

## DEFENDING ISLAMIC TRADITION

### Theological Responses of the Hadrami *Majlis Taklim* Groups toward the Salafi-Wahabi Preaching Movement in Contemporary Indonesia

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**Abstract:** This article discusses *majlis taklim* as an informal religious learning group in urban area led by Hadrami descents in Indonesia that functions not only in preaching Islam but also in defending their Islamic traditions and practices toward the criticism of Salafi movement in Indonesia. The data presented here is based on in-depth interview with members and leaders of the group and participant observation. This article argues that Islamic traditions in Indonesia are about knowledge, worldview, values, and mode of behavior for Indonesian Muslims, where the Scripture and the spirit of Scripture is the ultimate reference. In this study, we show how Islamic traditions in Indonesia have been carefully maintained, developed, and transmitted through generations. Despite the strong criticism of Salafi group in urban areas, Islamic traditions have been preserved and disseminated through the *majlis taklim* groups, including by the Indonesian Hadrami individuals. This study is aimed to look at how Hadrami *majlis taklim* in the urban area maintains, develops and transmits Islamic tradition to the Muslim community and give theological response to the Salafi group's attack to their practices. The effort of Hadrami *majlis taklim* has contributed to the maintaining of religious tolerance in contemporary Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Hadrami, *majlis taklim*, Islamic Tradition, Salafi-Wahabi Movement

#### Introduction

The rapid growth of the *majlis taklim* (*ta'lim*) in Indonesia in the last two decades is part of Islamic revivalism that has taken place in major

part of the Muslim world. Like many other Muslim countries, this revivalism is a religious phenomenon characterized by its strong emphasis on Islamic identity and practices.<sup>1</sup> However, the term revivalism in this context is often described by western scholars only as of the strengthening of legal and scripturalistic view of Islam. This view displaces traditional practices rather than strengthening Muslim religiosity and identity. With this view, Islamic revivalism in Indonesia is seen only from the aspects that strengthen of a scripturalistic view of Islam that strongly opposes Sufi practices and other Islamic tradition and practices of Muslim categorized as innovation to Islam (*bid'ah*). In addition, within similar period, Indonesia has also witnessed the expansion of the transnational Islamic revivalists and Salafi-Wahabi *da'wa* movements which strongly oppose religious practices of Indonesian Muslim in general and ritual practices of Indonesian *majlis taklim* in particular. This Islamic revivalism is responded by traditional Muslims in Indonesia as evidenced by the proliferation of Sufi groups (tarekat group) and *majlis dzikir* (*dhiker*, religious litanies) and *majlis taklim*.<sup>2</sup> The number of Indonesian Muslims joining these groups either in rural areas or urban is increasing vastly. Another salient feature of the current phenomenon in Indonesia is the increasing popularity of Sufi-inspired form of piety among urban Muslims. Thus, the rise of *majlis taklim* and *majlis dzikir* in contemporary Indonesia is seen as the evidence of Islamic revivalism which is not linked to a scripturalistic orientation of Islam, but linked to wider Islamic practices and pieties. Many of the *majlis* are founded and led by Hadrami descents in Indonesia, who have long history and internal dynamics.<sup>3</sup> In understanding this phenomenon, this article raises several questions: How does the Indonesian Hadrami *majlis taklim* in the urban area respond theologically to fierce ideological attack from the transnational Islamic revivalists and Salafi-Wahabi preachers whose activities have intensified in Indonesia during the last twenty years? What are the

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<sup>1</sup> Winn Phillip, "Women's Majelis Taklim and Gendered Religious Practice in Northern Ambon," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, last modified 2012, accessed June 12, 2018, <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue30/winn.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Arif Zamhari, "Socio-Structural Innovations In Indonesia's Urban Sufism: The Case Study of the Majelis Dzikir and Shalawat Nurul Mustafa," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 07, no. 01 (2013): 96–118.

<sup>3</sup> Syamsul Rijal, "Internal Dynamics within Hadhrami Arabs In Indonesia: From Social Hierarchy to Islamic Doctrine," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, 11, 1 (2017).

strategies of Indonesian *majlis taklim* to maintain, develop and transmit Islamic traditions to the Muslim community in the face of the devaluation of Islamic traditions from Salafi preachers?

Several studies on Indonesian *majlis taklim* have been written from various perspectives. Observers have analysed *majlis taklim* not only from its traditional religious role as a venue for religious learning forum, Sufi learning and practicing forum, preaching gatherings, public meetings for Islamic and Qur'anic studies<sup>4</sup> but they also have analysed *majlis taklim* as a social institution that has a significant role in community development<sup>5</sup> and socialization of acculturation process among Muslim minority group.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, another observer also analyses the political influence of *majlis taklim* in the local political governor election in Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> Miichi has aptly analysed the collaboration between an Indonesian Hadrami *majlis taklim* group with its Sufi orientation and Indonesian Islamists groups which actively engaged in local political issues with the use of their leader's charisma and their loyal members. Miichi argues that *majlis taklim* and *majlis dzikir* have significantly contributed to the mobilization of a large number of Muslim in the series of rallies protested against 'blasphemous' statements made by the Christian and ethnic Chinese Jakarta governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known as Ahok.<sup>8</sup> Due to strong pressure of the demonstration, the governor was filed by persecutor with blasphemy charge.<sup>9</sup> As a result, this legal case

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<sup>4</sup> Rubaidi, "The New Pseudo-Sufi Order Of The Majelis Shalawat Among Urban Muslims In East Java," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 14, no. 2 (2020): 431.

<sup>5</sup> Agus Ahmad Safei, "Development of Islamic Society Based on Majelis Taklim: A Study of the Shifting Role of the Majelis Taklim in West Java," *American Journal of Applied Sciences* 13, no. 9 (2016): 947–952.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad Marzuki, Mohamad Zaidin Mohamad, and Rohaizan Baru, "Role of Majelis Taklim and Adaptation Muslim Minority with Tengger Local Culture," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 8, no. 10 (2018): Pages 245-253.

<sup>7</sup> Ken Miichi, "Urban Sufi and Politics in Contemporary Indonesia: The Role of *Dhiker* Associations in the Anti-'Ahok' Rallies," *South East Asia Research* 27, no. 3 (2019): 225–237.

