THE RITUAL OF SLAWATAN AND NEO-SUFISM

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan* from its traditional Sufi form into a Neo-Sufist form and performance. It details how the rise of religious leaders such as Habib Sheikh has helped in motivating people looking for different experiences in this form of Neo-Sufist practice in urban Indonesia. The work adopts participant observation and the theory of ritual to look at the processes, actions and actors in the performance.

Introduction

Background

One of the fastest growing religious and social gatherings in Java, Indonesia, is the ritual of *Slawatan*. The word *Slawatan* is derived from the Arabic word "Salah," which translated means the five daily obligatory prayers in Islam (Woodward et al. 2012, 126).[1] In Indonesian, *Slawatan* is derived from *Sholawat* (prayers). From the beginning, this form of ritual has been conducted using different expressions of Islamic piety, including "*Maulid Nabi*" (celebration of the birth of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam). The celebration originally included recitation of poetry, and praise of the prophet and his family. Poetry and songs praising the Companion of the Prophet, Saints and religious leaders were included later. The commemoration comes in various forms, such as giving food to the poor, doing *Dhikrs* (venerations of the name of Allah), praising Allah, sending prayers of blessing upon His messenger, and listening to the life histories of the Prophet (Marhaba 2014). According to Pigeuad, as cited by Ricklefs, *Slawatan* is part of the rich variety of popular Javanese performances associated with Islamic piety. In the beginning, *Slawatan* was conducted and followed by traditional *Santri* (religious students) and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) sympathizers, and took place primarily in *Pesantren*s (Islamic boarding schools) (Ricklefs 2012, 32-34). Recently that phenomenon has been considerably transformed. Currently, the followers of *Slawatan* hail from all walks of life. They include *Ulama*, *Santri*, *Kyai*, politicians, businessmen, police officers, students and families of *Kejawen* (Javanese) beliefs. The performance of the ritual follows a systematic pattern. It involves the *Dzikrs* that are the veneration of the names of Allah, followed by the name of the Prophet. The entire crowd of participants do the *Dzikrs* together. People are always overwhelmed with deep spiritual and emotional feeling at this and some shed

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[1] In the Qur'an, the word "Salah," from which *Slawatan* might have been derived also has a combined meaning of "saying the benediction" and performing the ritual prayer.

tears. This type of feeling is difficult to explain unless one experiences it. People nod their heads from right to left while they do the *Dzikrs*. After the *Dzikrs*, they shift to songs, mostly about love of the Prophet. The tunes, music and mood of people change into something more relaxed. Participants can be seen waving flags, hands and bodies from right to left while singing. The songs are a combination of Arabic, Indonesian and Javanese languages. The music goes side by side with the singing and changes tune when the song shifts.

This process goes on for one to two hours and Habib Sheikh continually changes from one song to another, sometimes waving his hands to the participants. In the middle of the process is the *Maulid Nabi* (the birth of the Prophet). When the event reaches this stage, everyone is required to stand up and sing "*Tala Al Badru Allainah, Minn Sari Yaa Til wah da I.*" This activity is followed by *Da'wah* (preaching) about the life history of the Prophet Muhammad, His family and companions. Other topics in the preaching include the life histories of Saints and influential religious leaders who have contributed to the propagation and spread of Islam in Java and other parts of the world. The preaching is followed by *Do'a* (recited prayers) and closing remarks. Finally there is distribution of food and beverages to participants, then shaking and kissing of hands and seeking for blessing.

The problem underlying this study is that the ritual has now been significantly transformed by different religious leaders from its original spiritual purpose into a performance of Muslim popular culture. Among these charismatic leaders is Habib Sheikh. Habib sheikh bin Abdulkadir Assegaf was born in 1961 in Solo (Surakarta), a city in Central Java Province in Indonesia. The Habib is among the most influential Hadhrami Arabs of the Diaspora, and his origin can be traced to Hadhramaut, a region located in Yemen, Middle East.[2] In line with Hadhrami genealogical tradition, Habib Sheikh received religious education and *Slawatan* training from his father and two uncles, one of whom was also an *imam* of the Riyadh mosque in Solo, while the other hails from Yemen (Woodward et al. 2012, 121-122).

