

Embracing The Sacred Progeny: The Dynamic Religiosity Among The Youthful Congregants Of Habaib Assembly In The Land Of Sharia

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Abstract

The burgeoning prominence of Hadhrami-style religious discourses delivered by *habib* (singular) or *habaib* (plural), religious speakers who lay claim to lineage tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h, has introduced a novel mode of religious articulation among Muslim adolescents in Indonesia. This scholarly article endeavors to delve into the intricacies of religious articulation within the youthful members of the congregations of Majelis Anwarul Habib and Majelis Azzabidie in Kota Langsa, Aceh, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative research methodology grounded in a phenomenological framework, this study engages with 5 Acehnese Muslim youths between 12-19 years old who voluntarily self-identified as affiliates of these congregations. The data amassed was subsequently systematized via the utilization of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) facilitated by NVivo 12 software. Drawing from Glock & Stark's Theory of Religiosity, this article posits that the participation of Acehnese Muslim adolescents in *habib's* religious sermons not only acts as a conduit for the dissemination and fulfillment of the knowledge component but also manifests as an expression of devoutness within the realm of faith, demonstrated through reverence for the Prophet encapsulated in their devotion to the progeny. Moreover, this study underlines how the experiential facet functions as a propellant for the faith aspect, which is then articulated through the utilization of symbols believed to hold exceptional significance considering the prophet's presence. These traditional practices are extensively and proudly incorporated into the social fabric of young Indonesian Muslims in Aceh.

Keywords: *Habaib*, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, *majelis*, Muslim youth, piety

1. Introduction

The expression of religiosity in Indonesia is increasingly finding extensive space. In various cities, it is relatively easy to come across Muslim communities holding religious gatherings in public spaces, such as mosque courtyards, fields, and even on highways. These religious gatherings attract the attention of thousands of worshippers, including young Muslim individuals. The attendees of these meetings typically don traditional garments such as sarongs, *gamis* (a Middle-east robe), turbans, and other attire that express religious symbols with distinctive designs. This phenomenon illustrates the growing participation of young Muslims in religious activities as a manifestation of their religious expression.

Recently, there has been a shift in the religious trend among young people in Indonesia. The emergence and proliferation of Hadhrami-styled religious councils in various cities have introduced a new flavor. These councils present a different model and content of religious teachings that capture the community's attention compared to the mainstream teachings that were previously dominated by localized pesantren-style teachings. These councils, led by the habaib, are typically structured in a salawat majlis format. The religious sessions commence with the recitation of the Mawlid text and salawat accompanied by rhythmic hadrah beats, followed by tausiah (a brief religious lecturer) and then a continuation of salawat recitations, concluding with prayers. Another unique aspect of these religious sessions is the burning of incense and aromatics believed to be a tradition originating from the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h (Shabah, El Bilad, & Khair 2023).

In the context of Aceh, the presence of two Hadhrami study circles led by religious scholars, namely the Anwarul Habib Council led by Habib Fahmi Assegaf and the Azzabidie Council led by Habib Haikal Al-Athas, has introduced a new dimension. These two scholars, graduates from Yemen, offer an "alternative menu" for young Muslim Acehnese who was previously dominated by the majority of traditional Islamic boarding schools known as dayah. Dayah represents the traditional religious education in Aceh, focusing on theological, jurisprudential, and mystical teachings through the utilization of classical Islamic texts (turath). Hence, the presence of these scholar-led study circles has transformed the religious affiliations and expressions of religious devotion for the Muslim youth who follow them.

Research focusing on young Muslim communities in Indonesia has garnered considerable attention from researchers and has been examined from various perspectives. The majority of these studies delve into the involvement of young Muslims in the Islamic Movement and the influence of this movement on them (Fealy 2007; Hasan 2006; Salman 2006; Nisa 2012; Rijal 2011; Kailani 2012; Sakai 2012). Some authors have attempted to discuss the popularity of Hadhrami preaching among young Muslims as followers of religious leaders (habaib) (Zamhari and Howell 2012; Alatas 2009). Rijal (2020a) analyzed the experiences and feelings of young Muslim followers, their feelings, and experiences when participating in religious gatherings led by habaib. However, the impact of the teachings of the habaib on young Muslim individuals has not yet been addressed.

