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Publication Date

2019

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Sholawat and the Sounds of Islam Nusantara:
Music and Religious Authority in Contemporary Indonesia

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Ethnomusicology

by

Albert Nasser Agha

2019

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Sholawat and the Sounds of Islam Nusantara:
Music and Religious Authority in Contemporary Indonesia

by

Albert Nasser Agha

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor A.J. Racy, Co-Chair

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Through ethnographic fieldwork, this dissertation examines the culture of *sholawat* in Indonesia, a festive public event marked by a combination of prayer songs and sermons among Muslims. In this setting, the style of Indonesian Islam, what Indonesians label as *Islam Nusantara*, is represented through the unique engagement of *sholawat* performers through various forms of institutional affiliations. The research locates a Sufi-inspired Islamic revival scene that is representative of a modern and synergetic Islamic ethos, which Indonesian Muslims believe is an ideal model for the Muslim world. Several institutional interests develop from within this milieu, namely the pragmatic involvement in religious education the government undertook at the turn of the 21st century. Because of such actions, a whole generation of individuals embrace and develop artistic religious expressions in various ways. Consequently,

more Indonesian citizens are allowed to enter public platforms that artistically mediate religious authority, traditional discourses, and contemporary religious sentiments. The subjects of the ethnography are seen as articulators of the founding energy of the Islamic *umma*. The fieldwork was conducted in Central Java, particularly in the cities of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, both of which are known to host a variety of examples of this practice.

The dissertation of Albert Nasser Agha is approved.

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2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The work for this dissertation was made possible by the help of so many remarkable individuals and institutions, and the encouragement of my friends and family members to whom I want to express my gratitude here. For financial support, fellowships and grants provided by the Herb Alpert School of Music, UCLA Graduate Division, U.S Department of Education, and the Max H. Gluck Foundation were all important sources that allowed me to carry on this research. The FLAS program gave me the opportunity to learn Bahasa Indonesia while I was a masters student at Northern Illinois University, and a Ph.D. student at UCLA. The Gluck program at UCLA provided not only financial support, but also an opportunity to give back to the elderly and underprivileged communities of Los Angeles, an experience that was personally rewarding. I am grateful for that experience as it taught me about the value music can play in the lives of struggling individuals. The Herb Alpert Foundation donors were tremendously supportive in their commitments to help students in need of financial help succeed in the program and I am also grateful for their support. There are so many individuals who have inspired my passion the work I do and the individual I strive to become. Prior to coming to UCLA, my professors at Northern Illinois were instrumental in helping me gain foundational knowledge in music and ethnomusicology. I want to thank Dr. Jui-Ching Wang for believing in me and for guiding me through all the challenges and hurdles of graduate school. She was not only a reason why I chose to pursue ethnomusicology, but also role model for any educator. I Also want to thank Dr. Brian Hart, Dr. Janet Hathaway, Dr. Edward Klonoski, Fareed Haque, and Patricia Henry, all of whom were tremendously helpful at NIU. I also want to thank the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois for their support and the opportunity to demonstrate my research and knowledge of ethnomusicology and Indonesia in the classroom.

At UCLA my professors and classmates in the ethnomusicology program were all remarkable individuals in their own right and I am very fortunate to have met all of them. Even prior to being at UCLA, Dr. A.J Racy inspired me and many before me to pursue a life of *tarab* and an appreciation to learning and teaching Arab music in the United States. His mentorship and dedication to music paves the way for future scholars in the area. Dr. Roger Savage taught me how to think critically and theoretically about my work, and my committee members, professors Mark Kligman, Munir Beken and Jeffery Guhin all provided great input and helpful critique to the final draft of this dissertation. I also want to thank Cheryl Keyes, Chi Li, Steven Loza, Suhail Kaspar, Rahul Neuman, Julia Wijaya, Timothy Rice, Helen Rees, and Timothy Taylor for their valuable instruction and the knowledge and guidance they have provided. My cohort and graduate colleagues in the department were like a family to me, and my experience at UCLA would not have been the same without them. Special thanks to Mehrenegar Rostami, Gabe Lavin, Otto Stuparitz, AJ Kluth, Alex Rodriguiz, Eric Schmidt, Darci Sprengel, Payam Yousef, Farzad Amoozegar, Kristina Nielson, Sami Asmar, Logan Clark, John Widman, Georgia Broughton, and Benjamin Doleac. In addition, Bredna Galvez, Sandra McKerroll, Donna Armstrong, Barbara Racy, and Kathleen Hood were all helpful in multiple ways throughout my studies. Special thanks to friends, professors, and colleagues outside of UCLA, especially Anne Rasmussen, Kay Campbell, Bassam Saba, Simon Shaheen, Karim Nagi, Essam Rafea, and Sven Hansen.

The fieldwork portion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the visa sponsorship that was granted by the Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta. Thanks to the administration at UIN and some of the members of al-Mizan for their logistical support, especially Fajar Pamugkas, Ranu Nada, Muhammad Aris Asror, Faiz Selamat Santoso,

Muhammad Asad, Teguh Moull, Nida Zahwa and Gus Sholeh Ilham. These individuals played a big role in paving the way into learning about the *sholawat* scene around the community of Yogyakarta. Special thanks to Abdul Gani Abdullah for his help and the knowledge he provided, as well as the support of al-Jamiah members, especially Afnan Rahmaturrehman, Muhammad Rizal, and Habib Manshur who became very close friends and introduced me to the *orkes gambus* scene in Yogyakarta. These individuals treated me like their own brother and allowed me to perform in various celebrations around the community. Because of social media, I continue to stay in touch with them and look forward to revisiting the field at some point in the not so distant future.

Last but not least, is my family. They have been tremendously supportive and caring throughout all the highs and lows of my life. My mother is a role model to me not only as a parent, but also for how a caring, supportive, and loving individual can be. She has endured many difficult struggles as a single mother while raising my sister and me from a young age. Her supportive family, especially my Aunt May, have also been tremendously helpful throughout my life. I want to extend my love and gratitude to my grandmother Margaret, my uncles Johnny and Tony, Uncle Zaim, my cousins Eva, Eli, and Emma, Maggie, Chrissy, Ashley, and Jenny, as well as their families. And finally, my wife Allie, whose dedication to our marriage and support was a significant reason for my success. As her care and attention now shift to being a mother to our little newborn daughter, Lilian, I extend my deepest love to both.

Notes on Transliteration and Translation

The text of this dissertation uses many words written in Bahasa Indonesia and transliterations of Arabic. Indonesian and English letters are synonymous and pronounced similarly. There are many loanwords crossing over between Arabic and Indonesian adding to the complexity of what counts as an Indonesian or an Arabic word. At certain times throughout the text, I deliberately elucidate the root of the word as it is found in its original Arabic form to alleviate any confusions. For example, for a word such as *sholawat*, the text will explain "*sholawat*" (derived from the Arabic word *salawat*). Arabic words are also written out without the diacritical symbols, and instead replaced with apostrophes and hyphens where needed. Additionally, only non-English terms are italicized, with the exception to proper nouns.

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- 2017 "In Passing" Collaboration with Gabe Lavin and Dave Wilson
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Selected performance reviews

- 2017 Shepherd Express: "Early Music Now's 'Mediterranean Christmas'"
- 2011 The Northern Star: "Sounds of the Near East"
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- 2012 "A Rationale for Teaching World Music: The Middle Eastern Music Ensemble at Northern Illinois University: Observations and Analysis, NIU

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Purple, green, and blue laser lights cast about an audience of thousands, arms outstretched waving lit cell phones and the flags of Indonesia and Nahdatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest Islamic organization. On the main stage were six men dressed in traditional attire and singing in call and response. While I only heard voices and percussion (no instruments), there was enough gain and reverb to carry these sounds through entire neighborhoods. A few meters away and directly facing the stage was the *rebanna* percussion ensemble, a group of eight young men tasked with the role of playing in alternating and interlocking patterns, while the men on stage sang poems in reverence to the Prophet.¹ Hearing the drummers and their mastery of syncopation reminded me of gamelan performers in terms of their accuracy and accommodation to one another. However, I was nowhere near a traditional gamelan performance. This was a *sholawat* event held on the outskirts of Yogyakarta in Central Java in the summer of 2016, and attended by thousands of excited young men and women. At some point during this event, which I was told can take up to three hours to conclude, the singing and drumming stopped.

It is now time for the sermon, the *nasihat*, which is given by one of the same individuals that were just singing with the *rebanna* drummers. Most of the sermons during the *sholawat* were in Javanese and *Bahasa Indonesia* (the official language of Indonesia), with Arabic interjecting only in the form of references to Quranic phrases, traditional quotes, or relevant passages from the *hadith* (the collection of sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). To my surprise, some of these men were not only competent singers but also skilled public orators, with deep

¹ The rebanna is a frame-drum that resembles a large size tambourine, often stretched from goat skin and laced with thick cymbals.

knowledge of religious discourse and the intricate exegesis of Islamic scripture.² At this moment the atmosphere is transformed from one of amplified song and rhythms to speech and contemplative silence.³ Everyone respected and loved Habib Syech, one of Indonesia's most popular *sholawat* figures, and the person giving the *nasihat* in this event. Behind him and the rest of the men seated on stage was a banner that read "*Bersholawat Bersama Habib Syech Bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf*," which means "[doing] *sholawat* with Habib Syech Bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf."⁴

A beautiful solo Quranic recitation by an SMA female student followed the *nasihat* of Habib Syech. The attendees, most of whom were in their mid-twenties and early thirties, listened attentively, embodying a sense of reverence through their postures and body language (*khushu'*), listening to every Quranic verse (*ayah*), to every deep breath, and to the virtuosic and elaborate performance of the reader (*qari'a*). Despite her young age, she was fairly competent in the proper execution of the *maqam* melodic contour (*sayer*), and the pronunciation of classical Arabic text (*fus'ha*).⁵ The development of Quranic recitation among children and young adults, male and female, has progressed significantly under the expansion of Islamic schools (*madrasas*) and the state support of educational and cultural institutions.⁶ This has also allowed the Indonesian youth to not only master the classical Arabic text and its pronunciation, but also the opportunity to intone that text through the *maqam*. After the recitation, which lasted about fifteen minutes, the

² The Indonesian word *nasihat* is derived from the Arabic word *nasihah*, which means to advise or to direct. In Arabic, the word *khutba* is most commonly used. The Indonesian language has many loanwords adopted from Arabic but may have minor differences in their pronunciation or connotation.

³ The *Habib* is a title given to Indonesians of Arab origin from the *shurafa* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad). Although there are *shurafa* living across the globe, the *shurafa* of Java have roots in Hadramout, a region in Yemen, and are associated mainly with the Ba'alawi Sufis of Yemen. The Habibs' religious nobility and financial success gives them considerable social power and public recognition among the religious community and the Indonesian public.

⁴ The *ber-* is an adverb that transforms the noun *sholawat* (prayers) to an active verb *bersholawat* (doing the *sholawat*).

⁵ The *maqam* is the modal musical system of the Middle East, North Africa, Turkey, and several Central Asian countries.

⁶ The *mujawad* and *muratal* style were explained thoroughly in previous works (see Nielson 2003, Rasmussen 2002).

singing resumed in praise of the Prophet with the live accompaniment of the *rebanna* percussion ensemble.



Figure 1.1: A group of *rebanna* players seated in the front and facing the stage during a *sholawat* event.

The men on stage were singing verses from a book called *Simtu Durar*, which is a *mawlid*. The audience was also involved in the songs by responding or singing along with the men on stage. The *mawlid*—which I will discuss further in the next chapter—is a poetic genre containing the eulogies and devotional Sufi-inspired reverence to the Prophet Muhammad. It commemorates the birth of the Prophet (*al-Mawlid al-Nabawi*), celebrated throughout the Muslim world. Although the *mawlid* is not the only text of the *sholawat*, it is a significant contributor to much of what is sung and recited during the event. Despite the signing, the hand waving, and excitement of the audience members, I was told by the person seated next to me that not everyone understood the meaning of Arabic texts. Arabic in Indonesia is understood as the

language of *Allah* and Islam, preserved for religious performance, and was not used in public discourses or informal conversations. However, it is not unreasonable to presume that the sound of Arabic is internalized, to a certain extent, by all Indonesian Muslims since it is directly involved in the routine of daily prayer (*salat*).⁷ Nonetheless, the meaning of *ayat* (Quranic verses), and the discourse of the *hadith* (Prophet life and examples) is constantly subject to a translation from Arabic, and reinterpretation to Indonesian or Javanese through acts like the *nasihat*. Hearing Arabic takes precedence over listening to the discursive meaning of a religious text written in the classical Arabic language (*fus'ha*). Thus, the symbolism provided by the sound of Arabic, the intonation of the *maqam*, and the rhetorical or poetic expressions present in the *sholawat* provide Indonesians with a sense of the divine (*hess ilahi*).

Situating the *Sholawat* in Indonesia

The phenomenon I highlight above—the *sholawat* (derived from the Arabic word *salawat*)—is a celebratory event that combines musical and oratorical performances. Both actions—artistic and expressive in their substance—are vehicles mediating the power and legitimacy of various individuals and groups with claims to religious authority in contemporary Indonesian society, the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy. As individuals in this particular context, I am specifically referring to the Indonesian "Habib," a religious figure whose prestige and nobility is closely tied to his extended kinship to the Prophet Muhammad (what is known as a *sharif* or *sayyed*). The Habib's public persona has relied on the tradition of *sholawat*—with a historic canon of Sufi-inspired literary genres and public speaking skills—to continue to legitimize the role and social status of *shurafaa'* (plural of *sharif*) in Indonesia. The Habib relies

⁷ Islam prescribe that the daily *salat* routine must be exclusively recited in Arabic. In the *salat*, the person praying must memorize certain Arabic verses from the Quran.

not only on the tradition provided to him by Sufis of the past but continues to adapt to new literary and musical expressions revering the Prophet Muhammad. As a diaspora of Arab-Indonesians of religious nobility, the Hadhrami musical, and literary expressions play a crucial role in how the *sholawat* are developed and performed in Indonesia today.⁸

The groups with religious authority I refer to are the socio-religious organizations—hierarchical and politically active—whose authority is rooted in the wide public support for the ideology of Islam Nusantara (The Indonesian "brand" of Islam). I am careful here not to conflate the institutional and the organizational and stress the distinction between an organization like the revivalist Indonesian movement Nahdatul Ulama, and the institution of Indonesian Islam known as Islam Nusantara. The latter is a broad *crescive* institution, an abstract entity formed out of the customs and habits of Indonesians throughout the history of Islam in the region.⁹ Nahdatul Ulama is an organized entity with a set of objectives and a defined parameter of supporters operating under the ideology and brand of Islam Nusantara. The lines can be blurred between what we can consider a formal institution and a formally governed organization like NU. Nonetheless, I want to underscore that when I refer to the institutional, I am more specifically referring to organizations under the institution of Islam Nusantara, which has many types of organizational entities embedded underneath it (educational, political, cultural, private). Islam Nusantara is the abstract idea that refers to the socio-cultural milieu in which these organizations operate.

⁸ Indonesian culture—in light of a 20th century global Islamic revival scene—was slowly able embrace the religious nobility of the Habibs and safeguard the institutions that promote their practices and agendas.

⁹ By "crescive" I mean a type of institution that is not officially enacted or instituted and has risen spontaneously out of certain habits, interests, and goals. For example, the "medical community" is an abstract entity, a *crescive* institution that has many types of affiliations pertaining to the medical field. On the other hand, the AMA, or the American Medical Association, was instituted in the late 19th century as a well-defined association with a certain set of objectives and actions.

The individual and institutional religious entities are two sides of the same coin, forming a reciprocal relationship of power between two types of authority that are part of the central theoretical theme in this dissertation: *enunciative* and *institutional* Islamic authority. The enunciative authority in this dichotomy pertains to the discourses that enable people to organize and form an institutional entity to exercise authority. To provide a simple example to clarify this point, consider the enunciative authority founded in the written constitution of the United States, and the institutional authority of the body of congress that corresponds to its implementation and amendment. While adapting these terms, which are derived from Paul Ricoeur's work on authority (Ricoeur 2001), the authority acquired from individuals like the Habib as enunciative in the sense that he is involved in the reproduction and development of *religious discourse* through his public commentary and religious rhetoric. He rearticulates, reorients, and mediates an already existing body of a previous authoritative discourse rooted either in Quranic scripture, the *hadith*, or other literary religious genres found throughout Islamic history. The *sholawat*, as I will argue in this dissertation, is one of the avenues or platforms that bodies of institutional authority deploy to mediate an enunciative authority in the public sphere. This enunciative and institutional cooperation, manifested in such practice as the *sholawat* in this example, is examined to understand how religious authority continues to thrive in contemporary Islamic societies. Through the ethnographic work conducted for this dissertation, I comment on the dynamics between both forms of authority under the auspice of one of the most successful Islamic-majority democracies in modern times.

Scholars of Islamic studies traditionally focused on the normative framework of religious authority; namely the authority founded on the continuous production and amendment of commentaries and *fatwas* by Islamic scholars, the *ulama*. As producers of religious discourse, the authority of the *ulama*—in broader terms—is embedded in the institutional authority of Islamic

scholarship and education. As literary genres, these commentaries and *fatwas* are authoritative sources because they engage in legitimizing Islamic beliefs and actions through a process of argumentation and critique (*naq'd*). As Muhammad Zaman notes, the language knowledge of Arabic and the ability to use the correct rhetorical styles in the commentaries give the *'alim* a reputation of legitimacy and authenticity (Zaman 2002). But this discourse remains codified knowledge to the general public and exclusive to the circles of religious intellectuals and *ulama* with deep knowledge of religious discourse written in Arabic texts. It remains bound to the various forms of mediation (print, media, internet, live performances) and those in charge of mediating in the public sphere (teachers, politicians or political parties, scholars, celebrities). Additionally, Zaman correctly observes that the *ulama* in modern times have benefited greatly from advancements in the technologies of print and media because their writings circulated a wider global audience. At the same time, this has also made them susceptible to more refutation and criticism by a wider audience with access to various forms of religious knowledge and education. Because of this, the "special claims of the *'ulama* as the guardians and authoritative interpreters of religious text came to be disputed" by a larger class of religious and academic intellectuals (ibid:54). Here we see that enunciative authority is not necessarily bound to a particular institutional arrangement and agency, and can be subject to differing, and often conflicting, interpretation of enunciative sources. It remains a matter of consensus as to what forms of institutional authority gain the most legitimate representation of the enunciative.

The linguistic barrier that non-Arab speaking Muslim-majority countries face can certainly exacerbate the problem of reliably mediating Islamic authority since the public must completely rely on the *'alim's* (singular of *ulama*) competency of Arabic to articulate his knowledge back into the "mother tongue" of local populations. Remarkably, this is not only a problem of non-Arab speaking populations but also for Arab Muslim countries in the Middle

East and North Africa. The platform of the *khutba* in Arab society has been examined thoroughly in the work of Charles Hirschkind in his book *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (Hirschkind 2008). This important contribution to the anthropology of Islam explores the ethico-political effects of the cassette sermons on Egyptian society and the formation of what Hirschkind calls "Islamic counterpublics" within the Islamic revival scene of the second half of the 20th century. Egyptian society during this revival scene has benefited greatly from the technology of recording and media, and the Friday *khutba* (*khutbat al-Jum'a*) became available for circulation and consumption in ways that had never existed before. Even more fundamentalist organizations, like the Islamic Brotherhood, benefited from utilizing such mediums and sought to promote, record, and distribute these sermons to the public. Facing an increasingly secular global milieu, Egyptians of subordinate social status became participants—through listening—in "alternative publics" that enabled them to express their opposition to social inequalities, political corruption, the rising tides of secularism, and a Western capitalist global culture. This comes amid an increasingly improvised Egyptian population prone to religious fundamentalism and the embrace of radical social ideas. But Hirschkind opposes the notion that these cassette sermons radicalize individuals, rather, he attributes their significance to citizens involved in a habit of "self-fashioning," contesting state policy and mobilizing the public opinion based on preexisting moral codes and religious prescriptions (ibid). While building upon Hirschkind research, I locate a vastly different context of this revival scene through the *sholawat* I observe in Indonesia and reveal how individuals and institutions mediate Islamic authority in radically different ways. This speaks to the differing conceptions of the Islamic revival movement and the notion that it exhibits a "contingent and shifting constellation of ideas, practices, and associational forms" (Hirschkind 2008:206).

The amalgamation of a rich—artistically driven—Sufi tradition (one which is otherwise deemed on the periphery of mainstream Islam in the Arab world), and a vibrant indigenous tradition of Islamic proselytizing (*da'wah*) in Southeast Asia, are factors that contribute to this radically different context of mediating religion. Additionally, the engagement of the *shurafa'* in the Indonesian *da'wah*, as opposed to say the religious preachers of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, gives the Indonesian *da'wah* further legitimacy in the *umma* due to the traditional authority that the *shurafa'* hold in the eyes of Muslims. The Islamic revival that began globally in the 1970s did have a significant presence in Indonesia (Hefner 1997, Muzaffar 1986), but it directly opposed the Sufism traditionally utilized in spreading the Indonesian *da'wah* throughout the history of the country. Julia Howell argues that "Sufi inspired forms of piety can be seen as complementary with 'outer' expressions of Muslim religiosity, being practices as additions to or enhancement of the fulfillment of the minimal requirements of the faith" (Howell 2001:702). Indonesia's revivalist movement, although labeled as scripturalist and rejecting Sufism as idolatrous distractions to the pure faith, continues to survive today thanks to the intensification of religious festivalization as seen through the *sholawat*. Although this observation was made by previous scholars in the area, the practice of *sholawat* itself, and the significance of the Habib figure has been overlooked in previous observations.



Figure 1.2: Thousands of attendees holding up lit cellphones during a *sholawat* song by Habib Syech

The *musical* component of the *sholawat* revolves around the Sufi-inspired poetry often revering the Prophet Muhammad as the ideal example for the followers of Islam. This message naturally resonates with many Muslims across the world and is not unique to the *sholawat*. But for Indonesia specifically, reverence to the Prophet is of particular importance to the Habib figure because of a historic relationship between the Ba'alawi *Sada* in Yemen and their diaspora in Southeast Asia. Despite its status as a diaspora, the Arab-Indonesian community, and specifically the Ba'alawi Hadhrami *Sada* involved in the *sholawat* scene have had tremendous success and a rapid rise to popularity in recent years through the culture of *sholawat* they helped to foster. This gave a different face to the revivalist scene as one that is implicitly Sufi-inspired. In chapter 4 I discuss this point while focusing on Habib Syech Bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf, one of the most popular *sholawat* figures in Indonesia today. As we will see in a later chapter, what unifies the lyrics of the *sholawat*, either in Habib Syech's work or others like him, is a spirit of reverence to the Prophet.

Although I have stated that the *sholawat* are Sufi-inspired in terms of their literary origin, they are by no means part of a Sufi movement. Those involved in its practice and listening today do not necessarily identify themselves as Sufi masters or individuals who partake in what is known as *tassawuf*.¹⁰ However, there is an important connection between Sufism and Indonesia that must be underscored here to understand why Sufism plays a large role in Indonesia's Islam. The history of Islam in Java begins with the nine saints, (the *Walisongo*) who began spreading Islam on the island as early as the 15th century. These figures were given the status of "Sufi masters" and have profoundly influenced Indonesian Islamic culture as we see it today. Despite

¹⁰ *Tassawuf* turns the noun Sufi into an active verb and indicate the becoming of a Sufi.

this historic connection, it was easy for an outside observer like myself to overlook the Sufi aspect because the term "Sufi" did not come up anywhere during fieldwork. But after a closer examination of the history of Islam in Java, it was clear that the Sufi ideology (*turuq al-tassawuf*) has profoundly influenced how Indonesians practice Islam. In chapter four, I focus on the role of contemporary Ba'alawi Sufis in the discourse and performance of *sholawat* through Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf, the person we cited in the first example.

An analysis of the rhythmic modes that accompany the *sholawat* sheds light on the cultural synergy present between Javanese and Yemeni cultures. Thus, what we labeled in the beginning as the *rebanna* percussion ensemble becomes the hallmark of the instrumental ingenuity during the *sholawat*. Since only percussive accompaniment is allowed in the *sholawat*, there exists a wider community of performers and consumers of secular Arabic music. Songs of Hadhrami origin, either produced by Yemeni singers or by the Arab-Indonesians diaspora are known as the *gambus*. Sometimes the clearly defined barrier existing between the *gambus* and the *sholawat*—if we are to differentiate them as separate religious versus secular acts—is blurred. Through my ethnographic encounter with some musicians of the *gambus*, we see how this genre plays an implicit role in the development of the *sholawat* itself. In what appears like a paradox, the secular music scene of *gambus* lays out the socio-cultural groundwork that helps cultivate the performance of the *sholawat* itself.

The second component of the *sholawat*—the oratorical actions comprising the sermons—revolve around acts of public religious rhetoric. Having recognized the place of the sermon in the *sholawat* earlier, my ethnomusicological approach takes more into account how musical performance drives the mediation of religious authority in the non-discursive and easily "digested" symbolism. Other works (see Millie 2017 study on the sermons in Java) have focused on this particular component of Islam in Indonesia. But when it came to the *sholawat*, the sermon

or speech segment of the event was either short or of secondary importance to the overall performance. Some Habibs, like Habib Zaenal Abiddin Al Hamid, adapt the *khutba* exclusively and do not utilize any musical expressions in their performance. My aim in looking at the musical nuances in the *sholawat* is to locate how people cultivate certain sonic sensibilities to encounter the divine, which is the heart of why the *sholawat* works in the first place. Their potency is attributed to the feeling (*ehsaas*) that are internalized within its practitioners and observers.



Figure 1.3: Habib Zainal Abidin Al-Hamid uses the setting of the *majlis* to teach about Islam and the values of Islam Nusantara

But what do the *sholawat* mean for Islam in general and why is this form of mediating religious authority perhaps more significant than others? This is perhaps a more crucial question if we are to learn something about what this practice means for the *umma* as a whole. I believe the results of such an environment, where the religious arts take precedence in everyday life, create a culture of "play" that allows the observers to be interwoven into the act through their physical presence in cooperation. Here, Gadamer's aesthetics and his formulation of the concept of play helps sort out what is unique about the *sholawat* in terms of what it means as a

phenomenon. Unlike the passive hearing that takes place within the traditional forms of religious mediation—a one-way lecture-style act—the festive spirit of the *sholawat* is significant because it opens up the possibility for more "players" to be played by the religious art which exerts its influence on the spectators. Here perhaps one can see the "game of religion" played not only by those in charge of Islam but by all Muslims. I will later return to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics developed in *Truth and Method* (1960) to help us understand why the concept of play, ritual, and the festival can provide a framework for understanding the broader significance of *sholawat* for Islam today, particularly as we benchmark its significance against other forms of mediation.

At this point, I have stated that enunciative and institutional forms of Islamic authority utilize the act of *sholawat* to mediate and further legitimate Islam amongst the public. In the following section, I wish to untangle the specific organizations and bodies of institutional authority that appear in the ethnographic information provided by this dissertation. The aim is to provide a context for how various organizations under the auspice of Islam penetrate the foundational political structures of Indonesia.

Islam Nusantara

What does the institutional authority of Islam Nusantara precisely represent, and how does it adapt itself in public? Any person who knows the Indonesian constitution would know that the Pancasila, the document of the foundational philosophy of the Indonesian state, is an important founding document to some of the principles of Indonesian Islam. During the founding of the Pancasila, Muslims reaffirmed the authority of religion in the foundation of the state and made it explicit that the belief in the One and Only God is the number one principle (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*). Sukarno's first draft of the document included this phrase as the last of five

principles but was later persuaded to change it to be the first. The document was interpreted as a rejection of pantheism and atheism, an issue that human rights organizations still criticize.

This moment, in which the founding fathers of Indonesia incorporated the enunciative authority of the Abrahamic line as the first principle of the Pancasila (present in the statement "the One and Only God), shows the influence of Islamic theology on the foundation of the Indonesian republic. The founders recognize Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, despite some attempts to implement the statement "*ketuhanan dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariah Islam bagi pemeluk-pemelukny*," meaning "the belief in the almighty God, with the duty to carry out the Islamic *sharia*." But many individuals in the committee that oversaw the administration of Indonesia's independence after Japan and who wanted to delete the latter part of that statement lost control of the region.

After Indonesia's independence, Islamists parties persisted in their call to designate the country as an Islamic state with various successful and unsuccessful attempts throughout the 1950s and 1960s. At the turn of the 21st century and following Suharto's rule, Indonesians came very close to amending the Pancasila and implementing *shari'a* as law. Suharto's authoritarian style rule constantly cracked down on Islamic militants and advocates of an Islamic state despite being aligned with the Muslim elites and his vicious campaign against Communism. But again, this recent attempt in 2003 failed to gain sufficient support among nationalist political parties and military or state officials with voting power in the legislative branch (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Republic Indonesia*). However, what Islamists did achieve is amending portions of the constitution that mandated the government to increase religious education and strengthen faith and piety among the public, particularly the youth. In light of all of this, a comprehensive education bill was signed into law in 2003, which has resulted in a tremendous increase in economic support for religious education, as we will see in a subsequent chapter. From early

childhood and into universities and post-secondary schools, Indonesian placed a high priority on religious education, and the articles of this comprehensive bill explicitly stated that religious education is to be a portion of any curriculum taught to students regardless of the broader aim of their studies. The compulsory nature of the issue caused considerable controversy among private school administrators. Although the language within the bill did not specifically say that this only applies to Muslim students, this was an issue raised by Muslims and was for Muslims. However, because the Pancasila must accommodate the non-Muslim faiths, it had to use a broader language, "religious education," rather than "Islamic education."

This is only one example of the dilemma facing the implementation of Pancasila regarding religion, namely, the problem of governing under a plurality of religions. It is clear, however, that the Pancasila kept religious plurality and secular political parties in a delicate balance for many years. But how does Islamic authority penetrate the political sphere of Indonesia? We can attribute the answer to this to several things: the formation of several Islamist parties throughout modern history (both reformist and traditional), the rise in the number of *ulema* figures among the political elites, and the increase of Islamic ideals and morality in the public sphere. At the same time, however, when it came to voting throughout the years, the public at large seemed to always be inclined to minimize the legislative seats and control of Islamist parties and individuals, despite their extensive presence and pressure.

Compromised of local *ulema* figures, religious scholars, *kyais*, and even students of Islamic studies, the Indonesian Ulema Council, *Majlis Ulama Indonesia*, is the most powerful body of Islamic authority in the country. Formed under the Suharto regime in 1975, the council oversees socio-religious organizations including Nahdatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and several other smaller groups (Syarikat Islam, Al Ittihadiyah, Al Washliyah). The MUI was put in place by Suharto in 1975 as the main authority of leadership as an interface between the government

and the Muslim community (Gillespie 2007). The council of MUI can produce *fatwas*, and advise the Islamic community on contemporary matters. In this regard, the MUI opinion and claims are the most explicit representative of Islamic authority in the country. To what extent the state is obligated to implement or oppose the MUI claims rests on what the public at large accepts or rejects, as well as the global community. This can be either about serious political issues like the Indonesian Army or mundane social matters like the public's acceptability of a dancing pop star. The core roles of MUI are broad: strengthening religion as described by Pancasila, the participation of the council in national development, and maintaining harmony among Indonesians of different religions (Wessel 1996). The broad scope of its authority, which mainly involves providing input into matters about national developments, has made the MUI beneficial in matters on capitalist enterprises that may have been destructive socially or ecologically. For example, MUI issued a *fatwa* that states burning forests to clear land and plant crops were a sin. Nonetheless, the MUI and the institutions that come under its name offer the platform for different "modernist" and "traditionalist" streams in the public sphere.¹¹

Islam holds that the positions of the *ulama* are legitimate because they have maintained a certain intellectual rigor and knowledge of Arabic which sets them apart from the rest of ordinary Muslims in Indonesia. As we stated through Ricoeur's analysis, degree of knowledge (*ijtihad*, meaning the industrious pursuit of knowledge) gives authority its credit and legitimates the enunciative claim it makes, that is the claim of the *ulema* on certain matters. MUI provides the institutional body (institutional authority) —along with its internal social, educational, and

¹¹ Other organizations like *Al-Irsyad*, *Majlis Mujahidin Indonesia*, *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia*, *Forum Ulama Ummat Islam*, and the Islamic Defender Front (FPI), all have followers in the millions as well. But MUI has been also intolerant to other non-Sunni groups like *Ahlul Bait Indonesia* and *Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia*, both were rejected from MUI membership despite the government claim that MUI maintains harmony between the different religions of Indonesia. Thus, despite the *Islam Nusantara* that claims to be different from the Middle East, MUI still mirrors the *shia-sunni* tension existing in the Middle East.

cultural hierarchies— that allows individuals to make claims and produce discourse (enunciative authority) of the religious authority of Islam Nusantara. We could say that the monopoly on religious authority the MUI has must still be subject to the public's consensus and special interests. But the MUI does not persuade the public sphere through issuing *fatwas* or writing of new law that must be accepted without deliberation. It uses its institutional authority as a form of legitimating the actions on a policy level. One example of this is the new educational policy in Indonesia. The policy of instituting and mandating religious education I cited before, while it suppressed the desire for a religious-free education, also produced a public able to participate in critical discussions and commentary. In this sense, over the past fifteen years, the Indonesian Muslim community has been granted tremendous access to theological knowledge and education, giving them various outlets to argue for—or against—what Islam should and should not be for them.

Within Indonesia and throughout the entire Islamic *umma* the positions of the *ulema* are central in the formation of discourses of religious authority. As mentioned before, Muhammad Zaman's work on the *ulema* in contemporary Muslim societies argues for a dynamic scholarly class that has been engaged in the changing socio-political and cultural issues of their countries. His book reveals the various ways the *ulama* in modern times, depending on post-colonial conditions and cultural histories, vary in the ways they interpret and propagate religious authority. From scholarly literary works to *fatwas*, to educational reform, the *ulama* utilize multiple ways of communicating religious authority, and in many ways have a profound influence on the state's cultural and social policies. Although he focused on the Deobandi ideology of India and Pakistan Muslims, his analysis shows that the two countries have profound differences when it comes to how religious authority and politics interact and how the substance of religious authority can even change. Zaman's findings are not necessarily surprising given the

fact that the two nations differ greatly in their majority-minority Muslim status (opposite of Muslim-majority Pakistan, India has an Islamic minority). Although the Deobandi *ulama* are sometimes labeled as fundamentalists, their approaches are influenced by the West in the sense that religion was learned to be reified (Zaman 2002).

Just as the *ulama* of South Asia differ from one post-colonial nation context to the next, the *ulama* in Indonesia have also differences that can be observed as either "modernist" or "traditionalist" in their scope. But regardless of their positions, *Majlis Ulama Indonesia* does not only debate or construct religious discourses (forms of enunciative authority), but are also able "actively [be] involved in state capture [...] issuing *fatwas*, managing halal certifications, and determining public morality" (Saat 2018:56). In this sense, the formation of bodies like the Nahdatul Ulama (or in Zaman's example Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind in India) allows institutional powers to influence state policy (ibid) and set a context for their visions and opinions. But a study in 2014 by Greg Fealy and Robin Bush indicate that the *ulama* in Indonesia do not wield tangible political power at the state level, but have had a significant influence in their local communities. They are increasingly seen by the Indonesian public as agents of religious knowledge rather than state administrators or political figures (Fealy & Bush 2014). The *sholawat* as I observed them in Indonesia were certainly not a platform for the *ulema* in any traditional sense. Most of these figures utilize written discourses to propagate their opinions and ideas. On the other hand, figures like Habib Syech have used music to tap into a larger younger audience and has become a powerful public figure. But does the Habib have any tangible political power at their disposal? Perhaps through institutions like MUI or NU, these figures can and often do have the ability to influence the public in various ways.

I hesitate at this point to make any assertion that this type of religious activity, which is symbolic in its mediation and artistic in substance, translates to any broader political significance

for the country. Indonesia has a large population of moderate and progressive Muslims, as well as an incredibly complex political dynamic with religious institutions. But because I am framing the *sholawat* as a type of festive "public spectacle" of Islam Nusantara, and because this ideology has broad institutional capability and organizational tendencies, it becomes important to shed light on the institutions and actions that engender the values Islam in the public sphere from every day. Interestingly, recent empirical research shows that the increase in piety observed among contemporary Indonesians has not translated into the proliferation of Islamist politics (Pepinsky, Liddle, and Mujani 2018).

The authors I cite above concluded that public opinion in Indonesia has remained immune to the social transformation entailing the country's religious resurgence, and has not resulted in people favoring Islamist politics (ibid). The data presumably shows that a rise in Islamic piety does not necessarily correlate with the desire to implement Islamist policies from the top down. While these findings convey some optimism in the sense that they point to the willingness of Muslims to separate religion from political action, regardless of their piety, others' perspectives on this area point to contrary systematic attempts to increase religious authority and ethical improvement among Indonesians (Kloos 2018). There has also been the noted increase in the competition of Islamist ideas and values in the public sphere (Kersten 2015), and the successful attempts for Islamists to influence state policies in their favor (Saat 2017). Despite that, Indonesians at the polls do not seem to solely embrace Islamist parties and voting patterns among Indonesians show a profile of "critical citizens" and "critical voters" who have simultaneously embraced secular and religious policies (Mujani 2019).