<sup>8</sup> Ken Miichi, "Urban Sufi and Politics in Contemporary Indonesia: The Role of *Dhiker* Associations in the Anti-'Ahok' Rallies," *South East Asia Research* 27, no. 3 (2019): 225–237.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander R. Arifianto, "Rising Islamism and the Struggle for Islamic Authority in Post-*Reformasi* Indonesia," *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (2020): 37–50.

hampered his re-election as governor. A report made from widely read newspaper indicated that *majlis taklim* also played a significant role during the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, when an association of women's majelis taklims in Jakarta endorsed Anies Baswedan's candidacy.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, Indonesian *majlis taklim* groups have been studied from their effort not only to disseminate democratic values and religious tolerance<sup>11</sup> but also to introduce Islamic economic practices to its members.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, several studies on *majlis taklim* has been conducted particularly by analyzing female *majlis taklim* groups and their part not only in the shifting social-religious role which is previously in the hand of male, but also in strengthening female religiosity<sup>13</sup> and maintaining Islamic traditions in urban and rural areas.<sup>14</sup> Another researcher also focuses on studying Hadrami *majlis taklim* group in urban area and seeking to explain its popularity and experience of the *majlis'* young followers concerning their participation and activism within the group.<sup>15</sup> Unlike previous studies, this study seeks to fill the gap by analyzing the theological response of Hadrami *majlis taklim* toward a strong ideological attack from the transnational Islamic revivalists and Salafi-Wahabi preachers whose activities have intensified in Indonesia during the last twenty years. By doing this, this *majlis taklim* reaffirms its traditional Islamic practices with 'correct' Islam and defending their practices as compatible with the Islamic creed. This study is significant in understanding not only how the role of Hadrami *majlis taklim* in maintaining Islamic traditions but also its

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<sup>10</sup> Robertus Belarminus, "Anis Anggap Dukungan Dari Majelis Taklim Amanah," *kompas.com*, Oktober 2016, <https://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2016/10/06/190-52001/anies.anggap.dukungan.dari.majelis.taklim.dki.amana>.

<sup>11</sup> Zaenal Abidin, "Majlis Ta'lim (Islamic Forum) And Harmonizing Inter Faith Communication," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Communication* 4, no. 1 (2019): 115.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Syarif Hidayatullah, "Islamic Economics And Partial-Total Religiosity: A Case Study of Majelis Taklim in Banjarmasin," *Islamuna: Jurnal Studi Islam* 7, no. 1 (2020): 36–55.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Winn, "Women's Majelis Taklim and Gendered Religious Practice in Northern Ambon," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 30 (2012).

<sup>14</sup> Umdatul Hasanah, "Majelis Taklim and the Shifting of Religious Public Role in Urban Areas" (2019): 21.

<sup>15</sup> Syamsul Rijal, "Following Arab Saints: Urban Muslim Youth and Traditional Piety in Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 48, no. 141 (2020): 145–168.

position in the discourse of Indonesian Islam in the amid of transnational Islamic movement.

The main data of this article is based on fieldwork research conducted in 2019 to 2020. The fieldwork included several interviews and informal conversations with the leader of the *majlis taklim*, the staffs of the *majlis*, and its followers, as well as participatory observations in numerous religious events organized by *Majlis Rasulullah* in Jakarta. Besides, the data is also taken from books written by the leader of the *majlis taklim* as well as short articles written by the leader in the official *majlis* website. This study, therefore, employs qualitative research that combines ethnography and textual analysis to understand the theological response of the *majlis taklim* to the Salafi Wahabis preaching in Indonesia.

The present article will analyze this phenomenon based on the following outline. It will begin by providing a brief discussion on the proliferation of Salafi Wahabi preaching (*da'wah*) movement in the contemporary Indonesian Islam. The second part of this article will discuss Habib Munzir al-Musawwa and his *majlis taklim*. Finally, third part locates theoretical perspective of Islamic tradition and analyses Islamic traditional practices of the *majlis taklim* and how they respond theologically to the Salafi Wahabi *da'wah* movement in Indonesia.

### **Salafi Wahabi Preachers: The Rise of New Religious Authorities in Contemporary Indonesian Islam**

The fall of Suharto which led to reforms has paved the way for the freedom of speech among Indonesian citizens. In addition, the demise of the authoritarian regime gave rise to religious activism and religious discourse. Not only have several parties emerged, but also several religious movements have mushroomed and gained new followers during the reform era. The idea of Islamic state and application of shariah bylaws that has been banned by the state during the New Order regime were discussed and offered in public debates. Besides, this period also witnessed the increasing of religious violence and conflict in several regions not only taken place between religious groups but also occurred within religious groups.

Such Islamic movements as Salafi-Wahabi, Hizb al Tahrir Indonesia, Jama'ah Tabligh, Tarbiyah movement (now with the Prosperous Justice Party as its political arm) and FPI that lie low during the New Order era regarded the freedom of speech as the

opportunity to introduce their mission to Indonesian Muslim. As a result, these religious groups expressed their ideas through religious polemical debates in periodicals, websites, books, and public discussions. Among these groups, Salafi-Wahabis groups have been the most vocal group in promoting puritanical Islam in Indonesia and challenging the established religious authority in Indonesia. The spread Salafi-Wahabis influence in Indonesia is inseparable from the internationally Wahabization program of Saudi government.<sup>16</sup> The Salafi Wahabi movement in Indonesia has been strongly supported by Saudi government through Saudi charities and educational program by sending Indonesian students to study Islam in Universities in Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-sponsored higher education, LIPIA (Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies) in Jakarta.<sup>17</sup> Many alumnae of this program actively propagate puritanical Islam which strongly urge Muslim to return to the original way of Islam by imitating the Prophet and the pious predecessors (*salaf al-salih*). Their main concern is the purity of the concept of oneness of God and the call on strict religious practices. Therefore, they reject all form of innovation (*bid'a*), deviation (*inhirāf*), accretion (*zīyada*), speculative theology (*ilm kalam*), and philosophy. With this belief, Salafi- Wahabi group rejects Sufism and speculative theology or *ilm al-kalam* particularly the doctrines of the Ash'ariy and the Maturidy which are considered as misguided, heretical and offensive to God.<sup>18</sup> The global Salafi-Wahabi movement has successfully produced well known religious teachers (*ustadz*) and preachers (*da'i*). Thanks to the charities, they can establish institutions such as Islamic schools (*madrasah*), Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and mosques, two important institutions in Islam through which help to gain wider Muslim audience in Indonesia <sup>19</sup>. In addition to their activities in teaching the students in their *pesantren*, they actively launch their campaign in public mosques, offices, and private houses. Their

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<sup>16</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Failure of the Wahhabi Campaign: Transnational Islam and the Salafi *Madrasa* in Post-9/11 Indonesia," *South East Asia Research* 18, no. 4 (2010): 677.

<sup>17</sup> Din Wahid, "A Study of Salafi Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia" *Wacana* 15, no. 2 (2014): 10.

