governmental organisation in Saudi Arabia responsible for issuing fatwa on matters of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). According to Dār al-Iftāʾ, the maulid celebration, including the recitation of maulid books, is impermissible because neither the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, nor the early generations of Muslims performed such practices. As these acts lack basis in authentic Islamic sources, they are categorised as newly invented innovations (bidʿa) (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Iftāʾ, 2005).

1.1.3. Reprehensibility of veneration and idolatry

The third theological argument is the condemnation of excessive veneration and idolatry *(shirk)*. Salafis argue that maulid involves practices that exaggerate the Prophet's status, potentially equating him with God and thus violating the concept of monotheism (tawhīd) (Katz, 2007, p. 171). In line with this, they emphasise monotheism in all Islamic rituals, including the *maulid*, warning against any actions that could compromise this core belief. For Salafis, only God is worthy of worship, and invoking religious figures as intermediaries is considered disobedience, amounting to *shirk*, the gravest sin in Islamic law (Meijer, 2009, p. 5).

The accusation of idolatry is closely linked to the belief in the Prophet's presence during the *maulid*. Supporters claim this presence is not physical but embodied in the concept of the *Nūr Muhammad* (light of Muhammad), a theme often described in *maulid* texts. Many of these texts begin with the story of this divine light, which is said to have illuminated the Prophet's birth. Some accounts describe how Amina,

the Prophet's mother, was assisted by women from Paradise, such as Sarah and Maryam, and how the newborn Prophet's body emitted light (Katz, 2010, p. 42). Proponents believe that the light of Muhammad, created by God, was the source of Adam's creation and the world itself. Through this divine light, participants believe that the Prophet's spirit is present during *maulid* celebrations.

Salafis reject the notion of the Prophet's light or spirit being present at the *maulid*. Muhammad Sālih al-Munajjid, a prominent Syrian-Saudi scholar, argues that viewing the Prophet as more than human or as divine light contradicts the Qurʾān. He cites verses such as:

Surah al-Kahf: 110

> "Say (O Muhammad SAW): I am only a man like you. It has been inspired to me that your Ilah (God) is One Ilah (God, i.e. Allah). So whoever hopes for the Meeting with his Lord, let him work righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of his Lord" (al-Hilali & Khan, 1998, p. 442).

Al-Munajjid emphasises that the Prophet was human, and asserts that claims of his spiritual presence at maulid lack foundation in the Qurʾān and ḥadīth (Sālih al-Munajjid, 1998).

In summary, the Salafis' theological arguments, the requirement of authenticity, the prohibition of innovation, and the condemnation of excessive veneration and idolatry, form the basis of their criticism of maulid. These principles are not only theoretical but are actively applied to scrutinise and reject specific practices within maulid celebrations. Understanding how these theological objections translate into criticisms of particular customs is crucial to comprehending the broader debate surrounding maulid in Indonesia.

1.2. Criticism of the maulid practice

Having established the key theological objections posed by the Salafis, we now turn to how these objections manifest in critiques of specific *maulid* practices. This section will explore four common practices within the *maulid* celebration: serving food, the act of standing up (*qiyām*), the recitation of *maulid* books, and the use of musical instruments. By analysing each practice, we will see how the Salafis apply their theological principles to argue against these customs, while also considering the counterarguments presented by proponents of the *maulid*.

Opponents of the maulid draw heavily on the opinions of the Salafi movement, which has emerged as the strongest critic of maulid rituals in contemporary times. For proponents, including the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), an organisation of Shāfiʿī madhhab followers in Indonesia, arguments often draw on the writings of medieval Islamic scholars. Contemporary scholars who advocate for the maulid frequently rely on these medieval perspectives to strengthen their defence of the celebration.

1.2.1. Serving food

Serving food is a longstanding and integral practice during the *maulid* celebration. People gather, expressing happiness through the recitation and singing of *shalawat*. After the closing prayer, the host distributes food to participants, symbolising community and shared joy.

However, Salafis challenge this practice based on their theological objections. They argue that serving food during the *maulid* lacks authenticity and constitutes an innovation (*bidʿa*). Since there is no textual evidence in the Qurʾān or ḥadīth supporting this act, they maintain that it should not be performed.

For proponents of the *maulid*, serving food is considered a positive and commendable act. This viewpoint is presented by *Pesantren* Virtual, an online platform linked with Nahdlatul Ulama. In an article titled "Etiquette of Celebrating the Prophet's Birthday," they mention al-Suyūṭī, a prominent Shāfiʿī scholar who endorsed the celebration of the *maulid* and stated that offering food is a beneficial part of the event (*Pesantren* Virtual, 2014). Even though he admitted that food distribution is an innovation, he classified it as a good innovation (*bidʿa ḥasanah*). Therefore, he advised Muslims to provide food for *maulid* participants (Kaptein, 1993a, p. 48).

In contrast, opponents such as Muhammad Sālih al-Munajjid (b. 1960), a student of ʿAbd al-ʿAziz ibn Bāz and founder of the Salafi website IslamQA.info, strongly oppose this practice. Al-Munajjid issued a fatwa declaring the serving of food at maulid celebrations to be prohibited. He argued that since the Prophet's birthday celebration has no basis in Islamic law and was not practised by the early Muslims or the four imams, it constitutes an impermissible innovation. According to al-Munajjid, any activity associated with this innovation, including serving food, is unlawful (Sālih al-Munajjid, 2013). His reasoning originates from the fundamental position that the maulid itself is an innovation; consequently, any practices connected to it are automatically deemed impermissible.

1.2.2. The act of standing up (qiyām)

A distinctive practice during the *maulid* celebration is the act of standing up (*qiyām*). Participants stand mid-celebration as a gesture of honour and respect, symbolising the Prophet Muhammad's spiritual presence, as though he is present and watching over the gathering. For many communities, *qiyām* has become an essential part of the *maulid*.

The origins of *qiyām* as a standard practice during the *maulid* celebration are not precisely known. However, Marion Katz (2007, p. 129) notes that it became popular in the early 16th century. A manuscript by Ibrāhīm ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Halabī (d. 1549) even considered qiyām compulsory. Similarly, Abu al-Suʿud (d. 1574), an Ottoman legal expert (mufti), issued a fatwa declaring that anyone who refused to stand during maulid celebrations was an unbeliever due to their lack of respect for the Prophet.

Proponents of *qiyām* offer two main arguments in its favour. First, they view it as an act of admiration and respect for the Prophet, who is believed to appear spiritually during the *maulid*. Tahir-ul-Qadri (b. 1951), a contemporary Pakistani scholar, states:

> "In the gatherings of *maulid* Nabi, sending one's salutations on the most praised Prophet in the standing position is the hallmark of the lovers; it is a praiseworthy deed. Just as in the most revered Prophet's life, respect and reverence for his person was compulsory upon the believers-the noble Companions were very cautious in maintaining their reverence and respect. Similarly today, the same respect and reverence is compulsory. In the *mawlid* gatherings or in the assemblies of poetical praise, standing whilst sending one's salutations on the most esteemed Prophet is a continuation of this show of respect and reverence. The gatherings in which the *qiyām* is performed are certainly blessed by the descent of Divine light and *baraka*" (Tahir-ul-Qadri, 2014, p. 466).

Second, some scholars argue that qiyām is an expression of joy and happiness at the mention of the Prophet's birth. Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki (1944–2004), a prominent defender of maulid celebrations, explains

> "Standing in the Prophetic *maulid* is not necessary *(wājib)* nor *sunna*, and to believe that, is not correct whatsoever. It is only an action

> done by people expressing their happiness and joy. So when it is
> mentioned that Messenger of Allah *(pbuh)* was born and came into
> the world, the listener pictures at that time that the entire universe
> shakes in happiness and joy by this blessing, so they stand to show
> their happiness. Thus, it is purely an act of custom or convention, not
> religious. Indeed, it is neither worship *('ibāda)*, commanded in the
> Sacred Law, nor *sunna*, it is simply the custom of people that is
> performed" (Al-Maliki, 2015, p. 54).

However, Salafis oppose the practice of qiyām based on theological arguments, particularly the prohibition of innovation (bidʿa) and the concern over excessive veneration. They consider qiyām an innovation and an exaggerated form of honouring the Prophet, which was forbidden even during his lifetime (Ibn Bāz, 2005). Ibn Bāz cites a ḥadīth to support this stance:

> "It was narrated that Abu Umamah said: The Messenger of Allah pbuh
> came out to us leaning on a staff, and we stood up for him. He said:
> Do not stand up as the Persians stand up to venerate one another"
> (Al-Khattab, 2008, p. 469).

Salafis argue that the Prophet's companions did not stand for him because he explicitly discouraged imitating the Persian custom of venerating leaders through standing. For them, *qiyām* during *maulid* gatherings lacks any textual basis in the Qurʾān or ḥadīth and constitutes an unlawful innovation.

In summary, the practice of *qiyām* during the *maulid* celebration remains a point of contention. Proponents view it as a meaningful expression of love, respect, and joy for the Prophet's birth, rooted in cultural customs. Opponents, particularly the Salafis, regard it as an impermissible innovation, lacking scriptural support and potentially leading to the excessive veneration prohibited in Islam.

1.2.3. The recitation of maulid books

Recitation of the maulid narrative is an integral part of the maulid celebration and is consistently included in the event. The content of the book follows standard elements, comprising supplications and praises to God, the creation of the light of Muhammad, and historical narratives about the Prophet's life (Stanton, 2015, p. 199). The narrative combines stories from prophetic traditions (ḥadīth) and the prophetic biography (al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya), which highlight supernatural occurrences during his life (Fitzpatrick & Hani Walker, 2014, p. 366). Eulogistic

stories of the Prophet, often presented in rhymed prose and odes (qaṣīda), are also key features of these texts (Faruqi, 1986, p. 83).

Four maulid books are widely used today. The first is Qasīdat al-Burda (The Poem of the Mantle) by al-Būsīrī (1211–1294). The second is ʿIqd al-jawhar fī mawlid al-nabī al-azhar (The Jeweled Necklace of the Resplendent Prophet's Birth) by Jaʿfar b. Hasan al-Barzanjī (1716–1765), commonly referred to as the maulid book of *al-Barzanjī*. The third is the maulid book *of al-Dībaʿī* by ʿAbd al-Raḥman b. Muḥammad al-Dībaʿī (d. 1537), and the fourth is Simṭ al-durar fī akhbār mawlid khayr al-bashar (The Pearl Necklace of the Best Human's Birth) by ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Habsyi (d. 1912). During the *maulid* celebration, the leader recites the *maulid* book while the participants repeat the recitation. Most often, this recitation is performed in a musical tone, resembling a song. In larger ceremonies, such as a *shalawat* performance, the recitation of the *maulid* book is frequently accompanied by an ensemble of frame drums, which adds vibrancy and enhances the overall atmosphere of the event.

In contrast, proponents argue that the recitation of maulid books is permissible and beneficial. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), an Indonesian organisation of Shāfiʿī madhhab followers, defends maulid practices on its official website. NU explains that the maulid involves celebrating the Prophet's birthday by reciting the Qurʾān and stories about his life found in maulid books, which include poems and praise of the Prophet. NU also references the agreement of some ʿulamāʾ that such practices are allowed. This includes reciting the Qurʾān, maulid books, and poems; standing up; supplicating to God; and engaging in rhythmic repetition of God's name (dhikr) (NU Online, 2015).

1.2.4. The use of musical instruments

A notable element of the *maulid* celebration is the use of musical instruments to accompany the recitation of poems and praises of the Prophet. The *rebana*, a type of frame drum traditionally made of wood or plastic and sometimes fitted with small metal disks around its edge, is the most commonly used instrument. The number of *rebana* varies with the size of the celebration; larger festivals feature more drums, creating a joyful and vibrant atmosphere that enhances the recitation of *maulid* texts.

As previously explained, the maulid, according to the Salafis, is forbidden because of the lack of proof (dalīl) from the Qurʾān and the ḥadīth. Regarding the use of musical instruments, the Salafis, in general, forbid the pleasure of music as well as

listening to and playing musical instruments, especially during the maulid celebration, which they view as completely forbidden. Ibn Bāz mentions this in one of his fatwas:

> "In addition to being *bid'a*, it (*mawlid* celebration) often includes intermixing between men and women, use of songs and musical instruments, alcohol and drugs and other evil practices in the celebrations of the Prophet's *mawlid*" (Bāz, 2005).

In terms of the ruling on listening to songs and music, Ibn Bāz provides a separate fatwa stating:

> "Listening to songs is *Haram* and *Munkar* (that which is unacceptable or disapproved of by Islamic law and Muslims of sound intellect). It causes disease and hardness of the heart and ultimately diverts people from *dhikr* (Remembrance of Allah) and performing *ṣalāh* (Prayer)" (Ibn Bāz, 2005a).

This fatwa makes it clear that the Salafis declare music forbidden. This opinion is followed by Salafis in Indonesia. One of them is Yazid bin Abdul Qadir Jawas (d. 2024), who stated that there are many illegal and idolatrous acts in the maulid celebration, including the mixing of men and women, singing, and the use of musical instruments (Jawas, 2009).

Regarding the opinion of the proponents of the maulid, a fatwa was issued by a Shāfi'ī mufti of Mecca, Aḥmad b. Zaynī Daḥlān (1817–1886). This fatwa was published along with others from several scholars in a book entitled Muhimmāt al-nafā'is fī bayān as'ilah al-ḥadīth (The Precious Gems Treating the Explanation of Questions About Current Topics). In this fatwa, someone asked about the permissibility of using a frame drum in the maulid. Daḥlān answered by stating that beating a frame drum during the celebration of the Prophet's birthday is recommended, provided that the practice is not accompanied by anything that contradicts Islamic law (Kaptein, 1997, p. 156).

A more recent fatwa was issued by the Jakarta-based dhikr group Majelis Rasulullah, which is well known for promoting Islamic piety among grassroots communities in Jakarta through shalawat and dhikr (Zamhari & Howell, 2012). Its official website includes an article responding to a question from a person named Ridwan about the ruling on beating a frame drum during the maulid celebration. The question was answered by Munzir al-Musawa (d. 2013), who stated that the

frame drum, according to the Shāfiʿī madhhab, is allowed. He explained that the benefit of playing the frame drum is to attract Muslims to the mosque, encouraging them to sit and repent to God through the singing of praises of the Prophet (Majelis Rasulullah, 2007).

1.3. Maulid criticism in twentieth century Indonesia: continuities and debates

This section explores the critiques and ongoing debates surrounding the celebration of maulid in twentieth-century Indonesia. The initial criticism was introduced by reformist Muslims who later joined the Muhammadiyah organisation. Their ideas ran counter to the traditionalist stance of adherents of the Shāfiʿī *madhhab*, who founded the Islamic group Nahdlatul Ulama and fought to keep the *maulid* tradition alive. This section offers insights into how the debates surrounding *maulid* developed, evolved and continued throughout the twentieth century in Indonesia.

1.3.1. The emergence of the criticism

The criticism of the maulid celebration in twentieth-century Indonesia is closely tied to the spread of Islamic reformism from the Middle East, led by figures like Jamal al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muhammad ʿAbduh, and Rashīd Riḍā. This ideology was brought to Indonesia by students returning from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Research shows that one of the earliest advocates of Islamic reformism in Southeast Asia was Tahir Jalaluddin (1869–1956) (Azra, 2004; Burhanuddin, 2005; Roff, 1967; Zakariya, 2005). Born in West Sumatra, he studied in Mecca and later in Cairo at al-Azhar University, where he was influenced by ʿAbduh and connected with Riḍā. He maintained ties with them through contributions to the *al-Manar* journal (Azra, 1999, p. 83).

After returning to Southeast Asia in 1899, Tahir Jalaluddin settled permanently in Malaya in 1906 (Roff, 1967, p. 61). His connection with Rashīd Riḍā gave him religious authority, enabling him to introduce Islamic reformism in Southeast Asia. He contested the authority of several ʿulamāʾ from the Shāfiʿī madhhab by criticising practices he believed contradicted the Qurʾān and the ḥadīth (Zakariya, 2005, p. 52). To bolster his activism, Tahir Jalaluddin published the journal of *al-Imam* (the leader) (1906-1908), which emulated the content of *al-Manar* (Azra, 1999, p. 82; Burhanuddin, 2007, p. 180; Roff, 1967, p. 59). He invited students he had taught in Mecca—Abdullah Ahmad (1878–1933), Djamil Jambek (1862–1947), and

Abdul Karim Amrullah (Haji Rasul, 1879–1945)—to serve as al-Imam's correspondents in West Sumatra. According to Hamka (1958, p. 77), Tahir Jalaluddin corresponded regularly with these students through mail and the publication of al-Imam. This connection inspired his students to publish their journal al-Munir (The Radiant, 1911–1915).

The relationship between Tahir Jalaluddin in Malaya and Rashīd Riḍā in Egypt, as well as between Tahir Jalaluddin and his disciples in West Sumatra, was crucial to the development of the maulid criticism discourse in Indonesia. This connection is evident in two early works addressing the criticism of the Prophet's birthday celebration. The first appeared in January 1906, when al-Manar responded to a query regarding the recitation of the maulid book of al-Dībaʿī (Al-Manar, 1906a, pp. 910–1911; Kaptein, 1993b, p. 132). The journal stated that the maulid book contained fabricated stories and false ḥadīth that claimed the Prophet's spirit was present during the celebration (Al-Manar, 1906a, pp. 910–1911; Kaptein, 1993b, p. 132). This statement angered a reader from Singapore, who sent a rebuttal letter to al-Manar published in April 1906. In response to the criticism, al-Manar reaffirmed its position, stating that the journal stood by the decision published in its January edition (Al-Manar, 1906b, p. 240; Kaptein, 1993b, p. 132).

The second publication of the *maulid* criticism appeared in the journal *al-Imam*, edited by Tahir Jalaluddin in November 1906. The questioner (*mustafti*) was his disciple from West Sumatra, Abdullah Ahmad, who inquired about the ruling on the practice of *qiyām* in the *maulid* celebration according to Islamic law. In response to this question, *al-Imam* stated that the practice of *qiyām* was not authentic, as there was no ḥadīth supporting it, nor was it practised by the early generations of Muslims (Al-Imam, 1906, p. 150; Kaptein, 1993b, p. 134).

Both articles were published in 1906. It is likely that both Tahir Jalaluddin, as the editor of *al-Imam*, and Abdullah Ahmad, as the *mustafti*, were aware of the publication of *al-Manar* on the *maulid* celebration. The connection between the topics addressed in *al-Manar* and *al-Imam* is no coincidence. As confirmed by Abu Bakar Hamzah (1991, p. 1), al-Imam was a replica of al-Manar, not only in terms of the journal's style but also because it occasionally adopted some of al-Manar's content and translated it into the Malay language.

These two journals appear to mark the beginning of the struggle between the reformist youth group *(kaum muda)*, who criticised traditional religious practices, and the elderly group *(kaum tua)*, who were generally more lenient and supportive of rituals such as the *maulid* celebration. These publications (and other later

printings and journals by Islamic reformists) provided an opportunity for the reformists to contest the authenticity of the opinions held by the *kaum tua* in the interpretation and discourse of Islam in Indonesia (Burhanuddin, 2007, p. 202). This contestation is evident in the debates that followed in West Sumatra concerning several religious issues between the *kaum tua* and *kaum muda*, including the practice of *qiyām*. The first public discussion on this matter was held in Padang, West Sumatra, in 1907, focusing on the issue of standing up during the *maulid*. On that occasion, the reformists employed the rationale presented in *al-Imam* to defend their stance against this practice (Kaptein, 1993b, p. 134).

After the discussion, further debates on qiyām arose, both in public forums and written texts. The first criticism of the maulid celebration published in Indonesia (then the Dutch East Indies) was written by Haji Rasul in 1909. In his work, he explained the proper way of celebrating the Prophet's birthday (Amrullah, 1914). His criticism continued in 1913 when he published another book emphasising the use of the Qurʾān and ḥadīth instead of blindly following the statements of the ʿulamāʾ (taqlīd), which was a common practice among the kaum tua (Amrullah, 1913, pp. 4–8).

This dispute persisted for several years, culminating in a public debate held in Padang on 15 July 1919. The debate was moderated by Schrieke (1890–1945), a representative of the Bureau of Native Affairs from Batavia (Jakarta). However, no consensus was reached, as both groups maintained their respective arguments. Following the debate, several publications were released by proponents and opponents of qiyām, supporting or opposing its practice. According to Kaptein (1993b, p. 148), these debates ceased in 1920, as no further publications addressing qiyām in the maulid celebration appeared.

Analysing the above publications of the maulid's criticisms in early twentieth-century Indonesia, it is interesting to note that the debate between the kaum muda and kaum tua in Padang focused solely on the practice of qiyām in the maulid celebration. This indicates that, from the beginning, the reformists in Padang did not reject the concept of the maulid celebration itself. They only disapproved of certain practices within the celebration, which they deemed contrary to the Qurʾān and ḥadīth. Notably, Haji Rasul, who wrote several books and articles challenging the practice of standing up, continued to recite the maulid of *al-Barzanjī* but refrained from practising qiyām (Hamka, 1958, p. 70).

The stance of the reformists in Padang mirrored that of the reformists in Yogyakarta, who established the Muhammadiyah organisation in 1912 (Peacock,

1978). Regarding the celebration of maulid, Muhammadiyah expressed its opinion in the journal Suara Muhammadiyah (Voice of the Muhammadiyah) in 1921. In that edition, written in Javanese, Suara Muhammadiyah stated that the maulid celebration was permissible as long as it was conducted with good intentions and aimed to increase the piety of Muslims (Suara Muhammadiyah, 1921).

In the 1928 edition of Suara Muhammadiyah, another publication on the maulid appeared in the form of a question-and-answer column (kolom tanya jawab). A reader named Slamet submitted a letter with questions about religious issues, two of which pertained to the rulings on reciting the maulid of *al-Barzanjī* and praising the Prophet (shalawat) outside of prayer times. The editor replied that reciting *al-Barzanjī* was allowed but cautioned the reader not to regard it as a religious ritual, as the Prophet himself never practised it. Regarding shalawat, the editor permitted it but warned that neglecting daily prayers would render the shalawat impermissible (Suara Muhammadiyah, 1928, pp. 440–442).

This answer indicates that the reformists in Yogyakarta permitted *maulid* celebrations, including the recitation of *Barzanjī*, one of the four most popular *maulid* texts cited earlier. This is in line with the reformists in Padang, who also approved of the *maulid* and *Barzanjī* recitations but disapproved of *qiyām* and rejected the belief that the Prophet was present at the celebration. The similar stance of Muhammadiyah in Yogyakarta and the reformists in Padang can be attributed to the relationship between Haji Rasul and Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah. Haji Karim Amrullah, better known as Hamka, explained this connection in his biography of his father, Haji Rasul. Hamka (1958, p. 88) notes that Haji Rasul visited Ahmad Dahlan (1868–1923) in Yogyakarta in 1917. During this visit, it became clear that Ahmad Dahlan was a subscriber to *al-Munir*, a journal in which Haji Rasul regularly contributed. Upon returning to Padang, Haji Rasul expressed admiration for Ahmad Dahlan's work and Muhammadiyah. In 1925, Haji Rasul joined Muhammadiyah and established its branch in Padang (Hamka, 1958, p. 151). Hamka's account highlights the close connection between Ahmad Dahlan and Haji Rasul. The former subscribed to *al-Munir* and read Haji Rasul's contributions, while the latter was inspired by Muhammadiyah, which Ahmad Dahlan had founded. Consequently, it is not surprising that the reformists in Yogyakarta shared similar views with those in Padang regarding the *maulid* celebration.

The early twentieth-century debates over the *maulid* celebration in Indonesia underscore a significant moment of contestation over religious authority, as theorised by Muhammad Qasim Zaman. Reformist Muslims, influenced by modernist thinkers like Muhammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā, began challenging the

long-standing religious practices endorsed by the traditionalist scholars of the Shāfiʿī *madhhab*. By questioning rituals such as the practice of *qiyām* during the *maulid*, they were not merely disputing specific customs but were fundamentally contesting who held legitimate authority to interpret Islamic teachings.

This contestation is evident in the way reformists like Tahir Jalaluddin and his students utilised emerging print media, journals like *al-Imam* and *al-Munir*, to disseminate their critiques. By publishing *fatwas* and engaging in public debates, they leveraged modern platforms to assert their interpretive authority. This corresponds to Zaman's observation that modern contexts often provide new opportunities for disputes over religious authority (Zaman, 2009, p. 206).

Furthermore, these debates highlight the dynamic nature of Islamic traditions, as conceptualised by Talal Asad's notion of discursive tradition. Reformists engaged with foundational texts of the Qurʾān and ḥadīth to reinterpret practices like the *maulid*, contextualising them within their contemporary understanding of Islam. They sought to bring religious practices closer to what they considered authentic teachings, demonstrating that tradition is not a static inheritance but an active process of interpretation and re-interpretation.

By advocating for a return to primary texts and challenging the reliance on *taqlīd* (blind adherence to traditional scholars), the reformists were participating in a discourse that re-evaluated dominant practices. The process underscores Asad's idea that orthodoxy is shaped through power relations and the ability of groups to assert and regulate what is considered correct practice (Asad, 2009, p. 22). In this context, the reformists' efforts represent an attempt to redefine orthodoxy by promoting their interpretations as more authentic.

Analysing Muhammadiyah's stance on the *maulid* celebration during the first three decades of the twentieth century reveals that reformist Muslims sought to promote a new orthodoxy regarding the *maulid* ritual. They did this by challenging the legality of *qiyām* in the *maulid* ritual, debating proponents of the *maulid*, and publishing critiques. By doing so, reformist Muslims denounced certain practices within the *maulid* as unlawful and pushed for what they believed to be the correct practice. This activity corresponds with Talal Asad's concept of discursive tradition, in which orthodoxy provides Muslims the power to condemn, exclude, and replace one ritual with another (Asad, 2009, p. 22).

Besides Muhammadiyah, another stance can be observed in a smaller reformist organisation, Persatuan Islam *(*Persis / Islamic Union). Established in 1921 in

Bandung, West Java, by two traders from Palembang, Haji Zamzam and Haji Muhammad Yunus (Federspiel, 2001, p. 84), Persis expressed its view on the maulid in the journal Pembela Islam around 1930. In the journal, Ahmad Hassan (1887–1958), then chairman of Persis, responded to questions regarding several issues in the maulid celebration. He stated that reciting the maulid book and believing that God would reward the action was an innovation. He also criticised the practice of qiyām, asserting that there were no sources supporting the claim that the Prophet was present during the maulid celebration (Hassan, 1977, pp. 371–374).

In general, Ahmad Hassan's stance represents Persis' view, which differed from that of the reformists in Padang and Yogyakarta, who commemorated the Prophet's birthday with modifications. This divergence between Muhammadiyah and Persis regarding the maulid may be influenced by their distinct social backgrounds. According to Najib Burhani (2005), Ahmad Dahlan and nine other founders of Muhammadiyah were known for their roles as staff (abdi dalem) of the Javanese kingdom of Yogyakarta. This affiliation may have promoted tolerance for certain Javanese traditions blended with Islam. This tolerant attitude is evident in Muhammadiyah's stance towards the *gerebeg maulud*, a festival celebrated annually in *Rabīʿ al-Awwal* in Yogyakarta by thousands of people. Muhammadiyah viewed this celebration as a cultural expression and refrained from criticising it (Beck, 1995).

In its early years, Muhammadiyah focused more on Islamic educational activism, especially the establishment of Islamic schools, which were rare at the time, rather than issuing religious rulings (Federspiel, 1970, p. 58). In contrast, Persis prioritised religious purification, particularly the elimination of practices it regarded as innovations. Leading figures of Persis promoted what they considered the "proper interpretation of Islam" (Noer, 1973, p. 135; Federspiel, 2001, pp. 87–88). These differing social contexts likely contributed to the distinct approaches of the two reformist organisations towards the maulid celebration.

Besides the writings of the reformists on the maulid, there was one book written by a proponent of the maulid, KH. Hasyim Asy'ari (1871–1947), the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), an organisation founded by adherents of the Shāfiʿī madhhab in 1926 (Anam, 1985). The book is entitled *Obligatory warnings for those who created maulid with rejected conducts* (*al-tanbīhāt al-wājibāt liman yaṣnaʿ al-mawlid bi al-munkarāt*). The content of the book is a proposal on how to celebrate the *maulid* appropriately. It was based on his observation during a visit to Madiun, East Java, in 1936. In that region, he observed an 'inappropriate' *maulid* performance. He described five aspects of the performance as improper: the use of

martial arts or boxing, musical instruments, loud voices, dancing, and the mixing of women and men (Asy'ari, 2012, p. 21). To address this, Hasyim Asy'ari suggested the correct form of the maulid celebration in the following order: gathering people in one place, reciting the Qur'ān, reciting the Prophet's biography (maulid books), and serving food. If participants wanted to use musical instruments, they could use a frame drum (rebana) (Asy'ari, 2012, pp. 10–11).

The tone of this book differs from reformist criticism. Notably, the writer did not use the word "innovation" to explain the ruling on the celebration of the Prophet's birthday. As someone supportive of the celebration, it is logical that he did not condemn the *maulid* as an innovation. Instead, he clarified certain practices in the celebration that he considered incorrect. Regarding the performance, he did not mention *qiyām* or the presence of the Prophet, which are usually criticised by reformists. It is probable that, concerning these two issues, Hasyim Asy'ari did not oppose these practices. With regard to the use of musical instruments, he did not reject it entirely; rather, he confirmed that *maulid* participants could use the frame drum, provided it was used in an appropriate manner. The book criticised some parts of the *maulid* but supported its celebration while opposing the use of musical instruments other than frame drums.

Overall, the debates surrounding the celebration of *maulid* in Indonesia during the early to mid-twentieth century reflect a broader contestation over the authenticity and interpretation of Islamic practices. While some reformist Muslims, such as those associated with Muhammadiyah and Persis, challenged certain traditional practices associated with the *maulid* celebration, others approved of it with modifications, seeking to bring it more in line with the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. Despite these debates, the discussion did not conclude during this period. Notably, the stance of organisations like Muhammadiyah underwent significant shifts towards the late twentieth century, influenced by both internal dynamics and external factors. The following section will address this evolution, providing further insights into the ongoing debates surrounding the *maulid* celebration in Indonesia.

1.3.2. The shift of Muhammadiyah

At the start of the New Order regime (1967-1998) under President Suharto, the political landscape shifted significantly. Islamic organisations and parties faced considerable pressure. While religious practices were allowed, political expressions were heavily restricted (Hefner, 2000; Liddle, 1996; Porter, 2002; van Bruinessen, 1995). Islamic parties were consolidated into the United Development Party (Tamara, 1990; Truna, 1995; van Bruinessen, 1995). To further control Islamic

movements, the government established institutions like the Council of Indonesia *'ulamā'* (MUI) and the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI), aiming to unify Muslim leadership and maintain intra-religious harmony (Hefner, 1993).

During this period, the only *maulid* criticism that I found from the reformist organisation of Muhammadiyah that was issued in *Suara Muhammadiyah* in 1987. This criticism arose from a reader's query about an earlier article in the journal, which claimed that maulid books such as Barzanjī and Dībaʿī contained false information.

To address the question, Suara Muhammadiyah referred to the book by KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, which outlined the rulings on the maulid celebration. According to the journal, the maulid was permissible as long as it involved reading the Prophet's history and giving alms. However, it emphasised that the maulid was prohibited if it included musical instruments, the mixing of men and women, or loud voices. Regarding maulid books, Suara Muhammadiyah provided the following clarification:

> "In the *maulid* book of *al-Dībaʿī*, there are some statements that need to be scrutinised, for instance: the *Quraysh* (the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad) was the light that was created before the creation of Adam. And before Adam was created from clay, God firstly put the *Quraysh's* light inside that clay. In addition to that, there were more accounts that went against the religious tenets" (Suara Muhammadiyah, 1992, pp. 147–150).

This statement did not prohibit the *maulid* celebration. By citing KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, *Suara Muhammadiyah* implied that the celebration was allowed as long as practices such as the use of musical instruments, loud voices, and the mixing of men and women were avoided. However, it did not mention Hasyim Asy'ari's approval of frame drums (*rebana*). The journal's stance on *maulid* books in 1987 contrasted with its 1928 position, which had stated that *maulid* books were permissible to recite. In 1987, Muhammadiyah offered an ambiguous position, acknowledging problematic content in *maulid* books but refraining from explicitly prohibiting or endorsing their recitation.

In this regard, Muhammadiyah changed its stance pertaining to *maulid* books in 1987. At this time, it neither recommended nor denounced the use of *maulid* books in the celebration of the Prophet's birthday. However, the magazine criticised the content of *maulid* texts, asserting that certain information within these books

needed to be scrutinised. This shift indicates a growing scepticism towards practices associated with the *maulid* and a move towards a more conservative interpretation of permissible religious practices.

The shift in Muhammadiyah's stance on the recitation of *maulid* books by 1987 likely resulted from internal and external dynamics within the organisation. During its early period (1912–1930), Muhammadiyah had strong Javanese influences. As Najib Burhani (2005) notes, Ahmad Dahlan and nine other founders were staff members of the Javanese kingdom of Yogyakarta. This cultural background led Muhammadiyah to tolerate Islamic traditions intertwined with Javanese culture, such as the *gerebeg maulud* (the royal *maulid* festival) and *slametan*, which were considered acceptable. Consequently, in 1921 and 1928, Muhammadiyah's stance towards the *maulid* celebration and the recitation of *maulid* books was tolerant.

However, after 1930, Muhammadiyah underwent an ideological shift towards a more puritan stance, moving away from cultural accommodations to a stricter interpretation of Islamic practices. Burhani (2006, p. 4) mentions that this change was influenced by both internal and external factors.

One key internal factor was the establishment of the *Majelis Tarjih* (Council of Legal Affairs) in 1928. This council was responsible for issuing religious rulings (*fatwas*) and providing guidance on Islamic jurisprudence. Under the leadership of figures like KH. Mas Mansur (1896–1946), who served as the first coordinator of *Majelis Tarjih* and later as the chairman of Muhammadiyah from 1936 to 1942, the organisation began to emphasise the purification of Islamic practices by returning strictly to the Qur'ān and ḥadīth (Alfian, 1989, p. 176; Burhani, 2006, p. 18). KH. Mas Mansur advocated for *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) over *taqlīd* (blind adherence to traditional interpretations). He encouraged critical engagement with Islamic texts and sought to eliminate practices considered as *bidʻa* (innovation). This internal push towards reform and purification led Muhammadiyah to re-evaluate its stance on various local customs, including the *maulid* celebration.

Another internal factor was the influence of Muhammadiyah members from Minangkabau, who hosted the nineteenth Congress of Muhammadiyah in 1930. Burhani (2006) states that Muhammadiyah members in Minangkabau were culturally different from their Javanese counterparts; they were more puritanical, while the Javanese were more tolerant of local practices. The involvement of Minangkabau figures introduced a more conservative perspective, challenging the accommodation of local traditions and reinforcing the move towards stricter interpretations.

An external driver of this shift was the dissemination of Wahhabi ideology after Ibn Saud's conquest of Mecca and Medina in the 1920s and the formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism emphasises strict monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and opposes any form of innovation or practices not rooted in the Qurʾān and *sunna* (Commins, 2006, pp. 52–53). Indonesian students and pilgrims who travelled to the Middle East were exposed to these ideas and brought them back to Indonesia (Hasan, 2007, p. 58). The influx of Salafi thought influenced Muhammadiyah's leadership and scholars, encouraging them to adopt a more stringent approach towards religious practices. This external influence reinforced the internal push for purification and contributed to the organisation's shifting stance on the *maulid*.

As a result of these internal and external dynamics, Muhammadiyah's stance towards the recitation of *maulid* books changed. In 1987, the organisation suggested its followers be cautious with the recitation of *maulid* books due to their questionable contents. This shift is evident in Muhammadiyah's publications. In the 1987 issue of *Suara Muhammadiyah*, the organisation's official magazine, a response to a reader's question reflected a more cautious approach towards the *maulid* celebration. The magazine expressed concerns about the content of *maulid* books like *Barzanjī* and *Dībaʿī*, suggesting that they contained inaccurate information and exaggerations not supported by the Qurʾān and ḥadīth (Suara Muhammadiyah, 1987, pp. 147–150). This contrasts with earlier publications where Muhammadiyah had permitted the recitation of *maulid* books, as long as they were intended to inspire piety. The shift indicates a growing scepticism towards practices associated with the *maulid* and a move towards a stricter interpretation of acceptable religious practices.

Muhammadiyah's initial tolerance towards the *maulid*, influenced by its founders' Javanese cultural background, reflects an earlier engagement with Islamic practices that accommodated local customs. However, as internal dynamics shifted – with the establishment of the *Majelis Tarjih* and the influence of figures like KH. Mas Mansur – the organisation began to reassess its practices.

This reassessment illustrates that orthodoxy is not static but contingent, shaped by those who hold the authority to define and regulate correct practices (Asad, 2009, p. 22). The rise of more puritanical interpretations within Muhammadiyah, driven by internal actors advocating for stricter adherence to the Qurʾān and ḥadīth, led to a redefinition of what was considered orthodox within the organisation. The power relations shifted, allowing these actors to influence the organisation's stance on practices like the recitation of *maulid* books.

Moreover, this internal shift resonates with Zaman's concept of the contestation of religious authority. The changing perspectives within Muhammadiyah represent a struggle over who has the legitimacy to interpret Islamic teachings and prescribe acceptable practices. The adoption of more conservative views was not merely a theological evolution but also a reassertion of authority by certain factions within the organisation. They contested the previous interpretations that had allowed for the *maulid* celebration, positioning themselves as the custodians of authentic Islamic practice.

External influences, such as the spread of Wahhabi ideology and the increasing prominence of Salafi thought, further intensified this contestation. The influx of these ideas challenged traditional practices and provided additional support for those within Muhammadiyah advocating for purification and reform. This external pressure reinforced internal efforts to redefine orthodoxy, illustrating how broader movements within the Islamic world can impact local religious dynamics.

In essence, Muhammadiyah's evolving stance on the *maulid* celebration reflects the complex interplay between internal organisational dynamics and external ideological influences. These shifts signal how religious authority is contested and renegotiated over time, leading to changes in what is considered orthodox practice. This process underscores both Asad's and Zaman's theories, highlighting the flexible nature of tradition and ongoing disputes over interpretive authority within Muslim communities.

Muhammadiyah's position is further reinforced in the post-2000 era, as will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapter. This development has coincided with the increasing prominence of the Salafi critique of *maulid*, which has gained greater exposure due to the growing prevalence of Salafi groups from the year 2000 onwards.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored the arguments of both proponents and opponents of the *maulid*, seeking to understand why critics reject its celebration and how this discourse has evolved in the Indonesian context.

We began by analysing the theological arguments of the Salafi movement, focusing on three key principles: the requirement of authenticity, the prohibition of innovation (*bid'a*), and the reprehensibility of veneration and idolatry. These

principles form the foundation of the Salafi critique, positioning the *maulid* as an unwarranted innovation, lacking textual evidence from the Qurʾān and ḥadīth.

By examining practices such as serving food, standing (*qiyām*), reciting *maulid* texts, and using musical instruments, we outlined how these arguments are applied in practice. Salafis oppose these activities as *bidʿa*, while proponents, drawing on Shāfiʿī traditions, view them as commendable innovations or expressions of devotion, reflecting the diversity of Islamic interpretations.

The chapter also traced the historical emergence of *maulid* criticism in twentieth-century Indonesia, highlighting debates between reformist Muslims and traditionalists. Reformists, including those who later joined Muhammadiyah, often challenged specific practices while still participating in *maulid* celebrations. Over time, Muhammadiyah's stance shifted from tolerance to a more puritanical position, shaped by internal dynamics such as the creation of Majelis Tarjih and external influences like the rise of Salafi movements.

This evolution matches Talal Asad's framework of discursive tradition, illustrating how orthodoxy is reshaped by power relations within religious communities. Traditions are actively reinterpreted, and the authority to define correct practice is contingent upon these dynamics. Similarly, Muhammad Qasim Zaman's theory of religious authority highlights how the debates over *maulid* reflect broader struggles over interpretive power, as both Salafi and reformist groups contested traditionalist authority to assert their own interpretations.

These debates provide insights into the ongoing tensions in Indonesian Islam, particularly between traditionalist groups like Nahdlatul Ulama, reformist movements like Muhammadiyah, and more puritanical groups like the Salafi movements. Centred on issues of tradition versus reform and authenticity versus innovation, these tensions intensified in the post-New Order era, as political liberalisation created space for new religious actors and more assertive ideological expressions.

As we move to the next chapter, our focus shifts to the resurgence of Islamic radicalism and its impact on the *maulid* discourse, with particular emphasis on Muhammadiyah's evolving position regarding the recitation of the *maulid* book *Barzanjī*. This analysis will explore how the rise of Salafism and its doctrinal assertions have significantly influenced Muhammadiyah's stance, reflecting broader trends of religious conservatism and reform within Indonesian Islam. Through this lens, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics that

shape the practice and perceptions of *maulid* celebrations in the modern Indonesian context.

Chapter 2[2]

Islamic radicalism and the re-emergence of *maulid* criticism

Introduction

The preceding chapter traced how criticism of the *maulid* celebration evolved throughout the twentieth century, driven by theological debates between reformist Muslims and traditionalists. While these early criticisms initially focused on specific practices such as *qiyām*, the discourse underwent significant transformation in post-New Order Indonesia. This chapter examines the emergence of a more comprehensive and systematic critique of the *maulid*, particularly following the fall of the Suharto regime in May 1998. Although *maulid* criticism had surfaced sporadically before, it re-emerged with greater intensity in the post-reform era, largely due to the influence of Salafi groups who questioned not only specific practices but the legitimacy of the celebration itself. This intensification is evident in the proliferation of publications and online sermons condemning the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, arguing that it lacks authenticity and falls into the category of *bid'a* (innovation), and thus forbidden.

In the wake of the political and social transformations after 1998, Salafism in Indonesia experienced rapid growth and diversification. Scholars such as Noorhaidi Hasan (2006) initially identified two predominant groups within the Salafi movement: the Yemeni and the Sururi. The Yemeni group consisted of followers of the Yemeni Salafi scholar Muqbil ibn Hādī al-Wādi'ī (d. 2001), while the Sururi group comprised followers of Muhammad Surur bin Nayef al-'Abidin (d. 2016). However, Din Wahid (2014) later proposed a more nuanced taxonomy, distinguishing three distinct factions: the Purists, the *Haraki*, and the Jihadists. The Purists focus on loyalty to rulers, emphasising *dakwah* (preaching) and education, and advocate peaceful methods in their pursuit of an Islamic community. The *Haraki* faction does not advocate unconditional loyalty; instead, it emphasises the strict enforcement of Islamic law and expresses opposition if leaders fail to uphold this standard. The Jihadists, representing the most radical faction, are prepared to employ violent tactics against rulers they consider un-Islamic.

This chapter investigates the reasons behind the renewed *maulid* criticism, particularly within the context of burgeoning Islamic radicalism and the rise of Salafism in Indonesia. By employing Talal Asad's (2009) concept of discursive tradition and Muhammad Qasim Zaman's (2009) theory of the contestation of religious authority, this chapter explores how these renewed debates over the *maulid* reflect deeper struggles over religious interpretation, authority, and the shaping of Islamic practices in contemporary Indonesia. These theoretical perspectives allow us to understand not only the content of the criticisms but also

the dynamics of how religious traditions are negotiated and how authority is asserted and contested within the Muslim community.

The central question this chapter addresses is: To what extent has the development of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia shaped the re-emergence of *maulid* criticism? To answer this question, this chapter first examines the purist faction of Salafism in the Indonesian context, highlighting its active role in critiquing the *maulid* in the twenty-first century. In addition, the chapter considers the stance of the reformist organisation Muhammadiyah which, though less intense than the Salafis, has also voiced criticisms of the *maulid* during this period. It is important to compare the religious positions of purists and reformists, and to examine how Salafi influence has affected changes in Muhammadiyah's stance on the *maulid* celebration. Drawing on Asad's and Zaman's theoretical frameworks, this chapter aims to provide an analysis of the re-emergence of *maulid* criticism in Indonesia and its reflection of broader dynamics within Islamic thought and practice.

This chapter is structured into three main sections. The first examines Salafi criticism of the *maulid*, focusing on the Purist Salafi movement's growth in Indonesia and its systematic critique of *maulid* practices in the twenty-first century. It includes an analysis of both print and online publications through which Salafis disseminate their views. The second section investigates reformist *maulid* criticism, particularly Muhammadiyah's evolving stance in the contemporary era and how it has been influenced by the rise of Salafism. Here, the analysis expresses how Muhammadiyah negotiates between its reformist principles and the growing pressure of puritanical interpretations.

The final section provides a comparative analysis of these various forms of criticism, illustrating how they reflect the shifting landscape of religious authority and the transformation of Islamic practices within the discourse of Indonesian Islam.

2.1. Salafi criticism of the maulid

In post-New Order Indonesia, the Salafi movement wields significant influence on Islamic discourse, especially regarding religious practices. Purist Salafis, known for their loyalty to rulers and their emphasis on educational *dakwah* programmes, lead the critique against what they consider innovations in Islamic traditions, notably the *maulid* celebration. They argue that this event lacks a basis in early Islamic practice, emphasising strict adherence to the Qur'ān and *sunna*.

In contrast, the *Ḥaraki* faction advocates the application of Islamic law across all aspects of life, including politics, yet rejects absolute loyalty to state authority. The Jihadists, while sharing the *Ḥaraki* faction's objective of establishing an Islamic society under Islamic rule, distinguish themselves by endorsing violence to confront governance deemed contrary to Islamic principles (Wahid, 2014).

This dynamic underscores the Purist Salafis' unique position in publicly critiquing *maulid* as an innovation (*bidʻa*). Their commitment to reform through education and preaching supports their opposition to *maulid*, reflecting broader theological and ideological commitments to purify Islamic practices by strictly following the example of the earliest Muslim generations (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*). This approach also illustrates the dynamics of contestation of religious authority as described by Muhammad Qasim Zaman (2009), where the Salafis assert their interpretative authority over Islamic tradition. To understand how this assertion of authority manifests in practice, this chapter first examines the historical development and organisational structure of the purist Salafi movement in Indonesia. The subsequent section will focus on the purist Salafi movement's critique of *maulid*, underscoring its roots and impact on Islamic religious discourse.

2.1.1. The movement of the Purist Salafis

The Purist Salafi movement in Indonesia can be traced back to 1967, when the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII, Indonesian Council for Islamic Propagation) was founded by Mohammad Natsir, a former Indonesian Prime Minister and one of the leading figures of Rābiṭat al-ʻĀlam al-Islāmī, a Saudi-funded organisation aiming to spread Salafi ideas across the Muslim world (Kahin, 2012). With its founder's support, DDII channelled funding from Saudi Arabia to renovate local mosques (including university mosques), distribute copies of the Qurʾān and Islamic books, and train Islamic preachers. Although DDII has not explicitly declared itself a Salafi educational institution, it has played a significant role in disseminating Salafism in Indonesia. According to Hasan (2008, pp. 96–97), these activities particularly impacted universities, where students became more aware of Islamic teachings and their obligations to practise religious rituals.

Apart from DDII, Salafi ideas have been nurtured and spread through *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Bahasa Arab* (LIPIA, Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies) in Jakarta. This educational institution, established in 1980 with funding from Saudi Arabia, focuses on the study of Arabic language and Islamic studies. In its early years, LIPIA primarily trained DDII preachers in Arabic before they pursued further studies in Saudi Arabia. Over time, LIPIA expanded by offering an

undergraduate programme in Islamic law, providing opportunities for talented students from Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) and Islamic schools (*madrasah*) across Indonesia to study in Jakarta. This programme offered scholarships, living allowances, and books to its students. Top graduates were often sent to Saudi universities to continue their studies.

These graduates subsequently played pivotal roles in disseminating Salafi teachings in Indonesia (Jahroni, 2013, p. 168). Upon returning from Saudi Arabia, they set up networks by founding new pesantren, social and educational foundations (yayasan), and madrasah that adopted the Salafi curriculum. Key figures among these graduates included Abu Nida, Ahmad Faiz Asifuddin, and Aunur Rofiq Ghufron (Hasan, 2006, p. 44). One of the earliest pesantren resulting from this programme was Ihya al-Sunnah, founded in 1994 near Yogyakarta (Hasan, 2008, p. 254, 2011, p. 98). During the New Order regime, this pesantren operated discreetly to avoid suspicion from the authorities. After the collapse of the Suharto regime, with continued Saudi funding, the Salafi movement expanded significantly, building numerous pesantren in other regions.

The exact number of these pesantren is uncertain. In 2004, the International Crisis Group (ICG) reported 52 Salafi pesantren (ICG, 2004). However, more recent data from the Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) at UIN Jakarta in 2017 indicated a higher number. According to a PPIM survey (Berita UIN Online, 2018), there were 111 Salafi educational institutions, including 95 pesantren, 11 elementary schools, 3 higher education institutions, and 2 course institutes across 25 districts and cities in 13 provinces. The same report also suggested that the actual number may be even higher, as many areas remain unexamined.

In recent studies on Salafism in Indonesia, researchers have categorised Purist Salafis into distinct groups. As noted by Noorhaidi Hasan (2006), the first categorisation identified two predominant Salafi factions: Yemeni and non-Yemeni (Sururi), as previously discussed. The second categorisation comes from Din Wahid (2014, p. 39), who divides Purist Salafis into three categories: 'rejectionists,' who eschew state curricula in their *pesantren* and instead favour Middle Eastern Salafi teachings, as illustrated by educational institutions such as *al-Nur Atsari* in West Java, *al-Anshar* in Yogyakarta, and *al-Bayyinah* in East Java; 'cooperationists,' who integrate state curriculum with Salafi teachings, recognised by both the Indonesian and Saudi systems, with Ma'had Imam Bukhari Solo serving as an example; and *'tanzimi,'* organised hierarchically, focusing on mass organisational expansion of Salafi *dakwah*, as represented by Wahdah Islamiyah in South Sulawesi, established

by former Muhammadiyah members and now representing the largest Salafi group in Indonesia.

Sunarwoto (2016), a third researcher, initially classified Purist Salafis into two groups: the non-former Laskar Jihad network and the former Laskar Jihad or Yemeni network. He further subdivided the latter into subgroups: Luqman Ba'abduh, Dzulqarnain, and Abu Turob. In Sunarwoto's later work (2020), he refined this classification into two main groups. The first, originating from the non-former Laskar Jihad category, is associated with 'Radio Rodja,' a radio station based in Bogor launched in 2005. This station functions as a network for numerous Salafi purist preachers in Indonesia. The second group, referred to as 'Madkhalī,' comprises Yemenis and former Laskar Jihad members who follow Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī, an expert in ḥadīth at the Islamic University of Medina. They are known for their strict adherence to Salafi doctrines and strong obedience to rulers, closely aligned with al-Madkhali's viewpoints (Sunarwoto, 2020). Despite different classifications in various studies, all the groups mentioned above are considered 'Purist' Salafis, following the definition provided by Wiktorowicz (2006). These Salafis are known for their political quietism, generally refraining from active political engagement. They prioritise non-violent methods focusing on propagation, purification, and education within their religious practices.

Notably, the proactive actions of Purist Salafis in the post-New Order era reignited the discourse surrounding *maulid* criticism, which had been largely absent during the 1980s and 1990s. Through online and print publications, Salafis disseminate their teachings and critique Islamic rituals they regard as bidʿa. The number of publishing companies owned by Salafi groups is quite significant. It is estimated that there were 19 Salafi publishing houses according to the ICG report (ICG, 2004, p. 12). This number may exceed the current estimate today as there is no new investigation regarding the publishing houses owned by the Salafis. In addition to print publishing, the internet is another medium that is extensively utilised by the Salafis for propagating their ideas. In his work about Salafi cyber activism, Iqbal (2014) shows how the Salafis are quite successful in using the internet for promoting their Salafi identities, as well as shunning some religious rituals that they deem inauthentic, such as intercession *(tawassul)*, the celebration of Islamic New Year *(Muharram),* and also the *maulid* celebration.

These dynamics set the context for understanding how the Salafi movement's critique of the *maulid* celebration represents both an engagement in the discursive tradition and a contestation of religious authority, themes which will be explored in the following sections.

2.1.2. Salafism and maulid criticism in the twenty-first century

Contemporary Salafi criticism in Indonesia builds upon the three theological arguments

established in Chapter 1: authenticity requirements, *bid'a* prohibition, and concerns about excessive veneration. However, twenty-first-century applications show increased

intensity and scope, as evidenced in both print and online publications by Indonesian Salafi groups.

This section examines whether these arguments persist in the twenty-first century and how they expand upon or differ from twentieth-century *maulid* criticism discourse. Through analysis of both print and online publications, this study explores how contemporary Salafis engage in the ongoing interpretation of Islamic tradition and assert their religious authority in modern Indonesia.

As to the print publications, there are at least eleven books published by the Salafis critiquing *maulid* (see Appendix A for a complete list). Among these eleven works, I will focus on one periodical journal from As-Sunnah magazine and two books. The magazine is considered one of the most influential Salafi publications in Indonesia, with a circulation of 24,500 copies per edition at its peak (Wahid, 2014, p. 105). It was published by the Salafi pesantren of Ma'had Imam al-Bukhari in Karanganyar, Central Java. The two selected books are chosen based on their distribution and impact on the discourse. The first is a book titled Studi Kritis Perayaan Maulid Nabi (A Critical Study on the Maulid Celebration), written by Abu Mu'awiyah (2007), which had a second printing. This book is published by Ma'had Tanwir al-Sunnah, an Islamic boarding school led by *ustadh* Dzulqarnain, a prominent Salafi preacher in Makassar and a former member of Laskar Jihad. Dzulqarnain was a student of Ja'far Umar Thalib before their split, as Dzulqarnain and several of his colleagues accused Thalib of deviating from the ideal Salafi methodology (Hasan, 2006, pp. 211–212; Sunarwoto, 2015, pp. 237–240). This *pesantren* is categorised as Purist Salafi, given Dzulqarnain's stance in criticising Ja'far Umar Thalib for steering Laskar Jihad towards political interests. Dzulqarnain's criticism of Laskar Jihad and his adherence to the government convey his alignment with the Purist Salafi principle of state loyalty.

The second book is *Polemik Perayaan Maulid Nabi* (*Controversy Over the Celebration of the Prophet's Birthday*), authored by Abu Ubaidah Yusuf As-Sidawi (b. 1983). This

book is selected because it is one of the only two works written by Indonesian Salafi authors, the other being the book authored by Abu Mu'awiyah. Most of the eleven reviewed books are translations from Arabic. Choosing a book written by an Indonesian author is particularly valuable as it provides insights that reflect Indonesia's unique social and religious context, offering a clearer perspective on how Salafi ideas are contextualised and implemented within Indonesia. Based on his surname, Abu Ubaidah Yusuf As-Sidawi is likely from Sidawi, Gresik, East Java. He is a teacher at Ma'had al-Furqon, one of the earliest Salafi Islamic boarding schools in East Java, which is under the leadership of Aunur Rofiq bin Ghufron.