This article aims to fill the gaps in previous research by investigating the consequences of gatherings led by religious leaders on young congregants, particularly focusing on the dynamics and expressions of religiosity they possess. Inspired by Glock & Stark's (1965) work on religiosity, it explores the dynamics of religious expressions among young congregants of Majelis Anwarul Habib and Majelis Azzabidie in Langsa, Aceh, Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

The term "religion" originates from the Latin word "relegere" which means "to gather" and "to read" or "religare" which means "to bind" (Rakhmat, 2003). The term "religion" is often used interchangeably with the word "agama" (Sanskrit language), consisting of the prefix "a" meaning "not" and "gama" meaning "confused." Some argue that "agama" comes from "a" (not) and "gam" (go). Humans are referred to as religious beings. Nashori (2008) stipulates that humans are creatures with

a natural disposition toward religion. The need for religion within humans is indivisible, relating to beliefs in spiritual entities deemed to influence individual lives. Ramayulis (2002) asserts that the human need for religion is inseparable, as it pertains to faith in the unseen that is believed to impact human existence itself. The concept of religiosity defies simple definition. Religiosity is a complex concept that eludes easy definition, touching and intersecting various disciplines that provide differing definitions based on distinct perspectives (Demerath & Hammond, 1969). Religious scholars define religiosity from a perspective of faith, while experts in other fields view it through their respective expertise.

Islam regards religion as a form of bond between Allah SWT as the *prima causa* and humanity as His creation. Religiosity is also understood as ideology (*al-din*) and path (*tariqat*) as the central core in all aspects of actions, faith, and existence of the entire Muslim community (Mahudin et al., 2016). Religiosity in Islam can also be understood in terms of the extent to which the individual's religious internalization is reflected in the dimensions of belief, Islamic law, and morality (Amawidyati & Utami, 2007). Nashori and Mucharam (2002) define religiosity as the level of knowledge, belief, practice, and spiritual experience of a person in their professed religion. Ancok & Suroso (2011) describe religiosity as a form of religiosity that encompasses various dimensions, not only in the ritual dimension (worship), but also in other dimensions motivated by supernatural aspects. The root of religiosity lies in a sense of dependence as an implication of concern about the risks posed by the environment, along with a belief in the limitations and weaknesses inherent in humanity, leading individuals to seek an authority considered to possess supernatural power beyond themselves, which can be relied upon as a sanctuary for their lives (Nashori & Mucharam, 2002).

The concept of religiosity, which was comprehensively introduced by Glock and Stark (1965), is deemed by Ancok and Suroso (2011) to be centered on the extent of one's knowledge, the strength of one's beliefs, the diligence in the practice of religious rituals, and the depth of one's religious experiences. According to Glock and Stark (1965), the concept of religiosity is divided into five dimensions, namely: 1) The dimension of belief, which encompasses all forms of expectations regarding theological concepts accompanied by acknowledgment of the truth of religious teachings; 2) The dimension of religious practices, which includes compliance with performing religious rituals as a manifestation of commitment to the adopted religious teachings. All religions have ritualistic practices and personal contemplation expressed in the form of service or worship to God; 3) The dimension of experience, a highly personal dimension concerning the extent to which individuals experience spiritual connections with their religion. In Islam, this dimension can involve the fulfillment of hopes through prayers or specific religious practices, feelings of humility in worship, experiencing heart tremors when listening to Quranic verses or engaging in remembrance of God (*dhikr*), and feeling closeness to Allah; 4) The dimension of knowledge, which pertains to the extent of an individual's understanding of religious doctrines and the motivation to further expand knowledge and deepen understanding of their religious teachings; and 5) The dimension of consequences, which relates to the commitment to practice religious teachings in everyday life that affects one's surrounding environment. In contrast to the ritual dimension focusing on religious practices related to worship, this dimension is more oriented toward human relationships (*hablun min al-nas*). Essentially, this aspect is

more associated with the social dimension, as a manifestation of religious doctrines impacting communal life.

Religiosity plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' identities, beliefs, and practices, particularly within religious communities (Ysseldyk et al., 2010; Peek, 2005; Li, Lou, & Bond, 2022). The study of religiosity among young people is significant as it lays the foundation for their spiritual development and shapes their worldviews (Good & Willoughby, 2006). The habaib congregation stands out as a religious community known for its adherence to traditional Islamic teachings (Rijal, 2020a; Rijal, 2020b), providing a unique context to explore how religiosity is cultivated and expressed among its young members. Understanding how young congregants navigate their religious identities within such a community offers a broader insight into the complexities of balancing tradition and modern influences (Rijal, 2020c).