Habib Sheikh started his *Slawatan* performance at a young age, after receiving religious education and blessing from his father and uncles. He has a large following, ranging from thousands to tens of thousands at times in a single night of *Slawatan*. He has formal times scheduled for *Slawatan*s in Solo and other parts of Central and East Java. Recently he has also been frequently to Melaka and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia as well as to Singapore. His rise to fame has contributed to the revitalization of the ritual of *Slawatan* as a form of Muslim popular culture performed in the public context, which does not necessarily require one to be affiliated with a particular Sufi sect, organization or social obligation (Woodward et al. 2012, 127-128).

A Sufi is a person who practices Sufism. In another translation, the word "Sufi" from its Arabic root means "purity," or "one who is pure in heart," or "one of the elect." According to Noldeke and Nicholson, the name "Sufi" was derived from the word "Suf" which means "wool," which at its origin applied to those Muslim ascetics who in imitation of Christian hermits clad themselves in coarse woolen garb as a sign of penitence and renunciation of worldly vanities (Nicholson 1963, 1-4). Sufism is a form of Islamic mysticism and philosophy, also referred to as *Tawassuf* (Nicholson 1963, 1-66; Schimmel 1952; Rahman 1964; Suryo 2000; Howell 2001; Morris 2005; Asmawi 2006; Corbin 2013; Nasr 2013; Schimmel 2001; Von Schlegell 2002). According to Schimmel 1975, *Tasawuf* has three categories: the *Sharia* (Islamic Law), the *Tariqa* (mystical path), and the *Haqīqa* (truth). It also has three levels of purification: first from the lower

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[2] Hadhramaut is a region located in Yemen, well known for producing some of the best Islamic scholars in the latter part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of them immigrated to Southeast Asia in that period and many settled in Indonesia and other parts of the Malay Archipelago. In most cases they are referred to as *Habibs* and some people link them as descendents of the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. In Hadhramaut, they have a tradition of passing knowledge to their young ones from generation to generation. This is to maintain the family lineage and genealogy of the *Habib*. Therefore there is no doubt that Habib Sheikh himself had to go under the same tradition, even though he was born and raised in Solo, far away from the land of Yemen.

qualities and the wickedness of the soul, then from the bondage of human qualities, and eventually a purification and election at the level of the attributes (Schimmel 1975, 14-16). Nicholson (1914), states that the practice of Sufism includes individuals or groups of individuals seeking the understanding of divine realities called "*Ahl al-Haqq*" (the followers of the real). The Sufis endeavor to go beyond nature to reach that Reality which is none other than God. They believe that when they reach the Real, they will be united with the Everlasting God.[3]

Classical Sufi followers had a passion for seeking "union with God." This is what Ibn Arabî (1165-1240) called *Wahdat al-Wujud* (unity of being), an integral part of metaphysics (Van Bruinessen 1998). Metaphysics in the Sufi context is the process by which the individual reaches a stage of "free flow of forms" associated with mystical experiences (Howell 2007, 22).[4] Other practices associated with Sufism include *Tariqa, Muraqaba, Waseela, Ziyarah,* and *Bid'ah.* First, in Sufism *Tariqa* refers to the school, order or brotherhood that is related to mystical and spiritual teachings and practices. Schimmel (1975, 16) translated it as "mystical path." A *Tariqa* is a well structured order and consists of the *Murshid* (guide or teacher) as the spiritual leader and the *Murid* (student), who is seeking to know and love Allah. According to Lindholm (2013), in Sufism the acquisition of knowledge depends on the supervision of the *Murshid.* Hence the relationship of the *Murshid* and *Murid* is a core element in the practice of Sufism (Lindholm 2013, 82). One important feature of the *Tariqa* is *Silsila* (the chain or lineage of Sheikhs). In many cases, the Sheikhs claim to have links to the Prophet and His descendants. The *Tariqa* played a major role in spreading Islam in Africa and in Central, South and Southeast Asia.

Some of the dominant *Tariqa* in South and Southeast Asia include the Naqshbandiyya order, the Qadiri order, Chishti order, and the Suhrawardi order. Many *Tariqa* derive their name from the founding father of the order. The founder is always an individual from whom a specific Sufi order is derived and which has distinctive features (Le Gall 2005, 14). For example, the Naqshbandiyya order was named after Khwaja Baha al Din Naqshband (1318-1389), who was a Sufi saint born near Bukhara in Western Turkey (Netton 2014, 63-70). Likewise, the Qadiri order was named after its founder, Sheikh Abdul Qadir Gilani (1077-1166), of Iraq (Schimmel 1975, 18).