Analysing the content of the magazine and the two books, I find that all of them utilise the three theological arguments I outlined in the first chapter. Regarding the first argument of authenticity, the magazine *As-Sunnah* asserts that the *maulid* celebration was neither practised by the Prophet nor by the first three generations of Muslims (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) and lacks any religious basis in both the Qur'ān and ḥadīth (Ihsan, 2013, p. 27).

In addition to *As-Sunnah*, Abu Mu'awiyah's book uses the first theological argument by questioning the authenticity of the *maulid* by citing the following ḥadīth:

> "I have left two matters with you. As long as you hold to them, you
> will not go the wrong way. They are the Book of Allah and the Sunna
> of His Prophet" (Abu Mu'awiyah, 2007, p. 15).

Abu Mu'awiyah then concludes that the *maulid* is not authentic and is not part of Islam because the celebration was initiated after the era of the Prophet (Abu Mu'awiyah, 2007, p. 199). Similarly, Yusuf As-Sidawi employs the first theological argument as the primary basis for his rejection of the *maulid*. He emphasises that there is no textual evidence to support the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, whether from the Qur'ān, ḥadīth, or *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (Abu Ubaidah, 2008, p. 36).

The deduction from the argument of authenticity naturally leads to the application of the second argument of the prohibition of innovation *(bid'a).* The magazine of *As-Sunnah* stated:

> "*'ulamā'* of *Ahl al-Sunna* have agreed on the ruling of the *maulid*
> celebration. It is considered *bid'a*. Regarding some opinions stating
> that the *maulid* is *bid'a ḥasanah*, it is mistaken because there is no
> such thing as *bid'a ḥasanah* in Islamic law."

Regarding this second theological argument, Abu Mu'awiyah cites many Salafi scholars, from Shaykh Ibn Bāz to Shaykh Muqbil ibn Hādī al-Wādi'ī, to demonstrate that the *maulid* is *bid'a* (Abu Mu'awiyah, 2007, pp. 273-300). Yusuf As-Sidawi highlights a ḥadīth that states whoever performs an act of worship not taught by Prophet Muhammad, it will be rejected. By referencing this ḥadīth, Sidawi concludes that the celebration of the Prophet's birthday was not taught by the Prophet and, therefore, is considered an innovation and a deviation from Islamic law (Abu Ubaidah, 2008, p. 39)

In the third theological argument, the reprehensibility of veneration and idolatry, As-Sunnah magazine criticises the use of various forms of shalawat during the maulid celebration that are not recommended by the Prophet. According to As-Sunnah, these shalawat prayers exaggerate the position of the Prophet, portraying him as if he possesses divine power (Ihsan, 2013, p. 27).

Furthermore, Abu Mu'awiyah uses the same line of argumentation as the magazine by saying that the new *shalawat* poetry written in *maulid* books is excessive *(ghuluw)* in praising the Prophet, which leads people into idolatry (As-Sunnah, 2013, p. 164). Yusuf As-Sidawi, in his book, specifically addresses the *qiyām* ritual often included in *maulid* celebrations. He critiques this practice, which involves standing to honour the Prophet, as excessive veneration. Yusuf argues that according to a ḥadīth, the Prophet himself forbade such acts of veneration towards him, thereby questioning the appropriateness of *maulid* ritual within the framework of Islamic teachings (Abu Ubaidah, 2008, p. 55).

As for the four activities associated with the *maulid* celebration, serving food, *qiyām*, the recitation of *maulid* books, and the use of musical instruments, the magazine *As-Sunnah* does not provide detailed explanations of these practices. Instead, it primarily focuses on elucidating the three theological arguments. The lack of discussion on these activities in the magazine could be attributed to space constraints.

In contrast, Abu Mu'awiyah's book explores these four practices in greater detail. He criticises serving food at maulid events as wasteful, arguing that true gratitude for the Prophet should be exhibited through fasting rather than extravagant feasts (Abu Mu'awiyah, 2007, p. 222). He also condemns the act of qiyām, citing a ḥadīth in which the Prophet discourages standing in his honour (Abu Mu'awiyah, 2007). Additionally, Mu'awiyah critiques shalawat recitations from maulid books, such as Barzanjī, as unlawful innovations, equating them with idolatry (Abu Mu'awiyah, 2007, p. 164). Lastly, he considers the use of music or singing during maulid

celebrations as forbidden, describing it as evil and contrary to Salafi beliefs (Abu Mu'awiyah, 2007, p. 267).

Concerning the four activities within the maulid, Abu Ubaidah's book specifically examines two aspects. First, he addresses qiyām, previously described as a form of veneration that considers the maulid an unnecessary ritual (Abu Ubaidah, 2008, p. 55). Second, regarding music, Abu Ubaidah does not provide detailed analysis but states that many wrongdoings, including music, occur during the maulid ritual (Abu Ubaidah, 2008, p. 47). While he does not explicitly declare music as haram, his assertion that music is a wrongdoing implicitly corresponds to the broader Salafi view that considers music haram (Abu Ubaidah, 2008, p. 47).

Aside from print publications, the Salafis have also criticised the maulid through online platforms. At the time of writing, at least twenty Indonesian Salafi websites feature articles critiquing the maulid (see Appendix A for a complete list). For this section, I have selected four websites based on the following four criteria: first, the inclusion of the term "Salafi" or "Salaf" in the website's title; second, the board members are graduates of LIPIA or other Salafi institutions in Saudi Arabia and Yemen; third, the article authors are recognised Salafi scholars; and fourth, the website's Alexa Traffic Rank. The Alexa ranking per country is determined by the average number of daily unique visitors and total page views leading up to the reference date (Thakur et al., 2011, p. 15). Using the Alexa ranking as of 1 July 2018, I evaluated several Indonesian websites generally associated with Salafi discourse. The most popular Salafi website, according to Alexa, is www.muslim.or.id (578), followed by www.almanhaj.or.id (http://www.almanhaj.or.id) (637), www.konsultasi syariah.com (http://www.konsultasisyariah.com) (793), and www.salafy.or.id (http:// www.salafy.or.id) (5390). All of these websites can be categorised as Purist Salafi because they solely discuss Islamic studies without engaging in political matters.

In their critique of the maulid, all websites employ the three theological arguments, mirroring the approach of print publications. For instance, concerning the first theological argument of authenticity, www.muslim.or.id defines bid'a and relates it to the absence of authentic dalīl. The author stated:

> "There is no *dalīl* which shows that the *maulid* is recommended by the Prophet. No ḥadīth, the story of the companions or the saying of the four imams of Sunni Islamic schools of law that suggests the celebration of the Prophet's birthday" (Sulaimansyah, 2013).

This approach parallels the stance of www.almanhaj.or.id, which highlights the inauthenticity of the maulid by referring to an article by Salafi scholar Muhammad Sālih Utsaimin (d. 2001). In the article, Utsaimin argues that the maulid lacks dalīl because the Prophet neither practised it nor encouraged its observance (Utsaimin, 2005). Similarly, www.konsultasisyariah.com and www.salafi.or.id reinforce the same argument, asserting that no authentic evidence exists to show that the Prophet or his companions celebrated his birthday (Ibn Bāz, 2007; Nur Baits, 2017).

Related to the second theological argument of the prohibition of innovation *(bidʿa)*, www.muslim.or.id emphasises that the *maulid* celebration is an innovation without any foundation in Islamic teachings. Likewise, www.almanhaj.or.id describes the *maulid* as forbidden, referring to it as an innovation practice that leads participants to hellfire. The website www.konsultasisyariah.com and www.salafi.or.id (http://www.salafi.or.id) present identical arguments regarding prohibition of innovated religious rituals, such as the *maulid* (Ibn Bāz, 2007; Nur Baits, 2017; Sulaimansyah, 2013; Utsaimin, 2005).

On the third theological argument concerning the reprehensibility of veneration and idolatry, not all the websites include it in their content. Only www.almanhaj.or. id (http://www.almanhaj.or.id) incorporates this argument. The website affirms that during the maulid, there are songs sung by participants that excessively venerate the Prophet, "as if he is nobler than God" (Sulaimansyah, 2013).

Regarding activities within the maulid, such as serving food, qiyām, the recitation of maulid books, and the use of musical instruments, the online publications pay less attention to these aspects compared to the print publications. According to Nielsen (2011), most internet users typically read only about a quarter of a webpage's content. To effectively engage readers, webpage text should be concise, clear, and to the point. If the content is too lengthy, readers might quickly lose interest and navigate away from the page. In this regard, it is understandable that most of the aforementioned Salafi websites provide concise articles focusing solely on the three theological arguments in maulid criticism.

When comparing the discourse of *maulid* criticism in the twentieth century with that discussed above, two key differences emerge: the topic of the criticism and its tone. Regarding the topic, *maulid* criticism in the twentieth century primarily focused on *qiyām*, especially during its first three decades. By the 1980s, additional topics were introduced, including the reliability of *maulid* books and the use of musical instruments, as voiced by Muhammadiyah in its official magazine. In contrast, the twenty-first-century criticism is more diverse, moving beyond specific

topics such as *qiyām* or the recitation of *maulid* books. It presents a more fundamental critique, particularly targeting the legality of the entire celebration.

In terms of tone, Islamic reformist critics of the maulid in the twentieth century did not completely reject the celebration. They merely condemned certain practices within the maulid that they considered contrary to Islamic teachings. Consequently, reformist Muslims continued to observe the maulid, but they eliminated elements they deemed as bid'a. In the twenty-first century, however, the tone of the criticism is markedly harsher. The Salafis, as the leading critics of the maulid in this era, not only criticise certain maulid rituals but reject the celebration in its entirety, declaring it forbidden. Furthermore, Salafi writings often employ intimidating language, such as references to "hell," to deter people from practicing the maulid. They use this word to condemn both specific maulid practices and the celebration itself, asserting that such actions will lead to damnation (Utsaimin, 2005). In contrast, twentieth-century critics avoided such language. Thus, maulid criticism in the twentieth century can be characterised as softer compared to the more severe tone adopted in the twenty-first century, facilitated by digital media's broader reach and the emergence of better-funded Salafi institutions.

Additionally, the volume of *maulid* criticism has grown substantially in the twenty-first century. In the post-1998 era, more than ten print publications and at least twenty online publications have emerged, compared to the limited number of publications in the twentieth century. The discourse in the earlier century was predominantly disseminated in the first three decades by followers of Islamic reformism who had returned home after studying in the Middle East (see Chapter One). When comparing the two eras, it becomes evident that *maulid* criticism has become far more prolific and accessible in the twenty-first century. The rise of new media, particularly the internet, has significantly enhanced the ability of critics to publish and disseminate their views widely.

Overall, the increasing prevalence of *maulid* criticism in twenty-first-century Indonesia is closely linked to the expansion of the Salafi movement. This connection is evident in the sharp rise in publications attributed to Salafi followers since the late 1990s, totalling more than thirty works across print and online formats. This marks a significant shift from the previous century when *maulid* criticism was primarily voiced by Islamic reformists influenced by Middle Eastern studies. In the twenty-first century, the reach and availability of such criticism have expanded considerably, largely driven by the advent of the internet and new media platforms.

Nonetheless, this does not imply that Muhammadiyah's perspective on the *maulid* has vanished in the twenty-first century. Their writings continue to exist, presenting content that diverges from their twentieth-century opinions. This evolution in Muhammadiyah's viewpoints, particularly in relation to the *maulid* and in the context of the rise in Salafi criticism during the twenty-first century, will be further explored in the following section. This exploration will highlight how Muhammadiyah's current stance contrasts with its historical viewpoints.

2.2. Reformist maulid criticism in the twenty-first century

In the previous chapter, I discussed Muhammadiyah's *maulid* criticism in the twentieth century. As mentioned, Muhammadiyah only criticised certain practices within the celebration, particularly the *qiyām*. In this section, I will examine the current stance of this reformist organisation towards the *maulid* in the twenty-first century, exploring whether there is a significant difference from its earlier position. This examination lays the groundwork for a deeper analysis of how Muhammadiyah manages the complexities of interpreting Islamic tradition and asserting religious authority amid internal and external influences, particularly the Salafi movement.

2.2.1. The Muhammadiyah movement

Muhammadiyah is a reformist Islamic religious organisation established in 1912 by KH. Ahmad Dahlan in Yogyakarta. As explained in the previous chapter, the term 'reformist Islam' here refers to efforts to transform Islam from a rigid orthodoxy into a religion adaptable to modern life, inspired by the movement led by Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā (Sharabi, 1970, p. 29). To achieve this, the movement involves works to harmonise teachings with modern living while maintaining the fundamental values of the religion.

In realising its goals, Muhammadiyah has been actively involved in social and educational fields, investing in social services which they refer to as *'amal usaha'* in education, healthcare, and nutrition. By 2015, Muhammadiyah's social endeavours included 2,604 primary schools, 1,722 middle schools, 745 high schools, 546 vocational schools, 160 *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), and 177 colleges and universities (Muhammadiyah, 2015). In religious matters, Muhammadiyah prioritises the purification of Islam. Due to this purification, in its early years, particularly in the 1930s, Muhammadiyah was nicknamed Wahhabi, before this term in the 2000s became more associated with Salafi groups.

Muhammadiyah's purification movement places greater emphasis on purifying Muslims' understanding and practice of Islam from elements considered corrupting the religion. This approach is inspired by two methods: first, exhibiting an uncompromising attitude towards 'TBC', *takhayyul* (delusions)*, bid'a* (innovation) and *khurāfāt* (superstition) that are seen as contrary to prophetic traditions and the Qur'ān. Secondly, they modernise religious beliefs through education, prioritising reason and logic in theory and educational system reform (Burhani, 2019).

Despite this, the theological journey of Muhammadiyah displays considerable dynamism. Originally established with strong connections to the Javanese kingdom of Yogyakarta, the organisation was markedly influenced by Javanese culture in its formative years, from 1912 to 1930 (Burhani, 2006). The emergence of the Majelis Tarjih in 1928 signalled a pivotal shift towards a more conservative stance. Concurrently, there was a growing influence from members hailing from Minangkabau and the ascendancy of KH. Mas Mansur as a key figure. The convergence of these elements, Majelis Tarjih, Minangkabau members, and the stewardship of KH. Mas Mansur between 1936 and 1942, guided Muhammadiyah towards adopting a more puritanical approach in its religious doctrine and practices (Burhani, 2006). This directional change was further shaped by external influences, most notably the ascendancy of Wahhabism following Ibn Saud's conquest of Mecca, coinciding with Muhammadiyah's evolving puritanical inclinations.

In the period following Indonesian independence, particularly during the era of the New Order regime, the Muhammadiyah organisation underwent evolution. This phase was marked by a pragmatic approach under the New Order, yet the organisation's conservative roots remained strong and continued to develop (Basya, 2016). Throughout this era, Muhammadiyah maintained its commitment to conservative and puritanical principles, especially in advocating for an Islamic identity that harmonised with the concept of a modern nation-state. Concurrently, the organisation exhibited notable flexibility and adaptability towards government policies. This adaptability was manifested in actions such as the acceptance of ministerial roles, active participation in the founding of the Parmusi party, and the inclination of many of its members to assume civil service positions, all of which underscored a more pragmatic orientation (Basya, 2016).

The 1980s marked another transition in Muhammadiyah's journey with the emergence of a faction inclined towards more liberal views, led by influential figures like Amien Rais and Syafii Maarif (Basya, 2016). These individuals introduced

innovative perspectives that were grounded in a more liberal ideology, advocating for the integration of Islamic values with the needs of contemporary society. This shift signified a crucial moment in the history of Muhammadiyah, transforming it from a predominantly conservative organisation to one that was more inclusive and responsive to evolving societal challenges. This change signalled a new era for Muhammadiyah, where it took on a wider, more forward-looking role in response to the changing times (Basya, 2016). In the early 2000s, Muhammadiyah witnessed an ideological shift marked by clashes between liberal and conservative factions during its 1995 to 2010 congresses, leading to fluctuations in leadership and a fragmentation among members, some of whom diverted towards radical groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia and Laskar Jihad (Burhani, 2013).

These ideological contestations within Muhammadiyah provide the background for understanding its evolving stance on the *maulid*. Continuing the discussion on Muhammadiyah's theological journey and its interactions with various Islamic movements, the next section will focus on a specific topic within the organisation: the celebration of *maulid*. The following section will explore how Muhammadiyah confronts and adapts to existing religious dynamics, sometimes resulting in religious decisions that are either similar to or divergent from earlier approaches.

2.2.2. The Muhammadiyah criticism on the maulid

To understand Muhammadiyah's position on the maulid in the twenty-first century, I will refer to the magazine Suara Muhammadiyah. The reason for this choice is that Suara Muhammadiyah is the official magazine of the organisation. Many articles of the magazine represent the stance of Muhammadiyah especially the question-and-answer column, which is answered by the Majelis Tarjih Muhammadiyah (the Council of Religious Rulings of Muhammadiyah), a body responsible for issuing fatwas within Muhammadiyah.

Regarding Muhammadiyah's criticism of the maulid in the twenty-first century, it was published by Suara Muhammadiyah in 2003. The *fatwa* is related to the following questions: first, the ruling on recitation of *shalawat* and the use of the *Barzanjī maulid* book; second, what is the best time to recite *shalawat,* and third, whether reciting *Barzanjī* will be rewarded by God or not (Suara Muhammadiyah, 2012, p. 144).

In the answer section, *Suara Muhammadiyah* does not use the three theological arguments as the Salafis have done. In response to the first question, the magazine explains the meaning of shalawat without referring to any of the three theological

arguments. It describes that *shalawat* is a blessing from God to believers and *Suara Muhammadiyah* recommends that its readers use the authentic shalawat as mentioned in the ḥadīth. In addition to that, the magazine indicates that in recent times there have been variations of *shalawat* recitation that are different from the authentic practice. Examples of these new variations can be found in the book of *maulid* of *Barzanjī*, which was specifically mentioned due to its popularity at the time (Suara Muhammadiyah, 2012, p. 145).

On the second question, *Suara Muhammadiyah* elucidates that the best time to recite *shalawat*, for instance, is in the early morning and on Fridays. With regard to the recitation of the *maulid* book of *Barzanjī*, *Suara Muhammadiyah* recommends that readers abandon this practice altogether. *Suara Muhammadiyah* emphasises "that the book contains deviating narratives which poison Muslims' faith." The magazine provides an example from the book *Barzanjī*: the concept of the light of Prophet Muhammad, which was created by God before He created other creatures. *Suara Muhammadiyah* states that this idea is misleading because it is not based on authentic sources. It says that honouring the Prophet by exaggerating his position is not a sound attitude (Suara Muhammadiyah, 2012, p. 145).

Moreover, even though *Suara Muhammadiyah* does not mention the three theological arguments as the Salafis, it discusses two activities within the *maulid*. The first is the act of standing up in the middle of the *maulid* celebration and the second is the recitation of the *maulid* book. On the first activity, *Suara Muhammadiyah* claims that this practice is an innovation that is not based on the Qurʾān and ḥadīth. It accentuates that during his life, the Prophet forbade his companions to honour him by standing up when he was coming (Suara Muhammadiyah, 2012, p. 145). About the second activity, *Suara Muhammadiyah* states that some of its narratives deviate from the Qurʾān and ḥadīth. Therefore, in its recommendation, Muhammadiyah declares that reciting the *maulid* book is unnecessary, and readers should avoid it. Regarding two other activities, the serving of food and the use of musical instruments, *Suara Muhammadiyah* does not address them. In the question-and-answer column, there are only two activities that are cited. The recitation of the *maulid* book of *Barzanjī* is the main question of its readers and accordingly, it is explained. About the *qiyām,* it is an act that is related directly to the recitation of the *maulid* book, thus, it is relevant for the magazine to include a comment about the *qiyām*. The serving of food and the use of musical instruments are neither part of the question nor related to the recitation of the *maulid* book.

Besides the publication in 2003, there is another publication on the website of Majelis Tarjih Muhammadiyah concerning a question from someone on the issue of the celebration of the Prophet's birthday. Similar to the previous answer, Majelis Tarjih replied the question without referring to the three theological arguments. In general, Majelis Tarjih stated that the practice is a contested issue, meaning that people are neither obliged nor prohibited from practising the celebration. Furthermore, the Majelis Tarjih explains that if people in a certain area believe that the *maulid* should be celebrated, then it is acceptable. However, people must avoid mixing it with forbidden practices that are not approved by our religion: innovated acts such as venerating the Prophet and reciting *dhikr* that have no legal basis in the Qurʾān and ḥadīth (Muhammadiyah, 2009).

As shown in the above explanation, the answer of Muhammadiyah has a different structure of argumentation compared to the Salafis. The Salafis start their statement with the three theological arguments while the *Suara Muhammadiyah* does not. The use of three theological arguments leads to the conclusion that *maulid* is *bidʿa*, and therefore, it is forbidden to celebrate. As the Muhammadiyah never use such arguments, the conclusion of the Muhammadiyah is not the same as that of the Salafis. Muhammadiyah states that the *maulid* celebration is neither obliged nor prohibited. It is allowed to be practised as long as it is guaranteed that there are no unlawful activities. This difference reflects Muhammadiyah's engagement in the discursive tradition of Islam, as conceptualised by Talal Asad. Muhammadiyah participates in an ongoing process of interpreting and reinterpreting Islamic teachings to make them compatible with modern life, while maintaining the fundamental values of the religion. This approach involves a dynamic interaction with Islamic tradition, where practices like the *maulid* are evaluated in the light of contemporary contexts.

What makes the *Salafis'* critique of the *maulid* different from Muhammadiyah's stance? It seems this is related to their differing attitudes towards Islamic tradition. According to Muhammad Qasim Zaman (2009), reformist or modernist Islamic thinkers (such as Muhammadiyah) seek to make Islam compatible with the challenges of the modern age. This differs from the *Salafis*, who reject sources other than the Qurʾān and ḥadīth. *Salafi* thinkers even reject many interpretations of Islamic law produced after *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*. It is therefore understandable that the *Salafis'* stance on the *maulid* celebration contrasts with that of Muhammadiyah. As a practice not explicitly prescribed by Islamic law, the *Salafis* disapprove of the *maulid* and categorise it as *bidʿa*. This contrasts with Muhammadiyah, which approves the celebration as long as it conforms with Islamic law.

Analysing the opinion of Muhammadiyah in the twenty-first century, we observe both continuity and change compared to its view in the twentieth century, as explained in the previous chapter. The continuity is evident in the statement of *Majelis Tarjih* in 2009, which argues that people in certain areas may celebrate the *maulid* if they deem it necessary, but it must comply with Islamic law. This mirrors the opinion of Muhammadiyah in the twentieth century.

The shift pertains to Muhammadiyah's opinion on the recitation of the *maulid* book. In the twentieth century, Muhammadiyah did not give a firm recommendation to abandon the recitation of the *maulid* book. This contrasts with the recommendation of Muhammadiyah in the twenty-first century, which urges its followers not to read the *maulid* book because it contains deviated narratives and is harmful to Muslims' faith.

Using both Talal Asad's (2009) concept of discursive tradition and Muhammad Qasim Zaman's (2009) framework of the contestation of religious authority, we can analyse this shift as part of Muhammadiyah's ongoing engagement with Islamic tradition and its negotiation of religious authority. Muhammadiyah is actively interpreting tradition to address contemporary concerns, reflecting Asad's idea that tradition is not static but discursive and continually reinterpreted. At the same time, the growing influence of Salafism within Muhammadiyah represents a contestation over religious authority, as highlighted by Zaman (2009). This internal dynamic involves debates over who has the authority to interpret core Islamic texts and how these interpretations should apply in a modern context.

This is evident, for instance, in the work of Najib Burhani (2013), who notes a contestation between the liberal and conservative factions within Muhammadiyah, influenced by Salafi thought during the congresses from 2000 to 2010. Burhani based his research on four national congresses of Muhammadiyah (1995 in Aceh, 2000 in Jakarta, 2005 in Malang, and 2010 in Yogyakarta). During these congresses, there were contests between the progressive and conservative groups within the organisation. In the 2005 congress in Malang, the conservative side won "the battle" by getting more votes and electing many of its figures to the national board of Muhammadiyah. Progressive figures like Amin Abdullah (b. 1953) and Abdul Munir Mulkhan (b. 1964) did not get enough ballots and, therefore, did not serve on the national board in that period. The congress also excluded women's representatives from the national board and elected Adian Husaini (b. 1965), a conservative figure from a Salafi organisation (DDII), to be one of the national board members of the Majelis Tabligh of Muhammadiyah (Council of Religious Propagation).

The conflict between the conservative and progressive groups in Muhammadiyah continued in 2010, with the progressive group successfully taking over the leadership. However, as stated by Burhani, there was a dilemma among the members of Muhammadiyah due to the conservative-progressive conflict. Several members joined more radical groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), the Islamic Defender Front (FPI), the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI), and the Laskar Jihad (Jihad Troops). All of them argued that they were not accommodated by Muhammadiyah and its programmes (Burhani, 2013, p. 136).

The influence of Salafism within Muhammadiyah is also acknowledged by several Muhammadiyah figures, One of them is Nurbani Yusuf, a member of the Muhammadiyah Board of Batu City, East Java (2019), who notes that there is a new variant within Muhammadiyah, namely "Muhammadiyah Salafi." According to Yusuf (2019), this group thinks, worships, and shows loyalty in a Salafi manner, yet chooses to remain affiliated with Muhammadiyah. While identifying with Muhammadiyah, their ideological orientation often reflects Salafi teachings, as evidenced by their frequent invitation of Salafi clerics to Muhammadiyah mosques and study circles. Additionally, Biyanto (2019), the secretary of the Muhammadiyah board in East Java, stated in his article that current Muhammadiyah leaders express concerns regarding the increasing influence of Salafism within Muhammadiyah's social service institutions. This influence is observed through attire that differs from the norm, specifically the wearing of the niqab by women and ankle-length trousers by men. Biyanto (2019) further mentioned that to tackle this issue, Muhammadiyah ought to implement dress code regulations in line with its religious beliefs.

The aforementioned factors (the contestation between conservative groups influenced by Salafism and liberal groups within Muhammadiyah, as well as the growing influence of Salafism in Muhammadiyah) are likely to impact Muhammadiyah's stance on the celebration of *maulid* in the twenty-first century. Another factor, parallel with the influence of Salafism within Muhammadiyah, is the significant number of publications critiquing *maulid* at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Salafi effort to influence the Muslim community has been quite extensive, focusing on disseminating numerous publications that have recently dominated the discourse of *maulid* criticism. With this social and political landscape, it is likely that such discourse has affected Muhammadiyah. Besides, Muhammadiyah, as a Muslim reformist organisation, has followers who embrace the idea of returning to the Qurʾān and ḥadīth, which agrees with the Salafis. What differentiates Salafis from Muhammadiyah is that the Salafis are stricter in implementing their principle of returning to the Qurʾān and ḥadīth. They reject

independent reasoning (*ijtihād*), which is practised by Muhammadiyah. In this matter, Muhammadiyah is less orthodox than the Salafis due to the Salafis' strict interpretation of returning to the Qurʾān and ḥadīth without independent reasoning.

In some writings published by Muhammadiyah, its representatives stated that Muhammadiyah is not the same as the Salafis especially due to how Muhammadiyah practises *ijtihād* through *Majelis Tarjih* (Muhammadiyah, 2012; Suara Muhammadiyah, 2016). However, even though Muhammadiyah does not want to be associated with the Salafis, it still tries to maintain its relevance within the broader discussion of Islamic puritanism. This can be seen in the Majelis Tarjih Muhammadiyah's fatwa on the maulid in the twenty-first century, which has become more conservative compared to Muhammadiyah's decision in the twentieth century. By issuing the fatwa banning the use of the maulid book of Barzanjī, Muhammadiyah seeks to be recognised as an Islamic group that upholds the values of Islamic puritanism. With the rise of maulid criticism in the twenty-first century, which is mostly published by the Salafis, Muhammadiyah aims to be part of this purification movement by issuing a fatwa that states the maulid can be practised if it complies with Islamic law and avoids any practices that contradict it.

The changing stance of Muhammadiyah towards the celebration of *maulid* can be analysed through the combined frameworks of Talal Asad's (2009) concept of discursive tradition and Muhammad Qasim Zaman's (2009) concept of the contestation of religious authority. This evolution reflects Muhammadiyah's involvement in the ongoing debates over religious interpretation and authority within contemporary Islam.

Applying Asad's (2009) framework, the shift in Muhammadiyah's position regarding the *maulid* celebration can be seen as a result of power relations within the discursive tradition of Islam. As Asad (2009) posits, an "orthodoxy" is not merely about a majority of opinions but is shaped by relationships of power that regulate and uphold certain practices while condemning others. In the context of Muhammadiyah, the growing influence of Salafi networks (both through mass-media companies and influential preachers) has played a significant role in shaping the organisation's perspectives, particularly in the post-2000 era.

The Salafis have been successful in dominating the discourse on *maulid* criticism by producing numerous publications, both in print and online. This proliferation of Salafi critiques has gradually influenced members of Muhammadiyah, who share with the Salafis a commitment to returning to the Qurʾān and ḥadīth. The

accessibility and adaptation of Salafi reasoning within Muhammadiyah have facilitated a shift towards more conservative interpretations of Islamic practices, including a more critical stance on the *maulid* celebration.

Moreover, the presence of Salafi figures within Muhammadiyah's leadership, such as Adian Husaini, signifies the merging of Salafi ideology with Muhammadiyah's religious stance. Husaini's tenure as a national board member of the Majelis Tabligh coincided with the issuance of a *fatwa* by the Majelis Tarjih of Muhammadiyah against the recitation of the *maulid* book of *Barzanjī*. This correlation suggests that Salafi influence has significantly impacted Muhammadiyah's religious rulings, reflecting the power dynamics described by Asad in the shaping of orthodoxy.

Concurrently, the transformation within Muhammadiyah can be analysed through Zaman's (2009) concept of the contestation of religious authority. Muhammadiyah's evolving stance is not merely a simple reaction to Salafi influence but represents a complex negotiation of identity within the modern Muslim world. The organisation's efforts to maintain relevance and authority in interpreting Islamic teachings amidst competing understandings of Islam's textual sources highlight the dynamic nature of religious authority.

By increasingly adjusting its stance on *maulid* with more conservative interpretations, while still allowing its celebration under specific conditions, Muhammadiyah seeks to balance tradition with reformist principles. This approach aims to purify Islamic practices without entirely dismissing expressions of piety, depicting an attempt to manage the complexities of religious authority in contemporary Islam.

The shift in Muhammadiyah's position is also evident in its gradual move away from the Shāfiʿī *madhhab* towards a more puritanical approach. Historically, Muhammadiyah was known for practicing the Shāfiʿī *madhhab*, as evidenced in the 1928 edition of *Suara Muhammadiyah*, where the organisation affirmed its adherence to Shāfiʿī teachings and allowed the recitation of the *maulid* book of *Barzanjī* (Suara Muhammadiyah, 1928, pp. 440–42). However, the establishment of the *Majelis Tarjih* in 1928, influenced by figures like KH. Mas Mansur, marked a pivotal shift towards a more conservative stance. The *Majelis Tarjih* emphasised decisions based on the Qurʾān and ḥadīth, leading to the omission of practices traditionally performed by Shāfiʿī followers.

For instance, at *Majelis Tarjih*'s national conference in 1972 in Pekalongan, Central Java, Muhammadiyah decided to discontinue the *qunūt* supplication in the dawn

prayer, arguing that there were no authentic proofs for this practice (P. P. Muhammadiyah, 1974, pp. 366–369). This marked a significant departure from previous guidelines, such as those in the 1937 *Boekoe Sekolah Moehammadijah* [Muhammadiyah School Book], which instructed followers to include the *qunūt* in their prayers (Boekoe Sekolah Moehammadijah, 1937, p. 21). The 1972 conference can thus be seen as a turning point when Muhammadiyah ceased to identify strictly with the Shāfiʿī *madhhab*, moving towards an interpretation of Islamic practices based directly on the Qurʾān and ḥadīth.

These internal changes within Muhammadiyah, coupled with external influences from the Salafi movement, have shaped the organisation's current stance on the *maulid* celebration. The decision to urge followers to abandon the recitation of the *maulid* book of *Barzanjī*, citing it as containing deviated narratives poisonous to Muslims' faith (Suara Muhammadiyah, 2012, p. 145), reflects a more conservative approach compared to its earlier tolerance of the practice.

Applying both Asad's and Zaman's frameworks, we can understand Muhammadiyah's evolving position as part of a broader discursive tradition, where power relations and the contestation of religious authority play crucial roles. The organisation's engagement with *maulid* criticism, as seen through its publications and *fatwas*, highlights an ongoing effort to steer these contestations, seeking to balance tradition with a commitment to Islamic purity and modern sensibilities.

As Talal Asad's (2009) concept suggests, the shift in orthodoxy within Muhammadiyah is influenced by the interplay of social and political conditions, including the persuasive power of Salafi networks and the internal dynamics of the organisation. The adoption of more conservative stances on practices like the *maulid* reflects the influence of these power relations in redefining what is considered correct practice within the tradition.

Simultaneously, Muhammad Qasim Zaman's (2010) theory illuminates the complexities of religious authority within Muhammadiyah. The organisation's efforts to assert its interpretive stance in relation to competing understandings of Islamic texts reveal the dynamic negotiation of authority in the modern Muslim world. The influence of Salafi ideology, the internal contestation between conservative and progressive factions, and the organisation's historical engagement with *ijtihād* all contribute to this intricate landscape.

In conclusion, the changing perspectives within Muhammadiyah on the *maulid* celebration, influenced by Salafi ideology and mediated through the organisation's

internal structures and external engagements, underscore the profound impact of both discursive traditions and the contestation of religious authority. The interplay of power relations, as described by Talal Asad (2009), and the dynamic negotiation of religious authority, as articulated by Zaman (2009), illustrate the challenges faced by Muhammadiyah in asserting its interpretive stance within the evolving landscape of Islamic orthodoxy and reform.

Muhammadiyah's efforts to adapt and redefine its position on the *maulid* celebration signal its active role in the broader debates over Islamic authority and the practice of Islam in the modern era. By seeking to purify Islamic practices while acknowledging cultural expressions of piety, Muhammadiyah manages the delicate balance between tradition and reform, reflecting the ongoing discourse that shapes contemporary Islamic thought and practice in Indonesia.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the resurgence of *maulid* criticism in Indonesia during the twenty-first century, particularly following the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998. The political and social transformations of the post-reform era provided fertile ground for the rapid growth and diversification of Salafism, notably the Purist Salafi movement, which has actively led the critique of the *maulid* celebration. Characterised by their emphasis on *dakwah* and education, Purist Salafis base their criticisms on three theological arguments: the requirement of authenticity, the prohibition of innovation *(bid'a)*, and the reprehensibility of veneration and idolatry. Through both print and online publications, they have disseminated these arguments, emphasising strict adherence to the Qur'ān and *sunna*, while rejecting practices not rooted in early Islamic norms.

We have also analysed the stance of the reformist organisation Muhammadiyah, assessing both continuities and shifts in its position on the *maulid* in the twenty-first century. Historically, Muhammadiyah only criticised certain elements of the celebration but did not reject it outright. In recent years, however, the organisation has taken a more conservative turn, particularly in its recommendation to abandon the recitation of the *maulid* book *Barzanjī*, citing concerns over doctrinal deviation and potential harm to Muslims' faith. This shift reflects internal dynamics, including tensions between conservative and liberal factions and the growing influence of Salafi thought.

By applying Talal Asad's (2009) concept of discursive tradition and Muhammad Qasim Zaman's (2009) theory of the contestation of religious authority, this chapter

has shown how renewed debates over the *maulid* reflect contestations over interpretation, legitimacy, and religious expression in contemporary Indonesia. The Salafis' firm critique represents an attempt to redefine orthodoxy through a return to early Islamic sources, influencing not only their followers but also impacting discourse within organisations like Muhammadiyah. Muhammadiyah's evolving position illustrates its active engagement in the discursive tradition, interpreting Islamic teachings to respond to contemporary challenges while navigating internal and external pressures.

The resurgence of *maulid* criticism, led by Salafi Purists and managed by reformist groups like Muhammadiyah, underscores the profound impact of Islamic radicalism on debates over Islamic traditions in Indonesia. These debates highlight the ongoing contestations over religious authority, and the challenges of modernity faced by the Muslim community. The interactions between Salafi Purists and reformist groups illustrate the complexities of religious authority and tradition in the contemporary Muslim world.

In general, the re-emergence of *maulid* criticism in the twenty-first century reflects contestations within Indonesian Islamic thought. The Salafi movement's effective use of media and education to propagate their viewpoint has become a major force in these debates, challenging both traditional and reformist interpretations. Muhammadiyah's response represents an attempt to navigate the competing currents of tradition, reform, and puritanism in an evolving religious landscape.

As we move to the next chapter, we will further explore these dynamics by examining the unique role of the Hadhramis in Indonesia and their connection with the *maulid* celebration. This exploration will shed further light on the contestation of religious authority in the Indonesian context, highlighting how the Hadhramis, with their distinct historical and social background, are involved in and affected by ongoing debates on *maulid* criticism.

Chapter 3[3]

The dynamics of the Hadhramis on the maulid celebration

Introduction

The previous chapters examined how criticism of the maulid celebration emerged and evolved throughout Indonesian history, from early twentieth-century reformist critiques to more intensive Salafi opposition in the post-reform era. This chapter explores another significant dimension of the *maulid* discourse in Indonesia by examining the role of the Hadhrami community, particularly focusing on the BāʿAlawī, who have played an instrumental role in both preserving and transforming this tradition.

The focus on the BāʿAlawī community is relevant as it provides crucial background for understanding the *maulid* movement that emerged in Surakarta under the leadership of Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf, which will be examined extensively in Chapter 4. As descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, the BāʿAlawī have historically held significant religious authority in Indonesia, using this influence to maintain traditional practices like the *maulid* despite criticism from reformist and Salafi groups. Their experience in defending and adapting these practices offers valuable insights into how traditional religious rituals can be preserved while remaining relevant in contemporary society.

This chapter addresses how the BāʿAlawī community's experience provides essential context for understanding the broader transformation of *maulid* celebrations in contemporary Indonesia. Understanding the internal dynamics of the Hadhrami community, particularly the tensions between the BāʿAlawī and their critics within the Al-Irsyad movement, helps contextualise both the challenges faced by *maulid* practitioners and their strategies for maintaining this tradition. Of particular significance is how the BāʿAlawī in Surakarta, especially through figures like Habib Anis bin ʿAlwi al-Habsyi, preserved the *maulid* tradition that would later inspire Habib Syech's new style.

This chapter is structured to examine the BāʿAlawī community's establishment and religious authority, their contestation with Al-Irsyad over the *maulid*, and the ways in which they have sought to revive and maintain their traditions, especially in Surakarta, where the *maulid* practices set the stage for Habib Syech's transformative approach. By tracing these Hadhrami dynamics, the chapter provides essential context for understanding how traditional religious practices are maintained and adapted in response to criticism and changing social conditions, thereby preparing for the following chapter's discussion of Habib Syech's innovative approach.

3.1. The history and the dynamics of Hadhrami community in Indonesia

This section examines the history and dynamics of the Hadhrami community in Indonesia, focusing on aspects directly related to the *maulid* celebration and the Bā ʿAlawī. The Hadhramis, particularly the Bā ʿAlawī, who are descendants of Arabs from the Hadramaut region in Yemen, have significantly influenced Islamic practices in Indonesia, including the *maulid*.

The Bā ʿAlawī, claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad, have strictly preserved their cultural and religious traditions, including the practice of *kafāʾah* in marriage, whereby Bā ʿAlawī women can only marry men from within their community to preserve their lineage. They began migrating to Southeast Asia, including the Dutch East Indies, in the late eighteenth century, and established significant social and cultural roles that later shaped the context of the *maulid* movement among them (Boxberger, 2002, p. 20; Mobini-Kesheh, 1999, p. 21; van den Berg, 1989, p. 72). Honorific titles such as "*Sayyid*" and "*Habib*" for men, and "*Syarifah*" or "*Sayyida*" for women, distinguish the Bā ʿAlawī, granting them higher social status and requiring others to honour them, for instance, by kissing their hand as a mark of respect (Boxberger, 2002, p. 21; Mobini-Kesheh, 1999, p. 25).

In the early twentieth century, the Bā ʿAlawī established the Jamʿiyyat al-Khayr in 1901 to enhance education and maintain their traditions (Mobini-Kesheh, 1999). Despite adopting a modern organisational structure and setting up schools combining religious and secular curricula (Noer, 1973, pp. 90–91), the Jamʿiyyat al-Khayr upheld traditional Bā ʿAlawī practices and the Shāfiʿī *madhhab*.

To advance their educational goals, Jamʿiyyat al-Khayr invited several Middle Eastern teachers, including Shaykh Ahmad Surkati (d. 1943), a Sudanese scholar familiar with Islamic reformist ideas (Abu Shouk, 2002, p. 204). Surkati promoted *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) over *taqlīd* (blind adherence), in keeping with the reformist movements of Muhammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā. His views challenged the Bā ʿAlawī's practices and social status, particularly his stance on the equality of all Muslims regardless of descent (Abu Shouk, 2002, p. 209).

Tensions escalated after Surkati opposed practices such as kissing the *Sayyid*'s hand and questioned the *kafāʾah* rule, ultimately leading to his resignation from Jamʿiyyat al-Khayr in 1914 (Mobini-Kesheh, 1999, p. 55; Noer, 1963, p. 96). Surkati and his followers established Al-Irsyad, which promoted Islamic reformism and

directly challenged the religious authority of the Bā ʿAlawī (Affandi, 1976, p. 63). Al-Irsyad aimed "to spread the idea of Islamic reform among Muslims" and emphasised reviving "the true practice (*al-sunnah al-ṣaḥīḥah*) and abandonment of innovation" (Mobini-Kesheh, 1999, p. 56).

The founding of Al-Irsyad marked a significant contestation of religious authority between the traditionalist Bā ʿAlawī and the reformist Hadhramis. Surkati challenged the exclusivity of the title "*Sayyid*" and criticised practices he viewed as innovations (*bidʿa*), thereby contesting the Bā ʿAlawī's religious practices, including those related to the *maulid* celebration. The conflict between the two groups included debates in publications and occasionally escalated into physical clashes (de Jonge, 1993, p. 84).

Al-Irsyad expanded rapidly, attracting many who were drawn to its reformist agenda, and opened branches in several cities (Badjerei, 1996, pp. 80–81). This expansion reflected the broader spread of Islamic reformism in the Dutch East Indies at the time, with organisations like Muhammadiyah also promoting reformist ideas.

In response, the Bā ʿAlawī established the Rabitah ʿAlawiyah in 1927 to preserve their traditions and counter Al-Irsyad's reform movement (Mobini-Kesheh, 1999, p. 51). The ongoing contestation between the Bā ʿAlawī and Al-Irsyad highlighted the tensions within the Hadhrami community over religious practices, including the *maulid* celebration, and the authority to define Islamic orthodoxy in Indonesia.

3.2. Bā ʿAlawī and their maulid tradition

The Bā ʿAlawī community holds a distinctive position within Indonesian Islam due to their lineage as direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. This noble heritage provides them with significant religious authority and societal influence. Central to their spiritual identity is the *maulid* celebration which they have preserved and adapted over centuries. This section explores the significance of the Bā ʿAlawī and their *maulid* practices, particularly examining how these have evolved in contemporary contexts.

As descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, the Bā ʿAlawī, often referred to as *habaib*, meaning "the beloveds", are honoured within the Muslim ummah. In Southeast Asia, they have integrated into local communities, becoming influential religious and social figures while maintaining their distinct identity. The Bā ʿAlawī serve as spiritual leaders of the Alawiyya Sufi order, a tradition emphasising both

spiritual lineage and family ties that spread throughout the Indian Ocean region through their active proselytisation (Alatas, 2018).

Documented since the 18th century, the BāʿAlawī in Southeast Asia have assumed various roles including court advisors, religious teachers, judges, and merchants. Their authority derives not only from their prophetic lineage but also from their connections to broader religious and trade networks. Many rose to high religious offices, forming alliances with local ruling families while maintaining their traditional practices (Alatas, 2018).

The BāʿAlawī's influence extends through their roles as informal teachers and prayer leaders in local mosques. Some became revered as saints, their tombs becoming sites for annual commemorations *(haul)* that attract large crowds (Alatas, 2009). Their activism in Southeast Asia has focused on implementing Islamic law and spreading religious knowledge while supporting political stability, leading to appointments in significant governmental positions (Kaptein, 2014).

The *maulid* celebration represents a pillar of BāʿAlawī religious life, embodying their profound connection to the Prophet. Unlike other Muslim communities that observe *maulid* only during *Rabīʿ al-Awwal*, the BāʿAlawī celebrate it throughout the year, reflecting its perpetual significance in their tradition (Alkadzim, 2023). This practice enhances their spiritual identity and promotes communal unity, as noted by scholars who have extensively studied this connection (Knysh, 2001).

A distinctive feature of their *maulid* is its rich sensory experience, designed to create deep emotional and spiritual connections. Celebrations typically begin with Qurʾānic recitations, followed by devotional poems and litanies, particularly the *"Simth al-Durar"* composed by Habib ʿAli bin Muhammad al-Habsyi. These recitations narrate the Prophet's virtues and life events, nurturing profound spiritual engagement among participants (Alatas, 2016).

The practice of *presencing*, introduced by Abdurrahman al-Saqqaf in the 15th century, incorporated musical instruments and specific litanies *(Ratib al-Saqqaf)* to enhance emotional engagement. During these gatherings, participants stand (*qiyām*) while chanting praises, while hosts circulate perfumes and burn agarwood, creating an atmosphere believed to evoke the Prophet's presence (Alkadzim, 2023).

In modern Indonesia, the BāʿAlawī have adapted their *maulid* traditions while maintaining core spiritual elements. The 1990 unification of Yemen and subsequent restoration of Sufi establishments led to renewed connections between *maulid* and

Southeast Asia. Many young BāʿAlawī studied in Yemen, returning to create religious study groups and promote traditional practices (Slama, 2014).

Contemporary celebrations have expanded to include modern elements while preserving traditional aspects. Large gatherings now attract thousands of participants, functioning both as religious ceremonies and mechanisms for strengthening social networks. The most prominent example of this modernisation is seen in the events led by Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf in Surakarta, whose approach to performance combines traditional *maulid* elements with popular culture, attracting massive audiences through the use of elaborate stage settings, musical arrangements, and social media platforms. His performances not only preserve the spiritual essence of *maulid* but also transform it into a powerful medium for religious expression that resonates with contemporary audiences, particularly youth (see Chapter 4).

Female participation has notably increased, with modern BāʿAlawī female preachers actively preserving and transmitting these traditions. Their *maulid* gatherings incorporate traditional elements like *shalawat* and *dhikr* while addressing current community needs (Husein, 2021). This adaptation demonstrates the tradition's resilience and relevance in contemporary Indonesian society.

However, these practices face ongoing challenges from reformist groups like Al-Irsyad, who view certain aspects as innovations (*bid'a*) deviating from original Islamic teachings (Mobini-Kesheh, 1997). The following sections will examine these tensions and how the BāʿAlawī navigate them while maintaining their traditional practices.

3.3. Al-Irsyad criticism on the maulid celebration

The *maulid* celebration has been a point of contention within the Indonesian Muslim community, particularly between traditionalists and reformists. Al-Irsyad, a reformist Islamic organisation founded in the early twentieth century, has been critical of certain practices associated with the *maulid*. Understanding their criticism requires examining the perspectives of key figures like Ahmad Surkati and the evolution of al-Irsyad's stance over time.

3.3.1. Religious opinion of Ahmad Surkati

Ahmad Surkati (d. 1943), a Sudanese scholar and co-founder of Al-Irsyad, played an important role in critiquing the religious rituals practised by the BāʿAlawī

community, including the *maulid* celebration. As a reformist Muslim, Surkati always based his criticism on the Qurʾān and ḥadīth, referring to these direct sources instead of the ʿulamāʾ's opinions. He emphasised *ijtihād* (individual reasoning) over *taqlīd* (blind obedience), advocating for a return to the primary Islamic texts and rejecting practices he considered innovations (*bidʿa*).

Regarding the *maulid*, it seems Surkati did not reject the celebration itself but specifically considered the act of *qiyām*, standing during the narration of the Prophet's birth, as *bidʿa*. This is confirmed by a 1919 *maulid* event in Batavia where some Irsyadi attended but refused to stand up during the *qiyām*, which was criticised by many Muslims in Batavia (Kaptein, 1993b, p. 148). This occurrence provides evidence that Surkati and the Irsyadi did not reject the Prophet's birthday celebration, only the practice of *qiyām* during the *maulid* recitation.

Ahmad Surkati and Al-Irsyad's position on the *maulid* celebration resembles that of Muhammadiyah figures like Haji Rasul, as explained in earlier chapters. Muhammadiyah did not forbid the Prophet's birthday celebration as long as it complied with Islamic law, only objecting to the practice of *qiyām* within the *maulid*. However, as explained previously, Muhammadiyah shifted its stance on the *maulid*, especially on the recitation of the *maulid* book of *Barzanjī*. In the twentieth century, Muhammadiyah allowed the *Barzanjī* recitation, but in the twenty-first century, the organisation decided to forbid its members from reciting the *maulid* book.

3.3.2. The break of Al-Irsyad

In recent times, Al-Irsyad has experienced significant changes that have influenced its stance on the *maulid* celebration. The organisation is now divided into two separate institutions: Jamʿiyyah al-Ishlah wal Irsyad al-Islamiyah (Arab Association for Reform and Guidance) commonly known as Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah and Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad (Al-Irsyad Association). This division was caused by Salafi influences infiltrating the organisation, starting when an Al-Irsyad *pondok pesantren* in Tengaran, Central Java, was occupied by Salafi religious teachers (*ustadh*) after being built with funding from Saudi Arabia. The Saudi representative requested that the institution be run by Salafi teachers: Ja'far Umar Thalib (b. 1961), Abdul Qadir Jawas (b. 1962), and Yusuf Usman Baisa, all Hadhramis educated in the Middle East (Hasan, 2006, pp. 69–71).

The arrival of these teachers led to substantial changes within the *pondok pesantren* and the broader organisation. The curriculum was adapted according to

Salafi teaching, with strict implementation of Salafi principles such as the prohibition of human and animal images, refusal to salute the national flag, and bans on smoking, watching television, and music. These doctrinal rules concerned parents, as their children started implementing the teachings at home by removing pictures, televisions, and radios. After a formal complaint and a meeting attended by the central board of Al-Irsyad, it was decided that the three teachers must be replaced. However, the branch of Al-Irsyad in Semarang later re-appointed Yusuf Usman Baisa as the director of the *pesantren* (Hasan, 2006, pp. 69–71).

From this point on, Salafi teaching received strong support among several Al-Irsyad branches, especially among younger generations, with many branches inviting Salafi *ustadhs* like Abdul Qadir Jawas to give lectures (Miftahuddin, 2013, pp. 119–120). The spread of Salafi influences angered the central board of Al-Irsyad, resulting in the chairman, Geys Amar, issuing a letter of dismissal to ten other central board members, including his vice chairman Muhammad Bawazir, who were regarded as influenced by Salafi thinking. Geys Amar intended to protect Al-Irsyad from Salafi-Wahhabi influences and maintain its reformist-modernist style as built by Ahmad Surkati (Rijal, 2017, p. 16).

This dismissal led to a major shift in Al-Irsyad's organisational structure, ultimately resulting in a split within the organisation. Members who disagreed with the dismissal held an extraordinary congress in 1999, resulting in a new Salafi faction of the Al-Irsyad central board. Despite attempts at reconciliation, the court settled the conflict in favour of the reformist faction. In reaction to this defeat, the Salafi faction established a new organisation, Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad (Al-Irsyad Association), registered with the Ministry of Law and Human Rights in 2013. This new organisation still uses the word 'Al-Irsyad' with some modifications to the old logo (Rijal, 2017, p. 16). The reformist faction kept the old name of Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah as registered by Ahmad Surkati.

As Rijal (2017) argues, this separation shows the contestation of authority between the reformist and Salafi factions of Al-Irsyad. The reformist faction, mostly consisting of the older generation, wanted to maintain the organisation's reformist-modernist style, believing that Salafi-Wahhabi ideology poses a threat to Al-Irsyad. They claim this teaching was brought by the younger generation educated at Salafi institutions in Indonesia and the Middle East. In recent times, Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah has issued a guidebook that underscores the integration of religious knowledge and modernity as a defining feature of Al-Irsyad's identity (Rijal, 2017, p. 17).

The other faction, Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad, sought to emphasise religious purity within the organisation by adopting stringent interpretations of religious laws, including segregating boys and girls in schools. They reject the older interpretation of Al-Irsyad, stating it is influenced by ideas of liberalism and pluralism (Rijal, 2017, p. 16). Currently, many new Salafi *ustadhs* have joined Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad, including Firanda Andirja Abidin (b. 1979), Khalid Basalamah (b. 1975), and Syafiq Basalamah (b. 1974), who are quite famous on social media. These Salafi *ustadhs* graduated from universities in Saudi Arabia and are positioned on the *fatwa* board of Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad, now led by *ustadh* Firanda, a graduate of the Islamic University in Madinah (Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad, 2019).

3.3.3. Different interpretations of Al-Irsyad on the maulid celebration

The separation of Al-Irsyad into Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad and Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah brought about different interpretations regarding the legality of certain religious rituals, including the *maulid* celebration. This divergence reflects the broader ideological split within the organisation.

The opinion of Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad on the *maulid* can be seen through statements by members of its *fatwa* board on social media. As these preachers are quite famous online, their statements are easily found. Firanda Andirja Abidin, the chairman of the *fatwa* board, stated in response to a follower's question on the ruling of the *maulid* celebration:

> "The maulid celebration is a religious ritual that was neither performed by the Prophet nor his companions. For this reason, we do not practise the maulid celebration. If some people say that the maulid is practised because they love the Prophet, the companions had greater love for the Prophet than us. However, they never practised the *maulid* (Salam Dakwah, 2014)."

From this statement, it is clear that Firanda rejects the *maulid* celebration. In several other lectures on social media, he states that the *maulid* is *bid'a* and recommends his followers not to practise it (Muslim Belajar, 2017). Additionally, another *fatwa* board member, Khalid Basalamah, reiterated the same argument. When asked by a follower if it is permissible to join the *maulid* celebration based on a friend's invitation, Basalamah stated that he should not go because the *maulid* was never practised by the Prophet (Yuk Hijrah, 2016).

As for Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah's stance on the *maulid*, there are instances that suggest a more moderate position. The first is the chairman's statement during a *maulid* celebration in Jakarta in 2017, stating that the *maulid* is commemorated not only to celebrate the Prophet's birthday but also to spread Islam as a blessing for all (*Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin*) (Republika Online, 2017). Another instance is the Facebook page of Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah's primary school in Jember, East Java, posting a programme of the *maulid* to be celebrated by holding a speech contest for students (SD Al-Irsyad Jember, 2016).