<sup>18</sup> Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century*, Religion, culture, and public life (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Jajang Jahroni, "Saudi Arabia Charity and the Institutionalization of Indonesian Salafism," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 58, no. 1 (2020): 40.

religious gatherings have attracted many followers especially millennials from middle class background.

Since *Reformasi*, many new Muslim preachers have proliferated and gained many followers. Several renowned non-Salafi Wahabis preachers such as Abdullah Gymnastiar (AA Gym),<sup>20</sup> Abdussomad, Hanan Attaki, Jefri al-Bukhari, Arifin Ilham, Yusuf Mansur, Gus Baha', and Adi Hidayat have gained followers particularly among Indonesian Muslim youths. Whereas several new Salafi-Wahabis preachers have also gained popularity among Indonesian Muslim and youth millennial Muslims during last decade such as Khalid Basalamah, Syafiq Reza Basalamah, Subhan Bawazir, Muhammad Nurul Zikri, Badrussalam, Firanda Andirja, Abduh Tuasikal, Abdul Qadir Jawwas and Ammi Nurbaitis. These Wahabis preachers gain followers among celebrities. With the increasing popularity of *hijrah* movement among Indonesian Muslim in the last decade, they become more popular among Indonesian celebrities who have chosen *hijrah* lifestyle.<sup>21</sup> *Hijrah* lifestyle refers to people's transformation from a less religious person to more pious person. The expression of the transformation can be clearly seen from their choice of dress, namely wearing veil (*jalābīyah*) with flowing robes for ladies and wearing trousers above the ankle and growing beards (*libyah*). They even choose to practice full *hijrah* lifestyle by abandoning their profession as movie stars, celebrities, pop singers and non-Islamic bank workers. The *hijrah* lifestyle has its relevance to the Salafi-Wahabis idea of urging Muslim to move away from ignorance (*jāhiliyah*).<sup>22</sup>

While they used printing media to spread their Salafi-Wahabis teachings in 1990's, the current Salafi-Wahabis preachers have moved to use new media and technology to expand their *da'wah* after the 2000s. With the widespread use of the Internet, instead of using conventional media, the Salafi-Wahabi preachers begin to make use of a new media as a means of their preaching to attain wider audience.

<sup>20</sup> C.W. Watson, "A Popular Indonesian Preacher: The Significance Of Aa Gymnastiar," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11, no. 4 (2005): 773–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2005.00261.x>.

<sup>21</sup> Oki Setiana Dewi, "Pengajian Selebritas Hijrah Kelas Menengah Muslim (2000-2019): Respon atas Dakwah Salafi dan Jama'ah Tabligh" (Sekolah Pascasarjana UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2020), 131.

<sup>22</sup> Yuyun Sunesti and Noorhaidi Hasan, "Young Salafi-Niqabi and Hijrah: Agency and Identity Negotiation," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 8, no. 2 (n.d.): 26.

They also establish a nation-wide communities' radios network (Rodja Radio FM, AM) and local TV channels (Rodja TV) to propagate Wahabis puritanical teachings.<sup>23</sup> The Indonesian Salafi-Wahabis activists are very positive Islamic group in harnessing the Internet as their means of puritanical Islamic propagation. Therefore, their presence in the virtual realm can be clearly seen from many Salafi-Wahabis websites and its various names available in cyberspace. For example, several Indonesia Salafi-Wahabis websites which become the most popular Islamic websites in Indonesia include websites muslim.id; almanhaj.or.id; rumaysho.com; dalamislam.com; konsultasisyariah.com; radiorodja.com; Muslimah.or.id; dakwatuna.com; bersamadakwah.net; khotbahjumat.com; kisahmuslim.com. According to Alexa.com, the aforementioned websites are among the top twenty popular Islamic websites in Indonesia.<sup>24</sup> Apart from these websites, the Salafis-Wahabis preachers also use YouTube channel to conduct their *da'wah* among Indonesian Muslims.<sup>25</sup>

The Salafi-Wahabis preachers use internet to communicate, promote, and strengthen their interpretation of Islam. Iqbal points out that there are several reasons why Indonesian Salafi-Wahabis specifically use the Internet. First, they use it as ideological means, that is, to communicate their ideology and propagate Salafi-Wahabis teaching to a wider audience. Second, they use the Internet for polemical means by criticizing religious practices that has no textual basis in the Qur'an or the tradition of Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Third, they use the Internet as a medium to counter contemporary issues globally and locally.<sup>26</sup> Many people may question why have Salafi-Wahabis harnessed the Internet and its various applications as a useful and acceptable resource for their *da'wah*, even though it is a Western secularist product? The practical reason for

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<sup>23</sup> Oki Setiana Dewi, "Pengajian Selebritas Hijrah Kelas Menengah Muslim (2000-2019): Respons Atas Dakwah Salafi Dan Jamaah Tabligh" (Sekolah Pascasarjana UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2020), p.138.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.131.

<sup>25</sup> Wahyudi Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020), p.10.

<sup>26</sup> Asep Muhamad Iqbal, "Cyber-Activism and the Islamic Salafi Movement in Indonesia" (Australia, Murdoch University, 2017), 82.



them is because the Internet is cheaper, faster and it reaches wider audience than old media technologies such as printed media and TVs. In addition, the approval of using the internet among Salafi Wahabis activists is related to its users' motives. As long as the Internet is used for the purpose of promoting Salafi-Wahabis theology, the use of the Internet is allowed by Shariah.

Since its presence in Indonesia, the Salafi-Wahabi movement has been very hostile to the religious practices which have been long and widely practiced in Nusantara such as the tradition of the tarekat (Sufi order) the commemoration of Prophet birth, playing a musical instrument for reciting salawat, reciting *dhikr* in religious congregation, reciting *tahlil* (a special prayer recited after the death of Muslim), and visiting graves of Muslims as well as other religious Islamic traditions that are considered as heretical innovation (*bid'ah*) and superstition (*khurāfah*) and *shirk* (polytheistic belief and act). Therefore, the presence of Salafi-Wahabi in several regions in Indonesia has caused a conflict and tension with local religious groups and leaders. In South Kalimantan, for instance, conflict involving Salafi-Wahabi group and local Muslim happened due to Salafi's strong criticism to the respected figure of traditionalist Islamic circles. Moreover, another cause of the conflict in the region is due to the strong doctrine of Salafi teachings around *tawhid* and *sunnah* which has implications for the emergence of the concept of *shirk* and *bid'ah* in viewing religious practices among local Muslims. These two doctrines has been essential in the propagation of Salafi-Wahabi group in Indonesia. Based on these two doctrines, the group seeks to purify Islamic teaching and propagate the pristine Islam. The teaching *tawhid* contrasts with *shirk*, while the *sunnah* opposes the term *bid'ah*.<sup>27</sup>