Second, *Muraqaba is* the Sufi word for meditation. In Sufism, it is believed that meditation connects people to their spiritual heart or soul, and is thus a source of knowledge about their surroundings and creator (Lindholm 2013, 89; Dressler et al. 2009, 138; Lobel 2007, 225).

Third, *Waseela* is referred to as intercession, that is, a practice of seeking proximity to Allah. In Sufi or *Tawassuf* tradition, it is the act of praying to Allah through a prophet, *imam*, or Sufi saints who are either dead or alive. Followers of Sufism constantly perform this kind of ritual as they believe the spiritual capacity of their Sheikhs can lead them closer to God. Unlike the Sufis, the Salafi consider it unlawful to seek supplication through those who are dead. For them, this may lead to *shirk* (associating partners with Allah) (Zaheer 2014; Keddie 1972, 81, 357; Dehlvi 2012, 35; Osella and Osella 2013, 67; Masud et al. 2009, 131).

Fourth, *Ziyarah* is the Arabic word for "visit." It refers to a visit or pilgrimage to places and graves of the Prophet, His family, descendants, companions and other honored figures in Islam. This includes the Prophets, Sufi Saints, Sheikhs and Islamic scholars. The sites are mostly located in graves, mosques, mountains, caves and battle-fields. *Ziyarah* is a constant practice in Sufism. People believe that visiting the graves of the Prophet or *Awliyā* (friends of Allah) benefits the soul

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[3] Early Sufism commonly used the term *Ahl al-Haqq*, "the Real and the true," when they referred to God Almighty. Michael Sells translated *Ahl al- Haqq* as " the creator of the worshippers." He believes it is nearest in meaning to what Western theologians call "a personal God." However Schlegell maintains that in many early Sufi texts, *Haqq* is translated in accord with the English sense of "Ultimate Reality," or surely the "truth" (Von Schlegell 2002).

[4] "*Tawajjuh*," is "coming face to face with one's True Self" and "knowing the Creator" through *ma'rifatullah* [the highest stage of esoteric spiritual knowing in this rendering of Islam's Sufi heritage].

spiritually (Hadith Buhari no. 623 on Ziyarah; Ahmed and Sonn 2010, 328; Rehman 2009, 141-142; Janson 2013, 18).

Fifth, *Bid'ah* refers to innovations in Islam. It is derived from the root word of *Bada'ah,* which means to create a new thing without precedence. Innovation can either be positive or negative. In Islamic tradition, the negative or unwanted innovations are regarded as *Bid'ah* and are considered a sin (Azra 2005, 13). On the other hand, it can mean worshipping Allah in ways that Allah has not stipulated. It is pointed out in one verse of the Qur'an as follows: "or have they partners with Allah 'false gods' who have instituted for them a religion which Allah has not ordained" (Q 42: 21)

The above verse is one of many other verses in the Qur'an that addresses the act or practice usually termed as *Bid'ah*. Also in one Hadith of the Prophet, He is reported to have said: "abstain from innovations, for every kind of innovation is a Bid'ah, and every Bid'ah is misguidance and all misguidance leads to hellfire" (Iqbal et al. 2014, 41)

Critiques of Sufi practices of *Waseela* (intercession) and *Ziyarah* to the shrines of Sufi sheikhs refer to these kinds of rituals as *Bid'ah* (Iqbal et al. 2014, 37-38). Having given a brief description of Sufism, the following paragraph will explain what Neo-Sufism is. According to Von Schlegelld (2002, 578), there has been special interest in the changing landscape of late Sufism in the last two decades. He suggests a form of "Neo-Sufism," in terms of which eighteenth century Sufis shifted their doctrines and practices from "union with God" to "union with the figure of Muhammad." Furthermore, Neo-Sufism produces spiritual concepts of transcendence and immanence in human life. Thus, unlike the old mechanism of isolation by devotees seeking closeness to God, there is no need for such isolation because God is everywhere. People can find God even in their own world (Ahida 1998). Moreover, in Neo-Sufism, followers do not necessarily have to be affiliated with a particular Sufi Order (*Tariqa*), or practice other forms such as *Waseela* (intercession) and *Ziyarah* (visits) to the graves of Sufi Saints. This development is reflected also in the ritual of *Slawatan*. While it is still a ritual, *Slawatan* has seen significant innovations to its original form, becoming a kind of performance in urban spaces. The changes are part of the reason for calling it Neo-Sufism. People come from all directions to experience this performance wherever or whenever it takes place. Hence the ritual is no longer isolated to specific places as it used to be, especially to *Pesantren*, Mosques or holy sites. Instead it now takes place in public spaces such as *Alun Alun* (public squares), main streets or even on university campuses that were traditionally used for State and social functions, community gatherings or special events.