Based on these instances, it can be inferred that Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah does not oppose the Prophet's birthday celebration. The organisation even celebrates it with religious gatherings, as seen in the example of the primary school. However, it seems the *maulid* event of Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah differs from that of Nahdlatul Ulama followers, who celebrate by reciting the *maulid* book of *Barzanjī*. It is plausible that Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah adheres to Ahmad Surkati's *fatwa*, which only rejects the practice of *qiyām* during the *maulid*, rather than the celebration itself. In general, this religious stance is similar to Muhammadiyah's, as explained in earlier chapters.

A comparative analysis of Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad and Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah highlights the differences in their religious stances on the *maulid* celebration. The former rejects the ritual entirely, stating it is *bid'a* and that Muslims must not practise it, while the latter does not condemn the celebration and incorporates it into religious activities.

In terms of religious discourse, Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad has a significant impact on Indonesian Muslims, as seen in the numerous video lectures and articles by its *fatwa* board members uploaded on the internet (Lentera Islam, 2016; Sang Pendoa, 2017). These *ustadhs* routinely discuss and offer guidance to followers on rituals they deem as *bid'a*. This is different from Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah, whose preachers have a less prominent online presence.

The discourse on the *maulid* celebration within Al-Irsyad reflects the broader tensions between traditional practices and reformist ideologies in Indonesian Islam. Initially, Al-Irsyad, like other Islamic reformist organisations such as Muhammadiyah, criticised certain practices within the *maulid* celebration, particularly the *qiyām*, as *bid'a*. Ahmad Surkati emphasised a return to the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, rejecting innovations not rooted in these primary sources.

However, the position of Al-Irsyad evolved significantly in the twenty-first century with the infiltration of Salafi figures, leading to a sharp divide within the organisation. This fragmentation resulted in two distinct factions: Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah, which continued to embrace the reformist views of Ahmad Surkati by adapting the *maulid* celebration to include religious lectures and exclude practices considered *bid'a*; and Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad, which adopted a stricter Salafi perspective, declaring the *maulid* to be *bid'a* and advising its members and followers to abstain from its practices.

These differences in religious stances on the *maulid* celebration highlight the deep ideological split within the organisation, with Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad actively promoting their strict views online. This broader Islamic discourse in Indonesia features significant roles for groups like the Hadhrami community and large Islamic organisations like Nahdlatul Ulama, which defend *maulid* celebrations as a valuable part of Islamic cultural heritage. This contrasts sharply with reformist groups such as Muhammadiyah and Al-Irsyad, which view many *maulid* practices as divergent from the core teachings of Islam.

Despite divisions, the *maulid* celebration continues to hold deep significance for many Indonesian Muslims, including members of the Bā'Alawī community. Key figures like Habib Umar have been instrumental in reviving Bā'Alawī traditions and defending the *maulid* celebration against criticism. This evolving tradition and its impacts will be further discussed in the following sections.

3.4. The revival of Bā'Alawī in Indonesia

Following the intense criticism from Salafi and reformist groups, the Bā'Alawī community adopted various strategies to defend and preserve the *maulid* tradition. This section examines how they maintained and adapted their practices, particularly through the revival of connections with *maulid* and the development of new approaches to religious outreach.

3.4.1. Reviving the Yemeni connection

From the work of van den Berg (1989), it is recorded that a substantial number of the Hadhrami came to Indonesia in the latter half of the eighteenth century. This number increased in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from only 4,992 people in 1859 (Java only), to 80,000 people in 1942 (Mobini-Kesheh, 1999, p. 21). Although small compared to Indonesia's overall population, the Hadhrami, especially the Bā'Alawī, played an outsized role in religious, social, and economic

life (van den Berg, 1989). The connection between Indonesia and Yemen was maintained through the Hadhrami diaspora in Indonesia, as they sent their children to Yemen to study Islam. This relationship ceased due to the political situation in Yemen, especially with the Southern part occupied by the communist regime in 1967. The anti-communist regime of Suharto restricted migration between Indonesia and Yemen, influencing the network connection between Yemen and its diasporic community in Indonesia. According to Martin Slama (2014, p. 109), the last migration of Hadhramis to Indonesia was in the 1950s.

Following the collapse of the communist regime and the unification of South and North Yemen in 1990, the connection between Indonesia and Yemen experienced a revival. Syamsul Rijal (2016), found two factors in this reconnection. The first is the emergence of the charismatic preacher Habib Umar bin Hafiz (b. 1963), who accepted many Indonesian students and became the patron of many BāʿAlawī figures in this country. The second is the aspiration of the Indonesian BāʿAlawī community to reconnect with their ancestral homeland.

Related to the first factor, Habib Umar is a son of a respected BāʿAlawī ʿulamāʾ in Yemen. His father was killed during the communist regime that forced him to leave the country and stay in Saudi Arabia for studying. He returned to Yemen after the unification in 1990 and then established his *madrasah* of Darul Mustafa in Tarim, Hadramaut in 1996. The *madrasah* aims to maintain and protect the religious traditions of the BāʿAlawī, such as the daily recitation of the *maulid* book and visits to sacred tombs (Knysh, 2003, pp. 520–521). Darul Mustafa has played a pivotal role in preserving traditional maulid practices amidst growing Salafi criticism. The institution maintains daily maulid recitations and emphasises their spiritual significance while adapting their presentation to address contemporary challenges. This approach directly influenced Indonesian graduates, who brought these adaptive strategies back to their communities. In Surakarta, Habib Anis's connection with Darul Mustafa proved particularly significant. His weekly maulid gatherings at the Riyadh Mosque blended traditional elements with new ways of community engagement, initiating a framework that would later inspire Habib Syech's transformative approach to the maulid celebration.

Knysh (2003, p. 521) suggests that the emergence of Habib Umar and Darul Mustafa was in response to the growing influence of their Salafi counterparts in North Yemen led by Shaykh Muqbil ibn Hādī al-Wādiʿī: (d. 2001), who established his *madrasah* Darul Ḥadīth al-Khayriyya in Saʿda in 1979, which became a prominent centre of Salafi teaching (Haykel, 2002, p. 28). Many of Muqbil's students were from Indonesia, including Jaʿfar Umar Thalib, who later declared a jihad war during the

Maluku sectarian conflict (1999–2002) in Eastern Indonesia with his paramilitary group, Laskar Jihad (Hasan, 2006).

The second factor in the reconnection is the initiative of Indonesian BāʿAlawī, especially Habib Anis bin ʿAlwi al-Habsyi (d. 2006), to renew engagement with the *maulid* celebration. Habib Anis, a charismatic BāʿAlawī preacher from Solo, met Habib Abdul Qadir Assegaf (d. 2010) during a *maulid* gathering in Sayʾūn, Yemen. Habib Anis told Habib Abdul Qadir about the situation among young BāʿAlawī in Indonesia, claiming most had forgotten their ancestors' teachings. He asked Habib Abdul Qadir to find someone to come to Indonesia, select students, and bring them to Yemen to encourage a deeper understanding of Islam and their ancestors' tradition (Majelis Al-Munawwarah, 2017). Following this, Habib Abdul Qadir sent Habib Umar to Indonesia to fulfil this mission. In 1993, Habib Umar went to see Habib Anis during the annual death commemoration *(haul)* of Habib ʿAli in Solo. Afterwards, he brought students from Indonesia to study with him at his *madrasah* of Darul Mustafa. The first batch consisted of 30 students, 17 of whom were BāʿAlawī (Alatas, 2009; Rijal, 2016, p. 160).

After completing their studies, these students returned to Indonesia and founded religious assemblies in their local communities. Habib Umar's students in Indonesia have faced the challenge of Salafism, mirroring the growing Salafi influence he continues to encounter in Yemen. Knysh (2001) explains that Habib Umar minimises the use of narratives about saintly miracles and instead emphasises the importance of ḥadīth in his Sufi teachings. This approach partly stems from his contestation of religious authority with Salafis, who use a scriptural method to criticise Sufi practices in Yemen. Habib Umar's students in Indonesia also emphasise the use of Qurʾānic and ḥadīth interpretations in their dakwah programmes, which serve as an alternative for youth who are increasingly attracted to Salafism (Alatas, 2009, p. 96).

Central to the BāʿAlawī revival was their defence of *aswaja (ahl sunnah wal jamʾah)*, the traditionalist Sunni approach particularly associated with Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia. This theological framework, which incorporates the schools of al-Ashʿarī and al-Māturīdī in theology, the four major madhhabs in law, and the spiritual teachings of figures like al-Junayd al-Baghdādī and al-Ghazālī, served as a key distinguishing feature from reformist and Salafi interpretations.

Today, Habib Umar's former students maintain a network, establishing pondok pesantren and religious gatherings, while promoting the maulid and Darul Mustafa as key centres for Islamic studies in the Middle East. Many become intermediary agents for selecting prospective students for Darul Mustafa. Consequently, there are

now many alumni of Habib Umar in Indonesia, with more than 200 in East Java actively promoting *dakwah* through regular sermons or Islamic boarding schools (Rijal, 2016, pp. 177–179).

3.4.2. 'Street sufism' and the dakwah of aswaja

The revival of BāʿAlawī traditions in contemporary Indonesia has taken innovative forms, particularly through what scholars term 'street Sufism', the practice of bringing traditional Sufi rituals into public spaces (Zamhari & Howell, 2012). This approach, manifested in groups like Majelis Rasulullah (MR), has transformed traditional gatherings into large-scale public events that attract thousands of participants while maintaining core spiritual elements.

Among Habib Umar's students, one of the most renowned was the late Habib Munzir bin Fuad al-Musawa (d. 2013). He was one of the first 30 Indonesian students to study at Darul Mustafa. Upon returning to his birth country, he set up a weekly gathering in Jakarta, travelling from one mosque to another or visiting followers' homes to deliver his *dakwah* lectures. Due to the success of this religious programme, in 2000 he founded the Majelis Rasulullah gathering (Guntur, 2013, p. 28), which successfully attracted youth to his religious events.

One characteristic of Majelis Rasulullah, as noted by Alatas (2009, 98), was the use of a scriptural approach using ḥadīth and the Qurʾān to attract youth. This method was chosen with regard to the familiarity of youth, especially university students in Jakarta, with the Salafi-reformist style. This style also suited Munzir well, especially when defending rituals such as *tawassul* and the *maulid* practice, which are often criticised by Salafis.

Based on these scriptural references, Habib Munzir constructed a methodical defence of the maulid celebration that directly engaged with reformist and Salafi critiques. This approach can be seen in the question-and-answer column of the Majelis Rasulullah website. When asked about the ruling of the maulid celebration, Habib Munzir answered by citing Qurʾānic verses and ḥadīth on its permissibility. He referred to Surah Maryam, which highlights the peace bestowed upon a prophet on the day of his birth, death, and resurrection (Majelis Rasulullah, 2012). He also cited a ḥadīth where the Prophet Muhammad mentioned that he fasted on Mondays because it was the day he was born and received revelation (Majelis Rasulullah, 2012). By grounding his argument in these scriptural sources rather than solely relying on BāʿAlawī customs and practices, he validated how the celebration was in line with prophetic practice and Islamic principles. This

approach proved particularly effective in addressing sceptical youth who were familiar with scriptural-based reasoning (Majelis Rasulullah, 2012)

Moreover, Habib Munzir often encouraged his followers to participate in traditional BāʿAlawī religious rituals, including visiting graves and attending *maulid* celebrations. The *maulid* celebrations organised by Majelis Rasulullah are large-scale events that attract numerous participants. Howell and Zamhari (2012) describe these gatherings as a form of 'street Sufism', where Sufi practices are brought into public spaces. This phenomenon occurred because the *maulid* celebration organised by Majelis Rasulullah often required street closures to accommodate the large number of attendees. In one programme on its official YouTube account, Majelis Rasulullah performs the *maulid* by reciting the *maulid* book of *Dhiyamul Lami'* written by Habib Umar, accompanied by the musical percussion group of Banjari (a form of Islamic frame drum ensemble popular in Java) (Majelis Rasulullah, 2013). However, even though there are other branches of Majelis Rasulullah outside Jakarta, it seems that the performance of the *maulid* only covers the area of Greater Jakarta, differing from the *shalawat* performances of Habib Syech, whose popular *maulid* style allows him to reach a wider audience across Indonesia (further discussed in the next chapter).

Another distinctive feature of Habib Munzir (as well as other BāʿAlawī in Indonesia) is the *dakwah* for defending *aswaja (ahl sunnah wal jam'ah)*. *Aswaja* is the Sunni traditionalist version of Indonesia, especially the one that was used by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). According to this organisation, *aswaja* is defined based on three characteristics: following Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 936) and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944) in Islamic theology, adopting one of the four schools (Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī, or Ḥanbalī) in Islamic law, and apprehending schools of al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 910) and al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) in Sufism. The term *aswaja* is used by the BāʿAlawī and NU members to differentiate themselves from the reformist Muslims, especially the Salafis (Rijal, 2016, p. 76). Defending *aswaja* for BāʿAlawī means opposing the Salafis because, according to the Salafis, the Islamic theology of Ashʿariyya and Sufism deviate from the teaching of the first three generations of Muslims *(al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ)* (al-Munajjid, 2009; 2014)

This emphasis on aswaja became a defining feature of BāʿAlawī identity and practice in Indonesia, evident in their maulid celebrations and religious gatherings. Habib Munzir's articulation of this approach can be found on the Majelis Rasulullah website, where he recommends a questioner seeking guidance on strengthening his belief in aswaja theology to see his eBook on Islamic theology (Majelis Rasulullah, 2010). In his writing, he explains that aswaja in Islamic theology refers to allegorical

interpretation (takwil), which he considers better than another school of tafwid (relegation of matter to God) and is followed by Imam Shāfiʿī and Imam Bukhari (Al-Musawa, 2009, p. 25). The consistent articulation of these aswaja principles by figures like Habib Munzir, Habib Umar, and their students served to distinguish their approach from reformist interpretations while reinforcing their connection to traditional Islamic scholarship, as evidenced in their maulid celebrations.

Following Habib Munzir's passing in 2013, Majelis Rasulullah continued his legacy by maintaining the *maulid* celebration, which is still carried out today by his brothers and other Bā ʿAlawī in Jakarta. Above and beyond, Habib Munzir and other Bā ʿAlawī activities in Jakarta (for instance Majelis Nurul Mustofa and al-Fachriyah foundation) show that after 2000 Bā ʿAlawī preachers are reviving their religious activity especially after the reconnection of Yemen with Indonesia (Alatas, 2009, pp. 91–93; Al-Fachriyah, 2014; Rijal, 2016, pp. 112–117). Additionally, they are actively promoting the *maulid* celebration and defending this practice through their 'street Sufism' and online preaching.

While Majelis Rasulullah's maulid gatherings displayed the potential for adapting traditional practices to contemporary social contexts, their influence remained largely limited to Jakarta. It would be in Surakarta, building upon the foundation laid by Habib Anis, that Habib Syech would introduce a renewed form of maulid celebration that would transform these gatherings into a nationwide phenomenon. His synthesis of traditional practice with popular culture would prove particularly effective in making the maulid accessible to broader audiences while maintaining its spiritual essence.

Besides Jakarta, there are other Bā ʿAlawī preachers elsewhere in Indonesia who revitalised their traditionalist rituals such as the *maulid* as it was done by their ancestors in Yemen. This revival owes a debt of gratitude to the role of Habib Anis bin ʿAlwi al-Habsyi of Surakarta, who suggested the reattachment of Indonesia and *maulid*. In his hometown Surakarta, Habib Anis is known for his efforts to preserve the *maulid* from the 1970s, as well as for inspiring the new style of *maulid* with popular culture in the twenty-first century. In the following section, I will discuss the *maulid* celebration in Surakarta, especially the Bā ʿAlawī which inherited from Habib Anis al-Habsyi.

3.5. Hadhrami and the maulid celebration in Surakarta

Following the revival of Bā ʿAlawī traditions and the development of 'street Sufism' discussed in the previous section, Surakarta emerged as a particularly significant

centre for the preservation and transformation of *maulid* celebrations. The city's *maulid* traditions, especially those maintained by the Bā'Alawī community, would later provide the foundation for Habib Syech's fresh approach that transformed these celebrations into a popular cultural phenomenon. This section examines how the Hadhrami community in Surakarta, particularly the Bā'Alawī, have sustained and adapted the *maulid* celebration, setting the stage for the developments discussed in the following chapter.

Surakarta, commonly called Solo, represents a unique case where traditional Islamic practices have flourished despite the city gaining notoriety as a centre of Islamic radical groups since 1998 (Wildan, 2009). While several radical Islamic groups and Salafi institutions established themselves in the city, including Front Pemuda Islam Surakarta (FPIS), Laskar Jundullah, Forum Umat Islam (FUI), Majelis Mujahidin (MMI) and Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (Wildan, 2008), the Bā'Alawī community has maintained and even strengthened their traditional practices, particularly their *maulid* celebrations.

The Bā'Alawī presence in Surakarta has deep historical roots. Based on statistics from 1885, there were around 71 Hadhramis in the city, with only three persons born in Yemen, while the rest were born in the archipelago (van den Berg, 1989, p. 69). By 2001, this number had grown to 3,874 (Suhadi, 2014, p. 54). The Bā'Alawī mostly live in the sub-district of Pasar Kliwon, an area historically designated for Arabs under Dutch colonial policy (de Jonge, 1997, p. 97).

In Pasar Kliwon, four central sites serve as gathering points for the Bā'Alawī community. The first is the Islamic Educational Foundation of Diponegoro (YPID), established in 1928 by Bā'Alawī figures involved in *Rabitah 'Alawiyah*. The other three sites (the Jami' Assegaf Mosque, the Riyadh Mosque, and the Khoir Mosque) are the primary venues for *maulid* celebrations. Among these, the Riyadh Mosque holds particular significance as the only one conducting weekly *maulid* celebrations, while the Jami' Assegaf Mosque holds annual celebrations on the 12th of *Rabī' al-Awwal*, and the Khoir Mosque hosts informal gatherings.

Unlike the Javanese, who usually recite the *maulid* books of *Barzanjī* or *Dība'ī*, the Bā'Alawī in Surakarta and elsewhere recite the *maulid* book of *Simth al-Durar*. The reason for this choice is related to the fact that this *maulid* book is written by one of the charismatic Bā'Alawī scholars of the *maulid* in 1913, Habib 'Ali bin Muhammad al-Habsyi (d. 1915). During his life, Habib 'Ali had conducted the celebration of the Prophet's birthday every Thursday night in the Riyadh Mosque in the city of Say'ūn (Boxberger, 2002, pp. 159–161). By using the *maulid* book that is

authored by other BāʿAlawī scholars, the BāʿAlawī community emphasises their own authority and their connection to the Prophet.

The practice of reciting Simth al-Durar in Java was introduced by students and descendants of Habib ʿAli. One of them was Habib Muhammad bin Idrus al-Habsyi (d. 1917), who first introduced Simth al-Durar in Indonesia, initially in Cirebon before moving to Bogor and later Surabaya, where he regularly recited the *maulid* (Umar Mauladdawilah, 2008, p. 75). After his demise, Habib ʿAli bin Abdurrahman al-Habsyi (d. 1968), also known as Habib Kwitang, continued the recitation of *maulid Simth al-Durar* in Jakarta. Habib ʿAli first carried out the *maulid* in the headquarters of *Jamʿiyyat al-Khayr* but then the practice was moved to a mosque in the village of Kwitang, Central Jakarta. In this mosque, he started to organise annual *maulid* celebrations in 1918 which attracted thousands of participants, both from BāʿAlawī and Javanese people (Alatas, 2011, p. 58; Pijper, 1934, p. 133). Although perhaps this *maulid* occasionally attracted thousands of people, it seems that the large number of the participants was due to the charisma of Habib ʿAli. This is different from the new performance of *shalawat* which attracts much more participants; that I will explain in the next chapter.

In Surakarta, *Simth al-Durar* was brought by Habib ʿAlwi bin ʿAli al-Habsyi (d. 1953), the son of its author. He went to the Dutch East Indies after the death of his father. At first, he resided in Jakarta before moving to Semarang and then settled in Surakarta. In 1934, he built a mosque with supplementary buildings with various functions of stores and houses. He named the mosque Riyadh after the mosque in the city of Sayʾūn that was built by his father. As his father was well known for his *maulid* book, many BāʿAlawī in the Dutch East Indies respected Habib ʿAlwi. That is why many people came to his mosque to follow the *maulid* or seek for his blessing. He died in Palembang in 1953, and his body was transported back to Surakarta and buried at the side of the Riyadh Mosque (Qendaly, 2011, pp. 96–100). After the passing of Habib ʿAlwi, the *maulid* in the Riyadh Mosque was continued by his son, Habib Anis bin ʿAlwi al-Habsyi (d. 2006). Through Habib Anis's efforts, Simth al-Durar became well-known among Muslims. The weekly *maulid* was conducted every Thursday night, following his grandfather's tradition. The annual death commemoration (haul) of Habib ʿAli is also held every *Rabīʿ al-Thānī*, featuring the recitation of Simth al-Durar (Alatas, 2014; Slama, 2011). In 2014, the municipality of Surakarta integrated this programme into an annual government initiative, under the policy that promotes Solo as the city of *shalawat*.

In the following paragraphs, I will describe in detail the weekly Thursday night *maulid* celebrations held at Riyadh Mosque. Based on my observations during

fieldwork at this Riyadh Mosque, the *maulid* celebration begins around 6:00 PM, following the Maghrib prayer, though many attendees arrive several hours early. They first visit the graves of Habib ʿAlwi and Habib Anis beside the mosque, where they pray for the deceased and seek divine blessing *(baraka)* (Alatas, 2014, p. 308). The mosque's front yard fills with motorcycles as people gather for the celebration.

Once the Maghrib prayer concludes, the *maulid* celebration begins, led by Habib Hasan bin Anis al-Habsyi (b. 1966), a great-grandchild of the author of the *maulid* book. Therefore, many people including the BāʿAlawī, consider Habib Hasan, the most authoritative person to lead the celebration. Imams from other BāʿAlawī mosques, such as Assegaf and al-Khoir, frequently attend the *maulid* celebrations at the Riyadh Mosque. These participants show the interconnection of the three BāʿAlawī mosques, as well as the respect for the Riyadh Mosque as the central activity of the *maulid* in the city of Surakarta.

Based on my observations, the celebration follows a structured format. Before beginning the recitation of *Simth al-Durar*, Habib Hasan first performs the intercession *(tawassul)*. By practising *tawassul*, the people believe that they are able to pray for the deceased as well as to get a religious reward *(pahala)* without being physically present near the deceased (Millie, 2009, p. 104)**.** After Habib Hasan recalls all the names of the BāʿAlawī *ʿulamāʾ*, he continues by reciting the first chapter of al-Qurʾān *(al-Fātiḥah),* which is then followed by recitation of the participants. All the participants I observed inside the mosque were men; there were no women present in the main gathering area. However, I was informed that female participants were in a separate room, ensuring they remain out of sight from the male participants (Mbah Soleh, personal communication, 30 November 2018).

Figure 1: *Rebana* (photo taken by the author)

After the *tawassul,* the *Simth al-Durar* is recited by Habib Hasan, together with several Bā ʿAlawī who sit beside him and take turns in reciting the book. In this event, there is no Javanese reciting *Simth al-Durar* along with the Bā ʿAlawī. They only act as passive participants who listen and repeat some verses of the *Simth al-Durar*. The book itself has 14 chapters. There are interludes after the imam has recited some chapters during which another person sings *qasidah*, here referring to the Arabic odes embedded in the *maulid* text, which in the Indonesian context is also a term for religious-themed songs (Rasmussen, 2010).

When a person sings a *qasidah*, he is accompanied by five *rebana* players, locally called a *hadrah* ensemble (distinct from the Sufi usage of *hadrah* to denote a *dhikr* gathering). These instruments are not used every week; they are played only on the second and fourth Thursday nights of the month, while on the first and third Thursdays the *qasidah* is performed a cappella.

In terms of the number of the participants, the *maulid* with the *rebana* attracts more participants than the ones without the instruments. The *rebana* players in the Riyadh Mosque use *Banjari* style. It refers to the name of a city in the district of Banjar, South Kalimantan, from which the style originated. The size of the *rebana banjari* is 30 cm. This *rebana* style has been used in the Riyadh Mosque since the

early 1980s. Before using *rebana* banjari, the *maulid* in the Riyadh Mosque was only accompanied by two *duffs,* drums, which were brought from Yemen by Habib ʿAlwi (Mbah Soleh, personal communication, 30 November 2018).

After reciting chapter 7, participants stand up for the *qiyām.* In this chapter, the leader and all the participants sing a text containing a poem expressing happiness for the birth of Prophet Muhammad. During the *qiyām*, one person passes around a burning agarwood to the participants. The participants reach out their hands to the smoke of agarwood incense and each of them wipes it on their faces. Agarwood incense is commonly used by the BāʿAlawī for its sweet fragrance, which perfumes the room during celebrations. It is used not only in events like *maulid*, but also in their religious gatherings. After the *qiyām*, attendees are offered a piece of bread and a cup of milk coffee. Subsequently, a Hadhrami preacher delivers a ten-minute sermon focused on giving thanks to God. Following that, the recitation continues until all fourteen chapters are completed. The celebration concludes with Habib Ahmad reciting a final supplication. In total, the *maulid* lasts for almost two hours. The evening concludes with *ʿIshāʾ* prayer in congregation.

Apart from the weekly *maulid* celebration at the Riyadh Mosque, according to many BāʿAlawī I encountered, the *maulid Simth al-Durar* is performed in almost all big celebrations of BāʿAlawī e.g. moving into a new house, animal sacrifice for the baby born *(aqiqah)*, marriage proposal, as well as a wedding ceremony. Among the aforementioned events, I had the chance to observe the *maulid* performed during a wedding ceremony of BāʿAlawī. Generally, the descriptions of the *maulid* at Riyadh Mosque also apply to BāʿAlawī wedding ceremonies, including those led by Habib Hasan. The only difference is that in the *maulid* of the marriage event, the *qiyām* is followed by a marriage vow.

The *maulid* practices at the Riyadh Mosque, particularly under the leadership of Habib Anis, established a foundation that would significantly influence Habib Syech's approach to *maulid* celebration. While maintaining core traditional elements like the *Simth al-Durar* recitation and the use of *rebana*, these practices confirmed the potential for adapting the *maulid* to contemporary contexts while preserving its spiritual essence. This combination of tradition and adaptation would prove crucial in the development of Habib Syech's popular *maulid* performances, which will be examined in detail in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the discourse surrounding the *maulid* celebration within the Hadhrami community provides essential context for understanding the broader transformation of Islamic practices in contemporary Indonesia. The analysis of Hadhrami dynamics is particularly significant for this thesis as it illuminates how traditional religious authorities navigate criticism while adapting their practices for modern contexts - a pattern that would prove crucial for understanding Habib Syech's later innovations. The complex dynamics between the BāʿAlawī, who maintain and defend traditional *maulid* practices as integral to their religious identity, and their critics within the Al-Irsyad movement, offer valuable insights into how religious traditions can be preserved while remaining relevant to contemporary society.

The BāʿAlawī's dedication to preserving the *maulid* tradition originates from their unique position as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and their role as custodians of traditional Islamic practices. Their approach to maintaining these traditions, particularly through institutions like Jamʿiyyat al-Khayr and Rabitah ʿAlawiyah, showcases their capacity to uphold religious practices while adapting to changing social contexts. This adaptability, especially evident in Surakarta's BāʿAlawī community under figures like Habib Anis, would later provide both the spiritual foundation and practical model for Habib Syech's transformation of the *maulid* into a popular cultural phenomenon.

The evolution of Al-Irsyad's stance on the *maulid*, from Ahmad Surkati's initial measured criticism focusing specifically on *qiyām* to the more comprehensive rejection by the contemporary Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad, illustrates the growing influence of Salafi thought within reformist movements. This shift reflects broader changes in Indonesian Islamic discourse, where traditional practices increasingly face challenges from puritanical interpretations of Islam.

However, the BāʿAlawī community's response to these challenges, particularly in Surakarta, marks their resilience and adaptability. The maintenance of regular *maulid* celebrations at the Riyadh Mosque, established by Habib ʿAlwi and continued by Habib Anis, provided a foundational model that would later inspire Habib Syech's new direction for the *maulid* celebration. Their success in preserving these traditions while adapting to contemporary contexts laid the groundwork for the transformation of *maulid* into a more accessible and popular form of religious expression.

The experiences of the BāʿAlawī community in defending and adapting their traditions provide crucial context for understanding the subsequent development of the *maulid* celebration in contemporary Indonesia. Their ability to maintain traditional practices while remaining relevant to modern society would prove instrumental in shaping Habib Syech's approach to popularising the *maulid*, as explored in the following chapter. This transformation represents not merely a preservation of tradition but an evolution that enables traditional religious practices to thrive in contemporary Indonesian society while maintaining their spiritual essence.

The significance of this historical and cultural background extends beyond mere historical documentation. It demonstrates how religious traditions can be maintained and adapted in response to criticism and changing social conditions, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of religious authority and cultural preservation in contemporary Muslim societies. The BāʿAlawī experience in Surakarta, particularly through figures like Habib Anis, established a foundation that would enable subsequent innovations in *maulid* celebrations. This groundwork would prove especially crucial for Habib Syech's transformative approach to the *maulid*, which will be examined extensively in the following chapter. Through his innovative synthesis of traditional practice and popular culture, Habib Syech would build upon the BāʿAlawī legacy while pioneering new ways to make the *maulid* relevant and accessible to contemporary Indonesian society.

Chapter 4

Shalawat performance and popular culture: The change of the *maulid* celebration in Surakarta

Introduction

The previous chapters traced how criticism of the *maulid* celebration evolved from early twentieth century reformist critiques to more intensive Salafi opposition in the post-reform era. Chapter 3 specifically explored how the Bā'Alawī community maintained their *maulid* traditions despite these challenges, particularly through the practices at Surakarta's Riyadh Mosque under Habib Anis's leadership. This preservation of tradition would later provide the foundation for an innovative transformation of the *maulid* celebration that builds new forms of public resilience against radical ideologies.

This chapter focuses on the transformation of the maulid celebration into a more popular style in Surakarta, especially by Habib Syech and his Ahbabul Mustofa group. Inspired by Habib Anis's maulid at the Riyadh Mosque, this recent maulid features a large stage, elaborate lighting, numerous musical instruments, and it attracts thousands of attendees. The crowd brings flags and banners, waving them as performers sing shalawat or shalawatan, as the participants and performers refer to it. Although it resembles a music performance or rock concert more than traditional maulid rituals, it still incorporates elements like the maulid's qasidah (praise), qiyām, and prayers. Performers often sing *qasidah* drawn from both *maulid* texts and other sources, including classical Arabic odes and popular Indonesian religious songs such as *Ya Hanana*, *Ya Thoybah*, and *Lir Ilir* (for a detailed discussion of *qasidah* in Indonesia, see Rasmussen, 2010). Adapting a popular concert style, with its engaging atmosphere and modern elements, successfully attracts a large number of attendees to the shalawat performances, making them more appealing and accessible to a wider audience. This performance resembles the *maulid* event described by Howell and Zamhari (2012), who characterise it as taking Sufism to the street. However, Habib Syech's performance differs due to its scale and the extensive network of followers nationwide.

While previous Bā'Alawī resilience was oriented around preserving the *maulid* celebration in response to reformist and Salafi critiques, this chapter explores a shift towards a more innovative and popular engagement with *shalawat* performances under the leadership of Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf. This shift from preservation to active engagement underscores how religious communities can adapt traditional practices while navigating contemporary social and political dynamics.

Moreover, this new trend of *shalawat* performance as a part of popular culture reaffirms Hasan's work (2012, p. 372) on *dhikr akbar,* which he describes as representing a new sense of piety "which takes the form of peaceful, esoteric expression." This new form of piety offers an inward-oriented activism that contrasts with the outward-oriented radical Islamic groups that aim to fundamentally change the society based on religion. In this regard, the *shalawat* performance can be regarded as an alternative arena to fight religious fundamentalism, especially for its participants.

Understanding this transformation requires examining the underlying theoretical framework. Popular culture, however, is a complex term with various interpretations. Strinati (2004, p. xiv) contends that there is no singular, definitive meaning for popular culture. Similarly, Storey (2009, p. 1) notes that the term's meaning "depends on how it is used," implying that it can be analysed through diverse theoretical lenses. To address this complexity, Storey proposes six definitions of popular culture: as a form widely appreciated by many, as the opposite of high culture, as mass culture, as a tool for struggle, as a postmodern phenomenon that rejects the distinction between high and popular culture, and as a site of resistance. This chapter specifically focuses on three of these interpretations: popular culture as widely favoured by the masses, as mass culture, and as a vehicle for resistance. In this study, such resistance is often implicit, with most attendees participating for devotional or social reasons, while their presence nevertheless affirms practices contested by Salafi critics. Given this character of resistance, these particular definitions are especially relevant for analysing shalawat performances in Indonesia, where such performances resonate with a broad audience and serve as a platform for cultural and ideological resilience. Other definitions, such as the high/popular culture dichotomy, are less applicable to this context, as they do not capture the specific dynamics of shalawat performances within Indonesian society.

Building on the concept of public resilience introduced earlier, this chapter examines how this framework manifests in Habib Syech's transformation of traditional *maulid* into popular shalawat performances. Public resilience, as adapted from Hirschkind's counterpublic, captures the Surakarta context where religious communities work with, rather than against, state institutions while maintaining traditional practices.

This resilience manifests through two key elements: practice and discourse. The practice element involves collective actions such as large-scale performances with professional staging and sound systems, traditional percussion instruments

(*rebana*, *keprak*, *darbuka*) and modern musical instruments (guitars, keyboards, and flutes), and organised fan communities. The discourse element encompasses religious teachings and nationalistic expressions conveyed through songs and sermons. These elements work together to sustain traditional religious practices while maintaining productive relationships with state institutions.

The practice element manifests in two distinct but interconnected ways: through performance strategies (Chapter 4) and institutional support (Chapter 5). This chapter focuses on how Habib Syech's *shalawat* performance style creates physical spaces combining religious devotion with contemporary staging and musical arrangements, while Chapter 5 will examine how these practices gained institutional sponsorship through the *'Solo kota shalawat'* initiative. Subsequently, Chapters 6 and 7 will elaborate on the discourse element and participant perspectives respectively.

As Syamsul Rijal (2017) observes, the emergence of *habaib* preachers like Habib Syech reflects the contestation between traditionalists and their Salafi rivals. Habib Syech's transformation of the *maulid* into a popular *shalawat* performance can thus be understood as an expression of public resilience, showing how Bā'Alawī preachers defend long-standing traditions while, through music, lighting, and visuals, adapting to popular culture and reaching younger generations who might not connect with older forms.

This chapter will answer the following questions: how did the *maulid* evolve in the twenty-first century? How and when has popular culture become part of the tradition? How can we explain the fact that the *shalawat* performance is well received by the people (especially the youth) despite the growing number of *maulid* criticisms that are published and promoted by the Salafis in the twenty-first century?

To answer these, I focus on famous Hadhrami preacher Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf's (b. 1961) *shalawat* performance and how he shaped *maulid* into a more popular style. His performance is rooted in the *maulid* practised and preserved by Habib Anis in Surakarta's Riyadh Mosque, as explained previously. The chapter starts by describing Habib Syech's emergence, analysing his life and *dakwah* mission. It highlights his strategy of using *shalawat* performance to propagate *dakwah*, making him one of the most popular preachers. Subsequent sections discuss youth acceptance of this new *shalawat* style, focusing on establishing the Syekhermania fan group and two others, Mbolovers and Shoffalovers. The success of this transformation would later inspire similar

movements throughout Surakarta, eventually leading to the city's official embrace of *shalawat* performances, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.1. The emergence of Habib Syech

4.1.1. Early life and dakwah activities

Born in Surakarta in 1961, Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf is one of sixteen children of Habib Abdul Qadir bin Abdurrahman Assegaf (d. 1981), the *imam* of Jami' Assegaf Mosque in Pasar Kliwon. Following the BāʿAlawī tradition of transmitting religious knowledge through family lineage, Habib Syech received his religious education from his father and was frequently chosen to deliver the call to prayer (*adhān*) because of his melodious voice. In interviews, he highlights his vocal abilities and recalls how his father encouraged him to sing *shalawat* songs to guests, maintaining the BāʿAlawī tradition of integrating musical expression into religious practices (Majalah Langitan, 2014; TV9 Nusantara, 2015).

From a young age, Habib Syech was familiar with Arabic pop songs by renowned artists such as Umm Kulthum, Farid al-Atrash, Abdel Halim Hafez, and Abu Bakar Salim Bafakih. These influences likely shaped his later incorporation of popular-style songs into his *shalawat* performances. He attended YPID schools for his elementary and junior high education before enrolling in Al-Islam upper secondary school (*SMA*). However, he did not complete his studies, as his father sent him to work in Saudi Arabia in 1978 (Habib Syech, personal communication, 30 August 2017). Three months later, his father passed away, which compelled Habib Syech to remain in Saudi Arabia to support his family. In 1988, he returned to Surakarta and deepened his religious knowledge by attending Habib Anis's forums at the Riyadh Mosque, a central hub for Hadhrami activities and *maulid* celebrations. This relationship with Habib Anis proved essential, introducing him to the practices and the *maulid* book *Simth al-Durar*, which later became the foundation of his practice of religious performance (Habib Syech, personal communication, 30 August 2017).

After his return to Surakarta, Habib Syech began his preaching activities, encouraged by his younger brother, Habib Abdullah bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf (b. 1962), and his close associate, Habib Muhsin bin Muhammad al-Jufri (b. 1962). His *dakwah* efforts were organised into two primary programmes. The first was a door-to-door religious outreach initiative throughout Solo's villages, known as the Sunday Gathering Forum (*Fosmil*). This programme incorporated the *Shāfiʿī madhhab*-endorsed practice of *tahlilan*, which includes reciting the Qurʾān and chanting *dhikr* for the deceased over seven days, accompanied by communal meals

during religious gatherings (Abidin, 2014, p. 13). Javanese preachers (*kiai*) frequently use *tahlilan* as a *dakwah* method, and the BāʿAlawī community also employs it in their outreach efforts. In the initial phases, Habib Abdullah and Habib Muhsin conducted the *tahlilan*, while Habib Syech focused on delivering the sermons.

The second *dakwah* programme consisted of various religious activities during *Ramadhān*. Habib Syech and his companions visited mosques, distributed food packages, and invited people for *iftar* and *takjil*. He continued these activities until 1996 (Habib Syech, personal communication, 30 August 2017). However, he later acknowledged that both methods were largely ineffective in attracting people to his gatherings, particularly given the growing Salafi influence in the region. *Tahlilan* involves participants sitting for an hour to recite the Qurʾān and litanies, which some may perceive as tedious.

Another contributing factor could be the Solo Raya region's limited familiarity with the *Sayyid* community during the 1980s and early 1990s. According to Habib Muhammad bin Shāfiʿī Alaydrus (b. 1974), the BāʿAlawī were not particularly active in proselytisation in Solo Raya during the 1980s, engaging with the wider society and actively promoting Islam only in the early 1990s (Habib Muhammad, personal communication, 29 January 2018). Previously, they primarily organised gatherings in the three BāʿAlawī mosques in Kecamatan Pasar Kliwon. Habib Syech also believes that many were unaware of his status as a descendant of the Prophet, neither referring to him as Habib nor kissing his hand as is common today (Habib Syech, personal communication, 30 August 2017).

4.1.2. Using maulid Simth al-Durar

In 1996, following the tradition of BāʿAlawī adaptations, Habib Syech decided to adopt the *maulid* as his *dakwah* method. This decision followed a conversation with his uncle from Hadramaut and a recommendation from Habib Anis, both of whom suggested using the *maulid* book *Simth al-Durar* (TV9 Nusantara, 2015). This choice was significant, as the use of Simth al-Durar represents a continuation of the BāʿAlawī tradition, where the maulid serves as a foundation of spiritual practice.

Following their advice, Habib Syech held his first *maulid Simth al-Durar* celebration in Kartasura, Sukoharjo, attracting about 40 participants and featuring *hadrah banjari*, in a manner similar to the Riyadh Mosque. The successful performance led to an invitation in Sragen (approximately 30 kilometres northeast of Surakarta), where he combined the *maulid* with Javanese songs, stimulating participants'

curiosity and increasing his popularity in Javanese-speaking areas. Following that performance, he gained further recognition and was able to perform in places where Javanese is the lingua franca. In this regard, Habib Syech initiated a tour of performances as part of his *dakwah* programme.

Another city that first hosted his performance was Kudus, Central Java. In this city, he met some young people who became his main backing vocalists. Given that more people attended his performance in Kudus, Habib Syech modified his *maulid* celebration to adapt to the growing audience and enhance the appeal of his *dakwah*. His performance underwent several key changes. From this point onwards, Habib Syech's circle of performance expanded significantly. He began performing in areas with a high number of traditional Muslims (adherents of the Shāfiʿī *madhhab*), such as Solo Raya and various parts of Central Java, particularly Kudus. The choice of Kudus is likely related to its status as a central *dakwah* site of the 'Nine Saints' (*Walisongo*) and the location of Sunan Kudus' tomb. Javanese Muslims believe the *Walisongo* were Arab descendants who first introduced Islam to Java, combining music and local culture in their proselytisation (van Dijk, 1998, p. 221). The success of their *dakwah* methods, as many people believe, relies on these two combinations. Nowadays, there are songs of *Walisongo*, mostly in Javanese, that are sung by Muslims in Java. In an interview with an East Java television station, Habib Syech stated that he replicates the *Walisongo*'s methods, particularly singing their Javanese songs (TV9 Nusantara, 2015). By performing in regions where *Walisongo* traditions are preserved, like Kudus, Habib Syech makes his *dakwah* tour more acceptable. Additionally, Kudus was chosen due to his BāʿAlawī connection, as the BāʿAlawī preacher Habib Muhammad al-Kaff first invited him to perform there (Gus Shoffa, personal communication, 8 August 2018). These ties to the BāʿAlawī network facilitated finding venues and performing *shalawat* in the city.

The transformation of maulid into shalawat performance manifested in five strategic modifications. First, Habib Syech limited the recitation of the *maulid Simth al-Durar*, which constitutes only 10 per cent of his performance, including the *qiyām* chapter and two additional chapters before *qiyām*. The remaining 90 per cent consists of *qasidah* featuring Arabic, Javanese, and Indonesian songs. This adaptation made the *maulid* celebration shorter and less tedious, particularly appealing to the younger generation.

The second modification involves the incorporation of additional percussion instruments, such as the Egyptian *darbuka*, *keprak* (similar to the Middle Eastern *marawis*), and bass drum, alongside the frame drums. These instruments enable

Habib Syech to perform cheerful songs, creating a more joyful and lively atmosphere.

Figure 2: Percussion instruments (source: rebanamurah.blogspot.com)

The third modification involves the introduction of modern musical instruments such as guitars, keyboards, and flutes in his recordings. According to Habib Syech, this choice is intended to appeal to a wider audience, including both Muslims and non-Muslims. Notably, he has never opposed the use of or listening to music, asserting that the Prophet loves music. He cites the story of Prophet Muhammad's arrival in Madinah, where people welcomed him by singing a *qasidah* accompanied by *duff*, suggesting that music is not prohibited in Islam. While Habib Syech's recordings feature modern instruments, his stage performances rely exclusively on percussion, maintaining a distinction between the sacred and profane aspects of his artistry. On stage, his *shalawat* performances continue to include elements of the *maulid* celebration, particularly the *qiyām* and *maulid* supplication, preserving their devotional character. This practice is in line with the traditional allowance of *duff* or *rebana* in *maulid* celebrations, rooted in the story of the Prophet's arrival in Madinah.

Regarding recordings, they are treated as everyday products. Habib Syech explained that his use of modern instruments in these recordings is aimed at reaching a broader audience, including non-Muslims. Unlike *shalawat* performances, the recorded CDs do not feature elements of the *maulid* celebration, such as the *qiyām*. Instead, they consist of Arabic, Indonesian, and Javanese *qasidah*. As such, he is not restricted to using traditional instruments like the *duff* or *rebana*, as commonly found in *shalawat* performances or *maulid* celebrations.

Habib Syech's perspective on incorporating modern musical instruments into his *dakwah* style parallels that of other Bā ʿAlawī preachers in Indonesia. For example, Habib Luthfi (b. 1947), a notable Bā ʿAlawī preacher in Pekalongan, Central Java, also employs modern instruments in his *dakwah* programmes (Arifin, 2012). Moreover, modern musical instruments have long been part of the Bā ʿAlawī tradition. The *orkes gambus* genre, for instance, is commonly played at Bā ʿAlawī wedding ceremonies, featuring an Egyptian *ʿud* alongside small drums accompanying male dancers (Berg, 2011). Similarly, *zafin*, a genre akin to *gambus*, is performed prior to the annual *haul* activity. This genre typically features *ʿud* and a musical keyboard, complemented by two male dancers (Alatas, 2014). Given this cultural backdrop, it is unsurprising that Habib Syech integrates modern musical instruments into his *dakwah* programmes. This approach contrasts sharply with the Salafi stance, which prohibits all musical instruments. As discussed in Chapter 1, Salafis base their opposition on Ibn Bāz's *fatwa*, which categorises music as forbidden and disapproved (*haram* and *munkar*) (Ibn Bāz, 2005).

The fourth modification pertains to the stage and sound system. Unlike traditional *maulid* celebrations typically held in mosques or private spaces, Habib Syech's performances are conducted outdoors on a stage to accommodate larger audiences. Initially, the *hadrah* performers were positioned behind him on the same stage, but they were later moved to a lower stage in front of him, allowing him to signal when to begin a new song. As attendance grew, from approximately 200 people in Sragen to over 1,000 in Kudus, the stage and sound system were scaled up accordingly to meet these demands (Habib Syech, personal communication, 30 August 2017).

The fifth modification involves the use of modern technology for distribution, including CDs and the internet. This shift began with his decision to record his first album in 2001, and since then, he has produced 12 volumes of CDs. Since 2014, his albums have also been made available digitally via platforms like the iTunes Store and Google Play Music. By leveraging modern technology, he has successfully expanded his reach to a broader audience, particularly the tech-savvy youth, enhancing the dissemination of his *dakwah*.

This innovative approach to *shalawat* performance has proven effective in attracting large crowds to his religious gatherings. Reflecting on the success of his modifications, Habib Syech remarked:

> "Why do many people come to my religious gathering? *Dakwah* needs to be executed creatively. You cannot do *dakwah* by only

> delivering sermons. It is boring. Having said that, I created my new method that attracts people to come: by combining sermon, *dhikr*, *maulid* and music. People come to a religious gathering with a stressed mind of their working loads. After they arrive at the gathering, we cannot just give a sermon by saying this is *haram*, or you will go to the hellfire, and so on. This method will only make them feel more stressed. It is better to start with a *qasidah.* After they relax, then we can give them a preaching saying that we ask them to do the prayer *(salat)*. I think this method is easier and more acceptable" (Habib Syech, personal communication, 30 August 2017).

Apart from describing the effect of modifying his *dakwah* method, his statement shows his inward piety. He combines sermon and music to help participants feel more relaxed, demonstrating the easy-going and peaceful style of his preaching. He contrasts this with other styles that readily condemn people's acts as *haram* or threaten with hellfire punishment, seemingly comparing his musical *dakwah* approach with the more outwardly pious style of hardliners who easily judge others as wrong. This lenient style, which incorporates musical elements, accounts for the success of this *dakwah* programme.

Following the success of his *dakwah* programme outside Surakarta, he decided to use his old house in Metrodanan, Kelurahan Semanggi, as the centre for his preaching activities. In contrast to his performances elsewhere, where he only recites a few chapters from the *maulid* book *Simth al-Durar*, he recites the entire book at his own house every Wednesday night. It is also where he organises his *majlis* (religious gathering) and where he started the *shalawat* group Ahbabul Mustofa.

4.1.3. Shalawat performance and Ahbabul Mustofa

Building on the modifications established in his early performances, Habib Syech's current shows highlight how the practice element of public resilience has developed into a well-crafted system featuring expansive stages, intricate lighting, and advanced sound systems. At a concert I attended in Sukoharjo on 25 September 2017, thousands of people attended a free event titled 'Sukoharjo Bershalawat' (Sukoharjo praising the Prophet). Many of Habib Syech's performances incorporate the term *'bershalawat'* into the event's name. According to Habib Syech, his performances utilise sound systems with an 80,000-watt capacity (Habib Syech, personal communication, 30 August 2017). By comparison, a ticketed rock concert using similar sound systems in 2004 drew 37,000 attendees

(Detiknews, 2004), indicating that Habib Syech's free performances could surpass that figure.

The performance I attended began after 8 p.m., although attendees started arriving as early as 6 p.m. Before Habib Syech appeared on stage, 15 Ahbabul Mustofa performers entertained the audience with songs, sitting cross-legged on old newspapers or plastic mats. A rope line demarcated male and female participants, with officials attempting to maintain the separation, though strict enforcement proved challenging. Most participants were women aged 15 to 50, with visible youth representation from both genders. At approximately 8 p.m., Habib Syech took the stage alongside the Regent (*Bupati*) of Sukoharjo and other local officials, including the police chief (*Kapolres*) and military commander (*Dandim*). Positioned parallel to the musicians, these officials joined the audience in following and singing along with Habib Syech, who appeared to know all the lyrics. Many participants waved flags mounted on bamboo sticks, including the Indonesian flag, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Ahbabul Mustofa, and Syekhermania flags.

The waving of the Indonesian flag during Habib Syech's performances seems linked to his mission of promoting patriotism. He frequently sings songs encouraging participants to support their motherland, such as 'NKRI Harga Mati' (*The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is non-negotiable*) and *Yalal Wathan* (*O Motherland*). The regular inclusion of these 'nationalistic' songs (along with the Indonesian anthem and two other patriotic songs) appears to influence the use of Indonesian flags by participants. By consistently incorporating these nationalistic elements and inviting government officials to his performances, Habib Syech cultivates a sense of patriotism and loyalty to the nation among his followers. This practice stands in contrast to groups that advocate for an Islamic state and reject the nation-state concept. Through these performances, he demonstrates how religious devotion can go hand in hand with Indonesian citizenship.

Figure 3: Habib Syech facing his *shalawat* performers (photo taken by the author)

The flag of NU indicates that participants identify as followers of Nahdlatul Ulama. Similarly, the flags of Ahbabul Mustofa and Syekhermania serve as identity symbols for participants, signifying their membership in these groups. These actions reflect the cultivation of religious sensibility among NU and Ahbabul Mustofa followers, reinforcing their acceptance of *maulid* and *shalawat* performances. The waving of flags also contributes to an enjoyable atmosphere, enhancing the event's appeal to participants. At a particular moment during the performance, the crowd stands to sing the *qiyām* chapter from the *maulid* book *Simth al-Durar*. Afterwards, they return to their seats to listen to speeches by the regent of Sukoharjo and a sermon from Gus Karim (b. 1964), a prominent local preacher. Habib Syech then performs several more songs before concluding with a supplication. To close the event, he invites the local police chief to lead the Indonesian anthem and two patriotic songs, *'17 Agustus 1945'* and *'Garuda Pancasila'*.

There are notable differences between Habib Syech's performance and the *maulid* in the Riyadh Mosque. In Habib Syech's performance, the *maulid* book is only partially recited, whereas in the Riyadh Mosque, it is fully recited. Additionally, Habib Syech's performance incorporates various musical instruments, while the Riyadh Mosque's *maulid* relies solely on *rebana banjari*. Lastly, in Habib Syech's performance, male and female participants are loosely separated, whereas in the Riyadh Mosque, strict segregation of men and women is observed.

Furthermore, Habib Syech's performances with Ahbabul Mustofa are large-scale events requiring a substantial group of performers. He expanded his team to other cities, with several declaring themselves as branches of Ahbabul Mustofa. Each branch's declaration requires Habib Syech's approval, and not all are officially endorsed. The exact number of branches remains uncertain, as Ahbabul Mustofa is a non-formal organisation without formal registration documents. Gus Wahid (b. 1984), Habib Syech's main backing vocalist, estimates that there are around eight active and approved branches in Solo, Kudus, Yogyakarta, Jember, Surabaya, Lamongan, Cirebon, and Samarinda (Gus Wahid, personal communication, 15 October 2017). These branches primarily support Habib Syech's performances, though some also perform independently. The central board in Solo and the Kudus branch frequently accompany him in his performances, demonstrating how these networks sustain and expand these religious performances across different regions.

In 2009, Habib Syech established his own *dakwah* centre, Gedung Bustanul Asyiqin (GBA), in Semanggi, Surakarta, to accommodate the growing number of participants. The two-floor building, used for *maulid* celebrations since 2014, is spacious and can accommodate 2,000 participants. Its design resembles a Middle Eastern palace, with Indonesian and Ahbabul Mustofa flags hanging side by side. During my fieldwork, I attended Habib Syech's performances in GBA several times. I observed that the venue was always fully attended by participants not only from Surakarta but also from neighbouring cities. Unlike performances held in open areas, men and women are strictly segregated in GBA. YouTube streaming is provided for those unable to attend the performance live, allowing them to watch it later at their convenience. In addition, selected sermons from gatherings in GBA are also uploaded to YouTube, enabling participants to access them easily at home via their smartphones. During my interactions with participants, I found that many of them had saved numerous songs or sermons by Habib Syech on their smartphones.

4.2. Artist, popularity and fans

This section analyses Habib Syech's fame and its role in inspiring the organisation of fan groups, which in turn nurtures the growth of *shalawat* performance groups. It discusses Syekhermania, Mbolovers, and Shoffalovers. I argue that the popularity of Habib Syech, Syekhermania, and the two backing vocalists, along with their respective fan groups, demonstrates how the *maulid* celebration is gaining traction and disseminating within society, particularly among Muslim youth. This phenomenon has evolved into a *maulid* movement initiated by Habib Syech and Ahbabul Mustofa, later replicated by Syekhermania, Mbolovers, and Shoffalovers.

4.2.1. The popularity of Habib Syech and the development of Syekhermania

Currently, Habib Syech is regarded as a renowned 'artist' with a demanding and tightly packed schedule, as evidenced by his performance timetable being fully booked one year in advance. During my observation at the *maulid* celebration in GBA, a guest from Kebumen, Central Java, approached Habib Syech to invite him to perform in his city. However, his invitation was politely declined, with Habib Syech requesting the guest to return in six months to check for an available slot. Habib Syech performs almost daily, taking breaks only on Wednesdays for the *maulid* celebration in GBA and on Sundays (Gus Wahid, personal communication, 15 October 2017).

Moreover, Habib Syech's popularity becomes apparent whenever he performs. After events, many young participants approach him to request photos. As a respected BāʿAlawī, it is customary for participants to kiss his hand as a gesture of respect. These admirers call themselves Syekhermania, a group founded by Miftahul Dhuha (b. 1973), who has followed Habib Syech since 2000. In 2009, Dhuha created a Facebook fan page called 'Syekhermania Club,' which shares information about Habib Syech's performance schedule and related videos (Miftahul Dhuha, personal communication, 14 August 2017). The page gained significant traction, exceeding 30,000 members at the time, prompting Dhuha to seek Habib Syech's approval to formalise the organisation, which he granted. Today, the Facebook page, now named Syekhermania Pusat (the central board of Syekhermania) boasts 626,651 members as of 20 November 2018 (Syekhermania Pusat, 2009).