Taking these points into consideration, we ought to ask: does the culture of Islam Nusantara and its intensive festivalization of religion play any significant role in shaping the socio-political map of the country? In answering this question we ought to look at the

entanglement between religious and political institutions carefully by disentangling the different moments religious and political institutions interact. Another question is whether the aestheticizing Islamic ritual has any profound effects on the ways Islamist politics gets deployed in the public sphere, and whether it provides a more appropriate framework for political action among citizens. An ethnography of the lives and actions of individuals involved in the *sholawat* scene can shed light on these inquiries. A participant-observation study among university students shows the practices of *sholawat* among individuals of millennial and centennial age at the Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta (UIN), and how this state-sponsored religious institution actively prepares students to become competent performers involved in carrying out the *da'wah* in their surrounding community.

The university students at UIN provide a micro-version of the social and cultural processes fundamental to the practice of *sholawat*. From there, an established professional community of religious virtuosi with backgrounds spanning a variety of styles, levels of religiosity, and degree of religious authority in their community appears in the ethnography. The performance scene we speak of, the *sholawat*, consists of many types of expressions, some traditionally rooted, while others are modern interpretations, all of which are involved in artistically articulating religious authority, either in rhetoric or song. At this point, I wish to discuss further the conceptual framework mentioned earlier as pertaining to the two types of authority to help us understand the broader significance and meaning of religious authority within Islam Nusantara, and how the *sholawat* come into context.

Enunciative and Institutional Authority

The Quran is deemed to be the absolute authoritative text when it comes to the source of authority in Islam. Those who interpret the religion are believed on the basis that they have

mustered enough knowledge through *ijtihad* to know the proper meaning of Quranic scripture, the *hadith*, and theological discourse and commentaries of Muslim scholars throughout history. The foundational written word is central to the idea of enunciative authority I discussed earlier. Paul Ricoeur regards this type of authority as the "symbolic power, either of an enunciator or an author, to engender belief" (Ricoeur 2002: 94), the enunciative authority. Throughout Abrahamic religions, scripture is held to be the absolute truth, which makes the claim that a divine being has created the world, is omnipotent, and eternal in existence. This foundational claim extends back through Christianity and Judaism—along with their doctrines and institutions— and through a line of prophecy that goes back to Adam. If we conceive of the Abrahamic religions as a single doctrine with one original founding revelation—the revelation of an eternal God—we see that the interpretation and meanings of this revelation have been augmented by subsequent and differing claims to truth. If one overlooks the character or customs of different religions, one would often observe the same foundational claim:

The acts of building a mosque on the site of an ancient temple, of designating Friday as a day for collective prayer, of facing Mecca rather than Jerusalem, of fasting for an entire month as opposed to a few days, of changing the mythical figures of Isaac, Ishmael, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, of discussing God's existence, of redefining the revelations are all forms of encoding— ritual, cultural, ethical, judicial, and political levels of human existence to transform each religion into the unique "true religion" (Arkoun 2002:102)

To Ricoeur, authority rests on the basis of a claim to truth (the existence of God) and the institutional authority (the Church, the religious organization, the political body) that provides the ideological context for justifying the claim's truth. This dichotomy of authority has been passed down through different historic, geographic, and cultural epochs and discourses, and have taken on different forms of *tradition*.

According to Hannah Arendt, authority is rooted in the tradition of a founding claim (Arendt 1969). For her, our engagement with tradition enables us to "augment the foundation," and carry out actions that would preserve or re-anchor our actions to that foundation (ibid). In traditional political terms, individuals vested with authority must be virtuous in order to keep power in check, where virtue is precisely synonymous with maintaining the link between power and authority. Arendt points to the early Roman Empire as the ideal example of this type of civic virtue, possessed by the senate, who acts as the safeguard of Roman authority. The founding idea that tied the Romans to the eternal city of Rome and its founding principles was ultimately redefined with the rise of Christianity as the official state religion of the empire (ibid). At this point, the shared foundation established during the early Roman period shifted to a transcendent authority rooted in Christendom and the enunciative authority of Biblical scripture. Historians largely attribute this shift in authority to the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 AD, where Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman Empire.

It is precisely the augmentation of a foundation, which entails extending the work of foundation into the present, which gives authority its legitimacy. That is why in Arendt's view, authority has disappeared from the modern world and was replaced by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. We could attribute the shift in authority during the Roman period to a problem that every growing civilization must face, namely the tension between differences of origins and the conception of a single foundation. In attributing the loss or shift of authority to this reality, we must understand why it might become appealing to shift the claim to legitimacy to something beyond this world, a claim that can either be rejected by those who do not recognize this claim's authority or accepted by those who feel they must obey. Paul Ricoeur's reading of Arendt's essay "What is Authority" gives a contrary perspective to the notion that authority has been lost, and clarifies the notion of authority even further. In his essay "The

Paradox of Authority," Ricoeur attempts to decipher the problem of authority while admitting that the question of true legitimacy of authority is difficult—almost impossible—matter to properly achieve in the final instance (Ricoeur 2007: 91). Nonetheless, the idea of institutional authority and its various types of agencies can explain how the enunciative can always be vulnerable to the power vested in these institutions to forge out different claims to legitimacy.

Ricoeur focuses on the substantive meaning of the term authority, which is rooted in the idea of the right to command and impose obedience within existing organs of power. Those who exercise certain powers and are vested with authority do so on behalf of an existing form of legislative, military, or administrative branches (ibid). He states that "the civil servant can give orders because he obeys and because above him sits a, so to speak, naked authority, as in the first definition: the right to command, the power (recognized or not) to impose obedience" (Ricoeur 2007: 92). People exercising power in the name of an institution make up what we would call constituted authorities (ibid). For Ricoeur, the enigma arises with the question of the right to impose obedience, which lays bare the gap between the claim to authority and the belief in that claim. The recognition of the right to command and to impose obedience distinguished authority from violence, so that the recognition of the legitimacy of the claim to those in authority is critical to their exercise of power.

Ricoeur believes that in present times, there is a sense of a crisis of legitimation and growing resistance to credit those persons or institutions with the authority they claim. Here, Ricoeur proposes a hypothesis that is contrary to Arendt's believe that authority has vanished from the world and argues instead that authority has "transformed itself, even while preserving something of what it had been" (Ricoeur 2007: 94). Drawing from Gerard Leclerc's work in the book *Histoire de l'autorite*, Ricoeur states:

[...] we have the symbolic power, either of an enunciator or of an "author," to engender belief, to persuade, through a text, an assertion; to be persuasive, to engender belief. On the other side, there is the power connected with an institution, namely, the 'legitimate power that an individual or group has at its disposal to impose obedience on those it claims to direct' [...] we have simply split in two the place of origin of the process of legitimation—on the one side, discourse, as the source of symbolic power; on the other, the institution, as the source of legitimacy for those who exercise authority within it (Ricoeur 2007: 94).

Enunciative authority cannot exist without the institutional framework to contribute to the legitimacy of symbolic power and direct the actions of people. While recognizing that Leclerc's thesis was correct in that enunciative authority became more prevalent in the modern world, Ricoeur suggests that it is not that authority vanished all together in the modern world as Arendt suggested in her essay "What is Authority," but rather that both forms coexisted, enunciative and institutional, in different historical configurations over time (Ricoeur 2007). One of the examples that Ricoeur draws upon to clarify the meaning of an enunciative authority is Biblical scripture, which was "taken as given [...] canonized," and placed as superior to the remainder body of worldly "profane literature" (Ricoeur 2007: 96).

Complementing the eternal authoritative text of Biblical scripture was the institutional authority of the church. The institution of the church was the authoritative representative responsible for subsequent pronouncements pertaining to Christianity and what it means for people and political bodies. In this sense, the structures of institutional authority were designed to produce and implement discourses and "controlled the development of tradition" through various organizations and groups. Ricoeur explains:

Through the institutional network of universities and its clerics, the church controlled the production of thought by establishing theology to be the predominant mode of discourse, in relation to which the words of pagan teachers such as Aristotle and other *auctoritates* were discourse authorized by the ecclesial authority (Ricoeur 2007: 96).

But Ricoeur correctly contemplates whether the church's claim to be founded on scripture was true altogether and whether it was an institution that was the "beneficiary" of something different

and "distinct" from scriptural authority (ibid). Going back to Arendt's essay and her Roman example of authority, Ricoeur suspects that the church's institutional authority was born out of the political interest of the Roman *imperium* (ibid). From this critical vantage point, it is possible to understand how the decline of scriptural authority and the credibility of its authors has resulted in precipitating a legitimacy gap in the Roman imperium. Here, Ricoeur is suggesting that the institutional authority of the church has a political significance beyond scriptural authority.

Ricoeur's analysis of authority brings to the fore the question of the legitimacy of those in political positions. As such, the "origin of the power to command remained the enigma of political life" (Ricoeur 2007: 98). In Greek times, the notion of authority did not have an immediate political meaning although it was tied to the nature of beings and their given positions of power. To the Greeks, there are always those who command and those who obey, and the only thing Greeks knew regarding the justification of authority were "metaphors, all inappropriate, to speak of this paradox of hierarchy among equals" (ibid: 100). Conversely, the Romans had the founding of Rome as the sacred binding principle for the empire, where this founding event was the main anchor point for Roman authority. This founding event carries with it a type of "founding energy" that is precisely what is carried through the generations of subsequent authorities. The senate in Rome was the "transmitters of this founding energy," (ibid) and the ability to extend the foundation rested in the knowledge of its ancestors and of the tradition.

The political origin of institutional authority is evident in the way that the Roman Catholic Church is itself intertwined in the political origin of the Roman imperium. Thus, Ricoeur sees Christianity as a combination of the Roman foundation and the "instituted church," which is "held to be founded in scripture" (Ricoeur 2007: 100). Therefore, despite the collapse of the Roman Empire, the authority of the church along with its "anti-political and anti-institutional tendencies of primitive Christianity" would survive (ibid). Additionally, the double root of

authority is evident in the historical co-existence between monarchical and ecclesiastical powers; both were in support of each other and relied upon each other extensively. The church offered the unction of monarchs and thus legitimated their position, while at the same time the monarchs, acting politically, guaranteed the sanctioning and control of secular desires among the public (ibid).

If we follow the story of authority to the French Lumières, as Ricoeur did, we would arrive at the enunciative authority of the discourse of the Age of Enlightenment, where Ricoeur sees enunciative authority shifting from a transcendent sacred text to one based on the credibility of the author. Here, the measure of one's authority is in the degree of their learning and good faith, where their ability to be believed does not rest on a degree of piety but knowledge (Ricoeur 2007). The power of the people and their general will replaced everything from the past and the authority of the ancients, or "authority as stemming from power, where this power is itself identified with the general will" (ibid: 102). In the conclusion of the "Paradox of Authority," Ricoeur admits that he is not settled on a single solution to the problem of authority and its forms of legitimation because of the problem of crediting and credence at the heart of the aporia of authority. He is more satisfied with John Rawl's ideas in *A Theory of Justice* of a mutually recognizing and diverse set of rational, secular, and religious traditions that act as "cofoundational," and agree on their disagreements through an "overlapping consensus" (Ricoeur 2007: 105). Nonetheless, concerning the idea of accrediting, any authority must be accountable to its credibility claim, and when it fails to do so, its legitimacy is cast into doubt.

Following the argument that Ricoeur lays out, we can go back to the point made in the first paragraph about the line of Abrahamic traditions. Authority is subject to differing narratives and historical timeframes, and the dynamics between its enunciative and institutional forms are important to understand if we are to understand the nature of authority today. Institutions gain

their power in the sense that they are authoritative bodies engaged in upholding the foundational discourse through various types of organized actions. However, these authoritative structures can—and often do—make these foundational discourses susceptible to either coercion or distortions. Nonetheless, institutions are bodies that legitimate and seek to redefine, preserve, or in some cases, even abandon an enunciative authority altogether. Of course in the act of abandoning enunciative authority, institutional authority can undermine its legitimacy when it no longer represents the foundation. Institutional authority can establish the pragmatic path that can render authority resilient to historic circumstances that challenge a particular claim. This is why Ricoeur was correct to suggest that the survival of Christianity through the centuries was attributed to the Church's success in establishing the proper institutional framework to legitimate, keep, and ground its claims, even in the face of great political and social struggles of the Middle Ages and the Age of Enlightenment (ibid). At this point, we can deduce that the hierarchal framework of institutional authority can either anchor us to a founding tradition or completely distort the enunciated claims by that authority. But since enunciative claims themselves are within the context of an already established institution—for example the institutions of religious production, education, and/or proselytization—enunciative authority is always interwoven with an *already* established human institution or a system that administers an authority through an established hierarchy.

How is this relevant to the points discussed earlier on Islam Nusantara and the *sholawat* in Indonesia? The institution of Islam Nusantara—along with its unique historic and cultural components—provides the platform not only for rearticulating the enunciative authority of traditional discourses but also for providing the proper institutional framework to legitimate the place of religion in everyday contemporary Muslim life. This is not achieved by disparaging the modern secular political forces facing the *umma*, as many revivalist movements tended to do.

But rather by allowing the pious to experience a "more excellent reality."¹² Instead of confining religious discourse to a hierarchal structure of power, an *enchanted Islam* allows more Muslims to play along with this discourse, and internalize what is observed. This *play* is not "subjective playing with the work of [*sholawat*], but rather as the playing of the work with [Muslims]" (Grondin 2001:44). In the last chapter, I articulate this point further as I make certain conclusions about what the *sholawat* means to the *umma* today.

The contrary to being overtaken and "played" by a religious performance such as the *sholawat* is the passive and subjective listening, being uninvolved in the production of religious discourses and arts, which has traditionally been how religion gets deployed in the public sphere of Muslim societies. I am not suggesting that Indonesia is the only place that has this democratizing effect on religious performance and practice, but rather, its intensity and festive appearance in public spaces on an almost daily basis has profound effects on how people interact with Islam. This speaks to an active type of piety, one which partakes in the creation of contemporary religious discourse. In sum, what is unique about Islam Nusantara in the context of the *umma* as a whole, is its ability to aestheticize the experience of religious authority and bring along all those involved in its creation. Here, I refer to the *sholawat* as *the work of art* that Islam Nusantara present to the followers of the faith. Given Indonesia's history with Islamism and the state's founding ideology, it is no surprise that what has taken place here in terms of Islamic revivalism in the public sphere is truly unique.

¹² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edition, Sheed and Ward, London 1989.

Past Academic Encounters with Islamic Music in Indonesia

There has been several past endeavors looking at Islam in the context of music making within Indonesia. Given its immense cultural diversity, it is not surprising that Indonesia has been a site for multiple anthropological and ethnomusicological inquiries addressing a variety of issues. Within ethnomusicological discourse, scholars look specifically at practices pertaining to Muslims either within the context of Islamic ritual, or non-religious music practiced by Muslims. In either cases these studies have yielded insight into this rich cultural area that can certainly build upon and compliment the scope of this research. These works raised important issues such as power, gender, and feminism in Islam (Rasmussen 2010), Islam and hybridity (Berg 2007), transnationalism (Capwell 1995), and local policy and politics (Harnish 2006; Barendregt 2008; Becker 1993; Rasmussen 2010; Ben 2007; Gade 2004; Raseuki 2009; Knauth 2010; and Sutton 1985). Within this canon of scholarship, it became evident that musical performances among Islamic communities are widely varied and fluid—often recreating traditional indigenous praxis (*adat*), or maintaining a more transnational pan-Arab style that inherently embraces the “Arab” sound as indexing Islamic identity and preference. In either case, the term *seni musik Islam* (Islamic musical arts), which was adopted from Indonesians’ frequent use of the term to describe an array of genres, to be of most benefit within our context of this study. Specifically, Ann Rasmussen in her fieldwork in Jakarta observed multiple practices pertaining to this multi-genre label while focusing more specifically on the culture of Quranic recitation among young females (Rasmussen 2010). Not only is *seni musik Islam* applicable to musical performances, but also a range of activities that revolve around the arts including Quranic recitation, dance, calligraphy, painting, and architecture of Islamic significance.

The art of Quranic recitation is a practice that is central to any discussion on Islam and music, despite its highly sacred place within the canon of Islamic performances, and the widely-

held perception among Muslims that it should not be labeled as *music* in its general sense.

However, the *mujawad* vocal aesthetic is an emblem of the appropriate manner of performing the *maqam* and the Arabic text, and requires a high level of musical virtuosity, perhaps more so than any secular genre within the *maqam* realm of performance. The term *mujawad* is derived from the word *tajweed* (which means refine or enhance), indicating the process of using vocal tonality to read a text and embellish its significant through melody. In the canon of Islamic studies, many interpretations and rules have revolved around the proper linguistic treatment that the reader should undertake—ranging from the pronunciation of consonants and vowels—to behavioral and social guidelines for the reader to undertake. As an aural tradition transmitted from teacher to student, the musical aspect of Quranic recitation and the melodic treatment remains highly improvisatory, where one *ayah* (Quranic verse), can be recited in different modes depending on the *qari* (reciter) aesthetic choice.

Ethnomusicological studies of Quranic recitation have attempted to transcribe recitations in the *mujawad* style revealing certain musical features of Quranic recitation. (See Rasmussen 2010, Nelson 1985). As recognized by these scholars, the meterless and improvisatory world of *tajweed* makes the task of transcription a very challenging one and can undoubtedly overlook elements that can only be detected through an aural source rather than a musical transcription. Many legendary singers from the Arab world, like Umm Kulthoum, grew up learning how to recite the Quran from a very young age (Danielson 1997). In Kristina Nelson's work titled *The Art of Reciting the Quran*, the idea that Quranic recitation is not music, but a separate category of sacred performance that cannot be given the label of music is affirmed by her informants in Egypt. Her fieldwork reveals the perception of Muslim scholars in religious institutions like Al-Azhar Islamic University in Cairo who affirm that three divisions are made when it comes to conceptualizing the categories of performance: Secular music, religious music, and Quranic

recitation. Nelson rightly points to the fact that Western scholars have ignored this point in their academic canons, which tends to only distinguish between religious and non-religion forms of music.

In taking Nelson's observation on these three separate categories, one must consider the subjectivity of her informants. Often, religious scholars define music in terms of the context of music, rather than what *music* is. The dialogue is often conflated with the *context* of music making rather than the *subject* of music itself. This phenomenon opens a discussion into the permissibility of music in Islam in general, a subject that is frequently debated and sometimes miscommunicated between religious figures, scholars, and the public. Within the popular religious sphere—either in contemporary or historic times—Muslims see no controversy in adapting music either in religious or secular practice. I believe that in general, especially in the Western perception of Islam, the subject of the permissibility of music has been overtly centered on the interpretation of those in positions of authority. These figures, unless they are performers of music themselves, often hold radical views on a variety of issues to begin with, especially as they are related to gender, politics, and society.^[9]

On the topic of gender and Islam, the book *Women, the Recited Quran, and Islamic Music in Indonesia* by Anne Rasmussen shows how women in Indonesia are empowered through the performance of Quranic recitation and examined the idea of progress as a “perplexing concept” in the manner that it has been constructed by Western feminism (ibid). Such ideas as *ijtihad* (the active pursuit of knowledge through rigorous intellectual work) have been undertaken by women in Indonesia and redefine the place of women in Islam. The work also reveals certain aspects of Indonesia's perception of Middle Eastern Islam and politics that often resemble a sort of an orientalist perception and tends to be selective in adaptation. Rasmussen correctly observes that “The cultural production of an Arab or Middle Eastern Islam in Indonesia

resonates to a certain extent with the orientalist project originally identified by Edward Said, by which the European and subsequently American West “produce” the East in ways that reflect their fantasies and desires.” (Rasmussen 2010: 197). However, she points out that unlike the Western orientalist conceptions of magic lamps, camels, and deserts that represent Arabs, the ones in Indonesia suggest piety and the land of the Prophet. She calls the process of combining and re-inventing genres and styles “an ongoing process of musical pastiche and bricolage,” and uses the term Islamization throughout the text to describe an ongoing process of religious intensification that uses Arab culture to signal devotion to *Allah* (ibid).

From a different perspective looking at Quranic recitation in Indonesia, Anna Gade examined this practice in South Sulawesi in the late 90s, paying attention to the transmission of Arabic through memorization (Gade 2004). Gade specifically theorized the culture of learning the Quran and the moods and actions around this tedious and repetitive process. She also documented the different methods of learning that were utilized by the teachers and students which effectively produced a young generation of reciters and memorizers who are experts at reading the *fus'ha* text (*fush'a* is the classical Arabic text). This socio-linguistic focus shows how the transmission of Arabic has taken place through a milieu of religious intensification. Many of the subjects we encounter in the ethnography are a product of that environment, all of whom have been taught how to read and recite the Quran from a very young age.

In Lombok, an Island just to the east of Bali, David Harnish examines the tension between *Adat* (custom), and *Agama* (religion) and the conflicting takes on music between orthodox and traditionalist Muslims on the island (Harnish 2011). According to Harnish, global Islamic forms have been locally adopted and promoted to revitalize and modernize indigenous forms and become part of the larger Islamic *umma* (ibid). Within this process, Harnish describes how practices have departed from using *slendro* and *pelog* gamelan tuning to more diatonic or

linear forms such as those found within the *maqam* system. Interestingly, the local leaders and politicians involved in this transition perceive this action as a form detraditionalization to accommodate a more cohesive and cosmopolitan Islamic culture.

In his 1995 article *Contemporary Manifestations of Yemeni-Derived Song and Dance in Indonesia*, Charles Capwell writes about the culture of *gambus* and the Hadhrami dance and music traditions brought over by Arabs. As he discusses the genre, he also mentions that “the very name *gambus* itself refers to the instrument at the heart of the traditional ensemble that accompanies a singer” (Capwell 1995: 81). As stated earlier, the *gambus* is re-examined in the context of the lives of those who partake in *sholawat* and is presented more in depth in the next chapter.

Brigit Berg’s dissertation on *orkes gambus* highlights the amalgamation of this genre with an Islamic context and investigates the perception of local practitioners on labeling *orkes gambus* as Islamic. In describing what Indonesians abbreviate as OG (*orkes gambus*), Berg writes that “just as the Arabic language is often incorporated into Islamic domains in Indonesia, the Arab musical aesthetic of *orkes gambus* music—with its Arab instruments and musical techniques—is easily enfolded within an Islamic context.” (Berg 2009: 208). It is also sold commercially under the category of religious music and broadcasted in times of religious celebrations. Most individuals performing *orkes gambus* have been trained in either Quranic recitation in the melismatic and highly ornamental *mujawad* style, or have spent a considerable amount of time throughout their lives practicing the *sholawat* songs—both of which make heavy use of *maqam* tonality. Berg asserts that the growing presence of Arab culture as a symbol of Islamic expression, as well as its abandoning of the idea that Arab is Islamic, points to a more extensive process of shifts in identity on contradicting claims of what is Islamic on the local and international level (Berg 2009).

It is important to note that not all ethnomusicological works looking at Islam in Indonesia will automatically index Arab or Middle Eastern music. In fact, most of the earlier works (and I would argue the majority) in the discipline have looked at how indigenous practices and customs integrate with Islam in different ways. A well-known example of such works is Judith Becker's work in Central Java (Becker 1993). Becker looks at Tantrism and how it is was influenced in Javanese culture by a set of different religious practices coming together, specially Sufism, Saivism, and Tantric Buddhism. One of the aspects to this work shows how Islam, before it started adapting the musical cultures and sounds of the Middle East, was integrated in the indigenous musical traditions of the region. Examining the local musical culture and Islam is beyond the scope of this research primarily because almost every encounter a music scholar will have in Indonesia, whether it has something to do with Islam directly or not, will have some dynamic with Islam. In a country that has the world's largest Islamic population, it is very difficult to overlook the significance of Islam broadly.

There are several other works that situate Middle Eastern musical practices with religious performances that have been produced. For example, Michael Frishkopf's dissertation examined Sufi practices in Egypt, some of which have elements that we will encounter in the *sholawat* setting of Indonesia (Frishkopf 1999). Since the *sholawat* is extensively connected with the practice of Ba'alawi Sufis in Yemen, this work builds on several contributions of ethnomusicologists' research on music and Sufism (this includes Qureshi 1986; Khan 1988, 1993; Friedlander 2003; Hammarlund 2017). The use of *maqam* in other religions, although not as well documented as in the Islamic context, has also been studied by several ethnomusicologists. Mark Kligman's work with the music of Syrian Jews in Brooklyn is an example of such contexts. Based on fieldwork from the early 1990s, Kligman looks at how Arab music, particularly the aesthetics of the *maqam*, is intertwined with the liturgical worship of

Syrian Jews (Kligman 2008). This process has been taking place for several centuries and reveals an interesting dynamic for Arab-Jewish identity that has been previously overlooked. In other non-Islamic adaptation of *maqam* is Tala Jarjour's study of Syriac Orthodox chants in Aleppo. In St. George cathedral (Arabic name is *Mar Jerjos*), the congregation chants the *Beth Gazo*, a repertoire of Syriac melodies using eight different melodic variations that adapt the *maqam*. Jarjour traces the origin of these chants and investigate how local adaptation of language and culture influenced this ancient practice (Jarjour 2018).

The *sholawat* has been observed in passing by some of the scholars cited above but only to set the context of something else in focus. It is perfectly reasonable to assume that most of the observations in prior works have had a brush with the phenomenon as it is extensive throughout Muslim communities. Since it is hard to identify a specific sound, genre, or type of setting, the *sholawat*, despite their extensive presence, can be highly elusive to an outsider. This is because within a *sholawat* event a variety of things may or may not take place, which can make it impossible to identify a single progression or patterns of action. However, I stress the practice of the *mawlid* as an important component to understanding what the *sholawat* is because it reappears throughout daily or weekly *sholawat* events. In following the activities of the university student at UIN, I was able to observe how institutions become host to activities that nurture the practice of *sholawat* among young individuals. Here we see how institutions, manifested in such organizational structure as an academic environment, become involved in the nurture of Quranic arts. With Quran holding the source of Islamic authority, UIN becomes a site where this authority becomes articulated in Quranic arts, what the students properly label *Seni Quran*.

Ethnographic Framework and the Proceeding Chapters

To provide an ethnographic framework for the *sholawat* and to address the theoretical issues I raised earlier, I organized the middle three chapters of this dissertation into three different categories: context in chapter two; substance in chapter three; and significance in chapter four. For context provided in chapter two, I paint a picture of the ethnographic setting in my fieldwork and look at the practices of *sholawat* students at the Sunan Kalijaga Islamic University in Yogyakarta. This leads us to an analysis of what goes on in a typical *sholawat* event, including a breakdown of *mawlid* Simtu Durar, an important text that is extensively utilized in *sholawat*. From the students, an extended network of reciters and religious artists unfolds, as well as an entire repertoire of performances derived from cultural migration and religious hybridity as it pertains to Arab-Indonesians is examined. This allows us to see how Islam Nusantara, both in historic and contemporary terms, provide the institutional framework that facilitate the *sholawat*. The roots of the *sholawat* repertoires as it is derived from the *mawlid* and those who brought it, reveal a rich and complex dynamic of historical migration and cultural synergy between the Ba'alawi Sufi order in Yemen and the local Javanese culture, all of which culminate in the spirit that the university students embrace.

In chapter three, what I see as the substance of *sholawat*, is seen through examining Arab music culture in Indonesia through a genre called *gambus*. This is what I see as the broader "practice lab" for the aesthetics that emerge in the *sholawat*. The *sholawat* students at UIN are not only *sholawat* performers, but also *gambus* performers who engage in celebration and holiday concerts throughout their community. In this setting, they develop the nuances and skills needed to become competent performers of the *maqam*. Arab music gets vested with a certain meaning and becomes a symbol of Islamic music (*al-hess al-Islami*). This feeling goes into the heart of symbolism behind the "Arab sound" that can evoke a sense of belonging to a wider

Islamic community. The *gambus*, which is ultimately a secular genre loosely defined as "Arab music in Indonesia," is an important component on the peripheries of the *sholawat* scene. An interesting dynamic between the religious and the secular emerges as we encounter al-Jamiah members, a group of students who see themselves as modern musicians who play Arab music.

The fourth chapter is significance. It documents one of today's most celebrated singers, Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf. Through an interview with Habib Syech we begin to see how the *sholawat* became increasingly more popular in the last two decades and the life events that led to Habib Syech fame. The *sholawat* songs of Habib Syech are rooted in a rich tradition of *ibtihalaat* works by the Ba'alawi *al-Sada* and other Arab-Indonesians of Hadhrami heritage and kinship to the Prophet. The *sholawat* today are propagated extensively by members of Arab-Indonesian *sada* who enjoy considerable prestige and glamorization as decedents of the Prophet. We also look at the concept of *sholawat modern* and the modern forms of *sholawat* performances as seen by Cak Nun. At the end of the chapter I leave Solo, where Habib Syech resides, and return to UIN in Yogyakarta to document the Festival Seni Quran (Festival of Quranic Arts) to show how UIN students think of the *sholawat* today, and where they take the skills they developed to reinvigorate its manifestation in contemporary ways. In this festival, the *sholawat* students of UIN prepare for several types of competitions that include Islamic music performances and Quranic recitations. Within that festival, they also premiere new works that rely on re-adaptations of global mainstream religious genres, and utilize local instruments and musical style.

Chapter five brings all of the observations together by charting out the connections drawn from the ethnography and describing the processes observed along with its functioning theoretical view. The *sholawat* culture of Java is part of a more significant global revivalist movement eager to proliferate piety while also strengthening the national fabric of the

Indonesian republic. The Islamic *da'wah* and the state's support of religious education and the culture of *sholawat* facilitate the type of political mobilization that Indonesian Muslims endure today. It reveals how what matters for Indonesians is being enchanted by an Islam that draws into its presence a spirit of performance and festivities. I also provide suggestions for future research not only concerning ethnomusicology but also to Islamic studies broadly.

Summary

In this first chapter, I devised a framework for understanding the ensuing ethnography and focused on several key concepts on the interaction between religious authority and culture. Paul Ricoeur's comments on authority give us a theoretical context for considering how institutions provide the framework that anchors a foundational discourse—namely religious discourse—into religious action. Charles Hirschkind's study of Islamic sermons in Egypt shows one way how religious rhetoric and commentary get deployed through the utilization of media technology such as cassette tapes under the auspice of an Islamic revival scene. The *sholawat*, on the other hand, shows a different type of platform for the mediating religious discourse, one that takes into account the Sufi-inspired festive spirit of live religious performances and complemented by a variety of local and imported musical and literary performing arts. Moreover, the Habibs religious nobility, as well as the history of the Ba'alawi Sufi order is an important contribution to this milieu. Utilizing Gadamer's hermeneutics and the concept of play, I argue that Indonesian Islam, or Islam Nusantara, provides a context for the mediation of religious authority through a vibrant culture of play and participation, where the recipients of religious discourse are drawn into the performance through collective participation and attendance. Moreover, the type of authority propagated in these events rely on poetics of

reverence to the Prophet Muhamad, the moral example for Muslims, and continue to be produced and written by contemporary performers.

CHAPTER TWO *SHOLAWAT* IN YOGYAKARTA

Setting the Stage

The first time I heard Islamic music was when I watched the Syrian tenor Sabah Fakhri singing the ninety-nine names of God (*Asma' u Allah al-Husna*) on national television during Ramadan. Fakhri also sang the religious *qudud*, a folk Syrian genre which will be discussed further in chapter three because of its relation to some of the religious songs heard in the *sholawat*. Since my house was about two hundred yards away from the *al-Tawhid* mosque, one of Aleppo's largest mosques, I had grown accustomed to hearing elaborate renditions of the *adhan* (call to prayers) five times throughout the day. During the first morning of 'Eid al-Adha celebrations, the *zikh* of "Allahu Akbar (three times), *la ilaha ila Allah; Allahu Akbar* (three times), *wa Lilah al-hamd*" (God is great, there is no deity but God; God is great, praise be to God), would be continuously repeated by a group of *munshideen* (religious singers) before sunrise. These moments came to memory while I was in Java, especially when I heard the *sholawat* punctuating the public space throughout the day.

My first experience with Indonesian culture began in the United States while I was a graduate student at the music department at Northern Illinois University in 2010. There, I participated in a Javanese gamelan ensemble taught by Pak Nuri from Bali. The school of music at NIU owned one of the oldest gamelan sets in the United States and was acquired during the 1893 Chicago World Fair. The character of the music of Bali, with the percussive and rapid movement of gamelan, was profoundly different from the linear idioms of the Near East I had come to know. While studying Indonesian and directing the Northern Illinois Middle Eastern Music Ensemble in DeKalb, I learned about the presence of Arab music in Indonesian culture through professor Jui-Ching Wang, who introduced me to the phenomenon in one of her world

music seminars. She advised me to look at Arab culture's musical practices in Indonesia and the previous ethnomusicological works published on the subject. At the same time, I had known about Professor Anne Rasmussen's research in Jakarta on female Quranic recitations and was highly impressed with the vocal virtuosity of Maria Ulfa, one of Indonesia's top female Quranic reciters (Rasmussen 2009). Ulfa's recitation in the *mujawad* style reminded me of a the renditions of *sheikh* Abdel Baset Abdel Samad, one of Egypt's most famous Quranic reciters in the 20th century and a legendary *qari'* (reciter).¹³ However, in the Middle East, I had never heard women recite the Quran in the way Ulfa did in Jakarta. Since the art of Quranic recitation was an emblem of vocal virtuosity, I became more intrigued by Indonesia as a host for this highly elaborate practice.

During my *Bahasa Indonesia* class at UCLA, I had come to learn that Yogyakarta was a famous historical Javanese city with a vibrant local culture. With a population of just over 3.5 million and a reputation for being the *kota seni* (art city) of Java, Jogja (as Indonesians call it), was the birthplace for many artists, and a historic site for temples of ancient Hindu and Buddhists civilizations such as the temples Borobudur and Prambanan. The city is bustling with research institutions and large universities of different. *Kota Jogja* (city of Yogyakarta) sits within a larger district called *Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY)*, or The Special Region of Yogyakarta, and has been given a status of special administrative region by the state. This recognition gives DIY the only status of a sultanate with private sovereignty in Central Java, making it technically a regional monarchy within Java.

¹³ The *mujawad* style of recitation is known for its melismatic and highly ornamental style. It uses a variety of musical and linguistic guidelines designed to enhance the performance of sacred text and makes it more appealing to the listener. Kristina Nelson's 2001 book *The Art of Reciting the Quran* is a celebrated and comprehensive ethnomusicological study of this art.

Because of its proximity to the equator, the Indonesian Archipelago is dense with vegetation and is considerably humid throughout the year. In many performances I attended, musicians scrambled— under the conditions of sudden torrential rain— to turn off the sound system and bring large speakers under the tent. Indoor living with comfortable central-air conditioned spaces was confined to newly built facilities like hotels, apartments, universities, religious institutions (new mosques and churches), shopping malls, palaces, and modern homes. However, the majority of the individuals in the community I lived in relied mostly on large or small electric self-circulating fans. Since the *sholawat* often take place outdoors (just as do most events throughout the year), Indonesia's tropical climate is suitable for outdoor congregating since there are no cold long winter seasons or hot and dry summers.

Just as in any other major city in Java, the ratio of motorcycles to cars was remarkably high. For every one or two cars, one would encounter fifteen to twenty motorcycles, along with the environmental and sound pollutions they carry. Because of this, the need for amplification was crucial when it came to either amplifying the voice or an instrument (especially a string instrument like the *ud*). The *adhan*, the recitation of the Quran, the sermons of the *kyais*, or the gatherings of *sholawat* rely heavily on amplification in order to cut through the sonic clutter of crowded cities. Ann Rasmussen describes Jakarta residents and Indonesians' general inclination to the notion of *ramai* (crowded and noisy atmospheres) and the preference of sonically-dense public spaces (Rasmussen 2009). Though Java is Indonesia's most densely populated island, the noises of the cities subside in the majority of rural regions within the island. The noisiness I encountered in Jogja was a significant contributor to the disappearance of certain qualities and nuances important to the performance of *maqam* and to experiencing *tarab* (see Racy 2003). This phenomenon is not only unique to Indonesia, but to most contemporary cosmopolitan

environments where noise congestion, and the technology of amplification have had profound implications on aesthetics of music.