Scholarship concerning Indonesian Sufi orders began around 1960. However, it was not until the 1980s that they started receiving greater attention. According to Van Bruinessen (1998), during that period the orders found a new following in urban and educated circles. Their large numbers of followers soon gave them significant religious and political advantage. In the 1990s, the emergence of famous and charismatic religious leaders led to a social transformation of traditional Sufi practices into a new form of mediated culture. The change created a new kind of social space, where people in urban areas in Java and other parts of the Malay Archipelago actively took part in activities. This is commonly viewed as urban Sufism, and also as part of Neo-Sufism (Woodward et al. 2012). Moreover, it is called urban Sufism because of its practice in towns and cities where people from such places take part in the rituals (Zamhari and Howell 2012).

The study of Sufism and Neo-Sufism in Indonesia is incomplete without mentioning the history of the Hadhrami Diasporas and the *Wali Songo* (the nine saints of Java). These are believed to be the flag bearers of this Islamic piety since the arrival of Islam in Indonesia. Some of their followers hold a general belief that the *Wali Songo* (the nine saints of Java) were of Hadhrami descendent. However this is highly contested (Woodward et al. 2012, 105-146; Hauser-Schäublin and Harnish 2014; Freitag 2003).

There are also claims that former Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), has both Hadhrami and Javanese antecedents. Gus Dur (1940-2009), initiated the "'Gusdurian' Sufi tradition that propagates religious pluralism, democratic governance and local modes of Muslim Piety." His leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in the 1990s led to the combination of Hadhrami and NU practices in the ritual of *Salawatan* and hence contributed to the Hadhrami and Javanese Islamic civilization (Woodward et al. 2012, 119-120). This also played a crucial role in forming the Neo-Sufist practice that now flourishes in urban life in Indonesia.

The 1980s and 1990s are an important period in the status of Sufism and Islam in Indonesia and other parts of the world. This was a period in which Habib Sheikh himself started to rise—around 1998. This period witnessed the growth of religious revivalism in many parts of the world. This revivalism was a significant factor in the restoration and transformation of groups that may have felt they were being marginalized, particularly across Asia and Indonesia. Hence there seems to be an outpouring of emotion as a by-product of purposively constructed strategies by elites, religious leaders and revivalists to engage and submerge the masses into submission and to shape and sharpen newly-discovered identities. To further understand these processes, we need to take a look at the work of scholars of the theories of ritual.

Scholars such as Clifford Geertz (1973), Catherine Bell (1992), Victor Turner (1995), Mark Woodward (2011, 2012), J. D. Howell (2001), James Morris (2005), and Van Bruinessen (1998), have attempted to use the theory of ritual to examine the practices of different societies, including Indonesia. Building on these studies, this inquiry underscores the role of Habib Sheik and also the complex set of factors that play a substantial role in motivating people looking for different experiences in the religious changes evidenced in Neo-Sufism and exemplified in the ritual of *Slawatan* in Indonesia.

Having situated the research problem and identified the gap in the literature, this article aims to examine the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan* as a Neo-Sufist practice, and also the role of Habib Sheik, along with the complex set of factors that are motivating people to look for different experiences in light of this religious change in Indonesia

Research Question

To what extent has Habib Sheik transformed the ritual of *Slawatan* from a traditional Sufi practice to a new form of Sufism, and what type of experience and motivation are followers looking for?

Methodology

The main methodological principle of this study is built upon the view that complex sets of factors play substantial roles in motivating people to take part in practices of popular piety and that the religious changes found in Neo-Sufism and the ritual of *Slawatan* in Indonesia require investigation. In answering the research question, this work adopts a primarily qualitative approach and analysis to build a convincing chain of evidence. The data collection involves multiple techniques. Analytic data for this study is obtained through participant observation, print editions of books, reports, magazines, newspapers and journal articles, as well as those published online. A literature review and ethnographical research data will situate the subject of inquiry in its relevant field of study and provide a synthesized interpretative framework to analyze fully the collected data and issues under investigation. This will facilitate a thorough investigation of the research problem and a considered response to the research question.