Syekhermania is a loosely organised fan association of Habib Syech's admirers, not a legal entity. Members discuss their activities through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp groups, which also serve as channels for sharing recorded performances and sermons by Habib Syech. These platforms enable members to participate in his performances virtually in real-time and access them anytime via their smartphones. During fieldwork, I observed Syekhermania gatherings where members exchanged videos of Habib Syech's performances. Building on the online group's success, Dhuha designed a Syekhermania logo, which members use for merchandise such as flags, banners, T-shirts, and jackets (Syekhermania Pusat, 2009). Consequently, it is common to see many Syekhermania members wearing these outfits and displaying flags or banners during Habib Syech's performances.

Figure 4: Syekhermania after Habib Syech's performance in front of the city hall of Surakarta (photo taken by the author)

Recently, this fan group has expanded and established branches in many cities, each with its own *shalawat* performance group. According to the database of Syekhermania, as of August 2018, there are 37 branches of Syekhermania in Java and beyond (Faisol, personal communication, 15 October 2017). Each of these groups regularly organises *shalawat* performances. I had the opportunity to observe one of these performances on 13 September 2018 in Klaten district (24 kilometres from Surakarta). According to Shokib, its coordinator, their *shalawat* group performs every two months (Shokib, personal communication, 15 May 2018). During my visit, the celebration was held in the front yard of the Military Rayon Command (Koramil) of Kecamatan Karangananom, Klaten. Overall, the performance closely resembled a concert by Ahbabul Mustofa, including the singing of the Indonesian anthem at the end of the programme. At this event, the lead singer was Gus Wahid, the principal backing vocalist of Habib Syech. The sermon was delivered by a local preacher from the area.

4.2.2. The popularity of Habib Syech's backing vocalists

The success of Ahbabul Mustofa influenced not only Habib Syech's popularity but also his backing vocalists. Ahbabul Mustofa has many branches, each with vocalists frequently invited by Habib Syech to assist him in providing vocal harmony during his performances. Among these backing vocalists, I will provide information on the two most popular ones, represented by their fan groups and their frequent performances with Habib Syech. They are Wahid Syarifuddin Ahmad (b. 1985), also

known as Gus Wahid, and Ahmad Mushoffa, commonly referred to as Gus Shoffa (b. 1986).

The first famous backing vocalist is Gus Wahid, born in Gunung Kidul regency, Yogyakarta, into a religious Nahdlatul Ulama family. He describes himself as someone who grew up in a community of *shalawat* performances and is also familiar with performing Javanese ethnic songs of *campursari*, with numerous recordings of his performances available on YouTube. Habib Syech invited him to join Ahbabul Mustofa after performing *shalawat* at *Hadeging Nagari* in 2008, the birthday celebration of the Javanese kingdom of Yogyakarta (Gus Wahid, personal communication, 15 October 2017). During the observed performances by Habib Syech, Gus Wahid was the most favoured singer, participating in nearly every performance, including travels to Hong Kong and Taiwan. Habib Syech seems to prefer him due to his distinctive vocal ability in singing Javanese songs. Besides his unique vocal talent, Gus Wahid is also young and attractive, making him popular among youth, especially female participants, who often gather around him after performances for photographs.

Gus Wahid's popularity is also evident from his admirers who established a fan club called Mbolovers (*pecinta Mbolo*), named after his nickname, Mbolo. This fan club is smaller than Syekhermania and consists of members who interact via social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp groups to share videos and schedules of Gus Wahid's performances. In Kebumen, Central Java, Mbolovers not only communicate online but also meet frequently. According to their coordinator, Aziz, most members are young, ranging from junior high school students (aged 13–15) to university students. They usually gather once a month to practise *tahlilan* and invite Gus Wahid to perform *shalawat* in Kebumen every three or four months, with the most recent performance in August 2018 (Aziz, personal communication, 27 October 2018).

Figure 5: Three young female participants posed for a photo with Gus Wahid
(photo taken by the author)

The second renowned backing vocalist is Gus Shoffa, born in Kudus, Central Java, in 1986. He studied at the local *pondok pesantren* in Kudus and was a Qurʾānic reciter *(qārī)* before engaging in *shalawat* performances, initially joining a *shalawat* group in his *pondok pesantren*. When Habib Syech performed in Kudus for the first time in 2001, he was introduced to Gus Shoffa and invited him to join Ahbabul Mustofa. At that time, Habib Syech was not yet widely popular. Gus Shoffa was one of the earliest *shalawat* performers to join Habib Syech and has since performed with him across Java and beyond. In Kudus, he frequently performs *shalawat* independently from Ahbabul Mustofa, typically four days a week (Gus Shoffa, personal communication, 8 August 2017). In addition to performing with Ahbabul Mustofa, Shoffa manages several *shalawat* groups in Kudus and has produced audio recordings of *shalawat* with them, the most recent of which was released in 2017. These recordings are distributed locally through his friends and uploaded on YouTube, enhancing his popularity among *shalawat* performers in the city (Gus Shoffa, personal communication, 8 August 2017).

Similar to Gus Wahid, Gus Shoffa is also widely admired by teenagers, both boys and girls, who attend Habib Syech's performances. This popularity led to the formation of a fan club called Shoffalovers in 2014. Like Mbolovers, the Shoffalovers group primarily functions as an online forum, with a Facebook fan

page and WhatsApp group dedicated to fans of Gus Shoffa. These platforms are used to share videos of Gus Shoffa's performances. As an extension of Syekhermania, Shoffalovers occasionally gather to perform the *maulid* celebration among themselves. Their regular meeting place is the house of Gus Shoffa, with gatherings primarily occurring during the *Idul Fitri* holiday season (Gus Shoffa, personal communication, 8 August 2017).

Figure 6: Shoffalovers with Gus Shoffa
(source: Shoffalovers Facebook page)

The popularity of Habib Syech, the rise of Syekhermania, and the two backing vocalists with their respective fan groups showcase how the *maulid* celebration is gradually gaining ground and disseminating within society, particularly among Muslim youth. The transformation of the *maulid* into a large *shalawat* performance indicates its growing fame, which is related to the participants' desire to listen more to *qasidah* rather than solely reciting the *maulid*. The *shalawat* performance groups are further multiplied by the branch groups of Ahbabul Mustofa and the fan groups of Syekhermania, which have created *shalawat* groups in many Indonesian cities. Additionally, the emergence of fan groups for Habib Syech's two backing vocalists, *Mbolovers* and Shoffalovers, contributes to the multiplication of new *shalawat* performance groups. The establishment of these *shalawat* groups has become a *maulid* celebration movement that was initiated by Habib Syech, continued by Syekhermania, and further supported by his two backing vocalists.

4.2.3. Popularising shalawat performance

The *shalawat* performances by Habib Syech and Ahbabul Mustofa serve as a strategic response to Salafi criticism and radical Islamic ideologies in Indonesia. Through large-scale performances featuring professional staging, traditional and modern musical instruments, and collective rituals, practitioners cultivate discourses and practices that resist Salafi religious sensibilities while building public resilience against radical ideas. Their approach uses popular culture to develop organised fan networks like Syekhermania, Mbolovers, and Shoffalovers, while promoting a collective identity through shared practices such as singing Javanese *qasidah*, displaying NU flags, and performing nationalistic songs like *'NKRI Harga Mati'* and *'Yalal Wathan'*. These elements effectively counter radical Islamic ideologies while reinforcing the legitimacy of traditional *maulid* celebrations as an integral part of Indonesian Muslim expression.

This use of *shalawat* as resistance fits within one of Storey's (2009, p. 5) six definitions of popular culture - as a tool for subordinate groups to resist dominant ones. Along with this definition of resistance, Storey's framework of popular culture as widely favoured culture and as commercial mass culture helps explain how the *shalawat* phenomenon effectively builds public resilience against radical ideologies while maintaining traditional practices.

The transformation of *maulid* into *shalawat* performance demonstrates these aspects of popular culture. As widely favoured culture, Habib Syech strategically incorporates elements that appeal to mass audiences, particularly through Javanese songs that resonate with local populations of Solo Raya and Central Java. These songs bridge the gap between traditional religious practices and contemporary cultural preferences. This strategy draws on the cultural heritage and religious sentiments of the region, making the *maulid* celebrations more engaging and relatable for the community. Habib Syech's approach reflects the *dakwah* style of the Walisongo, noted for integrating local culture into the spread of Islam, as discussed by Woodward et al. (2012, p. 121). The use of Javanese songs not only adds to the festive nature of the *maulid* but also connects with the cultural memory and identity of his audience. Moreover, Habib Syech's lineage as a BāʿAlawī, direct descendant of the Prophet, adds a layer of religious authority and deep respect to the events.

In terms of commercial mass culture, Habib Syech employs modern technology such as CDs and the internet to broaden his *dakwah* reach. His CDs featuring *qasidah*s attract diverse listeners, while YouTube channels - both official ('AM Solo'

and 'isyekh') and fan-managed - promote his songs and sermons. The commercialisation extends to professional event production with advanced sound systems, lighting, and stage designs comparable to commercial entertainment. Modern musical instruments and professional performers enhance both aesthetic quality and broad appeal. Marketing strategies including digital sales and merchandise effectively draw large audiences, particularly youth. The popularity of fan groups like Syekhermania across Indonesia portrays this commercial strategy's success in making spiritual content accessible and competitive within the broader entertainment market.

These performances create dynamic spaces where participants engage in collective religious practices through large-scale gatherings. The practice element of public resilience manifests through comprehensive and interconnected elements. At their core are events featuring professional staging and sound systems, complemented by an integration of traditional *rebana* and modern musical instruments. These performances encourage mass participation through collective singing, prayer, and ritual practices such as *qiyām*. The display of various symbols during these gatherings includes Indonesian flags, Nahdlatul Ulama banners, Ahbabul Mustofa flags, and Syekhermania flags. The formation of organised fan communities like Syekhermania, Mbolovers, and Shoffalovers extends these activities beyond individual events, while regular gatherings strengthen social networks within these communities. Furthermore, collaboration with government officials, including local leaders, police chiefs, and military commanders who regularly attend and participate in these events, adds institutional support to these religious gatherings.

The *shalawat* performances act as a strategic tool to assert the legitimacy of Sufi practices like *maulid* within the public sphere. Fan groups like Syekhermania, Mbolovers, and Shoffalovers create significant networks promoting *maulid* celebrations while countering radical ideologies. The strategic use of NU flags and government official involvement promotes nationalism and civic duty, integrating religious practices into patriotic values.

The patriotic dimension of these performances particularly strengthens community resistance to radical ideologies. In response to terrorist incidents in Indonesia, *shalawat* performers actively resist radical Islamic groups opposing the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia *(Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia, NKRI)*. Through practices like waving the Indonesian flag, inviting government officials, and singing nationalist songs such as '*NKRI Harga Mati*' and '*Yalal Wathan*', these performances counter groups seeking to initiate an Islamic state. These radical

groups consider such patriotic expressions forbidden (ICG, 2002; Solahuddin, 2013, p. 86).

The quietist stance adopted by Habib Syech and other BāʿAlawī figures represents an approach focused on religious performances and cultural activities rather than political engagement. This approach involves organising public gatherings that combine religious rituals with cultural elements, enabling these leaders to work collaboratively with government institutions while maintaining their religious activities. By creating spaces for *shalawat* performances and traditional practices like *maulid* celebration, while staying clear of political controversies, they sustain regular religious gatherings that attract diverse participants. This strategy contrasts with Salafi groups' more confrontational approach to religious practice, as evidenced in their public criticism of traditional rituals and cultural practices.

Historical examples include respected figures like Sayyid Uthman (d. 1913), Batavia's *mufti*, and Habib 'Ali Kwitang (d. 1968), who maintained productive government relationships (Alatas, 2009). Similarly, Habib Munzir al-Musawa (d. 2013) echoed this accommodating approach. This differs markedly from confrontational figures like Habib Rizieq of the Islamic Defenders Front (Syechbubakr, 2017).

In the context of Indonesian Islam, Habib Syech's *shalawat* performances depict the nuanced interplay between traditional and puritanical forces, as analysed by both Noorhaidi Hasan (2012) and Syamsul Rijal (2017). These performances, embodying inward-oriented piety, contrast with radical groups' outward-looking ambitions for societal transformation. Habib Syech and Syekhermania navigate this complex landscape by promoting love for the Prophet and God while avoiding political discourse. Their approach of blending sermons, *dhikr*, *maulid*, and music, though critiqued by Salafis, serves as both religious expression and subtle contestation against puritanical rivals.

Unlike radical groups described by Hasan (2012, pp. 371-72), these performances focus on deepening piety and religious affection rather than changing state systems. These performances prioritise collective religious practices and communal gatherings over direct political activism, as evidenced by their focus on *shalawat* recitation, shared rituals and community events rather than calls for systemic change. Building on insights from Hasan (2012) and Rijal (2017), Habib Syech's *shalawat* performances represent a distinct approach that combines spiritual enrichment with expressions of nationalism, creating spaces where religious

devotion coexists with and reinforces support for Indonesia's unity, in contrast to radical groups that aspire to build an Islamic state.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined three key questions about the evolution of *maulid* in twenty-first century Surakarta. First, regarding how *maulid* evolved, the analysis reveals its transformation from a traditional devotional practice into a widely favoured performance through the visionary efforts of Bā ʿAlawī preacher Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf. Second, on the integration of popular culture, this occurred through strategic incorporation of modern staging, media technology, and the formation of fan communities. Third, addressing its widespread acceptance despite Salafi criticism, the success stems from Habib Syech's ability to adapt traditional practices while preserving religious essence. This adaptation manifests through both physical transformations and social networks that sustain traditional religious practices.

Rooted in the traditions of the *Simth al-Durar maulid* celebrated by Bā ʿAlawī for generations, Habib Syech re-envisioned the *maulid* into a *shalawat* performance that resonates with contemporary audiences, spreading from Solo to various regions across Central Java and beyond. This development involved incorporating vibrant stage settings, extensive lighting, and a variety of musical instruments, condensing the traditional recitation and emphasising singing *qasidah* in Javanese.

These physical transformations create new spaces for religious expression. By transitioning to larger stages and enhancing sound systems with additional percussion instruments, Habib Syech has initiated venues where participants gather for collective religious activities. The practice element manifests through these performances in specific, observable ways: professional staging and sound systems, integration of traditional and modern instruments, mass participation in collective rituals, and display of religious and national symbols. Furthermore, linking the performance to the legendary *Walisongo* connects these contemporary practices with traditional religious narratives.

The use of modern media tools like CDs and social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp expand these performances' reach, especially among younger audiences. The formation of organised fan communities, from Syekhermania to Mbolovers and Shoffalovers, extends activities beyond individual events, creating sustained networks for regular gatherings. These

communities actively organise *maulid* and *shalawat* performances, continuing the religious and cultural practices introduced by Habib Syech.

Through these various elements, Habib Syech's approach develops spaces for collective religious expression. This practice involves not merely religious rituals but encompasses how religious and cultural identity is expressed and experienced within the community. The practice element includes large-scale performances, community organisation, and use of cultural symbols, all contributing to the sustainability of these religious gatherings.

The incorporation of patriotic elements, such as singing the Indonesian anthem and displaying national flags, adds a civic dimension to these religious gatherings. The government's support through the *'Solo kota shalawat'* initiative provides institutional backing for these activities. This cooperative relationship between performers and state authorities distinguishes the Surakarta context from traditional counterpublic formations, leading to our conceptual framework of 'public resilience'.

As these practices continue to evolve, they represent an evolution in how traditional religious practices adapt to contemporary contexts while maintaining their spiritual significance. The details of how these activities gained governmental sponsorship through the *'Solo kota shalawat'* initiative will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

'Solo kota shalawat' and the festivalisation of religious ritual

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined how Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf transformed traditional *maulid* celebrations into popular *shalawat* performances, creating public resilience against Salafi criticism. His innovative approach, combining religious devotion with entertainment elements, has not only attracted young participants but also inspired other groups to adopt similar practices. These groups have embraced both his performance style, from stage structure to percussion instruments, and his integration of nationalistic songs to cultivate patriotism among participants.

This chapter analyses two interconnected developments: the emergence of *shalawat* groups following Habib Syech's model, and the municipal government's declaration of Solo as the city of *shalawat*. Similar to Morocco's state endorsement for Sufi music festivals (ter Laan, 2016), this institutional backing emerged in response to specific local contexts and concerns. As documented through interviews with municipal officials and fieldwork observations, this engagement progressed through a combination of cultural preservation initiatives and responses to local security challenges. Through the festivalisation of religious ritual, traditional *maulid* practices are transformed into engaging performances that balance piety with cultural appeal. Municipal support for *shalawat* performances illustrates the framework outlined in Chapter 4, showing how state–community collaboration, paralleling Morocco's Sufi festival promotion (ter Laan, 2016), transforms Surakarta's image while safeguarding ritual continuity.

Through the lens of festivalisation (Negrier, 2015; Przybylska, 2015; Rasmussen, 2010, 2015), these performances blend ritual, entertainment, economy, and politics. The purposes of festivalisation are cultural, political, economic (Belghazi, 2006), and entertainment. Bayat's (2007) analysis of the politics of fun and paradigms of power clarifies how performers navigate tensions between ritual continuity and popular appeal. Taken together, this theoretical framework explains how *shalawat* performances build public resilience while maintaining religious legitimacy.

The analysis draws on extensive fieldwork conducted between July and December 2017, focusing on four *shalawat* groups in Surakarta: Jamuro, Jamuri, al-Hidayah, and Jampi Sanubari. Through participant observation at 28 performances and interviews with key figures, this study examines how these groups adapt Habib

Syech's model while developing their own distinctive approaches to balancing religious tradition with popular appeal.

The chapter first examines how each group interprets and adapts the *shalawat* performance model, then analyses how their collective success contributed to Solo's official recognition of *shalawat* culture. This transformation represents not just a change in religious practice but the development of cultural resistance against radical ideologies through festivalisation of traditional rituals.

5.1. Shalawat performance groups in Surakarta

5.1.1. Jamuro (Jamaah Muji Rosul)

Jamuro or *Jamaah Muji Rosul* (congregation for praising the Prophet) is a group of *shalawat* performers established by several Javanese *kiai* (clerics) in Surakarta, including Gus Karim (b. 1964), KH. Idris Shafawi (b. 1951), and KH. Ibrahim (b. 1955). They are the chairmen of the Islamic boarding schools Al-Zayyadi, Takmirul Islam, and al-Muayyad, respectively, all renowned institutions affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).

According to Gus Karim, Jamuro was established on 9 April 2005 (Jamuro, 2006, p. 1). Previously, he and fellow clerics used *tahlilan*, a practice involving Qurʾānic recitation and *dhikr* to supplicate for the deceased, for *dakwah*, but attracted few people. Responding to a suggestion from a follower, Gus Karim launched Jamuro, adopting *shalawat* performance as the primary *dakwah* method (Gus Karim, personal communication, 30 January 2017).

When Jamuro started using *shalawat*, it began attracting more people. Initially, Jamuro had only 50-100 participants, but recently attendance has increased to around 5,000, depending on time and place. Jamuro's popularity is evident in events like the *maulid* celebrated at Hotel Sunan, a four-star hotel in Surakarta (Jateng Online, 2014). This mirrors Habib Syech's pattern: transitioning from an unsuccessful *tahlilan dakwah* programme to a more appealing *shalawat* performance. Jamuro chose *shalawat* over *dhikr* because *shalawat* can be transformed into a spectacle that attracts more people. Additionally, the involvement of BāʿAlawī figures, especially Habib Syech, enhances Jamuro's popularity and reach. Believed to be a descendant of the Prophet, he draws masses who seek his blessing. This connection persists today, with young BāʿAlawī preachers often participating and delivering sermons at Jamuro performances.

Currently, Jamuro hosts regular performances every 35 days, often held at a member's house. The venue is typically the front yard of a mosque, which can accommodate more people than the homes of members. Only occasionally is it held in a hotel hall or government building, if Jamuro is invited by a middle-class member or government official. Every month of *Rabīʿ al-Awwal*, Jamuro holds 12 days of *maulid* performances, with the last day usually hosted by the municipality of Surakarta. Jamuro's performance at the municipality was due to Gus Karim's close connection to the municipal government, especially the then Mayor of Solo, Jokowi. During his tenure, Jokowi often invited Jamuro to perform at Loji Gandrung, the official residence of the Mayor of Surakarta (KH. Idris Shafawi, personal communication, 29 January 2018).

5.1.2. Jamuri (Jamaah Muji Rosul untuk Putri)

Jamuri *(Jamaah Muji Rosul untuk Putri)*, a female congregation dedicated to praising the Prophet, was established in 2000 by women preachers in Surakarta, notably Sekhah Wal'afiah (b. 1964). The founders, mostly wives of Javanese *kiai* or alumni of NU-affiliated *pondok pesantren*, created Jamuri as a forum for women to express their religious interests (Sekhah Wal'afiah, personal communication, 21 September 2017). Munawaroh (b. 1946) emphasises that this initiative enables Muslim women to engage in activities beyond traditional domestic roles centred around the well, kitchen, and bed, domains associated with hygiene, nourishment, and marital harmony. By participating in Jamuri, women extend their activities beyond the domestic sphere, expressing happiness and piety (Bunyai Munawaroh, personal communication, 21 September 2017).

Affiliated with NU, Sekhah leverages her network of NU clerics to expand Jamuri within Surakarta's NU community. Jamuri maintains a strong relationship with Gus Karim, founder of Jamuro and patron of Jamuri, who supported its establishment. Another patron is the BāʿAlawī community, especially Habib Syech. Their patronage is evident in Jamuri's performance format change in 2009, when they began using a full set of *shalawat* musical instruments (hadrah), having previously performed without accompaniment. According to Bunyai Munawaroh, this decision responded to participants' requests for more attractive *shalawat* performances with hadrah (Bunyai Munawaroh, personal communication, 21 September 2017). Jamuri's incorporation of musical instruments reflects broader patterns of women's Islamic musical expression in Indonesia, where female participation in *qasidah* modern and related genres has deep historical roots (Rasmussen, 2011).

Jamuri first had the opportunity to perform outside their core group in 2005, gaining public recognition during the local direct election campaign. At that time, Jokowi was running for Mayor of Surakarta. To attract supporters to his campaign, Jokowi invited Jamuri to perform. This strategy proved successful, as more than 1,500 people attended the performance. Due to this success, other candidates followed suit by inviting Jamuri to their public campaigns. Afterwards, Jamuri performed not only in their members' houses but was also invited to non-members' homes (Sekhah Wal'afiah, personal communication, 21 September 2017). The incorporation of shalawat in political campaigns had a significant impact on Jamuri. After Jokowi became Mayor, the relationship between the municipality and shalawat performance supporters gradually strengthened.

The close relationship with the government continues today. This is evident in Jamuri's monthly performances held at the official residence of the Mayor of Surakarta. Additionally, in its annual *maulid* performance in the month of *Rabīʿ al-Awwal*, one event is held in the plenary hall of the Regional House of Representatives of Surakarta, demonstrating Jamuri's good relations with the government, especially the ruling Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP).

In terms of popular culture, Jamuri now uses Habib Syech's hadrah style, responding to participants' demands for musical accompaniment. There are at least two reasons for this demand. First, as Habib Syech's *shalawat* performance has grown more popular, many groups in Surakarta have adopted his style of presentation and pop culture approach, making it natural for participants to expect the same standard. Second, most of Jamuri's participants also attend Habib Syech's performances, leading them to desire the same style. The adoption of the hadrah style in response to participants' demands symbolises the festivalisation process. By incorporating musical instruments, participants have transformed Jamuri's performance into a spectacle comparable to Habib Syech's performances. Regarding attendance, my observations showed participation varying from 600 to 1,500 people.

5.1.3. Al-Hidayah

Al-Hidayah was initiated by Soni Parsono (d. 2021), a local preacher in Solo Baru, Sukoharjo. Without formal Islamic education, he developed his preaching skills autodidactically by attending religious gatherings of Habib and local *kiai*. Professionally a trader, he became a successful businessman distributing motorcycle spare parts from China, enabling him to fund Islamic propagation, including establishing *pondok pesantren* Darul Qur'an in Sukoharjo.

Initially unrelated to *shalawat* performance, al-Hidayah began when Parsono commissioned a mosque near his residence in 2004, serving for preaching and small-scale Islamic study. He expanded his preaching through weekly gatherings. After spearheading al-Hidayah in 2008, and following unsuccessful attempts with Qurʾān recitation programmes suggested by Habib Syech, Parsono decided to use *shalawat* as his core *dakwah* after consulting other *kiai* and BāʿAlawī preachers (Soni Parsono, personal communication, 26 September 2017).

Choosing to focus on *shalawat* proved successful. In the first six months, according to Parsono, the *shalawat* performance was effective and could easily attract around 500 people. He stated that, compared to *dakwah* methods with Qurʾānic recitation or *dhikr*, *shalawat* is the most successful in attracting participants (Soni Parsono, personal communication, 26 September 2017). The change of al-Hidayah's *dakwah* style resembled that of Habib Syech and Jamuro. Unlike Qurʾānic recitation, which was seen merely as a religious ritual, *shalawat* performance adopted a form of spectacle and had an entertaining character that engaged participants.

Besides the change in *dakwah* style, based on my observation of several al-Hidayah performances, Soni Parsono's success is partly due to his alliance with other BāʿAlawī preachers in Surakarta. During my fieldwork, Soni Parsono was often seen performing together with them. This success gradually gave him the confidence to preach alongside the BāʿAlawī preachers. This alliance enabled the extension of al-Hidayah's shalawat programme into more places and branches in the area of Solo Raya. Agus Supriyanto (b. 1986), one of his trusted staff members, stated that there are now more than seven branches of al-Hidayah in four districts: Surakarta, Wonogiri, Sukoharjo, and Karanganyar (Agus Supriyanto, personal communication, 31 July 2018). To support his *shalawat* programme, Soni also established a community radio of al-Hidayah in 2009 (see Sunarwoto, 2015, for a more detailed account).

In terms of performance venue, al-Hidayah usually hosts its programme in mosque yards. Besides mosque yards, al-Hidayah also performs monthly in the parking lot of Carrefour Mall in Sukoharjo. This location was chosen due to Soni Parsono's personal connection as a local businessman, enabling him to lobby the mall management for a performance spot. The number of participants ranges from 500 to 1,000 people.

5.1.4. Jampi Sanubari

Jampi Sanubari, the smallest *shalawat* group I interviewed, was founded in 2010 by two NU followers in Banjarsari, Abah Toha (b. 1958) and Purwanto (b. 1960). Both are associated with the royal Mangkunegaran mosque of al-Wustho, where Abah Toha is the full-time imam. Though the founder, he is rarely involved in performances due to his duties. Purwanto, the auxiliary imam and former singer with Jamuro, resigned from Jamuro in 2006 feeling he could not keep up with younger performers, and now performs small *maulid* in mosques or houses (Purwanto, personal communication, 14 July 2017).

In 2010, after recognising the need to strengthen NU's dakwah in the district of Banjarsari, Purwanto and several friends decided to establish the *shalawat* group of Jampi Sanubari. Between 2010 and 2014, Jampi Sanubari did not employ a *hadrah* group to accompany their *shalawat* performances. However, the absence of *hadrah* proved unattractive for the youth. Consequently, the board of Jampi Sanubari chose to set up a *hadrah* group to enhance the appeal of the performances (Purwanto, personal communication, 14 July 2017). The use of *hadrah* instruments proved successful in transforming the *shalawat* performance into a festive event, attracting more people like the previously mentioned groups. Jampi Sanubari performs every 35 days in the lunar calendar, with performances held in mosques' front yards in the district of Banjarsari.

Most of Jampi Sanubari's performers are young followers of Habib Syech. I met several of them during my attendance at Habib Syech's performances. It is not surprising that Jampi Sanubari's musical style resembles that of Habib Syech. Additionally, as Purwanto was a former singer of Jamuro, the relation between the two groups is maintained today, as seen in the involvement of Royyan, one of Jamuro's singers, in some of Jampi's performances. Some Jampi Sanubari singers also occasionally perform as additional singers for Jamuro. Regarding attendance, Jampi Sanubari attracts around 100-200 participants at each performance.

5.2. Comparing the performances

There are several similarities and slight differences among these groups' performances in three main aspects: the use of *festivalisation* for *dakwah*, the recitation of the *maulid* book, and their nationalist character and government connections.

5.2.1. Dakwah and festivalisation

The first similarity between all groups is the use of popular culture in their *dakwah* method. There are two main elements in this *dakwah* style: first, the use of *shalawat* and Habib Syech's *hadrah* style, and second, the use of a stage in every *shalawat* performance. Regarding the first element, the groups decided to use *shalawat* and Habib Syech's *hadrah* style because both options attract more people. Jamuro and al-Hidayah previously used *tahlilan* and Qurʾānic recitation, which failed to persuade people to attend their religious gatherings. They then replaced these with *shalawat* and Habib Syech's *hadrah*. This decision was successful, and more people started attending their religious gatherings.

The two other groups, Jamuri and Jampi Sanubari, have a different context as they used *maulid* from the beginning. However, their *maulid* styles did not use *shalawat* musical instruments *(hadrah)*. Only after realising that using *hadrah* was more compelling to participants, they decided to use it. The adoption of this style is not surprising, as Habib Syech's *hadrah* style is currently popular among *shalawat* performers. To attract more people, these groups must adapt to the recent trend in the area. Another factor is the close connection between the three major groups (Jamuro, Jamuri, and al-Hidayah) and Habib Syech, as well as the BāʿAlawī community in Surakarta. The establishment of these three groups cannot be separated from Habib Syech's role, as he was involved in each group's performances since their formation.

The second element is the use of a stage in each group's performances. As explained in the previous chapter, the stage in *shalawat* performance was popularised by Habib Syech. This style was then copied by other *shalawat* groups, including the four mentioned. The stage size depends on the number of participants. Compared to the other three groups, Jamuro uses the biggest stage as the number of participants is usually around 1,500-5,000. The combination of these two elements turns the religious ritual into a spectacle. The *maulid*, once held indoors with limited instruments, is now performed outdoors on large stages with powerful sound systems and additional percussion and modern instruments, transforming it into a visually and sonically engaging event. Most importantly, it is now watched by many participants, something not likely found in the old style of *maulid*. However, even though it has become a spectacle, the performers still try to maintain the ritual aspects of the performance. The fact that all four groups recite the *maulid* book, regarded as sacred, is evidence of this ritual component.

As *shalawat* involves a big sound system and stage, the entertainment element is inevitable. In interviews, participants described feeling enjoyment during performances (see Chapter 7). This experience differs from traditional *maulid* recitations. During my fieldwork, I observed participants moving their bodies when listening to the songs, showing that they felt entertained.

The transformation of *maulid* into *shalawat* performance combines traditional practices with contemporary staging elements. By incorporating professional sound systems, lighting, and musical arrangements, these performances attract diverse audiences. This adaptation parallels developments in Morocco, where Sufi music has been reframed as stage performance (ter Laan 2016, p. 116). While traditional *maulid* focuses on book recitation, these performances integrate musical instruments and interactive elements, creating a more dynamic experience.

These physical transformations create new spaces for religious expression. The practice element includes elaborate staging, professional sound systems, musical accompaniment, and collective participation. The presence of merchants selling religious items and government officials' participation further develops these gatherings into comprehensive public spaces that integrate spiritual, cultural, and civic activities.

5.2.2. The recitation of the maulid book

The second similarity among the four groups concerns their use of *maulid* texts, though their recitation styles differ slightly. Unlike Habib Syech, who only recites selected parts of *Simth al-Durar*, the four groups fully recite *Simth al-Durar* or *Barzanjī*. Jamuro, Jamuri, and Jampi Sanubari recite *Barzanjī*, while al-Hidayah alternates between *Barzanjī* and *Simth al-Durar*. Al-Hidayah's choice reflects the regular presence of BāʿAlawī preachers: when one is present they usually choose *Simth al-Durar*; otherwise, they use *Barzanjī*. These preferences are not only situational but also shaped by textual authority and lineage. Simth al-Durar, composed by Habib ʿAlī bin Muḥammad al-Ḥabshī (d. 1915), is especially cherished among the BāʿAlawī, whereas *Barzanjī*, authored by Jaʿfar al-Barzanjī (1690–1766), is more common among traditionalist Indonesian Muslims.

The four groups fully recite the maulid book because they view their activities as religious ritual requiring khushūʿ (a state of deep spiritual concentration and humility during worship that is highly valued in Indonesian Islamic practice). This emphasis on khushūʿ was articulated by Royyan, the main vocalist of Jamuro, who explained that their maulid recitation creates a more spiritually focused

atmosphere than Habib Syech's performances. He added that participants in Jamuro's performances experience a deeper spiritual connection, sensing the Prophet's presence, while Habib Syech's events emphasise entertainment value (Royyan, personal communication, 13 September 2017). Other performers across the groups expressed similar views about prioritising spiritual focus over entertainment, with Hamam from Jamuro (Hamam, personal communication, 28 November 2017), Ari Nur Hayati and Nada Fitria from Jamuri (Ari and Nada, personal communication, 24 September 2017), and Purwanto from Jampi Sanubari all preferring a more contemplative approach to performance.

The contrasting approaches to balancing religious devotion with entertainment can be understood through Asef Bayat's concept of the politics of fun and its connection to the paradigm of power (2007). Bayat argues that the fear of fun is not exclusive to Islam or radical Islamic groups; rather, it is a common concern across all religious and non-religious institutions. Islamic actors and authorities are apprehensive about fun because it has the potential to weaken Muslims' moral paradigm and undermine the individual religious authority of the shaykh or, in this case, the shalawat performers. Bayat explains that "the adversaries' fear of fun ultimately stems from the fear of losing control over the paradigm that grants them power; it is rooted in the anxiety of losing their 'paradigm power" (Bayat, 2007, p. 435).

While all groups must navigate between religious essence and popular appeal, they adopt different strategies. The four smaller groups emphasise spiritual focus by maintaining complete *maulid* recitation and limiting entertainment elements, thus preserving both religious authority and traditional practice. Habib Syech, in contrast, has developed a more flexible approach that accommodates both devotional and entertainment aspects. His public performances feature more *qasidah* and fewer *maulid* recitations to attract younger audiences, while offering traditional full recitations at his weekly home gatherings for those seeking deeper spiritual engagement. This balanced approach explains his larger attendance numbers while still maintaining religious legitimacy.

However, even Habib Syech's more entertainment-oriented approach includes careful regulation of 'fun' elements. For instance, he instructs followers to treat qasidah as prayer rather than entertainment, recommending raised hands in supplication instead of excessive movement (iSyekh, 2017). This disciplined approach to incorporating entertainment demonstrates how all performers, regardless of their position on the spectrum between devotion and entertainment,

must carefully manage the balance between ritual integrity and popular appeal to maintain both their religious authority and their ability to attract participants.

5.2.3. Nationalism in connection with the government

The third similarity among the four groups is the singing of nationalistic songs and the Indonesian anthem. Nonetheless, the number of nationalistic songs sung by the four groups is not as varied as Habib Syech's. They only sing *Yalal Wathan* (O Motherland), while Habib Syech performs at least four nationalistic songs. *Yalal Wathan* is consistently performed by all four groups. Furthermore, all groups sing the Indonesian anthem before ending their performances, following Habib Syech's practice. This pattern suggests Habib Syech's influential role as a patron figure for these *shalawat* groups in Surakarta, as he pioneered the incorporation of nationalistic songs into *shalawat* performances.

The four groups perform fewer nationalistic songs compared to Habib Syech to maintain spiritual focus over entertainment. During fieldwork observations of Habib Syech's performances, songs like *'NKRI Harga Mati'* featured cheerful tones and stronger beats that encouraged audience movement. The other groups, preferring to maintain a more devotional atmosphere, limit themselves to the Indonesian national anthem (sung without instruments) and *Yalal Wathan*.

The groups' incorporation of these patriotic elements stems from specific concerns about national unity. Royyan, Jamuro's lead singer, explained that this practice emerged in response to groups questioning Indonesia's state system, emphasising the importance of cultivating patriotism among participants (Royyan, personal communication, 13 September 2017). Similarly, Sekhah of Jamuri (personal communication, 21 September 2017) and Purwanto of Jampi Sanubari (personal communication, 14 July 2017) described their performances as expressions of both religious devotion and national loyalty.

The incorporation of nationalistic songs has coincided with increasing government involvement in these performances. During fieldwork, I observed regular attendance by government officials at *shalawat* events across Surakarta, from municipal, district and village representatives to military and police personnel. At the 2018 *hadrah* festival in Banjarsari, for example, these officials delivered speeches emphasising civic values and national unity. The pattern of government participation appears to have developed naturally from the *shalawat* groups' practice of including patriotic elements in their performances.

5.3. Solo as the city of shalawat

In this section, I will explain the background and motivations behind the declaration of *'Solo kota shalawat.'* This initiative was undertaken by the municipality to promote moderate Islam and create an image of Solo as a peaceful and harmonious city. As we will see, it was implicitly aimed at changing Surakarta's reputation as a stronghold of Islamic radicalism by accommodating and facilitating shalawat performances.

5.3.1. The construction of 'Solo kota shalawat'

'Solo as the city of *shalawat*' was a declaration made by F.X. Hadi Rudyatmo, the Mayor of Surakarta, during Habib Syech's performance on 22 June 2013. About 50,000 people gathered at this performance, including local politicians such as the Vice Mayor, Achmad Purnomo (b. 1948), and the chief of the Regional House of Representatives of Surakarta, Teguh Prakosa (b. 1958). The Mayor stated that the declaration is intended to accommodate *shalawat* because of its relation to the Javanese culture of *'Sekatenan'*, a royal *maulid* celebration *(garebeg maulud)* in the Sultanate kingdoms of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, held annually in the Islamic month of *Rabīʿ al-Awwal* (Woodward, 2011, p. 182). On the same stage, Habib Syech showed his appreciation for the government's decision, stating that this declaration would contribute to making Surakarta a peaceful city (Radio MDS, 2013). The declaration itself was a part of the celebration of the 67th anniversary of Surakarta.

This declaration reflects broader patterns where governments promote certain forms of religious expression to address perceived security concerns. Similar to Morocco's state support for Sufi music festivals (ter Laan, 2016), this institutional backing emerged as part of efforts to transform the city's image from a perceived centre of radical ideology. As stated by the Solo head of culture and tourism, Widdi Srihanto, during the 2013 *shalawat* parade, these events aimed to promote what he termed moderate Islam and change perceptions of Surakarta as a city associated with terrorism (VOA Indonesia, 2013). This official recognition exemplifies Falassi's understanding of festivals as vehicles of community renewal, where traditional religious practices are transformed into scheduled public events that serve to reconstruct community identity. The municipality's role in organising these festivals demonstrates how traditional practices undergo festivalisation not solely as commodification, but as ongoing processes of cultural reinvention allowing communities to sustain their collective worldview and adjust to present-day challenges.

'Solo kota shalawat' represents the municipality's effort to establish the city as a centre for *shalawat* performances. Following this declaration, the municipality began funding numerous *shalawat* performances and incorporating them into governmental programmes. Although government officials I encountered referred to this declaration as a 'policy', it does not meet the formal definition of governmental policy as described in the Dictionary of Politics and Government: 'a detailed plan of something that has to be done' (Collin, 2004, p. 289). The absence of regional regulation indicates that *'Solo kota shalawat'* remains primarily a political initiative, supported by the Regional House of Representatives and municipal departments, rather than a formal policy framework. In several public sermons, Habib Syech also expressed concern about the lack of such a regulation and urged that a bylaw be issued to strengthen the declaration (Solo Pos, 2015).

The actor behind this declaration is a local politician and the younger brother of Habib Syech, Habib Abdullah bin Abdur Qadir Assegaf (b. 1962). It is highly likely that he was religiously trained by his father, just like Habib Syech. Thereupon, he was actively involved in the *dakwah* programme. In the 2004 general elections, Habib Abdullah decided to run for a member of the Regional House from the National Mandate Party (PAN). He was elected but then resigned from this position in 2008. Afterwards, he joined Hanura Party and was elected as a House member in the 2009 general elections. Nowadays, he is known as the chief of Hanura party of Surakarta (Habib Abdullah, personal communication, 27 November 2017).

Before *'Solo kota shalawat'* was declared in 2013, Habib Abdullah had been actively endorsing and funding *shalawat* performances and *maulid* celebrations in Surakarta. As a member of the Regional House and its budget committee, he had the privilege to propose, discuss, and determine the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budgets. Between 2005 and 2012, he consistently proposed grants and distributed them to various groups and occasional *shalawat* performances. As Teguh Prakosa later confirmed, these funds were allocated through proposals submitted either to municipality offices or to the Regional House, with Habib Abdullah playing a central role in ensuring their approval (Habib Abdullah, personal communication, 27 November 2017; Teguh Prakosa, personal communication, 27 August 2018).

After Jokowi's inauguration as Governor of Jakarta on 15 October 2012, F.X. Hadi Rudyatmo, his successor in Surakarta, continued this funding in 2013. During that year, Habib Abdullah lobbied Rudyatmo to declare Solo as the city of *shalawat* (Habib Abdullah, personal communication, 27 November 2017). This proposal coincided with the 2015 local elections, in which Rudyatmo was campaigning for

another term. The Mayor agreed, and on 22 June 2013, declared Solo as the city of *shalawat*. Evidence indicates a political agreement between Rudyatmo and Habib Abdullah before this declaration. This became apparent a few months earlier when the Hanura Party announced its backing for Rudyatmo's re-election campaign (Solo Pos, 2013).

The declaration appears to have been a strategic move by Rudyatmo to win Muslim voters' approval in the upcoming elections. As a devout Catholic, he faced challenges in appealing to Muslim voters, especially supporters of *shalawat*. This declaration offered dual advantages. First, Habib Abdullah and the Hanura Party declared their backing for Rudyatmo's candidacy. Second, as the younger brother of Habib Syech, Habib Abdullah's endorsement also secured his older brother's political backing. Together, their assistance likely ensured the endorsement of *shalawat* performers and participants in Surakarta, bolstering Rudyatmo's electoral prospects.

The important role of Habib Abdullah in the declaration of *'Solo kota shalawat'* can be clearly seen from several performances of Habib Syech. In the middle of each performance, whenever Habib Syech gave his speech, he always thanked his brother for making the performances and the declaration happen. Since Solo was declared as the city of *shalawat* in June 2013, the municipal government began providing regular funding to several programmes of *maulid* and *shalawat*. Four of the earliest programmes that received funding were the annual *haul* of Habib 'Ali (the author of the *maulid* book *Simth al-Durar*), the annual *shalawat* parade, and two annual *shalawat* performances of Habib Syech at the royal mosque of Surakarta and in front of the city hall. Prior to the declaration, all these programmes were privately funded. Afterward, the government took over funding for all of them.

In 2016, the funding expanded to include grants for 51 villages under the municipality's administration. The grants were intended to provide a set of instruments for *shalawat* performance (*hadrah*). Additionally, the funding covered expert-led training for playing *hadrah*. By enabling *hadrah* instruments and training, new *shalawat* groups were able to emerge in every village in Surakarta. In 2017, after all the *shalawat* groups were established, the government provided funding to five districts to hold a *shalawat* competition and a major *shalawat* event. In 2018, a new *shalawat* competition was introduced, where district-level winners performed and competed at the city hall of Surakarta. The city-level winner earned the opportunity to perform the opening act at Habib Syech's annual *shalawat* performance in front of the city hall. According to Habib Abdullah,

additional programmes were planned to bolster the declaration. In the months following my interview with him, he intended to propose uniform clothes for all 51 *shalawat* groups in Surakarta's villages. He also planned to propose an annual *shalawat* performance in each village, all funded by the government (Habib Abdullah, personal communication, 27 November 2017).

The government's support has incentivised the growth of *shalawat* performance groups and the festivalisation of the *maulid* celebration. These developments are evident in the establishment of new *shalawat* groups in every village in Surakarta, as well as the numerous *maulid* festivals regularly funded by the municipality.

5.3.2. The objectives of the declaration of 'Solo kota shalawat'

From my observations and interviews with several key interlocutors during my fieldwork in Surakarta, I found that the declaration has three primary objectives: culture, economy, and politics.

In terms of culture, Vice Mayor Achmad Purnomo explained that the declaration was made to acknowledge a local tradition in Surakarta where people enjoy singing *shalawat* with *hadrah* instruments. Purnomo highlighted two benefits of this activity: first, it is perceived as a religious act by its performers and participants; second, it is considered a form of musical art. Due to the widespread popularity of *shalawat* across the villages of Surakarta, the municipal government decided to formalise its approval by declaring Solo as the city of *shalawat* (Achmad Purnomo, personal communication, 3 September 2018).

This perspective is echoed by the Chief of the Regional House of Surakarta, Teguh Prakosa. He noted that many people in Surakarta are passionate about singing and performing *shalawat*. The government seeks to accommodate this enthusiasm by encouraging performances not only in Pasar Kliwon, where Habib Syech resides, but also in other districts. According to Prakosa (personal communication, 24 August 2018), the declaration ensures the expansion of *shalawat* performances throughout the city. Similarly, Habib Abdullah, the initiator of the declaration, stated that *shalawat* is a cultural heritage of the nine saints (*walisongo*). He emphasised that people from outside Surakarta frequently visit the city to witness *shalawat* performances, particularly those of Habib Syech. Thus, he stressed the importance of municipal support in stimulating the growth of *shalawat* in the city (Habib Abdullah, personal communication, 27 November 2017).

Regarding the second objective, the economy, Prakosa elaborated on the economic potential of the annual death commemoration (*haul*) of the author of *Simth al-Durar*. As a key part of the *shalawat* tradition, this *haul* attracts thousands of tourists and *maulid* enthusiasts, not only from Indonesia but also from neighbouring countries (Teguh Prakosa, personal communication, 24 August 2018). During this event, street vendors sell food and merchandise to the pilgrims, generating significant economic activity (Kemenag Surakarta, 2018). Habib Abdullah also pointed out the economic benefits of the *haul*, which is held at the Riyadh Mosque and draws thousands of attendees. He argued that higher attendance translates to increased income for the people of Surakarta. Abdullah added that the declaration would make *shalawat* performances more structured, contributing to the municipality's local revenues (Habib Abdullah, personal communication, 27 November 2017).

For the third objective, politics, the declaration aims to reshape Surakarta's image, which was previously associated with Islamic radicalism. Prakosa placed particular emphasis on this goal. He explained:

> "We listen to suggestions from the people; in this city, we are aware
> of a potential threat from the hardliners. To tackle that threat, we
> agreed that the government gives annual funding to the *shalawat*
> activities (Teguh Prakosa, personal communication, 3
> November 2017)."

Prakosa's statement implicitly connects *shalawat* performances with what he views as moderate Islam. This perspective is also shared by Habib Abdullah. During our interview, Habib Abdullah used similar reasoning to describe Solo as a city historically associated with hardline elements. To change this perception, he proposed a new image of Surakarta as a soft and tolerant city. He believes that *shalawat* groups can play a central role in realising this vision. According to Habib Abdullah (personal communication, 27 November 2017), *shalawat* performances offer what he describes as a 'soft style' of *dakwah* that "makes people smile and touches people's hearts." He emphasises how these performances create spaces where religious practice merges with cultural expression, attracting diverse participants through their accessible and engaging nature.

Furthermore, the promotion of what officials term 'moderate Islam' (so-called moderate Islam) through *shalawat* performances is advocated by the mayor and other municipal officials. At the *shalawat* parade in 2016, the Mayor stated that the event and the declaration of *'Solo kota shalawat'* were intended to make Surakarta

a secure and peaceful city (Tribun Solo, 2016). This sentiment was echoed by other municipal officials, such as Said Ramdlon, who emphasised the goal of creating a harmonious city (Solotrust, 2018).

5.3.3. Festivalisation of shalawat performance

The three objectives explained above go hand in hand with the purpose of festivalisation: culture, economy, entertainment, and politics (Belghazi, 2006, p. 97; Negrier, 2015, p. 19; Rasmussen, 2010, p. 125). The first purpose of the festivalisation of *shalawat* in *'Solo kota shalawat'* is related to the development of culture, particularly the tradition of *hadrah* as a musical art. This transformation, supported by the government's declaration of Surakarta as the city of *shalawat*, elevates traditional religious observances into significant cultural festivals. This shift into spectacle illustrates what Falassi terms 'rites of conspicuous display,' namely ritual enactments in which sacred dimensions are presented openly and made accessible to wider publics, thereby supporting both communicative exchange and the strengthening of community ties (Falassi, 1987, p. 4). The *shalawat* festivals operate as vehicles for what Falassi calls the dual process to 'renounce and then announce culture', temporarily bracketing usual religious disputes while affirming renewed modes of Islamic practice that integrate devotion with civic responsibility. Through this recurring dynamic, communities consolidate their common worldview while at the same time adjusting to shifting social circumstances. These festivals not only reinforce the local cultural identity by integrating traditional religious practices with communal interactions but also ensure the sustainability of these cultural practices through government funding.

In addition to cultural preservation, the festivalisation of *shalawat* aims to adapt to contemporary needs and preferences, making these performances more engaging and accessible. This approach helps attract younger demographics, promoting inclusivity and community cohesion. Transforming *shalawat* into public spectacles makes them accessible to a broader audience, establishing regular mass religious gatherings across Surakarta's five districts.

The strategic festivalisation of *shalawat* in Surakarta serves as part of a broader municipal strategy to position the city as a central hub of Javanese culture, directly contesting Yogyakarta's claim as the "inheritor of the great tradition of Java" (Tsuchiya, 1990, p. 93). Since 2012, Surakarta has actively hosted annual *shalawat* programmes, including festivals and parades, funded by the municipality under the branding of *'Solo kota shalawat.'* These events not only reinforce Surakarta's cultural identity but also promote social cohesion and cultural continuity,

intensifying its rivalry with the larger and more renowned Yogyakarta. By increasing its tourism offerings with new festivals and carnivals, branded as expressions of 'the spirit of Java' (Purwani, 2012, p. 8), Surakarta aims to attract more tourists and boost the local economy, further enhancing its profile as a key centre of Javanese culture and a dynamic destination for those passionate about culture.

The second perspective pertains to the economic impacts of religious performances in Surakarta. When large gatherings such as Habib Syech's performances attract participants exceeding 50,000, significant economic activities occur. Not only are these participants from Surakarta, but they also come from neighbouring cities and provinces. The presence of diverse vendors around the performance venues (from those selling Islamic attire, books, and perfumes to street vendors offering flags, food, hot coffee, and seating mats) indicates a vibrant marketplace. These trading activities are not limited to large events like those involving Habib Syech; smaller *shalawat* performance groups also contribute to economic stimulation. By promoting '*Solo kota shalawat*,' the city schedules performances more systematically, particularly for prominent groups such as Habib Syech and Jamuro, enabling regular participation by both *shalawat* enthusiasts and merchants according to a municipally posted schedule.

The festivalisation of these events significantly enhances the local economy by extending benefits beyond immediate religious attendees to the broader community. The influx of visitors necessitates various services such as accommodation, food, and transport, boosting the hospitality sector and local businesses. These events also create employment opportunities in constructing stages, managing crowds, security, and other logistical roles, providing crucial income sources, especially for lower-income families. Additionally, the economic impact of such festivals includes increased visibility and branding of Surakarta as a destination for cultural and religious tourism, transforming the city's image from one potentially associated with radicalism to a centre of cultural and religious harmony. This rebranding attracts further investments and tourists, promoting sustained economic growth. Furthermore, the recurring nature of these festivals guarantees a continuous economic boost, supporting the city's infrastructure and public services through increased economic activities and government investment. This comprehensive economic engagement reflects a symbiotic relationship between cultural activities and economic development, enhancing the community's welfare and the city's economic landscape.

The third purpose is entertainment, intricately linked to the government's efforts to attract both local and international tourists to Surakarta by organising numerous

festivals, including *shalawat* festivals, that provide broad appeal. This strategy transforms traditional *shalawat* into engaging performances that emphasise enjoyable aspects, such as the *qasidah*. At the 2018 *Hadrah* festival in Surakarta, the focus shifted from traditional *maulid* book recitation to featuring selected famous and entertaining *qasidah* songs, highlighting a departure from the original rituals. This approach not only caters to amusement but also encourages deeper engagement with the cultural and artistic expressions inherent in *shalawat* performances. By incorporating musical instruments like the *hadrah* and theatrical elements, these events become vibrant spectacles of joy and celebration, enhancing attendee enjoyment while bridging social gaps and promoting cultural exchange. Additionally, appealing to the younger generation, who may be less engaged with traditional religious observances, helps bridge generational gaps, broadening the festivals' reach and impact within the community.

Regarding the fourth perspective, i.e., politics, this can be further divided into pragmatic and ideological purposes. The first pragmatic purpose relates to the likely political deal between Habib Abdullah and the Mayor, F.X. Hadi Rudyatmo. As a proponent of *shalawat* and *maulid*, Habib Abdullah has a significant interest in preserving these practices despite strong criticism from Salafis and reformists, as explained in chapters 1 and 2. Therefore, financial aid for the *shalawat* groups by the government represents an opportunity for him and other supporters of *shalawat* to sustain these traditions. The more sustainable the funding, the better it is for the groups in terms of continuing the practice of *shalawat* and *maulid*. Furthermore, the funding facilitates the creation of more groups practising and promoting *shalawat* and *maulid* across a wider area. In this context, many people will have the opportunity to learn more about the permissibility of these performances, countering critics who consider *shalawat* and *maulid* as *bid'a*.

For Rudyatmo, the declaration meant he would likely gain the endorsement of the Bā'Alawī community, especially Habib Abdullah and Habib Syech, for his candidacy. As they are regarded as key figures within this community, it is probable that both would encourage other members of the Bā'Alawī community to vote for Rudyatmo. Furthermore, as both are highly respected among *shalawat* advocates, their backing of Rudyatmo would likely secure the votes of *shalawat* participants and performers. This political arrangement appears to have been effective for two reasons. First, Rudyatmo was successfully elected as Mayor in the 2015 elections. Second, following the declaration of '*Solo kota shalawat*,' Rudyatmo continued funding *shalawat* activities, particularly after securing his re-election in 2015.

The *shalawat* performances serve a strategic cultural function in countering the influence of radical Islamic groups in Surakarta. Historically known as a centre for radical ideologies (Wildan, 2009), the city has witnessed prominent figures (especially government officials and *shalawat* supporters) advocating for these performances as a way of reshaping its image. During my fieldwork at the 2018 *hadrah* festivals in the Banjarsari and Pasar Kliwon sub-districts, as well as at the city hall, government officials consistently echoed similar messages in their speeches, emphasising the city's security and harmony. These addresses typically began by encouraging youth participation in *shalawat* performances, followed by calls to maintain the city's security and harmony (Solotrust.com, 2018). These messages suggest that officials see *shalawat* performances as a way to engage young people in traditional religious practices.