Figure 2.1: A traffic intersection showing the prevalence of motorcycles throughout the streets. This environment contribute to the noise pollution people face in crowded city spaces like Yogyakarta

While driving through the streets in Jogja, I would encounter a dizzying combination of modern and traditional buildings, punctuated by numerous *warungs* (small family-owned vendor stands), and *toko-toko* (shops) along the sidewalk, selling anything from coffee and refreshments to tourist artifacts and souvenirs. The similarity and mobility of the *warungs* made it challenging to distinguish neighborhoods from one another. Between motorcycles and cars, one would also encounter several *becak* cabs (a three-wheeled bicycle with an awning and seat attached to either frontside or backside). *Becak* drivers are scattered everywhere along significant streets like *Jalan Malioboro*, and in tourist attractions spaces within Jogja. With sites like the historic temples of Borobudur and Prambanan, *Jogja* is often visited by tourists from around the world who are looking to experience historic Buddhist and Hindu sites. Today *Jogja* is considered the “college city” of Java, with many research institutions and large universities scattered throughout its congested neighborhoods. *Kota Jogja* (The city of Yogyakarta) sits within a larger district called

Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY), or The Special Region of Yogyakarta, and has been given a status of special administrative region. This recognition gives this area the only status of a Javanese monarchy within Indonesia and the private sovereignty of its inhabitants.¹⁴



Figure 2.2: A *becak* cab driver riding through Jl. Malioboro, Jogja most popular destination for shopping

Jogja was not an arbitrary choice when I began forming an interest in studying Islamic music. It is artistically dynamic with a variety of modern and traditional practices within arts, theater, fashion, dance, and music. The city has several theater groups, renowned painters and sculptors, several top universities in the nation, and three prestigious art schools with traditional and postmodern approaches to education. It is no surprise that Jogja would be a suitable place to observe the process of Islamization in Java today, and the ways people portray their piety artistically. At any given moment or place, the eyes and ears can be witness to graffitis on public walls; street indie-rock performers; traditional Javanese gamelan; beggars playing guitar chords and signing something that resembles American folk melodies; the *adhan*, to a whole host of other things that can be overwhelming. Since my interest was observing the *sholawat* scene and

¹⁴ This special region of Yogyakarta has an important historical and political status in Java. It is recognized today as the only monarchy within the country (although it is not the only one with provisional autonomy). The family that currently hold the sultanate is Hamengkubuwono— with Sri Hamengkubuwono x as the current governor and sultan.

performances of Arab music, I was primarily disconnected, just by the nature of my focus, from a rather vibrant Jazz and Western classical music scene happening in places like the *Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta* (Indonesian Institute for the Arts, or ISI), and the Institute for Arts and Society (Cemeti). Nonetheless, I kept an open eye and ear to things unrelated and witnessed the effect such an environment has on the production and performance of Islamic music.

One of the most sonically visible signs of Islam in public spaces is the *adhan* (the Islamic call to prayer). Hearing of the *adhan* evoked nostalgia from my days as a child in Aleppo. The vocal *takbir* of *Allah* (exactly the phrase: *Allahu Akbar*), followed by the message of *shahadah* (*Ash'hadu Ana La Ilaha Ila Allah*) are often sung in *maqamat* (pl. *maqam*) *rast* or *hijaz*. These melodies resolve between dominant points of the *maqam*, in highly melismatic and virtuosic movements of the upper registers.¹⁵ While I still attempted to listen to the different renditions of the *adhans* from mosque to mosque, or from region to region, it eventually became a sonic background to everyday life.¹⁶ Its echoing multiplicity between different neighborhoods throughout the day conveyed a marked presence of the Islamic spirit.

The *adhan* invoked a certain type of ‘sonic authority’ that permeates the Islamic public space. Here, the presence of Islam in public is explicitly portrayed through the invisible and powerful presence of sound. Although the *adhan* has been a somewhat controversial issue in secular states in the West as some scholars have pointed out (Lee 1999, Green 2010, Weiner 2014), it has been part of the public sonic architecture for many people in the Islamic world for

¹⁵ *Maqam* (mode) *rast* from the pitch C has the notes C, D, E half-flat, F, G, A, B-half flat, C. Other times *maqam hijaz* is used with a similar contour. See appendix for scores of both versions heard during the fieldwork and in Syria.

¹⁶ The five prayers (*salat*) throughout the day range in the numbers of *rak'ah*, which is a certain movement with particular verses and bodily gestures (kneeling and prostration). The morning prayer has the least amount of *rak'ahaat* (pl. *rak-ah*) with only two needed to complete a single *salat* (prayer). If a *salat* was skipped at some point during the day, it can be made-up later.

centuries.¹⁷ Five-times throughout the day (sunrise, noon, afternoon, sunset, and night), the *muadhin* recite the verses:

1. *Allahu Akbar Allahu Akbar*
 2. *Ashhadu An La Ilaha Ila Allah*
 3. *Ashhadu An Muhammad Rasul Allah*
 4. *Hai 'Ala Al-Salat*
 5. *Hai 'Ala Al-Falaah*
-
1. God is Great. God is Great
 2. I testify that there is no deity but God
 3. I testify that Muhammad was the Messenger of God
 4. Hasten to prayer
 5. Hasten to salvation

In the morning, an additional line is added to these phrases: *Al-Salaatu Khairun Min Al-Nawm* (Prayer is better off than sleep). There were considerable differences in terms of the style, degree of virtuosity, pronunciation of Arabic, and musicianship of the *muadheneen* (plural) in Jogja. However, what matters most is not the actual performance of the *adhan* (though certain mosques had impressive *muadheneen*, while others not so much), but the times it punctuates throughout the day as markers for prayer. It gave people a sense of order and a sense of shared commitment. People would pray the *salat siang* (noon prayer) right before having lunch, thus making the *adhan siang* (the noon call-to-prayer) a sonic reminder that it is near lunchtime. The *adhan* eventually became as natural to the ear as the bananas trees were to my eyes. The performance of the *adhan* takes place within the *mosque*. *Mosques* in Java are built with a *Joglo* roof design, a wide flat rooftop characteristic to the traditional building of Javanese people. I had eventually figured out that the sound was coming from a nearby mosque called *Masjid Besar Pakualaman*. The *adhan* was the first sign to remind one of the power and presence of Islamic authority in

¹⁷ The *adhan* has a certain melodic contour that has been implement by the *mu'adeneen* over the years. It is not particularly clear where this melody came from, but it is usually in *maqam* (mode) *hijaz*. See the appendix for a transcription of the *adhan*.

daily life. Even before anyone can choose to volunteer or ignore religious responsibility, the *adhan* gave a sense of an inescapable sonic presence to the divine.

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga

Instead of staying in a hotel during my preliminary fieldwork trip in Jogja, I relied on Airbnb to find a room. It was a good choice as it allowed me to become familiar with the different cultural scenes of the city with the help of my landlord hosting me in their home. They went well beyond just providing the basic accommodation necessities and made sure I knew Jogja well. My hosts were a family of three: a mother and two daughters who belonged to the *priyayi* class of Javanese society. Their late father was a well-known judge in Jogja. Although they were not regular attendees of *sholawat*, they did eventually help me connect with some of the Islamic music performers I would eventually know. One morning after having some *gudeg* (a stew made from jackfruit, palm sugar, and coconut milk) at a *lesehan*, the cashier at the restaurant inquired about my reason for visiting Indonesia and what I planned on doing there. After informing her of my interests, she proceeded to give me information about a group of students whom she claimed played and sang Arab and Islamic music at a local university. It was at that moment where I first was made aware of the *Universitas Islam Negeri* and their mentor *Ustaz* Ilham Soleh. It was a small city after all, and needless to say, this connection paved the way into encountering an extensive network of Islamic music practitioners in *Jogja* and the rest of Central Java. UIN Sunan Kalijaga belongs to a more extensive network of Islamic universities in Java called *Universitas Islam Negeri*, or the State Islamic University system. UIN Sunan Kalijaga is one of the first state-funded institutions established for Islamic education and has the most extensive practice of Islamic arts among UIN schools.

The State Islamic University system organizes its academic disciplines like any other non-religious institution of higher learning. However, what distinguishes it from other universities are the extensive departments dedicated to theological and civic Islamic education. The UIN system began in the city of Yogyakarta when the state—under the pressure of Islamic organizations— began taking an active role in socio-religious affairs. This system was the first post-secondary religious education offered beyond the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and was known as *Institut Agama Islam Negeri* (IAIN), or the State Institute for Islam. At the time, these institutions were strictly dedicated to religious education and did not incorporate standardized secular learning into their system until the 21st century, as they gradually became the network of UIN universities.¹⁸ The first UIN conversion was in as recent as 2002 with UIN Syarif Hidayatullah in Jakarta, followed by UIN Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta in 2004. This was shortly after the beginning of the *reformasi* period in the post-Suharto era, when many institutions undertook substantial reform and organizational development, including the education system. As of 2018, there are still 23 IAIN campuses and 17 UIN campuses scattered across Indonesia. In 2017, five institutions switched over from the IAIN system to UIN, which essentially represents an increase in the departmental capacities of the IAIN system. These changes point to the more recent synthesis between secular and religious education in colleges and universities across Indonesia. Although the state and religious institutions recognized the need to amalgamate the religious and secular education into their curriculum and allow graduates to stay more competitive, UIN is still mostly an Islamic institution. Students in large attend it in order to receive higher education degrees in Islamic studies. Nonetheless, the state still

¹⁸ In addition to IAIN and UIN, *Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam* STAIN is also another system of Islamic higher-education institutions that offers graduate degrees in Islamic economics and business, as well as various other degrees in Islamic studies. Of all three entities, the UIN system is the only one that grant non-religiously affiliated degrees to students.

recognizes the need to produce graduates who can fit within the competitive business sectors in Indonesia and the rest of Southeast Asia.

When UIN began as an IAIN school it only had three major departments on its campus: The department of *Da'wah*, which later became *Ushuluddin* Faculty (The Faculty of Islamic Divinity), The Department of Shari'a (Islamic Law), The Department of *Tarbiyah* (Department of Islamic Education). When the school became a UIN system in 2004, five other departments were added: The Department of Literature and Cultural Studies, The Department of Science and Technology, The Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Department of Economics and Business Administration, and a separate department for graduate and doctoral studies (interview with dean of student affairs, June 27, 2016). UIN offers degree programs at the undergraduate, master, and Ph.D. levels, and employs faculty members from many disciplines. The dynamics between religious and secular learning was to me the hallmark for this type of Islamic institution, because it sought to always allow students to engage in both secular and religious understanding of their surrounding world, and ways they can mediate between both environment. We will see this directly as we learn later about the ways they innovate traditional Islamic arts.

At the time I conducted this research, UIN had multiple visiting scholars from Western Universities teaching courses in the humanities and social sciences. There were also guest lecturers and frequent speakers from the Middle East, Europe, Australia, and the United States, giving paper presentations within various academic topics. UIN was starting to look more like a traditional university than an Islamic institution. The wide range of workshops, classes, and daily activities encompass a whole range of secular and religious interests that give students a sense of belonging to a modern cosmopolitan world that accommodate both the religious and the secular. This was not only evident in the type of curriculum offered to UIN students, but the way the

students themselves sought to engage in extracurricular and voluntary actions that mediate between a life of religious learning within a wider secular world.



Figure 2.3: University Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga is one of the largest publically funded Islamic universities in Indonesia, and has transitioned its religious education programs to incorporating secular higher education disciplines

All of these departments employ curriculums designed to prepare students in various fields in science and technology, as well as social sciences and the humanities. As a state university wholly funded by the government, UIN and other state-funded institutions are utilized extensively by Indonesia's emerging young middle class. The accessibility to state-funded religious universities has its roots in the relationship that was developed between state officials and Islamic institutions. Muslim groups like *Darul Islam* gained leverage with the state by helping with the colonial resistance against the Dutch. The Islamists' support in the expulsion of the Dutch and other foreign adversaries throughout the 20th century improved the relationship between the central state authority and Islamic counterparts (Ricklefs 1993). Their requests for the increase of religion in Indonesia led the state to establish pragmatic guidelines in their approach to religion, further intensifying the propagation of religious education and infrastructure, and Islamizing Indonesian society. The state Islamic university system is under

the umbrella of the ministry of religion, whose minister Lukman Hakim Saifuddin began overseeing in 2014. During my visit to Java, Saifuddin was present at UIN for the inauguration of a new building and gave a speech about the future of UIN as a modern Islamic education system able to accommodate the modern world (UIN, Yogyakarta, August 2017). As a state entity, the ministry of religion is neutral in its mission to protect and oversee all religious affairs in Indonesia, provided they fall under the religion accepted in the *Pancasila*.¹⁹ However, in terms of Inter-religious education within religious institutions like UIN, the government remain 'out of the way' in terms of taking any direct action (Parker 2014).

The ideology of *da'wah* forms the underlying motive of community engagement that the students undertake throughout their presence at the university. It constitutes the full commitment to support, enhance, and maintain the social fabric of Muslims in Jogja, and enhance the social life of the community around them. The students routinely teach things like Quranic recitation, *rebanna* drumming, Arabic, and other Islamic subjects to women and children not affiliated with the student body at UIN. The outreach efforts undertaken by the students also extend to formal and informal celebrations like Islamic weddings, holidays, anniversaries, or any celebrations that require a form of Islamic music. In many instances, I accompanied the students on long trips that were funded not by the university itself, but by them personally to perform for someone's wedding, or attend a celebration for memorizing the Quran. The latter was a common occurrence, an event called "*Haflat Khatmul Quran*," where a community celebrate kids or teenagers who have recited or memorized the entire text of the Quran. In these types of celebrations, UIN students would perform *gambus* music which to many passive observer

¹⁹ Under the Indonesian constitution, the *pancasilia*, there are five recognized religions: Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. There has been numerous critical studies on the subject of the Pancasila and religious pluralism and equality in Indonesia both historically and in contemporary terms. For example of such studies see (Crouch 2013, Pearson 2013, Duncan 2012, Fitch 1989).

indicate a sense of "Islamicness." Although *gambus* is not particularly the topic of this dissertation (see Birg 2009), I have mentioned in the first chapter that it is important to the lives of those mostly involved in the *sholawat* scene. In fact, it was through *gambus* that students would be engaged mostly with the community around them. In the third chapter I will discuss the *gambus* in more detail focusing on how a *gambus* student club consist of members exclusively dedicated to the genre.



Figure 2.4: Members of the sholawat division of al-Mizan and UIN faculty with the minister of religion Lukman Hakim Saifuddin and the university president Yudian Wahyudi

UKM al-Mizan

Jalan Timoho separates the West and East side of the UIN campus where we drove up to meet Ilham, our contact from the restaurant owner. Upon entering the large cement building, echos of shouting were heard in the lobby as students practiced their Taekwondo, one of the units of as an extracurricular activity. The internal shape of the building was a courtyard-like structure with an open space in the middle and rooms scattered around the perimeter. This

building has been dedicated to the *Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa* (student activity units). Visual and performing arts degrees in music or dance are not offered; however, the *UKM mahasiswa* is available as an extracurricular for the students to develop interests ranging from film, visual arts, and music, to journalism, sports, and the environment.²⁰ The diversity of the *UKM* student clubs shows this wide range of interests. The two student groups that are in the scope of this ethnography are *al-Mizan* and *al-Jami'ah*, both of which are involved in performances of Islamic and Arab music in various styles and periods. *al-Mizan* more closely, which is the largest student group among *UKM*.



Figure 2.5: *Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa* (students activities unit) members rehearsing the *sholawat* in their room, located in the student's activities center building

Upon entering the building, I went to the second floor where *al-Mizan-sholawat* had a room that was no larger than 20 by 20 feet (pictured above). There, students were seated on the floor with one student play keyboard and three other students playing different percussion

²⁰ The groups under *UKM* were *Jama'ah Cinema Mahasiswa* (Student Cinema Group), *Gita Savana* (University Choir), *al-Mizan* (Islamic Arts and Music and one of the groups in focus for this ethnography), *Taekwondo*, *Olah Raga* (Sports), *KSR PIM* (Student Red Cross Group), *LPM Arena* (Student Newsletter Group), *Teater Eska* (Student Theater Group), *INKAI* (Student Karate Group), *Mapalaska* (Student Environmental Protection Group), *Orkes Gambus* (Gambus and Arab music), *Koerasi Mahasiswa* (Student Cooperation Group), *Kordiska* (Student Military Training Group), *Resimen Mahasiswa* (Student Scout Group).

instruments including the *darbuka* (goblet Middle Eastern drum). After greeting everyone, a student asked me: “*Aku bermain gambus mas?*” (do you play the gambus?). There was an *ud* in the room hanging right on the wall and since Ilham was not there yet, I proceeded to tune it and play along with the students while waiting for Ilham. One of the members of the group was a competent Quranic reciter by the name of Nida Zahwa. After I tuned the oud, Nada asked me to play a song for Umm Kalthoum with her called "Ghanili Shway." Her mastery of such popular Egyptian songs from the middle of the 20th century shows the competency some these students have in performing Arab music. Al-Mizan is the Arabic word for scale or balance, and in the context of the group, the name implies the balance of life and religion.



Figure 2.6: The student activities center at UIN is designed to facilitate the activities and rehearsals of all *unit kegiatan mahasiswa*. Each club is assigned a separate room where students spend most of their time socializing and rehearsing

Al-Mizan formed from a cooperation between two academic departments: The Department of Shari'a (Islamic Law), and the Department of Divinity (*Usuluddin*). In 1993 while UIN was still under the IAIN banner, they became *Jam'iyah Qurra 'wa al-Huffaz* (the organization of readers and memorizers). Club al-Mizan was dedicated to further enhance the

knowledge of Quranic studies through artistic engagement in visual and performing arts. At first, three divisions existed with club: *Tilawa* (recitation), *tahfiz* (memorization), and *tafseer* (interpretation). During the academic year of 2001-2002, three other divisions were added including calligraphy (namely Arabic calligraphy and Islamic visual arts), and *sholawat* (musical prayers). Today this group is called JQH al-Mizan.²¹

During my preliminary fieldwork visit, I interviewed Dr. Jarot Wahyudi, the dean of student affairs at UIN. When I asked him about the goals of al-Mizan prepare learners to become scholars and professionals at *da'wah* and can apply *da'wah* expertise in their community. Our students believe in being pious and noble individuals who have a deep sense of moral and civic responsibility towards social and political issues” (Wahyudi, Yudian. Interview on July 7, 2017). Dr. Wahyudi would eventually discuss his trip to America with me and how the weather in the U.S was far colder than he could handle. His competency in English allowed us to carry on a cordial conversation and discuss my research with him. He offered to help me with any visa needs in order to stay in Indonesia for a prolonged period. Indonesia's immigration policy mandate that researchers be sponsored by an institutions in order to gain a temporary residency visa, and UIN became the sponsoring institution for the duration of my fieldwork.

Al-Mizan-Sholawat holds various activities besides the day-to-day training, including performances in festivals, weddings, and celebrations; attending and supporting public religious sermons, hosting national competitions for Quranic arts, memorization and interpretation competitions, and hosting calligraphy art exhibits. A student member of al-Mizan does not necessarily participate in all of these divisions simultaneously, in fact, most students only choose one or two of the divisions, and their participation is based on their interest, competency, and

²¹ Abbreviation of names is very common in Indonesia. Many times throughout this ethnography, I asked members of the community and the school to inform me of the meaning for many abbreviations.

experience. Before entering UIN, participants of Al-Mizan-*sholawat* have had a certain degree of exposure to Islamic musical and visual arts through the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), or another public or private Islamic education programs for children and teenagers.



Figure 2.7: al-Mizan members Nida Zahwa and Nura Asiyah performing in a religious music festival in Sleman, outside of Yogyakarta

I observed al-Mizan for several months during their rehearsals at the student center; traveling to different venues and cities to play in festivals and weddings, and attending the *rutinan sholawat* with Gus Ilham every Thursday night in his house in Sleman. After several interviews with administrators and faculty members in charge of al-Mizan, it became clear that the group's focus is practicing and developing Quranic arts in traditional and reinvented ways. As mentioned before, the term Quranic arts, or *seni Quran*, does not only mean Quranic recitation but a variety of activities surrounding artistic sonic and visual creations and practices. With permission from the dean of student activities, and in order to obtain the proper governmental paperwork to conduct my research, I asked the university to sponsor my research. Islamic universities welcome projects such as mine because they are eager to hear the perspective of Western academics on Islam after a prolonged observation such as an ethnography

and a dissertation. The sponsorship ensured that I would become more familiar with the community of students and mentors in *Jogja*, and their lives in the culture of *sholawat*. When I asked one of the students about how art helps portray Islam, one of the students eloquently responded that “art reveals the beauty and wisdom underlying the word of Allah, which is in the Quran.” Many Indonesian Muslims encounter Arabic phonics at a very young age either through engaging with Quranic recitation or reading other Islamic texts in Arabic.



Figure 2.8: Members of al-Mizan *sholawat* division sing and practice the *sholawat* together in the building for student activities

In their audio-equipped small rehearsal space, students of al-Mizan played and sang not only religious anthems but also favorite songs from Egypt for the legendary Umm Kulthoum. Such songs like “Ghanili Shway” and “all-Atlal,” two pieces I eventually performed extensively with the group, were performed for different occasions. Also, al-Mizan recreated popular Islamic tunes for artists like Maher Zain and Mustafa Atef. Atef’s song, “*Qamaron*,” achieved considerable world fame by the year 2013. Indonesia currently hosts Atef and Zain several times throughout the year with thousands of attendees either through events like a *sholawat*, or a an

official Islamic music concert. In chapter four, I will discuss the significance of these transnational Islamic artists, and how their music within Indonesia became widely popular in recent years through the exposure to YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook.

Most of the individuals in the *sholawat* division were also competent percussionists who played hand drums called the *rebanna*. Because of this, the majority of my musical training among the students involved learning the history and practice of the *rebanna* drums along with their different patterns and styles. The students blend the *rebanna* drums not only in the context of religious anthems and prayers but also with synthesizers and Western instrumentations to perform other genres of music. Other students played instruments like bass and electric guitars, violin, and synthesizers able to electronically reproduce quarter tones as they are found in music based on microtonal *maqam* modes. Additionally, Javanese *gamelan* instruments like *saron* and *peking* were also adapted while using pelog and diatonic tuning. The student's Arabic diction and ability to perform the *maqam* vocally was evident from years of immersion in the tonal and phonetical uses of Arabic. This is especially the case for those who can recite the Quran in the melismatic and highly ornamental style of *mujawad*.



Figure: 2.9: Middle school students practicing the *rebanna*. The rebanna frame drums are essential to *sholawat*, and an intricate practice of interlocking patterns emerged as the result of its extensive use in worship.

Ilham Soleh and *Majlis al-Ukhuwwah* in Sleman

Among the practitioners of *sholawat*, a young *kyai* originally from the city of Kudus in northern Central Java named Ilham Sholeh has gained popularity in the region and became a close informant during my visit. Sholeh resides in a suburb just north of Yogyakarta in Sleman. Gus Ilham Sholeh is in his late thirties and has been a member of a larger network of Islamic *munshideen* called *Ahbabul Musthofa*. He is of Javanese descent and has not only mastered the discourses of *tafsir* (interpretation of Quranic text) but has also become a virtuosic performer of the *maqam* and the songs found in the *sholawat*. Sholeh was among the best I have heard in the *adaa'* (execution) of Arabic text, and the power of his voice and charming personality produces some of the best renditions of the *sholawat* in Java. Gus Ilham sponsors a *majlis* name *majlis al-ukhuwa lil ta'lim wal muthakara* (religious forum and gathering), which I will discuss in the next chapter as I describe the *mawlid*, a very important component to the *sholawat*.

Sholeh also mentors the *sholawat* students at UIN and was present during my first visit to the UIN campus. He is always cheerful and amiable, spoke Arabic in the *fus'ha* dialect (classical Arabic dialect), and knew how to recite the Quran. Ilham is a *kyai* of Javanese descent from Kudus, an important region for emergence of Islam in Java due to its association as a source for the early spread of the religion. One of the first mosques in Java was built in Kudus and is considered a popular pilgrimage site for visiting Sunan Kudus and his family— one of the nine saints credited for spreading Islam in Java (Ricklef 1993). Sunan Kudus is also credited for spreading the practice of *wayang golek*.²² Ilham did not live in *Jogja* proper, but on the outskirts of the city in a town called Sleman, just to the north of the special region, and holds a *majlis*

²² Three-dimensional wooden puppets used in the traditional shadow puppet theater in Java. These performances were adapted by the Wali Songo in their *Da'wah*.

called *Majlis al-Ukhuwah Lil Ta'lim Wal Muzakra* in the community.²³ The students from UIN would often go to Ilham's *majlis* and participate in his *sholawat* routine once a week. Ilham's vocal virtuosity in the *maqam* made me inclined to listen to him more and attend his weekly sessions, and document the *rutinan sholawat* (the *sholawat* routine) and the *mawlid* he carries on once or even several times a week. The students would bring their drums with them and join Ilham's *majlis*, which took place outside of his house. The *majlis* would pack anywhere from 20 to 100 attendees from the surrounding community from all ages. Women would often sit either in front of the men or to the left of the small stage.



Figure 2.10: Performing gambus music at a local mosque with members of al-Mizan sholawat division

During the first time I attended the *majlis*, I was invited by Gus Ilham (Gus comes from the word *bagus*, which is an important label given to those of Javanese descent who have a strong religious identity and religious knowledge) personally who exchanged his phone number

²³ The word *majlis* has several meanings in Arabic (forum, council, committee). But in the context of religion, the *majlis* entails gathering for studying and performing religion under the umbrella of a particular entity (either the name of the person leading it or a name of a group). A *majlis* can have either or both of these elements.

with me at the time we met in the students activity center on campus. One of the students picked me up from my residence, and we rode the *sepeda* (motorcycle) about 25 minutes to the town of Sleman. As we began to venture further away from the crowded streets and congested neighborhoods of Jogja, I began to notice the vast wet field of rice plantation and farm regions. Along with the *ramai* and *keras* nature of Jogja, there was a surrounding quiet rural region with cleaner air and vast fields of rice. Houses were further away from one another, and the dirt roads off of the primary two-lane highway were muddy and uneven. Aside from the major infrastructures of large cities like *Jogja*, it was apparent, from various travels by car across Central Java, that most of the region resembled what I am describing here. Except for major one-way highways that connect different regions within Central Java. Given the limited highway space between cities, car travel in Java was significantly slower than what I had been used to. Many times, what would usually take 4 hours of drive on a major highway in the U.S would take about 12 hours in Java. However, in recent years, Jokowi Widodo has been very aggressive in advancing Indonesia's travel and communication infrastructure. Becoming familiar with the *majlis* of Gus Ilham allowed me to gain an understanding of the *mawlid* and its role in the *sholawat*.

Sholeh was a perfect example of a *santri*, an individual educated in an Islamic boarding school named the *pesantren*. In his study *The Religion of Java*, Clifford Geertz highlights the contrast between the two terms *santri* and *abangan* by stating that the “*santris* are different from the *abangan* in their self-declared religious superiority and their insistence that Islam is doctrinal, [whereas] the *abangan* are fairly indifferent to doctrine, but are concerned about ritual details, while remaining tolerant toward different religious beliefs” (Geertz 1960:128). But many of the informants I spoke with believe that the *santri* and *abangaan* distinction is not relevant today, especially under the idea of Islam Nusantara. Individuals cross boundaries in terms of their

proximity to conservative and liberal interpretations, or local and imported customs. It remains particular to the specific type of *pesantren* that one has attended, and the kyai that overlook that particular school. Although this does not pertain to the subjects of this research, some *pesantren* have recently gone as far as incorporating Salafi-style madrasas and produced *santris* with radical and dogmatic Islamic views. Those *santris* often oppose the *sholawat* since they are seen by Salafism as a forbidden practice (*haram*), and not prescribed by the "pure" form of Islam. As mentioned in the first chapter, this is an important dichotomy between an Islam inspired by Sufism, and its opposition in the Salafi ideology. Although Salafism does not reject speech in the form of *khutba*, it does reject any attempts to glamorize religious scripture and poetry. For example, even the *mujawad* style of Quranic recitation is frowned upon by Salafism and reciters are obligated to not embellish their performance too much. The results of such rigid treatment of religious performance ends up alienating more Muslims who seek to engage further with Islam through artistic mediums.



Figure 2.11: Gus Ilham (second to left) surrounded by young *santris* in Sleman during his weekly *majlis al-ta'lim wal muthakara*

The Role of the *Mawlid* in *Sholawat*

Muslims around the world celebrate the *mawlid* (the birth of prophet Muhammad) during the Islamic lunar calendar month of *Rabi' al-awwal*.²⁴ The *mawlid* is a crucial aspect to understanding the *sholawat* because it is in the context of the *mawlid* that textual and musical material are produced, performed, and developed within the *sholawat*. What forms the majority of textual sources to conduct the *sholawat* are mainly adapted from the repertoire of the *mawlid*, where these texts are often read, recited, and sung with or without percussion. The *mawlid* can be conceived as a type of celebratory liturgy—one that has been written by several Islamic scholars throughout history. Though not always, each *mawlid* is usually named after its writer, and different *mawlids* vary widely in how they are performed across the Islamic world. It is suitable for us to perceive the *mawlid* as a central component of *sholawat* in terms of its textual material, but not as the entirety of *sholawat*. A single *sholawat* event may or may not contain a *mawlid*, and may or may not contain Islamic music such as a religious *qasidah* or *nasheed*. Though often, as seen in the *majlis* of Gus Ilham and others I have attended, the *sholawat* frequently incorporate all of these components together in a wide-ranging fashion. The sermons and public speaking portions through loudspeakers are always present and are usually what the spectators feel inclined to attend. At times, Gus Ilham would invite other *Kyais* and *Habibs* from the surrounding region to perform with him. The figure below shows the elements that constitute a *sholawat* event. The term *bersholawat* with the prefix *ber* often means ‘the act of doing’ *sholawat* or being in the state of *sholawat*.²⁵

²⁴ The celebration of the birth of the prophet occurs on the 12th day of *rabi al-awal* in the Islamic lunar calendar, thus can change in the corresponding non-Islamic calendar.

²⁵ For example the word for danger mean *bahaya*. When we add the prefix *ber* in front of it, it becomes *berbahaya* meaning dangerous.

Understanding just precisely what constituted the *sholawat* was a challenge to me because words like *mawlid* did not often circulate among people during the *sholawat*. We can properly say that the *sholawat* are essentially the intensification of the *mawlid* performance since they did not only take place once a year, but occurred often throughout the year. Its progression and what is read differ from one day to another— though I was eventually able to pinpoint a few practices and melodic material that seemed to always take place, at least in the groups and performers I observed. This variability was why I refrained from conceptualizing the *sholawat* as a genre of Islamic music. When one reads ‘*sholawat* album’ on a cover of CDs or YouTube video descriptions, one would assume that it would contain parts of a *mawlid* or some live performance. However, the word *sholawat* was starting to mean anything that had singing and religious lyrics praising the prophet— either with lyrics that are newly written or ones adapted from preexisting texts. CDs for Habib Shaikh were titled with the word *sholawat* and would contain songs and lyrics composed and written by Habib Sheikh exclusively.



Figure 2.12: A kiyai addressing sholawat attendees in the berkhotba portion of a typical sholawat event. Sometimes, the sholawat take place within the context of state and local celebrations

The term *sholawat* would start to sound more like a *genre* of Islamic music and less like the dynamic-act we are describing here. This was very frustrating and took some time to decipher and understand because it was challenging to distinguish other practices deemed ‘Islamic music’ from one another, especially when it came to things like *anasheed* or *qasidah*. Also, the prohibition of instruments was only apparent in live performances of *sholawat* but not on CDs or pre-recorded music published online. I believe that the canonization and creation of genres, in general, are problematic when it comes to Islamic music either in Indonesia or elsewhere. The lines are often so blurry that it becomes more of an obstacle to categorize them and understand their differences than to situate them in their times and contexts. In some instances, practices of genres develop and differ from one decade to another, and that is partly why the problem arises. These practices are fluid, recontextualized, reinvented, and reappropriated from one generation to the next, and from one country to the other. Since the Islamic world shares many literary Islamic works locally and from the Arab world, it becomes even more problematic the genres in literary terms. I will discuss all of these pitfalls in the last chapter because I found that terms, practices, genres, and meanings were very unorganized and mixed-up, either from scholarly attempts to canonize events and genres consistent recurrences or from the variety of different local interpretations I received while in the field.

It is safe to say, however, that in almost all of the *sholawat* events I attended, there were speeches and sermons given—*berkhotba* or *nasihat*—along with interpretations and inspirations derived from Quranic text or the *hadith*. As mentioned in the introduction, this portion of the *sholawat* is most often the longest, where the preacher is in charge of quoting verses from the Quran and translating them to Javanese or Indonesian for locals to understand. It is important to note here that a linguistic obstacle emerged when trying to translate *khotba* (singular term of the word sermon) transcripts from Javanese to English. However, with the help of some informants,

I luckily was able to find out what the theme of most sermons were. Although *Bahasa Indonesia* was the language I learned in the U.S before going to Indonesia, I found that most people in Java spoke with each other in the local Javanese dialect, which I was not well equipped to understand. This was the case for most conversations taking place between individuals— conversations which I eagerly wanted to participate in.

In formal terms, Bahasa Indonesian was the primary language for formal communication in businesses, politics, popular media, and other public nationwide outlets of communication. Arabic was perceived as the language of God, but not the language of everyday life. The *khotba* that was given during a *sholawat* event was entirely given in Javanese or Indonesian, except for moments when the leader quotes parts of the Quran or a *hadith*—something which frequently happened. As stated in the previous chapter, the art of the sermon and public speaking is an essential skill for religious figures. Many of the *kyais* and *habibs* I met were excellent at charismatic public speaking with in-depth knowledge of Arabic.²⁶ However, the task for the Indonesian Islamic preacher is two-fold: One is the translation (*terjemahan*) of Arabic into Javanese or Indonesia; the second is the interpretation and clarification (*tafsir*) of complicated religious text—both actions happening simultaneously in the *majlis*.

Musik Islami is perhaps the most loosely defined component within a *sholawat* act because it is highly unpredictable and changing depending on the situation. For example, a *sholawat* event may conclude with a song for a current Islamic artist like Mostafa Atef, or a religious song using borrowed melodies from secular Arab music of Syria or Egypt. It is necessary to note that *musik Islami* forms a mixture of songs and poems that may or may not be

²⁶ Here we shall mention that knowledge of Arabic derived from religious learning is different from Arabic derived from learning the language from a neutral non-religious perspective. Authority figures in Indonesia understand Arabic in the context of Islam primarily. In certain cases, conversational Arabic in *fusha* with some of my informants was at times still challenging despite their deep knowledge of language from a religious perspective. However, in the context of a *khotba* it was sufficient enough to understand and convey the meaning of religious text.

sung at a *sholawat* event. This portion usually takes place toward the end of a *sholawat* event when the text of the *mawlid* has been performed. In some instances, Gus Ilham allowed me to perform secular Arab music on stage after the conclusion of the *mawlid*, and the students would play the songs with me with their instruments. Gus Ilham would join me in singing for Umm Kulthum. To my surprise, this was permissible because the sound of the maqam and Arabic was intimately connected to Islamicness regardless of the contents of lyrics. We will return to this interesting point in another section because it highly pertains to our analysis of these events. Here is where the genre of *gambus* was not entirely forbidden at the end of a *sholawat* session because it is seen as a time to listen to something "light" and less serious than reading the *mawlid*.

The Significance of the *Mawlid* in Islam

The celebration of the *mawlid* takes place across the Muslim world in a variety of styles particular to the region they are performed. But as a religious act, the lines are blurred as to whether the *mawlid* should be seen as a normative process or a popular mode of piety Muslims. The moderate and conservative streams of Sunni Islam are at odds as to the legitimacy of the *mawlid* where the Salafi purist ideology categorially reject any celebration or any glorification of the Prophet, especially since all of the *mawlid* discourses are created after the Prophet's death and by individuals from different regions throughout the Muslim world. In doing so, the Salafi doctrine has in turn struggled to influence any public and popular religious acts and gain more supporters. In the moderate streams of Sunni Islam, the *mawlid* discourses are cherished and celebrated giving Muslims an opportunity to express their religion on the public stage. Marion Holmes Katz discusses this development in her book, and how act like the *mawlid* give the

modern Islamic subject a way to connect to a larger network of believers and not become reclusive in behavior (such as seen by Wahabi ideology). She writes:

[...] the transformation of the terms of the *mawlid* debate reflects more than the shifting balance of power in a dispute over religious authority in the Sunni world. It also reflects a transformation of religious consciousness that is integrally related to the impact of modernity. In many ways, the *mawlid* controversy can serve as a microcosm of the religious implication of modern ideas about the nature of the individual and of the world. The person implied by pre-modern devotional practice was not a bounded individual with exclusive responsibility for her own action and an emotional subjectivity inaccessible to others. Rather the believer's ethical personhood was constituted by a network of relationships with living and dead relatives, neighbors, and holy persons. His or her religious emotions were publically constituted, inculcated through appropriate pedagogical activities (Katz 2009: 210).

If we examine the *mawlid* carefully, one crucial question arises: what are the textual contents and sources of the *mawlid*, and how is it performed? Additionally, why have these works provoked so much interest in Java in the first place? The historical relationship between Hadramout and Indonesia offer a partial answer to this question. Additionally, the absence of a communal liturgical canon in the Islamic tradition is another reason why the performance of the *mawlid* is so prevalent in the first place—an act that is both musical and collective. The *salat* (prayer) in Islam is a solitary act, where individual whispers certain verses (though at times it is done in groups). An activity like *mawlid*, though not seen as one of the Islamic pillars, is attractive to many because it counters the solitude and soundlessness of *salat*. Moreover, the *mawlid* is an important aspect of Sufism and *da'wah* activities across the world. In the case of Java, it was performed by Sufis and Islamic clerics from the Arabian Peninsula and has attracted many people to Islam because of its artistic, performative nature. As a literary work, the *mawlid*, in its substance, does several things simultaneously. First, it reveals aspects of the prophet's life, the Quran, and the lives of those around him poetically and elaborately. Second, it brings forth to people the prophet Muhammad as a symbolic figure of the ideal Muslim type, and an example

for all to follow. Islamic art and music expert Lois Lamya al Faruqi elaborate on the *mawlid* further in her article:

The celebrations honoring the Prophet are enhanced by the retelling of events from his life as well as recitations praising his qualities and deeds. These narrative and poetic recitations, also called *mawlid*s, involve solo chants and hymn singing. In some communities the *mawlid* also incorporates examples of instrumental accompaniment, body movements and/or gala processions. (Faruqi 1986).