In addition, selected interviews and discussions with key informants, including actors and other participants, will contribute a key qualitative component to the chain of evidence by allowing for the collation of different perspectives on the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan* and Neo-Sufism, and by detailing how sample interviewees understand the problem. For the purpose of this study, adopting multiple data collection techniques, including field work, allows for a more fine-grained investigation of the complex dimensions of the subject of inquiry.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows: Firstly, to further interrogate the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan* as a Neo-Sufist practice and to explore the role of Habib Sheik, along with the complex set of factors that motivates people to look for different experiences in this period of religious change in Indonesia. Secondly, it is to offer a time-framed study of qualitative data in the assessment of Habib Sheik, the ritual of *Slawatan* and Neo-Sufism in the daily life of cities in Java, Indonesia. Finally, the study will contribute to the existing literature related to the ritual of *Slawatan* and Neo-Sufism and highlight avenues for further research on the specific issue under consideration.

The main argument is that although Indonesia is experiencing increased popular piety and religious change, with leaders like Habib Sheikh, and Neo-Sufism playing substantial roles in promoting such transformation, a further complex set of factors and multiple interests also condition people's experience and motivation concerning this form of ritual.

Outline

The study is comprised of four parts. Part one is the introduction, which outlines the rationale for the study; the research problem, and how this relates to the research question; the methodology adopted; and the aims and overall contribution of the study. Part two situates my research inquiry in the related field of study and outlines the synthesized interpretative framework and basis from which the data is analyzed. Part three advances the inquiry by detailing and analyzing the collected data, which includes the complex nature of the ritual process, actors and followers. Finally, part four concludes the inquiry by presenting a summary of the key findings from the foregoing data analysis in support of the study's overall argument.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this research views ritual as an anthropological field of study. Anthropology deals with various theories of ritual, which help us understand the essence of the practice in various societies. This approach is selected because it allows an in-depth study of *Slawatan* and Neo-Sufism, while at the same time engaging with wider academic debates relating to the subject of inquiry. Using theories of ritual as part of the research methodology enhances a wider understanding of the ritual of *Slawatan* as a Neo-Sufist practice.

First, the framework departs from Clifford Geertz, one of the famous anthropologists of the twenty-first century, who sees ritual as symbolic. Using Geertz helps in understanding the relationship between the main actor that is Habib Sheikh, who is also the main symbol, and the participants of the ritual, who are part of the social order in the ritual of *Slawatan*. Geertz (1973, 112) argues that ritual shapes social order and imposes meaning on disordered experience. Moreover, Geertz's symbolic approach to ritual influenced scholars such Bronislaw Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, George C. Humans and Edmund Leach, who also see ritual as a description of social order (Lessa and Vogt 1979, 38; Homans 1941, 171; Homans 2013, 155-158; Leach 1970, 12; Tambiah 2002, 355-481). Geertz is convinced that ritual is a means of displaying social passion (Bell 1992, 66-67; Geertz, 1973). Geertz's understanding of ritual as symbolic and shaping social order in society has been extended by scholars such as Munn (1973), Davis-Floyd (2003), Schirch (2005), and Firth (2011), who followed his approach. First, Munn (1973, 593) appears to complement Geertz's efforts, by arguing that ritual symbols set and uphold a coherent, balanced relationship between individual subjectivity and the objective social order. Furthermore, in his contribution to the topic, Davis-Floyd (2003, 10) asserts that rituals work to support the

belief system of the individual with the social group conducting the ritual.[5] In addition, Firth (2011, 207) maintains that in the sociological and anthropological domains, symbols are characteristic terms for sets or groups of people, for institutions, or for types of situations.

Schirch (2005, 16) concludes that in a ritual there is a sense of imagining the world, glued under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, producing distinctive transformation in one's sense of reality. Moreover, sacred symbols induce in people certain moods and enthusiasms. Likewise, they formulate general conceptions of the order of reality for which people meet and reinforce one another. Analyzing this will take us to the understanding of how people behave during the ritual of *Slawatan*. The majority of participants are seen to be so excited, actively waving flags and some even going to the extent of crying due to the emotion derived from the songs and the music of the performance. The leaders are embraced with humility and their hands are kissed to reinforce that sense of belonging to the brotherhood, and to strengthen loyalty to the *Habibs*, *Ulamas* and *Kyias*.