According to Habib Abdullah (personal communication, 27 November 2017), the declaration aims to nurture religious practices that are in harmony with the city's cultural traditions. This vision is in line with the municipality's broader strategy, paralleling other contexts where governments promote traditional religious performances (such as Morocco's promotion for Sufi festivals) to address security concerns while preserving cultural heritage. Through support for these events, Surakarta's municipal authorities aim to uphold local traditions while cultivating what they describe as a peaceful city image to counter associations with radicalism. Municipal officials frame these performances as promoting what they term 'moderate Islam,' reflecting broader state interests in encouraging certain forms of religious expression while addressing perceived security concerns.

This narrative has gained backing from religious leaders and performers. During the 2013 *shalawat* parade, the BāʿAlawī preacher Habib Novel Alaydrus emphasised that *shalawat* groups in Surakarta could guide youth away from radical influences (NU Online, 2014). Similarly, in his 2015 performance, Habib Syech highlighted Surakarta's transformation into a more secure and harmonious city (Solo Pos, 2015). His comparison between the city's current state and its previous 'troublesome' image underscored the perceived impact of the *'Solo kota shalawat'* initiative.

This raises important questions: how can *shalawat* performances counter the influence of radical groups? How can they make the city secure and harmonious? According to Habib Abdullah, the 'potential' of *shalawat* lies in its ability to deliver a 'soft' style of *dakwah*, which is more tolerant than the approach of hardliners. He noted that *shalawat* performances convey peaceful messages to participants. This is evident, for example, in Habib Syech's statement that he "does not want to

blame others" in his *dakwah* method (Habib Syech, personal communication, 30 August 2017). This demonstrates the tolerant and gentle nature of his approach. From my observations of Habib Syech's performances, I never witnessed him condemning other groups. Another example is his use of nationalistic songs to instil a sense of patriotism among participants. In recent times, other *shalawat* groups in Surakarta have also adopted the singing of nationalistic songs, treating them as a standard repertoire in their performances.

These practices and rituals create spaces for religious expression that are compatible with state interests, incorporating nationalistic elements like *'Yalal Wathan'* and the Indonesian national anthem. Through these performances, state and religious actors promote particular interpretations of Islamic practice that emphasise national unity and cultural traditions. Through peaceful messaging and inclusive gatherings, *shalawat* groups actively challenge hardline claims that the Indonesian state system contradicts Islamic values.

The rejection of Indonesia's democratic system as un-Islamic is evidenced by Solo-based radical cleric Abu Bakar Ba'asyir (b. 1938). In his book, he argued that democracy is anti-Islamic and urged Muslims to fight against it (Miichi, 2007). In 2014, he pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (The Jakarta Post, 2014). The *pondok pesantren* al-Mukmin, Ngruki, in Solo that he co-founded, is suspected of harbouring radical tendencies due to the number of its graduates affiliated with radical and terrorist groups in Indonesia (ICG, 2002). The existence of active cells of these groups in Solo is documented in the decision from the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) in 2016, categorising the city as 'a red zone' for terrorism (Jawa Pos, 2018; Kompas.com, 2016). For this reason, in recent years, BNPT has focused its deradicalisation programme in Solo (and Poso) (Susanto, 2016).

Figure 7: Hadrah 'Ngudirukun' from Kelurahan Semanggi, winner of the 2018 *shalawat* festival (photo taken by the author)

According to Habib Abdullah, the declaration of *'Solo kota shalawat,'* with its funding for performances and establishment of new groups, is a strategy to nurture *shalawat* groups in the city. He describes these performances as employing what he terms a 'soft' style of *dakwah* to promote patriotic sentiment. The government's support facilitates broader public participation in these religious performances, which harmonise with state objectives. In this context, the ubiquitous *shalawat* performances in the city offer an alternative for participants, particularly the youth, to shield them from the influence of radical Islamic groups in Surakarta. This is in line with the concept of public resilience discussed in the previous chapter, where *shalawat* performances function as a counterpublic, promoting discourses and practices that counter radical Islamic ideas and instil resilience among participants.

The *shalawat* groups' incorporation of nationalistic songs and particular religious interpretations positions them in opposition to radical Islamist groups present in Surakarta. This reflects the potential of popular culture to act as "a form of cultural resistance against different forms of global and local dominance" (El-Hamamsy and Soliman, 2013, p. 7), as discussed in the context of *shalawat* performances functioning as a counterpublic in the previous chapter. In this way, *shalawat* groups utilise the popular style of the *maulid* to counter the influence of radical groups that are allegedly still active in the city.

Moreover, not only was popular culture beneficial for *shalawat* supporters, but it was also connected to and employed by the municipality for its economic, cultural, and political interests, including changing the city's infamous image. This demonstrates that popular culture is not only advantageous for groups like *shalawat* in resisting other ideologies, but also for the state in bolstering its power (van Nieuwkerk et al., 2016). The interconnection between the *shalawat* groups and the municipality is mutually beneficial. The *shalawat* groups receive recognition to sustain their long-standing tradition and for their potential to resist Salafi influence, while the municipality mitigates the influence of radical groups by attracting youth to an alternative discourse and building a secure and harmonious environment for the city.

This dynamic is related to the concept of inward piety, which emphasises a "peaceful, esoteric expression" of religion (Hasan, 2012, p. 372). In many ways, Habib Syech embodies this religious conceptualisation. As a result, the municipality cooperated with Habib Syech and other *shalawat* groups in Surakarta because these groups did not aim to alter the state or society based on religious convictions. Instead, both parties collaborated to achieve the government's objective: what the state characterises as moderate Islam and establishing *shalawat* performances as a musical culture for youth, providing an alternative to Islamic radicalism.

Finally, the use of a religious musical genre and performance groups to promote state-sanctioned moderate Islam mirrors strategies employed in other countries, such as Morocco. In Morocco, the state encourages its interpretation of moderate Islam through festivalisation. Notable examples include the 'Festival for Sufi Culture' and the 'Festival of World Sacred Music,' which advocate values like interfaith dialogue and cultural pluralism (principles rejected by radical Islamic groups) (ter Laan, 2016, p. 111).

A similar tendency to utilise Sufi-style music or the Sufi movement can also be observed in Algeria, where the state employed Sufism to counter radical Islamic ideology (Muedini, 2012, p. 209). The preference for Sufism stems from the belief that Sufis are generally more loyal to the state, especially when compared to conservative Wahhabis (Burgat, 2003, p. 66). In a more general context, Sufi music (and Sufism) after 9/11 is considered "a tolerant, kinder, and gentler face of Islam" (Shannon, 2011, p. 268).

This inclination bears similarities to *shalawat* performances. While not directly related to Sufism, *shalawat* and the *maulid* are widely practised by many Sufi

orders in Indonesia. For example, the ʿAlawiyah Sufi order, upheld by the BāʿAlawī community, integrates *maulid* and *shalawat* into nearly all of their gatherings. Additionally, BāʿAlawī preachers in Indonesia, particularly the older generations, have tended to adopt a quietist stance and manifest loyalty to the state (Alatas, 2009, pp. 21–25). This quietist position is also reflected among BāʿAlawī figures in Surakarta, who include nationalistic songs in their *shalawat* performances. That is why it is unsurprising that the municipality chose to work with Habib Syech and his *shalawat* group as part of its *'Solo kota shalawat'* project.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained the growing number of *shalawat* groups in Surakarta through four representative groups: Jamuro, Jamuri, al-Hidayah, and Jampi Sanubari. These groups share important connections with Habib Syech, who serves as their patron figure through both personal relations and artistic guidance. The connection manifests in how they have adopted his *hadrah* style and performance approach, successfully drawing more participants to their *dakwah* programmes. This adoption of popular culture elements while maintaining religious content signifies the growing acceptance of *shalawat* among Muslims in Surakarta.

The significant growth of these *shalawat* groups led to the 2013 declaration of *'Solo kota shalawat'*, a municipal initiative serving three main objectives. First, it preserves cultural traditions by acknowledging and supporting *shalawat* performances as part of Javanese heritage. Second, it generates economic benefits through religious tourism and associated activities. Third, it serves political purposes, both pragmatic and ideological - building alliances between *shalawat* supporters and the PDIP government while positioning these performances as tools to counter radical Islamic influence.

Following this declaration, the municipality has funded various *shalawat* and *maulid* celebrations, contributing to the festivalisation of religious rituals. This transformation has created public spectacles that combine religious devotion with entertainment, economic activity, and political messaging. While maintaining their religious core, these festivals attract both locals and tourists, generating significant local revenue through various economic activities.

This festivalisation characterises the practice aspect of public resilience. Through large-scale festivals incorporating music, elaborate staging, and nationalistic elements such as Indonesian flags and patriotic songs, these events create spaces that resist Salafi criticism while shaping a form of Islamic expression integrated

with state-promoted cultural identity. By transforming religious rituals into cultural performances with popular appeal, *shalawat* supporters cultivate practices and discourses that challenge rigid interpretations of religion. Drawing on Falassi, festivalisation transcends commodification, functioning as a dynamic mode of cultural regeneration through which communities maintain their worldview and adapt to shifting social conditions. The strategic combination of ritual and entertainment particularly engages younger audiences, creating a participatory environment that counters competing ideologies. The integration of nationalistic narratives and symbols illustrates how religious practices can retain their spiritual essence while evolving into public festivals that draw thousands of participants across Surakarta. The next chapter will examine the specific content of these performances and their role in addressing critiques of *maulid* and responding to competing religious interpretations.

Chapter 6

Shalawat performance and counterpublic

Introduction

This chapter analyses the strategies of *shalawat* performers in Surakarta to counter both *maulid* criticism and the influence of radical Islamic groups. These strategies are expressed primarily through sermons and songs, which cultivate pious devotion alongside patriotic sentiments. By situating these practices within a wider public sphere, *shalawat* communities sustain their traditions while actively resisting exclusivist ideologies.

Building on the public resilience framework introduced earlier, this chapter examines how *shalawat* performers counter both *maulid* criticism and radical Islamic influences through sermons and songs. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, Surakarta's *shalawat* performers work in cooperation with municipal actors through initiatives such as Solo kota *shalawat*, reflecting the distinctive configuration where traditional ritual and civic identity reinforce one another rather than standing in opposition.

The following questions guide the discussion: How do *shalawat* performers address the criticisms of *maulid* practices? What strategies do *shalawat* performers use to counter Islamic radicalism? What kind of discourse are they trying to develop through their performances? To answer these questions, the chapter explores *shalawat* performers' views on *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism and details their responses through sermons and songs.

As previously explained, *shalawat* performances successfully combine religious rituals with elements of entertainment. This engaging and attractive style of *shalawat* aims to entice people to participate while conveying religious messages through songs and sermons. This trend reflects a broader phenomenon in the Islamic world, where many groups use music to communicate religious messages to their audiences. For instance, Nina ter Laan, in her study of Islam-inspired music in Morocco (2016, p. 124–25), observed that Sufi musicians are motivated to perform at religious music festivals as these events enable them to transmit Islamic messages. In Egypt, van Nieuwkerk (2011b, p. 197) identified a trend of 'art with mission' (*al-fann al-hādif*), where films, soap operas, and *halal* songs are used to disseminate Islamic messages. Similarly, Alagha (2011) noted that the Hizbullah party in Lebanon permits the use of music for noble purposes, such as praising the Prophet, countering violence, and preventing corruption. In the context of Malaysia and Indonesia, Barendregt (2011) explored how Islamic boy bands, or *nasyid* groups, effectively deliver religious, political, and social messages to their

audiences. Similarly, Rasmussen (2010) examines how Islamic musical arts in Indonesia serve as vehicles for conveying religious and ideological messages, though with varying approaches and orientations among different groups. Likewise, in Surakarta, Habib Syech and other *shalawat* groups utilise *shalawat* performances to attract larger audiences and promote religious messages through songs and sermons.

The use of popular culture and festivalisation in the *maulid* celebrations has proven effective in countering Salafi criticism. As outlined in Chapter 1, Salafis condemn *maulid* celebrations for various reasons, primarily because the Prophet did not practise them and due to other 'unlawful' activities associated with them, such as standing during the recitation and the use of musical instruments. However, the increasing popularity of *shalawat* performances has effectively challenged these criticisms. Moreover, the promotion of patriotism and national unity through *shalawat* performances directly contests the ideologies of radical Islamic groups advocating for an Islamic state. In Surakarta, performers cultivate pious and patriotic sensibilities through sermons and songs to counter Salafi criticism of the *maulid* and radical Islamic influences, promoting discourses, practices, and dispositions that support national unity.

The practice element of the counterpublic, introduced in Chapters 4 and 5, highlights how Habib Syech and other *shalawat* groups in Surakarta have incorporated popular culture and festivalisation into their performances. In this chapter, I focus on the discursive element by analysing sermons and songs. Using content analysis, this chapter examines selected sermons and songs from five *shalawat* groups in Surakarta (Ahbabul Mustofa [led by Habib Syech], Jamuro, Jamuri, al-Hidayah, and Jampi Sanubari). These groups were purposively selected during fieldwork, drawing on respondents' interviews and observed live performances. The materials include sermons and songs addressing *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism, both directly and indirectly. In addition to live recordings, I include sermons by Habib Syech available online. The *shalawat* phenomenon in Surakarta operates within this framework (see Chapter 4). More specifically, unlike Hirschkind's Egyptian case, where counterpublics opposed state discourse, performers in Surakarta collaborate with state institutions and counter Salafi criticism of the *maulid* through songs and sermons in *shalawat* performances.

I analyse the content of the songs and sermons to understand the performers' messages. More specifically, I analyse the argumentation presented in the performances against both *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism. For the

sermons, I divide and analyse them by the argumentation method employed by the preachers: sermons with indirect and direct arguments about *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism. However, unlike the sermons, which employ both indirect and direct methods, the songs only use the indirect approach to counter *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism.

Additionally, this chapter draws on interviews conducted with 20 performers from five *shalawat* groups in Surakarta. These participants, selected for their active involvement as lead singers or percussion players, provided insights through interviews conducted in Indonesian with occasional use of Javanese. The interviews, which lasted 20 to 60 minutes, were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. The transcripts were analysed using Atlas.ti, applying three coding steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding identified initial categories, axial coding organised related codes, and selective coding highlighted key themes that emerged during the process (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 59).

This chapter is divided into five sections, each addressing a specific aspect of *shalawat* performances. The first section explores *shalawat* performers' views on *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism. The second discusses their strategies for addressing these issues, focusing on cultivating pious and patriotic sensibilities. The third examines how they counter *maulid* criticism, while the fourth analyses how sermons and songs promote patriotism and national unity to counter Islamic radicalism. The final section revisits the conceptual framing of public resilience and counterpublic.

6.1. On the discourse of maulid criticism and Islamic radicalism

In the discourse surrounding the criticism of *maulid* and Islamic radicalism, the voices of those performing *shalawat* hold considerable significance. Nearly all performers from the five *shalawat* groups I interviewed are aware of the criticisms directed at the celebration of *maulid*. Most of them were raised in or are familiar with the environment of Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Interestingly, among the twenty performers interviewed, two were not associated with NU. One is Hamam, a vocalist who is affiliated with Jamuro and comes from a Muhammadiyah background. The other is Romdhoni, a percussionist from the Habib Syech group, who was previously active in the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS).

Hamam, with a Muhammadiyah family background, found a space to express himself in *shalawat*. His father never forbade him. "My father only said school time must be managed; pray the dawn prayer (Fajr) on time," while his brother, Hamam explained, is a follower of Salafism. "My brother leans towards Salafism (Hamam, personal communication, 28 November 2017)." Through his experiences, Hamam has encountered *maulid* criticism from various sources, including social media and community discussions. He frequently mentions groups like the Salafis, Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA), and even the Ngruki *pesantren* as critics of the *maulid* tradition. However, he does not see this criticism as a barrier. Instead, he views it as part of a broad spectrum of religious understanding, emphasising the importance of tolerance.

Hamam expresses this attitude towards the *maulid*, which is criticised as an innovation. "For me, [it is okay], it is normal. I do not hate them, so I accept it. They have their reasonings and we have our own (Hamam, personal communication, 28 November 2017)." Furthermore, Hamam talks about Islamic radicalism by stating: "for me, even a follower of hardliners, [it is fine], it is normal because everyone has their own principles." Hamam emphasises the value of tolerance and understanding diverse opinions. When asked about his involvement in *shalawat*, he responded: "it fits. It is because of my [musical] talent. I feel happy and spirited (Hamam, personal communication, 28 November 2017)."

Similarly, Romdhoni, a religious studies teacher at an Islamic elementary school, has been a member of the Habib Syech *shalawat* group since 2003. When I interviewed him, he enthusiastically declared: "I love *shalawat*." However, his journey to joining the group was not without challenges. Previously, Romdhoni was part of a group critical of the *maulid* (Romdhoni, personal communication, 5 October 2017). Before I joined Habib Syech, I was part of the critics," he stated, referring to his involvement in the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), an Indonesian Islamist political party. During his time in PKS at IAIN Surakarta, he was immersed in a discourse critical of *shalawat*, yet his love for *shalawat* persisted. He noted: "Even when I was in PKS (whose discourse generally opposed *shalawat* as an innovation), I privately maintained my affection for *shalawat*. In their forums, during discussions about innovation and other issues, I was quiet because I felt alone (Romdhoni, personal communication, 5 October 2017)."

Moreover, Romdhoni also shares his views on Islamic radicalism, which is another important issue in this discussion. He states: "in my opinion, these radical groups cause harm through their ideologies." Romdhoni acknowledges Habib Syech's efforts in facing these challenges. He adds: "Habib Syech preaches through songs

that have meaning, for example, the song of *NKRI Harga Mati.*" This statement shows how the performance of *shalawat* is used not only to respond to criticism of *maulid* but is also an effort to counteract radicalism. Romdhoni states: "I feel threatened [by these radical groups]. But it depends on us [how to react] (Romdhoni, personal communication, 5 October 2017)." This argument demonstrates that although radical groups pose a threat, individual responses to this threat vary significantly and are deeply personal. Through *shalawat* and the messages carried in the lyrics, Romdhoni and his colleagues attempt to build spiritual and social resilience in facing radicalism.

The stories of Hamam and Romdhoni illustrate their clear understanding of what *maulid* criticism and radicalism entail, as well as their identification of the critics of *maulid* and the groups they consider radical. Hamam and all the *shalawat* performers I interviewed consistently mentioned four groups as critics of *maulid*: the Salafis, Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA), Muhammadiyah, and Pondok Pesantren Ngruki. All these groups are based in Surakarta. Additionally, all the *shalawat* performers agree that Islamic radicalism poses a significant threat to society, particularly due to its potential to influence the younger generation. They identify groups such as Pondok Pesantren Ngruki, led by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Laskar Umat Islam Surakarta (LUIS), and ISIS as radical groups. They also categorise Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) as part of this radical grouping. How the performers counter *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism will be explored in the next section.

6.2. Performers' perspective on shalawat against maulid criticism and Islamic radicalism

This section examines the methods employed by *shalawat* performers to address *maulid* criticism and combat Islamic radicalism. The performers believe that sermons and songs are effective ways to educate participants about *maulid* and counter its criticism, thus creating a resilient public sphere. This effort to cultivate pious and patriotic sensibilities through *shalawat* performances directly contributes to public resilience by reinforcing values that oppose radicalism and promote national unity.

Regarding Islamic radicalism, all the performers believe that the performance is able to challenge the threat of Islamic radicalism. They are confident about this for two reasons: the cultivation of pious disposition and instilling patriotic sensibilities. The former displays two characteristics: the emphasis on the inward form of piety and the use of a calming and soothing narrative. The latter is related to the singing

of nationalistic songs, and to some extent, the gesture of welcoming non-Muslims into the event, which signifies openness of the *shalawat* participants to other fellow citizens.

The following sections explore how performers use sermons and songs to counter *maulid* criticism and combat Islamic radicalism, and provide examples of these methods in action.

6.2.1. The cultivation of pious sensibility

The cultivation of pious sensibility through *shalawat* performances manifests in two distinct but complementary approaches. First, performers emphasise an inward form of piety centred on love for the Prophet. Second, they deliver narratives that are calming and soothing in content, contrasting with the confrontational rhetoric of radical groups. These approaches work together to nurture public resilience among participants.

6.2.1.1. Inward form of piety

The emphasis on the inward form of piety is central to the *maulid* celebration, focusing on the love for the Prophet. This devotion is a core teaching of the ʿAlawī Sufi Order (Woodward et al., 2012, p. 106). Initiated by Bā ʿAlawī figures, such as Habib Syech, *shalawat* performances consistently convey these expressions through both preachers and performers. This inward piety is explicitly designed to counter the exclusive and often austere piety promoted by Salafi groups, which are perceived by the performers as rigid and confrontative.

Wahid, the main vocalist of Habib Syech, highlights the contrast between the peaceful inward piety of shalawat and the violent tendencies of radical groups:

> "In my opinion, radical thinking tends to be violent. This is clearly wrong because the Prophet was a person who loved to smile. He even had a nickname of *al-Amin* [the trusted one], given by non-Muslims. Why? Because of his attitude [akhlaq]. If we compare the radical Muslims with their bombing activities, we can ask them, did the Prophet teach us this? The answer is no (Gus Wahid, personal communication, 15 October 2017)."

Ilham, another performer of Habib Syech, further emphasises how shalawat performances create a comfortable environment that opposes radical ideologies:

> "Shalawat is absolutely anti-radical; it is like north and south or
> water and oil. The fundamental point of view is different, with
> shalawat based on love and the others on hatred. People feel
> comfortable in shalawat because there is no provocative speech. It is
> just about asking people to love and embrace humanity (Ilham,
> personal communication, 13 August 2017)."

These quotes demonstrate how shalawat performers intentionally promote an
inward piety centred on love for the Prophet. According to the performers, this
approach contrasts with what they describe as the rigid religious interpretations of
Salafi groups, offering an alternative religious sensibility that resonates with
Indonesia's pluralistic values. Noorhaidi Hasan's conception of inward-oriented
piety is particularly relevant in this context (Hasan, 2012). Hasan (2012) describes
this type of piety as one that manifests in peaceful, esoteric expression, which
contrasts with the outward piety of radicals who focus on changing others'
behaviours and society based on rigid religious convictions. By nurturing inward
piety, *shalawat* performances counter the confrontational, outward piety of Salafi
groups, presenting an alternative that resonates with Indonesia's pluralistic values.

6.2.1.2 Calming and soothing *narrative*

The calming and soothing narrative presented in *shalawat* performances
represents a counterpublic created by performers to oppose the confrontational
narratives of Salafi groups. Performers emphasise that *shalawat* performances
cultivate a softened heart, bringing peace and tranquillity, thus preventing people
from joining radical groups. Agus Mustofa (b. 1980), one of the main vocalists of
Jamuro, argues that people are drawn to *shalawat* because it relaxes them, unlike
what Agus describes as more intense religious forums (Agus Mustofa, personal
communication, 15 October 2017). He stated:

> "[The participants come to the performance because] they felt
> calmness when they joined the *shalawat*. They said, in this forum is
> nice. I felt relaxed and calm here (Agus Mustofa, personal
> communication, 15 October 2017)."

According to Agus, this sense of calm prevents them from joining radical groups. He
continued saying:

> "I don't think so [that they will join the radicals]. [The reason is] because they already find peace here. They already feel calm (Agus Mustofa, personal communication, 15 October 2017)."

While Agus does not explicitly criticise other groups, such as the Salafis, his assertion that *shalawat* provides a soothing environment implies that radical groups and Salafi forums may lack such a calming atmosphere.

Agus provided an example to illustrate this:

> "People like them don't have manners *(tidak ada rasa ewuh pakewuh)*. I speak like this because I face them [the Salafis] directly. For instance, in a mosque in Banjarsari, they would directly say that the mosque is practising *bid'a* without understanding its history. He directly went up front and led the prayer. While actually, it is not their mosque. So, they don't have good manners. When I approached him after the prayer and asked him, 'Who told you to lead the prayer?' We have a schedule here, who is the imam for today, and so on (Agus Mustofa, personal communication, 15 October 2017)."

These statements highlight how performers intentionally differentiate their calm, inclusive religious sensibility from the more intense, rigid sensibility of Salafi and radical Islamic groups. This differentiation is deliberate, aiming to construct an alternative public sphere through a form of piety and sensibility distinctly separate from the confrontational and exclusive practices of the Salafis.

Furthermore, the calming effect of *shalawat* performances can also be linked to the relaxing qualities of music, which is known to reduce stress by lowering heart rate and blood pressure (Iwanaga, Kobayashi, & Kawasaki, 2005; Lemmer, 2008). Fahri Sezer's research on Sufi music demonstrates that the *ney* (an end-blown flute) commonly used in Turkish Sufi music "had a considerably positive influence on reducing people's anger and psychological symptoms" (Sezer, 2012, p. 425). While it remains uncertain whether *shalawat* performances achieve the same physiological effects, performers confidently assert that the calmness they evoke is a key strength in challenging radical Islamic teachings.

This sentiment is echoed by Fauziah, the main vocalist of Jamuri, who states:

> "When participants attend the performance, they get entertained
> with the *shalawat*. They enjoy it. Because even if you are in a state of
> sadness or trouble, you will get entertained, and that feeling will be
> gone (Fauziah, personal communication, 15 October 2017)."

According to the *shalawat* performers, this emotional and spiritual fulfilment is
vastly different from what participants might experience in radical or Salafi groups,
which do not provide the same sense of comfort or relaxation. This clear
opposition to the exclusive and militant piety of Salafi groups supports the
argument that *shalawat* performers are creating an alternative public sphere.
Through this sphere, *shalawat* performances cultivate a religious sensibility that
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6.2.2. The creation of patriotic sensibility

6.2.2.1. Singing nationalistic songs

One of the key reasons why *shalawat* is effective in challenging Islamic radicalism is its ability to cultivate a patriotic sensibility through the singing of nationalistic songs. Most performers agree that this is a significant strength of *shalawat* performances in countering the influence of radical Islam. In Surakarta, *shalawat* performers frequently credited Habib Syech with initiating the practice of singing nationalistic songs during *shalawat* performances. According to him, this practice began as a response to what he perceived as a fading sense of love for the country that needed reinforcement (Habib Syech, personal communication, 30 August 2017). Other members of *shalawat* groups are even more direct: they believe the singing of nationalistic songs aims to prevent the influence of radical Islam. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Royyan (b. 1987) argues that these songs were introduced in reaction to groups that use the name of Islam to oppose the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Royyan, personal communication, 13 September 2017). Similarly, Purwanto, the head of the Jampi Sanubari *shalawat* group, explains:

> "Singing the Indonesian anthem is one way to fight radicalism. Why? Because we live in this country, so it is impossible to change the foundation of this country based on one religion. Why? Because we realise that there are no indigenous religions in this country. All of them were imported. If we force the implementation of Islamic law, other religions such as Hinduism or Buddhism would demand the same thing (Purwanto, personal communication, 14 July 2017)."

In addition to contrasting the calming style of *shalawat* with the confrontational style of the Salafis, performers aim to distinguish between the 'patriotic' *shalawat* performers and the 'non-patriotic' radical Islamic groups. As Purwanto suggests,

singing the Indonesian anthem in *shalawat* performances is a method of combating radicalism, which he believes threatens the nation's foundation.

Building on this, Zein, a performer from Jampi Sanubari elaborates on the significance of incorporating nationalistic songs into *shalawat* performances:

> "The songs which contain nationalism are indeed part of our performances. In Jampi, we sing several national songs, one of which is '*Yalal Wathan*.' We also sing the song '*NKRI Harga Mati*'. And yes, we commonly conclude our performances with the national anthem '*Indonesia Raya*.' This practice is quite common (Zein, personal communication, 10 November 2017)."

Zein continues his statement by saying:

> "[the function of these songs] is because we are in Indonesia, and we are Muslims, but we live in a country with many religions. In every performance, we include national songs to keep the sense of nationality in our minds. We live in Indonesia, and it is important to respect and remember our country. To cultivate the sense of belonging to this country. To cultivate nationalism (Zein, personal communication, 10 November 2017)."

Adding to this perspective, Partono, a performer with Habib Syech, explains:

> "Habib Syech wants to show people that our love for the country is not limited to a specific group, as evident by the inclusion of the national anthem in our performances. This means that anyone, not just members of NU, can join the performance. Any Indonesian can participate in the programme (Partono, personal communication, 5 October 2017)."

Partono's statement emphasises that these songs evoke a sense of nationalism. By listening to patriotic songs, participants (regardless of their religious affiliation) can develop a deeper love for their country.

The consistent integration of nationalistic songs into *shalawat*, as evidenced by the performers' statements, serves as a mechanism for creating a counterpublic. This counterpublic challenges the narratives of radical Islamic groups by promoting a harmonious coexistence of Islamic piety and Indonesian nationalism. For example,

the inclusion of the Indonesian national anthem in *shalawat* performances directly counters the views of jihadis who claim that the Indonesian system is anti-Islamic and must be overthrown (Jones, 2008). This is particularly significant given that some Solo-born jihadis, like Abdullah Sungkar, have gone so far as to label the singing of the Indonesian anthem as idolatrous (Solahuddin, 2013, p. 86). By regularly exposing participants to these patriotic messages, *shalawat* performances cultivate public resilience against radical ideologies that seek to undermine the pluralistic foundation of the Indonesian state.

The cultivation of patriotic sensibility through nationalistic songs is a central strategy in the broader efforts of *shalawat* performers to combat Islamic radicalism. This approach goes beyond mere opposition to radical ideologies; it actively constructs an Islamic identity that is both pious and patriotic. Not only does this strategy strengthen participants' commitment to the nation, but it also nurtures an identity that is resilient to radical influences.

As we move to the next section, we will further explore how *shalawat* performances cultivate inward-oriented pious sensibilities and patriotic sensibilities through their songs and sermons.

6.3. Countering maulid criticism by cultivating religious pious sensibility

This section examines the specific strategies employed by *shalawat* performers to address and counter criticism of the *maulid* celebration. Through both sermons and songs, performers cultivate a religious sensibility that strengthens participants' commitment to these traditional practices while providing them with theological and emotional resources to resist Salafi critiques. Their approaches vary from indirect methods using stories and analogies to more direct theological arguments based on Islamic texts.

6.3.1. Sermons tackling maulid criticism

Sermons play a crucial role in *shalawat* performances, serving as a primary medium for preachers to address and counter *maulid* criticism. These sermons are carefully crafted to affirm the legitimacy and spiritual benefits of celebrating the *maulid* while simultaneously challenging the arguments presented by critics. Preachers employ two primary methods of argumentation in their sermons: the indirect method and the direct method.

The indirect method relies on subtle and non-confrontational techniques, focusing on the positive aspects of *maulid* celebrations through storytelling and encouraging participants to disregard criticisms. This approach draws upon the cultural norms of indirect communication that are deeply rooted in Javanese society, enabling preachers to deliver their messages without direct confrontation (Geertz, 1976).

On the other hand, the direct method adopts a more explicit approach, using clear textual evidence from the Qurʾān and ḥadīth to directly refute criticisms of the *maulid*. Although this method is less commonly employed, it provides a robust theological defence of the practice by articulating the religious foundations that support the *maulid*.

6.3.1.1 Indirect method

The indirect method of addressing *maulid* criticism in *shalawat* performances encompasses three principal approaches: narrating miracle stories, advising participants to ignore criticisms, and cautioning them against radical preachers. This method avoids direct textual evidence *(dalīl)* from the Qurʾān or ḥadīth, instead nurturing a pious sensibility among the audience.

The first approach involves preachers sharing miracle stories to emphasise the spiritual benefits of praising the Prophet Muhammad. The following sermon by Habib Muhammad Husein al-Habsyi during a performance by Habib Syech demonstrates this method:

> "There is no good life except for the life in which you express your love for prophet Muhammad. Imam Busiri (d. 1294), the author of the *qasidah* al-Burdah, stated that ever since he focused his thoughts to praise the Prophet, all his problems were guaranteed to be solved by the Prophet. The Prophet Muhammad had special 'armed forces'. Their duties did not include going to war. Their only jobs were to praise the Prophet. One of them was Hasan ibn Tsabit. When Hasan praised prophet Muhammad, the Prophet then prayed for him that God would help Hasan through angel Gabriel. As someone who loved to praise the Prophet, God commanded angel Gabriel to help people who praise the Prophet. So, if we are consistent to praise the Prophet, we will be assisted by angel Gabriel as well" (Personal observation and recording, Solo, 17 August 2017).

This narrative cultivates the belief that praising the Prophet and celebrating the *maulid* will bring divine blessings and support to participants. Another example was observed during a Jamuro performance on 24 November 2017. The preacher narrated a story of a saint whose tongue was cut off by his enemy but miraculously regrew due to his consistent recitation of *shalawat*. These stories are intended to encourage participants to continue their practices with the hope of experiencing similar miracles.

The second approach, advising participants to ignore criticisms, is illustrated by the following sermon by Gus Karim during a Jamuro performance:

> "The Prophet got upset because some people called him a sorcerer or a crazy person. How could a holy person like him be called like that? When the Prophet talked to God about the situation, God spoke through the Holy book and told the Prophet to ignore it. God told the Prophet to continue the *dhikr*, and to recite His name. God asked the Prophet to continue his prayer until his time is gone. From this story, we can infer that reciting the *shalawat* must be done forever, even though there are some people who do not like it. We practice the *shalawat* because we love the Prophet. We love and respect him by sending our praise to him." (Personal observation and recording, Solo, 30 November 2017)

In this sermon, Gus Karim uses an analogy to encourage participants to ignore criticisms of the *maulid* and continue their practices. This rhetoric of ignoring the criticism is commonly found at the *shalawat* performance and was frequently mentioned during my interviews with some performers who stated that, in order to address any influence of *maulid* criticism, they simply advised participants to ignore it and perpetuate the celebration.

The third approach involves advising participants to avoid radical preachers who condemn the *maulid* as *bidʿa* or *shirk*. This is illustrated by Habib Muhammad Baragbah during a Jamuri performance:

> "Whenever you attend a religious gathering, you have to analyse whether the preacher is reliable or not. How to check whether one religious gathering is reliable or not? It is considered reliable if after attending the programme, you feel that you are the worst person in the world, and other people will go to heaven. Nonetheless, one religious gathering is considered unreliable if after attending the

programme, you feel that you are the holy person and will go to heaven, and others will go to hell. [Another sign of an unreliable religious gathering] is the one that claims people who attend the *maulid* will go to hell; your parents who practice chanting *dhikr* for 7 days after the passing date of a person *(tahlilan)* will also go to hell. Preachers like these are dangerous. It means that they are arrogant. God will never take their good deeds." (Personal observation and recording, Solo, 1 November 2017)

In this sermon, Habib Muhammad Baragbah often contrasted the inclusive, humble nature of reliable preachers with the exclusive, judgmental attitude of radical ones. By doing so, he aimed to guide participants towards supportive religious authorities and establish a more inclusive religious community.

Furthermore, in the above sermon, Habib Muhammad Baragbah differentiates the pious sensibility of the *shalawat* supporters and the critics (Salafi): reliable and inclusive versus unreliable and exclusive. He explains that attending sermons by reliable preachers encourages an inclusive attitude among participants, who do not see themselves as perfect Muslims capable of condemning others. In contrast, 'unreliable preachers' or Salafis exclude others by viewing themselves as perfect Muslims and deeming those outside their group, including *maulid* practitioners, as wrong. This dichotomy echoes John Bowen's observation in Aceh, where reformists built separate mosques to avoid worshipping with those practising *bid'a* (Bowen, 1989). Similarly, Salafis often create exclusive enclaves, leading to segregation and reduced contact with outsiders (Hasan, 2011, pp. 100–101).

This indirect approach to addressing *maulid* criticism corresponds to the Javanese practice of indirect communication, as described by Clifford Geertz (1976), in which "Javanese culture prefers lengthy, indirect explanations to avoid offending others." This cultural politeness is reflected in the sermons of *shalawat* preachers in Surakarta, who often use stories and analogies to convey their messages subtly. For example, Geertz observed that a Javanese *kyai* would often tell stories rather than directly criticising others, allowing listeners to grasp the message without embarrassment (Geertz, 1976, p. 244). This approach is evident in the indirect methods used by *shalawat* preachers to counter *maulid* criticism.

By employing these indirect methods, *shalawat* preachers effectively promote the benefits of *maulid* practices, encourage resilience against criticism, and guide participants towards inclusive and supportive religious authorities. These narratives help cultivate a pious sensibility among the audience, strengthening

their commitment to the *maulid* and creating a counterpublic that challenges radical criticisms.

6.3.1.2. Direct method

The direct method employed by some *shalawat* preachers involves using textual evidence (*dalīl*) from the Qurʾān and ḥadīth to counter *maulid* criticism. This approach is more straightforward, directly addressing the arguments of critics. While less commonly used, it is showcased by the leader of the al-Hidayah *shalawat* group, Soni Parsono.

Soni Parsono's sermons are characterised by a meticulous use of *dalīl* to support the celebration of the *maulid*. His direct approach is evident in the following sermon delivered during an al-Hidayah performance:

Today, I would like to talk about some *dalīl* concerning the *maulid* celebration that I quoted from a great cleric in Saudi, *Sayyid* Muhammad bin Alawi bin Maliki al-Hasani. He gave nineteen *dalīl* regarding the *maulid*. On this occasion, I would like to explain three of them. The first *dalīl* states that we should bear in mind that the first one to celebrate the Prophet's birthday was the Prophet himself. As stated in the following ḥadīth: Abu Qatadah al-Ansari reported: 'The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, was asked about fasting on Monday. The Prophet said: "That is the day I was born and the day I was sent with revelation."'This ḥadīth has two consequences. First, it is a foundation for the celebration of the Prophet's birthday. The Prophet did fast on Monday because on that day he was born. […] Second, Monday is the day when he started receiving revelation. […]

The second *dalīl* questions why the *maulid* celebration uses duff (*rebana*) even when it is performed in the mosque? The *dalīl* for playing *rebana* in the mosque is an authentic [sahih] ḥadīth and was transmitted by Tirmidzi: 'It is narrated by ʿAisha that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said: "Announce the marriage, celebrate it in the mosque and play the duff at it."'[…]

The third *dalīl* states that the *maulid* celebration, according to *Sayyid* Muhammad bin Alawi bin Maliki al-Hasani, is the expression of joy for the birthday of the Prophet. He explains that celebrating the Prophet's birthday is recommended. As it is mentioned in the Qurʾān (10:58): 'Say, in the bounty of Allah and in His mercy - in that let them rejoice; it is better than what they accumulate.'[…] For our God, the best gift from Him to us is the sending of the Prophet into this world. […] Above all,

we have to be grateful by celebrating the birthday of the Prophet." (Personal observation and recording, Solo, 10 December 2017)

In addition to providing textual evidence, Soni Parsono does not hesitate to directly address and criticise opposing groups such as the Salafis and Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA). During an al-Hidayah performance on 11 September 2017, he explicitly condemned Salafi theology, stating:

> "Indonesian Muslims follow the theological schools of Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, thus rejecting Salafi interpretations" (Personal observation and recording, Solo, 11 September 2017).

This direct mention of opposing groups differs significantly from the more indirect approach favoured by other preachers and serves to delineate the theological boundaries between mainstream Indonesian Islam and Salafi ideology. The preference for the direct method by preachers like Soni Parsono may be less common due to the Javanese cultural tendency towards indirect communication (Geertz, 1976, p. 242). However, Parsono's approach reflects an intentional decision to engage critics directly, using authoritative religious texts to emphasise the legitimacy of the *maulid*.

By employing the direct method, preachers like Soni Parsono aim to provide comprehensive theological justifications for the *maulid*, directly countering criticisms with textual support. This approach not only defends the practice but also strengthens the theological foundations of the *maulid*, demonstrating that such celebrations are deeply rooted in Islamic tradition. While sermons serve as a platform for direct theological engagement with *maulid* criticism, songs offer a complementary approach to reinforcing the legitimacy of these practices.

6.3.2. Songs tackling maulid criticism

Songs play a pivotal role in *shalawat* performances, particularly in addressing *maulid* criticism. Among the *shalawat* groups, Habib Syech's use of songs stands out as a distinctive approach to counter criticisms and promote the practice of *maulid*.

One notable song used by Habib Syech is titled "The Song of NU." This song is unique to his performances and is not found in the *maulid* books used by other *shalawat* groups, which prefer to adhere strictly to traditional texts to preserve the

'sacredness' of their performances. The song's lyrics provide an overview of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organisation, its structure, and its religious rituals. By doing so, the song serves both an educational and a defensive purpose. The lyrics of "The Song of NU" can be translated as follows:

Tawassalnā bi bismillah, wabi al-hādī Rasūlillāh	We intercede with the word bismillah, and the guidance of the Prophet
Wakulli mujāhidi li Allah, bi Ahl al-Badri yā Allah	We intercede with the warrior of God in the battle of Badr.
Tahun 26 lahire NU	Year 1926 is the birth of NU
Ijo ijo benderane NU	Green is the flag of NU
Gambar Jagad simbule NU	The earth is the symbol of NU
Bintang songo lambange NU	Nine stars are the emblem of NU
Shuriyah ulama'e NU	*Shuriyah* (the advisory board) is the *'ulamā'* of NU
Tanfīdhīyah pelaksana NU	*Tanfīdhīyah* (executive) is the executive board of NU
GP Ansor pemuda NU	GP Ansor is the youth (boys) of NU
Fatayat pemudi NU	Fatayat is the youth (girls) of NU
Nganggo uṣalli sholate NU	Reciting *'uṣalli'* (uttering the praying's intention loudly) is the prayer of NU
Adhān pindo Jum'atane NU	Two *adhān* (call to prayer) are the Friday prayer of NU
Nganggo Qunut Subuhane NU	*Qunut* supplication is the dawn prayer of NU
Dzikir bareng amalane NU	Communal *dhikr* is the ritual prayer of NU
Tahlilan hadiahe NU	*Tahlilan* is the gift of NU
Manāqiban washilahe NU	*Manāqiban* (reciting miraculous deeds of a saint) is the intercession of NU
Wiridan rutinane NU	Daily *dhikr* is the routine activity of NU
Maulidan sholawate NU	*Maulidan* is the *shalawat* performance of NU

The song highlights two critical aspects: the historical and organisational structure of NU and the religious rituals regularly practised by its followers. It begins by showcasing the year of NU's establishment (1926), the symbolism of its logo, and its organisational hierarchy, including its advisory (*Shuriyah*) and executive (*Tanfīdhīyah*) boards, as well as its youth wings (*GP Ansor* and *Fatayat*). According to Habib Syech, this information nurtures a sense of identity and pride among participants (TV9 Nusantara, 2015).

In terms of religious rituals, the song lists several practices integral to NU followers, such as the recitation of '*uṣalli'* before prayers, the two calls to prayer during Friday prayers *(adhān)*, communal *dhikr*, chanting *dhikr* for 7 days after the passing date of a person *(tahlilan),* and reciting miraculous deeds of saints *(manaqiban)* rituals. By presenting these practices in a song, Habib Syech reinforces their legitimacy and normalises them within the context of the *maulid* celebration (TV9 Nusantara, 2015).

The inclusion of this song in Habib Syech's performances serves a dual purpose. First, it educates participants about the organisational and ritualistic aspects of NU, strengthening their understanding and commitment to these practices. Second, it subtly counters criticism by affirming that these practices are a well-established part of NU's religious repertoire, thus supporting their validity. This inclusion also creates a counterpublic by challenging the criticisms and misconceptions about these rituals. It educates and supports the audience's belief in their practices, showing that these rituals are not innovations but are deeply rooted in tradition and widely accepted within the NU community. This counterpublic narrative helps to nurture a sense of solidarity and resilience among the participants, reinforcing their commitment to their religious practices and their community.

The musical dimension of *shalawat* performances plays a crucial role in building resistance beyond its lyrical content. The rhythmic patterns of *hadrah* and the melodic structures of *qasidah* operate on multiple levels to build resilience. First, the repetitive nature of *shalawat* melodies helps embed religious messages in participants' memory more effectively than spoken sermons alone. Second, the collective experience of musical performance creates emotional resonance among participants, reinforcing their shared identity and commitment to traditional practices. Third, the integration of local musical styles with Arabic religious poetry demonstrates how traditional Islamic practices can successfully adapt to local cultural contexts, countering Salafi arguments that such adaptations constitute religious innovation (*bid'a*).

Furthermore, the use of music in *shalawat* performances directly challenges the Salafi prohibition of musical instruments in religious practice. By successfully combining devotional content with musical expression, these performances depict the compatibility of music and piety, offering an experiential refutation of Salafi criticism. The emotional and spiritual impact of musical performance helps create a form of embodied resistance, where participants' positive experiences of musical devotion naturally immunise them against arguments condemning such practices.

Habib Syech's flexible approach, defined by the inclusion of "The Song of NU", stands in contrast to the practices of other *shalawat* groups. These groups, while sharing the same aim of creating resilience against criticism and nurturing devotion, adhere strictly to the traditional *maulid* book in their performances. This adherence stems from a desire to maintain what they perceive as the 'sacredness' of their *shalawat* practices. Habib Syech's approach, on the other hand, allows for the incorporation of contemporary elements that directly address current issues and criticisms. By including songs like "The Song of NU", he creates a more accessible and relatable experience for younger participants who may be less familiar with traditional texts. This approach enables him to more explicitly counter criticisms and reinforce NU identity and practices in a way that connects with contemporary Indonesian Muslims.

Both approaches aim to build resilience and counter criticism, albeit through different strategies. Traditional groups rely on the established legitimacy of *maulid* texts, while Habib Syech blends traditional and modern elements to connect with contemporary Indonesian Muslims. Despite these differences, both approaches contribute to creating a counterpublic that challenges criticisms of *maulid* practices. By reinforcing the validity of these practices and supporting shared cultural experiences, *shalawat* performances unite communities against external criticism and nurture resilience among participants.

6.4. Countering Islamic radicalism by cultivating patriotic sensibility

This section examines the methods employed by performers to counter Islamic radicalism by cultivating a patriotic sensibility through sermons and songs. The distinction between sermons and songs, as well as between direct and indirect methods, is less relevant in this context. Therefore, sermons and songs are analysed collectively to explore how this patriotic sensibility functions as a counterpublic to Islamic radicalism.

6.4.1. Sermons and songs in tackling the influence of Islamic radicalism

6.4.1.1. Condemning radical actions

Islamic radicalism is not the primary focus of *maulid* celebrations; thus, preachers address the issue only occasionally and often indirectly, typically as an additional

remark after discussing the virtues of praising the Prophet. During my nine months of fieldwork in 2017–2018, I observed that all five *shalawat* performance groups in Surakarta discussed Islamic radicalism, albeit infrequently.

Among the preachers, Habib Syech was the most vocal in addressing Islamic radicalism. He frequently commented on the topic of Islam and terrorism, particularly in response to terrorist attacks. For example, during a performance in South Kalimantan on 13 May 2018, following the church bombings in Surabaya, Habib Syech condemned the attacks, stating:

> "Suicide bombing is barbaric, an attitude that is condemned by God. Many people think that such an act will be rewarded with heaven, while, on the contrary, it is a big sin (Duta Televisi, 2018)."

He emphasised that such acts contradict Islamic teachings, suggesting that those responsible for such actions likely lacked a proper understanding of religion (Duta Televisi, 2018).

In addition to condemning terrorist actions, Habib Syech addressed the issue of *takfiri* ideologies, which involve labelling other Muslims as infidels. During a Jamuri performance, he advised participants to avoid sending their children to *pondok pesantren* that practise *takfiri*. Instead, he recommended educational institutions that teach *shalawat* and *maulid*, thereby implicitly criticising radical groups known for promoting *takfiri* practices, such as those influenced by Aman Abdurrahman (IPAC Report, 2016). By using indirect methods, Habib Syech effectively countered radical ideologies while maintaining cultural etiquette and avoiding direct confrontation.

6.4.1.2. Promoting national unity

The most common theme in *shalawat* performances related to the issue of Islamic radicalism is the defence of the Unitary State of Indonesia (*NKRI*). This theme is addressed by all *shalawat* groups. During a performance commemorating Indonesian Independence Day in 2017, Habib Syech encouraged participants to honour national heroes and defend *NKRI*, declaring, '*NKRI Harga Mati,*' meaning '*NKRI* is not negotiable.'

Other preachers also highlighted the importance of supporting the government and advocating for national unity. For example, during a Jamuro performance, Gus

Karim advised participants to join communities that enhance their love for God, the Prophet, the clerics, and *NKRI*:

> "By joining this community, your love for Allah is bigger, your love for the Prophet is stronger, as well as your love for the clerics, and your love for the Unitary State of Indonesia [*NKRI*]" (Personal observation and recording, Solo, 30 November 2017).

Similarly, the Jampi Sanubari group emphasised the connection between NU, *shalawat*, and *NKRI*. One preacher explained that NU's practices, such as *yasinan* (the communal recitation of Surah Yasin) and *tahlilan* (a dhikr gathering conducted seven days after a person's passing), play a crucial role in defending *NKRI*. He stated:

> "The *NKRI* is not negotiable. The raison d'être of *NKRI* is to unite our country, so that our country is not disintegrated, and the people are not disunited. So, by practising *shalawat* we will always keep our *NKRI*" (Personal observation and recording, Solo, 12 September 2017).

The al-Hidayah group also addressed *NKRI*, albeit in a different manner. During a performance on 3 October 2017, a government official warned participants about the dangers of fake news (*hoaxes*) that could disrupt harmony between Muslims and non-Muslims. He urged participants to be cautious and not to be easily provoked by *hoaxes*, emphasising the importance of unity and stability for *NKRI*. Through these sermons, *shalawat* preachers aim to cultivate both patriotic and pious sensibilities among participants, thus creating a counterpublic that supports national unity.

6.4.2. Songs promoting patriotism

Patriotic songs play a significant role in *shalawat* performances, conveying messages of national unity and countering Islamic radicalism. These songs, performed alongside religious themes, help cultivate a sense of national pride and duty among participants. One prominent song in this regard is "The Unitary State of Indonesia is Not Negotiable" *(NKRI Harga Mati)*, which is a staple in Habib Syech's repertoire.

Other *shalawat* groups, such as Jamuro, Jamuri, al-Hidayah, and Jampi Sanubari, while primarily focusing on maintaining the sacredness of their *shalawat*

traditions, occasionally include *'NKRI Harga Mati'* in their performances. This practice highlights Habib Syech's influential role as a model for all *shalawat* groups, even as they strive to preserve the sacredness of their performances. Despite the occasional inclusion of *'NKRI Harga Mati'*, it is significant to note that all *shalawat* groups, regardless of their adherence to traditional *maulid* texts, conclude their performances by singing the Indonesian national anthem, *"Indonesia Raya."* This general practice demonstrates a shared commitment to patriotism across all *shalawat* groups, even as they differ in their approaches to integrating additional nationalistic content.

By consistently including the national anthem and patriotic themes, these groups cultivate both religious and patriotic sensibilities among participants. The song *'NKRI Harga Mati'* serves as an example of this approach, with lyrics that emphasise unity, peace and national integrity, as follows:

Allah al-kāfi Rabbunā al-kāfi	God is sufficient
Qaṣadnā al-kāfi wajadnā al-kāfi	Our intention is sufficient
Likulli kāfi kafānā al-kāfi	God suffices us
Wani'ma al-kāfi alhamdulillah	Everyone has sufficient strength, and yes to all, thank God
Indonesia Jiwa Raga Kami	Indonesia is our body and soul
Indonesia Jantung hati kami	Indonesia is our heart
Indonesia Harga Diri Kami	Indonesia is our dignity
Akan Kubela Sampai Mati	I will defend it until I die
Indonesia Kebangsaan kami	Indonesia is our nation
Indonesia Kebanggaan kami	Indonesia is our pride
Indonesia Tanah Air kami	Indonesia is our homeland
Akanku Bela Sampai Mati	I will defend it until I die
Bersatulah Bangsa Indonesia	Unite Indonesia
Kami Semua Cinta Indonesia	We all love Indonesia
Ayo Bangkit Wahai Indonesia	Let's Rise O Indonesia
Sekali Merdeka Tetap Merdeka	Freedom once and for all
Hidup Rukun Bangsa Indonesia	Live in harmony O Indonesia
Damai Selalu Bangsa Indonesia	Live in peace O Indonesia
Ayo Berjuang untuk Indonesia	Let's fight for Indonesia
Sekali Merdeka Tetap Merdeka	Freedom once and for all

Ya Allah Jaga Negeri kami	God please protect our country
Dari Makar dan musuh kami	From treason and rebellion of our enemy
Terimalah Semboyan kami	Please God accept our motto
NKRI Harga Mati	NKRI is not negotiable
Indonesia Kebanggaan Kami	Indonesia is our pride
Indonesia Kebangsaan kami	Indonesia is our nation
Merah Putih Bendera kami	Red and white are our flag
NKRI Harga Mati	NKRI is not negotiable

The repeated assertion of "NKRI is not negotiable" serves as a unifying call against radical threats. Following the Javanese etiquette of indirect communication (Geertz, 1976, p. 242), Habib Syech addresses the potential risks of national disintegration without explicitly naming provocative groups. This patriotic message is further reinforced through another significant song, "O People of the Homeland" *(Yalal Wathan)*, written by Wahab Hasbullah and revived by Habib Syech:

Yalal wathan yalal wathan yalal wathan	O homeland, homeland, homeland
Hubb al-waṭan min al-īmān	Loving the country is part of my faith
Walā takun min al-ḥirmān	Don't be deprived
Inhaẓu ahl al-waṭan	Stand up the people of the homeland
Indonesia Negeriku	Indonesia is my country
Engkau Panji Martabatku	You are my dignity
Siapa Datang Mengancammu	Anyone comes threatening you
Kan Binasa di bawah durimu	He/she will die

This song harmonises Muslim commitment to faith with love for the country, emphasising that defending the nation is integral to religious devotion (TV9 Nusantara, 2015). The integration of piety and patriotism in shalawat performances demonstrates how religious devotion and national loyalty mutually reinforce each other. By positioning what the state sees as moderate Islamic practice as supportive of national interests, these performances create a resilient Islamic identity that effectively counters narratives attempting to delegitimise the nation-state.

The prominence of patriotic themes in *shalawat* performances, especially the catchphrase '*NKRI Harga Mati*,' can be attributed to two main factors: religious

nationalism and the desire of *shalawat* groups to be congruent with the government. Influenced by BāʿAlawī preacher Habib Luthfi, who combines *maulid* recitations with the Indonesian anthem, Habib Syech adopted and popularised these nationalistic elements. Habib Luthfi promotes religious nationalism, where "religious and national identities coexist and even reinforce each other" (Arifin, 2012, p. 91). He emphasises that loving the country is as important as loving Islam, aiming "to show the world that Indonesian Muslims are nationalist" (Alatas, 2016, p. 319). Wahid, Habib Syech's main vocalist, revealed that Habib Luthfi's influence led Habib Syech to incorporate these nationalistic songs, which became widespread in *shalawat* performances (Gus Wahid, personal communication, 15 October 2017). Additionally, *shalawat* groups aim to garner government support by promoting national unity and countering Islamic radicalism. This alignment with the government is evident in the declaration of Surakarta as the city of *shalawat*, with the municipality funding *shalawat* events to mitigate the influence of radical Islam (see Chapter 5).