Lois does not situate the *mawlid* in a particular region or country but describes its general features. Depending on the Sufi tradition (*tariqa*), and geographic regions, the *mawlid* can have different texts and routines, and vary widely from one place to another.

Because the *mawlid* has laid the groundwork for religious performance, it has become an essential component of celebrations ranging from religious holidays like Eid Al-Adha and Eid Al-Fitr, to family celebrations like birth, circumstances, graduations, and weddings. In terms of the views on *mawlid* from the perspectives of religious authorities like the *ulema*, it has been both criticized and praised as a practice—depending on who is doing the criticizing or praising. Most of the criticism of the *mawlid* is justified as being a new phenomenon that did not exist during the times of the prophet or the early years following his death. From the perspective of religious authority figures who praise it, the *mawlid* is seen as an opportunity for one to get closer to God and closer to the prophet. An Iraqi *Ulema* by the name of Abdul Malik Al Sadi said (translated):

The celebration of the Prophet's birth was not known in the era of the companions. But its absence from these times does not make it a sin or against the *Sariah*. But celebrating the prophet's birth as if it was one of the five pillars of Islam, like fasting and praying, is indeed a sin. Moreover, we shall not call it 'Eid because Muslims only have two 'Eids. It is a remembrance of our prophet and his life, away from worldly temptations and the mixing of men and women, while praising the prophet peace be upon him, is not a sin (al-Saidi 1964).

Al-Sadi claims that the *mawlid* should not be labeled as a holiday, but rather, a collective performance justified by the virtue found in repeating the Prophet's name.

The content of *mawlid* reveals that its authors were well versed and highly competent in poetic and elaborate Arabic writing (known in Arabic as *balaghah*), and have received a considerable amount of religious knowledge throughout their life. Most *mawlid* writers were men holding a religious authority status like a *mufti* or *ulema*. With around 200 documented *mawlids* throughout Islamic history, the *mawlid* is perceived as a literary genre of classical religious text in Arabic and has been an essential theme among formalized religious performances alongside Quranic recitations. In Indonesia, there are three *mawlids* frequently performed within the *sholawat*: *mawlid al-Diba'i*, *mawlid Simtu-dhuror*, and *mawlid al-Barzanji*. In different ways, all of these *mawlids* contain the history of the life of the prophet and his physical depictions, his behavior, and lessons, as well as poems praising him as an ideal role model and messenger of Allah. Throughout my fieldwork, the most widely used *mawlid* in Java appeared to be *Mawlid Simtu-Dhurar* for Ali Bin Muhammad al-Habshi. Additionally, *Mawlid Al-Barzanji* for Ja'afar bin Hassan al-Barzanji was also performed, though not as frequently as *Simtu-Dhurar*. When attending Gus Ilham's *majlis* in Sleman, I often witnessed the performance of sections from *Simtu-Dhurar*. It was unusual to witness a reading of the entire *mawlid*.

The author of *Simtu-Dhurar*, Habib Ali Bin Muhammad Bin Hussain al-Habshi, has a lineage that extends to the prophet, and was born in Hadramout in the year 1843 and died in 1915 (al-Hamed 1968).²⁷ The name al-Habshi, or as it is written in Indonesian *al-Habsyi*, is a significant name in our study because it points to a family with significant religious authority in Indonesia. Al-Habshi is widely considered to be one of the leading Sufi figures in Hadramout, and the founder of the first Islamic school in that region (al-Alawi 2005). The *mawlid Simtu-Dhurar* was written by al-Habshi during the month of the prophet's birth and was read out loud

²⁷ The presence of the prophet's lineage in Hadramout is attributed to the Banu Hashim clan of Saudi Arabia, who are descendants from the Prophet Muhammad Quraysh tribe.

every day throughout the whole month in people's homes in Seiyun (al-Habsyi 2010). The *mawlid* was designed to remind people of the purity and features of the prophet, an aspect to remember during his birth. *Simtu-Dhurar* circulated through the presence of al-Habshi family in Java, who have been present in the region during the middle of the 19th century. The lineage to the prophet is perhaps, and thus the spreading of the *mawlid*, are both contributions that are crucial to the Hadhrami immigrants in Java. All of whom are a small minority in the region.

This reality, the existence of *Hadhramis* with genealogical ties to the prophet himself, and a whole host of global political processes taking place throughout the 19th and early 20th century have played a crucial role in the Islamization of Java in general, and the increased acclaim of Arabs despite their minority status. Therefore we attribute the religious authority of those belonging to the prophet's family as one of the most important features and reasons for the spread of the *mawlid* not only in Java but also across the Muslim world. Since *mawlid Simtu-Dhurar* was performed extensively throughout this ethnography, it is useful to look at some of its textual and musical elements, which have gained wide popularity not only in the context of *sholawat* but sometimes as stand-alone poems with different musical arrangements performed in Islamic music genres like *qasidah* and *nasyid*. Attendants of the *sholawat* have been able to recite back and engage with the performers on stage making the literary genre of the *mawlid* some of the most popular among Indonesians today.



Figure 2.13: Students from UIN participating in *sholawat* of Gus Soleh Ilham in Sleman right outside of Yogyakarta. The students use several types of drums including *terbangan*, *dumbek*, and Indonesian *marawis*



Figure 2.14: Several books from a typical *sholawat* event. The book pictured on the right is *Simtu Durar*, a *mawlid* that is extensively used in Indonesia, while the other two are *qasidah* books

Upon examination of *mawlid Simtu-Dhurar* text, the contents seem to indicate that the text is divided between free verses and devotional poetry. The sections of the *mawlid* contain what we would term a eulogy (*made'h*), a biography (*sira*), Quranic verses, and a *du'a*

(invocation of blessings). At the start of the evening (most *sholawat* occur during the evening between 6 and 7 PM and last anywhere from two to four hours), the *kyai* would begin with *du'a*. This portion is not sung or recited but spoken (rather quickly) and enunciated with conviction and humbleness (*khushu'*). Before the *mawlid*, the eulogy is recited in *maqam bayati*. This *maqam* is one of the most important Arab modes in religious and secular music and frequently used in Quranic recitations and the *mawlid*. The *made'h* is free-metered and uses percussion only after the first section has been completed. The first section contains the following repeated refrain exchanged between the audiences and the reader (*qari'*: reader): *Ya Rabbi S'hali Ala Muhammad. Ya Rabi S'hali A'lehi Wa Salem* (my God pray upon Muhammad, my God pray upon him and guard him):

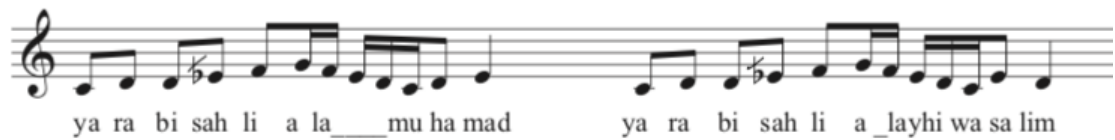


Figure 2.15: The refrain portion of *made'h* (eulogy) before mawlid Simtu-Dhurar

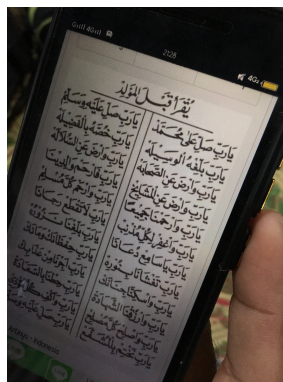


Figure 2.16: "*Ya Rabi Sali Ala Muhammad*" is recited in *maqam bayati* before the *mawlid* starts. Here a student uses his smartphone to read the verses during *sholawat*

Because of the absence of pitched instruments, the starting pitch is not necessarily D natural as we often encounter in *maqam bayati*. In relative terms, it has to be low enough to accommodate the upper parts of the voice. Gus Ilham had a wide vocal range and good relative pitch gained from decades of training at his *pesantren* in Kudus. The above meterless section repeatedly uses the first portion of the line and alternate the second portion with a new phrase each time, all of which while keeping the melodic material the same throughout. In the poetic tools utilized here are known as *balagha*: exaggerated and elaborate ways of praising a subject, and can be found in classical Arabic extensively not only in religious poetry but also in love or longing themes. The first sixteen lines in the *made'h* end with the letter “b” (baa’) while the second sixteen lines end with the glottal “q” (qaaf). While the attendees are seated on the ground participating in the eulogy along with Gus Ilham, the *rebana* percussionists are often seated in a different section adjacent to the stage either to the left or the right side. Most if not all the percussionists are using microphone equipment, making the stage crowded with wires, stands, and instruments. Large banners are hung behind the students and the main stage indicating the type of event taking place. Throughout the fieldwork, banners were a crucial aspect of every single event that took place, whether the event was a small local wedding or a large festival, banners seemed to be everywhere. Either in Indonesian or Arabic letters, the visual cues provided by the presence of banners give a sense of formality and importance to an event.



Figure 2.17: Majlis al-Ukhuwwah Lil-ta'lim wal-Muzakara in Sleman with UIN students (left) during a sholawat event. Depending on the location of the sholawat, the percussionists may either sit to the side of the stage or directly in front of it

After the first portion in the eulogy, the *rebana* drummers are ready to start the first metered section of the *madeh* and the most celebrated line within the *sholawat* culture: “*Assalam ‘alaika ya nabi (or ya Rasul) Allah*” (Peace be Upon You) prophet of God. In this second section of *made’h* the phrases *ya Rasul Allah* alternate with different praises such as “*zain al-anbiyai*” (the paragon of prophets), or, “*asfa al-asfiyai*” (the purest of pure), “*azka al-azkiya’i*” (the smartest of the smart), or, “*Ahmad ya habibi*” (Ahmed my beloved).²⁸ All of these short phrases are indicators of how the *mawlid* display fascination and love for the prophet that is punctuated by the notion of *balagha* (poetic exaggeration). This section is metered and follows a particular melody that also uses maqam *bayati*. At this point within the *mawlid*, the *rebana* drums play a vital rhythm called *Banjari*, which was developed in East Java and found in *sholawat*. After the first section of *made’h* we already introduced above, the metered section of the *made’h* comes along as follows:

²⁸ There are numerous and well known nicknames for the prophet that circulate among Muslims in Java and the Islamic world such as Ahmad (or Ahmed), Hamud, Humaid, Hamudeh, Hameed, etc..



Figure 2.18: the Second portion of the ma'deh indicating the response at audience response at measure six

The syncopated pattern *Banjari* is an important feature in the *sholawat* scene not only due to its prevalence throughout the *sholawat* of Java but its versatility across different genres. Starting with at least four drummers, the *Banjari* pattern is often played in even number of players who play two different patterns simultaneously: *grinci* and *tikah*. One of my informants from UIN told me that the history and practice of these patterns are associated with a region in South Kalimantan called Banjarmasin (hence the name *Banjari*), and was developed in practice throughout East Java, particularly in a region called Bangil (interview with Abdul Ghani August 2017). Their strokes are precise, elaborate, and accommodative to one another and utilize two different timbres from the *rebana*, often referred to by players as “dum” and “tek.” This phenomenon was perhaps the most “Javanese” or indigenous feature within the practice of *sholawat* that stood out as being particular to Java. It reminded me of the patterns played by the *kendang* player with the Javanese gamelan music. Its development in the Southeast Asian Archipelago makes perfect sense since its elaborate and syncopated patterns are not mainly Middle Eastern. The *Barzanji* pattern has two different tempos that change drastically (almost in double time) depending on the section being played. The first metered portion of the *made'h* we discussed above utilizes the slow tempo of the *Banjari* pattern and comes in at measure one right after the two-notes pick up:



Figure 2.19: This multi-rhythmic pattern played frequently on the *rebanna* drums during the *sholawat* is called Banjari. This is a significant rhythm in the *sholawat* and it is often used with multiple songs throughout the performance



Figure 2.20: Rebanna drummers alternating with the *grinci* and *tikah* interlocking. The drummers in this setting are directly facing the stage

The *Banjari* pattern is played throughout the slow rhythmic portion of the *mاده* until the *kyai* suddenly interrupts it with a fast up-tempo version of the same section but in a completely different melody. The double tempo of the Banjari pattern is almost unrecognizable in comparison to the beginning of the *mاده* but it is also easier to play because one can grasp the meter quickly. At this point, the upper portions of *maqam bayati* are explored with a more defined and extensive melody that utilizes the double-timed Banjari pattern, which also becomes

interchangeable with a rhythm called *masmudi* which is found in Middle Eastern music. Both patterns are played at the same time, using different instruments. With the already intricate and busy pattern of the *Banjari*, the elaborate and charged singing of the *kyai*, and the swaying along of the audiences, the *mawlid* at this point is highly evocative and energetic. The students play the *darbuka*, bass drums, and other hand percussions that they have brought along with them from campus. They have not utilized any other instruments besides the *rebana* drums at this point, and they have been eager to get into this section. In this instance, the percussion becomes intense and climatic, and people begin to sway along, slowly and subtly to the combined voice of those on stage. The *sholawat*, of course, is not carried out by a single person, but several people who are all regular attendees of the *majlis*.

The image shows a musical score for a section of a mawlid. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in 4/4 time, with lyrics in Indonesian: "a sa la mu a lek za i nal a n bi ya i a sa". The middle staff is labeled "Grinci" and the bottom staff is labeled "Tikah". Both percussion parts play a complex, rhythmic pattern. The score is divided into two systems, with a measure number "5" at the beginning of each system. The tempo of this section is indicated as allegro.

Figure 2.21: As the *made'h* section comes to an end, the tempo of this particular melody is allegro.

The *sira* or biography of the prophet is not typical or chronological but rather discloses aspects of the prophet's manners and teaching in free verse. These are read out loud by either the *kyai* or another member from the *kyai* assembly gathered on stage. Gus Ilham sometimes invited me to share the stage with him along with his assembly, where I would be given a small booklet that contains the *mawlid* text. Often, the *sira* is read fast (but clear) and people on stage would alternate between one another in a sequence. The microphones are in our hands, and the eyes of the audience are fixated on those who are on stage. During the sermon, *teh manis* (sweet hot tea) is given to us, and a box containing an assortment of snacks like sweet cake and a small banana keep people from getting too hungry. There is not a single sequence or organizational scheme of the *mawlid*, but rather it is different every time and varies in length and substance. What remains constant are the renditions and poems written by the authors of the *mawlid*, in this case, Ali Bin Hussain Al Habshi.

Sholawat as a component of the Da'wah in Indonesia

What institutions come into play when we refer to the practices of the *sholawat* as we observe in this chapter? First, we know that *sholawat* provides the context where the *santri*, *kyai*, *Habib*, *ulema*, (those with religious authority and training) approach the surrounding communities (many of which are *abangans*) through what they perceive as a form of *da'wah*. The maintenance of the religious authority of these individuals requires an input— a performance— and constant public engagements that go beyond the scriptural nature of Islam's holy book. The relationship between Gus Ilham, UIN, the State University, and the surrounding community create the scene of *sholawat* necessary to maintain the status quo of religion throughout Javanese society. The relationships we highlight here is part of the pragmatism the

institutions provide in order to propagate this practice. All of these institutions are vested in the *da'wah* in order to uphold the authority of Islam throughout society.

The following illustration gives a picture of this enterprise forming out of the cooperation between various *crecive* and formal institutions. First, the religious figure who is dedicated to the text—to the enunciative authority—and uses his performance and artistic knowledge in such event. Second, the Islamic universities, with institutions like UIN, bring forth a new generation of performers and ensures that the enterprise of *sholawat* continues to the future by giving young people the resources to nurture the practice. Third, the political and socio-religious community, like UN and MUI, ensures that these practices are propagated in the wider religious public sphere through their immense public support, and allows religion to penetrate educational and civil policies. Fourth, the pious community, the observers of such practices, form the various identities that come together in order to be enchanted by religion and become directly involved in performances through their support and attendance. This "fan base" of the *sholawat* is very difficult to isolate because of the many different types, locations, purpose, performers, and occasions of a *sholawat* event. As we will discuss in chapter four, what we think of as *sholawat* has evolved into other forms (for example *sholawat modern*) that do not directly correlate with the traditional *mawlid* we discussed here. Thus, in this chapter we have articulated the traditional *sholawat* event as it is conceived by the text of the *mawlid*, one which is highly routinized.

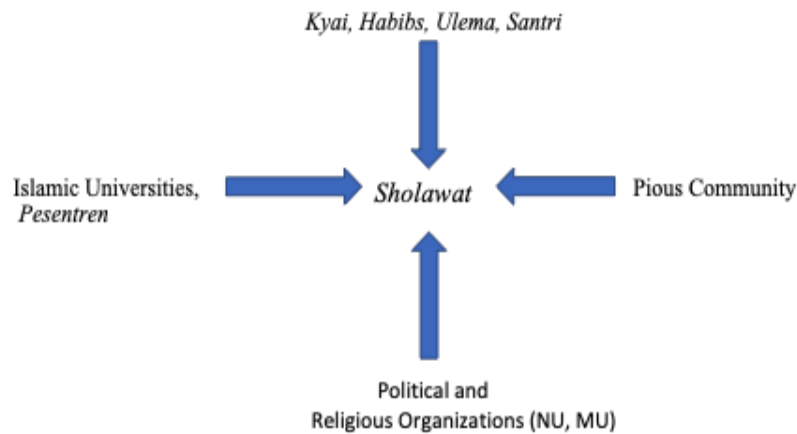


Figure 2.22: The different institutional connections forming the culture of sholawat in Indonesia

The pervasive Islamization of Indonesia, both in its modern history and before, has given rise to Islamic expressions of public piety and necessitated the canonization, frequency, and development of the *mawlid* as we observe it in Java today. As we mentioned earlier, the *mawlid* itself is the core or ideological thrust beneath the *sholawat* but not its only element. Historically, the performance of the *mawlid* in Java was a crucial component of Sufis in the region and has been instrumental in the Islamic *da'wah* among the *abangan* of rural regions. All of the students, *kyais*, and figures I encountered see themselves as belonging to this community of *da'ieen* (proselytizing individuals). The adjective *d'au* can have several translations such as invite, call, and summon. The action of calling toward God means to call upon a person to remember God and his prophet. The first *da'is* was, of course, Muhammad himself, who at first secretly brought the message of god to his close circle of family and friend. This period is known as the secret *da'wah* period and lasted three years. After that, bani Quraish, Muhammad's tribe accepted Muhammad's calling for a new faith and a new commitment.

Da'wah does entail not only the spread of religion among non-believers but also the activities and commitments of those who propagate faith among existing Muslims. It is then no surprise that the activities of UIN students and religious preachers and singers in this study were all under what constitutes a life of *da'wah*. Although *da'wah* is not one of the five Islamic pillars, it is considered a duty for Muslims who can carry the message—either for those who possess an artistic and intellectual gift, or individuals who are financially capable of initiating and funding public actions and ceremonies. Regardless of its aim, *da'wah* can either be understood historically as the deliberate and, of course, non-violent propagation of the Islamic creed or through the current actions of Muslims among each other to strengthen and rejuvenate the faith among each other. In the Indonesian case, the *da'wah* entails spreading the most authentic form of the religion. This is where *da'wah* becomes synonymous with correcting the customs and habits of the local population, especially the one that has endured years of “doing things the wrong way” under the indigenous appropriation of Islam.

The history of *da'wah* in Indonesia dates back to the times when Islam started spreading in the Southeast Asian region as Arab merchants dominated trade in as early as the third caliphate in 645 AD (Ricklefs 1993). Indonesia was in the middle of a vibrant trade route between China and the Arabian peninsula, and it is no surprise that the Indonesian-Malay area was likely a stop for Muslim traders. The Majapahit empire in Java, with its vast reaching political and military control in the region, would have certainly seen foreign Muslims traders in its ports and cities. Further northwest, the city of Malacca which is located in modern-day Malaysia, was a famous port city for Muslim traders in the region, and gravestones evidence shows Arabic and Islamic inscriptions that date back to the early 1400s (ibid). Although there were Muslim settlements in the region, it remains unknown just exactly when Islam was fully adopted by Javanese people, except for a few gravestones and travel logs that indicate the

presence of Islam in a particular region. Ricklef notes that “the surviving evidence cannot answer more complex questions—such as, for instance, how many of the people of Sumatra other than the ruler were Muslims, or how deeply the lifestyles of religious ideas of the first Indonesian converts were affected by Islam” (Ricklef 1993:6). One thing that seems certain is that Arab settlers in the island of Sumatra and Java came primarily from the southern coasts of the Arabian Peninsula: namely Yemen and Oman. Despite Muslims passing through the region for hundreds of years, significant conversion to Islam among the inhabitants did not occur until the thirteenth century, and most significantly in the fourteenth and fifteenth century.²⁹

It is more accurate to understand the process of Islamization in Indonesia as one which is continual to the present day rather than attributing it to a specific time. Many of the early adopters of Islam were the elites, and it was common for rulers and Muslim aristocrats to be of different religious status than the common inhabitant of a particular region. On the individual level, the conversion to Islam among inhabitants of the archipelago took a top-down approach. From those involved with spreading the message, was Sunan Kalijaga, perhaps one of the best know Javanese mystics who brought Islam, to an Island that knew a lot more Buddhism and Hinduism than Islam. Sunan Kalijaga's legacy as the saint who combined indigenous musical and theater practices to proselytize Islam in Java motivates many of the students at UIN, who see themselves as carrying the torch of *da'wah* from their ancestors.

²⁹ The term sunan derives from the Javanese term Sunanhun which was a label given to people who were glorified and respected, usually because of their position and services in the community. The life span of Sunan Kalijaga is estimated reached 100 years, and experienced the end of Majapahit rule in (1478). Sunan Kalijaga is a Javanese cultural icon when it comes to conceptualizing Java's influence from Islam, and his unique process in *da'wah* and the broadcasting of Islam in Java was known to incorporate local culture in a seamless manner.

Summary

This chapter attempted to clarify the nature of the institutions and subjects who support the *sholawat* directly either through official state sponsored institutions like UIN, or community organizations dedicated to nurturing the *sholawat* tradition (like *majlis al-ukhuwa*). Individuals develop both the theoretical and practical knowledge needed to partake in the *dawah* of Islam in their surrounding community. The system of Islamic Universities as overseen by the ministry of religion provide the support for college students to cultivate the *sholawat* through constantly practicing and performing publically. Thus, the institutionalization of religion carried out on the national level in Indonesia was key to the development of *sholawat* in metropolitan Javanese cities like Yogyakarta. Around the *shalawat* is a community of musicians and singers who also partake in other non-religious musical activities that still symbolize their Islamic identity. In the followings chapters, we will discuss the specific cases where the nature of *da'wah* takes place implicitly through the cultural agencies of Arab and Arab-Indonesian musicians, and how Arab culture indexes Muslimness in indirect ways. Young Muslims I met in Jogja express their religious identity in non-religious modes of performance. We will also examine how my performances and collaborations among the subjects mentioned in this chapter — performances which used secular non-religious music in religious settings—initiated further dialogues and perceptions on the place of “Arabness” in Islam.

CHAPTER THREE Sholawat and Gambus Music

The Gambus: Past and Present Encounters

On the third floor of the student's activity center at UIN, a different rehearsal room was dedicated to a group called al-Jami'ahh who also belonged to the UKM (*unit kegiatan mahasiswa*) at the university. Initially, my assumption was that al-Mizan was the only group performing Islamic and Arab types of music, but I was wrong. Al-Jami'ah, a group of about 8-10 students, perform secular Arab music on instruments like the *ud*, keyboard with pre-programmed microtonal capabilities, violin, bongos, guitar, bass, and *darbuka*, and sometimes *nay* or *suling*.³⁰ This type of ensemble is called *orkes gambus*, which translates to the *gambus* orchestra. The term *gambus* is an important one in this chapter because it highlights the popular non-religious, Arab-derived musical practices among Muslim communities in Indonesia. It also encompasses a good portion of my participatory observation activities among my informants in the field.

Arab migrants to the Southeast Asian archipelago have normalized the *gambus* practice over several generations. Although it began as a tradition among Arab-Indonesians, the culture of *gambus* today has grown in popularity among Indonesians of all backgrounds, including the younger generation. Within the process of Indonesia's Islamization path, both historical and in the present, religious authority is further legitimated through the culture of *gambus*. In this chapter, my goal is to situate this practice by highlighting past ethnomusicological encounters, and comment on their continuity and difference as they exist today, particularly among the youth. I will also comment on problems of musical categorizations associated with the word *gambus* and its multi-genre dimensionality across different scenes. In light of our broader

³⁰ Both the *nay* and the *suling* are aerophones indigenous to the Middle East and Southeast Asia respectively.

discussion of religion, authority, and legitimacy, I seek to reveal how secular Arab music played by *gambus* musicians is culturally *reterritorialized* as an analog of Islamicness and the identity of Islamic communities. Through participatory observations and direct contact with this process, I also reveal how different agents (mainly University educated students in the cosmopolitan spaces of Java) disrupt, reshape, and rethink what *gambus* means to Indonesians today, and how it indexes a global whole.

The subheading of this section is not a mistake. The word *gambus* (also pronounced *qanbus* in Arabic) has multiple meanings: an instrument, and a genre. As an instrument, the *gambus* was the plucked-lute among the Hadhramis (*Hadaarimah*) of the Arabian Peninsula and was spread to Southeast Asia through historical migration and trade (Capwell 1995). Upon first look, it appears to resemble the shape of a Chinese pipa closely, but with a narrower body, fretless fingerboard, a leather top (usually goat skin), and a hollow interior. Though variations on this description and construction exist, it is often mistaken for the *ud*. This *Hadhrami* lute, the *qanbus*, made its way to other regions in Southeast Asia including Malaysia and Brunei, as well as rural regions within the Islands of Sulawesi. Different versions of the instrument exist throughout the world including the East African *gabbus* (Kunst 1973), the Turkish *qopuz* (Sachs 1923), and the Central Asian *komuz* (Golos 1961), all of which have a close resemblance to the *qanbus*. However, the source of origin for it remain ambiguous, and organological traces remain inconclusive. In Yemen, this lute is also referred to as the *tohrrabi* (or *turabi*), which is derived from the term *tarab* (musical ecstasy and enchantment); as well as *ud Yamani* (Yemeni *ud*). Both terms are newer than the original and older Arabic name: *al-qanbus*. The only *qanbus* luthier in Yemen today is named Fouad al-Ka'tari, who claims that the instrument has very little interest among younger musicians. Individuals interested in the preservation of Yemeni heritage like al-Ka'tari hope to establish renewed interest among young people in Sana (capital of Yemen) today

(Fouad al-Ka'tari, 2014, interview with al-Hurra TV).³¹ Twenty-nine-year-old Yemeni *ud* player Muhammad al-Hijri studies *ud* at the conservatory of music in Egypt and has been attempting to revive the *gambus* lute in the Arab world by encouraging *ud* players to take on the instrument and develop its performative capabilities.³² Other less common Arab references of the *gambus* lute are *al-ud al-San'ai* (the Sana *ud*).



Figure 3.1: Different variations and sizes of the gambus courtesy of Eram FM

Today, the *qanbus* has been almost entirely replaced by the acoustic or electric *ud* in performances both in Southeast Asia and in the Middle East. The name for both instruments, the *ud* and the *gambus* (an etymological derivative of *qanbus*), is interchangeable among Indonesians today. To the general Indonesian population unfamiliar with Islamic or Arab music, *gambus* is the more popular term. The historical process of *Hadhrami* migrations to Indonesia and the dominant presence of *Hadhrami* settlers and traders in the region indicate that the instrument was prevalent in the region. This is also further supported by the fact that regional

³¹ The title of this brief three-minute special was “*al-Qanbus Yusare' min ajli al-baqaa*” (The *Gambus*: Fighting to Stay Alive).

³² Interview with Muhammad al-Hijri on Mind TV, retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jx_k1CJ9y60

styles have been developed using the *Hadhrami gambus* for many years. My informants and colleagues in the field were more sensitive to adapting the right expressions and referred to the *ud* by its name. Since the *gambus* and the *ud* have a strong association with Arab, Islamic, and *Hadhrami* cultures and identity, and since the instrument visually indexes a type of musical performance, it also became the name of the genre associated with that instrument. In the field, people would say “*aku bermain musik gambus*” (I play *gambus* music), not usually referring to the *ud*, but Arab music as it is practiced in Indonesia. To clear any confusions for the reader here, I will refer to *gambus* as I speak of the genre; *ud* as I speak of the instrument; and *gambus* lute as I speak of the antiquated *Hadhrami* version we just introduced (shown in figure 3.11). The majority of my informants referred to the *ud* as *ud*—the *Hadhrami gambus* was virtually non-existent during my presence in Java.



Figure 3.2: The fretless Yemeni or Hadhrami qanbus (tohrabi) has a timbre that resembles a cross between the *ud* and the banjo (Photo courtesy of Raseef22.com).

As mentioned previously, the *gambus* lute (the instrument) has existed in the Southeast Asian archipelago for many years—possibly hundreds of years—since Arab migration to the region goes back to the 14th century with the spread of Islam (Ricklef 2010). The *qanbus* was cited by Hadhrami poet and musician Yehyah Umar in the 1600s, who became widely popular

throughout the Arabian Peninsula (al-Sayyed 2013). These migrations extended to regions in Malaysia, Brunei, South India, and East Africa, where the instrument was also found with slightly different variations. As the *gambus* began to spread among indigenous populations converting to Islam, regional practices began to develop and started to incorporate the *gambus* into their songs. Birgit Berg documented regional *gambus* music in North Sulawesi (Berg 2007). She made the categorical distinctions— regional *gambus* and Arab *gambus*— to highlight differences between past and present *gambus* practices. The regional style she observed was called *gambus Gorontalo*, which was based on the name of the region where the fieldwork took place. It is likely that the *gambus* lute was adopted into local and pre-existing contexts of music making and songs. Today local styles tend to be less popular because they are sung in local dialects, and performed as a solo act. However, these genres did not develop out of the *jalsah* culture that facilitated *gambus* performance.



Figure 3.3: A promotional poster for an orkes gambus event sponsored by students at UIN

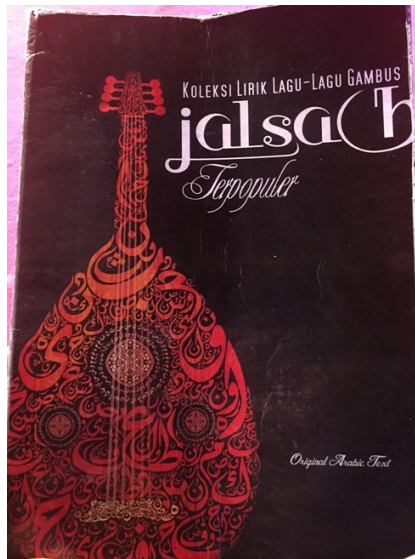


Figure 3.4: A collection of gambus songs titled "jalsah," published in Indonesia. The book belonged to one of the students from al-Jamia OG ensemble.

Generally speaking, the *gambus* lute and the local *gambus* genres are in decline. Genres like the *gambus* Gorontalo cited by Berg are essentially in ‘preservation-mode’ by local government agencies. Berg does document the various attempts by the state to standardize and preserve these local and dispersed genres. However, it seems that the practices of *orkes gambus* have dominated anything containing the word *gambus*. This is not the case to other regions within Southeast Asia. In Malaysia, more common usage of the traditional *gambus* and the *ud* exist today, and local Southeast Asian flavors have been more systematically adapted by the Malay Muslim expressive cultures (Kinzer 2016). Such genres like *gambus Melayu* incorporate the traditional Middle Eastern *ud*, as well as the *gambus* lute.

There are a few practical reasons for the decline of the *gambus* lute and the rise of the *ud* in performance practice both in Yemen and in Indonesia. Based on video observations of *gambus* lute players online, and upon closer inspection of photographs, it is not unreasonable to assume that the present-day need for more volume, ease, and versatility of playing, accommodative ecological and construction conditions, are all legitimate factors that contributed to the decline of

the *gambus* lute in general. This is not to dismiss the fact that the *gambus* lute has unique performative techniques and nuances of timbre (something that sits between the sound of a banjo and an *ud*). However, when it was time to perform in front of thousands of audiences in an outdoor space with large speakers, neither the *gambus* lute or even the acoustic *ud* could be sufficient. In the *ramai* (busy) and *keras* (loud/harsh) environment of Javanese cities, and the vast outdoor spaces where concerts of *orkes gambus* take place, the electric *ud* reigns supreme. Today, performers in *orkes gambus* almost always prefer the electric *ud* or an *ud* with an electric pickup installed. Many of which are made locally in Indonesia. This allows the soft and mellow sounding instrument to overcome the adjacent amplified electronic instruments and ensemble of loud percussions surrounding it.³³ During fieldwork, my acoustic Syrian *ud* made by Ibrahim Sukar could hardly make a dent in such sonic milieu, forcing me to borrow the electric *uds* that were owned by some members of O.G al-Jami'ah and others I encountered during fieldwork.



Figure 3.5: Afnan Rahmaturahman of UIN plays the electric *ud* on stage. The electric *ud* provides adequate amplification for live *gambus* performances

³³ I was fortunate to know Viken Najarian, one of the first *ud* makers in the world to produce the electric *ud*, who informed me that he now manufactures more electric *uds* than acoustic ones. Najarian, who is based in Orange County California, ships his *uds* all over the world. His number one destination is the Arabian Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, where the culture of *jalsa* (musical gatherings) demand the presence of an amplified *ud*.

Definitions and Categories

It is not clear how long the term *orkes gambus* (*gambus* orchestra) has been circulating among Indonesians. Previous ethnomusicological discussions indicate that it had circulated in the early 80s, and was popularized further by the end of the New Order and the Suharto regime in the late 1990s (Berg 2007, Capwell 1995). The term seems to indicate a type of ensemble and also a genre. I have encountered phrases like “*orkes gambus* songs,” “*orkes gambus* tradition,” “*orkes gambus* players,” “*orkes gambus* music,” “*orkes gambus* performance,” “*orkes gambus* ensemble,” “*orkes gambus* lyrics,” “*orkes gambus* musicians,” which obscured what exactly is being conveyed when such a reference is made. I often contemplated whether O.G (the abbreviation widely used) was a type of songs, a tradition, poetry, a specific arrangement of a group, music from Islamic countries, or all of these things? Berg does assert the vagueness of this category in her dissertation:

Orkes gambus is not an art form that has a clearly defined influence [or features] on Indonesian Islamic life or practice, but instead, it remains vague, casual, and even flexible symbol in Indonesian Islamic culture open to diverse Muslims to accept or reject on their terms (Berg 2011:235).

There are different uses for the word *orkes* in Indonesia, such as “*orkes Melayu*” or “*orkes dangdut*,” all of which indicate the type of band playing the genre. More recently, terms like “*orkes gambus modern*; *orkes gambus Arab*; *gambus modern*; and *gambus jalsa*” began to circulate among Indonesians complicating the categorization further. Today groups like *Sabyan Gambus* use the word *gambus* to label themselves as *grup musik Islami* (Islamic music group), even when their ensemble has an *orkes gambus* instrumentation.³⁴ The best way to think of *orkes*

³⁴ As in gamelan for example, the description of genre is aligned with the description of what instruments are present within that genre and not the sounds or form of that music. It would not convey much information to label a jazz ensemble as “trumpet music group,” or a “trumpet orchestra.” Form, intonation, and general soundscape often dictate the description rather than the instruments’ present. The problem of genre and discussions of world music

gambus is to think of things like a rock band playing rock, jazz ensemble playing jazz, *takht* playing classical Egyptian music or *adwar*. In this case, *orkes gambus* playing *gambus*.

Berg does make the distinction that *orkes gambus* in its modern form has electronic instruments, but it is not clear if this term was given before the introduction of the keyboards:

An ensemble incorporating the gambus lute (almost always the modern 'ud form) and various forms of small handheld drums (including tamtam, dumbuk, and marwas—similar to the maluwas found in Gorontalo and also known by its plural form marawis). Modern *orkes gambus* ensembles also incorporate the guitar, bass, and electric keyboard which can produce the sounds of instruments such as the qanun, nay, and violin (Berg 2007:67).