Departing from the approach of Geertz and his followers, Catherine Bell understands ritual as a form of discipline and a process of ritualization. Bell's theory helps us to understand the role of Habib Sheikh as the superior authority, and the participant who takes part in the ritual as the guardian is the one who legitimizes the ritual. Bell's understanding of ritual as a discipline means that it is necessary for a "superior authority" to be there in order to legitimize the ritual performance. In oral societies, for example those in Java, the audience acts as guardians of the superior authority. They hold the power to judge a ritual performance and validate its relation to the past and present (Bell 1992, 120).[6] Bell goes further in her analyses of ritual as a discipline backed by legitimate superior authority, by describing ritual as a process of ritualization. In her explanation, "ritualization" is a process whereby ritual is created as a cultural form, composed to differentiate and privilege certain things being done in comparison with other daily activities in the society (Bell 1992, 74). Moreover, ritualization always aligns one within a series of relationships connected to the vital sources of power and is one way of acting under certain cultural settings. However, Bell (1992, 141) suggests that acting ritually does not necessarily add up to a neat theoretical model that can be freely applied to other data of various kinds .[7]

Crain and Hughes-Freeland (2003), appear to be followers of Bell. They claim that ritualization provides the dynamic element of ritual as a performance of action. This approach allows us to explore themes such as agency and intentionality and the interaction of creativity and limitation in social action (Crain and Hughes-Freeland 2003, 3). On the other hand, performance as social action and as the dialogical agency of situations, allows us to understand these situations in terms of a participatory and rhetorical model (Tulloch 1999, 85).

This theory helps to explain the transformation of the *Slawatan* ritual from its traditional space in the *Pasentrens* to the public space. The coming of Habib Sheikh has been effective in mobilizing other religious leaders and state authorities who can also be seen as the superior authorities. His ability to write texts in both Arabic and Javanese, which are then published in books and pamphlets, is evidence of the disciplined and skilled actions embodied in the ritual. In doing this, the general audience for the first time has access to read and observe the performance in public spaces. They are thus encouraged to extend the message of the performance to different

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[5] Further explanation on symbolic connection (Leach 1976, 96), ritual symbolism (Rappaport 1999, 244-245), ritual and symbolic meaning (McLaren, 1999, 40). See also Grimes (2010), Watts (2007), and Turner (1995, 42).

[6] For more analyses on performance and ritual, see for example Grimes (2004), Hughes-Freeland (2008), Brown, Rappaport, and Wang (2013, 202).

[7] See also Bell (1997, 82) for further explanation on ritualization, ritual theory and ritual practice.

groups in their communities. Those who hear the message based on a successful narrative turn up in large numbers and continue to increase with every event held by the Habib.

In conclusion, the various theories presented in this research outline the multidimensional explanations of ritual theories. The fundamental elements in ritual theories are ritual's purpose to serve as a symbol, discipline and/or a process of ritualization. All these facets are clearly visible in the ritual of *Slawatan* and the people involved therein. However, it is important to be critical of ritual theories, as rituals are not limited to the explanations given here, since they differ from place to place. Moreover, Geertz himself was criticized by other scholars, such as Talal Asad. Asad claims that Geertz tends to separate religious senses from particular social settings and to consider them as independent. In that sense, he tries to discern religious from nonreligious exercises by contending that a religious practice is everything that upholds certain elemental natures of reality. This is a weakness in Geertz's great intellectual masterpiece, but it does not undermine its credibility in metaphysical and anthropological interpretations of religions. Using a genealogical perspective, Asad (1993, 27-54) contentiously argues that Geertz treats religion as primarily issues of meaning, linked to concepts of general order, and that this is an implicitly modern, privatized Christian approach, one that hides the power relations that give rise to religion, to the extent that it emphasizes the priority of belief as a state of mind. Asad (1993, 48) believes that it is not too unreasonable to maintain that "the basic axiom" in what Geertz called "the religious perspective" is not everywhere the same. On the one hand I agree with Asad's criticism of Geertz, but on the other hand it can also be misleading, because Geertz's definition is helpful in the process of understanding various complex religious phenomena. But of course we should not reify the definition, because realities are always more complex than our understanding of them.