The concept of holy descendants holds significant implications for young followers in the habaib congregation (Rijal, 2018). They claim descent as legitimate descendants of Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. (dzurriyyah ar-rasul), through his daughter Fatimah Az-Zahra, who married Ali ibn Abi Talib, and their sons, Hussein and Hasan (Alkatiri & Karim, 2022), subsequently giving rise to a family genealogical tree. This offspring is more commonly known as the 'alawiyyin (ba'alawi) family. To distinguish members of this lineage, they prefix their names with "al-syarif" or "al-sayyid" for males and "syarifah" for females. Those considered well-versed in religious knowledge among them are referred to as "habib" (plural: habaib). To manage and ensure the continuity of their lineage, an organization named Rabithah Alawiyah was established, tasked with validating and recording their family genealogy. As of current records, there are 151 sub-families worldwide tracing their lineage back to Prophet Muhammad, with 68 sub-families (tribes) still existing in Indonesia.

In addition to fulfilling domestic needs within each alawiyyin family, the concept of sacred lineage also implicates the transmission of religious knowledge, values, and practices from one generation to the next, thereby impacting the identity and commitment of youth towards religious rituals (Surya, et al. 2023). Examining how the idea of sacred lineage influences religiosity offers insights into intergenerational dynamics in faith and community involvement within the framework of Sharia law.

Living in a society governed by Sharia law—such as in Aceh Province—the young congregants of habaib congregation face challenges in integrating their beliefs and religious practices with the legal and moral principles set forth by Islamic jurisprudence. The intersection of religiosity and Sharia law creates a diversity of religious experiences, shaping the moral compass of youth and their interactions within the community. Understanding how young congregants negotiate their religious obligations in Sharia-based societies provides valuable insights into the complexity of religious identity formation and expression.

This article highlights the nuanced interaction between religiosity, tradition, and Sharia law in shaping the religious experiences of young congregants. By examining the role of sacred lineage in influencing religiosity and exploring how youth navigate their religious identities within traditional religious settings, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of religious complexities.

3. Method

This research employed a qualitative methodology utilizing the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). A participant-centred technique facilitates the unfettered expression of participants' experiences, minimizing external pressures and distortions (Alase, 2017). A purposive sampling method was employed to select five research participants meeting the inclusion criteria of being Indonesian Muslim youth within the age range of 12-19 years, self-identifying as attendees of Habib-led sermon gatherings, and willing participants in the study. Before their involvement in the research, all participants were required to give informed consent. Table 1 provides the demographic information of the study participants.

The primary data were gathered through interviews supplemented by participant observation in the field. The interview protocol focused on exploring the participants' initiation into the Habib-led sermon group, their significant experiences within the congregation, and the transformations they underwent concerning their religiosity. Diverse questioning techniques were utilized to delve into the intricate experiences of the participants, such as inquiring about their acquaintance with the sermon group, their encounters while engaging with and being part of the congregation, and the impact of these sermons on their personal development. Each interview session lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. The data collection process consisted of two phases: an initial stage aimed at collating information directly from primary sources, followed by an inquiry phase designed to achieve data saturation by including a new participant along with the initial five participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5). Data collection was taken from April to September 2022.

All participants provided written informed consent, and pseudonyms were assigned to safeguard their identities. The primary data, comprising transcribed Microsoft Word documents derived from interview recordings, were subjected to interpretive phenomenological analysis (La Kahija, 2018; Smith, Flower, & Larkin 2009). Verbatim transcripts were meticulously examined, and initial observations were recorded (La Kahija, 2018; Smith, Flower, & Larkin 2009). Utilizing NVivo 12's code system, data segments were identified based on relevant themes. Emergent themes were organized into superordinate themes by distinguishing codes; for instance, themes such as "belief," "experience," "practice," "theology," and "ethics" were categorized. In the final phase, patterns across cases and individuals were identified to determine unique themes specific to individual participants and those shared among all participants (La Kahija, 2018; Smith et al., 2009).

To ensure the congruence of the code systems employed in the data analysis, leading to the establishment of superordinate themes, a comprehensive codebook was provided, delineating all code phrases and topics in detail. The research's credibility was assessed by utilizing Ephocé (La Kahija, 2018; Smith, Flower, & Larkin 2009) and member-checking. The operationalization of religiosity, as previously discussed, is theoretically underpinned by the works of Glock and Stark (1965).