By incorporating patriotic songs into their performances, *shalawat* groups cultivate both patriotic and religious sensibilities among participants, creating a counterpublic that opposes radical Islamic ideologies and advocates for national unity. This is different from radical groups like the Salafi jihadis, who reject nationalism and advocate for a transnational Islamic struggle (Byman, 2013, p. 356). According to some performers, the overall aim of these sermons and songs is to protect participants from the influence of radical Islamic groups (Purwanto, personal communication, 14 July 2017).

6.5. Shalawat as counterpublic

This section synthesises how performers' strategies manifest public resilience through both pious and patriotic sensibilities. The empirical evidence demonstrates how these performances contribute to community strength through mechanisms that align with rather than oppose state interests.

The analysis confirms how performers successfully cultivate pious sensibilities (emphasising inward-focused spirituality) and patriotic sensibilities (through nationalistic songs and symbols). Through sermons and songs, they create peaceful, inclusive religious expression that strengthens participants' resilience against confrontational rhetoric often associated with radical interpretations.

Simultaneously, the patriotic sensibility contributes to public resilience through consistent promotion of national unity and pride. The regular inclusion of

nationalistic songs, particularly '*NKRI Harga Mati*', creates a discourse that harmoniously combines religious devotion with civic duty. This integration builds resilience against radical narratives that position Islamic and national identities as incompatible.

The mechanism through which this counterpublic builds public resilience is particularly noteworthy. Unlike the Egyptian case where cassette sermons created an alternative discourse opposing state ideology, *shalawat* performances in Indonesia generate a space where state interests and traditional Islamic practices mutually reinforce each other, strengthening community resilience against radical influences. This demonstrates how counterpublics can function not only in opposition to dominant narratives but also in creating resilient communities that strengthen social cohesion.

The effectiveness of this public resilience lies in its ability to connect with lived experiences of Indonesian Muslims. By offering a devotional experience that feels religiously grounded while in accord with core values such as Pancasila, community harmony, and respect for pluralism, *shalawat* performances contribute to shaping a contemporary Indonesian Islamic identity that is resistant to radical influences. This adaptation of Hirschkind's concept helps us understand how religious practices can build community resilience without necessarily standing in opposition to state authority.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed how *shalawat* performers cultivate a counterpublic through sermons and songs, effectively responding to *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism. The analysis reveals how performers strategically construct a counterpublic through their careful use of sermons and songs, creating a framework for alternative religious expression that potentially challenges dominant Salafi narratives.

Our analysis reveals several key findings. Firstly, *shalawat* performers utilise both indirect and direct methods in addressing *maulid* criticism. The indirect approach, employing stories and analogies, synchronises with Javanese cultural preferences for subtle communication. The direct method, though less common, provides robust theological defences of *maulid* practices through careful exegesis of religious texts. These complementary approaches help legitimise traditional practices while building community resilience against criticism.

Secondly, in confronting Islamic radicalism, *shalawat* groups have developed a distinctive discourse characterised by two interconnected sensibilities. The pious sensibility emphasises inward-focused spirituality and devotion to the Prophet Muhammad, deliberately contrasting with the more rigid interpretations promoted by radical groups. The patriotic sensibility, manifested through nationalistic songs and symbols, reinforces the compatibility of Islamic and national identities. This combination proves particularly effective in building resistance against radical narratives that position these identities as contradictory.

The empirical evidence reveals how these performances contribute to public resilience through multiple mechanisms. The performances create spaces for moderate religious expression while bringing people together through shared cultural experiences. They provide theological resources that effectively counter radical interpretations, while simultaneously strengthening national identity alongside religious devotion.

Significantly, these efforts coordinate with state interests while maintaining religious essence, demonstrating how traditional practices can adapt to contemporary challenges without losing their spiritual essence. The success of *shalawat* performances in cultivating both pious and patriotic sensibilities suggests its importance in shaping an Indonesian Islamic identity that is resistant to radical influences.

The analysis of shalawat performances in this chapter displays how performers actively construct counterpublics and cultivate public resilience through their strategic use of sermons and songs. However, the effectiveness of these efforts can only be fully understood by examining how participants receive and respond to these performances. The following chapter will explore participants' perspectives, investigating their motivations for attendance and their responses to the discourses developed by performers. This examination will provide deeper insights into how shalawat performances function in building resilience against radical influences in contemporary Surakarta.

Chapter 7

Participants' perspectives on the *shalawat* performance

Introduction

Following the analysis of performers' strategies in Chapter 6, this chapter examines the participants' perspectives on *shalawat* performances within the public resilience framework established earlier. It focuses on two aspects: (1) their motivations for attending *shalawat* performances and (2) their responses to *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism.

To answer these questions, I analysed interviews with 40 participants (21 female, 19 male) from five *shalawat* groups in Surakarta, employing the three-step coding process described in the Introduction. Using Atlas.ti software, I first identified specific statements about *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism (open coding), then organised these into conceptual categories (axial coding), and finally synthesised these categories into overarching themes (selective coding) that revealed patterns in how participants developed response strategies to criticism.

By examining participants' perspectives, this chapter aims to understand how state recognition for religious practices influences community responses to ideological challenges. This analysis contributes to our understanding of how public resilience emerges through the interaction between state initiatives, religious practice, and community engagement in the local context of Surakarta.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section explores the participants' motivations for attending *shalawat* performances, which include piety, entertainment, and social interaction. The second section examines participants' responses to *maulid* criticism and how they navigate these challenges. The third section analyses how participation in state-supported *shalawat* performances shapes religious understanding and community resilience.

7.1. Participants' motives in attending the shalawat performances

Some reasons for attending musical concerts or festivals include the enjoyment of the performance and social interaction (cf. Bowen & Daniels, 2005; Crompton & McKay, 1997), which also holds true for attendance at religious musical performances (Tkaczynski & Rundle-Thiele, 2013). My findings confirm these studies, identifying three motives of my interlocutors for attending shalawat performance: piety, entertainment, and social interaction.

The concept of 'pious entertainment' as discussed by Alagha (2011), Harb (2006), and van Nieuwkerk (2011a) is useful in this context, since *shalawat* performances combine religious devotion with entertainment, creating a unique environment where participants can experience spiritual learning in an enjoyable and socially engaging context. This combination of piety and entertainment attracts a diverse audience and contributes to the formation of a 'counterpublic.' By providing a pleasurable yet religious experience, *shalawat* performances offer an alternative to stricter forms of religious practice and resist the rigid interpretations of groups like the Salafis, helping to create a communal space that sustains moderate and inclusive Islamic narratives while countering extremist ideologies.

7.1.1. Piety

Among the 40 interlocutors I interviewed, all except one included piety as a motive when I asked about their reasons for participating in the *shalawat* performance. The participants understand the *shalawat* performance and the *maulid* as recommended or obligatory religious rituals. In Islamic law, actions are commonly classified on a five-point scale: *wājib* (obligatory), *sunna* (recommended), *mubāḥ* (permitted), *makrūh* (discouraged), and *haram* (prohibited) (Juynboll, 1991). Of the forty interlocutors, half replied that the *maulid* is a recommended act *(sunna)*, thirteen stated it is an obligatory act *(wājib)*, a few proposed it is a permitted act *(mubāh)*, while two said it is almost *wājib*, and another two did not reply.

Many of my interlocutors perceive the maulid as wājib, or almost wājib. Although the expression *"almost wājib"* does not exist in classical legal terminology, my interlocutors used it to signal a pious commitment, treating attendance at the *maulid* as if it were more than recommended. This is interesting because the 'ulamā' who support the maulid generally consider it sunna. This indicates their strong approval for the maulid and its deep integration into their religious rituals. These two indicators are demonstrated in the figure of Somad. Despite being over 60, he depicts this commitment by always attending Habib Syech's performances in Surakarta, arriving early, and staying until late at night. His regular presence and perception that maulid is wājib reinforce his strong commitment to the performance. He stated:

> "We are obliged to know our Prophet. The Qur'ān said, "there has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often." In this regard, we have to tell the story of the Prophet to our wives and children. […] It is explained [in the

ḥadīth] that whoever supplicates Allah to exalt my mention, Allah will exalt his mention ten times (Somad, personal communication, 13 September 2017)."

Somad's steadfast commitment to attending *maulid* celebrations is rooted in his pious conviction that God will reward those who venerate the Prophet. Similarly, my interlocutors who regarded the *maulid* as sunna also connected it with a religious reward. This was put forward by Musyarofah who stated that "[the ruling of the *maulid*] is under the category of *mubāh* or sunna. [This is the case] because when we practised it, we get the reward from God" (Musyarofah, personal communication, 21 September 2017). She views participating in the *shalawat* as a pious act. As an alumnus of an Islamic Boarding school *(pesantren)* in Jombang who received thorough teaching of loving the prophet through *shalawat*, her answer comes as no surprise. Moreover, her commitment to participating in a whole month programme of the *shalawat* in *Rabīʿ al-Awwal* held by a *shalawat* group of Jamuri in Surakarta is extraordinary. While attending once a month gathering of *shalawat* is already seen as a steady religious commitment, participating in a whole month programme is another level of commitment.

Generally, my interlocutors view the maulid as sunna, wājib, or nearly wājib, considering it an essential religious ritual and act of piety that brings religious rewards. They articulate their pious motivations through expressions related to spiritual and religious needs, love for the Prophet and the need for his intercession (shafāʿa), and the feeling of tranquillity (tenang/ayem/adem).

Marlina (female, b. 1970), for instance, explained her pious motives for attending the *shalawat* as follows:

"[It is] to bring ourselves closer to God. The question is, why do we have to practise *qiyām*? The preacher said that it is the way for us to honour the Prophet. If we can honour a leader by standing up whenever he comes, we have to do the same for the Prophet (Marlina, personal communication, 11 September 2017)."

Marlina's pious intention by drawing herself to God can be seen in her effort to establish her own *maulid* performance at her house, which I attended several times. As a busy member of the Surakarta House of Representatives, she is often unable to attend the *shalawat* group of Jamuri performance. To compensate for the missing *shalawat* routine from this group, she brought the *maulid* performance to her home. Another statement came from Yanto (male, b. 1968), who explained

that he attended the performance because of his spiritual need. His statement is as follows:

> "[It is] my spiritual need. If I did not come to the assembly, for instance if I did not come to Habib Syech's *shalawat* performance or did not come to his religious gathering, if I truly had no excuse, my heart would be disappointed. I would lose out; I would miss the opportunity to meet with pious people, I could not see the Prophet's descendants, I could not listen to the stories of the Prophet, and could not listen to the tales of the pious people (Yanto, personal communication, 7 August 2017)."

Similarly to Marlina, in order to fulfil his spiritual need and make up for missing Habib Syech's performance, Yanto initiated a similar programme in his community with his friends and family. I attended his *maulid* twice. He seems very dedicated to these events. This is the case because he is responsible both for the performance and for leading it.

Besides these two, other interlocutors mention their love for the Prophet and the need for his intercession, like Subakri (male, b. 1969):

> "[It is] an expression of love for the Prophet. I believe there is one task that we all have to complete: to worship God. [Moreover, there are] specific acts worship that are easy to be performed and emphasise intention *(niat)*, such as *salat* (praying), participating in the *shalawat* performance and seeking knowledge (Subakri, personal communication, 22 November 2017)."

Subakri's commitment to the *shalawat* performance, with the intention of loving the Prophet, is quite strong. Despite being tired from working as a gardener the whole day, he still participated in the performance from 7:00 PM until midnight, helping set up the place and clean up the site afterward.

In addition to that, another statement related to piety is the expression of my interlocutors that they felt comfortable or that the *shalawat* calmed their hearts whenever they participated or listened to it. Asifah (female, b. 1985) explained: "Whenever we did that, I felt comfortable and relaxed. That is the reason why I participate in it" (Asifah, personal communication, 8 September 2017). To understand this tranquillity phenomenon and Asifah's statement, I participated in and observed her participation at the Jamuri performance. By participating at this

performance at that time, I can finally see what she described as relaxed and comfortable. In Jamuri's performance, there are moments when the singers sing soft-soothing tunes, especially the song of *'sa'altu Allah'* (asking God). This song has a soft tune, accompanied by the gentle beating of the *rebana*. It is no wonder that it gives tranquillity to people who listen to it. The lead singer's beautiful voice adds to the enchanting mixture. With the lead singer's cue, the participants sang along willingly and were physically moved by it. They closed their eyes while nodding back and forth to the tune. For those who understand the literal meaning of the song, it enhances this feeling of calmness even more. However, most participants do not understand the translation, but still feel relaxed due to the combination of the beautiful voice, the music and the atmosphere of the performers. The song narrates Muslims' requests for blessings from God, seeking relief from problems and striving to become better Muslims.

A surprisingly large number of interlocutors who mentioned piety as their motivation did not reference either entertainment or social interaction. Among these interlocutors, most of them were older than 40. Compared to the younger interlocutors, it seems that the older participants believe the *shalawat* performance is particularly about piety. This observation is supported by the age of the audiences at the performances of Habib Syech and the other four *shalawat* groups. While Habib Syech's cheerful and entertaining performances attract a younger audience more, the other four groups that focus more on the *khushū'* (deep spiritual focus and humility in worship) and the piety aspect of *shalawat,* attract older interlocutors.

Accordingly, almost all of my interlocutors referred to the participation in *shalawat* as a pious act because, by participating, they believed that they brought themselves closer to God and expressed their love for the Prophet. They are motivated by their quest for piety, or *taqwā,* as explained by Saba Mahmood (2005, p. 145). Taqwā expresses the desire to obey God and refrain from what He has prohibited, motivated by both fear and love of God. In the interviews, my interlocutors did not mention the word taqwā or fear of God but rather emphasised that their attendance is part of their love for God and the Prophet, viewing it as a deeply spiritual practice that enhances their piety. The participants' affection for the Prophet manifests through their commitment to regular attendance and organising smaller gatherings, reflecting the deep religious significance they attach to these performances as a form of communal worship. Loving the Prophet, as part of their taqwā, is inseparable from loving God in Islamic theology (Badawi, 2005).

7.1.2. Entertainment

Surakarta has become known for Islamic radical groups (Wildan, 2009), with several such groups emerging since 1998. Salafi Islamic boarding schools are found throughout the Surakarta area. With growing numbers and influence, these groups conduct raids on cafes and entertainment venues, particularly those offering music performances or services they consider inappropriate (The Jakarta Post, 2017). As discussed in Chapter 1, these actions reflect their belief that music is *haram* and requires strict regulation or prohibition.

Some Muslims in Surakarta seek forms of entertainment that correlate with Islamic principles. My younger interlocutors often mentioned attending *shalawat* performances for entertainment alongside piety or social interaction motives. Participants described *shalawat* performances as "enjoyable", "happy", and "fun." Mansur (male, b. 2001), a student from a *pondok pesantren* in Karanganyar who hitchhiked to Habib Syech's performance, explained: "I really enjoyed it. First, there are the *qasidah* (poetry) songs. Then after that, we recite the *maulid* text. If we understand the meaning, it is very good" (Mansur, personal communication, 21 August 2017).

Young participants particularly enjoy *qasidah* singing which, as discussed in Chapter 5, combines Arabic, Javanese and Indonesian languages and is not always tied to the sacred *maulid* text. Performers use upbeat rhythms that appeal to younger audiences. Indah (female, b. 1995) explains:

> "The qasidah songs are good and enjoyable, as are the shalawat songs. It is like they are calling us to come to a religious gathering that is full of joy. To be honest, every time I was invited to a religious gathering as a young person, I found them all boring. But when I attended the shalawat performance, I felt differently. It was enjoyable to participate in and listen to such a performance. From that moment onwards, I have attended this specific programme regularly (Indah, personal communication, 9 December 2017)."

Qasidah songs form a significant part of these gatherings' appeal. During performances, participants like Indah wave Syekhermania flags and sing along, expressing their enjoyment through collective participation from start to finish.

Older participants describe their enjoyment differently. Setiawi (female, b. 1966) explains:

> "I cannot explain [the reason why I participate in the shalawat performance], [but] I like it. Even when I am alone and doing nothing, sometimes I sing shalawat. [The singing of shalawat] feels enjoyable and makes my heart comfortable (nyaman) and calm (tenang). Even if I don't have money, I feel calm. Instead of singing other songs, it is better to sing shalawat because it brings us closer to the Prophet (Setiawi, personal communication, 26 September 2017)."

While both age groups appreciate the performances' entertainment and religious elements, younger participants tend to emphasise entertainment while older ones focus on piety. Anam (male, b. 1978) offers another perspective:

> "[The reason why I participate in the performance] cannot be explained by words. I think [I like all of it], including the song and the vocal. It is the same when we listen to Western songs, we don't know the meaning, but it is enjoyable to listen to them. [Shalawatan and Western music] are slightly different, [but the effect] is somewhat the same. It means that I felt as if I were being carried away by the flow of water whenever I listened to shalawat (Anam, personal communication, 21 November 2017)."

Anam's description using *menghanyutkan* (being carried away) echoes other participants' references to feelings of calm (*tenang*) and comfort (*nyaman*), suggesting how *shalawat* music creates a meditative state for listeners. These responses underscore how *shalawat* performances combine entertainment and spiritual expression in ways that appeal to different generations, with participants engaging according to their individual preferences and needs.

As noted in Section 7.1, the concept of 'pious entertainment' is important in understanding this phenomenon. Van Nieuwkerk's exploration (2011a) of *al-fann al-hādif* (art with purpose) emphasises the use of music and performance to promote Islamic values and mobilise religious sentiments, which corresponds with how *shalawat* performances combine religious ritual with entertainment to cultivate pious sensibilities. Alagha's work (2011) on Hizbullah's Islamic cultural sphere highlights how entertainment can be adapted to fit within religious frameworks, promoting piety and patriotism, while Harb's (2006) study of Al-Saha Traditional Village in Lebanon shows how Islamic movements create alternative spaces for entertainment that comply with religious sensibilities, offering a 'pious' version of

leisure activities. Together these works emphasise the combination of religious devotion and entertainment in a way that *shalawat* performances in Surakarta also demonstrate, creating an environment where participants can experience spiritual growth and enjoyment simultaneously.

Furthermore, the entertainment aspect of the *shalawat* serves as an opposition to the stricter interpretations of Islam promoted by Salafi groups. The joy and communal happiness evident in these performances contrast with restrictive views on music and gatherings (see Chapter 1). *Shalawat* performances play an essential role as a counterpublic; they do not merely offer an alternative religious experience but actively create an environment for expressing a moderate, inclusive form of Islam. This challenges the narratives and practices of extremist groups by promoting a version of Islam that is joyful, inclusive, and communal. By maintaining the balance between following religious norms and engaging in cultural expression, *shalawat* performances enrich the spiritual and social life of the community.

7.1.3. Social interaction

The social interaction between participants is the third motive among my interlocutors, with phrases such as "meeting friends" or "being invited by friends" used to describe this motive. As mentioned by Munawaroh, the founder of the women's shalawat group Jamuri, participating in the performance serves as a leisure activity and social interaction for many Muslim women in Surakarta, providing a space to pray, chat, and joke with others outside their domestic roles (Bunyai Munawaroh, personal communication, 21 September 2017).

Rahmawati (female, b. 1967), an English teacher at a private school in Surakarta who migrated from Medan, North Sumatra in the 1980s. In the last three years she actively participated in the *shalawat* performance in the city, not only of Habib Syech, but also of smaller groups like Jampi Sanubari. I met her in the latter performance. Regarding her recent engagement with the *shalawat*, she said:

> "I like the *shalawat* performance because it is not only about the religious learning, but also about meeting friends that we never knew before (Rahmawati, personal communication, 6 November 2017)."

Her remark is in accordance with Munawaroh that meeting friends are among their purpose to participate in the performance.

How about the younger participants? Most young interlocutors, like Musyarofah, explained:

> "[I went to the performance] because I am interested in it. I am interested in the *shalawat* and the community in which we have the same experience of the performance, especially the graduates of Islamic boarding schools *(pondok pesantren)* (Musyarofah, personal communication, 21 September 2017)."

Another young participant, Malikah (female, b. 1998), said:

> "I like the *shalawat* performance because I am curious about Prophet Muhammad. This love for the Prophet motivates us to practise the performance. The second reason is meeting friends, and the third one is the soothing songs [of *shalawat*] (Malikah, personal communication, 23 November 2017)."

The above statements demonstrate that younger interlocutors share the same motivation to attend the shalawat performance: piety and socialisation. Most of them attend the performance as a group, highlighting the communal aspect of their participation. For instance, Mansur and Indah's attendance is typically a group activity, with Indah travelling 50 km from Wonogiri to Surakarta and sharing travel costs with her group. This suggests that their participation is driven not only by piety but also by the social interactions that begin before reaching the venue and continue until their return home.

Generally, it can be seen that the social motives of participants are intertwined with, and sometimes overlap with, their piety motives. Exceptionally, one out of seven younger interlocutors disregarded the pious aspect altogether, stating she attended the performance because she enjoyed the music and was invited by a friend. This pattern of mixed motivations is pertinent to findings from a study by Tkaczynski & Rundle-Thiele (2013), which identifies socialisation, entertainment, and religiosity as the main motivations for attending religious music events. These factors illustrate the complex interplay of social and religious motivations that characterise the attendance at *shalawat* performances, reflecting a broader trend within religious and cultural events.

The concept of 'pious entertainment' (Alagha, 2011; Harb, 2006; van Nieuwkerk, 2011a) involves more than just the enjoyment of music. It also includes the social and communal benefits of attending *shalawat* performances. These events create

spaces where people can connect over shared religious and cultural experiences, nurturing a sense of community and belonging among participants. This social interaction strengthens the group's identity as moderate, inclusive Muslims, while the entertainment aspects engage and attract a diverse audience.

By facilitating social interaction within a religious setting, *shalawat* performances contribute to the formation of a 'counterpublic.' This counterpublic contrasts with more radical and exclusive interpretations of Islam by promoting inclusivity and communal harmony. These gatherings function as a venue where state-endorsed religious expressions are celebrated and disseminated, offering different narratives from groups advocating more restrictive interpretations of Islam.

The social aspect of *shalawat* performances is thus integral to both of their function as 'pious entertainment' and their role in creating a counterpublic. Through these performances, participants not only engage in religious devotion but also build social networks that nurture their commitment to a peaceful and inclusive form of Islam. This dual function of *shalawat* performances as both religious and social events helps to develop a resilient community that can counter the influence of radical ideologies.

7.2. On the discourse of maulid criticism

I also discussed the Salafi criticism on *maulid* with my 40 respondents. Most of them had encountered this criticism, which reflects their broad exposure to the common claim that the *maulid* constitutes *bid'a*.

My interlocutors mentioned that they were exposed to *maulid* criticism through five sources: sermons, radio broadcasts, friends, social media, and books. Sermons were mentioned most often. When I asked to specify groups that regularly criticise the *maulid* through sermons, my interlocutors mentioned Islamic groups like Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA), Salafi and Muhammadiyah. The criticism that came from their friends also relied on these sources. This information is especially understandable in the context of the city of Surakarta where these groups regularly deliver sermons.

However, even though almost all of my interlocutors were aware of the criticism, they said that they did not change their stance on the ruling of the *maulid*. There are two reasons for this. First, as described in the previous sections, almost all interlocutors regard the *maulid* as a pious act. Some of them even consider it an obligatory act. In light of their strong commitment to Islam, it is not surprising that

they reject the criticism. Second, nearly all interlocutors are affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), an Islamic organisation in Indonesia that supports the *maulid* celebration. As NU followers, they are convinced that the *maulid* has a sound legal basis.

Only three interlocutors were not affiliated with any specific religious organisation. The first, Mufidah (b. 1958), described herself as neutral and participated in both Muhammadiyah programmes and *maulid* celebrations (Mufidah, personal communication, 9 December 2017). She expressed no preference for either Muhammadiyah or NU, finding it legitimate to alternate between the rituals of both groups. Two other interlocutors, Mahmad (b. 1961) and Muhsin (b. 1987), likewise claimed neutrality. Both, however, had practised the *maulid* since their youth (Mahmad, personal communication, 28 August 2017; Muhsin, personal communication, 14 September 2017), even though they did not consider themselves followers of NU. These examples suggest that, while most participants are affiliated with NU, some originate from Muhammadiyah circles or position themselves outside formal organisational boundaries. As Mulkhan (2000) notes, Muhammadiyah followers themselves can be categorised into several tendencies, including those who combine Muhammadiyah affiliation with NU-style ritual practices.

Regarding the issue of *maulid* criticism, there are at least four different ways my interlocutors respond to it. First, ignoring the criticism and continuing to practise the *maulid*. Second, claiming that the critics have a lack of religious knowledge. Third, arguing that the critics have their own right to criticise, and fourth, disagreeing with the criticism. These responses reflect the rhetoric of the preachers, as I have analysed in the previous chapter.

Ignoring the criticism is done by many interlocutors. One of them is Mustain (male, b. 1986), a participant of al-Hidayah:

> "I do not really care [about the criticism]. The most important thing
> is that I perform the *maulid* (Mustain, personal communication, 21
> October 2017)."

There are two reasons why interlocutors ignore the criticism. First, they follow the performers' guidance to disregard critics. Second, ignoring criticism requires far less effort than memorising dalīl for counter-arguments. As a result, smaller shalawat performances continue to flourish within their communities. This is in part due to the encouragement of performers to keep attending *shalawat* despite

the criticism. Marlina (female, b. 1970), a participant of Jamuri, elaborates this in the following way:

> "The preacher told us to let go of the criticism, not to fight it but to keep doing what we are doing. You will only waste your energy and time if you fight the criticism. So, we ignore the *maulid* criticism, but we keep doing the celebration*:* fight with silence (Marlina, personal communication, 11 September 2017)."

Following this recommendation, Marlina initiated a *maulid* programme in her house in which she became one of the participants. I have observed three other small *maulid* celebrations initiated by different interlocutors for the same reason.

The second way to respond to the *maulid* criticism is to argue that the critics lack religious knowledge or understanding of the religious ruling on the *maulid* celebration. For instance, Mahmudi (male, b. 1980), a participant of Jampi Sanubari, mentioned:

> "In my opinion, they may not be wrong, but may also be wrong because each person has a different level of religious knowledge. Maybe the ones who rejected the *maulid* did so because their religious knowledge is low. If they learn more, then they will understand our position. So, it is not because they hate *shalawat*, but because they do not know (Mahmudi, personal communication, 18 July 2017)."

Asifah argued that when the critics denounce the *maulid,* it means that they do not understand the ruling of the celebration (Asifah, personal communication, 8 September 2017).

This way of delegitimising the criticism is close to the first response of ignoring the critics but gives more argumentation to it by undermining the religious authority of the critics and implicitly favouring the scholars who support the celebration. This stance is also influenced by the discourse of the performers as outlined in Chapter 6.

The third way of handling the criticism is to maintain that critics have the right to criticise the *maulid,* like Somad (male, b. 1995) does:

"These are their rights and their businesses. We are to be rewarded for our deeds and you for your deeds" *(lanā aʿmālunā wa lakum aʿmālukum)*. God grants the reward, not Habib Syech. So, we can practice the *shalawat* wherever we want. It is not a problem [if others disagree with us] (Somad, personal communication, 13 September 2017)."

Also, Ratna (female, b. 1982) gave a similar argument and further related the performance to the inclusive nature of the *shalawat* and its patriotic element:

"That is the position of the people who don't practice it, not ours. It is your right to practise or not. As NU followers, we are nationalist. We are Muslim with a patriotic feeling: nationalism. With this practice, we can invite anyone including non-Muslims. Some of them joined because they enjoy the songs (Ratna, personal communication, 8 September 2017)."

The above statement shows the inclusive stand of several of my interlocutors. Not only do they demonstrate their tolerance by acknowledging one's right to not practice the *maulid*, but they are also willing to allow non-Muslims to participate in the celebration. This attitude is contrasted to the belief that the Salafis are hostile to non-Muslims, especially Jews and Christians who are "portrayed as being harmful to Muslims' religion" (Wagemakers, 2008, p. 5).

The fourth way of dealing with *maulid* criticism is to reject the arguments, as elaborated by Romlah (female, b. 1966) in the following way:

"In my opinion *bidʿa* is divided into two categories; good *(ḥasan)* and bad *(ḍalāla)*. So, I disagree with [those who are against the *maulid*] (Romlah, personal communication, 27 August 2017)."

Romlah distinguishes between a good and bad *bidʿa*, with the *maulid* falling under the category of a good innovation. Therefore, it is allowed to be practised. Obviously, this understanding is against the Salafis' standing who equate innovation to heresy in the religious domain. Analysing these four responses reveals that they all mirror the rhetoric of the preachers discussed in the previous chapter. Ignoring the criticism as an approach is widely used among the preachers in the shalawat performance, and the repeated sermons on this topic appear to have been quite successful and absorbed by the participants.

Regarding the argument on the critics' lack of religious knowledge, it also echoes the rhetoric of the performers. A sermon of one of the BāʿAlawī preacher mentioned in the previous chapter suggested to the participants to only consult 'reliable' religious preachers, notably Javanese *kyais* and BāʿAlawī scholars. It seems this kind of rhetoric affected my interlocutors by deeming the anti *maulid* preacher unreliable and lacking religious knowledge. Regarding the argument that the critics have the right to criticise, my interlocutors' arguments reflect the inclusive stand of the performers. This attitude is taken even further by Ratna (personal communication, 8 September 2017), who stated that non-Muslims were welcomed to the *shalawat* and that they would enjoy it. The way Ratna described herself and other followers of NU as patriotic and inclusive seems to contrast her to radical groups who were against nationalism and non-Muslims. Accordingly, all four ways of responding to the critics reverberate the rhetoric of the performers of *shalawat*.

The way my interlocutors reacted is in line with Hirschkind's analysis (2006) of how ethical reasoning is cultivated through repeated exposure to certain discourses. In his work on ethical sermon listening, Hirschkind (2006) describes that ethical conduct and reasoning can become sedimented in the character of the listeners if they repeatedly listen to the sermons. Considering that my interlocutors regularly participated in the *shalawat* performances and listened to the sermons, it is likely that they also underwent this process. By persistently and earnestly listening to sermons as well as to songs in the *shalawat* performance, participants undergo a pedagogical process in which the message is inculcated, with the goal of becoming pious Muslims. The corresponding responses between my interlocutors and the performers show how the participants frequently listen to every sermon and song, and in a later stage can become embodied in their sense of piety.

These responses also show that the counterpublic the performers aim to create, both through their discourse and their practice, seems to affect the participants. Many of the participants expressed that their regular involvement in the *shalawat* performances provided them with an understanding of Islam, one that actively resists the strict and sometimes extremist views propagated by certain radical groups. This resistance is not visibly confrontational but is rather expressed through the celebration of an Islam that is inclusive, joyous, and deeply connected to traditional and communal values. This form of engagement creates a quiet but powerful form of public resilience that not only challenges extremist narratives but also strengthen an inclusive, civic-minded interpretation of Islam, mirroring the performers' discourse of inclusivity and openness to different viewpoints.

The various ways participants respond to *maulid* criticism (whether through ignoring, questioning critics' knowledge, acknowledging critics' rights, or rejecting criticism) reveal the complex relationship between counterpublic formation and public resilience in Surakarta. Unlike Hirschkind's Egyptian case where cassette sermons created opposition to state discourse, the Surakarta context shows how religious communities can maintain their practices while engaging with both critics and state institutions. These responses demonstrate how the counterpublic and public resilience work together: while participants create their own spaces for religious expression through *shalawat* performances, they also build connections with broader society rather than simply opposing critics. Through regular participation in *shalawat*, community members develop ways to preserve their religious traditions while adapting to contemporary Indonesian society. This suggests that analysing these practices requires understanding both their role in creating alternative religious spaces and their contribution to wider social discourse.

7.3. On Islamic radicalism

When discussing Islamic radicalism with my interlocutors, it appeared that defining this term was not an easy task for them, and they all gave a pejorative definition of this orientation, either explicitly or implicitly expressing their disagreement with this stance. Among them, 31 participants perceived Islamic radicalism as a threat, while 9 did not see it that way. Although the extent to which Islamic radicalism was perceived as a threat varied among my interlocutors, almost all of them agreed with the idea of *shalawat* as a remedy for the influence of radicalism.

Regarding the potential of *shalawat* performances to counter Islamic radicalism, 39 of my 40 interlocutors firmly believed these performances serve as an effective remedy against radical influences. Only one interlocutor, Mufidah, gave a less definitive answer, stating 'It depends on the people' (personal communication, 9 December 2017). Her response suggested that individual religious understanding, rather than *shalawat* participation alone, determines one's susceptibility to radical influence. The 39 interlocutors who expressed confidence in *shalawat*'s effectiveness suggested it operates through four primary mechanisms: promoting social cohesion through small *maulid* celebrations, teaching non-violence through religious discourse, building emotional connections that "touch people's hearts," and encouraging Indonesian nationalism.

First, community cohesion is an important tool when challenging external threats. The numerous *maulid* celebrations that are created on a community level allow my

interlocutors to comfortably share their common religious rituals. The unity and solidarity they experienced through social cohesion provided a sense of protection against threats posed by radical Islamic groups. As Muhsin expressed:

> "The performances of *shalawat* come from the people. They are cohesive and prioritise harmony. So, if there is any threat from the outsiders, we can help each other (Muhsin, personal communication, 14 September 2017)."

Also, Musyarofah argued:

> "By establishing a *shalawat* performance group, we have the power to gather people in one religious forum, the power to tackle radicalism so that people are not easily influenced. People who don't understand religion will easily listen to preachers who use *dalīl*. While us, we focus on practising religion by following our *'ulamā'*, not by collecting as many *dalīl* as possible (Musyarofah, personal communication, 21 September 2017)."

Shalawat groups provide a space for religious gatherings and strengthen community cohesiveness, which helps prevent members from being drawn to Islamic radicalism. Reports by Iffat Idris (2019) and Emily Myers & Elizabeth Hume (2018) confirm that community cohesion can prevent violent extremism by enhancing the community's capacity to resist and mitigate violence. Peace-building efforts by leaders, including *shalawat* performers, disseminate non-violent and tolerant messages to promote peace and inclusion.

Secondly, the teaching of non-violence in *shalawat*, as elaborated by Marlina, can counter Islamic radicalism:

> "[In the *shalawat* performance], participants are taught that, in your life, you must be polite, coexist with others, avoid searching for enemies, try to cooperate, and don't put the blame on others. These are the explanations that were given to us after the recitation of the *maulid* book. The children who regularly come to the *maulid* will understand this teaching because it is cultivated in their hearts. I would feel more optimistic if many people would participate in the *maulid* celebration; there would be less raids on the streets (Marlina, personal communication, 11 September 2017)."

Marlina's view is built by the idea that the performance is built on the idea of teaching love and compassion, as argued by Nugroho (male, b. 1980):

> "The topic that is always discussed in the *shalawat* performance is love, love, and love. As you may know, love is identical to softness (Nugroho, personal communication, 27 August 2017)."

These statements show that the interlocutors share the values of non-violent conduct. As presented in the previous chapter, many *shalawat* performers encourage participants to adopt peaceful and inclusive attitudes towards all people, regardless of their religious background. Moreover, this teaching of non-violence relates to the idea of community cohesion and both are essential in strengthening resilience against the influence of Islamic radical groups.

Third, the interlocutors argued that the *shalawat* prevents people from joining Islamic radicalism because it "touches people's hearts." This expression was elaborated in different ways. Musyarofah, for instance, explained:

> "The *shalawat* song indirectly prevents us from joining the radicals because it makes us calm. [Therefore], I think it is impossible for someone who participates in the *shalawat* performance to join Islamic radical groups (Musyarofah, personal communication, 21 September 2017)."

Musyarofah's experience of the effects of the *shalawat* songs can be explained by the general relaxing effects of music (Iwanaga et al., 2005). More particularly, Islamic music, such as *shalawat,* might yield similar results as proposed in the study of Fahri Sezer (2012). He demonstrated that Turkish Sufi music has a positive influence in reducing anger.

Moreover, another interlocutor, Marlina, gave a different explanation:

> "The suggestion from the preachers [which I literally follow] is that: "you have to cry during the programme. If you cannot cry, pretend that you are crying. You also have to try to imagine that the Prophet is present." And you know, when you are able to do this, it is something that is beyond imagination. [This is the case] because when someone joins the *maulid* and is able to do the *qiyām*, then crying is something that is very beautiful (Marlina, personal communication, 11 September 2017)."

Crying during shalawat performances can be understood as a response to tarab, an Arabic concept describing musical enchantment or ecstasy (Frishkopf, 2001; Racy, 2004; Shannon, 2003). Tarab may contribute to the spiritual transformation of participants (Shannon, 2004, p. 381) by cultivating certain sentiments and ethical dispositions (akhlaq) such as calmness, tolerance, and inclusivity (ter Laan, 2016, p. 187). Such transformation is achieved through the repeated deployment of thoughts, feelings, and actions during the performance.

Comparing the nashid in Nina ter Laan's work (2016, p. 130) with the shalawat performance, it is evident that both performers aim to transform their listeners' spiritual and behavioural dispositions. This transformation is important for understanding how shalawat, by "touching people's hearts", successfully counters Islamic radicalism. The spiritual condition manifested in the calmness induced by shalawat music also brings about changes on a behavioural and emotional level, encouraging participants to generate positive feelings and emotions. This sensibility cultivates inclusiveness among participants towards those different from them, countering the perceived antagonistic attitudes and negative emotions of radical groups, especially towards others who do not belong to the group.

Additionally, the weeping can also be related to the endeavour of the participants to achieve an ideal state of piety. In her work on the women's piety movement in Cairo, Egypt, Saba Mahmood (2001, p. 843) portrays the encouragement of her interlocutors to cry during their *salāt* ritual as part of their pedagogy to cultivate piety. Pious crying did not come naturally to the participants of the Egyptian mosque movements Mahmood studied. She stated that her interlocutors were trained to have an emotional reaction during the prayer in order to evoke their pious tenderness that leads to weeping (Mahmood 2005, p. 129). Besides that, weeping can also be achieved after listening to a sermon as a sign of love for God (Hirschkind, 2006, p. 90). And if it is done repeatedly and with the right intention, the action of weeping can become a way to cultivate a pious disposition of the believer and eventually lead to pious conduct (Mahmood 2005, p. 130, 133). I observed a similar pedagogical process among my interlocutors, when one of them was encouraged to cry by imagining the presence of the Prophet. After embracing this practice, weeping surfaced as a sign of the overwhelming love to the Prophet. If done repeatedly, such a practice can be embodied as a personal disposition that motivates good moral conduct. Moreover, this good behaviour is strengthened by the use of positive and inclusive arguments of the performers in their songs and sermons. With this discourse, they try to create certain pious sensibilities that provoke and appeal to inclusive and positive feelings acting as a counterforce to Islamic radicalism.

Finally, my interlocutors explain that they are immune to the influence of radical Islamic groups due to the feeling of love for the country. This argument is presented, among others, by Malikah (female, b. 1998):

> "I believe nationalistic songs have an impact. The performers cultivate patriotic feeling within us. In addition to learning Islam, [in the *shalawat* performance] we also strengthen our patriotic feeling (Malikah, personal communication, 23 November 2017)."

A more straightforward argument is put forward by Indah (female, b. 1995):

> "[The *shalawat* performance] enhances our love for Indonesia, contrasting with some Salafi *ustadhs* claim that saluting the flag is *haram* and singing the Indonesian anthem is forbidden (Indah, personal communication, 9 December 2017)."

As I have shown in the previous chapter, the performers were nurturing the concept of religious nationalism, a notion in which the identity of nationality and religion coexist and strengthen each other. This can be seen in the performers' initiative to sing nationalistic songs, as well as to regularly shout out the phrase *'NKRI Harga Mati'* during performances. It seems that my interlocutors are affected by this nationalistic spirit, as we can see from Indah's argument in which she condemned the Salafis' attitude on the salutation of the Indonesian flag and the singing of the Indonesian anthem. Even though her statement appears to conflate more extreme views, such as the ones proposed by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir (CNN Indonesia, 2019), with those of the Salafis, her willingness to denounce those extreme religious stances demonstrates how the patriotic sensibility is engraved in her thought. The nationalist sensibility differs from the Salafi jihadis who oppose nationalism and invite Muslims to fight beyond state borders (Byman, 2013).

What becomes clear from the analysis of my interlocutors' statements is that they closely reiterate the performers' statement and teachings. The fact that almost all arguments of my interlocutors replicate those of the performers can be related to the 'belief' of the participants that they follow "reliable" *'ulamā'*, something that is promoted by the performers as I have discussed in the previous chapter. During the interview, many interlocutors stated that the critics could say whatever they want about the *maulid*, but they only believe and follow what the preachers told them to do. My interlocutors literally show this attitude: they are doing the same actions as advised by their preachers. The reason for this attitude is that among NU followers, *'ulamā'* play important roles not only in religious matters but also in social and

political life (Dhofier, 1999; Turmudi, 2007). Their authority is mostly unchallenged and they demand full loyalty. Therefore, a submission to *'ulamā'* as it is shown by my interlocutors is a common attitude among NU followers (Hidayat, 2011, p. 8). Understanding this compliance can be aided by Hirschkind (2006, p. 113), when he argues that "a well-crafted sermon is understood to evoke in the listener the affective dispositions that underlie ethical conduct and reasoning, and which, through repeated listening, may become sedimented in the listener's character."

As we have seen, the four ways in which participants perceive the *shalawat* as a tool to counter Islamic radicalism are generally in accordance with the endeavour of the performers to create a counterpublic as explained in the previous chapter. This holds true both with regard to discourse and practice. The latter can be seen, for instance, in their idea that *shalawat* promotes social cohesion. My interlocutors celebrate their religious beliefs despite the criticism. In addition to that, as the city of Surakarta is known as the home ground to several radical groups, they felt that their small maulid groups were cohesive enough to tackle any influence of radical thought that could have possibly been injected to their friends or family. This cohesion allows them to monitor their members and possible outsiders suspected of bringing radical beliefs against their religious sensibilities.

The other two arguments, that *shalawat* teaches non-violence and has the ability to "touch people's hearts", can be seen as the discursive elements of counterpublic. These two responses have the goal to cultivate non-aggressive and tolerant attitudes among the participants. Performers explicitly encourage non-violent conduct, while implicitly stimulating pious tenderness through crying. These responses cultivate the "calmness" character of participants, leading to feelings of compassion and love for each other. Another discursive element of counterpublic is encouraging love for the country. Performers regularly use this argument in songs and sermons in order to encourage a patriotic sensibility among the participants as part of their religious commitment. My interlocutors' responses appear to confirm the effectiveness of these efforts; they openly challenge the jihadi prohibitions against saluting the Indonesian flag and singing the national anthem. It shows that the performers' attempts to cultivate the patriotic sensibilities are quite effective.

Therefore, the *shalawat* performances act as a powerful tool for creating a counterpublic that actively mitigates the influence of radical ideologies and builds public resilience. By promoting a moderate, inclusive form of Islam, *shalawat* performances provide an environment where participants can engage in religious practices that are fundamentally different from the restrictive and often exclusionary views promoted by radical groups. This inclusive approach not only

counters Salafi and radical critiques but also strengthens community cohesion and national unity. The consistent engagement with *shalawat* cultivates a resilient community that is capable of resisting extremist narratives and upholding a balanced and harmonious interpretation of Islam, as outlined in Chapter 6.

7.4. Shalawat as a means of public resilience action

Building on the foundation established in Chapter 6 and the preceding sections, this section integrates the practical outcomes, particularly in relation to resilience against *maulid* criticism and Islamic radicalism.

The *shalawat* performances have nurtured a comprehensive approach to public resilience, primarily through the integration of spiritual and social practices. By providing spaces where participants can combine religious devotion with community gatherings, these performances have notably enhanced the community's capacity to resist external pressures, including criticisms of the *maulid*.

The cultivation of patriotic sensibilities within *shalawat* performance has played an important role in supporting participants' commitment to national unity. The incorporation of nationalistic themes and symbols serves as an effective counter-narrative to anti-nationalistic ideologies promoted by radical groups. This patriotic sensibility not only strengthens national identity but also integrates religious practice with civic responsibility, creating a harmonious combination of faith and citizenship.

Specific examples illustrate the practical implications of these strategies. Participants like Marlina, who actively organise *maulid* programmes in their homes, demonstrate a proactive approach to nurturing their beliefs and community bonds. By hosting regular gatherings, they create safe spaces for religious expression and societal interaction, which counteracts the isolation often exploited by radical ideologies. Similarly, Yanto's initiative to establish a *shalawat* programme within his community reflects grassroots efforts to sustain religious and cultural practices that align with locally rooted traditions.

Equally significant is the promotion of non-violent and inclusive values through *shalawat* performances. The ethical discourses cultivated in sermons and songs have nurtured dispositions of tolerance and inclusivity among participants. This transformation in attitudes is evident in participants' active rejection of radical ideologies and their engagement in promoting peaceful Islamic values within their

communities. For instance, Marlina explains that *shalawat* performances teach participants to be polite, coexist with others, avoid searching for enemies, cooperate and not blame others, thereby cultivating love and compassion. Similarly, Nugroho emphasises that the recurring theme in *shalawat* performances is love, which promotes a soft and inclusive approach to life.

In relation to *maulid* criticism, participants have developed nuanced resilience strategies. Rather than adopting confrontational approaches, they have focused on deepening their understanding of the practice and using community networks. This approach demonstrates a mature and reflective engagement with their faith, one that prioritises knowledge and communal solidarity over reactionary defences. The case of Mustain, who chooses to ignore criticism and focus on his personal and communal practice of *maulid*, captures this strategic resilience. The repeated engagement with these ethical discourses, as suggested by Hirschkind (2006, p. 113), has cultivated specific sensibilities into the character of the participants. These include non-violence, love for the Prophet, and patriotism, which enhance the community's cohesion and national pride. This process of inculcation equips participants with the intellectual and emotional tools to resist radical ideologies, maintain a moderate, inclusive interpretation of Islam.

The cooperative relationship between *shalawat* performances and state institutions in Surakarta has further strengthened the effectiveness of these performances in promoting moderate and inclusive Islamic practices. This collaboration highlights the adaptive nature of the counterpublic concept within Surakarta's varied sociopolitical landscape, showing how religious practices can complement efforts to strengthen social cohesion, foster non-violent and inclusive values, and reinforce national unity.

In general, *shalawat* performances in Surakarta demonstrate how participants actively navigate religious criticism and radical influences through multiple strategies. As shown through participant observation and interviews, these include building local religious networks through neighbourhood *maulid* gatherings, cultivating non-violent religious expression through songs and sermons, and expressing patriotic sentiments through nationalistic elements in performances. The participants' engagement with these practices reflects their active role in maintaining religious traditions while addressing contemporary challenges. Their responses, from ignoring criticism to initiating local *maulid* groups, illustrate how religious communities can sustain their practices through adaptation rather than simple opposition to critics.

7.5. Conclusion

This chapter addressed two questions: first, why do people attend shalawat performances in the Solo region? And second, what are the opinions of the participants on the discourse of maulid criticism and the use of maulid against Islamic radicalism?

Regarding the first question, the analysis reveals that there are three primary motives driving participants to attend shalawat performances in the Solo region: piety, entertainment, and social interaction. These motives are intertwined, creating a unique environment of 'pious entertainment' as described by scholars such as Alagha (2011), Harb (2006), and van Nieuwkerk (2011a). This concept effectively captures how shalawat performances combine religious practice with cultural expression and social engagement, appealing to a diverse audience.

As for the second question, the opinions of participants on the discourse of maulid criticism and the use of maulid against Islamic radicalism closely mirror the rhetoric of *shalawat* performers, indicating the successful creation of a resilient counterpublic. Participants employ various strategies, including ignoring criticism, questioning critics' knowledge, affirming critics' rights to their views, or completely rejecting the criticism, demonstrating a nuanced engagement with the concept of counterpublics (Hirschkind, 2006).

The participant perspectives validate how *shalawat* performances function as spaces of public resilience. Their motivations for attendance and responses to criticism demonstrate the effectiveness of performers' strategies in building community cohesion and resistance to radical ideologies through cooperative rather than oppositional means. This cooperation manifests particularly through initiatives like *'Solo kota shalawat'*, where municipal support for *shalawat* performances reflects broader state interests in promoting certain forms of religious expression while addressing perceived security concerns, as detailed in Chapter 5.

Participants' experiences confirm how these performances create spaces where religious devotion and civic responsibility mutually reinforce each other, demonstrating the practical manifestation of public resilience in contemporary Indonesian Islam. The analysis of participant perspectives shows how these negotiations manifest in daily practice, as community members actively engage with and adapt traditional religious expressions while responding to contemporary challenges in Surakarta's unique social and political context.

Conclusion

This study investigates how *shalawat performances* in contemporary Indonesia contest Islamic radicalism and respond to critiques of the *maulid* celebration. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: in how far and in which ways do *shalawat performances* in Surakarta transform traditional *maulid* celebrations into popular cultural expressions that challenge Salafi criticism and radical Islamic influences?

This study demonstrates that shalawat performances in Surakarta have effectively transformed traditional maulid celebrations by integrating devotional practices with contemporary staging, music, and nationalist elements. These performances counter Salafi criticism through their popularity and cultural appeal while challenging radical Islamic influences by promoting both pious and patriotic sensibilities. Through this innovative synthesis, performers have created spaces of 'public resilience' where religious communities preserve their traditions while cooperating with state institutions, ultimately offering a compelling alternative to more rigid and puritanical religious interpretations.

Surakarta (Solo), in Central Java, offers a significant context for this research. Post-1998, Surakarta became associated with radical Islamic groups, as detailed in Chapter 3. Scholars such as Fealy (2004) and van Bruinessen (2011, 2013) have documented this association, detailing how democratisation and decentralisation allowed radical groups more freedom to operate publicly. Within this environment, however, numerous *shalawat* groups have emerged, innovating the traditional *maulid* celebrations. Their performances incorporate music, staging, and nationalist themes, transforming the *maulid* from a private ritual into a large-scale cultural spectacle appealing to diverse audiences, including youth. In 2013, the municipality declared '*Solo kota shalawat,*' officially recognising the role of these performances in reshaping Surakarta's image and promoting communal harmony.

Four theoretical frameworks guided the analysis. First, Talal Asad's (2009) notion of discursive tradition helped us understand how debates over *maulid* reflect deeper struggles over religious interpretation and authority, particularly in how different groups connect their arguments to the Qurʾān and ḥadīth and assert what constitutes correct practice. This framework revealed how power relations shape orthodoxy, as evident in the evolution of *maulid* criticism from partial reformist critiques to comprehensive Salafi condemnation. Second, Muhammad Qasim

Zaman's (2009) theory of the contestation of religious authority aided in examining how various Muslim groups (traditionalist (often Shāfiʿī), reformist (like Muhammadiyah), and Salafi) compete to define orthodoxy and shape public religious discourse. Third, John Storey's (2009) concept of popular culture elucidated how *maulid* celebrations gain mass appeal and become vehicles for cultural resistance. Finally, Charles Hirschkind's (2006) notion of counterpublic helped to frame how alternative discursive domains emerge alongside dominant narratives. However, unlike Hirschkind's Egyptian case, these religious expressions in Surakarta do not necessarily oppose the state. Instead, they cooperate with local authorities, prompting the development of what this study terms "public resilience." This concept refines Hirschkind's counterpublic idea to capture contexts where religious performances adapt traditions and promote community strength with institutional support rather than through opposition.

Combining historical analysis with ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis provides a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of *maulid* celebrations into popular cultural expressions and their effectiveness in contesting Salafi criticism and radical Islamic influences in contemporary Indonesia. Historically, textual research in Introduction and Chapters 1-2 traced how *maulid* criticisms evolved over time. Ethnographic methods (participant observation of 28 *shalawat performances* and 60 interviews with performers, participants, and local officials) offered direct insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of community members. Justification for this combined approach lies in the multifaceted nature of religious adaptation: while historical analysis clarifies long-term shifts in Islamic discourse, ethnography captures how contemporary believers engage with new practices in everyday life. This synergy revealed how intellectual arguments, social changes, and institutional policies interact on the ground.

Fieldwork focused on Surakarta between mid-2017 and early 2018, encompassing performances by leading *shalawat* groups such as Ahbabul Mustofa (of Habib Syech), Jamuro, Jamuri, al-Hidayah, and Jampi Sanubari. In depth interviews with participants of different ages and genders ensured a diverse sample. Observing both large-scale performances and smaller *maulid* gatherings in neighbourhoods provided a nuanced understanding of how ideas travel from public stages to private homes, forming networks of communal resilience. Data collection included audio-recordings of sermons and songs, and documentation of local municipal support.

The argument develops logically through five main research questions, each addressing a distinct dimension of the phenomenon. The first question examined how *maulid* criticism evolved historically, focusing on changing religious authority

and the intensification of Salafi critiques. The second question explored how *maulid* transformed into popular culture, engaging Storey's theories and showing how *qasidah* songs, staging, and social media broaden audiences. Answering the third question, we analysed cultural resistance, highlighting official municipal endorsement and festivalisation. The fourth question led to the identification of strategies of *shalawat* activists in developing alternative discourses and building public resilience. The fifth question assessed the impact on participants, examining how attending *shalawat performances* influences community bonds, attitudes towards radicalism, and overall religious dispositions.

By integrating these analyses, the study points out that *shalawat* performances in Indonesia demonstrate how traditional *maulid* rituals transform through popular cultural elements (professional staging, music, and nationalist themes) while maintaining their traditional ritual elements. This adaptation enables them to effectively counter Salafi criticism and radical Islamic influences through both aesthetic appeal and theological arguments. Furthermore, the cooperation between religious communities and state institutions through the *'Solo kota shalawat'* initiative reveals a distinctive form of public resilience that contrasts with oppositional counterpublics observed in other Islamic contexts. These findings contribute to scholarly debates on discursive tradition, religious authority, and cultural resistance, while providing a practical case study of how religious communities can strengthen cohesion and cultivate patriotic and pious sensibilities in response to puritanical challenges.

Development of *maulid* criticism

Maulid criticism in Indonesia dates back to early twentieth-century reformist debates, as documented in Chapters 1-3. Initially, reformists *(kaum muda)* focused on specific aspects of the *maulid* celebration, questioning practices like *qiyām*, and urging adherents to rely strictly on Qurʾān and ḥadīth. Though critical, reformists such as early Muhammadiyah leaders did not entirely reject *maulid*; they suggested modifications to ensure conformity with Islamic texts. *Suara Muhammadiyah* (1921, 1928) articles show a measured approach (adapting problematic elements while retaining the Prophet's commemoration).

However, the post-1998 political reforms reshaped Islamic discourse. Democratisation allowed radical groups like Salafis, influenced by Saudi-funded educational institutions, to openly challenge local traditions. Salafi preachers considered the entire *maulid* celebration as an unlawful innovation (*bidʿa*). Driven by global Salafi networks and supported by Saudi funding (Hasan 2006; Jahroni,

2013), these groups set up schools and boarding institutions in Surakarta, intensifying their efforts to delegitimise local Islamic customs. As elaborated in Chapter 2, this marks a shift from partial criticism to comprehensive condemnation of the *maulid*.