For some observers, the rise of these new Salafi-Wahabis preachers has challenged the existing religious authorities: *ulama*, *kyai* and religious leaders of the Indonesian Muslim mass organizations. They argue that the rise of these new Salafi-Wahabis preachers with their popular followings at the grassroot level has caused to the declining influence of traditional Islamic authority as represented by NU and Muhammadiyah. As a result, the Salafi Wahabis preachers have opportunities to take over the space previously occupied by

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<sup>27</sup> Muhammad Zainal Abidin and Yulia Hafizah, "Conflict and Integration in The Salafi-Wahabi Purification Movement in South Kalimantan," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 4, no. 2 (2019): p.193.

traditional Islamic religious authorities. These challenges have been sensed by religious leaders of mass organizations including the leaders of Hadrami *majlis taklim* in Indonesia since their activities also become the target of new Salafi Wahabis preachers. As a result, they try to 'fight back' against the Salafi Wahabis preachers who have denigrated religious and cultural practices of local Muslim community in Indonesia.<sup>28</sup> The struggles of this resistance appear in the defense of the Indonesian Hadrami scholars against the practices of the religious rituals that they have been doing. In addition, they also increasingly assert themselves as defenders and followers of the sunnah and the salaf generation by affirming that the cultural practices of Islam are according to the teachings of their religion.

### **Habib Munzir al-Musawwa and *Majlis Rasulallah***

*Majlis Rasulallah* will not exist without the figure of Habib Munzir al-Musawa. He is a Hadrami descendent who has been actively involved in preaching Islam and Islamic education in Jakarta and its surroundings since he graduated from Darul Mustafa College in Tarim Yemen under the guidance of Habib Umar ibn Hafidh in 1998. During his four years study in Yemen, he not only studied in the college but also studied privately with many other prominent Muslim scholars in Yemen. Before studying in Yemen, he joined with many Hadrami *majlis taklim* and studied with prominent *ḥabāib* in his hometown. Looking at his educational background, we can see that he strongly maintains his Hadrami intellectual genealogy by studying only with Hadrami teachers in Hadrami Islamic school rather than studying with non-Hadrami ulama and pesantren. Most Hadrami family in Indonesia prefer to send their children to study Islamic knowledge in Islamic school established and led by Hadrami scholars rather than sending them to non-Hadrami pesantren as documented in Habib Munzir's study and his teachers.

Preaching Islam to the Muslim community is the main activity of the young Habib Munzir after completing his study in Yemen. Previously, he preached Islam among his community in his hometown, Cipanas, Bogor. However, his Islamic preaching activity did not improve significantly. So, he decided to move to Jakarta and preached

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<sup>28</sup> Arif Zamhari and Imam Mustofa, "The Popular Da'wah Movement In Urban Communities: The Role Of Hadrami Scholars' Da'wah In Response To Religious Radicalism In Indonesia," *Akademika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 25, no. 1 (2020): p.186.

Islam in the city by visiting one house to another to share his knowledge. He then focused mainly on preaching Islam in Jakarta by teaching Islamic knowledge in one *majlis taklim* on Tuesday evening. He was also frequently invited by his *jama'ah* (congregates) from various suburbs of Jakarta.

Since his *majlis*, which was held at the houses of his *jama'ah* could no longer accommodate participants, he, then, approached surrounding mosques in which he could use them as a venue of his *majlis taklim*. He arranged his *majlis* in several mosques in the district, and the numbers of participants to his *majlis* continued to grow, he decided to give a name for the community. One of his colleagues suggested to name his *majlis* with his name 'Majlis Habib Munzir', but he disagreed with this name. He chose *Majlis Rasulullah* (the Assembly of the Prophet of God) as the name of his *majlis*, similar with his mission, to give a lesson about the Prophet and guidance of nurturing a love of God by becoming closer to the Prophet.

The activities of *Majlis Rasulullah* are mainly concentrated in several mosques in different parts of Jakarta including Al-Munawar Mosque, Pancoran, Pasar Minggu, South Jakarta; At-Taqwa Mosque, Rawa Jati, South Jakarta; and the Mosque of Darul Islah Boarding School, Kalibata, South Jakarta. The *Majlis Rasulullah* in Al-Munawar Mosque held on Monday evening is considered as 'huge' in terms of participants attending the *majlis*. This *majlis* is known by people as *Majlis SMS* (*Majlis* Senin Malam Selasa), and this *majlis* has become famous for people from many different districts. In addition to the activities in four mosques, *Majlis Rasulullah* also holds its activities in different places in Jakarta and the vicinity. Habib Munzir leads all *Majlis Rasulullah* meetings and events in those four mosques and other small mosques each week on different days.

The biggest event of the *Majlis Rasulullah* is the annual commemoration of the Prophet birth (Maulid). For such a big event, *Majlis Rasulullah* usually chooses the Monumen Nasional (Monas; the National Monument) square as the venue. Many public figures, such as president Yudhoyono at the time, governor, ministers, attended the event. However, in 2015 the Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaya Purnama issued an instruction on banning the Quran recitals and religious activities at the National Monument, arguing that such an activity should be conducted at mosques, instead of the National Monument. Because of this regulation, *Majlis Rasulullah* can no longer

use the Monas Square as a venue of annual *maulid* commemoration. The governor's banning is aimed to keep the Monas Square free from street vendors and use the Monas Square only for official state events. He argued that if he allowed the Monas Square for any kind of public activities, the Square would be occupied by flocking street vendors, and this makes the Square dirty. He wanted Monas Square becomes an exclusive place that is free from street vendors. Therefore, the governor suggested the *Majlis Rasulullah* use Istiqlal Mosque as a venue for its religious event. Ahok said,

"Wouldn't God listen to our prayers if the *dhikr* recital were not held at the national monument? It will not cause any problem, will it? It does not have to be held at the national monument... How if we will reopen the Monument for religious activities? Churches community will ask the same thing, and they will hold a mass prayer at the monument."

In response to the governor regulation, the member of *Majlis Rasulullah* brought this issue to the Vice President of Indonesia, Jusuf Kalla, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, this did not change the governor regulation. However, the newly elected Jakarta governor, Anis Baswedan in 2017 who replaced Basuki in the governor office, had lifted the local regulation banning religious activities from being held in the Monumen Nasional. Anis Baswedan argues that one of the principles of the Indonesian state is the belief in one God. The government, according to Anies, must support activities reflect five principles, including religious activities.<sup>29</sup> Since then, *Majlis Rasulullah* can hold its activities again in the Monument Nasional.