4. Result and Discussion

The following section will describe the condition of young congregants by tracing the patterns of their religious changes after acquainting with both *habaib* councils. The researcher commences the review by citing the findings of Grajales and Sommers (2016), which indicate that identity style can predict an individual's religiousness when mediated by identity commitment. On the other hand, identity status predicts religiosity without being mediated by identity commitment. This research indicates that individuals with high informational identity styles are associated with high religiosity when possessing high identity commitment, and high identity status predicts the high level of religiosity held by an individual.

Young congregants undergo progressive changes after becoming part of the *habaib* councils. In terms of knowledge, they are exposed to a wealth of information related to the history and stories of Prophet Muhammad. One example illustrating a change in the intellectual dimension is regarding the birth of Prophet Muhammad, which was not through normal biological means but from a place under the left rib that opened and closed by itself. To the researcher's knowledge, such stories are seldom narrated on various occasions detailing the Prophet's life history. For the congregants, this narrative imparts knowledge and strengthens the impression of the uniqueness of Prophet Muhammad compared to other humans in the world.

The discovery that the congregation was exposed to knowledge related to the history and stories of Prophet Muhammad, with a focus on the mysterious circumstances surrounding the Prophet's birth, raises questions regarding the impact of this knowledge on the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of the congregation. Unique narratives such as this have been shown to have the potential to stimulate critical thinking and provoke deep interpretations of the magnificence of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the eyes of the congregation. It is essential to note that an individual's spiritual understanding and experience can be influenced by the knowledge they acquire. In this context, knowledge of the extraordinary birth of the Prophet may leave an impression regarding the superiority of Prophet Muhammad compared to other human beings. These findings confirm research by Vitz (1990) and Mar, et al. (2010) concerning the influence of narratives on emotions and morals.

During routine Mawlid activities, the study materials are predominantly focused on topics related to the stories and virtues of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, with a light discussion style. The selection of content and presentation style is made to enrich the culture of sending blessings upon the Prophet, specifically targeting a diverse congregation background. Meanwhile, for attendees seeking a more in-depth religious education, this need is facilitated through more specialized study sessions with predetermined schedules outside of routine activities. The subjects covered in these sessions include studies on monotheism (Tawhid), Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), Sufism (tasawuf), and the biography of the Prophet (sirah nabawiyah). Although a light discussion style can ignite enthusiasm and spiritual devotion, it is crucial to consider the necessity for a more profound and structured understanding of religion, especially for those wishing to explore the religious dimensions more seriously. Thus, the findings of this study highlight the complexity of exploring the relationship between the religious knowledge imparted to congregants and its implications on their intellectual and spiritual dimensions.

The changes in the dimensions of belief are also evident among young congregants, particularly about the concept of intercession. In the previous discussion, P4 has elucidated the shifts in their belief regarding the intercession of the Prophet, which has traditionally been perceived as something exclusive to be attained. Moreover, the definition of intercession understood by the congregants has undergone a broadening of meaning. The parent of P3 shared their experience with the researchers when they were ill:

“Saat itu saya sedang sakit gatal-gatal di tangan. Sudah berobat di berbagai tempat, namun tak sembuh-sembuh. Saya biarkan begitu saja. Anak saya belakangan ini rajin ke majelis habib. Jadi, dia bawakan saya air shalawat. ‘Diminum ini, Ma!’ Saya dikasihnya air shalawat. Berkah shalawat dapat syafaat katanya. Jadi saya minum. Qadarullah, sembuh gatal-gatal di tangan ini sampai sekarang. Sekarang, stok air salawat selalu ada di rumah. Kalau sudah mau habis, anak saya bawa lagi.” (“During that time, I was experiencing persistent itching on my hands. Despite seeking medical treatment at various places, the condition did not improve. I let it be. Lately, my child has been diligently attending the gatherings of a respected Islamic scholar. Consequently, they started bringing me water infused with prayers seeking blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). "Drink this, Mother," they handed me the water. They told me that blessings from such prayers may bring intercession. Therefore, I drank it. By the decree of Allah, the itching on my hands was healed and has not reoccurred since. Currently, we always keep a stock of the blessed water at home. When it is running low, my child replenishes it.”)