In addition, three dance genres were cited under the practices of *orkes gambus* music: *zapin*, *shareh*, and *zahfa* (Berg 2007). However, these types of dances can be performed as an accompaniment to multiple types of songs and do not necessarily signify a particular genre within *orkes gambus* as Berg describes. When correlating these practices with Arab *Hadhrami* communities and their dances, or Malaysian communities, a lot of overlapping and similarities are noted. The *Zapin* dance seems rooted and well adapted in the pan-Malaysian culture and throughout other regions in Southeast Asia. Often choreographed, *zapin* contains elaborate costumes, male and female simultaneous presence (though not always), and although it is derived from *Hadhrami* and Arabian dance aesthetics, it is a uniquely a Southeast Asian construction. *Zapin* is notably slower in tempo, can accompany religious lyrics, and the movements are synchronized usually performed in pairs. The *shareh*, on the other hand, is in fast triple meters and may involve more than two people at once. In the Arabian Peninsula, different modes of *shareh* exist between the *khaleeji* (Gulf), *Hijazi* (Saudi), and Hadramout (Yemen) regions. However, the *Hadhrami shareh* I observed in Java seemed to be the most prevalent

from Western perspectives has been examined by ethnomusicologists and popular music scholars (see Guilbault 1997, Appadurai 1990, Cohen 1993, Kartomi 1981).

among Javanese and Arabs of *Hadhrami* lineage and was practiced only by men.³⁵ The dance *zahfeh*, which was cited by Berg in her fieldwork in Sulawesi, was similar to *shahreh* but consisted of three dancers, one clapping and two people moving in rapid synchronized footwork in a circle. *Zahfeeh* (sometimes spelled *dehefeh*) is usually in a 2/4 meter.³⁶

To better understand the etymological perplexity of a term like *gambus*, let us set aside regional *gambus* styles discussed earlier like *gambus Gorontalo* (which sound uniquely different than Arab music). I believe that the term *gambus* is “muddled-up” by a process related to how we perceive taxonomies and categorization of music in general. To best describe this phenomenon, I refer to systematic musicologist Pablo Mendoza-Halliday who discusses a theory of musical genre where “cognitive categories” become “cultural units” through a process of conventionalization, and in the process become normalized genres. This perhaps gives us a clue as to why *orkes gambus*, or *gambus*, both terms, are sometimes seen as a variety of things simultaneously: Islamic music, Arab music, music with *ud*, music in Arabic, music from *Hadramout*, music with *maqam*, music during weddings, religious music, none of these things, or all of these things combined. The complexity of this etymological lineage is due to how cultures resolve overarching taxonomies. Mendoza-Halliday goes on further by citing F. Fabbri (2006) who states that “musical genres are cultural units, which are types of musical events, regulated by semiotic codes that associate a plane of expression to a plane of content. Semiotic codes can be interpreted as socially accepted norms, although mostly tacit. These norms can only be relevant if they are conventionalized” (Mendoza-Halliday, 2017). The cultural units (*maqam*,

³⁵ In *Hadhrami* tradition, the *shareh* has been observed as a dance practiced by men and women together. Though more recent radicalization of Middle Eastern societies prohibit this, several recordings exist online of *shareh* dances being performed by the presence of both men and women together. For a link to some of these recording see these links: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Am8CfdjsyJY> and the link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_fOJsim7RI&list=PL3W9sMul6taFqzhPi8vnxoIh5T5Gn1_cb

³⁶ *Zahfeh*, as understood in Arabic, is a term given to indicate a “wedding processional ceremony” with unique rhythm (the rhythm is also called *zahfeh*) played while the bride and the groom walk into a wedding venue.

ud, Islam, Arab music) as expressed by Indonesians, are conventionalized through specific expectations and socialization processes over time. In the production of meaning for Indonesian culture, the word *gambus* has a semiological utility in that it indexes several things simultaneously: *maqam*-based music, Arab music, Islamic music, music which has the instrument *gambus* in it, and so on.

Technology and *Orkes Gambus*

The absence of the term *orkes gambus* during the time Bahasa Indonesia was made into a national language in 1945, indicates that it may correlate more with the rise of technology of instruments and amplification, no one in my fieldwork was able to pinpoint a period in the past when this term was used. Previously documented *gambus* musicians included local Arab-Indonesians like Nizar Ali, Mustafa Abdullah, and Segaf Assegaf from East Java, and other important *orkes gambus* groups (we will use the abbreviation O.G. as Indonesians do) like O.G. Latansa, O.G. Balasyik, and O.G. el-Mira (Berg 2007). Many of the groups I observed relied primarily on the keyboard, which seemed to hold a more central role than the *ud*. As in many world music traditions since the mid to late 20th century, the electric keyboard or synthesizer, known in Arabic as *org*, has had a profound influence on modern performances of *gambus*. It is difficult to conceptualize the sounds of *orkes gambus* in Indonesia before the existence of keyboards able to produce microtones, sampled sounds of Arab instruments like the *qanun* and *nay*, and electric drum loops of Arab rhythms. These features allow the manipulation of certain pitches within to produce a microtonal *maqam* like *Bayati* and *Rast*. It also allows auto-accompaniment of bass, electric guitar, string ensemble, and the ability to produce the sounds of multiple rhythmic and melodic instruments simultaneously. The one-man show phenomenon of

Arab singers and instrumentalists changed the nature of Middle Eastern ensembles in popular spheres and continues to do so today.³⁷

In Arab countries, the phenomenon of the *org* began being incorporated during the late eras of notable figures like Umm Kulthum, Abdel Halim Hafez, and Mohamed Abdel Wahab in Egypt during the 1970s and 1980s. Such utilities must have made their way into the Indonesian and Malaysian Muslim communities already performing Arab music shortly after that period. With international corporations like Korg, Yamaha, and Sony, producing products that facilitate this development, the folk and traditional sounds of Arab instruments and instrumentalists began radically changing. While gaining more volume, exposure, and different adaptations, they also began losing the aesthetic subtleties and *tarab* nuances that can be produced by acoustic instruments. Although the *org* is only a single instrument within an ensemble of percussion and acoustic melodic instruments, it substantially dominates the sounds of Arab and *orkes gambus* music today either in pre-recorded music or live performances. This is not to suggest that we should be completely dismissive of such advancements, in fact, they have created valuable consumer markets for music production, new genres, new opportunities, enhanced the practicality of music education, created new ways of approaching composition, and a whole host of positive outcomes. However, they have also affected labor of music production (one man orchestra), aesthetics of performance, instrumental pedagogy, proper ear training, distorted timbres, and physical nuances and tonal manipulations that can only be produced by human beings. A.J. Racy cited some of these as crucial in the evocation and production of *tarab* (Racy 2003). Of course, this is not exclusive to Arab or Indonesian music; this dynamic exists as a

³⁷ In the United States ethnomusicologist Ann Rasmussen documents the “org” practice among musicians in the 90s and why their attempts are influenced by capitalists, social, and international influences on individuals. There were both hostilities and enthusiasms among music lovers and performers that can still be observed today. But with the rise of electric versions of traditional instruments like the electric *ud* or electric *baglama*, traditional instruments can to a certain extent be heard again (Rasmussen 1996).

‘double-edged sword’ between the electronic and acoustic world of music making. As far as *orkes gambus* goes and the music we discuss here, the *org* is irreplaceable.



Figure 3.6: Multi-instrumentalist Ranu Nada arranges new pieces for al-Mizan ensemble using the org (keyboard) extensively.

Changes in *Gambus* culture

Orkes gambus has been influential in the construction and portrayal of Arabs and Indo-Arab identities, providing a platform for Islamic idiosyncrasies among a broad demographic spectrum in many parts of Indonesia (Berg 2007, Weintraub 2008). Though rooted in the Arab language and culture, the practice of *orkes gambus* today is not exclusive to Arabs and Indo-Arab communities. The majority of students and community members performing the *orkes gambus* around me in Jogja were of Javanese backgrounds. They use the culture of *orkes gambus* to affirm their Islamic identity and distinguish themselves in contemporary Indonesian society. *Orkes gambus* has been rapidly changing in light of further exposure to popular and traditional Arab music to such a degree where it is now hard to identify what this performance or ‘genre’ entails in terms of a particular repertoire or canon within Indonesia.

With exposure and learning that has been facilitated by advancement in internet media platforms such as YouTube videos, Spotify playlists, and Instagram channels, *Orkes gambus* today simply means: Music practiced in Indonesia by Muslims and for Muslims that ‘sounds like Arab music’ or has elements of Arab culture such as instruments, lyrics, vocal qualities, language, or tonal color. In a dizzying variety of Western and popular streams of music ranging from jazz and classical music, to hip hop and R&B; from Indonesian metal bands to hip and cool indie rock soft rock groups; it becomes evident and inevitable that *orkes gambus* is closely associated with an Islamic identity that can set aside the plethora of global genres and categories. Additionally, previous readings on the subject suggest that it is not entirely clear where *orkes gambus* ‘sits’ in contrast to other practices of Arab musics in general. An *orkes gambus* group can play anything from an Umm Kalthoum song to a traditional Ottoman instrumental composition; or the performance of popular Yemeni or Saudi songs (the most prevalent), to locally composed works by musicians or even religious figures.

The term *gambus* by younger musicians and audiences today can also indicate an Islamic music group. For example, the tremendously successful group *Sabyan Gambus* has five million followers on YouTube and has received over 200 million views on their single titled “*Deen Assalam*” (religion of peace). Their group lead singer, Nissa Sabyan, wears the *hijab* (Islamic headscarf) along with baggy pants, chic glasses, and a stylish coat, and sing songs that may sound like pop and R&B tunes with Islamic lyrics (either in Arabic or Indonesian). Nissa is capable of singing the *maqam* beautifully, but the band’s hip and modern look gives them an advantage in gaining a wider younger global Muslim audience. Her movement on stage, hand gestures, and engagement with the audience in front of her are more akin to the way rap, and hip hop artists perform in the West. *Sabyan Gambus* uses Arabic or Indonesian lyrics to sing songs in praise of the prophet Muhammad, nationalism, family values, and morality. Their

instrumentation utilizes electric violin, synthesizer, drum set, and a *darbuka* to produce Islamic pop. Through smart utilization of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram to market themselves, *Sabyan* has gained a vast platform and lots of success globally. Their association with the word *gambus* stems from the mainstream Indonesian understanding of the term *gambus* to index Islam. The group of six musicians also collaborate with *sholawat* events taking place not only in Indonesian, but in other places in Southeast Asia, and even East Asian countries like South Korea and Hong Kong. Of course, the combination of *sholawat* and *gambus* happens only as back-to-back events. Islamic pop will be discussed in more details in the next chapter, especially as it relates to how al-Mizan contextualize and recreate global Islamic popular tunes.



Figure 3.7: Sabyan Gambus plays mega-large concerts and has recently gained tremendous popularity among young Muslims around the world

O.G. al-Jami'ah: Orkes Gambus in the University

As a Syrian brought up in the *tarab* culture of Aleppo, and a foreigner in Java, Javanese musicians around me began experiencing a different aspect of what Arab music could signify in culture and praxis. This became even more visible when I started teaching new songs from the Aleppian repertoire that were entirely foreign for *orkes gambus* musicians who were more

competent in the *Hadhrami* music tradition. Some of my friends would joke by saying, “you are probably the only Syrian whom I have ever and will ever meet.” There were various conceptions of who Syrians were, most of which were dominated by today’s subjects that are related to terrorism or ISIS. In many events I attended, an ISIS-related question or genuine concern would surface almost immediately upon an encounter with a stranger. Since the Syrian civil war began, Syria became widely known to Westerners and the rest of the world through its affiliation with the presence of ISIS in its territory. Moreover, the devastation of the Syrian civil war on the Syrian population. In the mid-90s, when I moved from Aleppo to Boston with my family, I would mention “Syria” to high schoolers, and the response would be “where?” Today, either in the U.S or in Indonesia, the response is either “oh! That is where ISIS is, right?” or “is your family ok over there?”

Often I found myself to be at the center of focus rather than the passive observant I had sought to be in the field. Indonesians are extremely curious about strangers, but they are also polite and incredibly hospitable, especially Javanese. Although an awkward gesture in the West, I have come to learn that being stared at publically, very intensely at times, was normal and a sign that someone was only curious about my presence there. I was eager to learn the *Hadhrami* tradition, which I had not been exposed to before my visit to Java and my interactions with *Hadhramis* living in the region. The nature of my identity as a scholar in the field allowed me to explore and disrupt various processes of cultural appropriations taking place around me, especially, as we shall see in the next chapter, when I was given a platform of expression among important figures like Habib Syech and Cak Nun with a large number of audiences. For the moment, I want to discuss al-Jami’ah and the development of *orkes gambus* in the UIN Sunan Kalijaga. As discussed earlier, *orkes gambus* epitomizes Arab and Hadhrami artistic expression

and cultural identity. Even though I had not been exposed to it, I still felt that it was part of my cultural repertoire due to affinity with Arabic and the *maqam*.

My first encounter with O.G al-Jami'ah was through their percussionist Muhammad Rizal. I did not see Muhammad among the *sholawat* group, but he contacted me after he had heard that I was interested in observing Arab music in their university. Muhammad asked me if I would meet al-Jami'ah on campus. My first encounter with the group was in their rehearsal space at the same UIN center for student activities, which was mentioned in the previous chapter. The room was medium size, perhaps fifteen-by-twenty feet, and was full of sound equipment, instruments, cables, and microphone stands (See figure 3.16 below). The sound system was on, and the group was playing a song for Abu Bakr Salem, perhaps one of the most influential figures in the popular music of the Gulf and Hadramout region. Although I was not aware of the music they were playing, I was willing to join in on a violin that was plugged in through a pickup. I could follow the melodic line in a type of heterophonic shadowing, just staying a split moment behind the melody. Within a few minutes, I was able to play the melody of the song. Precision and accuracy were not crucial to the overall sound that relied heavily on amplification, percussions, and the keyboard. What is truly imperative is the voice and the sampled sounds of the keyboard. At this point, I still have not said a word to anyone in the room; our first encounter consisted of simply playing together upon encounter.

Since the song we just finished playing was in *maqam bayati*, I started playing a popular Egyptian melody called “*Ana Baasha'ak*” composed by Baleegh Hamdi, a well known Egyptian composer who also composed for Umm Kulthum. This was a significant rhythmic diversion from the *khaliji* groove that we just played, but Muhammad Rizal recognized it and started to play its rhythm with me on his *darbuka*. Rizal knew how to properly play a popular rhythm in 4/4 meter called *saidi*, which has been more prevalent in modern Arab music traditions of the Levant

and Egypt. On the other hand, Habib Manshur, the group's lead keyboardist was not aware of it. At this moment, I kept playing the melodic introduction to the piece several times, articulating for Habib and the rest of the group the primary melodic sequence. Able to quickly learn by ear, Habib, who was seated on the floor with his keyboard, eventually started playing the piece correctly.



Figure 3.8: Al-Jami'ah in their rehearsal room at the Student Activities Center in UIN

O.G al-Jami'ahh means *orkes gambus* of the university (al-jami'ah is the Arabic word for university). The student-group performs a variety of styles from different eras and regions throughout the Middle East. The *Hadhrami* tradition dominated most of their repertoire, but they were always eager to broaden their repertoire. I interviewed one of their members, Afnan Rahmaturrahman, a twenty-year-old Madurese student who sings and plays the *ud* and keyboard. To my surprise, Afnan informed me that the group had already existed since 1981, even before the inception of the new UIN system, when the school was a religious institution. The *gambus* back then was part of the Muslim community in *Jogja* just as it is today. The group has been

successful in recruiting students with musical proficiency every year, and they particularly seek those who have experience in Arab and Islamic music. Outside their rehearsal room was a poster to recruit students and encourage them to try out and be part of the ensemble. The players go around the communities and other cities in Central Java to perform in different *haflaat* (parties), religious celebrations, and special anniversaries. The group performs for no charge, and the hosts of these events usually cover the costs of the sound system and the food. This was the case for many of the events I attended of student performers who see this as a religious duty and part of their *da'wah* activities in the community. Through this observation, we see how the *gambus*, from the perspective of *da'wah* actions of university students, functions through a cooperative model of community members.

Both Abdul Ghani, whom I cited in the previous chapter, and Afnan, sang and played *ud* as front men in the group, and grew up reciting the Quran in the pesantren. Al-Jami'a's mission, according to Afnan, was to “create artists with good moral character, broaden their minds, foster their professionalism, and allow them to play an important role in society.” He also articulated the vision of the group as “using *gambus* as an alternative medium for *da'wah* in Indonesian society” (Interview, September 23, 2017). Al-Jami'a, just like al-Mizan, understands their position not only as a role to enhance personal development and foster creativity but preserve a tradition, that is the traditions of Islamic cultures and practices. The group and its members understand that there is a certain quality that develops in a person when fostering the nuances of maqam performance, and the sounds used in *gambus* music can certainly be symbolic of Islam since it is associated with Arab culture. But as individuals constantly interconnected with a global community surrounded by information about musical cultures in the Middle East, their perspective on Arab music is not tied exclusively to a religious identity as many Indonesians may assume.



Figure 3.9: Performing with O.G Al-Jamiah on their 36th anniversary concert in Jogja

O.G al-Jami'a did not perform in *sholawat* events using *rebanna* drums as al-Mizan participants did. Nor did they engage in any practices of Quranic arts like the systematic and rigorous *tilawa* and *tafsir* practices of al-Mizan students, but rather, their main focus was the performance of secular, entertainment, folk, and pop music found in the Arab world, and often played in social gatherings like a *jalsa*, wedding celebrations, anniversaries, and other celebratory events. Their group leader and mentor, Abdul Ghani Abdullah, became a close friend of mine and a valuable informant throughout my time in Jogja. Abdul Ghani was a high school principal and 2012 UIN graduate alumni who had been with al-Jami'a the longest at the time I had met them in 2016. To my amusement, Abdul Ghani, who was the vocalist of the group, was getting married in the summer of 2017, and his marriage coincided with the time I planned on conducting the prolonged fieldwork portion of my research. One night while participating in a *jalsa* near a mosque in Jogja, Abdul Ghani leaned over and asked me "I want you to perform in my wedding next year when you come back to Jogja, would you?" With the speakers overpowering any possibility of hearing a normal conversation, I looked back and nodded my head in agreement.



Figure 3.10: O.G. al-Jami'ah with lead vocalist and udist Afnan Rahmaturahman seated in the center

Although both al-Jami'a and al-Mizan are technically involved in musical performances, their structures and goals are entirely different from one another. Al-Mizan members do perform *gambus* music from time to time, but *gambus* is not the central focus of their activities. Religious performance is their priority, which consists of Quranic recitation (*tajweed*), religious anthems *Nasyid*, Qasidah, and Islamic pop music— all of which can be performed in conjunction with the mawlid we spoke of in the last chapter. To al-Mizan, *gambus* performances, come second, perhaps at the end of a night, as the *sholawat* end. This does not stop them from innovating within that domain, which we will see in the next chapter when talking about *sholawat modern* and the fusion of Islamic pop with Javanese and Western instrumentations and styles. Al-Mizan members see themselves as proselytizers of Islam who peacefully spread the word of God in their *Da'wah*, and through their *ijtihad* (industriousness) with art and music.

Al-Jami'ah members portray themselves differently. Their attire is casual, and what they seem to value or pay attention to more is explicitly the popular or mainstream music of Arabs.

They have memorized not only songs from the *Hadhrami* and *Khaliji* tradition, but also instrumental pieces like *samai*, and Egyptian songs for Umm Kulthum and Muhammad Abdul Wahab. They invite musicians from other regions within Central and East Java to perform with them in weddings and different celebrations. Their attire is Western, casual, and when they perform publicly they dress in black. This is not the *orkes gambus* of the traditional *jalsa* where musicians dress in traditional outfits and sit on the floor in a large circle while dancer perform in the middle. But rather, it is a staged and more formal portrayal— one that we may find in a nightclub in Cairo or Beirut. *Orkes gambus* groups can cross between both types of atmosphere. There seems to always be an empty space in the middle for men to get and perform the dances we mentioned earlier.

From Religious Training to *Gambus*

Like many students at UIN, al-Jami'ah members are often trained Quranic *tilawa* in the *pesantren* systems. The majority of students begin with the *muratal* style, and if they are musically apt move on to the more elaborate *mujawad*. Those with higher musical competency end up learning *tajweed*, percussion, and Arabic from an early age and subsequently perform in *sholawat* and *tilawa* competitions around their community. However, upon leaving the *pesantren* system, they become more inclined to use their training to perform in non-religious contexts and UIN facilitate this process. They perform *orkes gambus* to members of their surrounding community in Jogja and other regions from Central Java and portray themselves as professional *orkes gambus* musicians. I spoke to Afnan, whose father was a *kiyai*, and he articulated his upbringing in the context of Arab music learning further:

I was raised in a suburban area in a town called Pamekasan on the Island of Madura [a large island northeast of Surabaya]. Growing up in a society and family which holds strong Islamic belief, I became familiar with several kinds of Islamic traditions, including the Arab language and the Quran. I was taught the Quran at the age of 7 which led me to gain more interest in music. At 12, I started learning the keyboard and *ud*, and started to perform in some events. At that time, I started studying at *Annuqayah*, which is an Islamic boarding school based in Sumenep. There I was more exposed to Arab music and started to listen to Mohamed Abdo, Abu Bakr Salem, George Wassouf, and others. However, I began studying and performing Arabian music after joining al-Jami'ah at UIN.

Afnan, who was born in 1997, grew up in a post-Suharto Indonesia, in an environment of rapid institutional, political, and social change, that has already undergone a substantial Islamization process. In this midst of this internal change, the world itself was becoming more connected through rapid development in communication and mobilization technologies, and Indonesia was exposed to external influences more so than ever before. Afnan, like many young *gambus* musicians in Indonesia, is more competent in *Hadhrami* and *Khaliji* songs but has been more interested in the traditions of the Levant and Egypt, and popular songs of today's top Arab singers. These distinctions are crucial and have not been sufficiently emphasized while discussing the *gambus* soundscape.

The marked distinctions between *khaliji* (Arab Gulf music), the Levant, Egypt, folkloric (*sha'bi*), and traditional or "classical" *tarab* repertoires drive Arabs to look at these practices in completely separate genres. Most musicians are often required to be, to a certain extent, competent in all genres in order to be commercially successful and work professionally. Popular singing contest shows like the Arab Idol and The Voice, which have gained tremendous popularity across the Arab world in recent years (so as in other countries), reveal the need for versatility that the audience requires. The contestants are expected to be well-versed in several genres in order to gain the most support of multiple nations and win the contest. As a participant enters the room, the judges may ask a question like "*shu lonak el-ghina 'i?*" (what is your singing

color?). This ‘singing color,’ at least in the way it is conceptualized today in mainstream Arab psyche, indexes several categories based on rhythmic, linguistic, historical, and formulaic distinctions specific to the music.

In the West, most systematized pedagogical works for Arab music (either by Arab migrants to the West, or by Westerners learning performance practice of Arab music) has taken place under Ottoman, Levant, and Egyptian forms. This pertains to the type of migration that the United States and Europe had with migrants from the Middle East and North Africa. But the usage of the term ‘Arab music’ or *musik Arab* present some issues and confusions related to the origin and style of what we are discussing. Microtonal systems have developed elsewhere in Asian, African, and European cultures both in popular and classical styles for hundreds of years. Examples of such traditions is the Shashmaqam of Central Asia, the Turkish Classical Music tradition (Ottoman period), North African Nuba, or the Persian Radif. While these traditions are different in many perspective, they do share many characteristics related to their broad soundscape and vocal techniques. To students new to any of these traditions, a significant effort must be given to developing the aural skills needed for performance. Thus, any discussion of Arab music must take into consideration the complexity of the origin of such term and acknowledge the different cultures who played a role in the development of these styles.

Unlike Indonesia, Islamic music in the Arab world has developed minimally beyond the solo and virtuosic Quranic recitation act, or the traditional Sufi canons of the Mevlevi and Maliki *tariqa(s)*. As we mentioned earlier, the *salat* remained a solo act, and the idea of a combined Islamic liturgy is not an aspect of Islamic worship, but rather an auxiliary act that emerged from a devoted religious agency. The prolonged preoccupation with the unity of a divine being—*tasawuf* (becoming Sufi)—seeks music to facilitate *tasawuf*, and refine the *da'wah*. It is then increased religiosity and *ijtihad* that facilitated the inevitable unfolding of new (as well as

renewed) musical and literary works in Sufi *turuq*. However, the political mobility of the Salafi-type Sunnism—which has dominated Islamic theological thought—regarded Sufi ritual as *al-ibti'aad 'an al-deen* (the departure from religion). But the more moderate—and more prevalent—streams of Islam across all of the Muslim world embrace a culture of performance that embraces the Prophet Muhammad, and challenges the interpretation of traditional Arab Islamic authority rooted in *Salafism*. In the case for Indonesia, the Ba'alawis who migrated to Indonesia were instrumental in integrating Sufi literary and expressive culture in Sunni worship life. This also helped them gain prestige despite their ethnic minority status as Arab-Indonesians.

Reflections on *Tarab* and Islam Nusantara

One of the most remarkable features in the past two decades was the popularization and commercial success of folk genres in the Levant region. The rise to fame of folk singers like Wafee' Habib and Ali el-Deek of Syria, or Fares Karam and Tony Kiwan of Lebanon has brought to surface colloquial forms of poetry, grooves, instruments, and folk aesthetics to the rest of the Arab world that were often only performed by local Arab Bedouins in rural regions. Such genres are often called *jabili*; *sha'bi*; or *zajal*; and are full of nationalist or romantic sentiments, combined with highly melismatic *mawwal* vocal style. Add the extreme durability and technological advancement of music production and keyboards, including properly sampled rhythms and effects, and a whole new sonic environment emerges in the mainstream market that electronically inhabits the sensibilities of *tarab*. The electronic sampling of folk instruments, facilitated by technological advancements in production and amplification, gives an environment that mediates folk and tradition repeatedly. The repetition produces multiple trajectories and connections between machines of sonic technologies and machines of sonic arts and effects that drive the culture of *tarab* production continuously.

Successful *Khaliji* singers like Emirati singer Hussein al-Jassmi has also bridged practices like piano harmonies, local *khaliji* dialects, Levant rhythms, and *maqam* innovations to produce songs that bring together Jazz and harmonic forms into the Arab music market. In addition, al-Jassmi also recorded songs from the Egyptian golden era of Muhammad Abdul Wahab and Umm Kulthum, such as the song “*Mudnaka Jafahu Marqaduhu*” for Abdel Wahab. Al-Jassmi’s unique alto-range vocal timbre that can cross genres easily in order to gain wide attention among Arab audiences. Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries’ access to capital and financial prosperity has been a remarkably important factor in dissemination, production, variety, and success of the Arab music industry. Ironically, any production of music centers around the idea of secular rather than religious entertainment. This happens through record label giants like Rotana Records, a subsidiary of Rotana Group, which was founded by Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal of Saudi Arabia. This media giant has signed hundreds of artists over the past thirty years, including the most popular pop stars in the Arab world today. Artists signed into the label have access to a tremendous network of distribution and wide public exposure, including state-of-the-art production facility and an ensemble of producers, songwriters, composers, and managers.

Just like other media giants around the world, companies like Rotana have influenced the consumer market of Arab music, the options listeners have, and even what should or should not be relevant and appealing. However, it has also facilitated the production, consumption, and exposure to *tarab* music. For example, Rotana *Tarab* is a twenty-four satellite channel that broadcasts full concerts in black and white of Umm Kalthoum, and Abdel Halim Hafez, or live coverage of *Jalsaat* in different Gulf countries. As A.J. Racy mentions, Arabs, at least in the present day, think of *tarab* not only as an adjective to describe musical ecstasy and enchantment, but also a genre, a particular type category of certain types of music from a past era (Racy 2003). To add to that, networks like Rotana and famous artists like al-Jassmi, the *tarab* culture of the

past remains in the mainstream market of today, by readapting and reconfiguring itself continuously.

In Indonesia, *gambus* ensembles, particularly those of millennial generations have more awareness of these changes and adapt Western forms to the Arab aesthetics easily, while others prefer the traditional settings found in the Yemeni and *khaliji jalsa*. *Gambus* musicians are beginning to cross genre boundaries due to their exposure to a broad homogenized Arab music market that presents a spectrum of musical possibilities. In her discussion on mediation and agency, Jocelyne Guilbault discusses how to be attentive to how individuals and communities adapt and change the conceptions of their practices and identities over borders and times. The goal is to avoid the possibility of imposing a ‘rigid’ understanding of particular actions, instead, noting how individuals adapt to local and global changes around them. She summarizes this by stating that:

The multiple allegiances the musicians of many world musics have exhibited through their music practices and the various positionings they have adopted in various international markets all point to the fact that cultures or people's identities are not 'lodged' somewhere or in something but rather, as I have argued, emerge from points of articulation (Guilbault 1997:41).

The categorization of genres and modes of musicking can help us organize practices and put them in perspective. However, I think it is useful to keep the categorization open to different modes of articulation, especially as technology and automation converge with artistic praxis. *Gambus* can be seen as one mode of articulating Islamicness— one of the tools that can be pulled out of a cultural toolbox. As Ann Swidler sees it, people do not only live in culture but use the culture as a toolkit for behavior and making decisions (Swidler 1986). The proliferation of religious authority takes place on an indirect level among certain Muslim youths. They choose to re-contextualize the setting of an Islamic public by popularizing the *jalsah* and *samra* events.

The culture of *gambus* implicitly embodies the Islamic ethos, which is why groups like *Sayban Gambus* use the word "gambus" in their name to define their Islamic character.

Bahasa Arab and Religious Authority

As mentioned in the introduction, Islam Nusantara was not only motivated by historical and cultural particularities to the region but also on a strong desire to be a different type of Islam today. However, *Nahdatul Ulama* is deeply embedded with the Habib culture, and the religious virtuosi who have gained popular support through their charisma and religious rhetoric are themselves rooted in Arab Islamic culture, a culture that is highly involved in the religious glamorization of the Muslim other. Thus, the lines become blurred as to whether the idea of Islam Nusantara has any real support among the Arab Habibs that dominate the *sholawat* scene. While some figures like Habib Syech do not explicitly reject the idea of being a unique Islamic country, some more radical figures oppose any local cultural implementations of Islam.

In light of a more recent and exponentially rapid communication across different media platforms, it seems that the picture Indonesians drew of the homeland of Islam, the Arab world is changing into a more heterogeneous one, at least amongst some circles. During my fieldwork, I encountered students and former students of UIN who have acquired an interest in modern Arabic poetry and started a community club called *Sastra Arab* (Arab literature) that examines works by the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani, Najib Mahfouz, and others. This points to the presence of some members within the community that are interested in Arab culture beyond Islam, including some of the students I encountered playing in the *orkes gambus* of UIN. These networks are crucial first steps in ameliorating the misconception Indonesians may hold toward Arabs in light of Wahabi inspired radicalization and interreligious violence.

Although Arabs played an important role in shaping the culture of Islam in the country, they have sometimes been portrayed as destroyers of indigenous costumes and rejecters of religious pluralism (al-Qurtuby 2012). On the contrary, they have also been portrayed as a culture to be admired and are widely seen as the authentic representation of Islam—the carriers of the true *Suna* ideals. Arab condemnation in Indonesia and elsewhere in the world correlate closely with religious fanaticism and radicalization instigated extremist ideology derived from the Wahhabi doctrine. In the post-Suharto period, Arab-Indonesians gained popularity and inspired Salafi Islamist movements contributing to this negative image publically. This reality continues to this day, particularly as Salafi *pesantren* and institutions get support and membership. This caused tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim Indonesians, as well as non-Sunni Muslim sects within Indonesia like Ahmadis and Shiites minorities. But it has also done something more peculiar but equally dangerous: passive radicalization. This is not radicalization that directly instigates violence, but rather one that installs alienation and discontent among its victims, which may or may not lead to violence. We can hear the rhetoric of these fanatic figures on social media platforms, and sometimes the line is blurred between peaceful preaching and hateful ideology. The distance from the Arab language can provide leverage to the religious virtuosi in Java, which Foucault would certainly perceive as a power disparity between social subjects as one would possess a coded type of knowledge to the truth, while the other waits for an interpretation and explication of a discursive and complex religious text.

Arabic provided what Pierre Bourdieu would call “linguistic capital” during the ‘dark spiritual ages’ that predated Islam (Bourdieu 1986). It was able to dispense economic and political power to those who mastered it throughout the caliphates, particularly as authoritative Islamic discourses began to develop throughout the Islamic caliphates. As a form of cultural

capital, linguistic capital produces agents who interact and influence those around them in what Bourdieu calls a “linguistic market” where power relations are formed based on different linguistic capabilities among agents (including rhetoric and oratory competence).³⁸ It is generally an understood sociological process that language has a profound influence on society and vice versa. It helps structures the way we see the world around us and shapes our identity and culture. Classical Arabic (*fus’ha*) the formal language of academic and communicative discourse used throughout the Arab world, is perhaps the only clear map that one can draw of a single unified culture.

Arab identity and belonging is an idea commonly invoked in a nostalgic sense, yearning for a common nation under a single political banner, but never actualized. This dream, this image of what Arabs call *Umma Arabiya Wahida* (one Arab nation), in the face of Western global powers, endless sectarian and ethnic conflicts, and internal political tyranny have not been realized. The poet Nizar Qabbani beautifully epitomizes this notion in his poem “*Mata Yu’linoona Wafat al-Arab*” (When are they Going to Proclaim that Arabs are Dead?). By “dead,” al-Qabbani means the idea of Arab as a single unified nation. He attempts to locate an Arab map and to show the problems and complexities in defining a singular Arab *umma*. I entered the discussion of Arab identity and culture because I wanted to problematize the idea of Arab identity in the first place. The ethnolinguistic attribute to Arab identity is its most imminent and singular overarching feature. Beyond this attribute, we begin to enter the murky territory of defining culture norms that end up at best being another form of cultural relativism, or at worst orientalism of the Arab other. In this sense, Indonesian society enters a form of Orientalizing the

³⁸ Bourdieu’s argument linguistic capital is essential when discussing religious authority in Indonesia because Arabic is seen to provide substantial power for those holding religious authority, and their ability to use their voice and body gives them considerable power in the linguistic marketplace.

Arab other—the Bedouin dress, the *hijab*, *maqam* songs—all symbols that lump in an Arab-speaking individual into one category. This arises not out of an Indonesian ignorance of who Arabs are, but out of a need for Indonesians to differentiate themselves from the rest of those around them. The migration of Arabs from the southern region of the Arabian Peninsula also contribute to why there is a particular understanding of who Arabs are.³⁹

The definition of culture needs to be appropriated to today's modes of cultural expressions. How do Arabs view themselves as a unified and single cultural entity? I think two definitions provided by sociolinguistics and sociology perspectives can help us make a reflection on the broad understanding of Arab culture. First, as a social ethnolinguistic group, Arabs “position themselves and their social worlds through [their] language,” and use it as a *constant* in their various “repertoire of thoughts and actions,” which are transmitted and reconfigured from one generation and geographic location to the next (Harris 1979:47). The defining aspect of this definition is language as a cultural expression. Language has enduring effects on actions and motivations. Through language, Arabs have a “settled culture,” and in turn, a cultural repertoire that “provide the ritual traditions that regulate ordinary patterns of authority and cooperation.” (Swidler 1986). I raise this point here because I think that language has a profound influence on the discussion of authority. If Islam is to develop or “renovate” itself into something else, it must give precedence to the linguistic diversity of its believers and their ability to foster new thinking that is no longer only rooted in the Arab linguistic tradition. Although this is a separate topic of its own, and one which may pertain more broadly to a sociology of language (the influence of

³⁹ Cross-cultural encounters usually have this effect in general and not just in our example. For example, Italians who immigrated to the United States in the early part of the 20th century were from the underprivileged and lower class populations seeking refuge and a better life. Thus, the American encounter with Italy entails an encounter with the culture of Italians from the southern region. The identity of Italian formed by Americans that does not mirror the class and cultural diversity internal to Italy.

language on society), it is worth asking, what effects does Arabic have (or have had) on the evolution (or devolution) of Islam and Islamic cultures?

Summary

Orkes Gambus al-Jami'ah allowed me to explore the lives of Muslim musicians who do not necessarily enter the religious virtuosi market. Instead, they choose to express themselves in the shadows of mainstream and religiously differentiated modern Arab culture. In doing so, they counter the internal stereotypes and religious glamorization of the Arab other within Southeast Asia. In the university, millennials engage in the convergence between the secular and the religious within the same setting, either through a *gambus* performance after a *sholawat* event, or a *jalsa* in front of a mosque. Many times the dances of *gambus* we discussed earlier take place in the mosque's courtyard. Secular and religious Arab music is not differentiated in Indonesia society because to the wider public audience, *gambus* and Islam intersect and converge under the same taxonomical unit of cultural recognition. In this sense, groups of O.G al-Jamia'ah might be 'lost in the crowd' as just another group playing Arab music in Java. But these students are more. They are in touch with a global, highly interconnected culture of performers and reciters, all aware of the expressive diversity of modern Middle Eastern music.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sholawat and the Umma

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate and examine the culture of *sholawat* through the practices of Hadhrami *Sada* in Java. Habib Syech Bin Abdul Qodir Assegaf, who writes and composes his religious songs, has been one of the most successful figures in the *sholawat* scene recently. Ahbabul Musthofa, and the *rebana* or *hadroh* practices in mega-large events numbering thousands has been the brand of Habib Syech in recent years. Habib Syech was the son of an Arab Hadhrami *muadhen* named Abdul Qadir Assegaf who lived in Surakarta. Habib Syech recently became widely popular dominating the market of *sholawat* music through multiple releases of successful albums. I was able to participate in performances and interviews with Habib Syech in Solo and outside of Yogyakarta, and will have an overview of my fieldwork activities in his scene. The results shed light on a powerful network extending to NU, Indonesia most successful socio-religious organization ⁴⁰

We look at *da'wah modern*, an amalgamation of indigenous, Western, and Arabic musical idioms that were popularized by the local Javanese culture, especially through Emha Ainun Nadjib (Cak Nun), and his fusion ensemble *Kiyai Kanjeng*. Cak Nun is a singer, poet, writer, and public social activist who combines Javanese mysticism, Western and Javanese instruments, and televised discussions. Nun has been cited by previous ethnomusicological studies. (Berg 2007, Rasmussen 2009) I was able to participate in a lengthy performance (from 11 PM to 5 AM) with Cak Nun and Kiai Kanjeng, in front of thousands of his fans. During the

⁴⁰ Habib Syech and other Habibs who engage in *sholawat* work have wide support among socio-religious organizations institutions like Nahdatul Ulama and the MUI (*majlis ulema Indonesia*). These institutions take considerable pragmatic steps in advocating for and funding public religious performances and Islamic arts within the *bershalawat* scene; (for a thorough study of Nahdatul Ulama throughout history, and overview over the organization today see Bush 2009; Fealy & Barton 1996; Fachruddin 2006).

concert, we engaged in a live public discussion about music, religion, politics, ethnomusicology, Syria, Indonesia, and society in general. This important collaboration allowed my ethnomusicological engagement in the field to turn into a broadcast that reached thousands of audiences across Indonesia.