Changes in religious authority are evident: while Shāfiʿī-oriented traditional *ʿulamāʾ* and reformists once negotiated over permissible adaptations, Salafis claimed direct adherence to the Prophet's earliest generation *(al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ)*, rejecting any post-Prophetic additions. Zaman's (2009) theory of contestation of religious authority applies here: multiple actors compete to define authentic Islamic practice. The rise of Salafism reconfigured authority hierarchies, pressuring even longstanding institutions like Muhammadiyah to re-evaluate their stance on the *maulid*. Chapter 2 documents how Muhammadiyah's position shifted, becoming cautious towards recitation of *maulid* books by the late twentieth century.

The political context post-1998 also facilitated radical voices. Fealy (2004) and van Bruinessen (2013) note that deregulation of religious life allowed groups to spread puritanical interpretations. This dynamic connects with Asad's (2009) discursive tradition, showing how religious arguments gain prominence or fade depending on socio-political conditions. The evolution of *maulid* criticism (initially nuanced reforms, eventually all-out Salafi condemnation) illustrates how changing power relations, media dissemination, and global religious currents reshape Islamic orthodoxy.

This first question highlights that *maulid* criticism is not static; it responds to historical contingencies, and Salafi critiques represent a culmination of intensified ideological battles over religious interpretation in contemporary Indonesia.

Transformation into popular culture

From the early reformist debates to the Salafi ascendancy, the *maulid* has not only survived but evolved. Chapter 4 showed a remarkable shift: traditional *maulid* celebrations have transformed into large-scale *shalawat performances* attracting thousands across Surakarta. Rather than diminishing, the *maulid* adapted to new cultural formats. Performers like Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf pioneered this transformation. After limited success with *tahlilan*-based *dakwah*, he integrated popular cultural elements (professional staging, sound systems, percussion instruments, and multilingual *qasidah* songs) into the *maulid* recitation, making it enjoyable and accessible.

This adaptation is in line with Storey's (2009) notion of popular culture as widely favoured and as a site of mass engagement. Chapter 4 details how such innovations cater to younger audiences, who might find traditional rituals monotonous. By infusing cheerful melodies, Javanese and Indonesian lyrics alongside Arabic *qasidah*, and presenting performances outdoors like music concerts, these events gain wide appeal. Rasmussen's (2010) conception of festivalisation, turning religious rites into public spectacles, applies here. The spiritual content of praising the Prophet is retained yet packaged with entertainment value.

Cultural integration is evident. *Maulid* recitation once took place in mosques or homes; now it occurs on big stages in city squares, resonating with Weintraub's (2011) analysis of Islamic music and media industries in Indonesia. Popular culture does not dilute spirituality; instead, it broadens the audience and makes religious devotion part of public life. Songs like "The Song of NU" educate participants about NU practices, celebrating identity and unity. Other songs integrate nationalist themes, singing the Indonesian anthem and patriotic slogans like '*NKRI Harga Mati*,' linking religious devotion and national loyalty.

The rise of fan communities, such as Syekhermania, Mbolovers, and Shoffalovers, typifies how these performances generate fandom-like enthusiasm. Fans attend multiple performances, form online groups, produce merchandise, and share recordings via social media. Media platforms extend the performances' reach beyond local venues. CDs, YouTube channels, and Facebook pages help disseminate sermons, songs, and performance schedules. Participants frequently mention that recording and online accessibility allow continual engagement, reinforcing the popularity and influence of *shalawat*.

This popularisation also provides a subtle resistance to Salafi narratives. While Salafis reject music and consider *maulid* as *bid'a*, *shalawat* performances show that music can be an instrument of piety and community building. By merging Islamic devotion with local cultural forms, these performances stand against exclusive interpretations, resonating with community values and encouraging moderate, inclusive Islam.

In sum, the *maulid*'s transformation into popular culture articulates how religious traditions adapt amidst rising religious conservatism. The incorporation of entertainment, local culture, and nationalist themes inspires broad participation, preserving ritual integrity while ensuring relevance in the modern Indonesian context.

Cultural resistance and alternatives

These transformed *shalawat* performances not only entertain and inspire but also serve as cultural resistance against radical Islamic narratives. In Chapter 5, we showed how local authorities recognised the potential of these performances. The municipality's declaration of *'Solo kota shalawat'* in 2013 illustrates institutionalised support by integrating *shalawat* events into city programmes, and by funding instruments and training in villages. This official endorsement, coupled with government grants, encourages widespread, regular performances and *shalawat* competitions.

Such municipal support harmonises with Asad's (2009) discursive tradition, showing the government's role in endorsing certain interpretations of Islam. Instead of marginalising local traditions, public administration encourages them to counter extremist influences. This cooperation signifies a departure from the model Hirschkind (2006) observed in Egypt, where Islamic counterpublics often emerged against state narratives. In Surakarta, we find a pattern of synergy: the government perceives *shalawat* performances as cultural tools to reinforce moderate religiosity, improve social cohesion, and bolster the city's peaceful image. This environment of mutual reinforcement encourages what we call "public resilience", a sustained capacity to resist radical influences through cohesive, government supported cultural activities.

The festivalisation of religious ritual, as explored by Rasmussen (2010), becomes a strategy for cultural resistance. Festivals draw crowds, generate tourism, and improve local economies. More importantly, they transform religious gatherings into accessible, family-friendly events that promote civic pride and national unity. Government funding ensures these performances are not sporadic but sustainable, allowing their messages to permeate everyday life. As participants repeatedly attend these events, they internalise inclusive religious values and patriotic sentiments, protecting themselves against radical ideologies that reject the legitimacy of nation-states.

By providing alternatives to radical narratives, *shalawat* performances reshape the cultural landscape. Rather than lecturing people about the dangers of radicalism, these events demonstrate a lived alternative, a moderate, joyful, community-oriented Islamic practice endorsed by religious and civic leaders. This approach subtly delegitimises radical groups claiming monopoly over Islamic orthodoxy. As a result, cultural resistance emerges not through confrontation but through offering compelling, culturally rich alternatives that integrate religious devotion with civic

responsibility. This festivalisation process demonstrates what Falassi (1987) identifies as festivals' capacity to renew community life. The *shalawat* festivals in Surakarta function, in Falassi's terms, "to renounce and then to announce culture," setting aside confrontational religious debates while presenting Islamic practices in forms that resonate with civic life and contemporary cultural contexts.

In essence, the third research question reveals that municipal support and festival-like presentations of *maulid* create a public sphere where moderate religious values thrive. This mutually beneficial interplay between community initiatives and state policies enhances cultural resilience against radical influences.

This study's findings on how Habib Syech and other BāʿAlawī preachers transformed traditional *maulid* celebrations into popular performances complement recent scholarship on religious authority in contemporary Indonesia. Najib Kailani and Sunarwoto (2019) have documented how new religious actors leverage television and internet platforms to reach broader audiences, demonstrating that religious authority is not diminishing but transforming through engagement with modern media. The *shalawat* performances in Surakarta exemplify this adaptation, using professional staging, musical arrangements, and social media to maintain religious authority while expanding their reach. Similarly, Syamsul Rijal's research (2017, 2020) on how *habaib* strategically utilise their genealogical status and Arab identity in contemporary *dakwah* is evident in how Habib Syech's lineage enhances his authority while his innovative performance style attracts diverse audiences. These *habaib* preachers, as Rijal notes, have strengthened connections to scholarly networks in Hadhramaut specifically to counter Salafi-Wahhabi criticisms of traditional rituals like *maulid*, a strategy visible in Surakarta's BāʿAlawī community's resilience against Salafi influence.

Shalawat activists' strategies

Shalawat performers employ various strategies to counter *maulid* criticism and radicalism. Chapter 6 highlighted that preachers and vocalists use both indirect and direct methods in their sermons. Indirectly, they rely on stories, analogies, and moral exemplars, reflecting Javanese communication norms that prefer subtlety (Geertz, 1976). Directly, they reference Qurʾānic verses and ḥadīth to legitimise *maulid* practices, providing theological arguments that neutralise claims of *bidʿa* by Salafis. These dual methods ensure that a wide audience, from lay Muslims to more theologically inclined participants, can find reassurance in these gatherings.

In constructing alternative discourse, performers shape both pious and patriotic sensibilities. They encourage participants to love the Prophet, obey God, and display compassion. Simultaneously, they integrate nationalistic songs and slogans, linking religious piety to civic virtue. This combination reinforces community bonds and strengthens public resilience by producing citizens who value both religious tradition and national unity.

The creation of public resilience becomes clear when considering Hirschkind's (2006) concept of counterpublic. Instead of creating a counterpublic antagonistic to the state, *shalawat* activists form a sphere that works with state backing. The result is a form of public engagement where religious communities maintain their heritage while endorsing peaceful co-existence and loyalty to the Indonesian state. By doing so, they differentiate themselves from radical ideologies that reject nationhood or advocate violence.

Performers also utilise emotional appeals. *Qasidah* songs and soft melodies evoke feelings of tranquillity and love, touching participants' hearts. This emotional dimension cultivates positive dispositions that safeguard participants from radical influences seeking to instil hatred or alienation. Zaman's (2009) discussion of contested religious authority appears here as well: by providing ethically rich narratives and affective encounters, *shalawat* activists reinforce their interpretive authority, contrasting sharply with the rigidity and exclusivity of radical preachers.

Ultimately, these strategies, from the use of layered rhetoric to the emotional power of music, work together to build what we call public resilience. They empower communities to continue *maulid* traditions, confidently refute critics, and remain immune to radical messages by experiencing a form of Islam that is spiritually fulfilling, culturally relevant, and civically engaged.

Impact on participants

Chapter 7 focused on participants, revealing their motivations, piety, entertainment, and social interaction, confirming that *shalawat* performances serve as 'pious entertainment.' By consistently participating, individuals develop routines that integrate religious devotion with enjoyable communal activities. This environment nurtures dispositions consistent with what the state and *shalawat* performers define as moderate Islam.

Participants who find *shalawat* gatherings spiritually rewarding and emotionally comforting typically ignore *maulid* criticism or reject radical discourses. Some

acknowledge critics' rights to disapprove but remain firm, strengthened by the supportive community and convincing sermons they regularly encounter. The ethical formation that Hirschkind (2006) describes is evident: repeated listening to sermons and engagement in *qasidah* cultivate a religious sensibility in harmony with inclusive interpretations of Islam and national pride.

In their testimonies, participants often mention feeling calm, loving, and more open after attending *shalawat* performances. They experience closeness to the Prophet's teachings and adopt positive emotional states that discourage confrontational or exclusivist ideologies. Nationalistic songs, for instance, remind them that defending *NKRI* and respecting other faiths is part of their religious identity. Many participants say they can't imagine someone who enjoys these harmonious gatherings being drawn in by a radical preacher advocating violence or rejecting the Indonesian state. These performances create networks of participants who regularly gather for religious devotion, collectively rejecting radical interpretations through their shared practices of *shalawat*.

Attending performances also strengthens community bonds. Participants meet new friends, revisit familiar faces, and share meals or travel together to attend shows. These regular gatherings and collective activities - from traveling together to performances to organising neighbourhood *maulid* - help prevent isolation or fragmentation that radical groups might exploit. By engaging regularly in these gatherings, participants reinforce their sense of belonging to a moderate and patriotic religious community that counters radical influences not through direct confrontation but by offering compelling alternatives.

In terms of changing attitudes towards radical ideologies, participants often express dismissive or critical views of extremism without having to debate each Salafi argument. Instead, they find reassurance through their shared participation in *shalawat* performance: a steady, long-term process of shaping beliefs, emotions, and loyalties. This process leads to public resilience: communities that remain faithful to their traditions, open to cultural adaptation, and corresponding to national principles.

Thus, the impact on participants confirms the effectiveness of *shalawat* performances in cultivating moderate religious sensibilities. Through inclusive, enjoyable, and spiritually rich experiences, participants internalise values that naturally resist radical narratives.

Scholarly and societal contribution of this study

This research contributes to scholarship on religious adaptation, authority, and cultural resilience in contemporary Muslim contexts. Theoretically, it introduced the concept of "public resilience," expanding upon Hirschkind's counterpublic. While Hirschkind analysed pious listening practices in opposition to state narratives, this study shows that in Surakarta, religious communities can establish resilient domains that cooperate with state institutions. This refinement deepens our understanding of discursive tradition (Asad, 2009) and the contestation of religious authority (Zaman, 2009) by illustrating a case where moderate Islam flourishes through cultural innovation, popular appeal, and governmental support.

This study also engages with critical scholarship on state projects of moderate Islam, as examined by Nina ter Laan (2016) in the Moroccan context. While ter Laan demonstrates how the Moroccan state strategically promotes Sufi music as representing "moderate Islam" while marginalising *anashid* (Islamic vocal hymns) associated with Islamic activism, this research reveals both parallels and distinctions in Indonesia. Ter Laan's research shows that following the 2003 Casablanca bombings, the Moroccan state became a leading actor in orchestrating control over religion in the public sphere by constructing a national "Moroccan Islam" as part of its participation in the global "war on terror" (ter Laan 2016). Similarly, Indonesian state institutions actively support cultural expressions of moderate Islam through *shalawat* performances as part of a broader strategy to counter religious extremism, particularly evident in the *'Solo kota shalawat'* initiative.

Echoing ter Laan's finding that Islam-inspired music cultivates religious sentiments and moral subjectivities, *shalawat* performances in Surakarta serve similar functions while simultaneously promoting nationalistic values. Even though the Indonesian case appears less overtly controlling than Morocco's, the act of privileging certain Islamic expressions underscores the politics of religious representation and the selective legitimisation of particular traditions.

Empirically, the research provides detailed documentation of how *maulid* celebrations evolve into *shalawat* performances, integrating music, staging, and nationalism. It enriches the literature by linking theoretical insights on popular culture (Storey, 2009), festivalisation (Rasmussen, 2010), and Islamic popular media (Weintraub, 2011) with concrete evidence from fieldwork in Surakarta. This case exemplifies how communities navigate between traditional religious practices and present-day challenges from Salafi criticism, embracing cultural adaptation while preserving spiritual significance.

Practically, the findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, religious leaders, and civil society actors navigating tensions between religious expression and security concerns. While encouraging cultural practices such as *shalawat* performances can serve as an effective counter to radicalism by offering appealing alternatives rather than confrontation, this study acknowledges, drawing on ter Laan's (2016) critical perspective, the inherent tensions in state-sponsored religious expressions. Although these performances contribute to community resilience, the selective promotion of 'acceptable' Islamic expressions by the state inevitably privileges certain interpretations while potentially marginalising others. As documented in Chapters 5 and 6, the collaboration between *shalawat* groups and municipal authorities in Surakarta represents this nuanced dynamic, facilitating the growth of traditional practices while simultaneously advancing broader political objectives related to the city's public image and security agenda.

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Glossary

Ahbabul Mustofa	: A *shalawat* performance group founded by Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf in Surakarta; literally means "the beloved ones of the Chosen One" (referring to Prophet Muhammad).
Ahl al-sunna wal-jama'a (aswaja)	: "People of the Sunna and community," typically referring to Sunni traditionalist Islam following the Ash'ari/Maturidi theology, four legal schools, and traditional Sufi practices.
Al-fann al-hādif	: "Art with mission," referring to religious art forms that aim to promote Islamic values and piety.
Al-Irsyad	: An Indonesian Islamic reformist organisation founded in 1914, originally by Hadhrami Arabs who opposed certain Bā ʿAlawī practices. Now split into two factions: Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah and Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad.
Al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ	: The "righteous predecessors," referring to the first three generations of Muslims after the Prophet Muhammad.
Bā ʿAlawī	: A group of Hadhrami Arabs who claim descent from the Prophet Muhammad; they emphasise their *Sayyid* status and maintain specific religious traditions.
Barzanjī	: A popular *maulid* text composed by Jaʿfar al-Barzanjī (d. 1764), widely recited during *maulid* celebrations in Indonesia.
Bidʿa	: "Innovation" in religious practice, considered either absolutely prohibited (in Salafi view) or potentially acceptable if good *(bidʿa ḥasanah)* or blameworthy *(bidʿa ḍalāla)* in traditionalist view.
Counterpublic	: A concept developed by Charles Hirschkind describing domains where alternative religious discourses and practices are cultivated, often in opposition to dominant narratives.
Dakwah	: Islamic outreach or missionary work; the practice of calling others to Islam or to correct Islamic practice.
Dalīl	: Textual evidence from the Qurʾān or ḥadīth used to justify religious rulings or practices.
Dībaʿī	: A *maulid* text written by Abd al-Rahman al- Dībaʿī (d. 1537), commonly recited during *maulid* celebrations in Indonesia.

Festivalisation of Religious Ritual	: The process by which religious ceremonies and rituals are transformed into public spectacles or festival-like events.
Hadrah	: In the Indonesian context, a performance featuring *rebana* drums accompanying religious songs; traditionally performed during *maulid* celebrations.
Hadhrami	: People originating from Hadramaut region in Yemen, many of whom migrated to Indonesia and established influential communities.
Habib	: An honorific title for male descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, particularly used for Bā ʿAlawī figures in Indonesia.
Haul	: Annual commemoration of a deceased person, usually a saint or respected religious figure, often featuring religious rituals and gatherings.
Ijtihād	: Independent reasoning or interpretation of Islamic sources, as opposed to *taqlīd* (following established authorities).
Jamuro	: *Jamaah Muji Rosul* (Congregation for Praising the Prophet), a *shalawat* group in Surakarta founded by Javanese clerics.
Jamuri	: *Jamaah Muji Rosul untuk Putri* (Congregation for Praising the Prophet for Women), a female *shalawat* group in Surakarta.
Kafāʾah	: Marriage suitability or equality, particularly the practice among Bā ʿAlawī of requiring women to marry men of equal or higher status.
Kaum muda	: "Young group," term for Islamic reformists in early 20th century Indonesia who advocated for religious reform based on direct interpretation of Islamic texts.
Kaum tua	: "Old group," term for traditional Islamic scholars in early 20th century Indonesia who followed established religious authorities and practices.
Khushūʿ	: State of deep spiritual concentration, humility, and focus during worship or religious rituals.
Kiai	: Javanese term for an Islamic religious leader or scholar, often the head of a *pesantren*.
Madhhab	: Islamic legal school; the four Sunni *madhhabs* are Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī, and Ḥanbalī.
Maulid	: Celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday; also refers to texts reciting the Prophet's birth story and virtues.

Muhammadiyah	: A major Indonesian Islamic reformist organisation founded in 1912, focused on educational activism and religious purification.
Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)	: Indonesia's largest Islamic organisation, founded in 1926, representing traditionalist Islam following the Shāfiʿī school.
NKRI Harga Mati	: "The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is non-negotiable," a patriotic slogan emphasising commitment to Indonesian nationalism.
Pondok pesantren	: Traditional Islamic boarding school in Indonesia.
Qasidah	: Poetic odes praising the Prophet Muhammad or containing Islamic themes; often sung during religious gatherings.
Qiyām	: The practice of standing during *maulid* recitation when the Prophet's birth is mentioned, as a sign of respect.
Rebana	: A type of frame drum used in Islamic religious music in Indonesia, particularly during *shalawat* performances.
Salafism	: An Islamic movement advocating return to the practices of early Muslims *(al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ)*, rejecting later innovations and often embracing literal interpretations of Islamic texts.
Sayyid	: An honorific title for male descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.
Shalawat	: Prayers of praise and blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad; also refers to musical performances featuring such prayers.
Simth al-Durar	: A *maulid* text written by Habib ʿAli bin Muhammad al-Habsyi (d. 1915), particularly popular among the Bā ʿAlawī community.
Solo kota shalawat	: "Solo, the City of *Shalawat*," a municipal initiative of Surakarta (Solo) to promote *shalawat* performances and redefine the city's image.
Syekhermania	: Fan community of Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf, who organize *shalawat* performances and gatherings.
Rebana	: A type of frame drum used in Islamic religious music in Indonesia, particularly during *shalawat* performances.
Salafism	: An Islamic movement advocating return to the practices of early Muslims *(al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ)*, rejecting later innovations and often embracing literal interpretations of Islamic texts.
Sayyid	: An honorific title for male descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

Shalawat	: Prayers of praise and blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad; also refers to musical performances featuring such prayers.
Simth al-Durar	: A *maulid* text written by Habib 'Ali bin Muhammad al-Habsyi (d. 1915), particularly popular among the Bā ʿAlawī community.
Solo kota shalawat	: "Solo, the City of *Shalawat*," a municipal initiative of Surakarta (Solo) to promote *shalawat* performances and redefine the city's image.
Syekhermania	: Fan community of Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf, who organize *shalawat* performances and gatherings.

Appendix A

Salafi Publications Critiquing Maulid Celebrations

This appendix provides a list of books and websites published by Salafi groups critiquing *maulid* celebrations, as referenced in Chapter 2. These sources are listed without ranking of influence or importance.

Books

1. Abu Mu'awiyah. (2007). Studi kritis perayaan maulid nabi. Maktabah Latsariyyah.
2. Abu Mu'awiyah Muhammad Aryan. (2010). Siapa bilang perayaan maulid nabi bid'a. Khazanah Islam.
3. 'Abdullah bin 'Abd al-'Aziz At-Tuwaijiri. (2011). Adakah maulid nabi. Darul Falah.
4. 'Abdullah bin 'Abd al-'Aziz at-Tuwaijiri. (2012). Rutinitas perayaan bid'ah sepanjang tahun. Pustaka Imam Syafi'i.
5. 'Ali Mahrus. (2007). Mantan kiai NU menggugat sholawat dan dzikir syirik. Laa Tasyuki Press.
6. Basyaruddin bin Nurdin Shalih Syuhaimin. (2007). Membongkar kesesatan: Tahlilan, yasinan, ruwahan, tawassul, istighotsah, ziarah, dan maulid nabi SAW. Mujahid Press.
7. Buchari. (2013). Mustasyar MWC NU menggugat maulid nabi. Laa Tasyuki Press.
8. Hammud bin 'Abd Allah al-Mathar. (2012). Ensiklopedia bid'ah. Penerbit Darul Haq.
9. Ibnu Saini bin Muhammad bin Musa. (2013). Benarkah Shalahuddin Al-Ayubi merayakan maulid nabi? Maktabah Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan.
10. Waskito. (2014). Pro dan kontra maulid nabi. Pustaka Al-Kautsar.

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2. https://almanhaj.or.id/10131-peringatan-maulid-nabi-shallallahu-alaihi-wa-salam-menurut-syariat-islam.html
3. www.islamhouse.com/id/fatwa/72553/ (http://www.islamhouse.com/id/fatwa/72553/)
4. www.islamqa.info/id/128530 (http://www.islamqa.info/id/128530)
5. www.konsultasisyariah.com/10421-halalkah-makanan-maulid-nabi.ht ml (http://www.konsultasisyariah.com/10421-halalkah-makanan-maulid-nabi.ht%20ml)
6. www.muslim.or.id/11394-mengapa-maulid-nabi-dikategorikan-sebagai-bidah.html (http://www.muslim.or.id/11394-mengapa-maulid-nabi-dikategorikan-sebagai-bidah.html)
7. www.muslimah.or.id/8064-hukum-makan-sembelihan-untuk-acara-maulid-nabi.html (http://www.muslimah.or.id/8064-hukum-makan-sembelihan-untuk-acara-maulid-nabi.html)
8. www.nisaa-assunnah.com/2016/12/hukum-merayakan-maulid-nabi.html (http://www.nisaa-assunnah.com/2016/12/hukum-merayakan-maulid-nabi.html)
9. www.panjimas.com/nahi-munkar/aliran-sesat-tbc/2014/03/15/menguak-kebidahan-dalam-perayaan-maulid-nabi/ (http://www.panjimas.com/nahi-munkar/aliran-sesat-tbc/2014/03/15/menguak-kebidahan-dalam-perayaan-maulid-nabi/)
10. www.ustadzaris.com/bolehkah-mengisi-acara-maulid-nabi (http://www.ustadzaris.com/bolehkah-mengisi-acara-maulid-nabi)
11. https://rumaysho.com/2226-memperingati-maulid-dalam-rangka-mengingat-kelahiran-nabi.html
12. https://almanhaj.or.id/89028-asal-muasal-perayaan-maulid-nabi.html
13. https://rumaysho.com/869-ulama-ahlus-sunnah-menyikapi-maulid-nabi.html
14. https://salafy.or.id/hukum-memperingati-maulid-nabi/
15. https://konsultasisyariah.com/26137-perayaan-maulid-menurut-ulama-madzhab.html
16. https://www.atsar.id/2016/12/apa-kata-ulama-salaf-tentang-maulid-nabi.html
17. https://www.salafycirebon.com/maulid-nabi-bukan-ajaran-salaf.htm
18. https://itishom.org/blog/artikel/ruduud/bantahan-terhadap-artikel-berjudul-inilah-sejarah-yang-benar-tentang-awal-perayaan-maulid-nabi
19. https://darussalaf.or.id/peringatan-maulid-nabi-dalam-timbangan-islam/
20. https://majalahassunnah.net/akidah/peringatan-maulid-nabi-menurut-syariat-islam/

Appendix B

List of Interviewees

Table 1: Interviews with Habib Syech

No.	Name	Position	Date of Interview	Location
1	Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf	Leader of Ahbabul Mustofa	30 August 2017	Surakarta
2	Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf	Leader of Ahbabul Mustofa	25 October 2017	Surakarta

Table 2: Interviews with Performers of Ahbabul Mustofa

No.	Name	Age/Gender	Date of Interview	Location
1	Muhammad Sholeh Ilham	Male, b. 1980	13 August 2017	Yogyakarta
2	Romdhoni	Male, b. 1984	5 October 2017	Surakarta
3	Partono	Male, b. 1967	5 October 2017	Surakarta
4	Gus Wahid	Male, b. 1987	15 October 2017	Wonosobo
5	Gus Shoffa	Male, b. 1986	8 August 2018	Kudus

Table 3: Interviews with Performers of Jamuro

No.	Name	Age/Gender	Date of Interview	Location
1	Royyan Kurniawan	Male, b. 1980	13 September 2017	Surakarta
2	Anis Nur Rohmad	Male, b. 1987	23 November 2017	Surakarta
3	Hamam	Male, b. 1998	28 November 2017	Surakarta

Table 4: Interviews with Performers of Jamuri

No.	Name	Age/Gender	Date of Interview	Location
1	Fauziyah	Female, b. 1967	17 September 2017	Surakarta
2	Ari Nur Hayati	Female, b. 1985	24 September 2017	Surakarta
3	Nada Fitria	Female, b. 1988	24 September 2017	Surakarta
4	Siti Fatimah	Female, b. 1986	27 September 2017	Surakarta

Table 5: Interviews with Performers of Al-Hidayah

No.	Name	Age/Gender	Date of Interview	Location
1	Faiq Sholahudin	Male, b. 1994	21 September 2017	Surakarta
2	Mustakim	Male, b. 1990	22 October 2017	Surakarta
3	Didik Sumargo	Male, b. 1987	6 November 2017	Surakarta

Table 6: Interviews with Performers of Jampi Sanubari

No.	Name	Age/Gender	Date of Interview	Location
1	Purwanto	Male, b. 1960	14 July 2017	Surakarta
2	Muhammad Zaini	Male, b. 1972	23 July 2017	Surakarta
3	Ahmad Fauzi Ringga Saputra	Male, b. 1998	7 November 2017	Surakarta
4	Abdullah Husen Syarif (Zein)	Male, b. 1997	10 November 2017	Surakarta
5	Muhammad Zainuri	Male, b. 1989	19 November 2017	Surakarta

Table 7: Interviews with Participants of Ahbabul Mustofa

No.	Name	Age/Gender	Date of Interview	Location
1	Mujib	Male, b. 1997	15 July 2017	Surakarta
2	Yanto	Male, b. 1968	7 August 2017	Surakarta
3	Yuliani	Female, b. 1970	17 August 2017	Surakarta
4	Mansur	Male, b. 2001	21 August 2017	Surakarta
5	Nugroho	Male, b. 1980	27 August 2017	Surakarta
6	Mahmad	Male, b. 1961	14 September 2017	Surakarta
7	Yuni	Female, b. 1969	13 October 2017	Surakarta
8	Zain	Male, b. 1924	1 November 2017	Surakarta
9	Somad	Male, b. 1959	13 November 2017	Surakarta
10	Indah	Female, b. 1995	18 November 2017	Surakarta

Table 8: Interviews with Participants of Jamuro

No.	Name	Age/Gender	Date of Interview	Location
1	Nur Hanifa	Female, b. 1997	23 November 2017	Surakarta
2	Malikah	Female, b. 1998	23 November 2017	Surakarta
3	Anam	Male, b. 1978	21 November 2017	Surakarta
4	Aris	Male, b. 1990	26 November 2017	Surakarta
5	Subakri	Male, b. 1969	22 November 2017	Surakarta
6	Mufidah	Female, b. 1958	9 December 2017	Surakarta
7	Latif	Male, b. 1995	5 December 2017	Surakarta
8	Saiful Sahri	Male, b. 1975	6 December 2017	Surakarta

Table 9: Interviews with Participants of Jamuri

No.	Name	Age/Gender	Date of Interview	Location
1	Ratna	Female, b. 1970	8 September 2017	Surakarta
2	Siti Zubaidah	Female, b. 1948	7 September 2017	Surakarta
3	Asifah	Female, b. 1985	8 September 2017	Surakarta
4	Marlina	Female, b. 1982	11 September 2017	Surakarta
5	Musyarofah	Female, b. 1986	21 September 2017	Surakarta
6	Setiawi	Female, b. 1966	26 September 2017	Surakarta
7	Siti Syamsiyah	Female, b. 1966	2 October 2017	Surakarta
8	Wiwik	Female, b. 1964	2 October 2017	Surakarta

Table 10: Interviews withParticipants of Al-Hidayah

No.	Name	Age/Gender	Date of Interview	Location
1	Ani Suwarni	Female, b. 1972	9 October 2017	Surakarta
2	Rofiatun	Female, b. 1957	9 October 2017	Surakarta
3	Siti Khotijah	Female, b. 1960	9 October 2017	Surakarta
4	Mustakim	Male, b. 1957	9 October 2017	Surakarta
5	Mustain	Male, b. 1986	21 October 2017	Surakarta
6	Feri	Male, b. 1986	21 October 2017	Surakarta
7	Endah	Female, b. 1995	9 December 2017	Surakarta

Table 11: Interviews withParticipants of Jampi Sanubari

No.	Name	Age/Gender	Date of Interview	Location
1	Fadil	Male, b. 1980	26 July 2017	Surakarta
2	Mahmudi	Male, b. 1957	18 July 2017	Surakarta
3	Surati	Female, b. 1968	28 August 2017	Surakarta
4	Al-Farisi	Male, b. 1997	28 August 2017	Surakarta
5	Muhsin	Male, b. 1987	28 August 2017	Surakarta
6	Romlah	Female, b. 1966	27 September 2017	Surakarta
7	Rahmawati	Female, b. 1967	6 November 2017	Surakarta

Table 12: Interviews with Government Officials and others

| No.	Name	Position	Date of Interview	Location
1	Miftahul Dhuha	Founder of Syekhermania	14 August 2017	Grobogan
2	Teguh Prakosa	Chief of Regional House of Surakarta	27 August 2017	Surakarta
3	Achmad Purnomo	Vice Mayor of Surakarta	3 September 2018	Surakarta
4	Soni Parsono	Founder of Al-Hidayah	26 September 2017	Surakarta
5	Bunyai Munawaroh	Founder of Jamuri	21 September 2017	Surakarta
6	Sekhah Wal'afiah	Founder of Jamuri	21 September 2017	Surakarta
7	Habib Abdullah bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf	Brother of Habib Syech, Chief of Hanura Party of Surakarta	27 November 2017	Surakarta
8	Habib Muhammad	Bā ʿAlawī preacher	29 January 2018	Surakarta
9	Gus Karim	Founder of Jamuro	30 January 2018	Surakarta
10	Mbah Soleh	Senior congregation member at the Riyadh Mosque in Surakarta	30 November 2018	Surakarta

Appendix C

List of codes / Coding and Relationships:

A. Social Class

| Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• Factory workers • Household wife • Micro-entrepreneur • Ojek driver • Low white-collar worker • Student • Teacher	Lower Socioeconomic Class	Social Status
• College students • Entrepreneur • High ranked police officer	Higher Socioeconomic Class	
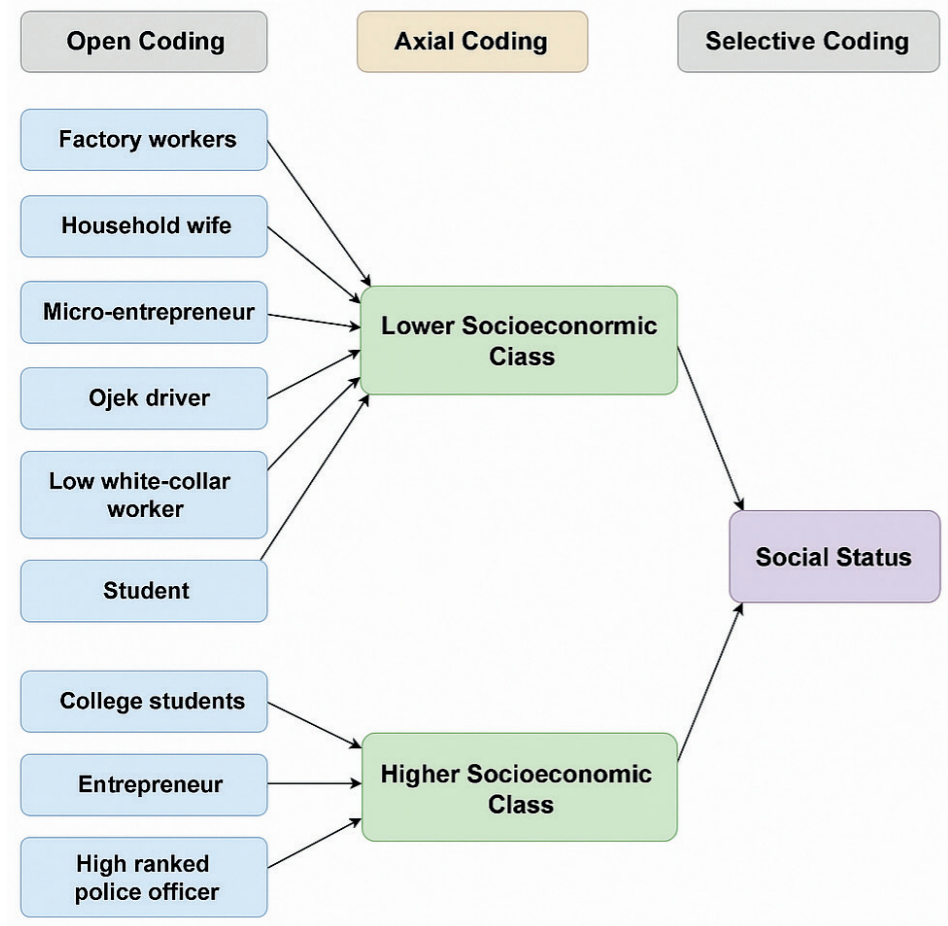
B. Knowledge of *maulid* criticism

| Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• Know about the *maulid* criticism • Know about the content of *maulid* criticism	Know *maulid* criticism	Awareness of Maulid Criticism
• Do not want to know about the criticism • Do not know about the *maulid* criticism	Do not know *maulid* criticism	
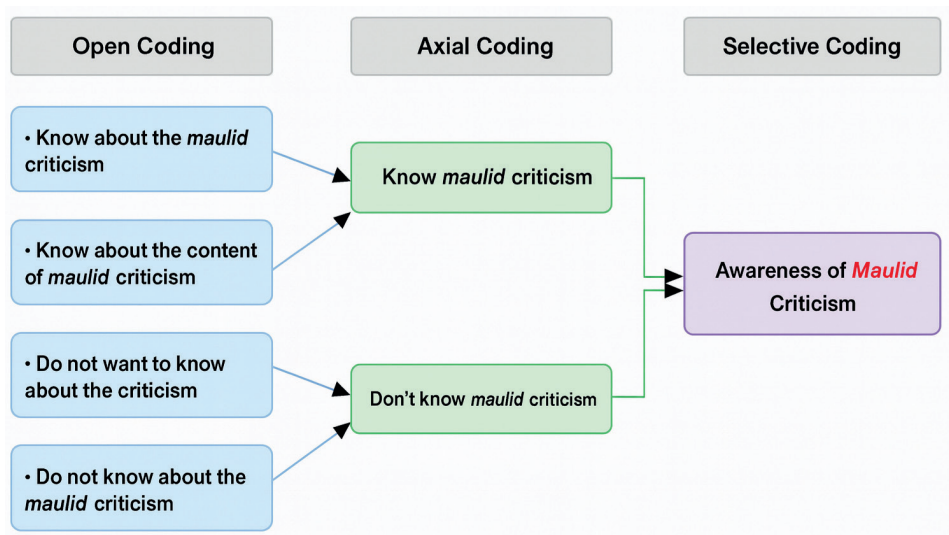
C. Strategies for Responding to Maulid Criticism

| Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• Directly criticise the *maulid* criticism	Direct Response to Maulid Criticism	Strategies for Responding to Maulid Criticism
• Indirectly criticised the *maulid* criticism • Indirectly; just practise the *maulid* • Simply ignore the criticism	Indirect Response to Maulid Criticism	
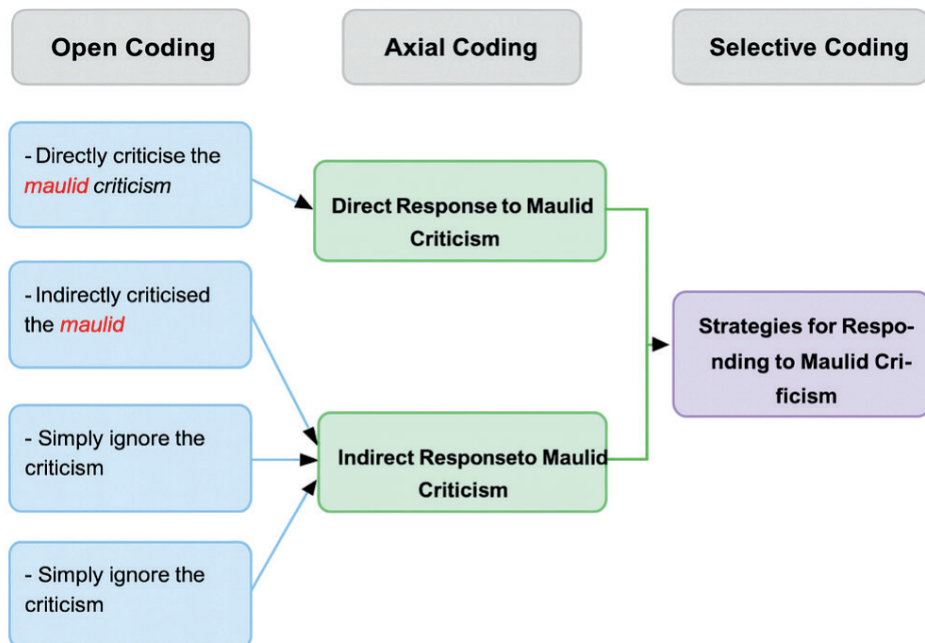
D. Source of the *Maulid* Criticism

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• *Maulid* criticism from books	Text-based sources	Origins of Maulid Criticism
• *Maulid* criticism from friends	Interpersonal sources	
• *Maulid* criticism from radio (MTA)	Broadcast/Media sources	
• *Maulid* criticism from sermon	Religious preaching sources	
• *Maulid* criticism from social media	Digital sources	
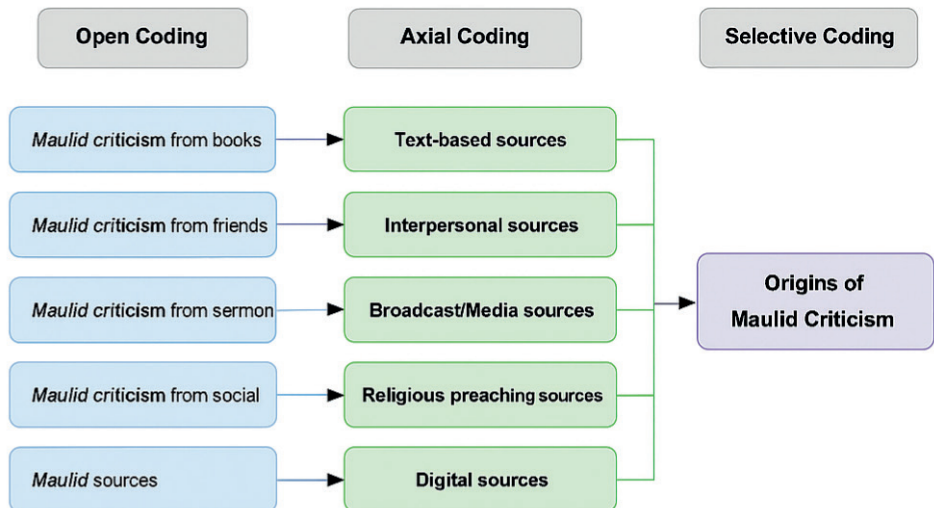
E. Views on *Maulid* criticism

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• *Maulid* criticism does not change my opinion	Maulid criticism has no effect	Unchanged Views on Maulid Criticism

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• Maulid criticism does not change my opinion	**Maulid** criticism has no effect	**Unchanged Views on Maulid Criticism**
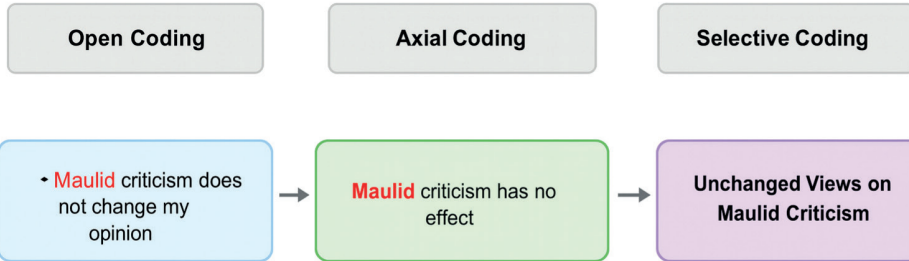
F. Interpretations of the *Maulid* Ruling

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• *Maulid* is *wājib*	Obligatory Ruling	Interpretations of the Maulid Ruling
• Farḍ al-ʿAyn / Almost *wājib*		
• *Maulid* is *sunna*	Recommended Ruling	
• *Maulid* is *mubāh* / allowed	Permissible Ruling	
• No answer on the ruling of the *maulid*	Ambiguous Ruling	
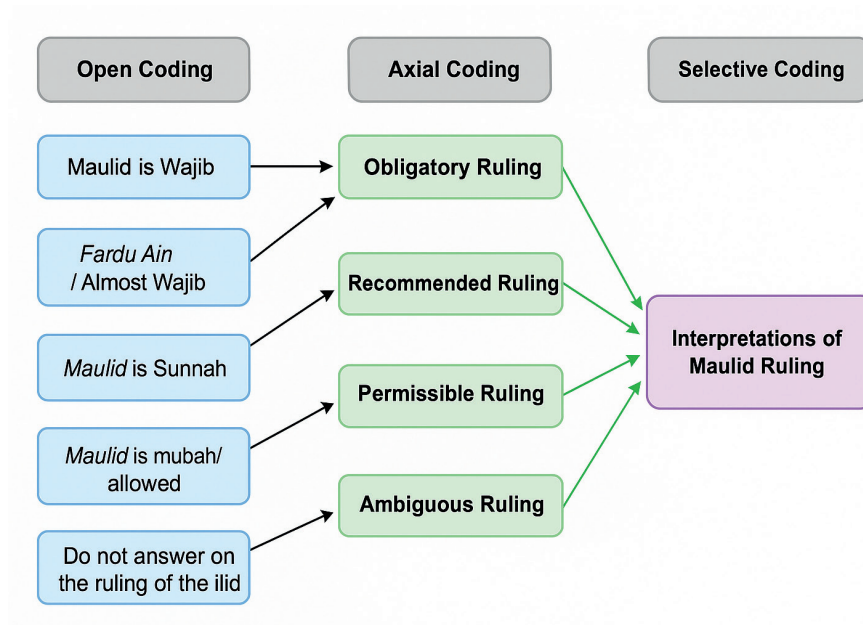
G. *Maulid* critic groups

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• Criticism from Muhammadiyah	Institutional Critics	Maulid Critic Groups
• Criticism from (Majlis Tafsir Al-Qur'an) MTA		
• Criticism from Salafi	Purist Critics	
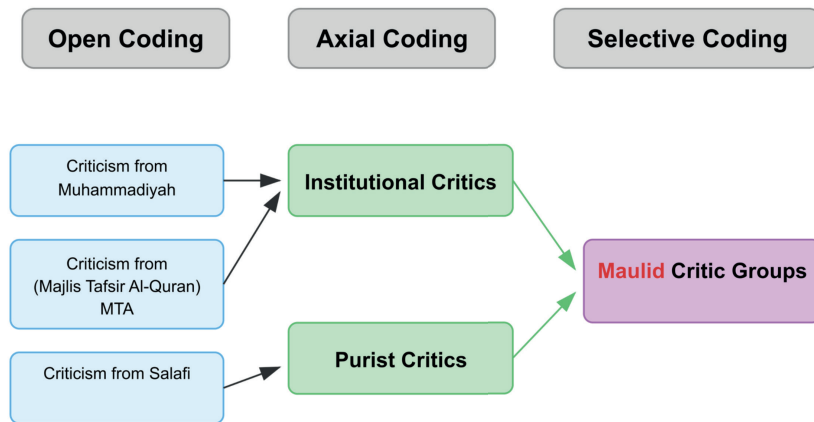
H. Criticism of the *maulid*

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• *Maulid* has no ruling in Islamic law	Islamic legal criticism	Spectrum of *maulid* criticism
• *Maulid* is not allowed		
• *Maulid* is unnecessary		
• The criticism of the mix men and women		
• The criticism on the musical instruments		
• *Maulid* was never practised by the prophet	Historical & Authority-Based Criticism	
• *Maulid* is *bidʿa*	Doctrinal Criticism	
• The criticism of exaggerating the prophet	Doctrinal Criticism	
• The criticism of the *maulid* books	Textual Criticism	
• The criticism on the food service	Cultural & Ritual Criticism	
• The criticism on the *qiyām*		

Open Coding | Axial Coding | Selective Coding

Maulid has no ruling in islamic law

Maulid is not allowed

Maulid is unnecessary

The criticism of the mix of men and women

The criticism on the musical instruments

Maulid was never practiced by the prophet

Maulid is bid'a

The criticism of exeagerating the prophet

The criticism on the maulid books

The criticism on the tood service

Islamic Legal Criticism

Historical and Authority-Based Criticism

Doctrinal Criticism

Textual Criticism

Cultural and Ritual Criticism

Spestrum of Maulid Criticism

I. Reactions on the *maulid* criticism

| Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• *I* don't agree with the criticism	Defensive Response	Reactions to Maulid Criticism
• The critics are lack of knowledge	Counter-Criticism	
• It is their right to criticise	Accepting Criticism	
• Ignoring *maulid criticism* and continuing the *maulid* practice	Dismissive Response	

Reactions on the maulid criticism
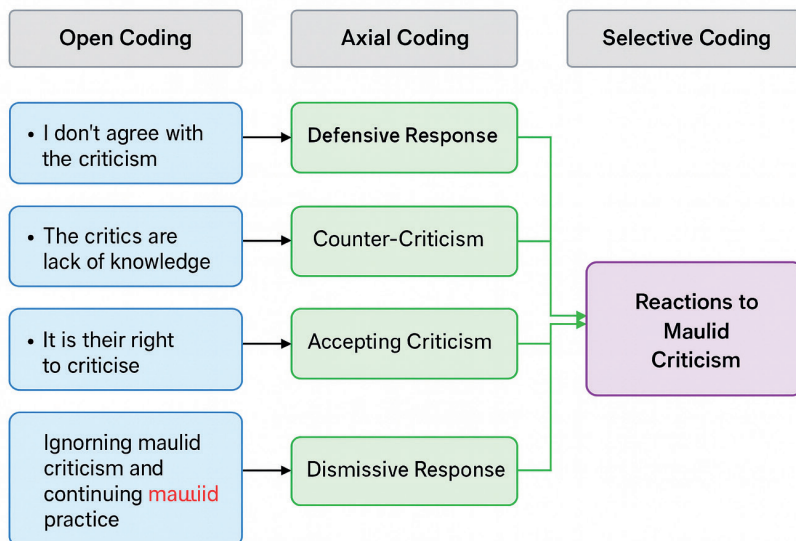
J. Perception on Islamic radicalism

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• I don't want to know about Islamic radicalism	Disengagement from Islamic Radicalism	Perception on Islamic radicalism
• I don't care about Islamic radicalism		
• I don't agree with Islamic radicalism	Rejection of Islamic Radicalism	
• I will fight Islamic radicalism		
• I don't like Islamic radicalism		
• No comment on Islamic radicalism		
• Frightening	Perceived Characteristics of Islamic Radicalism	
• Irresponsible		
• Being radical		
• Being disturbing		
• Destroying the good name of Islam		
• Fighting non-Muslim		
• Changing the Indonesian constitution	Political & Social Aspects	
• Small in size but dominating public debate		
• Imported from abroad		
• Against Islamic law	Religious Perspective	
• Lack of religious knowledge		

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding

Open Coding:
- I don't want to know about Islamic radicalism
- I don't care about Islamic radicalism
- I will fight islamic radicalism
- I don't like Islamic radicalism
- Frightening
- Irresponsible
- Being radical
- Being disturbing
- Destroving the good name of islam
- Changing the indchesian constitution
- Small in size but dominating public debate
- Imported from abroad

Axial Coding:
- Disengagement from Islamic Radicalism
- Rejection of Islamic Radicalism
- Perceived Characteristics of Islamic Radicalism
- Political and Social Aspects
- Reugious Perspective

Selective Coding:
- Perspectives.on Islamic Radicalism

K. Radical Islamic groups in Surakarta

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• ISIS is radical	Transnational Jihadist group	Perceptions of radical Islamic groups in Surakarta
• Jamaah Islamiyah is radical		
• Salafi is radical	Islamic ideological movement	
• HTI is radical		
• Pondok Ngruki is radical	Local Islamic institution	
• Laskar Umat Islam Surakarta (LUIS) is radical	Local Islamic organisation	
• Abu Bakar Ba'asyir is radical	Radical Islamic figure	
• Laskar Jihad is radical	Militant Islamic group	

Perceptions of Radical Islamic Groups in Surakarta

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding

ISiS is radical → **Transnational Jihadist Groups**

Jamaah islamiyah is radical → **Islamic Ideological Movements**

Salafi is radical → **Islamic Ideological Movements**

HTI is is radical → **Local Islamic Institutions**

Abu Bakar Ba'asyir radical → **Radical Islamic Figures**

Laskar Jihad is radical → **Militant Islamic Groups**

Abu Bakar Ba'asyir is radical → **Selective Ingredienture**

Laskar Jihad is radical → **Selective Ingredienture**

All axial coding categories → **Perceptions of Radical Islamic Groups in Surakarta**

L. Radicals are threatening

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• Threat	Radicals perceived as a threat	Perspectives on the Threat of Radicalism
• No Threat	Radicals perceived as a not threat	
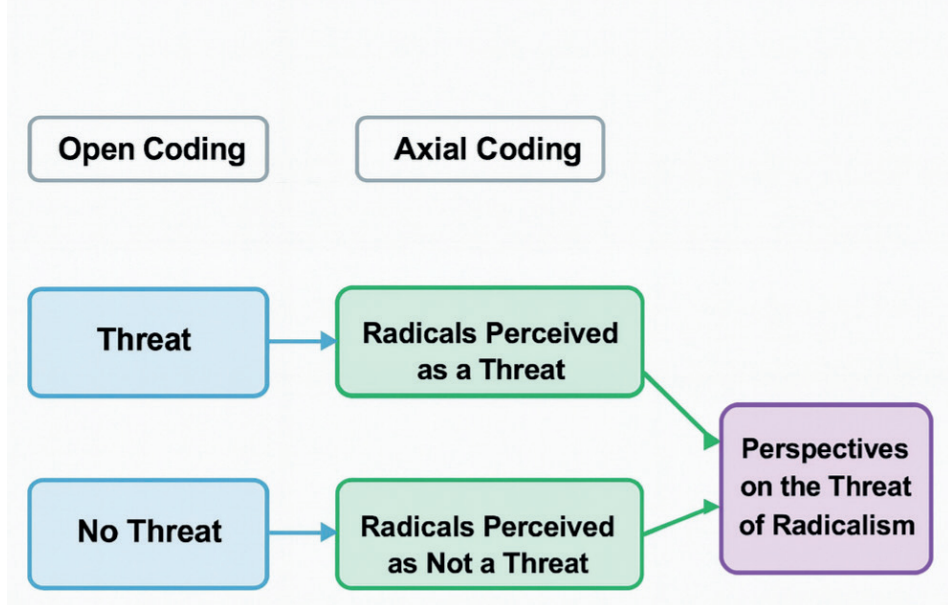
M. *Shalawat* prevent radicalism

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• Participating in the *shalawat* maybe prevent participants join the radicals	*Shalawat* as a Preventive Measure	Role of *shalawat* in Countering Radicalism
• Participating in the *shalawat* prevents participants join the radicals		
• Regularly participate in *shalawat* prevent participant joining the radical Islam		
• Islamic radical groups do not like *shalawat / maulid*	*Shalawat* as a Distinction from Radical Groups	
• Participate regularly in *shalawat* makes people's hearts calm	Spiritual and Psychological Benefits of *Shalawat*	
• Because we believe in the performers	Trust in Religious Leaders	