Therefore, it is admissible to say that all the frameworks and approaches for the analysis of rituals and the explanations given are vulnerable to overlooking some other aspect of ritual of which the authors may not be aware. However, the theories described here are helpful in understanding the general pattern involved in the study of the ritual of *Slawatan*, its transformation and people involved. The theoretical framework used in this research was established after studying the ritual of *Slawatan* conducted by Habib Sheikh in central Java of Indonesia. It is important to note, therefore, that the people, background, place, material and environment might differ in societies outside Java, even though the process is similar. Hence, the methodological approaches of the theories are not absolute, something which might contribute to the shortcoming of this research. Moreover, there is need for further research to test the consistency and applicability of these theories in other places where rituals of Sufism take place.

Having given the conceptual framework used in this study, the next section will outline the process and performance of the ritual of *Slawatan* by Habib Sheikh.

The Ritual of *Slawatan*

The performance of the ritual follows a systematic pattern. First, the activities start with various logistics that include the building of tents and stages in the place where the event is to take place. The structures are well decorated, the background covered with a large poster of Habib Sheikh. Also one can see calligraphic writing of his name, the organizers of the ritual, the purpose of the ritual for that specific performance, and the date and place. The ritual is usually performed in the evening between 9 p.m and 12 a.m. There is a dress code whereby people attending are usually dressed in white clothes. Men wear hats, turbans and scarves to cover their heads, while women use veils and scarves. All participants, including Habib Sheikh, sit on the ground.[8] Proceedings begin after the arrival of Habib Sheikh and his entourage, which includes

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[8] Although the majority of the people use white dress, other colors are also allowed.

members of his group called *Ahbabul Mustapha*. Before this, most of the participants will have arrived and been seated in their respective places, while songs of *Dzikr* and Habib Sheikh are played to evoke passion in the crowd. The *Rebanas* (drummers) and supporting vocalists will have been seated in their positions and will have tested their equipment. The second part starts with the opening statement and prayers.[9] Third, Habib Sheikh will give a signal to the drummers and supporting vocalists to seek their attention, after which the *Dzikrs* and music will start and the gathering will follow.

This process goes on for one to two hours while Habib Sheikh continuously changes from one song to another, sometimes waving his hands to the participants. In the middle of the process is the *Maulid Nabi* (the birth of the Prophet). When the event reaches this stage, everyone is required to stand up and sing "*Tala Al Badru Allainah, Minn Sari Yaa Til wah da I.*" This is a welcome song for the Prophet when he emigrated from Mecca to Medina. While singing, someone rubs perfume on the hands of the leaders and another sprinkles flowers as signs of blessing.

After the *Dzikrs* and the singing comes the *Da'wah* (preaching). The preaching is about the life history of the Prophet Muhammad, His family and companions. Other topics in the preaching include the life history of Saints and influential religious leaders who have contributed to the propagation and spread of Islam in Java and other parts of the world. Habib Sheikh also preaches about issues of common concern affecting society, including political, economic, social and cultural matters. In some cases, while preaching, he asks people to write notes on things they want him to talk about and questions are then allowed. The preaching is followed by *Do'a* (recitation of prayers). Habib Sheikh usually says the prayers by reciting verses from the Qur'an with the rest in Javanese or Indonesian. The *Do'a* is followed by closing remarks, usually by one of the elders among the group of religious leaders present. Immediately after the *Do'a*, participants prepare to leave. Also at this stage people bring forward their bottles of water. Habib Sheikh blesses the water by dipping his fingers in it and reciting some prayers. When he leaves, along with all the leaders, people form queues to shake and kiss their hands, which is also to seek their blessing (*barakah*). The final part of the ritual involves the distribution of food and beverages to participants (Ilham 2011, 67-75). Habib Sheikh and the religious leaders, including the elites, are usually received in a special room where different kinds of food and beverages are arranged in lines and circles. After eating, they leave with their convoy, while the crowd lines up attempting to shake their hands and take photos.

General Findings

Spirituality

The general findings show that for many people attending this kind of ritual is a reinforcement of their faith. Also, many claim that attending means showing their love for the Prophet. Hence for most people it is specifically religious purposes that motivate them to attend.