Third, within the context of the above figures, the ethnography of al-Mizan students continues through examining their *da'wah* activities, and preparations for an important event called *festival seni Quran*, which was hosted on their campus, and invites university students across the whole country to participate in various activities. Through the soundscapes of *da'wah modern* and the *sholawat* scene, UIN students prepare a variety of musical works such as synchronized *mujawad* Quranic recitations, original instrumental compositions by composers and arrangers Ranu Neda and Teguh Mulyono, *qasidah rebana*, and cover rearrangements for international pop Islamic artists. The latter draws from a transnational repertoire of popular Islamic music work by Middle Eastern artists abroad. Within this discussion, we highlight two international figures that have had influence and success in the Islamic music world: Mostafa Atef of Egypt, and Maher Zain (an Arab-Swedish producer and singer).

Sufism and the Habibs of Java

The *sada*, (السادة), also referred to as *al-Shurafaa'* (الشرفاء), are those with genealogical ancestry to the Prophet Muhammad, or anyone with ties to families from Banu Hashim, Muhammad's ancestral clan.⁴¹ *Ahl al-bait* (the family of the house of Muhammad), and the people of Banu Hashim hold considerable political and religious power in their societies even to this day. Whether it is the *Sufi* inspired performances of Hadhrami *sada*, the theocratic state of

⁴¹ Hashim Bin Abd Manaf was the great grandfather of Muhammad, and had a large family in the clan of Quraysh during pre-Islamic Arabia. *Manaf* is the name of an old deity in the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula.

al-Saud in Saudi Arabia, the families of *ulema* figures across the world, kinship to the prophet has been an important function (though not the only) to religious authority. The *sada* are perceived as pure and holy and are to be revered and respected anywhere throughout the Islamic *umma*. This kinship status gave them economic prosperity and social prestige throughout the Islamic world, especially in countries with active state and religion connection. It is hard to think of this group as a single unified social or political entity because of *al-sada* generations mixed with different cultures for many years. We are only aware of them through spotlights when speaking of particular historical or popular personalities. Substantial populations of *al-sada* can be found not only in the Middle East and North Africa, but also throughout Central and South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Balkans, Turkey, and Anatolia (Canbakal 2009).

The Hadhrami *sayyids*, the group we will focus on here, trace their ancestry to Iraqi *sayyids* of the 10th-century Abbasid caliphate, who moved from Basra in Iraq to Tarim in Hadramout because of sectarian violence between the Qarmatian Shia clan and the Abbasid military. A Sayyid by the name of Ahmad al-Muhajir immigrated to Hadramout in the year 931 AD (Batheeb 2015).⁴² The family of Al-Muhajir settled in Tarim, Hadramout and were eventually called the Ba'alawi *sada* after two generations in Hadramout. They were called the Ba'alawi *sada* because Ahmad al-Muhajir's grandson, the first to be born in Hadramout, was named Alawi bin Abdullah bin Ahmad (Ibid). Ba'alawi means *bin Alawi* and follows the *Shafi* school of Islamic *fiqh*.⁴³ There are more than fifty large families of Hadhrami Ba'alawi backgrounds living between Yemen and Southeast Asia today.

⁴² Historical sources in Arabic indicate that the name "al-Muhajir" (the immigrant), is not the true last name of Ahmad, but rather his *laqab* (nickname) when he moved to Tarim. His name is Ahmad bin Issa bin Mohammed Anaqeeb (Batheeb 2015). The extension goes back to Ali Bin Abi Talib, Muhammad's cousin and son in law.

⁴³ In Arabic historic or religious discourses, the father's name precede the person's first name with the word *bin* preceding it. The Prophet Muhammad's name would be written as Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Abdul Mutalib revealing the father and grandfather name. especially in Islamic and academic discourses, people historians use

The Ba'alawis of Hadramout engaged Sufi ideology in their practices and combined the use of Prophet praise *made'h* (مدح نبوي) and remembrance *zikh* in their worship. This culminated into what is known as a particular *tariqa Sufia* (Sufi order or approach), that is specific to the Ba'alawis in Hadramout. Ba'alawi Sufism is one among many different types of Sufi doctrines in Islam. Sufi approaches differ in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *aqd* (doctrine) applications from one region to another. As we noted previously, the Ba'alawis adhere to the *fiqh* of *Shafi'i* and their *aqd* of *Ash'ari* (Bin-Ibrahim 2005).⁴⁴ The Ba'alawi Sufi order today is not only recognized by Ba'alawis themselves but also people of non-Ba'alawi backgrounds living among them (just as the example in Java). The Ba'alawi approach was indoctrinated by Muhammad Bin Ali Ba'alawi in the early 1200s A.D. and was eventually revised in the late 1600s by Abdullah Bin Alawi al-Haddad (ibid).

The idea of *Sufism*, in its original sense, is rooted in the notion of strict piety and the persistent occupation with the divine. However, when we speak of Sufis, it is important to ask which Sufi order or ideology are we referring to, and in what historical and cultural contexts do they exist. While Sufis do generally believe in transcendence and divine union, they significantly differ in their social and cultural approach. Ranging from orthodox interpretations of texts to a more open model of integrating cultural and artistic norms (the majority of Sufi approach), Sufis can be observed through a variety of lenses. The principles of Sufism (التصوف) as a type of 'mystical' stoic figure does not necessarily correlate with how Sufis define themselves. They are strict when it comes to basic Islamic principles (*Salafia*) and are generally individuals who enter

the father name as a way to refer to historical figures. In certain cases, families (probably the elites of societies) names to Biblical figures like Abraham and Ishmael.

⁴⁴ The Ash'ari *aqd* (doctrine) is perhaps the most prevalent *aqd* in the Islamic world. It prescribes the most basic principles of *sunni* Islam and is widely accepted by the ulema (see *kitab ahl al-haq Abu Hassan al-Ash'ari* written by Abdul Qadri Muhammad Hussain, 2010).

‘the business of religion’ in their society. This is precisely why *Sufis* are pragmatists when it comes to religious performance because their cultural *production* in their respective societies rests on providing religious appeal and upholding religious authority. In some cases, Sufi music become embedded in the culture as a folkloric ‘genre’ in such examples as the *Mevlevi* Sufis traditions of Turkey and the Levant region.⁴⁵

Their *ijtihad* work in religion and proselytization of Islam may or may not have resulted in explicit artistic production. In certain cases Sufism may enter the political sphere as seen in Chechnya or parts of Central Asia’s involvement with political Islam or the Iranian regime (al-Tefi 2016). The ideological struggle between the Salafism of Saudi Arabia and the Shi’ism of Iran is a religious struggle between Salafism and Sufism as overarching ideologies within Islam. In an article titled “The Politicization of Sufism,” Yemeni author Muhammad al-Tefi writes (translated):

To say that the West is responsible for manufacturing the conflicts seen between the Saudi Arabia and Iran today is a misrepresentation of truth. The ideologies of Sufism and Salafism have always existed in Arab countries, and provide the backdrop to a larger more historic conflict of Sunnis and Shiites; the West does not need to do anything beyond this historic reality, they benefit from an existing sectarian and ethnic conflicts that plagues the region (al-Tefi 2016).

In another word, the Shiism similarity of approaches, the *toruq* (طرق), to Sufi practices (like venerating Islamic sainthood) is perceived as two sides of the same coin for the Salafis/Wahabis. Sufism and Salafism, both Sunni conceptions, are embedded in the political struggle of Shia and Sunni Muslims. Al-Teffi further writes:

⁴⁵ Authored by Jalal El-Din al-Rumi in the 1200s the *Mevlevi tariqa* is known for incorporating traditional instruments and dance (whirling dervishes) in practice (for a study on mevlevi ritual and culture see: Munir Nurettin Beken’s article *Returning: The Music of the Whirling Dervishes* in *Ethnomusicology OnLine*; and *The Interpretation of Mevlevi Dance* by Theodore Barber.

Ideologically, political Sufism and political Salafism are both trying to monopolize Islamic authority and thought, despite the fact that they are both consulting the same historical sources of authority: Sunni Islam, and the one which historically negate Shia Islam. Both versions do not necessarily represent the true Islam, and with contemporary political conflicts of the Middle East, the sectarian *Shia-Sunni* struggle became the struggle of two competing Sunni ideologies: Sunni-Salafism and Sunni-Sufism (al-Tefi 2016).

This observation is valid given today's conflict in the Arab world and the radical idea of a Salafi Islamic State in the Levant region. Sufi ideologies have been embedded slowly through a long historical process in various global communities. Its success is because of its accommodative nature and creativity in unifying fundamental Islamic ideals across different cultures. However, the Salafism of the twentieth-century-Wahabi-state could not bear a diffused and diverse Sufi-inspired forms of Islam. Today, the worst example of this Sunni-Shia conflict is in the Houthi-Saudi conflict in Yemen, with the Iranians militarily supporting the Houthis (a *Shia* sect). The Ba'alawi families of Yemen represent the Sufi doctrines of their historical founders.

Yemeni historian and poet Saleh bin Ali al-Haamdi wrote on the Ba'alawi Sufis while noting their economic wit and industriousness in the following statement:

Our Sufi ancestors did not abandon their children and material world in the act of being pious; rather, their Sufism did not prevent them from building their cities, planting their crops, leading them to great prosperity (Al-Haamdi 1936).

This observation is important because it was the success of Hadhrami commercial trade that made Ba'alawi Sufi practices proliferate in Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei. Java was and remains the largest diaspora of Ba'alawis in the world. Thus the Sufis of the Ba'alawis along with their religious texts, have contributed to a variety of artistic scenes in Islam Nusantara. Some of the well-known Ba'alawi families in Indonesia include al-Segaaf, Alwi, al-Habsyi, al-Jufri, Shihab, al-Bar, and others. Although our focus with the Ba'alawi is religious, I shall mention that not all Ba'alawis public personalities have religious connections like that of Habib Syech and, but include personalities ranging from political figures, actors,

athletes, and journalists, to rock artists, composers, and gambus musicians. Many other Ba'alawis played crucial roles throughout the political processes of 20th century Indonesia.⁴⁶

Habib Syech and Ahabul Musthofa

Born in 1961 in the city of Surakarta in Central Java, Habib Syech (sometimes referred to as Bib Syech), was one of 16 children. His father, Abdul Qodir Bin Abdul Rahman Assegaf, was his mentor and an imam at a community mosque in the district of Kilwon in the heart of the city. Habib learned Quranic recitation and religious ideals from his dad at an early age. In his late teens, he deepened his religious education further after the arrival of his uncle from Yemen. During that time, Habib learned about his Hadhrami roots and the long tradition of Islamic proselytization (*da'wah*) in Java through Ba'alawi Sufism. While growing up, Habib recalled hardship times in his twenties and thirties when he went bankrupt and was always subject to various animosities and skepticism. Despite that, he never reacted negatively to anyone around him and always kept his spirit high and smiled (interview July 8th, 2017).

Habib Syech's recent success has been mainly due to his productions of *qasidah* (poem) songs either in Indonesian or Arabic lyrics and recording in professional studios. The market for religious music was gasping for new works at the time Habib Syech started gaining fame, and he had a lot to gain from his work. The praise of the Prophet Muhammad in the *qasidah* form, and the texts of the *mawlid* inspired newly created (sometimes rearranged) poems and the simple melodies of Habib Syech. One of his most popular songs, *Ya Hanana* (our extolment) was very popular by the time I had conducted this fieldwork. In this song, Syech continues the religious

⁴⁶ For academic works on the political history of Indonesia in the 20th century see (Ricklef 1991, Vickers 2005, Hannigan 2015, and Kirsten 2017).

ethos and love for the Prophet that his ancestors had—focusing on the purity and humanity of the Prophet through his lyrics.

ظَهَرَ الدِّينُ الْمُؤَيَّدُ
بِظُهُورِ النَّبِيِّ أَحْمَدُ
يَا هَنَانَا بِمُحَمَّدٍ
ذَلِكَ الْفَضْلُ مِنَ اللَّهِ
خُصَّ بِالسَّبْعِ الْمَثَانِي
وَخَوَى لُطْفَ الْمَعَانِي
مَالَهُ فِي الْخَلْقِ ثَانِي
وَعَلَيْهِ أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ
مِنْ مَكَّةٍ لَمَّا ظَهَرَ
لِأَجْلِهِ انشَقَّ الْقَمَرُ
أَطِيبَ النَّاسِ خُلُقًا
وَأَجَلَ النَّاسِ خُلُقًا
ذِكْرُهُ غَرْبًا وَشَرْقًا سَائِرُ
وَالْحَمْدُ بِهِ

thahara al-deenul mu'ayad

bithuhur el-nabi Muhammad

ya hanana, bi Muhamad

thalika al-fadlu min Allah

khasa bil sab'il mathani

wa hawa lutfu al maani

malahu fil khalqi thani

*wa alayhi anzala Allah
min maka lama thahar
li ajlihi anshaq al qamar
atyabu al-naasi khalqan
wajilunalnaasi khuluq
thikrahu gharban wa sharqan
wa alhamdulillah
ya hanana, ya hanana*

the supported religion appeared
with the appearance of the prophet Ahmad
oh our extolment, oh our extolment, with Muhamad
this is a blessing from God
he was a specialist in prayer
and had good intentions
no one resembles him among humans
and to him God revealed the word
when he appeared in Mecca
the moon shined bright for him
the most complete of the created
and the true example of moral conduct
his *zikr* (remembrance) is throughout the East and the West
thanks to God
oh our extolment, oh our extolment

“Ya Hanana” starts with an instrumental introduction in *maqam rast* that lasts a few bars. With the first verse in sung in *maqam nahawand*, and it is hard to distinguish here whether this was a deliberate act or the result of different intuition with the *sayer* (pathways of the *maqam*). Upon learning about Habib Syech’s training in the *maqam*, it was clear that the *mujawwad*’s precise and virtuosic maneuvers we know of reciters like Maria Ulfa and Abdel Baset Abdel take a particular type of nasal and at times high pitched, all of which were not part of Habib Syech’s repertoire of abilities. When he does recite the *mujawwad*, modulations schemes, register expansions, and breath support unfold minimally, if any at all. Instead, his strength lies more in his compositional abilities, charismatic personality, and literary production in the *qasidah* genre. The presence of melodic instruments the studio version is not present adapted in live *sholawat rebana* performances. In the album, we can hear the synthesizers and sounds of traditional Middle Eastern instruments like the *nay*, the *ud*, or the *qanun*.⁴⁷

As a literary adaptation to music, *qasidah* is a precursor to several musical processes in Indonesian culture. The *qasidah* modern often fuses with contemporary or traditional Arab, Western, and Southeast Asian idioms. For example, the Arabic or Indonesia *qasidah modern* that Nissa Sayban performs has catchy rhythms and electronic instrumental patches that give it a uniquely ‘pop’ feel. On the other hand, the group Nasida Ria combines Arabic *maqam* aesthetics more predominantly while using traditional instruments like the *nay* and *ud*. Another example is the *qasidah dangdut*, which has rhythmic structures akin to *dangdut* music and the Indian *tabla* aesthetic. It is also hard to ignore that the predominant presence of Muslim women in these genres, as opposed to more men in *orkes gambus*, shows the importance of *qasidah* culture in the

⁴⁷ For a link to the studio-recorded version of “Ya Hanana” visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgngg2zY2ns>

Islam of Southeast Asia. On the other hand, the genre *nasyid* with all its different adaptations has more male performers (individuals cross between the two).

Again, I wish here to point to issues related to the taxonomies of Islamic music genres, especially as they relate to literary works before they are set to music. In certain cases, when taking out the musical aesthetics, contexts of performance, and market genres, what is referred to as *nasyid* and how it differs from *qasidah* is highly ambiguous. For example, Mustafa Atef, whom we will speak of in a latter section, has a very popular song called *Qamarun* that is posted as both a *nasyid* and a *qasidah* by different people and in different videos. Technically, a *nasyid* can be a type of *qasidah* or other types of literary, poetic genres found in today. As the etymology of *nasheed* indicates, *nashd*, is to “raise one’s voice and improve the quality and delivery of texts” (translated from Arabic, *al-Mu'jam al-Arabi al-Kabir*). Implied in the sign ‘*Nasheed*,’ to engage in *nash* is to facilitate a unified emotion and sonic connection with the other, regardless of social, religious, or genre context. At its deconstructed meaning, *nasyid* more indicates the *manner* of delivery, rather than a literary or musical genre in itself. Thus, Indonesians refer to the ‘national anthem of Indonesia’ as ‘*lagu kebangsaan Indonesia*’ (national song of Indonesia) we understand why. *Nasyid kebangsaan Indonesia* would be confusing because it would indicate an unrelated religious connotation. The intersection of religion with the term *nasheed/nasyid* (either in the Arab world or in Indonesia) is the result of processes related to the exclusion of instruments with voice. Nonetheless, the *nasyid* groups are popular in the Islamic music market of Indonesia and have been observed in different socio-religious contexts (Knauth 2010). Religious poetry is sung by men together, and without instruments (or women) are religious anthems (*Anasheed Deenieh*). In the Arab world today, the *Anasheed Deenieh* has been formalized into the process of religious production of fundamentalists and radicalized groups.

The *qasidah burdah* uses the poetry of Muhammad bin Said al-Bus'iri from the 1200s, who is considered one of the most important poets in Islamic history. Divided into ten-sections, the *burdah* of Bus'iri has been set to numerous works not only in the Indonesian music scene but throughout the world. Inspired poets and singers have adapted the *burdah* text into their music. For example, the virtuosic Syrian vocalist of *tarab*, Sabah Fakhri, uses the line “*Na'am sara tayfu ma nahwa fa araqani, wal hubu ya'atridu al-zata bil alami*” in a *mawwal*.⁴⁸ An important point to consider is that part of the appeal of religious poetry in secular *tarab* music is the ambiguity of the subject in praise. Because the sign of the subject is elusive, sometimes in the third person, the subject and target of praise can easily be part of a romance with others. Thus, *mاده* (praise) of physical beauty has often been the subject of many adaptations from the obsession with the Prophet to the obsession with a lover.



Figure 4.1: Bustanul Asyiqin mosque in Solo with sholawat attendees seated in the spacious courtyard

⁴⁸ A *mawwal* is in free-meter and can either be pre-composed or improvised; though it is usually the latter. The *mawwal* is still sung to this day and is a very important component of *tarab*.



Figure: 4.2: The courtyard of the mosque Bustanul Asyiqin has elaborate internal walls and a fountain in the middle

Fortunately, I was able to visit “Bustanul Asyiqin” in Solo, a state of the art mosque in the heart of the city. Upon entering Bustanul Asyiqin, one can be instantly transformed into encountering the aesthetics of Islamic architecture. From the elaborate craftsmanship of the interior walls, to to the large center fountain in the courtyard (also where everyone sits), Bustanul Asyiqin was a symbol of power and prestige of al-Seggaf and his family. To schedule my interview with Habib Syech, I got in touch with an Indonesian student; I met coincidentally in one of Gus Ilham’s *majlis* gatherings in Sleman. He was a masters student in anthropology at a European university and spoke English very well. He told me that there was another student from the U.S who wanted to come with us to meet Habib Syech, who was an undergraduate. The three of us went to Bustanul Asyiqin and waited. I brought my *ud* just in case Habib wanted me to play something for him. After waiting in the courtyard for about 30 minutes, Habib came on a motorcycle with another person. We went to an area inside the mosque and sat. There were about

25 other people from the community who were also there. Habib began discussing his life, going back to the early days when he started, and the anthropology student started translating to English for me and the other student who was there. The following is a script from Habib Syech discussing his life before and after he became well-known:

“After finishing *sekolah menengah atas* (SMA, high school), I went to Saudi Arabia in order to work and send back money to my family. This was the late 70s and early 80s, and I found myself a stranger in the Islamic holy land with not much money and the inability to preach or do anything with religion. In Solo, I was the *madhen* (call to prayer cantor) of the masjid, while my father was the Imam. When my father passed away, it became my responsibility to work and send money back to my family in Indonesia.” (Habib Syech, Bustanul Asyiqin interview August 20, 2017).

Habib remained in Saudi Arabia for ten years and was most likely dealing with trade. He did not specify the nature of his work in Saudi Arabia. However, the fact that he was not well-off from the beginning, and his struggle financially reveals that Hadhrami of Al-Balawis sada were not all rich novelty. He continues:

“When I was young, my first experience with Arabic music and culture was through the popular songs of Umm Kulthum, and Farid Al-Atrash, all Egyptian music like the one our friend plays here. I grew up listening to all these guys every day, and I loved the music they sang even though I did not understand the Egyptian dialect very much. However, then also I learned about the gambus players of Hadramout people like Aboubakar Salem. This was the music of my ancestors over there.” (ibid).

Unlike many other *sada*, Habib grew up in a family where religion was the business of the family. His father’s Imam status and his upbringing in Indonesia could not be resolved in his identity as a businessman in Saudi Arabia, sending all the money he makes back home. Deep in his heart, he wanted to become a person who does the *da’wah* work and continue the ‘duty’ of his family. Thus, different family circles with the Ba’alawis would have different proximities to holding religion capital in their communities. He points to this notion in the following paragraph:

“In Saudi Arabia, you could not do anything with religion. There was no room to be a preacher or even do anything after *Maghrib* (the sunset prayer) like we do here. Because over there, they do not have the culture of *da'wah* that we have in Indonesia. So my younger brother, who does *tahlil* in Indonesia, one day invited me to come back to Java, and work with him in the mosque. At the time my brother did the *mawlid* in Ramadan only, but we decided that we can hold this every month. I would do the singing, and he would do the *tahlil*.”

The word *tafsir* which we encountered earlier is synonymous with *tahlil*. Habib's younger brother Habib Muhsen, had continued the family tradition while Habib was gone. People eventually started to notice the two, using a unique new system were preaching, *mawlid* and *qasidah* were all within the same act. Habib mentioned that these all existed to a certain extent, but after he came, they started to become standard:

My brother and I started introducing a new way of doing the *mawlid* in Ramadan, and we began incorporating it every month throughout the whole year. At that time we have very few followers, between 50 and 100 people. Even after many years throughout the 90s, only people around the Solo community knew us. A person from Jakarta came and saw us. He was very impressed with our *mawlid* and asked about me. Then the word started spreading slowly about us outside of Solo.

Simtiu Durar, The *mawlid* we discussed earlier written by Habib (get his name) that Gus Ilham uses in his *mawlid* was popularized by Habib Syech in recent years. He revealed this aspect through a story about when his uncle came and visited them from Yemen:

“One time, my uncle came from Yemen and visited us. He wondered why we only had 100s of followers and not more. He brought a *mawlid* with him called *Simtud Duror*. He said read and sing this *mawlid* people will like it. It was amazing, *subhan Allah* (through the grace of God), after I started using *Simtu Durar* in 1996, my following got so much bigger. After that, people started inviting me to do the *mawlid* in their cities. Before that, I had no invitations, no money (he said no money in English), and I did not even have a car to take me anywhere; it was a difficult time. That was a sweet part about my *da'wah*, in the beginning; it was tough. The hardship you must endure to conduct your *da'wah* can be immense. My wife was supportive alhamdulillah (thank God) because she knew that this was good work for Allah. Sometimes we had to see jewelry in order for me to feed others and conduct our *da'wah*. The first time I was invited to go outside of solo was in 1998 (ibid).

Enduring such circumstances can test for one's motivation, diligence, and commitment to the preacher's life. However, Habib's motivation seemed to stem from a combination of ethical and practical grounds. On the one hand, he knows the opportunity for prosperity is great if he becomes widely known, on the other, his moral commitment to serving his community and religion feeds back into attaining more fans and respect through the philanthropic projects he is involved in. This feedback cycle is demonstrated in figure 4.13.

At this point, we have sufficient background information on Habib Syech up until the late 90s. It was not after 2000 that Habib was involved in the new productions we highlighted earlier. He elaborates on his involvement with the new *qasidahs* he wrote:

The first time I recorded the *qasidah* was in 2001. I had no studio or even microphone stands. We recorded it at home. Some people were critical of my work at first, especially religious figures in Kudus. They were suspicious and did not support me. Ordinary people supported me, but religious figures did not. They said that what I was doing was *haram* (forbidden). They wanted to keep the preaching and recitation in their *majlis*, but without many other musical effects. This was my new system which they saw as not the norm, and should not be carried out. But I knew that if we stick only to *nasihat-nasihat* type of *majlis* then no one will come. I think people liked this new system.

The undergraduate student that was with us during this interview was interested in the topics of *haram* (forbidden), vs. *halal* (permissible) in music. He was on a scholarship that allowed him to travel around the world looking at different contexts of Islamic music, and how the topic of Islamic music permissibility exist in different societies. Habib Syech had to navigate some foggy territory in terms of convincing people that music was allowed. It also seemed to involve clearing some confusions about the place of music in Islam. Unlike other preachers and *sada* of Arab descent in religious circles, who have spent years trying to eliminate artistic practices from the Islam of Java, Habib was interested in bringing them back to people. He sang in Japanese and Arabic, and as long he was spreading the word God and his prophet, his actions were permissible. He explains:

These people thought music was completely *haram*. Even though there was *qasidah burdah* and other types of songs. However, ironically, those very same people who criticized me back then and did not support me at first, are the ones who support me now the most. I used instruments in my album because I thought it would appeal to more people. But *gambus* music is different. We do not use it in praying or anything religious. It is for a relaxing time with the family, and should only be used outside of worship.

I have seen Habib Syech participate in *gambus jalsa* several times through observations of YouTube and Instagram videos. He even does the *shareh* dances and sings along with the music enthusiastically. He holds a lot of religious authority and power that he can break out of his shell in public and do this to show that it is permitted. This is very powerful because it shows a religious authority figure who can engage in music and dance freely, and without any fear of public criticism. Though some *Salafis* would still certainly criticize him, Habib is respected enough that their opinion is only affirmed by a minority. The alienating nature of Salafis certainly works against them and for the benefit of Habib Syech.



Figure 4.3: A promotion poster promoted by Nahdatul Ulama for a Habib Syech sholawat event

Today Habib Syech enjoys lots of support from institutions like Nahdatul Ulama, Indonesia largest Islamic socio-religious organization. In recent years, it appears that Nahdatul Ulama has been endorsing Habib Syech's performances and actively promoting them on their

social media accounts. NU aligned itself with Habib Syech because it understands that the appeal of his *mawlid* and the culture of *sholawat* he helped create can be very valuable for their organization. They frequently post videos on Instagram showing captions of his preaching and singing. To date, he has produced 11 albums, which include songs written in Indonesian with either religious nationalist's themes. Nahdatul Ulama has been the subject of many studies within Western academia, especially in political and social sciences. Their power to influence political campaigns and popularize Islamic agendas are immense and have been a political force since their inception in 1926. Although an extensive analysis of their network is beyond the scope of this project, it is important to note that the organization enters a part of our discussion on authority due to their political influence.

Nahdatul Ulama is a *Sunni* traditionalist movement that follows the *Shafi'i madhab* we discussed earlier. It was established in 1926 in Surabaya and is seen as a charitable body which funds schools, hospitals, and other organizations dedicated to the activities of Islamic proselytizing. NU is an advocate for Islam Nusantara and recognizes that this version of Islam is the product of centuries of indigenous, contextualization, and interpretation of universal Islamic values. *The political elites* see Islam Nusantara as an alternative to the global, transnational Islam that is currently dominated by Arabic or Middle Eastern perspectives, and NU support for that gives legitimacy to both sides. Thus, *Salafism* and the anti-Sufi rhetoric we mentioned are all outside of the NU ethos. NU has been described as a liberal, progressive, and pluralist Islamic movement. Since its inception, and because of its large public support, NU held seats in the Indonesian house of representatives (Barton & Fealy, 1996).

The NU support comes through its commitment to institutional bodies which exist to spread Islamic teaching and preaching. Its vast network of over 6000 Islamic boarding schools named the *Pesantren*, and affiliation with 44 universities, gives it the ability to gain legitimacy

among a vast number of Muslims around the country. Despite appearing orthodox to the outside world, NU appears internally to be more tolerant than other institutions and claims that misinterpretation of Islam makes Indonesians prone to extremist and radical views. However, for human rights organizations and social justice groups, it remains controversial how tolerant NU is to certain social aspects of Indonesian society. For example, the organization has recently issued a fatwa in favor of female genital mutilation, or FGM (Hariyadi 2013). This act was condemned by international human rights organizations within Indonesia and around the world. Even though the government prohibited FGM in 2006, in March of 2010 NU issued an edict supporting FGM, and the government lifted the ban. The dynamic between government state-authority and organizations like NU shows that Islamist politics is always at negotiating law with the central state-authority. Despite these publicized and controversial events, in recent years, particularly in the past four years, Nahdatul Ulama has opened its arms and embraced others in its endorsements and sponsorships. It also encourages performances of *qasidah* and *nasyid* genres and different creative means of *da'wah* like *qasidah modern*.

In the grand scheme of things, NU remains more tolerant than its rival, Muhammadiyah, an organization that is generally seen to want a purer form of Islam with less local adaptations. Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912 in Yogyakarta as a response to the late 19th-century Islamic modernism founded by a sheik named Muhammad Abduh (Hamid 2006). The movement is part of a larger global initiative that is considered the “first ideological response of the Muslim world” (ibid). The organization sharply criticizes any syncretic forms of Islam that had existed in Indonesia for centuries, and ultimately moved sharply toward a more conservative brand of the religion. It advocates *ijtihad*, which as we mentioned, is the independent reasoning of ambiguous human issues that are not settled in the Quran or the *hadith*. Being able to exercise *ijtihad* requires one to be an expert in Arabic, theology, and principles of Islamic jurisprudence. One of

the main issues of Islamic modernism and institutions that propagate its logic is the promotion of upward mobility for Muslims and religious tolerance on the one hand, and a fervent rejection of autonomous or secularist institutions on the other. In this sense, the revivalist movements become an obstacle in the process of integrating modern social and political thought. It sees local and syncretic cultures in non-Arab countries as backward and ideologically underdeveloped.

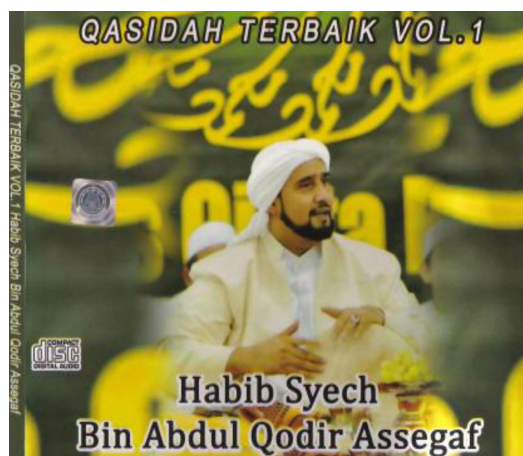


Figure 4.4: Habib Syech Album Qasidah Terbaik Vol. 1 (The best of qasidah) on compact discs.

Muhammadiyah rejects not only non-Islamic syncretic forms of religions but also opposes the tradition of Sufism. However, Habib Syech affirmed that even Muhammadiyah supporters came to him and started following his *da'wah* and the culture of *sholawat* he advocates. Muhammadiyah does have a significant network of school systems across the country, roughly 5, 755 schools and several hundred nonprofit medical clinics and hospitals. Both NU and Muhammadiyah are parts of the Indonesian Ulema Council or MUI.

Performing with Habib Syech

After the interview was through, Habib Syech asked me to perform something on the *ud* and sing for everyone there. Suddenly, everyone's cameraphone pointed at me, as I started

recording as I played the song “*Ya Rasulallah Salamun Alaik.*” It was the only appropriate thing I knew for such a setting. It used the melody of an existing Aleppian secular song called *Qaduka al-Mayas*. This was popular for a long time in Indonesia and was cited by Rasmussen in her ethnography (Rasmussen 2009). Habib said the word “*ajib*” in praise of my performance which meant amazing, or splendid. It was not long until we exchanged phone numbers and Habib asked me to be in touch with him, maybe perhaps perform with him in one of his *sholawat* events. Habib did indeed requested that I join him on stage in one of his events, which was taking place between Solo and Yogyakarta called Klaten. I decided to go with al-Jami’ah members from UIN who helped us with the ride over to that village. Habib asked me to wear a traditional Islamic outfit instead of pants and shirt, and I, of course, complied because of my enthusiasm to perform with him. By this time, I had been to enough *mawlid*s with Gus Ilham in Sleman that I can probably know what to expect.



Figure 4.5: A massive *sholawat* gathering for Habib Syech in a football stadium



Figure 4.6: Habib Syech in the middle of men of religious status on the stage during the end of a *sholawat* event

The event I performed with Habib Syech had anywhere between 5,000 to 6,000 attendees. It was crowded enough that the streets surrounding the performance area were barricaded. Though it was nighttime, it reminded me of the times we would park and walk to a major league baseball game. Everyone was walking toward the event. It almost felt like we are going to a large rock festival or an NFL football game. We got to the venue, it was a large open space, and we made it to an area behind the stage close to where Habib Syech car might come in from. With several police cars in front of it and behind it, Habib Syech car came through. It was almost as if the president of Indonesia was coming. From the crowds eager to kiss his hands, he was able to see us, and through the crowd around him, he signaled me to follow him on to the stage. There were several individuals on the stage already who greeted me as I sat behind Habib Syech directly. On the stage with us was Ma'ruf Amin, MUI president, who was seated a few meters to my right. As mentioned earlier, Amin has recently been asked by the president of

Indonesia Jokowi Widodo to be his next running mate. Although at the time of this event, Amin the head of MUI and the recent president of Nahdatul Ulama.



Figure 4.7: Performing with Habib Syech in an event attended by thousands of spectators and the MUI president Ma'ruf Amin

Facing the stage directly in front of us were members of *Ahbabul Mustafa* performing the rebana/hadroh drums and singing with Habib. To my surprise, this event had more singing and playing than talking and interpreting. Most people were carrying flags with either NU logos, Ahbabul Musthofa logo, or plain green, the color of Islam Nusantara. In front of each of us were a basket of fruit and a box of snacks, which is very common. After several songs, Habib introduced me to his crowd. Without the *ud*, I performed the same song I performed at the mosque in Solo. I was introduced as someone *dari Suria* (from Syria) to his crowd, and Habib said that he wishes peace upon the country. The entire event lasted not more than 90 minutes, we got off the stage, and people came up to me and started kissing my hand as if I was also a Habib. I was very intimidated and had to pull my hand back several times. However, I understood that

many people viewed Arabs as religious figures and thought I was a Habib as well. Upon going to the back room, in the house of one of the event's hosts, I thanked Habib for allowing to perform on stage with him and experience his concert from the stage. This was a tremendous opportunity to be able to share the stage with such important figures of Islamic authority in contemporary Indonesia.



Figure 4.8: Habib Syech asked me to wear a traditional Islamic outfit during the *sholawat*

Learning about Habib Syech and his followers was important in the process of uncovering the structures of religious authority in Java, and how this authority manifests its presence throughout society. It was evident that musical performance, whether with melodic instruments or without, was not a notion on the peripheries of Islamic public life but at the heart of it. Even people's convictions and attitude about the permissibility of how much music they can bring into religion can change from time to time. We can think of this sphere that we just examined (Habib Syech, Nahdatul Ulama, and the *sholawat* they support) as still within the conservative circle among the Muslims of Indonesia.

On the spectrum of the religious and the secular, we can see the *sholawat* of Habib Syech as the ideal place for musical worship of many pious individuals. It is removed enough away from explicitly secular practices while maintaining its distance from praxis which completely opposes any music. Another revealing aspect about the success of figures like Habib Syech is the individuality, or personality of this type of person and how they may chart their way to attain their status as influencers in their society.

In the figure below (Figure 4.9), I outline the mechanisms of religious authority gained by the Habibs and *kyais* we mentioned so far, and how their *da'wah* stimulate philanthropic activities. Today, we shall not forget that Habib Syech is not alone in what he is doing. Many preachers and *sada* figures use their musicianship in *sholawat* and have risen to prominence in the past few years. They are not only of Assegaf family but of other prominent Ba-Alawi and none Ba-Alawi *sada* as well. Some of those Habibs today include Habib Bidin Assegaf, Habib Ali Zaenal Abidin Alkaff, Habib Hud Alatas. Other prominent Habib figures that became influential in recent years include: Habib Umar Bin Hafiz; Habib Taufik Assegaf; Habib Nabel Almusawna; Habib Lutfi Bin Yahya; Habib Ali Zainl Abidin Hamid; Habib Hud Alatas; Habib Shaleh al-Jufri; Habib Idrus al-Aydrus; Habib Abdurrahman Fahmi Assegaf; Habib Mahdi Assegaf; Habib Muhamad Ahmad al-Habshi; Habib Abdullah Almuhdar; Habib Qasem Bin Jafar Assegaf; Habib Abdullah Bin Ja'far; Habib Mahdi Muhamad Shihab; and Habib Ahmad Alwai al-Habsyi. These figures may or may not be well-versed in Quranic recitation, or even be competent vocalists. However, what they all share is an insatiable appetite for attaining and increasing their religious authority. However, as I mentioned earlier, what seemed to have helped our particular subject, Habib Syech Assegaf, was his ability to create new religious *qasidah* works, record and market them, and combine them with the *mawlid* as a single act.