Role of Shalawat in Countering Radicalism

Open Coding

Axial Coding

Selective Coding

Participating in shalawat maybe prevents participants from jpining radicals

Participating in shalawat prevennts participants from joining radical islam

Islamic radical groups do not like shalawatimautid

Participating regularly in shalawal makes people's hearts calm

Because we believe in the performers

Shalawat as a Preventive Measure

Shalawat as a Distinction from Radical Groups

Spiritual and Psychological Benefits of Shalawat

Trust in Religious Leaders

Role of Shalawat in Countering Radicalism
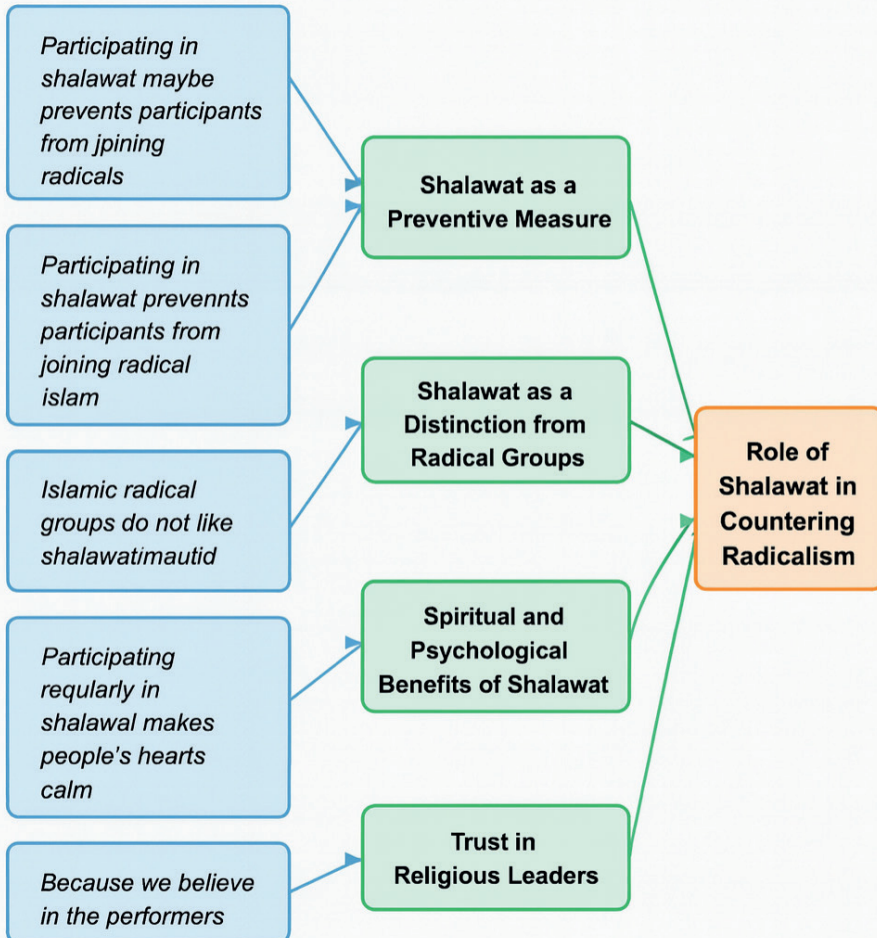
N. *Shalawat* can challenge Islamic radicalism

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• Because it calms my heart • Because *shalawat* is touch people's heart (peaceful) • By appealing to Emotions / Sensitivity (calming and touching people heart / love of the Prophet)	Denouncing Islamic radicalism by music/ *shalawat* (tranquility)	*Shalawat* as a Means to Challenge Islamic Radicalism
• Promoting Social Cohesion through small *maulid*	Denouncing Islamic radicalism by social cohesion	
• Cultivating Pancasila in sermons • Cultivating Pancasila in songs	Denouncing Islamic radicalism with nationalistic discourse	
• Indirect criticism through sermon • Indirect Criticism through the song • By Blessings	Denouncing Islamic radicalism with religious discourse	
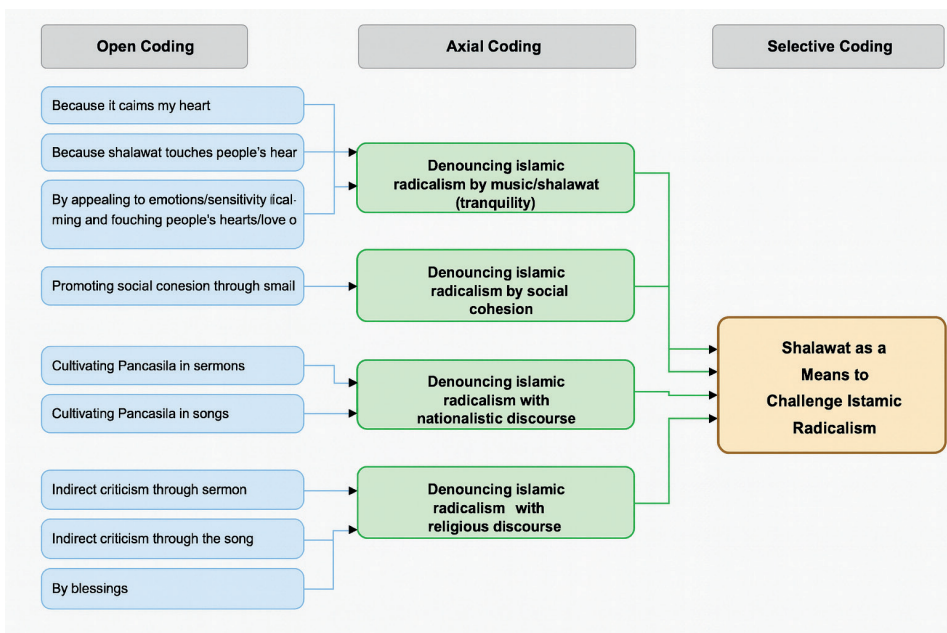
O. How Prevent Islamic Radicalism

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• By creating/joining maulid / *shalawat* in the community • By educating the people about radicalism • By learning religion more with the community • By joining good Islamic group • By attaching myself into 'ulamā' • By cutting their networks • By following my creed • By practicing my religious ritual • By protecting my family	Countering radicalism through piety	Piety and Nationalism as Methods to Counter Islamic Radicalism
• By cultivating pancasila and nationalism • By Indonesian security force	Countering radicalism through nationalism	

P. *Shalawat* is Anti-Radical

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• The *shalawat* explained about the radicals • *Shalawat* is effective against radicalism • Agree with the explanation that radicalism is not good • Because I have never heard *maulid* participants involve with violence or radicalism.	*Shalawat* fosters awareness against radicalism	*Shalawat* is anti-radical

Shalawat is Anti-Radical

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding

- • The *shalawat* explained about the radicals
- • *Shalawat* is effective against radicalism
- • Agree with the explanation that radicalism is not good
- • Because I never heard *maulld* participants involve with violence or radicalism

Shalawat fosters awareness agá radiclism → *Shalawat* is anti-radical
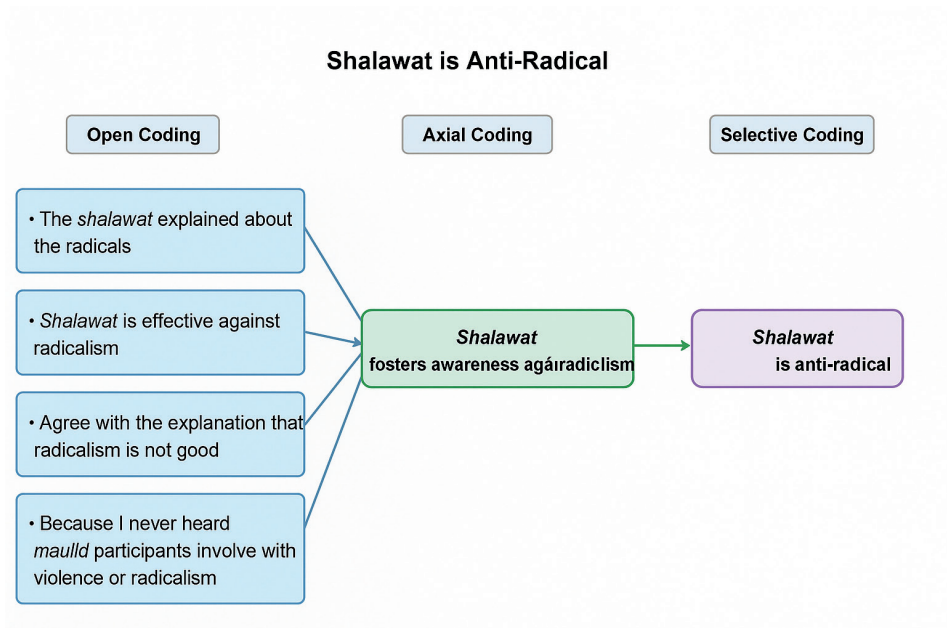
Q. Intention to Participate in the Performance

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• Learning about religion • Because of the follower of NU • To draw closer to God • Become more faithful • I want to recite *shalawat* • It is part of my faith • It is a religious reason • To get the religious reward • It makes me close to 'ulamā'	spiritual and religious need (Piety)	Piety, Entertainment, and Social Interaction
• It expresses my love to the prophet • To get the blessing of the prophet	Devotion to the Prophet (Piety)	
• Calming my heart • I am comfortable with *shalawat*	The feeling of calm (Piety)	
• Entertainment • I like the music of *shalawat* • It is enjoyable • It is entertaining • It makes me happy • It is fun	Entertainment	
• I was invited by a friend • Meeting with friends	Social interaction	

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding

- Learning about religion
- Because of the follower of NU
- To close ourseives to God
- Become more faithful
- I want to recite shalawat
- It is part of my faith
- It is a religious reaseward
- To express my love for the Proph
- To get the blessing of the Prophet *(Shallallahu 'alaini va sallam)*
- Calming my heart
- I am comfortable with shalawat
- Entertainment
- I like the music of shalawat
- It is enjoyable

Spiritual and religious need (Plety)

Devotion to the Prophet (Plety)

The feeling of calm (Plety)

Entertainment

Social interaction

Pieb, Entertainment, and Social Interaction

R. On Salafi Preachers

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• Salafi preachers are lack of knowledge • Salafi preachers are extreme • Salafi preachers are foreigners • Salafi preachers only famous online	Salafi preachers lack credibility	Perceptions of Salafi Preachers
• I don't agree with Salafi preachers	Opposition to Salafi preachers	
• I don't care about Salafi preachers • No comment on Salafi preachers • I don't know about Salafi preachers • Do not disturb us	Do not care with the Salafi	
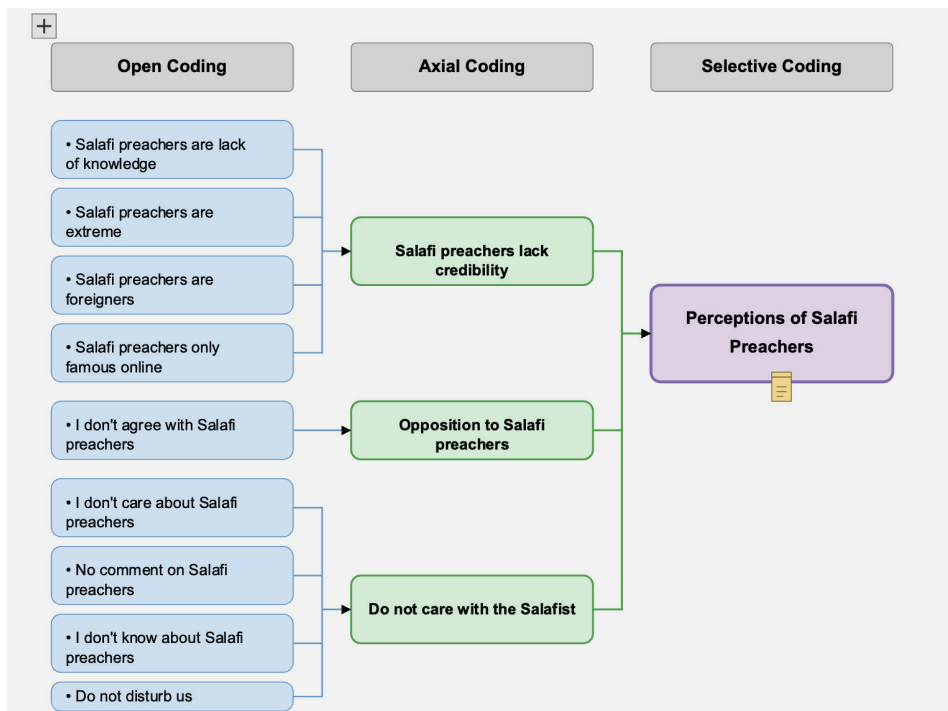
S. On the contestation against the Salafis

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
• I tolerate Salafi preaching • I stimulate dialogue with Salafi preachers • I stimulate dialogue with those who dismiss the maulid	Soft approach against the Salafis	Attitude towards Salafi Preachers
• I oppose the *maulid* dismissal personally • I oppose Salafi preaching • I oppose the *maulid* dismissal by calling the police	Hard approach against the Salafis	
• I don't know about maulid dismissal • No comment on the maulid dismissal • I don't know how to react against the *maulid* dismissal	No comment / neutral	
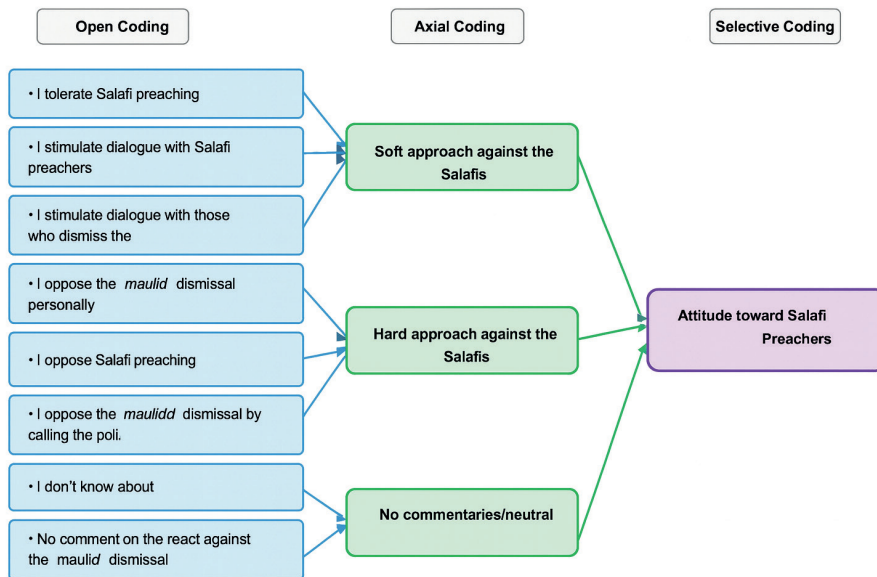
Appendix D

Interview protocol for participants

1. Personal background

    1. Could you tell me about yourself (name, age, occupation, etc.)?
    2. Do you live in this city (Yogyakarta or Solo)?
    3. How long have you been participating in the performances of Habib Syech or Jamuro?
    4. Could you tell me how and when you first started attending these *shalawat* gatherings?
    5. Why do you enjoy attending *shalawat* gatherings?

2. **Religious affiliation**

    1. Are you a member of any Islamic organisation in Indonesia (NU, Muhammadiyah, or others)?
    2. If you are not a formal member of any specific religious organisation, do you culturally or religiously incline toward any of these organisations?

3. The evolution of *maulid* practices

    1. When did you first attend a *maulid* celebration?
    2. Have you observed any changes in *maulid* celebrations since your childhood?
    3. Could you describe the *maulid* celebrations from that time?
    4. What are the differences between Maulid celebrations then and now?
    5. What are your thoughts about *shalawat* performances that use large stages, are attended by thousands of participants, and are shared through new media? Is this different from what you experienced in your younger years? When did this style of *shalawat* performance become popular?
    6. In your experience, were Habib Syech and Ahbabul Mustofa the first groups to incorporate popular culture elements? Have you seen other *shalawat* performance groups? Could you describe them?

7. What differences do you notice between Habib Syech (or Jamuro) and other *shalawat* groups?
8. Which style of *maulid* do you prefer—the traditional style or the new one with popular culture elements? Why?

4. Maulid criticism discourse

1. What do you know about the arguments for and against *maulid* celebrations?
2. What is your opinion about the religious ruling on celebrating *maulid*?
3. What do you think about people who claim that *maulid* is *bid'a* (innovation) and therefore forbidden?
4. Have you ever heard or read criticisms about *maulid* celebrations?
5. From what sources did you learn about these criticisms?
6. What is your understanding of the content of these criticisms?
7. How do you personally counter arguments against *maulid*?
8. Do you know which Islamic groups these criticisms originate from?
9. What is your opinion about these Islamic groups? Could you elaborate?
10. Has your opinion about the religious ruling on *maulid* changed after hearing these criticisms? Could you explain why?
11. Which perspective do you find more credible—the discourse claiming *maulid* is forbidden or the teachings of Habib Syech (or other *shalawat* groups)? Could you explain your reasoning?

5. Islamic radicalism

1. What are your thoughts on the emergence of radical Islamic groups in Indonesia?
2. Could you provide examples of such groups?
3. Do you feel threatened by these radical groups? Why?
4. How do you address this threat?
5. Do you believe that *shalawat* gatherings can counter this threat? How?
6. Do you think people attend *shalawat* gatherings as a way to challenge Islamic radicalism?
7. Does participating in *shalawat* gatherings prevent you from joining radical groups? Could you explain why?
8. Do *shalawat* gatherings explain or warn against the dangers of Islamic radicalism? Could you elaborate?
9. Do you agree with those explanations?
10. Do you think the explanations or strategies of *shalawat* gatherings are effective in countering radical Islamic teachings or activities?

6. Reasons for participating in *maulid* celebrations

1. What are your reasons for attending *shalawat* gatherings?

7. Contestation between supporters and opponents of *maulid* celebrations

1. What is your opinion about preachers (such as Khalid Bassalamah) who preach against *maulid* celebrations?
2. What do you think about the recent incident where Khalid Bassalamah's sermon was disrupted by NU members in Sidoarjo, East Java? Do you agree with their actions? Why?
3. What would you do if you encountered Khalid Bassalamah or other preachers who oppose *maulid* celebrations? Would you act similarly to the NU members in Sidoarjo? Why?
4. What is your opinion regarding instances where people have disrupted *maulid* celebrations?
5. How would you react to such disruptions?
6. What would you do if you were participating in a *maulid* celebration and someone attempted to disrupt it? Why?
7. What actions do you take to preserve the tradition of *maulid* or *shalawat* performances?
8. In your opinion, what is the best approach for NU followers to maintain their religious traditions and practices (such as *maulid* celebrations)?
9. What do you believe is the most appropriate attitude for both supporters and opponents of *maulid* celebrations when faced with differences in understanding certain Islamic practices?

Appendix E

Interview protocol for *shalawat* performers

1. Personal background

1. Could you tell me about yourself (name, age, occupation, etc.)?
2. Do you live in this city?
3. Why and how did you become a *shalawat* performer? Could you explain that?
4. Could you elaborate on your career history? (How many *shalawat* performance groups have you worked with, etc.?)
5. What are your reasons for working with Habib Syech or other *shalawat* groups?

6. Is being a *shalawat* performer your main occupation? What are your other daily activities? Could you explain further?

2. Religious affiliation

1. Are you a member of any Islamic organisation in Indonesia (NU, Muhammadiyah, or others)?
2. If you are not a formal member of any specific religious organisation, do you culturally or religiously incline toward any of these organisations?

3. The evolution of *maulid* practices

1. When did you first attend a *maulid* celebration? (Was it during your childhood or teenage years?)
2. Have you observed any developments or changes in *maulid* celebrations since your childhood?
3. Could you describe the *maulid* performances from that time?
4. What are the differences between *maulid* celebrations then and now?
5. What can you tell me about *shalawat* performances that use large stages, are attended by thousands of participants, and are shared through new media? Is this different from what you experienced in your younger years? When did this style of *shalawat* performance become popular?
6. In your experience, were Habib Syech and Ahbabul Mustofa the first groups to incorporate popular culture elements? Have you seen other *shalawat* performance groups? Could you describe them?
7. What are the differences between other *shalawat* performances and those of Habib Syech or Jamuro?
8. Which style of *maulid* do you prefer—the traditional style or the new one that incorporates elements of popular culture? Why?
9. Who typically attends *shalawat* performances? Are they mostly men, women, young people, adults, or elderly?
10. Could you describe the age range of people who attend *shalawat* performances?
11. Do you think participants prefer the *shalawat* performances like JAM or the traditional *maulid* celebrations held in mosques and homes? Could you elaborate on this?
12. What are young Muslims' opinions regarding *shalawat* performances? Do they enjoy them? Could you explain further?

4. *Maulid* criticism discourse

1. What do you know about the arguments for and against *maulid* celebrations?
2. What is your opinion about the religious ruling on celebrating *maulid*?
3. What do you think about claims that *maulid* is bidʿa (innovation) and therefore forbidden?
4. Have you ever heard or read criticisms about *maulid* celebrations?
5. From what sources did you learn about these criticisms?
6. What is your understanding of the content of these criticisms?
7. How do *shalawat* performers defend themselves against *maulid* criticisms?
8. Do you know which Islamic groups these criticisms originate from?
9. What is your opinion about these Islamic groups? Could you elaborate?
10. Has your opinion about the religious ruling on *maulid* changed after hearing these criticisms? Could you explain why?
11. Do you think the discourse of *maulid* criticism affects the number of people who attend *shalawat* performances? Could you explain why?
12. How do Habib Syech and other *shalawat* performers (JAM or Jamuro) convince and maintain the participants' belief that *maulid* celebrations are permissible?
13. Do you think promoting *maulid* celebrations through *shalawat* performances (with popular culture elements) increases people's perception that *maulid* is permissible? Could you elaborate?

5. Islamic radicalism

1. What are your thoughts on the emergence of radical Islamic groups in Indonesia?
2. Could you provide examples of such groups?
3. Do you feel threatened by these radical groups? Why?
4. How do you address this threat?
5. Do you believe that *shalawat* performances can counter this threat? How?
6. How do *shalawat* gatherings address the influence of Islamic radicalism? Could you explain the strategies used?
7. Do you think people attend *shalawat* performances because they want to challenge Islamic radicalism?
8. In your opinion, are people who attend *shalawat* performances less likely to become involved with radical Islam? Why?

9. What makes you confident that *shalawat* participants will not become involved in radical activities?
10. What is the essence of *shalawat* performances that prevents participants from joining radical Islamic groups?
11. Why do you think people are attracted to radical Islamic teachings or activities? What about yourself?

6. Contestation between supporters and opponents of *maulid* celebrations

1. What is your opinion about preachers (such as Khalid Bassalamah) who preach against *maulid* celebrations?
2. What do you think about the recent incident where Khalid Bassalamah's sermon was disrupted by NU members in Sidoarjo, East Java? Do you agree with their actions? Why?
3. What would you do if you encountered Khalid Bassalamah or other preachers who oppose *maulid* celebrations? Would you act similarly to the NU members in Sidoarjo? Why?
4. What is your opinion regarding instances where people have disrupted *maulid* celebrations?
5. How would you react to such disruptions?
6. What would you do if you were participating in a *maulid* celebration and someone attempted to disrupt it? Why?
7. What actions do you take to preserve the tradition of *maulid* or *shalawat* performances?
8. In your opinion, what is the best approach for NU followers to maintain their religious traditions and practices (such as *maulid* celebrations)?
9. What do you believe is the most appropriate attitude for both supporters and opponents of *maulid* celebrations when faced with differences in understanding certain Islamic practices?

Appendix E

Interview protocol for *shalawat* performers

1. Personal background

1. Could you tell me about yourself (name, age, occupation, etc.)?
2. Do you live in this city?
3. Why and how did you become a *shalawat* performer? Could you explain that?
4. Could you elaborate on your career history? (How many *shalawat* performance groups have you worked with, etc.?)
5. What are your reasons for working with Habib Syech or other *shalawat* groups?
6. Is being a *shalawat* performer your main occupation? What are your other daily activities? Could you explain further?

2. Religious affiliation

1. Are you a member of any Islamic organisation in Indonesia (NU, Muhammadiyah, or others)?
2. If you are not a formal member of any specific religious organisation, do you culturally or religiously incline toward any of these organisations?

3. The evolution of *maulid* practices

1. When did you first attend a *maulid* celebration? (Was it during your childhood or teenage years?)
2. Have you observed any developments or changes in *maulid* celebrations since your childhood?
3. Could you describe the *maulid* performances from that time?
4. What are the differences between *maulid* celebrations then and now?
5. What can you tell me about *shalawat* performances that use large stages, are attended by thousands of participants, and are shared through new media? Is this different from what you experienced in your

younger years? When did this style of *shalawat* performance become popular?

6. In your experience, were Habib Syech and Ahbabul Mustofa the first groups to incorporate popular culture elements? Have you seen other *shalawat* performance groups? Could you describe them?

7. What are the differences between other *shalawat* performances and those of Habib Syech or Jamuro?

8. Which style of *maulid* do you prefer—the traditional style or the new one that incorporates elements of popular culture? Why?

9. Who typically attends *shalawat* performances? Are they mostly men, women, young people, adults, or elderly?

10. Could you describe the age range of people who attend *shalawat* performances?

11. Do you think participants prefer the *shalawat* performances like JAM or the traditional *maulid* celebrations held in mosques and homes? Could you elaborate on this?

12. What are young Muslims' opinions regarding *shalawat* performances? Do they enjoy them? Could you explain further?

4. *Maulid* criticism discourse

1. What do you know about the arguments for and against *maulid* celebrations?

2. What is your opinion about the religious ruling on celebrating *maulid*?

3. What do you think about claims that *maulid* is bid'a (innovation) and therefore forbidden?

4. Have you ever heard or read criticisms about *maulid* celebrations?

5. From what sources did you learn about these criticisms?

6. What is your understanding of the content of these criticisms?

7. How do *shalawat* performers defend themselves against *maulid* criticisms?

8. Do you know which Islamic groups these criticisms originate from?

9. What is your opinion about these Islamic groups? Could you elaborate?

10. Has your opinion about the religious ruling on *maulid* changed after hearing these criticisms? Could you explain why?

11. Do you think the discourse of *maulid* criticism affects the number of people who attend *shalawat* performances? Could you explain why?

12. How do Habib Syech and other *shalawat* performers (JAM or Jamuro) convince and maintain the participants' belief that *maulid* celebrations are permissible?

13. Do you think promoting *maulid* celebrations through *shalawat* performances (with popular culture elements) increases people's perception that *maulid* is permissible? Could you elaborate?

5. Islamic radicalism

1. What are your thoughts on the emergence of radical Islamic groups in Indonesia?
2. Could you provide examples of such groups?
3. Do you feel threatened by these radical groups? Why?
4. How do you address this threat?
5. Do you believe that *shalawat* performances can counter this threat? How?
6. How do *shalawat* gatherings address the influence of Islamic radicalism? Could you explain the strategies used?
7. Do you think people attend *shalawat* performances because they want to challenge Islamic radicalism?
8. In your opinion, are people who attend *shalawat* performances less likely to become involved with radical Islam? Why?
9. What makes you confident that *shalawat* participants will not become involved in radical activities?
10. What is the essence of *shalawat* performances that prevents participants from joining radical Islamic groups?
11. Why do you think people are attracted to radical Islamic teachings or activities? What about yourself?

6. Contestation between supporters and opponents of *maulid* celebrations

1. What is your opinion about preachers (such as Khalid Bassalamah) who preach against *maulid* celebrations?
2. What do you think about the recent incident where Khalid Bassalamah's sermon was disrupted by NU members in Sidoarjo, East Java? Do you agree with their actions? Why?
3. What would you do if you encountered Khalid Bassalamah or other preachers who oppose *maulid* celebrations? Would you act similarly to the NU members in Sidoarjo? Why?
4. What is your opinion regarding instances where people have disrupted *maulid* celebrations?
5. How would you react to such disruptions?
6. What would you do if you were participating in a *maulid* celebration and someone attempted to disrupt it? Why?

7. What actions do you take to preserve the tradition of *maulid* or *shalawat* performances?
8. In your opinion, what is the best approach for NU followers to maintain their religious traditions and practices (such as *maulid* celebrations)?
9. What do you believe is the most appropriate attitude for both supporters and opponents of *maulid* celebrations when faced with differences in understanding certain Islamic practices?

Appendix F

Data Management Plan

1. Research project

1.1 Title	**Shalawat Performance and Cultural Resistance: Transforming *Maulid* Celebrations in Contemporary Indonesia**
1.2 Abstract	This study examines how the traditional Islamic ritual of *maulid* (celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday) has been transformed into popular *shalawat* performances in Surakarta (Solo), Indonesia. The research focuses on how these performances function as forms of cultural resistance against both Salafi criticism of traditional practices and the influence of radical Islamic movements. Drawing on fieldwork conducted between 2017-2018, the study analyses how performers and participants navigate tensions between religious authenticity and contemporary cultural expression, creating what I term "public resilience" - a sustained capacity to preserve religious traditions while countering radical narratives. Using theoretical frameworks from discursive tradition, religious authority, and popular culture, the research examines five *shalawat* groups in Surakarta, including the influential Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf's Ahbabul Mustofa. This work contributes to our understanding of how traditional religious practices adapt to contemporary challenges while maintaining their spiritual essence and building community resilience against criticism.

Data life cycle: planning research

2. Organisational context

2.1 Researcher(s)	Muhammad As'ad
2.2 Research Institute	Philosophy, Theology, Religious Studies
2.3 Chair group	
2.4 Supervisor(s)	Karin van Nieuwkerk, Carl Sterkens, Noorhaidi Hasan
2.5 Funder	Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan)
2.6 Start date of the project	01-02-16
2.7 File name for this version of the DMP	2020-01-20_Data Management Plan
2.8 Date of this version of the DMP	20-01-2020

3. Data management roles

3.1 Who is involved in writing the DMP?	Muhammad As'ad
3.2 Who is collecting the data?	Muhammad As'ad
3.3 Who is processing and analysing the data?	Muhammad As'ad
3.4 Who is preserving and giving access to the data?	Muhammad As'ad
3.5 Who may want to reuse the data?	Nil
3.6 Are there any other roles that are relevant to the management of your research data? Please indicate the role(s) and person(s).	Nil

4. Costs

4.1 What type(s) of costs do you foresee for data management (both during and after research is completed) and what amount of cost do you estimate? How will these costs be covered?
Nil

Data life cycle: collecting data

5. Use of existing data

5.1 Do you make use of existing data?		Yes, go to 5.2	X	No, go to 6.1
5.2 What arrangements have been made regarding the use of these data?				

6. Collection process

6.1 Briefly describe your data collection process and indicate if you are collecting critical, sensitive and/or standard data?
The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with both performers and participants of *shalawat*. These interviews were recorded and later transcribed. I approached my interlocutors and requested individual interview sessions with them—following their *shalawat* performances for the performers and after their participation in the *shalawat* sessions for the participants. Given the sensitivity of the data, all identifying information will remain anonymous.

7. Informed consent

7.1 Will you need the informed consent of participants?	X	Yes, go to 7.2		No, go to 8

7.2 Briefly describe the content of your informed consent form and the accompanying information document.
Before each interview, I informed my interlocutors that their statements would be used for my dissertation. They provided explicit consent before the interviews were recorded. While most of them agreed to have their names included, the dissertation will maintain anonymity through pseudonymous citations to protect their identities. Consent was given verbally before or during the interview, as they preferred not to provide formal written consent.

8. Ethics committee

8.1 Do you need approval of the ethics committee?		Yes	X	No

9. Privacy

9.1 Are there any privacy issues that concern the collecting of the data? If so, please describe them and indicate how you will address them.

Yes, most of my interlocutors did not want their identities to be disclosed in the dissertation.

1. Transcripts use pseudonyms
2. Transcripts are stored on RU VPN.
3. The access to my data or transcribed only to Muhammad As'ad
4. The transcripts are used for the data analysis.

10. Security

10.1 How will you deal with security issues that concern the collecting of the data?

The data has so far been stored on RU VPN. Also see 9.1.

Data life cycle: processing and analysing data

11. Overview of research data

11.1 Please specify and describe for each data stage (a) what type of data is involved, (b) how the data is classified (critical, sensitive or standard), (c) the software you will use, and (d) the (expected) size of the data.

Data stage	a. Type of data	b. Classification	c. Software	d. Data size
Raw data	Audio files Interlocutor list	Sensitive	Recording software	
Processed data	PDF files	Sensitive	Word/AdobePdf/ Atlas.ti	
Analysed data	Data Set Code book	Sensitive	Atlas.ti	
Other	Data Management Plan	Standard	Text editor	

12. Storing during research

12.1 Indicate where the data will be stored physically and why you choose that location. And what arrangements will be made to organise the backup of your data during your research. NB When you are working with critical or sensitive data, you are limited in your choice of storage location.		
Type of data	**Storage location**	**Backup procedures**
Audio files	Phone and personal laptop, which is only for the recording of the interview.	Home drive
Transcripts	RU VPN	RU VPN
Analysed data	Personal laptop due to flexibility to work on any places	RU VPN & HomeDrive
Other data	DMP is stored on RU VPN	RU VPN.

13. Privacy

13.1 If applicable, how will you anonymise or pseudonymise personal data after collection?
Transcripts are written in pseudonyms Transcripts are stored on RU VPN. The access is only available to Muhammad As'ad

14. Structuring your data

14.1 Indicate a proposed folder and file naming structure, including versioning.
Folders: Fieldwork/interview transcript File naming structure: Yyyymmdd_Place_AnonymisedName.mp3/.pdf

15. Sharing data during research

15.1 Do you need to share your data with others during your research?		Yes, go to 15.2	X	No, go to 16.1

15.2 Are there any agreements made on how the data will be used and shared during your research?
No

15.3 Describe who will have access to the data and which access level applies.		
Type of data	**Research partner(s)**	**Access level**
nil	nil	nil
nil	nil	nil
nil	nil	nil

16. Documentation

16.1 How would you describe the content of your dataset?
Interviews and fieldnotes on *shalawat* performances and *maulid* celebrations in Surakarta, Indonesia. No quantitative data. All data are in .pdf files (text)

16.2 How would you describe the context of your dataset?

This dataset provides insights into the transformation of traditional Islamic practices in contemporary Indonesia, specifically focusing on *shalawat* performances and *maulid* celebrations in Surakarta. The research addresses the following key questions:
1. What are the main arguments of the pros and cons of the *maulid* celebration? How did the debate develop from the twentieth century Indonesia onwards until today?
2. How and why did the *maulid* celebration transform in the twenty-first century into a form of popular culture, and to what extent does popular culture play a role in the acceptance and popularity of *maulid* celebrations among young Muslims?
3. In how far did the maulid celebration become a form of cultural resistance against Islamic radicalism and provide the participants of the *maulid* with an alternative to Islamic radicalism?
4. How do the *shalawat* activists try to tackle *maulid* criticism and combat Islamic radicalism? What kind of alternative discourse and practice did they want to develop?
5. What are the motivations of the participants to attend the *shalawat* performance? To what extent were the participants affected by the performers' effort to create 'public resilience' against Islamic radicalism?
Data collection consisted of
 	
     1. Semi-structured interviews
     2. Ethnographic fieldnotes
 	
Data was collected by:
 	
     1. Formal and informal network of the researcher
     2. Formal networks such as local contact with local government of the research location.
     3. gender, ethnicity, but without age restrictions
 	
All data has been pseudonyms

16.3 How would you describe the structure of your dataset?
All data has been recorded with corresponding dates.

Data life cycle: preserving and giving access to data

17. Long-term storage

17.1 Please indicate whether you will store your data for the long term. If not, explain why.		
Type of data	**Long-term storage?**	**If no, why?**
Transcripts of interviews	Yes/	
Field notes	No	Personal consideration
	Yes/No	

17.2 Please indicate where you will store your data long term and what the minimum and maximum retention period will be.		
Type of data	**Repository**	**Retention period**
Transcripts of interviews	DANS	Min. 4 years.

17.3 Do you need to migrate your data to a format or formats other than they are in? If so, please provide details.
n/a

17.4 Do you need to store software and/or tools together with your data?		Yes, go to 17.5	X	No, go to 18

17.5 Describe what software and/or tools you will store together with your data
n/a

18. Metadata and documentation

18.1 Is the metadata of the archive of your choice rich enough?	X	Yes, go to 18.3		No, go to 18.2

18.2 If you want to add an additional metadata schema, describe which metadata you will add and how you are going to do this.
No

18.3 What documentation will you add to your data files?
No

19. Giving access to data

19.1 Are there any funder, journal or institutional requirements regarding the sharing of data after research? If so, please indicate what they are.
No

19.2 Are there any privacy or security issues that concern the sharing of data after research? If so, please describe them and indicate how you will address them.
No

19.3 Please indicate which access level you want to use, who controls the access to your data and if you are going to place an embargo period on the access of your data.			
Type of data	Access level	Access control	Embargo
n/a			

19.4 Who is the target audience for your data?
No

Summary

Introduction and Research Background

The central question of this dissertation is: in how far and in which ways do *shalawat* performances in contemporary Indonesia contest Islamic radicalism? The impetus for this research emerged from observing a remarkable transformation in Surakarta, where traditional *maulid* celebrations evolved into large-scale *shalawat* performances attracting thousands, particularly youth, despite intensive Salafi criticism.

The social context underlying this research is the intensification of criticism against the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*maulid*) following Indonesia's post-1998 democratic reforms. Salafi groups, bolstered by Saudi-funded *pesantren* and *madrasah*, condemn *maulid* celebrations as *bidʿa* (innovation) forbidden in Islam. Meanwhile, traditionalist communities, particularly the Bā ʿAlawī (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad from Hadramaut, Yemen), strive to preserve these practices through innovative cultural adaptations.

Previous scholarship has examined Islam and popular culture in Indonesia, yet few studies specifically analyse the transformation of *maulid* into *shalawat* performances as cultural resistance. Existing literature lacks comprehensive analysis of how traditional religious rituals adapt to contemporary challenges through popular culture elements and state institutional support. While scholarship on *maulid* remains focused on historical debates or royal court adaptations, and studies of Islamic popular culture examine various media platforms, this research offers analysis of the intersection between traditional ritual, cultural adaptation, and resistance to radical ideologies.

During fieldwork in Surakarta from July 2017 to February 2018, traditional religious practices were not merely surviving but thriving through innovative cultural expressions. This phenomenon occurred within a city known as a stronghold of Islamic radicalism, making the success of these adaptations particularly significant for understanding religious resilience in contemporary Indonesia.

Research Questions and Conceptual Framework

The central research question asks: In how far and in which ways do *shalawat* performances in contemporary Indonesia contest Islamic radicalism?

Five sub-questions structure this inquiry: (1) What are the main arguments of the pro and cons of the *maulid* celebration, and how did the debate develop from twentieth-century Indonesia onwards until today? (2) How and why did the *maulid* celebration transform in the twenty-first century into a form of popular culture, and to what extent does popular culture play a role in the acceptance and popularity of *maulid* celebrations among young Muslims? (3) In how far did the *maulid* celebration become a form of cultural resistance against Islamic radicalism and provide participants with an alternative to Islamic radicalism? (4) How do *shalawat* activists try to tackle *maulid* criticism and combat Islamic radicalism, and what kind of alternative discourse and practice did they want to develop? (5) What are the motivations of participants to attend the *shalawat* performance, and to what extent were participants affected by performers' efforts to create 'public resilience' against Islamic radicalism?

The theoretical framework employs: Talal Asad's discursive tradition, Muhammad Qasim Zaman's contestation of religious authority, John Storey's popular culture definitions, and Charles Hirschkind's counterpublic, which this study adapts into "public resilience." The research encompasses five *shalawat* groups in Surakarta: Ahbabul Mustofa (led by Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf), Jamuro, Jamuri, al-Hidayah, and Jampi Sanubari, with 20 performers and 40 participants interviewed.

The methodology combines historical analysis of twentieth and twenty-first century publications on *maulid* with ethnographic fieldwork conducted over nine months. This included participant observation at 28 *shalawat* performances and interviews with 20 performers and 40 participants. The combined approach is justified because historical analysis illuminates long-term shifts in Islamic discourse while ethnography captures how contemporary believers engage with new practices. Interview data was analysed using Atlas.ti software, employing open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Elaboration of Theoretical Framework

Asad's concept of discursive tradition primarily helps analyse how different Muslim groups authenticate religious practices based on their understanding of what is correct in Islam. According to Asad, when investigating Islamic practice, one should

begin from the concept of discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qurʾān and ḥadīth. In this study, the framework primarily analyses *maulid* criticism debates in Chapters 1-2, examining how reformists and Salafis contest the authenticity of *maulid* practices and compete to define orthodox practice.

The theory of contestation of religious authority explains how various Muslim groups, traditionalist (Shāfiʿī), reformist (Muhammadiyah), and Salafi, compete to define orthodoxy and shape public religious discourse. Zaman's framework demonstrates how religious authority is actively negotiated through educational institutions, media networks, and cultural practices, particularly during periods of social and political transformation.

This study introduces "public resilience" as a novel theoretical contribution that modifies Hirschkind's counterpublic concept. Unlike the Egyptian case where religious expressions opposed state narratives, Surakarta demonstrates cooperation between religious communities and state institutions through the *'Solo kota shalawat'* initiative. Public resilience describes how religious communities preserve traditions whilst cooperating with state institutions to build community strength rather than through opposition.

This concept captures contexts where religious performances adapt traditions and promote community strength with institutional backing. Unlike counterpublics developing in opposition to state power, public resilience shows how religious expression can harmonise with state interests while maintaining religious significance.

The festivalisation framework, following Anne Rasmussen's conception, understands religious praxis framed as public spectacle, mixing religious ritual and entertainment, dogma and information, piety and politics. This helps analyse how traditional *maulid* practices transform into engaging performances balancing piety with cultural appeal through municipal support.

Contextual Background and Regulatory Framework

Maulid criticism in Indonesia emerged through early twentieth-century reformist Muslims *(kaum muda)* challenging established practices of traditional scholars *(kaum tua).* Initial criticism focused on specific practices like *qiyām* (standing during celebrations) while reformists like Haji Rasul and Ahmad Dahlan suggested

modifications rather than complete rejection. Publications in journals like al-Imam and Suara Muhammadiyah document these early debates.

However, post-1998 political reforms reshaped Islamic discourse significantly. Democratisation allowed radical groups like Salafis, influenced by Saudi-funded educational institutions, to openly challenge local traditions. Driven by global Salafi networks and supported by Saudi funding, these groups established schools and boarding institutions in Indonesia, intensifying efforts to delegitimise local Islamic customs. This marks a shift from partial criticism to comprehensive condemnation of *maulid* celebrations.

Surakarta was selected as the research location due to its reputation as a centre for radical Islamic groups post-1998, yet simultaneously becoming the site where various *shalawat* groups innovate traditional *maulid* celebrations. The city earned notoriety for hosting radical Islamic groups and institutions that actively promote stricter interpretations of Islam. Within this environment, however, numerous *shalawat* groups emerged, transforming traditional *maulid* celebrations through music, staging, and nationalist themes.

The BāʿAlawī community plays a crucial role in preserving *maulid* traditions through practices at Surakarta's Riyadh Mosque, later inspiring Habib Syech's innovative approach to transforming *maulid* into popular performances. Their experience in defending and adapting traditional practices provides valuable insights into how religious traditions can be preserved whilst remaining relevant in contemporary society.

In 2013, the municipality declared 'Solo kota *shalawat*,' officially recognising these performances' role in reshaping Surakarta's image and promoting communal harmony. This declaration represents not just a change in religious practice but the development of cultural resistance against radical ideologies through festivalisation of traditional rituals.

Research Findings and Analysis

Chapter One focuses on the historical development of *maulid* criticism, examining theological arguments opposing *maulid* celebrations. The chapter identifies three primary theological objections used by Salafis: the requirement of authenticity, prohibition of innovation *(bidʿa)*, and condemnation of excessive veneration leading to idolatry. These principles form the foundation of Salafi critique, positioning *maulid* as unwarranted innovation lacking textual evidence from Qurʾān and ḥadīth.

The chapter traces how these debates emerged in twentieth-century Indonesia through reformist Muslims challenging traditional practices, leading to ongoing tensions between traditionalist groups like Nahdlatul Ulama and reformist movements like Muhammadiyah.

Chapter Two examines the re-emergence of *maulid* criticism in twenty-first century Indonesia, particularly following Suharto's fall in 1998. The chapter demonstrates how Salafism experienced rapid growth and diversification, with Purist Salafi movement leading systematic critique of *maulid* practices. Through analysis of print and online publications, the chapter reveals how Salafi arguments became more comprehensive and aggressive compared to earlier reformist criticism. The chapter also analyses Muhammadiyah's evolving stance, showing how the organisation shifted from tolerance to a more conservative position influenced by internal dynamics and Salafi pressure.

Chapter Three explores the dynamics within the Hadhrami community regarding *maulid* celebrations, focusing particularly on the BāʿAlawī who have played instrumental roles in preserving and transforming this tradition. The chapter examines how Sayyid and non-Sayyid groups developed distinct positions on *maulid*, with BāʿAlawī supporting the practice whilst Al-Irsyad historically questioned specific elements. Despite criticism, the chapter showcases how the BāʿAlawī community in Surakarta maintains their *maulid* traditions, particularly through weekly celebrations at Riyadh Mosque under Habib Anis's leadership, which later provided foundation for Habib Syech's innovations.

Chapter Four documents the transformation of *maulid* into popular culture through Habib Syech's innovative approach. Drawing on Storey's theoretical framework, the chapter explores how he developed a performance style attracting mass audiences through five strategic modifications: limiting *Simth al-Durar* recitation, adding percussion instruments, using modern musical instruments in recordings, employing stages and sound systems, and utilising modern technology for distribution. The chapter demonstrates how this popularisation serves to counter *maulid* criticism whilst creating spaces for collective religious expression that combine traditional practices with contemporary staging and musical arrangements.

Chapter Five uncovers two developments: the emergence of groups following Habib Syech's model and Surakarta's declaration as the 'city of *shalawat*.' Through observing five *shalawat* groups (Jamuro, Jamuri, al-Hidayah, and Jampi Sanubari), the chapter highlights their connections to Habib Syech's approach whilst

developing distinctive methods for balancing religious tradition with popular appeal. The chapter then traces how municipal authorities embraced *shalawat* performances to transform the city's image from a centre of radicalism to one emphasising peace and harmony, leading to the festivalisation of religious ritual serving cultural, political, economic, and entertainment purposes.

Chapter Six details how *shalawat* groups counter both *maulid* criticism and radical Islamic influence through developing alternative discourses. The chapter examines performers' strategies using both indirect and direct methods in sermons. Indirect approaches include storytelling, advising participants to ignore criticism, and cautioning against radical preachers. Direct methods employ textual evidence from Qurʾān and ḥadīth to legitimise *maulid* practices. In building public resilience, performers cultivate both pious and patriotic sensibilities—the former centring on inward-focused spirituality contrasting with confrontational rhetoric of radical groups, the latter emerging through nationalistic songs, particularly *'NKRI Harga Mati'* and *'Yalal Wathan.'*

Chapter Seven explores participants' perspectives through examining their motivations and responses to performers' efforts building public resilience. The chapter reveals three key motivations for attendance: piety, entertainment, and social interaction, confirming *shalawat* performances serve as 'pious entertainment.' Participants develop various strategies responding to *maulid* criticism: ignoring criticism, questioning critics' knowledge, acknowledging critics' rights, or rejecting criticism entirely. Almost all participants (39 of 40) believe *shalawat* performances effectively counter radical influences through community cohesion, non-violence teaching, emotional connections, and Indonesian nationalism. The analysis demonstrates how repeated engagement cultivates resilient communities capable of resisting extremist narratives whilst upholding moderate Islamic interpretations.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *shalawat* performances in Surakarta have successfully transformed traditional *maulid* celebrations through integrating popular cultural elements, professional staging, music, and nationalist themes, whilst maintaining traditional ritual elements. This adaptation enables them to effectively counter Salafi criticism and radical Islamic influences through both aesthetic appeal and theological arguments.

The cooperation between religious communities and state institutions through the 'Solo kota *shalawat*' initiative reveals a distinctive form of public resilience contrasting with oppositional counterpublics observed in other Islamic contexts. Rather than creating spaces of opposition, these performances develop domains where religious and state interests productively converge whilst preserving religious expression integrity.

Key findings include: (1) The transformation process involves five strategic modifications making traditional practices accessible to contemporary audiences; (2) Performers employ both indirect and direct strategies in sermons to counter criticism and build alternative discourses; (3) Participants demonstrate mixed motivations (piety, entertainment, social interaction) confirming the 'pious entertainment' concept; (4) Community resilience emerges through regular participation in performances that cultivate moderate religious sensibilities naturally resistant to radical narratives; (5) Municipal support through festivalisation creates sustainable frameworks for traditional practice preservation.

Theoretically, this research introduces "public resilience" as a refinement of Hirschkind's counterpublic framework for contexts where religious expressions cooperate with state institutions. This contribution deepens understanding of discursive tradition and contestation of religious authority by illustrating cases where moderate Islam flourishes through cultural innovation, popular appeal, and governmental support.

Empirically, the research provides detailed documentation of *maulid* evolution into *shalawat* performances, integrating music, staging, and nationalism. It enriches literature by linking theoretical insights on popular culture, festivalisation, and Islamic popular media with concrete fieldwork evidence from Surakarta.

Practically, findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, religious leaders, and civil society actors navigating tensions between religious expression and security concerns. Encouraging cultural practices such as *shalawat* performances can serve as effective counters to radicalism by offering appealing alternatives rather than confrontation. However, the study acknowledges inherent tensions in state-sponsored religious expressions, as selective promotion of 'acceptable' Islamic expressions inevitably privileges certain interpretations whilst potentially marginalising others.

The research contributes to scholarly debates on religious adaptation, authority, and cultural resilience in contemporary Muslim contexts whilst providing practical

understanding of how communities navigate between traditional religious practices and contemporary challenges through embracing cultural adaptation whilst preserving spiritual significance. This case exemplifies how communities successfully balance traditional religious practices with contemporary social and political dynamics, offering compelling alternatives to rigid puritanical interpretations through innovative synthesis of devotion, culture, and civic responsibility.

Samenvatting

Deze studie onderzoekt hoe uitvoeringen van *shalawat* in Surakarta (Solo), Indonesië, hedendaagse vieringen van de *maulid* transformeren tot populaire culturele uitingen, en hoe deze uitvoeringen kritiek vanuit Salafistische en radicale islamitische groepen betwisten. De centrale onderzoeksvraag luidt: in hoeverre en op welke manieren zijn de *shalawat*-optredens in Surakarta populaire transformaties van traditionele *maulid*-vieringen, en hoe vormen zij een uitdaging voor de kritiek van Salafi-groepen en voor radicale islamitische invloeden?

Dit onderzoek toont aan dat *shalawat*-uitvoeringen in Surakarta traditionele *maulid*-vieringen effectief hebben getransformeerd door devotionele praktijken te combineren met eigentijdse muziek, professionele podiumpresentatie en nationalistische elementen. Deze optredens zijn een antwoord op de Salafi-kritiek door hun brede culturele aantrekkingskracht en populariteit, en ze dagen radicale invloeden uit door vrome en patriottische sentimenten te promoten. Met hun innovatieve combinaties demonstreren performers de publieke veerkrach ('public resilience') van religieuze tradities. Religieuze gemeenschappen behouden hun tradities door ze anders vorm te geven, en ze worden daarin ondersteund door lokale overheidsinstellingen. Zo bieden ze een overtuigend alternatief voor strengere en puriteinse interpretaties van de islam.

Surakarta biedt hiervoor een belangrijke context, vooral sinds de politieke hervormingen na 1998. Radicale Salafi-groepen kregen na 1998 meer vrijheid om strenge islamitische interpretaties publiekelijk te promoten. Maar ondanks de opkomst van deze radicale groepen ontwikkelden *shalawat*-groepen nieuwe vormen van *maulid*-vieringen. Ze verwerkten muziek, professionele podiumpresentaties en nationalistische thema's in hun uitvoeringen. Daarmee maakten ze traditionele rituelen toegankelijk voor nieuwe en brede doelgroepen, vooral jongeren. In 2013 erkende de stad Solo deze ontwikkelingen met het initiatief *'Solo kota shalawat,'* waarmee ze de rol van *shalawat*-uitvoeringen voor de versterking van maatschappelijke harmonie onderstreepte.

Vier theoretische kaders vormden de basis van dit onderzoek: Talal Asads concept van discursieve traditie; Muhammad Qasim Zamans theorie over betwiste religieuze autoriteit; John Storey's concept van populaire cultuur; en Charles Hirschkinds concept van 'counterpublics'. In tegenstelling tot Hirschkinds studie in Egypte blijkt uit dit onderzoek dat *shalawat* in Indonesië niet tegenover de staat staat, maar

juist steun krijgt van lokale overheden. Dit heeft geleid tot de ontwikkeling van het concept 'public resilience': een collectieve veerkracht die eerder samenwerking promoot dan reactionaire oppositie.

Dit proefschrift combineert historisch onderzoek met etnografisch veldwerk. De historische analyse geeft inzicht in de ontwikkeling van kritiek op *maulid*-vieringen sinds de vroege twintigste eeuw. Vanaf 1998 versterkten Salafi-groepen, geïnspireerd door wereldwijde netwerken en gesteund door Saoedische financiering, hun kritiek en wezen ze *maulid* volledig af als *bid'a* (onrechtmatige innovatie). *Shalawat*-performers reageerden hierop met nieuwe culturele strategieën: ze gebruikten populaire muziek, patriottische thema's en grootschalige evenementen als indirect antwoord op radicale kritiek.

De historische analyse wordt in dit proefschrift gecombineerd met etnografisch veldwerk. Tussen medio 2017 en begin 2018 werden 28 *shalawat*-uitvoeringen van bekende groepen zoals Ahbabul Mustofa (Habib Syech), Jamuro, Jamuri, al-Hidayah en Jampi Sanubari bezocht. Er werden 60 interviews gehouden met performers, deelnemers en lokale autoriteiten. De combinatie van historische en etnografische methoden laten toe om zowel lange termijn-veranderingen in religieus gezag als directe ervaringen van lokale gemeenschappen te beschrijven en analyseren.

De resultaten laten zien hoe *shalawat*-uitvoeringen traditionele *maulid*-rituelen aanpassen door middel van populaire culturele elementen, waaronder professionele podiumproducties, muziek en nationalistische thema's, terwijl de spirituele essentie behouden blijft. De culturele aanpassingen functioneren als een subtiele vorm van weerstand tegen radicale islamitische kritiek door zowel esthetische aantrekkelijkheid als theologische legitimiteit te bieden. Bovendien toont het initiatief *'Solo kota shalawat'* hoe lokale autoriteiten en religieuze gemeenschappen succesvol samenwerken bij het bevorderen van gematigde en nationalistische interpretaties van islam.

Dit onderzoek levert drie belangrijke bijdragen aan het wetenschappelijke debat. Ten eerste toont het hoe ideeën over religieuze autoriteit bijdragen aan religieuze praktijken en hoe deze weerstand bieden tegen radicalisme. Ten tweede verbreedt het de theoretische discussie over counterpublics door het concept 'public resilience' te introduceren. Ten derde levert het empirische inzichten over hoe populaire cultuur religieuze tradities kan versterken en maatschappelijk draagvlak voor een gematigde islam kan vergroten.

Samenvattend biedt dit onderzoek een diepgaande bijdrage aan de wetenschappelijke discussies over religieuze autoriteit, culturele weerstand en publieke veerkracht, en laat het zien hoe religieuze gemeenschappen tradities behouden en tegelijk vernieuwen om extremistische invloeden tegen te gaan.

Acknowledgements

Although this dissertation marks the conclusion of one stage of my scholarly journey, it should be regarded as a beginning rather than an end. I am fully aware of its limitations and therefore welcome thoughtful critique and constructive suggestions. Such engagement will be vital for refining this work and shaping the directions of my future research.

Curriculum Vitae

Muhammad As'ad was born in Sidoarjo, Indonesia, on December 1, 1982. He holds a B.A. in Islamic History (Humaniora) from UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya and M.A. in Islamic Studies from Leiden University. For his M.A., he wrote a thesis entitled *Religion and Politics in Indonesia: Attitudes and Influences of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) on the General Elections*. As'ad has been teaching at a university in Jombang, East Java. He is currently establishing the Kayangan Learning Institute, an educational initiative that provides opportunities for children and youth from less privileged backgrounds to study languages and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), helping them to pursue higher levels of education.

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