The appeal of the *Majlis Rasulullah* lies on the figure of its leader, Habib Munzir al-Musawa. Therefore, when Habib Munzir died in 2013, the *Majlis Rasulullah* lost its prominent figure, which led to the loss of leadership of the *majlis*. The *jama'ah* of the *majlis* feels that the position of Habib Munzir in the *majlis* is irreplaceable. Although the death of the leader did not cause the fracture of *Majlis Rasulullah* (into different groups), the *Majlis Rasulullah* found it difficult to seek a new leader of the *Majlis Rasulullah*. One of the strategies to cope with this leadership gap in the *majlis* was by asking Habib Umar ibn al-Hafidh

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<sup>29</sup> Tempo, "Anies to Revamp Religious Activities Banned By Ahok," *Tempo*, last modified 2018, accessed June 16, 2020, <https://metro.tempo.co/read/869089/anies-to-revamp-religious-activities-banned-by-ahok> accessed 22/5/2018.

from Yemen who is the teacher of Habib Munzir al-Musawwa to choose the successor of Habib Munzir to lead *Majlis Rasulullah*, whereby its members did not formally nominate the *majlis* leader. Habib Umar chose the leader of the *majlis* based on the criteria that he made. Since then the leadership of *Majlis Rasulullah* has undergone succession three times. Consecutively, they were Habib Muchsin ibn Idrus al-Hamid, Habib Ahmad Novel ibn Salim ibn Jindan, and Habib Muhammad Bagir ibn Yahya succeeded Habib Munzir as the leader of the *Majlis Rasulullah*. Like Habib Munzir, the founder of *Majlis Rasulullah*, some of the chosen leaders were the graduates of Darul Mustafa, Tarim, Yemen.<sup>30</sup>

### **Practising and Maintaining Islamic Tradition**

Islam, as a religion, influences and gives colour to Muslim's behaviour. As Islam spread throughout the world, it inevitably meets with different local cultures and traditions. During this process, it is no doubt that Islam blended with local cultures and practices in what I call as Islamic traditions. The term tradition used here refers to what Muhaimin has defined as 'knowledge, doctrines, customs, practices, etc., as well as the transmission of such knowledge, doctrines and practices' from generation to generation<sup>31</sup>. Tradition is also understood as the passing down of elements of culture from generation to generation, primarily through oral transmission. Usually, elements of culture transmitted include institutionalised practice, precept, belief, and custom. In this sense, tradition has a symbolic meaning and special significance with origins in the past. Therefore, Islamic tradition is related to any practices, customs, beliefs that come from and have a spirit of Islam, and Muslim still practises them from generation to generation. With this sense, Islamic tradition that has been practised by Muslim from generation to generation cannot be said as un-Islamic and heretic even though it is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition (Ḥadīth).

As mentioned earlier, one tradition can be said to have the spirit of Islam if the tradition is deeply rooted in the Islamic religion. However, how can we ensure that one particular tradition can be considered

<sup>30</sup> Adriansyah, *Majelis Rasulullah Religiusitas Perkotaan Dan Moderasi Dakwah* (Jakarta: Nusa Litera Inspirasi, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> AG Muhaimin, *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon: Ibadat And Adat Among Javanese Muslims*, 1st ed. (Canberra: ANU Press, 2006).

Islamic? As Muhaimin argues: in order to know whether or not one tradition is Islamic, is through the mechanism of intention (Ind: *niat*). Using *niat* and reciting the name of God (*bismillah*), all activities can be valued as religious activities (*ibadah*).<sup>32</sup> This mechanism is relevant to what Prophet Muhammad said that ‘all actions are judged by intention (Arabic: *nīyah*), so each person will have what he/or she intended’<sup>33</sup>.

Moreover, another Prophetic tradition states that any kind of worldly activities and matters (*a’ māl al-dunyā*) can be valued as hereafter activities (*a’ māl al-ākhirah*) because of good intention or sincere intention (*ikhlās*), while any kind of hereafter activities will be valued as worldly activities because of bad intention. In other words, intention is an important part of Muslim activities in defining whether or not the activities are valued as Islamic or religious ones. Sayed Hosen Nasr, Iranian scholar who stay in the United States, stressed the importance of intention to give a stamp that all activities conducted by Muslim are for God. Nasr further argues that any kind of worldly or religious activities will become *ibadah* if they are started with *bismillah* (a phrase saying, in the name of Allah, the Beneficent and the Merciful).<sup>34</sup>

I use Muhaimin and Nasr’s perspective to look at Islamic traditions that have been practised and maintained by Hadrami *majlis taklim* in the urban area of Indonesia. Islamic traditions including the commemoration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (Mawlid al-Nabi),<sup>35</sup> playing a musical instrument for reciting *ṣalāwah*, reciting *dhikr* in unison, reciting *tablil* (a special prayer recited after the death of Muslim), and visiting the graves of Muslims have been the primary practices of urban *majlis taklim* in Indonesia. These Islamic traditions have been practised, maintained and transmitted from generation to generation, especially among Hadrami *majlis taklim* and Muslims in general. Although the Prophet may not have practised all these Islamic traditions, this does not mean that these traditions are un-Islamic and

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<sup>32</sup> Muhaimin AG, *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon: Ibadat and Adat Among Javanese Muslims*, (Canberra, ANU Press, 2006), xii

<sup>33</sup> Jamal Ahmed Badi, “Sharh Arba’een Al-Nawawi, Commentary of Forty Hadiths of An-Nawawi,” *Kulliyah of ICT IIUM*, last modified 2002, accessed June 12, 2018, <http://fortyhadith.iiu.edu.my/>.

<sup>34</sup> Sayed Hosen Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1981).

<sup>35</sup> Kunawi Basvir, “The ‘Acculturative Islam’ As A Type Of Home-Grown Islamic Tradition: Religion And Local Culture In Bali,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 13, no. 2 (2019): p.335.

unorthodox. These Islamic traditions are not mentioned clearly in the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth, but these practices, as explained by Hadrami *majlis taklim*, are deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. The following part of this paper deals with the practices of Islamic traditions and how the Hadrami *majlis taklim* groups maintain and defend their practices as Islamic.