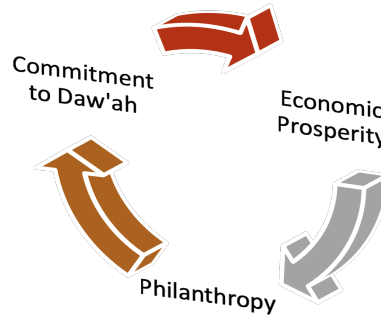


Figure 4.9: Philanthropy and economic prosperity of the religious elites feed into the commitment to Da'wah

With the institutional support of Nahdatul Ulama and the MUI—both of which have powerful political, religious, and economic influences in the country—figures like Habib Syech can gain tremendous public support through such endorsements. Habib Syech is not an *ulama* figure or an Islamic scholar but has the attributes of both; he is not a Javanese *kyai* or Sufi mystic but embodies the spirit of both. He is perhaps a combination of several critical elements to the success of a religious leader. As a *sharif* of Hadhrami origin, Habib Syech creates new praise songs for the Prophet, and like many before him, is involved in a project that has been a powerful tool in creating the *mawlid* canon throughout history. The legitimacy of the *sharif* is further affirmed by works like *Ya Hanana*, which involves the glorification and establishment of the savior-image of the Prophet among Muslims. Through such works, Muslims are able to bridge together the past and the present, and foster a sense of festival and celebration in everyday life. This provides Indonesians with a milieu of an enchanted, open ended, and improvisatory Islamic practice that seeks connection with what is beyond their existence through artistic innovation.

One of the most remarkable observations during this fieldwork was seeing how *sholawat* was mediated between different spheres of Indonesian society. The patriarchal model of the ‘Arab-Habib’ preacher uses the voice—in Arabic and *maqam*—while remaining resilient to melodic instruments either Western or Arab. Habib Syech affirmed that the reason he included

instruments in his studio release was to attract wider public interest, and not try and introduce instruments in live *sholawat* acts. The instrumentally-driven culture of *gambus* was to be enjoyed during family gatherings and private celebrations (personal communication, Habib Syech August 30th, 2017). This puts the *sholawat* among Arab *sadas* in a place where improvised, precomposed, and rearranged forms cannot exist within the parameters of the *mawlid*. The deeply mystical nature of *tarab* and its focus on the subliminal features emerging from the marriage of melody and language shifts toward the world of rhythmic interlocking known in Southeast Asian and Southern Arabian cultures. Surprisingly, and because of this shift, practices of syncopating and interlocking patterns emerge.

In the practices of the *hadroh/rebana* percussion, the *tikah* and *grinci* patterns are fundamental to the *sholawat*, especially given the general versatility of quadruple time. This allows them to combine different rhythms and create hybrid Indo-Arab rhythmic forms easily. The following figure (4.18) transcription shows the combination of three patterns: *tikah* and *kreci* we observed in chapter two, and a *saidi* Middle Eastern pattern common to contemporary and Arab folk styles (particularly in the Levant and Egypt). Some individuals called this rhythm the Habsyi pattern, even though that is not the original name for it. In the *hadroh/rebana* ensemble, the *saidi* is played by the *darbuka* (goblet-shaped drum), which has also been adapted in the *sholawat* of the Arab Habibs.



Figure 4.10: These three patterns, which are sometimes played together and other times only the second and third parts, epitomize the merger between Arab and Indonesian rhythmic expressions.

The pattern was implemented in many *madeh*, *qasidah*, and *anasyid* sung during a *sholawat* event, and serves the critically important job of embellishing the voice. At the same time, a whole host of contemporary approaches to *sholawat* get recontextualized by Javanese culture. Unlike the group Gambus Sabyan and their singer Nissa we saw in the last chapter, the practice we are about to describe has a unique approach that preceded what the Habibs are doing today. This approach combines the spirit of Javanese indigeneity in its ethos and religious production and relies on syncretism between nationalists, religious, and cultural thought.

Da'wah Modern with Cak Nun

Before the current rise in the popularity of the Arab Habibs, the concept of *sholawat* was something entirely different. The historic Islamization of Javanese people through the Sufi-inspired local musical adaptations of *Wali Sanga*, like Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Kudus, were syncretic in the sense that they brought Islam over through the use of familiar sounds. Implied in the word *sanga* (first), the *Wali Sanga* was the first to do the *da'wah* in Java and spread Islam in the region, using their local cultural traditions and indigenous habits. Nonetheless, some Arab Habibs like Habib Syech does incorporate Javanese poetry written by the Walis like the song

“Turi Putih” written by Sunan Kalijaga, and sung after the *mawlid*. Islam Nusantara as an idea springs out of the difference Indonesia holds in its version of Islam, and it is derived predominantly from the lifestyles and teachings of these historic *Walis*.⁴⁹

Several scholars have noted the importance of *Walis* in the early period of the Islamic *da'wah* in Indonesia (Geertz 1976; Hasyim 1974,79,73; Richlef 1981; Fatah 1985). Additionally, there has been an interest in the *Wali Songo* in contemporary popular culture, highlighting the revival of indigenous traditions (Soenarto 2005; Foley 2015; Harnish 2007 and 2003; Wessing 2012). Our interest here is in Emha Ainun Nadjib, also known popularly as Cak Nun. In Rasmussen’s work on the recited Quran in Jakarta, she mentions Cak Nun and his group Kiai Kanjeng as important figures in the contemporary local manifestations of piety (Rasmussen 2009). Cak Nun precedes the Habib culture we discussed and is a remarkable intellectual, writer, philosopher, and cultural critic, who has been an artistic force since the 1970s. He personifies Javanese Sufism in its most authentic and explicit form.

Cak Nun and Kiai Kanjeng have been examined closely by Dorcinda Knauth in her dissertation on *Performing Islam through Indonesian Popular Music* (Dorcinda 2010). Dorcinda analyzes two pieces “Gundul Pacul” and “Iilir-Iilir,” and describes Cak Nun and his group’s role in the revival of Sufi texts by the *Walis*:

One of Kiai Kanjeng’s most significant roles in the Indonesian Sufi revival has been their arrangement and interpretation of traditional folk songs as first and foremost Sufi texts, allegedly written by Javanese saints in the fifteenth century. Through the accompanying rhetoric of Cak Nun, the ensemble invests these tunes with new meaning—or as Cak Nun prefers, reinvests them with their original—in a way that demonstrates both spiritual and political awareness. Their method of interpretation derives from traditional Javanese philology, which allows ancient Javanese texts to have contemporary relevance through the suppression of linear historiography (Dorcinda 2010).

⁴⁹ The terms *wali* comes from the Arabic word (ولي), which means keeper of, guardian, or the person in charge of a tradition, crown, or religion. The *walis* were seen as the guardians of Islam and its earliest proponents in the Indonesian archipelago.

One of the crucial points in Dorcinda's argument is that the Sufi-inspired poetry and Javanese folk are utilized in political activism and social criticism. The performance of this group is somewhat unique both in terms of what the audience does, and what people do on stage. It is highly participatory in the sense that conversations take place on stage, religious discussions unfold to debates, and music punctuates the process throughout.

First, the instrumentalists on stage represent *gamelan*, Western, Arab, and Chinese music. The group has four or five *saron* players (traditional idiophone in the gamelan ensemble), a *suling* player (a type of indigenous bamboo flute), a violinist, a keyboardist, an electric bassist and guitarist, drumset, and several backup singers. The *saron* players also alternate playing the *rebanna* drums from time to time. My first encounter with the group was through attending one of their shows in Yogyakarta. In this event, I saw a fusion between gamelan instruments, Western instruments, and the maqam vocal aesthetic, all performing original songs. Kiai Kanjeng is not just merely the name this group is known for, but also more specifically a system of gamelan performance that uses a scale developed by Novi Budianto, their group leader.⁵⁰

One day after giving a talk at a Yogyakarta State University, I met an individual who knew Cak Nun's manager and asked me if I would like to see the group perform live. Indeed, I had already planned to attend one of their concerts and was enthusiastic about the possibility of meeting Cak Nun in person, possibly even perform with the ensemble. Eventually, I observed the ensemble several times, and participated in their "Mocopat Syafaat" show in Bantul, near Yogyakarta. This is a monthly discussion-performance type of an event where Cak Nun and several people on stage engage in a dialogue among each other and with the audience members. It happens on the 17th of each month and packs anywhere from a thousand to two thousand

⁵⁰ The notes of Budianto scale are Gb, A, B, C, D, E, F, G

individuals. This particular event, Mocopat Syafaat, is not just a *sholawat* event, but a form of an open forum where discussions about society, politics, and life take place. It is a fascinating performance model that I have not seen in the West. It seems to be a cross between a late night show, a musical performance, public discussions and debate, comedy, prayers. The attendees are anywhere between a thousand and two thousand individuals, most of whom were between the ages of 18 and 30. It can be an event that would last from 10 or 11 PM to sunrise.

The friend I met at Yogyakarta State University drove me to Cak Nun's Mocopat Syafaat event in Bantul. I had the electric *ud* which I borrowed from Afnan the day before I left. At first, I walked through the crowd and sat on the ground with everyone. The stage was packed with instruments, and there was a band playing indie rock Indonesian music. Eventually, the manager for Cak Nun came to where I was seated and told me to come with him to the back to meet Cak Nun and members of Kiai Kanjeng. At first, Cak Nun was not there, and some of his members were already there. After some formal introductions and small talk, their main back singers asked me, "*mau bermain apa mas?*" (what do you want to play sir?). We had to find something that is known by both of us. This usually meant either a song for Umm Kalthoum or something popular from Egypt or Lebanon that I have heard them play before. In one of the past concert I attended, I heard the group play the song "Nassam Alayna el-Hawa" for the Lebanese singer Fairuz. I told them that I heard the ensemble play that song and I would be willing to play that, as well as the song "al-Atlal" for Umm Kulthum. After about 30 minutes backstage, Cak Nun arrives. He spoke some English, was soft-spoken, and asked me where I am from. After telling him a brief version of my story, me and Kiai Kanjeng proceeded to go on stage and began playing three songs before Cak Nun joined us.



Figure 4.11: Performing with members of the fusion ensemble Kiai Kanjeng before Cak Nun's arrival on stage (photo courtesy of Muhammad Fadil, contributor for Caknun.com)

After the three songs with Kiai Kanjeng, Cak Nun comes on stage with several individuals, a *kiyai*, two newly-wed couple, and two female vocalists. The night had several speeches, questions, and answers, many jokes especially surrounding the romantic life of the couple that just got married, music, and prayer. It was a collage of different things all happening under one act, comedy, music, dialogue, religion, and questions about life in general. This was the point of this particular event, which happens in five different locations every month. Cak Nun is known for his ability to bring together politics and arts, tradition and modernity, the local and the foreign, preaching to and learning from his audience. Cak Nun's approach had a more egalitarian approach to the *da'wah*—one which is less rooted in religious authority derived from the patriarchal structures of the *sada*, and more in the cultural logic and day to day life of Javanese people.



Figure 4.12: Cak Nun and two newly-wed couple exchange laughter on stage (photo courtesy of Muhammad Fadil, contributor for Caknun.com)

The night lasted several hours into the *fajr adhan*, and those on stage stood up to sing one more time together. Cak Nun turned to me and asked me if I can lead the *dua*' in Arabic (the *dua*' asks for the blessings of God for the sick, poor, and unprivileged). I proceeded to utter the *dua*' to the best of my ability while being nervous not to make a mistake or pause. At this point, everyone in attendance came up to the stage and greeted both Cak Nun and me. From the unique sounds of Kiai Kanjeng; the joking and laughter of everyone in presence; the social commentary and dialogues about society, morality, and Islam; this was a significantly different experience than the *santri* inspired *sholawat* among *kyais* like Ilham Sholeh and the *munshideen* of Ahbabul Musthofa.



Figure 4.13: With Cak Nun after a long night of performance in Bantul near Yogyakarta

In this regard, Sufism, as it pertains to proselytization and music, exists in different schemes. The first one is the imported Arab-inspired Sufism of the Ba'alawis and their *sada*, who use their cultural roots and language as forms of legitimacy to the religious authority they hold dear. They authenticate this authority further through the performance of the *mawlid* with its elaborate poetic canons such as those found in *mawlid Simtudduror* or *mawlid al-Barzanji*. While they only developed their musical *da'wah* vocally, they managed to reproduce and recreate the overlapping rhythmic structures found in both Hadhrami and gamelan traditions, devising hybrid Arab-Indonesian *hodroh/rebana* polyrhythms. The second scheme of Sufi-inspired proselytizing emerges from the local Javanese-inspired cultural ethos, one that is modeled after the *Wali Songo*, and exemplified in Cak Nun and Kyai Knajing modern approach to *sholawat*. I designate the first system as confined and rigid, while the later can be seen as open-ended and flexible. Ironically, the group that embodies the spirit of both worlds simultaneously seemed to be the students of al-Mizan who bring the best of both worlds together. From the *marawis* interlocking drumming of *Hadhrami* music to the art of Quranic *tilawa* in the *mujawwad* style. From gamelan and Western instruments adaptation to the *sholawat rebana* and

the *mawlid* repertoires of the Habibs. From new creation in the *qasidah* and *nasyid* world, to newly composed and arranged nationalist and religious songs, UIN al-Mizan *sholawat divisi* (division) highlighted in chapter two embodies what I would call *the Future Sufis of Islam Nusantara*. In the next section, we examine their ongoing commitment through the *Festival Seni Quran Nasional*.

Festival Seni Quran Nasional

The student activity center has been closed for several weeks while undergoing some interior renovation and remodeling. However, this is not a good time for the center to be closed. It is almost the end of October, and the *Festival Seni Quran Nasional* (The National Festival for Quranic Arts) is approaching. Al-Mizan participants are not only participating in the event this year, they are also hosting it on their campus at UIN. This was an excellent opportunity to observe a whole variety of activities, not just for university students in Yogyakarta, but the whole country. A high school friend I had reconnected with through Facebook was a filmmaker who lived in Japan. After we chatted about what I was doing in Indonesia, he offered to take a trip and help me make a music video for al-Mizan while they were preparing for the festival. This was a great chance to show my gratitude for UIN students and offer something for them to keep. Sho Wada, my high school friend and filmmaker, visited me for two weeks while the students prepared.

The event was large in its scope of participants. There were a total of 34 participant institutions, some were from the UIN network of universities, while others were from the IAIN (*Institut Agama Islam Negeri*). Although this was tagged as a festival, the event was more specifically a competition between all the different schools and their various divisions. In her

book on the recited Quran, Anne Rasmussen discusses the importance of such events and the concept of “festivalization of religion” in a post-Suharto Indonesia:

Religious festivals at which competition is the focus exist to reward excellence; however, they also serve the function of introducing, teaching, and reinforcing an Islamic praxis on global, national, and regional levels. Festivals and competitive events that feature Islamic arts—from fashion to calligraphy and from recitation to pageantry—are part of a culture of competition that thoroughly saturates the performing arts in post-independent Indonesia. (Rasmussen 2010, 126)

Such festivals would also have political and religious figures and a variety of professional artists. The event lasted several days, between October 26 until November 1st of 2017. In broad terms, the festival serves on major function: preparing the future generation for the skills needed to carry out their *da'wah*. Figure 4.23 shows a poster with the schedule of events that are to take place in the FSQN 2017.

The competitions were not the only activities of the festival; there was also Islamic fashion show for children and adults, *hadroh* and other percussion parades by males and females, coloring and calligraphy, and an outdoor bazaar with vendors selling many Islamic items and accessories. The activities also included a night of *sholawat* with Habib Muhsin al-Hamid from Jember, Gus Wahid with Ahabul Mustafa, and of course Ustaz Sholeh Ilham from Sleman. The main function of the festival was the competitions, which occurred during the day between 255 students from 34 different institutions. These were *Musabaqa Syarhil Quran* (competition for Quranic interpretation), *Musabaqa Khatt al-Quran* (competition for Quranic calligraphy), *Musabaqa tilawat al-Quran* (competition for Quranic recitation, both for solo and group), *Musabaqa Hafz al-Quran* (competition for Quranic memorization), and *Musabaqa Qira'at al-Kutub* (competition for readings and interpretations of religious texts). The al-Mizan *sholawat* division was in charge of performing a set during the opening and closing ceremonies.



Figure 4.14: UKM JQH al-Mizan logo in the middle with the five divisions of Quranic arts

Semarak Miladiah XIX UKM JQH al-Mizan UIN Sunan Kalijaga

2017 festival Seni Qur'ani Nasional

"Membangun Kualitas Qur'ani dalam Bingkai Kebhinekaan"

Dialog Kebangsaan
Kamis, 26 oktober 2017
13.00-16.00 // Convention Hall L1
Prof. Dr. M. Busyro Muqoddas
(Ketua KPK 2014)

Seminar Tahfidz
Jumat, 27 oktober 2017
13.00-16.30 // Convention Hall L1
Dr. KH. TGH. Muhammad Zatul Majidi, MA
(Gubernur NTB periode 2013-2018)

Workshop Tilawah
Sabtu, 28 oktober 2017
08.00-15.00 // Convention Hall L1
Ust. Drs. Ahmad Mujlis, S.Q.
(Pembin Qur'ani dan Juri MTQ Internasional)

Grand Opening FSQ Nasional 2017
Senin, 30 Oktober 2017
08.00-12.00 // Panggung Utama
Kirab Fisik Nasional
Tari Saman Serambi Fabel
Gebyar Tilawah
Tari Kretek KKY
Nyanyian Bersahaja AMB
20.00-23.00WB
Panggung Utama

Pekan Raya Kalijaga
(BAZAR) 28-31 Oktober 2017
Dapok Panggung Utama
Stand Fashion, Buku, Kuliner Asean/daerah

Pameran Kaligrafi Nusantara
27 Oktober - 1 November 2017
Selektor Masjid UIN Sunan Kalijaga

Sim'a'an al-Qur'an
Sabtu, 28 Oktober 2017
08.00-Selatan // Masjid UIN Sunan Kalijaga

Pertunjukan
Minggu, 29 Oktober 2017
07.30-12.00 // Ruang Utama Masjid
08.00-12.00
13.00-17.00 WIB // Panggung Utama

Pertunjukan
Selasa, 31 Oktober 2017
08.00-15.00WB // Selektor Masjid
08.00-15.00WB
08.00-15.00WB // Panggung Utama

Pertunjukan
Selasa, 31 Oktober 2017
08.00-15.00 // Teatrikal K. Terkayuh
08.00-15.00WB // Teatrikal Perpus
08.00-15.00WB // Teatrikal Perpus

Malam Rahmat
Selasa, 31 Oktober 2017
19.30-22.00 // Panggung Utama
Tahfidz, Awang, Harmoni Tilawah, Nada-Nada Rindu, Habib Mulkun al-Hamid Jember, Ust. Shahab Hamid, S. Th.I, Ust. Zamran Suyuti

Bahtera Cinta Kangjeng Nabi
Rabu, 1 November 2017
19.30-23.00 // Halat Purpose
Pembagian Trofi, Paduan Suara Tilawah, Penampilan AMB, Nusantara, HJ. Wafiq Abibah, Gebyar Nada Nusantara

Dimeriahkan Oleh
Atas izin Mahasiswa Seni Islami Gebyar Nada Nusantara UKM JQH al-Mizan UIN Sunan Kalijaga
Tari Saman Serambi Fabel Adabi Dance Community Tari Kretek KKY Tari Sufi

Bintang Tamu:
HJ. Wafiq Abibah (Relawan Sholatwasi Nasional), Panca Komarsono (Seniman "Rita Groove")

Pengorganisasi FSQ:
Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa (UKM) JQH al-Mizan UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta
Sekretariat:
Gedung Baktiwan Lama / PKSI (Gedung Teatrikal Fakultas Ilmu-Ilmu dan Sosial UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta)

Info Lengkap:
@festival.seni.qurani
#festival.seni.qurani
#festival.seni.qurani
#festival.seni.qurani
#festival.seni.qurani

Penanggungjawab:
08550094812 Syarifuddin
085743280950 al-Mizan

Sponsorship:
KEMERDEKAAN, KEMAJUAN, KESEHATAN, KESELAMATAN, KEADILAN, KEMERDEKAAN, KEMAJUAN, KESEHATAN, KESELAMATAN, KEADILAN, KEMERDEKAAN, KEMAJUAN, KESEHATAN, KESELAMATAN, KEADILAN

Media Partner:
METRO TV

Figure 4.15: A poster showing the schedule of the main events, the times, and locations for the FSQN 2017

UIN's biggest rival in this competition was UIN Syarif Hidayatullah from Jakarta, who are known to be more competitive in the *tilawa* division (this was the same Jakarta university mentioned in Rasmussen's book). UIN Syarif Hidayatullah of Jakarta won several medals in the *tilawa* division including the one with the group recitation. The group recitation activity has been a new addition to the *tilawa* competition and has been a new practice of Quranic recitation that I was inquisitive about. As we have mentioned earlier, the *mujawwad* elaborate style of *tilawa* has always been a solo act, relying on the virtuosity and skills of the reciter alone. In recent years, however, groups of children were seen learning how to recite the *mujawwad* together in unison across different *pesantren* in Indonesia. Group *tilawa* has never been practiced or observed anywhere in the Arab world in a group arrangement and marks a tremendous expansion of praxis in the highly rigorous world of the *mujawwad*. As the students of al-Mizan prepared for this event, I was very interested in seeing how this practice takes places, mainly, how the *tilawa* can be dictated and rehearsed with a group and not just a single person as it always has. I was very impressed with the work the students had put into this process, mainly the dictation of *maqam* to several people, and the memorization of the *tilawa sayar*. Because this is a group activity singing in unison, the improvisatory aspects are pre-worked into the process of a unified and planned manner of *tilawa*. This systemization moves the *mujawwad* melodic formulas from an improvisatory scheme into composed one, while keeping everything else the same.

The *tilawa* group was directed by a graduate student *qari'* (reciter) who dictated the verses to the students while they were seated in a circle on the floor. They repeated the phrase just as a teacher and *qari'* would, only this time, 12 people had to get it exactly right. The duration of the verses and the *qaflaat* of each *ayeh* (sub-verse) must all be in unison, and must also be memorized — the group alternate between combined voice for some verses, and solo verses for other ones. I joined the group and repeated the verses with them. Despite my ability to

sing the *maqam* and pronounce Arabic, the difficulty lied in the memorizing the melodic material, and the pathway of each verse. Because singing the *maqam* in *mujawwad* style is heavily melismatic, the coordination of words with melody across multiple people is challenging. Nonetheless, this is an important development in the *mujawwad* because each time the *tilawa* is memorized, it becomes canonized and regurgitated as a chorus pre-composed work, as opposed to spontaneous and unpredictable treatment of a single person. Again, we see here the egalitarian markers of performance that transforms a solitary act into a collaborative one.



Figure 4.16: The *tilawa* group after a rehearsal as they prepared for the competition

The *sholawat* division of al-Mizan had set up a rehearsal space on a ground floor deck right outside a newly built facility. They had many instruments for bringing back and forth, and setup/takedown every day, including a drum set, several *sarons*, and a large sound system. Sho wanted to film the students in that area as they rehearsed. The group was led by two students Ranu Nada, and Teguh Mulyono, both of whom played several instruments and arranged for the group. With the *sarons* lined up in front of a keyboardist, bassist, and guitarist, the group began

looking a lot like Kiai Kanjeng and their fusion ensemble. In addition to these melodic instruments, there was five *hadroh/rebana* players, three males, and two females, playing the alternating *grinci* and *tikah* patterns we discussed earlier. They also played the *marawis* drums, which are *gambus* drums of Arabian origin that use syncopating patterns. In some of our previous events, the group played the *marawis* drums with popular Arabic tunes. Indeed, the *sholawat* division also played *gambus* music from time to time, depending on the event and type of ceremony. However, in this arrangement, they combined Arabic, Javanese, and Western aesthetics in creative ways.



Figure 4.17: The *sholawat divisi* of al-Mizan ensemble playing a variety of instruments in preparation for FSN

The song “Ummati” (أمّتي), which translates to “My Motherland” was released by Lebanese born Swedish singer Maher Zain and produced by his label Awakening Music. During the Lebanese civil war in the 80s, Maher immigrated to Sweden at the age of eight with his family and has lived there ever since. He began as a producer and sound engineer behind the scenes and only started singing after he was encouraged to use his talent for a good cause. One interesting aspect of Maher Zain was that he was not religious throughout his upbringing and

later turned to religion in his approach with music. His departure from the world of production to the stage as a singer sparked a new development in Islamic music. This development combines the contemporary elements of Arab pop with religious messages and the praise of the Prophet. They are produced using the newest strategies of music production and sampled sounds. The result is the merger between secular pop Arab and Turkish world, with the Islamic religious message. Traces of soft rock and mainstream pop also combine with elaborate *maqam* string works recorded by Turkish producer Emre Moğulkoç. Zain’s rise to the global stage of Arabic Islamic pop was quick and influential.

Al-Mizan students prepared “Ummat” while adding a new Indonesian flavor to it. Keeping the skeleton melody and instrumental introduction the same, the group’s interpretation of this piece added *hadroh* solos and *saron* punctuations throughout. After a short instrumental introduction on the piano, the lead singer of al-Mizan *sholawat*, Ahfash Tontowi, stands in the middle of the group (see figure 4.24) and starts his rendition of the melody. The first time I had heard this piece, I did not know who it was for or when it was released. I did recognize two main aspects to the song: The Prophet Muhammad, and Islamic *Umma*. Ahmad Al-Yafi’i wrote this qasidah from Qatar, and has written several other religious works in recent years. The lyrics of “Ummat” are:

جِئْتَنَا نَوْراً مُبِينَا
تَغْرِسُ الْإِيمَانَ فِينَا
أَحْرَصُ النَّاسِ عَلَيْنَا
أَقْرَبُ النَّاسِ إِلَيْنَا
كُلُّ نَفْسٍ تَقُولُ نَفْسِي
إِلَّا الْحَبِيبِ

أُمَّتِي أُمَّتِي
يَقُولُهَا لَنَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
أُمَّتِي أُمَّتِي
يَقُولُهَا شَفَاعَةً: أَنَا لَهَا أَنَا لَهَا

عَشْتٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا كَرِيمًا
صَابِرًا رَغَمَ الْبَلَايَا
عَشْتٌ إِنْسَانًا رَحِيمًا
لُطْفُكَ عَمَّ الْبَرَايَا

You came a shining light

Planting faith in us

And protecting us

the closest one to us

every self, says that myself

belongs to the Habib (Prophet)

Ummati, ummati

(he) says it to us until judgment day

Ummati, ummati

(he) mercifully says it to us, we are for it

You lived generously in this world

Patient regardless of hardships

You lived a merciful human

Your kindness filled all corner

The subject is the Prophet in *qasidat* “Ummati,” who sometimes appears in the third person, like in the phrase “(he) says it to us until judgment day.” I placed the “he” in parentheses because of the subject-verb agreement and the absence of the third person in the word “Yaqulu’ha” (he says it). In its recorded version, “*Ummat*” uses the loosely defined “*romasi*” genre of contemporary Arabic pop, which uses less percussion, and more harmonic integration in the production process. Because of that *romansi* genres tend to be in minor-oriented *maqams* like *kurd* and *nahawand*. *Ummati* is in *kurd*, like the most common mode of this genre, and progresses diatonically through the usual predominant and dominant position of the *maqam*. The following figure is a transcription along with the transliteration of the song’s words into English.

ji ta na nu__ran mu bi_na tagh ri sul e ma na fi na

5 aq ra bul na si e lay____na ah ra sul na si a lay na

9 kul lu naf sen ta qul lu naf si _____ el al ha bi__b umm a

13 ti _____ umm a ti _____ ya qu__ lu

17 ha sh fa a tan a na la ha _____ umm a

Figure 4.18: Ummati's first verse originally sung by Maher Zain and covered by Ahfash Tontowi of al-Mizan in preparation for FSQN in Yogyakarta

Al-Mizan demonstrated versatility and innovation in their reinterpretation of the above melody. The *sarons* typically have a *pelog* or *slendro* tuning, but the students manually modified the instrument to be able to play diatonic scales just like *Kiai Kanjeng* players did with Cak Nun. Between the *hadroh* percussion, and the rest of the ensemble, we have a fusion of Javanese *gamelan* and the *romasi* aesthetics of Arabic pop. This combination produces a unique sound that represents the new wave of Islam Nusantara globalized and accommodative works. The students practiced every night for the entire month of October and worked with me and Sho to record a video clip taken at right in the deck area where they rehearse. We first recorded the group in a clear audio format and then overdubbed the audio file with what we captured on camera. There were four other songs in the group's set, two of which were instrumental compositions by Teguh and Ranu. This ensemble worked in conjunction with dancers and singers for other songs and instrumental pieces.

During an interview with Teguh, he spoke about the different projects the group had to work through in order to put on the highly elaborate and dynamic show during FSQN opening night at UIN. As the group's co-director, arranger, and guitarist, Teguh worked with the ensemble to perform a variety of *sholawat* styles ranging from local Javanese tunes to the *sholawat* song from Kalimantan and Sumatra. Al-Mizan acknowledged the variety of Islamic musical practices of throughout Indonesia's Islamization process, whether they were imported from the Middle East in the *mawlid* and Arabic Islamic *nasyids*, or locally produced in indigenous tonalities and forms. Teguh elaborates further:

Our first song tells our love of the great Prophet. Before the song, there is an opening instrumental section, while collaborating with dance. Our ensemble in these arrangements include all the instruments that al-Mizan uses throughout our programs, such as *marawis*, *hadroh*,

gamelan, and other electronic instruments. In this ensemble, we try to attract the attention of everyone. The first song is *sholawat tarhim*. This piece talks about the behavior and morality of the prophet and praises him. He is the best role model. We use only the voice in this segment and leave the atmosphere quiet and serene for the singer to freestyle the *madeh*. The second song is *Ummati*. This composition tell about the love of the prophet and the love he has for the Umma. Our third piece features an instrumental medley with *rebana* and *saron* solos, as well as a collaboration with a saxophone player. Here we bring the saxophone sound while incorporating it with Islamic music. The motivation to this piece was that even though Muhammad died a long time ago, his spirit still lives on with in us. In the fourth piece, “Medley Sholawat Nusantara,” we show the different *sholawat* types from different regions in Indonesia. From Sumatra; from Sulawesi; from Kalimantan; and Java. The fifth piece is *sholawat Muhammadun*. The song features a *hadroh* solo in the beginning, and uses the saxophone again, with a jazzy style. The sixth and seventh pieces were “Nurul Huda” and “Ya Rasool Allah.” For these songs, we collaborated with the renowned singer Wafiq Azizah, and this is a new thing for us to collaborate with professional singers. This was a long process, involving many elements and things that needed to go together like dancers, artists, and musicians. This show will be the biggest show for UIN Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta (interview with Teguh Mulyono, October 2017).

We can see how extensive and organized these preparations were. At the same time the rehearsal for the event was taking place, other students were making signs, banners, and material to display on stage. They took charge of every single aspect from the smallest details related to managing the entire event, to participants in the festival.

Summary

In this chapter, we focused on the *sholawat* in three different contemporary examples, the musical *sharif* (Habib Syech); the Javanese mystic and religious philosopher (Cak Nun); and the young generation of local and global Islamic musicians (UIN al-Mizan students). On the spectrum of conservative hierarchy and traditional authority, the musical *sharif* and the Prophet's kinship status offers considerable social and political power to its agents. As individuals, they can provide support for socio-religious organizations like Nahdatul Ulama, and the cooperation between the two legitimate religious authority culturally and politically. The Habib power is compounded further by his engagement in the artistic productions—as we highlighted in the

song "*Ya Hanana*"—which helps the public maintain reverence to the prophet, and consequently to his line of descendants in Indonesia.

Cak Nun and his approach to *sholawat* differ in the way it plugs into different flows of cultural narratives. He combines indigenous instruments and musical forms, Arabic and Javanese poetry, and hosts public forums that discuss local and global issues. His followers are more moderate and open to different manifestations of Islam that are rooted in the ethos of the *abangan* life. Lastly, the *Festival Seni Quran* in Yogyakarta shows us the new recreation of Islamic arts and the artistic versatility of the students of al-Mizan. They can bring several instrumental and vocal aesthetics from Western, Arabic, and Javanese styles, and reformulate them as a single new work. For example, their cover of Maher Zain's song *Ummati* shows their attempt to combine Arab-*maqam* vocals, Javanese *saron*, *rebanna* drums and interlocking techniques, and the standard rock trio of bass, guitar, drums into one new whole that reflect their important position in the culture of *sholawat*. These students represent the sparks that produce new flows within the *machine* of Islamic music and ritual.

CHAPTER FIVE THE “PLAY” OF *SHOLAWAT*

This chapter aims to untangle the different moments we encountered in the preceding ethnography and analyze their relevance to the theoretical concepts discussed in chapter one. Through enunciative and institutional forms of religious authority, poetic discourses derived from the *mawlid* and Sufi-inspired devotional texts become deployed publically in large congregations called the *sholawat*. We looked specifically at the *sholawat* of Habib Syech bin Abdul Qadir Assegaf; *Ahbabul Mustafa*; Cak Nun and the group Kyai Knajing; the students of *sholawat* at the Universitas Islam Negeri in Yogyakarta, the student *gambus* group al-Jami'ah. All adapt Hadhrami, Javanese, and Western musical aesthetics in their performances. These groups and individuals articulate religious authority in various ways under an Islamic ethos Indonesians refer to as Islam Nusantara. The crecive institution, Islam Nusantara, fosters a space for collective spiritual and moral expression through the increase of the “festivalization of religion” (Rasmussen 2009). The Islamic university setting we examined at UIN—adapted recently as part of the state’s pragmatic involvement in religious education—ensures the survival and continued development of Muslim musical and oratorical arts among future generations of Indonesians.

As it pertains to the practice of *sholawat*, the enunciative (religious discourse) and institutional (human-organizing) forms of religious authority operate together to promote religious devotion through music and speech. Reverence to the prophet is of unique benefit to the status of the traditional authority of *al-Sada* Arab-Indonesians of Yemeni origin, who themselves have utilized the persona of the Habib to increase that grandeur of such an event. Additionally, a Javanese rhythmic tradition of syncopation and cyclical forms translates cleverly to the *rebanna* styles we analyzed and heard frequently in the *sholawat*. This cultural synergy—this infusion—

between Hadhrami and Javanese aesthetics is the musical trademark of *sholawat*. This practice is also a site for amplified religious speech. During fieldwork, I heard amplified speeches just as many times (if not more) than I have heard music. Speeches can take the forms of traditional sermons or be informal discussions and religious learning in smaller *sholawat* events. Numerous *majalis* (*plural for majlis*) became sites for moral and ethical learning. In the ethnography, I discussed Majlis al-Quraa' wal Hufaz led by *kyai* and *sholawat* singer Ilham Sholeh. Ilham began performing with *Ahbabul Mustafa* more than a decade ago before he started to lead his own *sholawat* in Sleman (the outskirts of Yogyakarta).

The students at UIN showed me a different side to the *sholawat* life while they prepared for the festival of Quranic arts. First, group Quranic recitations in the *mujawad* style have drawn my attention to how much time and effort must be taken to accomplish a performance genre known for its improvisatory character. This means every aspect of a melodic phrase and pattern is planned out beforehand by the students in order to sing in unison. Second, the students competently play the *sholawat modern* genre that performers like Cak Nun and Kyai Knajing have mastered. In this setting, the ensemble's instrumentation moves from a solely percussive group to one incorporating instruments like drums, guitar, and keyboards. In *sholawat modern*, the textual sources of the performance move away from the realm of the *mawlid* and traditional *zikr* and into the popular Islamic music songs circulating on social media and streaming music applications. There have been commercial Western-style renditions of the *sholawat* such as the one by *gambus Sabyan*, who have recently gained a wide fan base in Indonesia and elsewhere. The National Festival of Quranic Arts (FSQ) sponsored by UIN was an opportunity for me to observe numerous types of Islamic arts, including visual and calligraphy works, traditional Quranic recitations, rock instrumentations of *sholawat modern*, and recreations of popular Islamic music songs by global artists like Maher Zain and Mustafa Atef. The *sholawat*

community embraces such global hits as “Qamaron” by Egyptian singer Mustafa Atef, sometimes singing it at the end of *sholawat* events. These developments indicate a wider change within the conservative streams of Islam that should be looked at beyond the dichotomy of modern-secular or traditional religious scope. The revival undertaken by conservative Muslims in Indonesia accentuates an Islam that is open to the innate expressive drive of human beings.