The excerpt above illustrates changes in individuals' beliefs, indicating that healing is considered a part of intercession, with recitations of blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad serving as a means to achieve intercession. This suggests that beliefs can have a positive impact on an individual's health and happiness (Jawaid, 2014; Koenig, 2004; Lundh, 1987; Schwarzer, 1994). The shift in understanding intercession as attainable through specific prayers and practices also reflects the young congregants' motivation to deepen their beliefs and religious practices. In this context, the findings of this research make a significant contribution to understanding the dynamics of belief changes and religious practices among young congregants. It underlines that a deeper understanding of religious teachings and spiritual values can significantly influence an individual's behaviours and outlook on life. The implementation of religious values in daily life can also have a positive impact on an individual's spiritual and mental well-being (Cohen & Johnson, 2016; Kim-Prieto & Miller, 2018).

The most fundamental change in the practical dimension, acknowledged by these young congregants, is in the aspect of congregational prayers. With nearly the same sentiment, the interviewed sources admit that congregational prayers have become a worship practice that they highly prioritize. It is explained that Habib often emphasizes that congregational prayers are a deed greatly beloved by Prophet Muhammad while expressing love entails loving what the beloved loves. Through several interview sessions with the sources, the researcher discovered consistency in the implementation of congregational prayers. The sources requested a pause in the interview sessions when prayer time arrived. Furthermore, they also mentioned that after joining this group of scholars, sending blessings upon the Prophet now becomes a regular act of worship for the congregants, having learned of the virtues of sending blessings upon the Prophet in both this life and the hereafter.

The acceptance of young congregants towards Habib's teachings on the significance of congregational prayer as a beloved practice of Prophet Muhammad reflects the transmission of religious values across generations influencing their religious practices through social influence. The concept that loving what the beloved loves demonstrates a profound understanding of the social influence process that impacts the internalization of religious teachings. These findings corroborate research on social influence in religiosity within society (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; D'Onofrio, Eaves, Lenn Murrelle, Maes, & Spilka, 1999).

Not only does a transformation occur in terms of knowledge, beliefs, and the quality of worship, being a congregant in the gatherings led by habaib also has an impact in the dimension of consequences. This implies that the influence of these changes is not only felt by the individual but also by those around them. Additional informants confessed that some of their students who actively participate in the gatherings led by religious scholars appear to have become polite individuals.

“Terlihat perbedaannya. Kalau kita bandingkan dengan mahasiswa yang lain, P1 dan P2 itu cukup sopan. Berbicara dengan orang yang lebih tua juga beda” (The differences are noticeable. When compared to other students, P1 and P2 appear quite polite. Their manner of speaking with older individuals also sets them apart).

During several instances of attending routine council gatherings, the researcher also observed the quite courteous behavior exhibited by the council members in welcoming other attendees present. Promptly, they assist congregants facing difficulties in parking and exiting their vehicles after the event concludes. Additionally, active participation in the recitation of blessings upon the Prophet also enhances their religious devotion. The majority of congregants admitted that after frequently joining the salawat assembly, they experienced a sense of transformation. Some expressed having inner peace upon returning from the assembly, while others felt a deep sense of presence during worship. The feeling of closeness to Prophet Muhammad is consistently evoked during the recitation of blessings, especially during the Mahalu al-Qiyam, a moment when Habib urges congregants to visualize the Prophet Muhammad attentively listening to the best salawat being chanted by the congregation.

In this context, changes in behaviour are observed as a result of active participation in the assembly. This reflects the strong social influence of the assembly environment on individuals, where the norms of courtesy and manners applied in interactions within the assembly can be reflected in everyday behavior. This is consistent with the theory of identification in psychology, where individuals tend to mimic behaviors considered important or highly esteemed by the group or figures they admire (Gobel & Miyamoto, 2024). The increased sense of religious devotion felt by the congregation in the assembly of blessings indicates that active participation in religious activities can deepen an individual's spiritual relationship with their religious beliefs. The experience of inner peace and solemnity in worship provides a space for spiritual experiences that enrich and deepen the individual's relationship with God (Tavares et al., 2022). The sense of shared presence can serve as a strong stimulus in strengthening religious identity and deepening the affective bond of individuals with the spiritual figures they love, thus having a positive effect on mental health (Cherniak, Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pehr Granqvist, 2021; Counted, Possamai, & Meade, 2018).

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