### ***Commemoration of the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad***

The celebration of the birthday of the Prophet, *maulid al Nabi*, is among three major Islamic celebration festivals in Indonesia. Unlike the Idul Fitri, which marks the end of fasting and Ramadhan and the Sacrificial Festival known as Idul Adha, the *maulid* festival have been widely practised despite it is not clearly described by the Qurʾān and Prophetic traditions as a celebration. Today, *maulid* day is a public holiday in many Muslim countries except for Saudi Arabia, which considers it as an innovation (*bid'ah*). In Indonesia, the *maulid* festival has been celebrated in different regions with various forms of local celebration. Mark Woodward argues that *maulid* festival is also an expression of popular piety in many Muslim societies. *Mawlid* is considered an essential part of Islam for most Javanese Muslim as this tradition benefits and help them become pious Muslims.<sup>36</sup>

The celebration of the birthday of the Prophet is controversial within Muslim community since it is not practised during the lifetime of the Prophet. In Indonesia, without doubt, a strong criticism toward *maulid* festival comes from the Salafis or Wahhabis. They and their ideology condemn any ritual practices that have never been practised during the lifetime of the Prophet. Therefore, this group argues that, those who practise any ritual which is not practiced or approved by the Prophet can be considered *bid'ah* that lead them to the hellfire. Celebration of *maulid al-Nabi* was not practised during the lifetime of the Prophet, and therefore considered *bid'ah*. As a result, those who celebrate it can be condemned as unbelievers destined for hell.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, the *maulid* celebration is part of an essential ritual in urban Hadrami *majlis taklim* such as *Majlis Taklim Majlis Rasulullah*. In this *majlis taklim*, celebrating *maulid al-Nabi* can be conducted not only

<sup>36</sup> Mark Woodward et al., “Ordering What Is Right, Forbidding What Is Wrong: Two Faces of Hadrami Dakwah in Contemporary Indonesia,” *RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 46, no. 2 (2012): 105–46.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

on the date of the birthday of the Prophet but also conducted several times after the date of the birthday of the Prophet. Since *maulid al-Nabi* is one of the main rituals in the *majlis*, the leader of the *majlis* must respond to the Salafi group's condemnation and defend the lawful of maulid tradition practised within the *majlis taklim*.

Habib Munzir al-Musawwa responded to the condemnation by citing a hadith:

“The one who invent a good innovation in Islam shall be rewarded for it and similarly rewarded when other person(s) imitates him or her in performing that deed—without the reward of the latter being reduced. Likewise, the one who invent a bad innovation in Islam will be sinful for it and will similarly bear a sin when other person(s) imitates him or her in that bad innovation—without any of the latter's sin being lessened.”

According to Habib Munzir, this hadith encourages good innovation (*bid'ah hasanah*) and forbids bad innovation (*bid'ah sayyiah*). He argues that this hadith indicates that the Prophet Muhammad will remember his followers even after his death. Therefore, the Prophet has permitted his followers to make useful innovations which are not forbidden by Islam. One innovation that Habib Munzir considers is Islamic is the collecting pages of the Qur'anic verses into one compilation as initiated by Abu Bakr, the first caliph (successor) of the Prophet, as proposed by Umar ibn al-Khattab. This collecting of the Qur'an was not conducted during the prophet's life who only ordered its writing. Therefore, it is classified as *bid'ah*. Habib Munzir mentioned another example performing pilgrimage to Mecca more than once. Habib Munzir maintained that if a pilgrimage to Mecca is performed more than once is terrible innovation, Muslims today would not have practised it because the Prophet Muhammad never carried out a pilgrimage to Mecca more than once during his lifetime. All of these examples have indicated that not all religious practices that have never been practised by the prophet are bad innovation (*bid'ah sayyiah*). For this Majlis, the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday is also categorised as praiseworthy innovation practices. Although the Prophet did not explicitly practice the commemoration of his birthday, there are many prophetic traditions (hadith) quoted by Habib Munzir as a sign of permissibility of commemorating the birthday of the prophet aiming to praise and set him as a role model for Muslims. One of these is narrated by Abbas Ibn Abdul Muttallib who said to the



Prophet asking to allow him to praise the Prophet. Then, the Prophet allowed Abbas to praise him by reciting a poet:

“And then, when you were born, a light rose over the earth until it illuminated the horizon with its radiance. We are in that illumination and that original light and those paths of guidance - and thanks to them we pierce through.”

This hadith, according to Habib Munzir, indicates that the Prophet allows people to praise him. Therefore, Habib Munzir argues that since the ritual of *Maulid al-Nabi* is mainly giving praise to the Prophet, so commemorating of the Prophet’s birthday is not forbidden by Islam.<sup>38</sup>

Another argument put forward by Habib Munzir is based on the hadith about the expression of joy from the Prophet’s uncle, Abu Lahab, after hearing about the birth of his nephew brought by his slave, Thuwaybah. Abu Lahab freed Thuwaybah because of his joy and ordered her to nurse the Prophet. Later, Abu Lahab was known as one of the fiercest opponents of the Prophet during his life. When Abu Lahab died, Al-Abbas (another uncle of the Prophet) had a dream about Abu Lahab. He said that every Monday Abu Lahab’s punishment was lessened because he freed Thuwaybah who told him about the birth of the Prophet... So, for Habib Munzir, the celebration of the *maulid al-Nabi* is one way to express gratitude and joy at the birth of the blessed prophet by reciting *salawat* and prayer on the celebration.

Habib Munzir also quoted several views of the Muslim scholars. One of views is from Imam al-Hafidh Abu Syamah who argued that several religious practices today are considered as praiseworthy innovations. Those innovations are giving alms or charity, inviting Muslim scholars (ulama) to teach, expressing joyfulness and gratitude on the occasion of the celebration of *maulid*. However, Habib Munzir advised that such celebrations should not be followed with practices that are forbidden by Islam, such as overspending to celebrate *maulid al-Nabi* while people living in the surroundings need more money for food and education.<sup>39</sup>

For Habib Munzir, in general, the celebration of *maulid al-Nabi* is aimed to gather Muslims in religious sermons (*tabligh agama*) filled with religious instructions and the recitation of the praises of the Prophet, as an expression of joyfulness and gratitude with the birth of the

<sup>38</sup> Mundzir Almusawa, *Kenali Akidahmu 2* (Majlis Rasulullah saw, 2009), 60-70.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Prophet. Without a doubt, this ritual of *maulid al-Nabi* will result in the increasing of Muslims' love of the Prophet and the improvement of religious belief of Muslims. In line with this, Habib Munzir argues that any activities that can increase Muslim's love to the Prophet and improve Muslim's belief to God cannot be considered as bad innovation (*bid'ah sayyiah*). Any kind of activities that can improve faith is considered as a virtue. For Habib Munzir, improving faith is part of religious obligation, so any activities which can improve faith, including the celebration of *maulid al-Nabi*, is in itself an obligation.