Sholawat, Sufism, and the Revival of Islam

Several recent studies have pointed to a rising tide of Islamic conservatism that has swept Indonesia in recent years (Liddle 1996; Tessler and Jesse 1996). While these observations consider the regressive social and political processes that took place, they often overlook the internal dynamics within conservative circles. But rather than seeing a turn backward, one that is benchmarked with Western neoliberal and secular policies in its internal politics, I see practices such as the *sholawat*—embedded with a flair of artistic expression—providing a public platform to rearticulate and reorient what Islam means to ordinary believers. The IAIN network of universities is a place that facilitates contemporary Islamic thought and allows Muslims to adopt secular and religious streams of modern life in their conception of the religion. As Martin van Bruinessen noted, the government “endorsed liberal and religious thought and made efforts to develop the State Institutes of Islamic Studies (IAIN) into the center of Muslim intellectualism” while also acknowledging that “institutional support for liberal and progressive thought and action no longer exists, whereas other Muslim discourses, including some that were suppressed under the New Order, have gained greater prominence and official endorsement” (Bruinessen 2013: 224). As we mentioned in chapter two, UIN is an institution that was part of the IAIN network of universities before it added traditional departments in law, education, social sciences, humanities, science and technology, and communication.

In the late 20th century, during the last few years of the Suharto period, academics pointed to a failure for Islamism to embrace pluralist secular politics. An example of such an observation is Oliver Roy's book *The Failure of Political Islam* (Roy 1994), which paints a pessimistic picture marked by the failure of Islamism to integrate with a healthy pluralist civil society. His main thesis is that Islamist parties can gain power, but are unable to "invent new societies," either falling under a model benefiting the rich (Saudi Arabia as revenue plus sharia), or a model of unemployment (like Pakistan or Sudan). In either case, Roy sees an inherent political feature of Islam that renders it unable to facilitate pluralist types of politics. But painting a wide brush on the notion of "Islamism" can overlook the significance of the Indonesian experience, which takes into priority the artistic medium in rather extensive ways. As I cited in chapter one, recent findings show that voter motivation is not driven towards Islamist politics, but rather the need for the state to tackle economic, security, and infrastructural development. The current president of Indonesia, Jokowi Widodo, has embraced this vision and campaigned strongly for the expansion of communication, commercial, and technological infrastructures. Nonetheless, institutions with abilities to influence state policy—like *majlis ulema Indonesia*—can deploy actions that may sway the public opinion toward Islamist policy.⁵¹

⁵¹ The province of Aceh in Northern Sumatra has gained regional autonomy governed by Sharia law. This process is more complicated and historic given the long-standing conflicts between Acehese local governments, and a central Indonesia Republic government. Currently, there are many controversies surrounding Aceh relationship with minority groups (women, LGBT, and non-Muslims).



Figure 5.1: A promotional social media poster for Habib Ali Zainal Abidin Bin Segaf Assgaf, which quotes him saying, “Do not become a defender of your mistakes and a judge of others’ mistakes.”

As I have highlighted in chapter two, the state’s involvement in religious education played a big role in the developments we have observed throughout the ethnography. But this is not a top-down dogmatic indoctrination, where the public is forced into a state-imposed religious education environment. Rather this was a pragmatic step where the state’s resources are deployed to ensure that Islam’s intellectual, cultural, and artistic capacities are opened to larger segments of the middle and lower class populations. Through such institutions as the ministry of religious affairs, substantial infrastructure and human resources have been deployed by the state to nourish Islamic education at universities. More than just centers of theological and religious development, the UIN system has a vision of incorporating traditional non-religious education in its system, including subjects like the natural sciences and humanities that may even challenge Islamic ideals in the first place. UIN has numerous faculty members that have co-authored Islamic studies by Western academics. As far as the revival scene itself, the performance and

development of Islamic ritual have taken place under such organized institutions and through the influences of a long-standing Sufi culture in the region.

The Indonesian Islamic revival was marked by some Sufi forms that found institutional support in the urban environments of the Indonesian archipelago (Howell 2001). This Sufi ethos penetrated into the ways Indonesians encounter Islam and uphold the *da'wah* tradition of their ancestors. Revivalists in modern Islam want to “return to the learned guides of the time of the Prophet, who were ‘more expert than we’ (*lebih pintar dari kita*)” (Ricklefs 2006: 405). But this belief challenges the modernist approach to Islam that Muslim intellectuals and thinkers take across the world (a great example of this is Islamic scholars like Hamza Youssef or Abdullahi An-Na'im). On the surface, however, it becomes a matter of what is palatable as a religious ideology for the public. The mediation of religious authority will take shape one way or another, and it is a matter of its style and preference among Muslims that ultimately matters. In this case, we observe a democratizing force for Islamic religious authority that puts more players at stake in the mediation of authoritative discourses. Sufi devotional life that utilizes expressive performing arts like the *sholawat* appears to be the most palatable form of mediating religious authority among Indonesians. It is the active and participatory mode of faith that Indonesians engage in that marks the ethos of this Sufi-inspired scene.



Figure 5.2: A photo showing thousands of attendees gathered for a typical sholawat event. These events take place almost every day and seem to be the manifestation of intense Islamic revivalism in the region.

The rise of Sufi-inspired festivalization meant that Islam became highly visible in public spaces. The visibility of public religion directly correlates with the success of the revivalist mission and its explicit *da'wah* agenda because it helps give a sense of consensus and acceptance among the public. However, historians like Richlef believe that this prevents the public space from being a possible place of discussion and negotiation between liberal and conservative streams of the public.

[...] unlike the Liberal political agenda supported by the intellectual substantiality of An-Na'im's arguments, the Revivalist and Islamist position seeks not to open but to close the public space, to reject intellectuality and to call that justice. A reconciliation of the competing priorities of freedom and justice thus faces a formidable obstacle from those who reject Liberalism (Ricklef 2006: 45).

It is difficult to frame a Sufi-inspired intensification of religious ritual as something to be cherished by all Indonesians. However, that does not mean that the revivalist movement itself has not brought forth any intellectual progress to conservative Islam internally. Part of the pragmatic steps the state has taken in religious education produced several scholars and authors who have produced several critiques of the Wahhabi state and political Islam.

One recent event at UIN revealed how the Islamist streams of revival are themselves in contradictory positions on Islam and how much Salafism would interject Islam Nusantara. As the *niqab* (the hijab style/*burqa* covering the entire body including the face), was becoming more popular among students in the university, some were starting to worry that this is starting to be a major problem for university codes and rules. The university board placed a ban on the *niqaab*, which ultimately only lasted for a week. Eventually, the university rescinded its rule and allowed the students to return to wearing the *niqab*. A group by the name Niqab Squad protested outside the university for days. In an article published by the New York Times, Joe Cochrane writes, “Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, an analyst on Islam and a lecturer at the university, said she regretted that her rector had rescinded the ban. She said it was important to point out that the *niqab* is not an integral part of either Islam or Indonesian culture (Cochrane 2018). For an Islamic University such as UIN to be involved in such a controversy means that the administration and a large body of students find the *niqab* repulsive. It is part of the recent Salafi wave that has tarnished the values and habits of Islam Nusantara. Upon speaking to students about the event, some were critical of the administration’s decision, but the majority (particularly women) rejected the practice as too conservative.



Figure 5.3: An Indonesian student wearing the *niqab* and protesting outside the main entrance of UIN (courtesy of the New York Times)

Most Indonesians do not wear the *niqab*, and I have only seen it worn by several students, none of whom were part of the Al-Mizan ensemble. The wider Indonesian public looks at the *niqab* as a type of Arab dress, not Islamic, that does not represent Indonesian Islamic culture. However, the question comes back to how much freedom of religion can the state grant its citizens when certain acts present an obstacle for the public or a certain institution. U.S constitutional law reveals how the U.S dealt with this very same problem in courts when conflicts have arisen. For example, certain cases established that religious duty is not a defense to a criminal indictment (Reynolds vs. the United States, 1878). This applies to how much freedom of religion can be given without interfering with issues like public safety and institutional rules, and it has usually been one of the biggest challenges in integrating Islam with secular and liberal law. Additionally, those with religious authority, essentially the interpreters of Islamic law, have maintained a hierarchal structure of Islamic societies. Islamic authority thrives because of the political position the *ulama* hold in political institution imposing law:

“Islamism seeks to restrain the potential tyranny of a state or ruler by requiring it or him to heed the advice of the *ulama*, who are qualified—unlike everyone else—to interpret God’s revelation in such a way that it becomes divine law imposed on earth. Thus, Islamism is, like Plato’s ideal state, a class-based government—the *ulama* class being the law-givers on behalf of God. While the goal is an ideal, pious ruler in the form of a caliph, even a caliph must listen to the *ulama*. The egalitarianism of Islam in principle thus becomes in practice an inegalitarian political system led by the *ulama*, whose political purposes are two: restrain the potential tyranny of the ruler and restrain the freedom of individuals, for free individuals are likely to disobey God’s commandments unless restrained by law and the punishments attached to it (Ricklef 2006: 48).

What arises out of such a dynamic is a type of pushback from the government, where the two parties—the *ulama* and political officials—converge and create a government that is essentially an instrument of imposing the agenda of religious authority. For Indonesia, the question remains as to how much power the political elites are willing to give to the Islamist agendas, an agenda

that seeks to implement a certain policy and public conduct. Since politicians are obligated to please their constituents, the answer remains a matter of what the public is willing to accept. It is interesting to observe that despite all the actions taken by the government to propagate Islam throughout society, most voters in Indonesia remained immune to wanting more Islamist policies.

Why the *sholawat*?

The *sholawat* culture facilitates live performances and a type of extravaganza: a milieu of festivities and excitement. As Talal Asad notes, it is these “categorical forms of religious belief and practice, the ones that offer certainty and simplicity, which may have an advantage over more subtle and complex forms of faith” (Asad 2008: 67). The *sholawat* re-territorialized complex forms of religious life in ways that allow the religion to mediate its legitimacy in the artistic medium. But what about the rest of the non-Muslim world? Are those beliefs and practices able to open the possibility of co-existence? Answering such a question requires more than just looking at the *sholawat* or the practice of Islamic music in Indonesia, both of which are ultimately internal practices within a single Muslim community, and are less significant to the lives of more than 1.5 billion followers globally. But academics have certainly been driven by a sense of urgency to answer critical social and political questions about peaceful coexistence, especially after the involvement of Islamic terrorism during the events of September 11, 2001.

Because of this strong intellectual tide, the questions always revolve around “Is this faith compatible with non-Muslims?” or “Is the coexistence of Islam and liberal democracy even possible?” I do not wish to frame the study of *sholawat* as part of a competing dichotomy of two major hegemonic forces, the East and West, or Islam and the West, or secularism and religion. Rather, an in-depth look at Muslim daily life reveals a much more complex world playing

beneath the surface concerning who and what is Muslim. I believe that understanding the question of *how* Islam matters to Muslims today is a much more concrete and fundamental question to put forth. More questions related to the ethnography are: *what* does the *sholawat* do for Muslims and Islam in general? What does this process mediate, or what are people trying to communicate with each other when they engage in such activity? Why is it done in such ways? Are there things happening beyond what we hear and see in the act that might mean something more significant about the meaning of such action? Generally, in the world of Islamic studies, the focus on artistic phenomena and their influence on society and culture is usually sidestepped by a more critical pursuit of controversial topics that prove which side of the clash of civilization is right, individuals or groups within an institution—because of consensus between minority or majority groups within that institution—can “hijack” the foundational principles founded in authoritative discourses such as the Quran and the Hadith. For many years, Islamic intellectualism was mobilized for various political interests, distorting and reinterpreting the meaning of Islamic scripture. But through the variety of religious and secular parties involved in Indonesia's governance, a healthy political environment that keeps powers in check is observed. For example, the ruling party (*Partai Demokrat*) was accused of corruption and was forced to make some of its leading members resign. In these instances, Islamic parties played a major role in mobilizing the public to be highly critical of corrupt and immoral politicians. The same thing goes to the criticism that radical Islamic parties face, like the Indonesian Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), who are constantly condemned by many groups loyal to Nahdatul Ulama.

In the first chapter I discussed in length the two forms of authority that Paul Ricoeur highlighted—while drawing on the work of Gerard Leclerc—to explain the nature of legitimacy: enunciative and institutional. The power of legitimacy connected to institutional authority, and the symbolic support of an enunciative authority, are both at play when we consider the nature of

legitimacy. Enunciative authority rests on the foundational claim, a "founding energy," that has sought to engender a certain belief (Ricoeur 2007:100). For Islam, this founding energy was in the divine scripture that Muhammad mediated to the people of Mecca, who in return recognized such message as true and believed that the words of the Quran have descended from God through Gabriel and were mediated by Muhammad. But what happens next? While answering Arendt's argument that authority has vanished, Ricoeur sees not an absence of authority in the modern world, but different institutional formations for authority throughout history. In this case, the enunciative authority of Islam, just as in other religions, has undergone numerous institutional frameworks that have had the power to uphold, augment, or even distort the foundational claims. It remains a matter of consensus as to the legitimacy of an institutional authority. But legitimacy garnished by constituted bodies—which are by their very nature hierarchal and political—does not mean they uphold the foundational principle they claim to represent. Here is where the question of authority and the "crisis of legitimacy" in modern times must address the notion that institutional authority is ultimately *authoritative* in its nature. Institutions may seem on the surface legitimate when they are able to garner support, but may not be anchoring their principles to the founding energy of their predecessors. This was already known in Arendt's political philosophy, which perhaps saw this as an inevitable process of human's political reality.

One of my aims in this dissertation was to understand the nature of authority in Islam and whether the institution of Islam Nusantara is a legitimate representation of the religion. The individuals I encountered used the foundational discourses of the religion in creative and expressive ways to show their faith. Their actions, for Islam broadly, are significant because their loyalty to the founding energy of the Islamic creed is manifested through how they keep rearticulating the founding of the religion. We see this in a remarkably clear example in the song *Ummati* (my motherland) from chapter four, which is about Muhammad establishing a new faith

and a new land for the faithful; a song about the foundation of Islam. The institutional authority of Islam Nusantara comes through only in artistic and expressive manner and only to illuminate the founding experience of the religion. In this sense, Islam Nusantara discloses the founding energy of Islam, which for many centuries has been distorted by numerous political epochs. At this moment, we can say that this institution represents the most legitimate example of an Islamic institutional authority in the modern world.

The Game of Religion and the Play of *Sholawat*

To make sense of the phenomenon of religious festival, as seen through the *sholawat*, I utilize Gadamer's concept of play (*spiel*) to locate the substance of such actions. In the preceding chapters, I have demonstrated several examples of actors and institutions involved in the practice and development of the *sholawat*, labeling it as an entire scene of practitioners, teachers, and fans, all in constant pursuit of the Islamic *da'wah*. Students groups such as al-Mizan, al-Sada individuals like Habib Syech, community leaders and *kyais* like Ilham Sholeh, and ensembles of *sholawat modern* like Cak Nun are all constantly developing the Quranic arts and ultimately articulating the enunciative authority of Islam in the public sphere. The articulation of this enunciative authority—of literary, religious discourses—is constantly reshaped and readapted by various types of institutional structures. Although they have different methods and visions in their presentation, their goal remains the same: the subjugation of religious discourse to artistic mediums. But what is the significance of such actions beyond their significance to the type of authority they represent? I want to suggest here that through the *sholawat* and the culture surrounding its practice, Muslims under the auspices of institutional authority are able to partake in the production of religious authority that was otherwise confined to single-direction mediums controlled by the religious elites. This allows us to see not an intensification of religious

dogmatism or radicalization of an Islamic public, but, rather, one that gives more opportunity to reinvigorate and reinvent what Islam means to people in the modern world. The university students in *festival Seni Quran*; the Habibs who write new lyrics and compose new religious pieces; the poets, artists, and bands who partake in the *sholawat modern* scene; the international Islamic music singers; the *gambus* ensembles who play in Muslims weddings, holidays, and celebrations; and the observers and fans who sing along all become players within the *play of religion*. This process, as I want to suggest here, is an antidote to the monopoly over Islamic authority.

In the first chapter, I briefly discussed Hans-Georg Gadamer's work on the concept of play, which he eloquently developed in his maxim opus *Truth and Method* (1960). Play (or *spiel*) in this case comes out of Gadamer's attempt to understand the question of truth as it emerges in the experience of art (ibid). The concept has an important role in his understanding of the meaning of art through developing Heidegger's lecture on 'The Origin of the Work of Art.'⁵² To Gadamer, who is highly influenced by Heidegger, the work of art is not merely its form of representation, but rather its relation to us when we become engaged in the work itself. Whether it is inspired by an experience or intended to represent an experience, an important aim in a work of art is to represent that experience meaningfully. In Gadamer's terms, this experience takes us out of the ordinary world we live in and into an 'autonomous' time of being. This autonomous time rests on an ability to differentiate between aesthetic and non-aesthetic qualities that transcend its time and cultural specificities, what Gadamer terms "aesthetic differentiation" (ibid). Moreover, art attempts to uncover a truth about the world we live in, which is grounded in our eternal pursuit to 'unconceal' what has already been 'concealed' from our knowledge in this

⁵² "The Origin of the Work of Art" was first given in a lecture on November 13, 1935. The text pertaining to this edition of the essay was translated to English by Roger Berkowitz and Phillippe Nonet

life.⁵³ The play takes place when the observer's subjectivity and the subjectivity of the work itself are at an interplay with one another, both exerting different experiences and defining the meaning of the work. The metaphor of play is evidently a critique of German subjectivist and idealist interpretations, which has greatly influenced aesthetic theory, especially after the influence of Kantian philosophy.

Another discussion important to Gadamer's ontology of art is the notion of festival and its reoccurrence in our lives. The essence of the festival and its recurrence is an important example that shows how we transform and fuse our experiences of the present with those of the past. As Jean Grondin notes:

A festival—as every work of art, yes, as every understanding—has its being in its accomplishment and the community in which it is celebrated. Even though most festivals can be traced back to an enactment event or time, they exist only in their contemporary fulfillment by being celebrated [...] This intonation or attunement of the presence of the celebration happens, for Gadamer, in every experience of art, even of understating. The celebration or festival fulfills itself only through this representation in this temporal happening. In it, the horizons of the present and the past fuse. In the return of the festival, there lies a movement of the representation of the past but also just as much in the representation relating to the present (Grondin 2001:46).⁵⁴

Taking part in the festival is its most necessary feature as we encounter each other and celebrate being in the world together. The communicative character of the festive event, of what the event itself entails in terms of performance and perception, fulfills the conditions of play or a work of art. To go back to the concept of play, what is performed in such events as in the *sholawat*, gains its significance not through those who have created it but through its return and reengagement with observers. The notion of play here does not mean an absence of seriousness but rather artistic, religious expression is itself subject to the different contexts of intersubjective ideas,

⁵³ Gadamer is critical of people's attempts to understand the meaning of a work of art solely through its historical contexts, because it seeks to recover a meaning which no longer exists in our current context of life.

⁵⁴ Translated by Lawrence K. Schmidt in *Language and Luisticality in Gadamer's Hermenutics*. Lanham (Maryland): Lexington Books, 2001:46).

habits, sounds, and meanings. All these are involved in an ever-changing interplay between the performance of religion and its observers.

If we take the metaphor of the *game of religion* further, we can follow the idea of what the *sholawat* and the institution of Islam Nusantara entail when it comes to Islam. What institutions or any other forms of human organization do is provide the field for this play to take place, and thus give the game of religion a type of mutually recognized legitimacy. This legitimacy is subject to the consensus of all the players involved, who collectively recognize the rules, actions, and ideas that the institution facilitates and upholds. The institutions are the organizers here, the hosts, referees, and mediators between all the players in the game of religion. But it is also important to note, as I have mentioned in the first chapter, that institutions can—and often do—create boundaries and obstacles that can undermine the play of the game itself. For example, we can see this through the tension between the institutional authority of Salafism and Sufism (which inspires Islam Nusantara), both playing in the game of religion, and both at odds about what the rules of the game are. When boundaries between such institutions thicken, the play stops. Salafis and Sufis adhere to different rules and no longer debate the rules of the game, ultimately tuning one another out. This is not the only problem. The idea that institutions can be at odds happens in virtually every relationship between authoritative bodies interpreting and rearticulating a discourse or an enunciative authority (political ideologies; academic disciplines; gender, ethnic, and class struggles). The problem, and here is where Gadamer comes again, is that humans do not become involved in fulfilling the purpose of play in the first place. They are no longer involved in dialogues that attempt to uncover basic truths. The only conditions to mediate truth or to convince others of a prior to truth is to enter into a mutual and constructive dialogue, into a mode of communication that seeks to establish truth and to convince the other of truth.

This goes to the principle idea behind Gadamer's hermeneutics, which seeks to understand the conditions that make truth possible. Dialogue between institutions does not only rest on convincing one another that their ideas and principles are correct and virtuous, but that they can be open to fundamental changes themselves. Because art attempts to disclose truth, it is especially potent in the game of religion. We have seen this in the ways humans have adapted art into their religious expressions throughout history, from important musical works to painting and poetic expressions. Going back to the phrase *hess ilahi*, which means a sense of the divine, Indonesians equate the music and aesthetics found in the modes and sounds of the Arab world as inhabiting a certain sacredness. The observations we encountered in the ethnography have a certain character in that they constitute a background for the affirmation of Islamicness among Indonesians. Sometimes they are implicit and subtle, like hearing secular Arab music in an Islamic wedding, or explicit and loud, like hearing the call to prayer on loudspeakers throughout the day.

Young college students were sensitive to the globalized *umma* in the way that they portrayed the song *Ummati* in the FSQ competition in Yogyakarta. Other students, like the group *Orkes Gambus al-Jami'ah* from the same Islamic university, sought more indirect ways of living the Islamic ethos through the cultural legacy of Arab-Indonesian musicians and the repertoire of Hadhrami and Yemeni artistic heritage. Perhaps the unique feature to note here is that Islam becomes embedded in non-religious forms of life in extensive ways. This *absence of differentiation* appears to do more good than harm because religion gets embedded into various day-to-day actions without imposing an ideology, but exists in an artistic praxis. Thus, the aestheticizing of Islam in Indonesia becomes deployed daily in ways that are not frequently observed throughout the Muslim world. Because sound has the ability to penetrate more sensory space than objects, books, or sermons, it has the ability to weave itself into the fabric of Islamic

life in remarkable ways. In this seemingly utopic reality for artistic expression, art is not only on a differentiated platform of representation within the infinite world of things one passively observes daily. Rather, the necessity of intensive religious praxis facilitates the crossing between artistic expression and the fabric of everyday life. The significance of the call to prayer is not only its intent to remind people to go pray but rather in the nostalgic, musical expression people anticipate that gets recreated throughout the day. It disrupts the reality embedded in the world with a call from beyond.

In a sense, this brings us back to Hirschkind's study of the Islamic sermon tapes playing in the background of everyday Egyptian life. I think that the important connection here is not what the tapes themselves say specifically, but rather what their soundscape means beyond its content and messages. Indeed, Hirschkind does recognize this by claiming that the tapes themselves foster a certain type of sonic environment just by playing in the background. Sound occupies large portions of our everyday sensory experience and can powerfully penetrate the fabric of everyday life. In our case, the combination of religious listening, Islamic revival, and the influence of secular forms of entertainment reveal how the lines between the musical and the religious are blurring. To give an example of this, a Quranic reciter by the name of Mahmood al-Shahaat elicited responses from the audience that are similar to those of Umm Kulthoum during her widely televised concerts throughout the 20th century. As I stated earlier, Quranic recitation in the *mujawad* style epitomizes vocal and improvisatory skill, knowledge of the *maqam* and its interpretation, ornamentations, and melodic elongation, all of which are expected to elicit responses found in a *tarab* milieu. Thus, in moments where Quranic text—a source of enunciative authority—becomes embedded in the aesthetics and behaviors of *tarab*, we see a marriage that gives rise to a state of *saltanah* in the religious act.

A religious act that possesses ecstatic, musically dominant states of performance and collective listening is certainly interesting to observe. This is not the ecstasy of being lost in haunting effects of music but of being aware and paying attention to the aesthetics of a performance. Through agents of *sholawat*, we see religion offering a public plateau for citizens to act together in the context of continuously unfolding forms of art and communal worship. The emerging of a new Islam is inevitable according to Casanova, who correctly states that Islamic, Hindu, and Confucian faiths are forging their versions of modernity:

“In the same way as ‘our’ modern secular age is fundamentally and inevitably post-Christian, the emerging multiple modernities in the different post-axial civilizational areas are likely to be post-Hindu, or post-Confucian, or post-Muslim, that is, they will also be a modern refashioning and transformation of already existing civilizational patterns and social imaginaries.”

Additionally, Casanova sees transformations in these religions as not merely anti-conservative or revivalist movements from within the religion, but as acts of Muslims to create their subjective forms of a modern Islam not bound to traditionalist’s schemes. While he presents the Catholics as an example of a modern struggle to change the tradition and react to modern obstacles, Casanova sees a modern religion that would not necessarily defy religious authority, but rather operate through its implemented structures and institutions (a good example of this is the Islamic University and its creations of *modern da'wah* arts).

The obvious implication is that if Catholicism can change, renew, and update its tradition in response to modern challenges, then certainly there is no reason to believe that Islam cannot do the same. But more importantly it suggests that viewing contemporary Muslim transformations as forms of Muslim *aggiornamento*, that is, as plural and often antithetical attempts by Muslim individuals and collective actors to fashion their own Muslim versions of modernity, may be analytically and hermeneutically more fruitful than to view such transformations as the civilizational resistance of fundamentalist Islam against an essentialist construction of Western secular modernity (page 278).

One of the aspects of Casanova’s three-part classification for public religion (the state, the political society, and the civil society) is that it sees religion in the West in a passive state, with

humans applying it to different contexts of daily life. In this example, however, public religion runs through economic, political, and cultural forces simultaneously, and always unfolds to take on a new public character or form. The evolving of religious actions and motives takes place through the course of their applications in daily life—their deliberation—among actors, not their desertion. The attempt to combine artistic expression with religion stems from the primordial drive of religious action: the revealing of truth.

Indonesia has a vibrant middle class, a free and diverse press, and a substantial moderate Muslim community that seems to care more for ideas of patriotism and nationhood building within pluralist policies—a project that organizations like NU are trying grapple with. It remains unclear how. The *sholawat*, as much as they evolve through a tradition of singing, can also foster a milieu of public piety that constantly engenders universal modern and Islamic ethical ideals that promote interreligious hospitality. Within the context of *sholawat*, a variety of rhetorical and musical aesthetics emerge which combine indigenous and foreign Islamic expressions, and signal how the youth culture adapts global and contemporary expressions in their music. The mega-large gatherings of *sholawat* today stimulate not only an ongoing public religious engagement but also a discussion on the political and cultural reality of modern Islamic societies. When I started this fieldwork, I wanted to answer questions pertaining to how Muslims promote, submit to, or resist the force of dominant and global secular neoliberal politics, but I have discovered that there are deeper, more principled actions taking place beyond just a simple dichotomy of secular vs. religious. Perhaps this goes to Tim Ingold’s call to locate the essence of anthropological inquiry where ontological commitment and an educational process are part of one’s discovery of different questions (Ingold 2007).

Marianne Moyaert, comparative theologian and a scholar of the hermeneutics of interreligious dialogue, says that “rituals, symbols, and narratives structure the world and make it

possible for human beings to find meaning in it.” (Moyaert 2014:52). Of course, everyone has his or her own religious and cultural autobiography, but religious adherence always implies that religious commitment is formed by a preceding tradition, which is reinterpreted and re-appropriated by each new generation of believers. As an advocate for what she terms a “post-religious faith,” Moyaert asserts that “post-religious faith recognizes that one can only relate to the illimited through mediation, through stories, symbols, rituals, and even institutions.” This dissertation echoes Moyaert’s assertion in the sense that the subjects we encountered are concerned with an Islam that attempts to articulate a divine truth not from discourses of *ulama* figures or Islamist politics but from art, symbols, and rituals. The actions of UIN students resemble a new generation of Muslims, all with a drive to articulate new forms of Islamic belief that centers around the development and presence of the art subject (or object) in daily life.

Summary

There are several points to consider in the conclusion to this research that I wish to highlight here. First, we framed the question of religious authority in terms of looking at how discourse and practice shape the actions of religious, or any other form of recognized social and political praxis. In the specific case for Indonesia, we designated the Islam of Indonesia (Islam Nusantara) as a type of institution that adheres to the enunciative Islamic authority founded in Islamic scripture and religious discourses. It is unique in the sense that it uses a mixture of cultural and social circumstances in devising its own Islamic ethos. In this sense, institutional authority is shaped by specific agents, histories, location, political circumstances and desires, and cultural beliefs and customs. For Indonesia, Islam Nusantara was shaped by a long and slow process of Islamization that was marked by peaceful spread of the religion. Sufism played an instrumental role in the spread of Islam in the region in the ways that Sufi saints (like the

Walisongo) sought to use the expressive medium in spreading the religion. This legacy continues to this day in the ways that millennial and centennial Muslims engage the arts in their *da'wah*.

The “festivalization of religion” led to the development of musical and literary forms of religious expression by individuals with traditional Islamic authority. The production of *sholawat* songs by Habib Syech shows the new creations from within the religious nobility and the Prophet’s descendants (*al-sada*), all following the footsteps of the Ba’alawi Sufis of Yemen. Within the context of *sholawat*, a variety of rhetorical and musical aesthetics are deployed, combining indigenous and foreign Islamic expressions and signaling how the youth culture adapts global and contemporary expressions in their music. The *rebanna* interlocking aesthetics we analyzed show a unique Indo-Arab cultural synergy and expression that is the product of centuries of cultural migration between the Arabian Peninsula and Southeast Asia. This synergy is not only seen in religious expression but also in the flourishing *gambus* culture that is practiced extensively by Arab and non-Arab Indonesian citizens. Both the *sholawat* division of UIN students and al-Jami’ah student gambus groups play extensively in various types of Muslim celebrations throughout the community. The students also create new ways of combining both Javanese and Arab aesthetics in the ways that they rearrange and rearticulate existing songs.

As Talal Asad notes, “The repetition of forms [precisely the character of tradition] is not necessarily repressive; one can see that formality requires not only [a] repetition of past formal models, but also creativity that is produced from the judgement of its present relevance” (Asad 2008: 76). He asserts that the cultivation of forms is thus necessary for the cultivation of ethical virtues. Asad is a proponent of the type of ethnography that looks at different manifestations of belief in the modern world. To understand the modern Islamic ethos and what it seeks to achieve, Asad states that “we need ethnographies of the human body—its attitudes toward pain, physical damage, decay, and death, as well as to bodily integrity, growth, and enjoyment” (ibid). As we

engage our senses with the world, what we hear, see, touch, smell, and feel, is drawn from an infinite plane of possibilities, where the practices we observe throughout the culture of *sholawat* seek a type of religious sensibility. This sensibility is in constant search of the best political and moral possibilities of the future because they seek to uncover the truth about the world.

It was Gadamer's hermeneutics and his ontological investigation into the work of art that gave us a framework to understand the substance of the *sholawat* and what they mean for Muslims and their faith. Institutions from this scope of analysis are entering the game of religion, with a different conception of how to articulate the meaning of religion and what the enunciative discourses mean to people. One of the biggest problems facing institutions is the absence of dialogue, which can ultimately render people incapable of achieving any form of agreement. If Islam—or any source of knowledge—is to develop, institutions must be engaged in its mediation and development, attempting to reach more consensus among people. The significance of the art subject or artistic expression is in its ability to mediate, attract, engage, and move its observer. Its purpose lies in the unconcealment of what is concealed. In the *sholawat*, the texts and melodies devised by the performers are constantly aiming to unconceal what is hidden from us: a constant project of unconcealment.

The internal socio-cultural dynamics of Islam in Indonesia today shed light on the question of why religious authority continues to thrive in a vibrant and active environment. The ethnography reveals the deliberate, meaningful, and creative actions that individuals take, the motivations that drive them to revere their piety and faith, and the reverence to the authority prescribed by religion. Institutions become the hubs of the networks that operate across the “machine” of Islam, which are constantly interconnecting, negotiating, reconnecting, and even breaking apart from pre-existing understanding of the religion. Rather than speculating if Islam is an obstacle to modernity as many previous works attempted to do, it is more fruitful to

understand how modern Muslim believers make their lives more meaningful by adapting certain practices throughout everyday modern life. This endeavor becomes more possible when art and religious praxis intersect one another. In this sense, I see the culture of *sholawat* today not only entailing a conservative turn but also utilizing artistic expression in the fabric of everyday life.

This dissertation research will contribute an understanding of the way authority and power relations, especially along axes of religion, transnationalism, and class, influence the ideology and politics of Southeast Asian states in particular and the Islamic community globally. Paul Ricoeur and Hannah Arendt, both of whom articulated the notion of authority and legitimacy, provide a context for authority that I sought to define in an Islamic setting. Within ethnomusicology, there has been research by Ann Rasmussen, Charles Capwell, and David Harnish regarding Islam and music in Indonesia. But this area within ethnomusicology is in its infancy, both in theory and practice. The research will be an addition to this new canon of works with different theoretical insights and methodological schemes that were possible through the intensive type of collaboration I undertook. Additionally, aside from answering the critical question I raise about authority and religion, ethnomusicologists seeking to connect theoretical inquiries with performance practices must consider the purpose of their collaboration with their informants. It took several months of performing with UIN students to start noticing the aspect of their performance that speaks to the cultural synergy between Arabs and Javanese people. The methodological procedures generated from a dissertation, where participant-observation and theory are working in parallel, can also provide insights into new modes of ethnographies. Other future areas to explore include providing a comparative model that allows us to see the creative ways people engage art and music in their lives, and how these forms have either departed from tradition or revived a tradition that was deserted.

Concluding Remarks

The argument posed by fundamentalism and Islamic authority against a liberal and more modern Islam is that secularist ideology and Islam cannot co-exist in the shadow of a Judeo-Christian tradition that produced Western capitalism. Before dismissing Islam as unmodern or not compatible with capitalism—both notions are utterly inaccurate—my attempt to understand the *sholawat* in Indonesia led to more detailed analysis and careful attention to the rhetoric and content of the performances themselves, their histories, and the ways in which Muslims encounter religion, art, and religious discourses every day. From the perspective of the Hadhrami lineage to the prophet and the powers of the Habib image both in Indonesia and the world, Islamic authority, at least from the explicit and clear example shown here, is malleable and fluid, able to shift and change through times and through different agents, motivations, and ideas, all of which operate under different institutional narratives. However, this is not to undermine any genuine attempts to critique certain dogmatic forms of religious authority that may arise out of various political and dominating interests. But even within the realm of conservatism, people still want to remain relevant to the world around them and convey this drive in the ways they encounter life through creativity. The life of the Muslims I met in the field was marked by *ramai* environments, with bodies sensing and embodying sounds that represent the divine. These people are preoccupied with discovering what is beyond the capacities of understanding. This fascination with what is beyond the capacities of human understanding drives people to explore the arts of revealing the essence of God's words.

The retreat from artistic religious expressions in the public sphere, as we have seen in other parts of the developed Muslim world, have more radicalizing tendencies than intellectual and artistic engagement with Islamic discourses. The results of this art form's retreat into private life means the loss of spaces for citizen-led action. Codependent expression of religious

rhetoric—primarily a type of rhetoric that seeks to establish consensus on shared human ideals and dignity—ensures that people can establish consensus on ideas of virtue, morality, and freedom. In the privatized, technologically and globally driven neo-modern Islamic-majority state, people passively encounter a one-way medium of religious communication. This method, as we presently encounter it in many parts of the Muslim world, gives a sense of grandeur to the Islamic ideal in the public sphere, which produces differing degrees of self-posturing and claims to religious virtue. This is the perfect world for radical Islamic authority and political Islam, which seeks to remove the discussion or critique of religion from the popular religious sphere altogether. This brings the discussion to the cyber world and the question of social media platforms and collective political or social action. While I do not discredit the benefits brought by the modern means of communication and media, I am suspicious of how effectively people can establish a sense of commitment to each and form institutions and communities around certain causes while missing the physical, spatial, temporal elements of collective action. The social media platforms—while giving the single user tremendous access to a public platform—remain susceptible to coercion and manipulation by competing interests. This is significant and warrants further research not only in the religious sphere but in the political and social spheres of modern life. Given the framework of social media, this is the question to consider in this regard: what forms of *appearance for action* take place for humans under the current context of a borderless, cyber public sphere? Do these forms produce tangible or constructive political change, and what are their vulnerabilities? At this moment, I think I can make a valid assertion, based on what was observed in the ethnography, that the very point of institutions is to facilitate the transition of words and ideas into a perceptible political reality.

The religious festival, the *sholawat* event, and even the *majlis*, are simply settings for human interaction that bring bodies and voices near each other, all in search of ways to discover

the truth. They hear the words of God and religious poems through melodies that nostalgically index a divine presence around them, hidden from them, but also existing everywhere. What they strive for is not merely the preservation of tradition or the continuation of something from the past, but the creation of today's Islam drawn by a modern-secular-religious complexity of life, which is inescapable. The *sholawat* fulfills its purpose in that it brings people together in order to remember that they share something, and their individualities all add up to a single common will to seek divine truth. It is not what is in the *sholawat* that matters as much as that co-presence is marked by the temporal reality of the *sholawat* returning again and again. The coming together in the spirit of collective worship, in the single, most important pursuit of seeking the truth for mankind, is what makes the *sholawat* a phenomenon worth examining today.

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