The Music

The music provides a form of expression for the entire content of the ritual (Bellah 2011, 140). The findings indicate that the music and songs are recorded at every ritual. These recordings are played in many television and radio programmes. Others are available as studio recordings in

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[9] In some events the opening statements and prayers are given before the arrival of Habib Sheikh, so that when he comes the *Dzikrs*, songs and music start straight away. However, in other events this is done after his arrival. It all depends on how the organizing committee wants it done.

video and musical shops in different part of Indonesia. One can also get them in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore, where the ritual of *Slawatan* is practiced and where Habib Sheikh is also popular among the Malays in those places. Schulz (2006), believes that many supporters of the Islamic moral reform movement, listening to the recordings of their leaders and teachers, are intricately linked to their collective endeavor and orientation. The followers and fans treat these recordings as a source of moral enlightenment and a means of endowing and enriching the material infrastructure of daily matters with a particular spiritual quality. As in other democratic countries in the Muslim world, the mushrooming of local television and radio stations has helped in the pervasive presence of Islam in broadcast media, where religious leaders skillfully disseminate their teachings (Schulz 2006, 210-219).

The use of music by Muslim leaders to create harmony in society has been practiced in different generations since Islam arrived in Indonesia. The *Wali Songo* used traditional Javanese puppet shows with music in their quest to spread Islam in Java. The musical part involved in this ritual of *Slawatan* could be linked to what Nicholson (1963) called "*Sama*" (audition), which explains how the Sufis view music. However, he acknowledges that some agree with this, while others disagree, based on their own understanding of *Sama* (audition). He argues that the Sufis believe that ecstasy can be induced artificially both through concentration of thought and *Dzikr* (veneration of the name of Allah), as well as through music, singing and dancing (Nicholson 1963, 63-66).[10]

The Use of Water

Holy water is commonly used for medical purposes in the medical practice of Java. The practice is based on a highly complex notion of personhood derived from the Sufi mystical concept of "the perfection of man." In addition to water, some techniques, such as reciting passages from the Qur'an and belief in the healing power of the *barakah* (blessing) of those religious practitioners are used for medical purposes. *Zam Zam* (water) from Mecca in Saudi Arabia is among the most efficient and greatly valued water that is used (Woodward 2011, 69-81). In cases where the *Zam Zam* (water) is not available, for instance during the ritual of *Slawatan*, people use ordinary water. Meanwhile, aside from water being used for healing, some believe that if water is blessed by the Habib, it will help increase the intellectual capacity of students when they drink it.

The Handshake

The shaking and kissing of the hands of religious leaders is an attempt at seeking their blessing (barakah). This is one of the most common activities observed during the ritual of *Slawatan.* Bellah (2011, 278) argues that the handshake is common practice in the daily life of tribal society and is part of face-to-face rituals which continue in concealed form.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this section has drawn together the analyses of the previous sections and provided an overall summary of the major findings. This responds to the research question by foregrounding the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan* into a Neo-Sufist practice, and the role of Habib Sheik in this transformation, along with a complex set of factors motivating people who are looking for different experiences as part of the religious change occurring in Indonesia. In

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[10] Ecstasy in Sufi tradition is when a person is believed to have died from the emotion that is aroused on hearing a verse of the Qur'an of heavenly voice (*Hatif*), poetry or music. This implies not physical death, but spiritual death, where the soul is believed to be highly connected to God. The person feels nothing is there except God and only God. They don't hear or feel anything connected to this world.

order to accomplish this task, an initial literature review outlined the role of influential leaders such as Habib Sheik in the transformation of traditional Sufi practices into a new form of performance, including the ritual of *Slawatan*. This transformation has created a new religious and social space in urban life in Java, Indonesia and is referred to as Neo-Sufism.

A literature review of secondary resources related to the field of study informed and framed the analysis of primary data collected through participant observation and various techniques. Adopting this type of qualitative methodological approach allowed a more full exploration of the role of Habib Sheik and the complex set of factors that play a substantial part in motivating people to embrace the popular piety and religious changes such as those occurring in Neo-Sufism and in the ritual of *Slawatan* in Indonesia. Evidently, Habib Sheik's charismatic leadership and skills are one among the primary factors in the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan*. However, the data reveals that there is also a complex set of other factors and multiple interests that condition people's experience and motivations. The extent to which Habib Sheik transforms the ritual of *Slawatan* is interlinked and mediated by a complex set of factors and interests as are detailed in the study. These include spiritual music, water for healing and seeking of *barakah* (blessing).

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