### ***Playing Music Instrument inside a Mosque***

Playing music instruments such as the tambourine and drums during an Islamic religious ceremony has been a common tradition among Muslims in Indonesia. Even, the skill of playing those instruments, and reciting and singing *salawat* poetry for some of the Hadrami community is considered part of the Maulid celebration. This instrument is commonly played in religious rituals such as to singing *salawat* (*barzanji* and *maulid al-diba'*) prayer at celebration of *maulid al-Nabi*, during the seventh month of pregnancy, and a baby name-giving ritual (*walimat al-tasmiyah*). Playing tambourines during those rituals does not prompt religious debate among Muslim scholars. However, when those instruments are played in a mosque, then it becomes a serious debate among Muslim scholars in Indonesia nowadays. The question here is that whether or not playing instruments in a mosque is allowed.

For Hadrami *majlis taklim*, singing *salawat* prayer accompanied by leather tambourine and drums becomes the central ritual of the *majlis taklim*. This ritual is conducted in a mosque accompanied by tambourines and drums. Some scholars argue that playing the leather tambourine in a mosque is strictly forbidden because the mosque is a place to *dhiker* and worship God. A mosque for them is not a place to play music instruments as this can prevent people from remembering God in a mosque. On this issue, quoting al-Shāfi'i, Habib Munzir argue that playing tambourine is not forbidden. This argument is based on the fact that Prophet Muhammad once enjoyed listening to a woman who played an instrument and sung a song praising the Prophet in a wedding party. The prophet only prohibited one lyric of the song, "With us is a prophet who knows something that will happen", and he allowed the rest of the song to be sung. Habib Munzir argued that

based on this hadith, playing musical instruments is not forbidden as long as the music and a lyric of the song do not prevent people from recollecting God. He further pointed out that playing musical instruments while reciting *salamat* and praising the Prophet in a mosque does not cause people to forget God. In fact, it can increase people's love for the Prophet.<sup>40</sup>

About the leather tambourine and drums played by his *majlis* in a mosque, Habib Munzir pointed out that instead of making people forget God, playing this instrument in a mosque can attract people to attend the *majlis*. Furthermore, Habib Munzir argues that if playing these instruments are forbidden in a mosque, prominent Muslim scholars such as Habib Umar ibn Hafidh (his teacher), Habib Zein ibn Smith (Medinah) and Habib Salim Abdullah bin Satiri (Yemen) would have strongly prohibited these instrument from being played in a mosque earlier on. Those Muslim scholars allowed Muslim to play those instruments in mosques. Therefore, those who prohibit playing instruments e.g. tambourine and drums in a mosque fail to grasp the essence of this problem. So, Habib Munzir concluded that the prohibition of playing tambourines or drums is not on the instruments but on its objective of playing these instruments.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Visiting Graves***

Visiting graves is commonly practised among Indonesian Muslims. Fox argues that the Javanese and many other Indonesian Muslims view tombs as a symbol of the past and it gives the source of power.<sup>42</sup> The tradition of tomb visitation is conducted not only to the tombs of the family but also to the tombs of venerated persons such as Muslim saints (*wali*) commonly called *keramat*. Visiting holy tombs for pilgrimage has been part of the main ritual of Hadrami *majlis taklim*. The member of Hadrami *majlis taklim* is strongly urged to visit holy tombs as part of a ritual that can increase their closeness to God. They make pilgrimages (*ziyarah*) in various ways not only to Javanese Muslim saints (Wali Songo) but also the holy tombs of Hadrami clerics. They

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<sup>40</sup> Mundzir Almusawa, *Kenali Akidahmu* (Majelis Rasulullah saw, n.d.), 42-44.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> James J. Fox, "Interpreting the Historical Significance of Tombs and Chronicles in Contemporary Java," in *The Potent Dead. Ancestors, Saints and Heroes in Contemporary Indonesia*, ed. Loir-Henry Chambert and Reid Anthony (Hawai: Allen and Unwin, 2002), 160-172.

may make visit to the tombs individually with their family for purposes or visit the tombs organized by Hadrami *majlis taklim* with a big group of people. The Hadrami *majlis taklim* members usually make pilgrimages to venerated tombs in particular festivals such as *hawl* (annual death commemoration) of Habib Ahmad ibn Alwi Al-Haddad known as Habib Kunciung located in Jakarta, Habib Abdullah ibn Mukhsin Al Attas or known as Makam Keramat Empang in Bogor, Tombs of Habib Husain Alayidrus of Luar Batang in North Jakarta and Habib Ali ibn Abdurrahman Al Habsyi at Kwitang, Jakarta. There are many other holy tombs of Hadrami clerics outside Jakarta that are popular sites of pilgrimage among Hadrami *majlis taklim* group.

The intention for these trips is to perform *istighathab* (asking help to God by mentioning the name of the death people) to the buried persons in the tombs. For some Muslims, this practice is considered as a *shirk* (polytheism) since praying and asking help can be conducted only to Allah, and it cannot be conducted to dead persons. However, this practice of *istighathab* for Habib Munzir is lawful and Islamic since the prophet himself asks Muslim to do *istighathab* as mentioned in a hadith, and he did not call this practice as *shirk*. Supporting his argument, Habib Munzir quoted one of hadith narrated by an authoritative narrator. It says that prophet Muhammad said that on the day of the judgment when all people are suffering from the hot Sun, people would call upon all prophets: Adam, Moses, Christ, and all cannot help them, so then they will call upon Muhammad. For Habib Munzir this hadith can be used as a piece of evidence that asking help (*istighathab*) to those who have died is permitted and is not *shirk*.<sup>43</sup>

Another intention to make a pilgrimage to venerated tombs is not only to pray for the occupant of the tombs but also to serve as a reminder for the pilgrims that they will die one day, so the trips will make them closer to Allah. With such intentions, there is nothing wrong to make a pilgrimage to venerated tombs. Habib Munzir says that praying at the tombs is permitted as long as Muslims do not ask directly to the tombs.<sup>44</sup> For Hadrami *majlis taklim*, the families of the occupants of the tombs can listen to what pilgrims say when they visit their tombs. They feel happy if one of their families visits their tombs and praying for them. With this belief, Hadrami *majlis taklim* allows

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<sup>43</sup> Almusawa, *Kenali Akidahmu*, 39-42.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-42.

Muslims to ask *tawassul* (intercession) and *tabarruk* (obtain a blessing) asking the occupants of the tombs to pray to Allah and asking what they wish. Asking *tawassul* and *tabarruk*, in this case, is permitted as long as people do not believe that those buried people are independently able to give blessings without the will of Allah.

### **Reciting Tahlil**

The ritual of *tahlil* has been practised by Indonesian Muslims, especially those who are traditionalist Muslim for a long time. Little is known about the origin of the ritual and who first created the ritual of reciting *tahlil*. Some people speculate that this ritual was introduced by Walisongo (the Nine Javanese Muslim Saints) after the death of a family member. Before *tahlil*, usually mourning was performed on the third, seventh, fourteenth, hundredth night of death of their family family by gambling and getting drunk. Walisongo introduced the reciting of *tahlil* (prayers) to replace these traditions on those nights. Reciting *tahlil* has become a typical practice of Indonesian Muslims that cannot be found in many other Muslim countries. This ritual has been practised in not only in rural areas but also in urban areas in Indonesia. In the past, *tahlil* was only practised by traditionalist Indonesian Muslims, but now it is widely practised as well by the so-called Indonesian modernist Muslims. Urban middle-class Muslims living in big cities in Indonesia frequently perform *tahlil*. However, the ritual of *tahlil* is not as simple as reciting of the word *lā ilāha illā Allāh* but involves a set of prayers such as reciting some verses of the Qurʾān, reciting *dhikr* litanies and *salāwah*, the Chapter of Yasin, reciting *ḥamdalah* (praises to Allah), *tasbih*, and the word *lā ilāha illā al-Allāh*. The ritual aims to send the reward of the reciting of *tahlil* to those who have died. Therefore, the question related to the ritual of *tahlil* is also about whether or not sending the reward of the reciting *tahlil* is permitted in Islam and whether or not the reward is beneficial for the dead persons?

Without a doubt, the practice of *tahlil* has received sharp criticism among Indonesian Salafi-Wahabis. Salafi-Wahabis scholars consider the ritual of *tahlil* as a ritual that is not supported by sound evidence either from Sunnah and the Qurʾān. Moreover, this ritual has never been practised nor approved by the Prophet during his lifetime. Since the ritual has become part of the ritual of Hadrami *majlis taklim*, the leader of this *majlis* defends the ritual from the criticism of Wahabis

and Salafi group. Moreover, Habib Munzir responded the denunciation because not only it discourages Muslims who want to pray to Allah, but it also grows doubt in the faith of members of *majlis taklim*. Habib Munzir quoted a Prophetic tradition that tells the story about a woman who asked the Prophet whether she could donate her wealth to charity for her dead mother. The prophet, according to Habib Munzir, has already permitted the women to do it. The Prophet had permitted his Companions to make the pilgrimage (*hajj*) for his dead parents. For Habib Munzir, these are enough argument about the permissibility of reciting the *dhikr* of *tablil* as tribute for deceased persons, and it is beneficial for them.<sup>45</sup>

Habib Munzir specifically criticised the argument of critics saying that the ritual of *tablil* usually performed by the *majlis* every the third, seventh, fortieth, hundredth day of dead persons as an imitation of the Hindu and Buddhist tradition. The critics argued that Hindus and Buddhists believe that the spirit of deceased persons would return to their home on these days, which was against Islamic teachings. If their families do not give an offering to them, the spirit would be angry with their family. In responding to this criticism, Habib Munzir has convinced his *majlis taklim* member that the reciting *tablil* can be categorised as good and the Prophet never forbade Muslims to recite *dhikr* and *tablil*. Habib Munzir challenged his critics to find any evidence in the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions on the forbidding of reciting *tablil* and *dhikr*. Habib Munzir says:

“We question, is it part of Islamic teaching if a Muslim forbids others from reciting *la ilaaha illa Allah*; who is allergic to hear the word *la ilaaha illallah Allah* unless Satan and their followers? Is it considered Muslim to those who forbid *la ilaaha illallah Allah*?”<sup>46</sup>

Habib Munzir argued that if it is true that ritual of *tablil* on particulars days after the death of Muslims has emulated Hindus and Buddhist tradition, for Habib Munzir, then why not, as it did not matter in the name of goodness. He even questioned his critics, arguing that while the ritual to some extent imitated other religious traditions, many Muslims do not mind them. For instance, the use of pulpit for Friday prayers emulated Christian church. For Habib Munzir, this emulation is good, and Muslims do not mind. Another

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 30–32.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

example is that the Prophet, according to Habib Munzir, fasted on 10 Muharram (day of Ashura) to express his gratitude on the survival of Moses from chasing of Pharaoh. This practice of the Prophet emulated the Jewish tradition, which doses Jews fasting on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram for the same purpose.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

It is clear that Hadrami *majlis taklim* preserves Islamic traditions in urban areas, and use Islamic traditions as a means of preaching and promoting peaceful Islam. This preservation of Islamic traditions can be seen from the subjects taught in Hadrami *majlis taklim*. Instead of attacking other Muslims who do not correctly perform Islamic ritual practices as frequently held by the Salafi Wahabi, Hadrami *majlis taklim* offers the teachings of love towards Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, and encourages people to emulate the attributes of the Prophet Muhammad. Hadrami *majlis taklim* promotes itself as an Indonesian religious group that differentiates itself from transnational Islamic groups and local Islamic radical groups and defends itself from the theological attacks of these groups that devaluate Islamic traditions practised by Hadrami *majlis taklim*. In contrast to these groups, Hadrami *majlis taklim* views its practices of Islamic traditions as deeply Islamic rooted. Although Islamic traditions practised by Hadrami individuals were absent in the Prophet era, careful examinations of these Islamic traditions practised by Hadrami groups show that these Islamic traditions have their roots in Islamic sources: the Qurʾān, Ḥadīth and the works of Muslim scholars. These Muslim scholars elaborate the operational meaning of the Qurʾān and the Ḥadīth. Therefore, for Hadrami *majlis taklim*, practising Islamic traditions cannot be considered as a deviation from Islam. Rather, practising Islamic traditions can be seen from the perspective of *maqāṣid al-sharʿah*, which is to attain the goodness of life. Also, Islamic traditions itself can be used by this Hadrami *majlis taklim* as a means of promoting Islam as a peaceful religion.

Unlike pesantren that preserves and disseminates the Islamic tradition to the students registered in the *pesantren*, Hadrami *majlis taklim* introduces and disseminates the Islamic tradition to wider urbanites which is not confined to its regular member. In this sense,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Hadrami *majlis taklim* has directly transmitted Islamic traditions to other Muslims of different ages and social layers through the religious instructions (*pengajian agama*) and its other activities. Habib Munzir Al-Musawa and his Majlis Rasulullah play important role in this regard. The majlis successfully amasses massive congregations which spread Islam amidst the frenzy of big city with the version of Islam that brings serenity and peacefulness with the surroundings. It also adequately responded to the rival ideology of Salafi-Wahhabi which tends to confine Islam to its minimal application without trying to understand Islam in its context and relevance. []

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