

RELIGIOUS COMMODIFICATION: THE PERFORMANCE OF ‘USTĀDHA HALIMAH AL-ALAYDRUS’ ON DAKWAH STAGE IN TARGETING INDONESIAN AUDIENCES

Mariati Aprilia Harahap^{1*}

^{*1}Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia (UIII)

^{*1}*email:* mariati.harahap@uiii.ac.id

Abstract: This study explains the religious commodification aspect that has attracted many female audiences in Indonesia. Female preachers such as Sharifa Halimah have commodified religion into more attractive and persuasive products. This paper analyzes factors that led her to become an influential preacher among her female listeners—born genealogically related to the Prophet Muhammad and her pious ancestors, having good rhetorical skills in persuading the audiences, and inheriting the magnet of Tarim have led her to become an influential Muslima saint figure¹ in Indonesia. The use of relevant infrastructures supporting her callings to Islam, such as Instagram and YouTube channels, tends to be viral among young Indonesians. All these social media have become practical tools to spread the messages of Islam among Indonesians, especially the female youth generations. This study uses qualitative research analysis, including participatory observation, textual analysis, and interviews, to support the remark. Some secondary data was also acquired from her writing books and recorded videos from YouTube and Instagram channels. The result found that her blood relationship with the Prophet, the way she talks in a moderate, polite, and persuasive manner, and a graduate of Tarim school have led her to become an influential, famous preacher in Indonesia.

A. INTRODUCTION

I first attended this female Ḥaḍramī Majlis Taklim on Monday, January 13, 2009. Many female audiences were crowded in one point assembly in front of my house in Citayam, Depok. It has been so long since I could participate in this kind of majlis because it is rare to find this type of majlis held by Muslima urban Depok unless we explore the alleys near the city. So, lucky I am to be a neighbor of the Ḥaḍramī family. It was the first time Majelis Taklim “al- Mardhiyah”, under her leadership, conducted a public sermon with the guest prominent speaker Ustādha Halimah al-Alaydrus. She said this women preacher is among the top preachers in female Ḥaḍramī communities. Then I would say enthusiastically, “Let us invite her!” During the H-day, I just waited inside my house and provided some spaces in front of my house for the ladies who may want to join, too. The space provided by the committee was quite ample, but since the crowd never stopped even closer to my front window of the front room, it made me trapped in my own house.

¹ The word *Muslima* here, means the gender language for female Muslims derived from Arabic language

I was quite sad because this *sharīfa*² sat on the other side of the wall, which prevented me from watching her and listening attentively to her speech. Praise be to Allah, she moved and started to preach on the side where I could exactly watch my Ḥaḍramī neighbors' windows. I could see her, and then I started to cry and cry while listening to her story of the Prophet Muhammad's presence in the dream of a sexy movie star from Egypt who acts as Rabi'a al-Adawiya, the important female figure in Sūfi traditions, which used to chant dhikr and Salawat up to several thousand every day.

In Indonesia, *majelis ta'lim* and *majelis dhikr* are not a new product of Islam. It posits that an individual, as well as the public, has the right to recharge the faith of Muslim believers to be closer to God and His messenger, the Prophet Muhammad. Both majlis types stand as practical tools for Muslims of Indonesia to heal their sickness. The 'sickness' word here means an illness that people need to recover from their heart problem (spiritual disease), such as being arrogant (feeling better than others), stingy, and envious (when seeing others' fate is better than him or her), and so on. All these are diseases that can be cured only by cleaning one's own heart. According to (Rijal 2020, 192)³ the word and system of *majelis taklim* in Indonesia is unique. It is only available in Indonesia; it is a well-known place for Muslims in Indonesia to obtain knowledge of Islam by listening attentively to one or several preachers.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The commodification of religion is turning religion into marketing goods. It is not about creating a bad stigma on religion or creating new beliefs in the religious conviction by establishing new movements that conflict with religious beliefs or officially recognized religious organizations in a country, for example, Indonesia. Moreover, it is more about spreading religious messages through market commodities, not in prohibited belief. However, it also teaches about moral acts and spiritual protection for humans and their communities (Pattana Kitiarsa, 2008: 1-3).⁴ In other words, religious commodification transforms religion into a marketable product that can be marketed to satisfy different market tastes based on transactions prevailing in that market. For such, the writer believes that commodification in religion makes religious practices more attractive and persuasive.

Even though her *da'wa* invitation spreads mouth to mouth and typically appears on her social media, such as Instagram @halimahalaydrus, many people join the sermon. Hundreds, even thousands of people, came and crowded the places where the majlis dhikr held the mission. Notably, in the recent event "From Tarim to Indonesia" on the 21st of August 2023 at the Grand Masjid of Istiqlal Jakarta, millions of males and females came from all over Jakarta and its

² *Sharīfa* (sing.) is an honorary call for the female Prophet's descendent, while *sharā'if* is the plural form of it. The same as *ḥabīb* (sing) for the male descendants, with *ḥabāib* as the plural form of it.

³ Syamsul Rijal, "Performing Arab Saints and Marketing the Prophet: Habaib and Islamic Markets in Contemporary Indonesia," *Archipel*, no. 99 (2020): 192. <https://doi.org/10.4000/archipel.1719>.

⁴ Pattana Kitiarsa. *Religious Commodifications in Asia: Marketing Gods* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1-3.

surroundings to attend this public event. For the male audiences the sermon led by H{abi<b Umar bin H{a<fiz{, with the translators from alumni of his Da<r al-Mus{t{ofa< such as H{abi<b Jindan bin Novel and H{abi<b ‘Ali Zaenal. For female part will be delivered by the wife of H{abi<b Umar, with the translator Sharīfa Halimah. According to (Rijal 2020, 190)⁵ this phenomenon also indicated two crucial points: First, the increasing popularity of da'wa culture is filled by the descendants of the Prophet (*sayyids* or *syarīfa* from Hadrami circles), and second, the rising demand for public *da'wa* from Indonesian Muslims themselves. This kind of public preaching can attract thousands of people and create big traffic jams since it becomes the meeting point between the audiences and sellers of merchandise, especially religious products, who fill the streets near the activity.

The *ḥabāib* and *sharā'if* roles in religious education

However, the position of *ḥabāib* as the male Prophet Muḥammad's descendants plays a significant role in the Jakarta public sermons (*majlis ta'lim*). The people of Jakarta highly respected them because of their genealogical blood to the Prophet and their religious reputation as Ḥaḍramī societies. Throughout history, the Bā‘Alawī diaspora was popular as Islamic preachers and entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia in the 18th century (Nisa 2012, 56).⁶ However, the role of the female Hadrami preachers, the *sharā'if*, actually was not much different from the *ḥabāib* one. The framework that women should be protected from public life eyes is one of the causes that limited the study on this. Besides, strict sex separation regarding the interaction between males and females must be upheld closely among the Ḥaḍramī societies. (Nisa 2012, 69).⁷ In the 18th century, the presence of male Bā‘Alawī migrants as Islamic mission bearers and trade enterprise builders has been known throughout history. Not popular as female *sharā'if* who in the past had limited roles and were secluded from the public sphere.

According to (Husein 2021, 171) ⁸wrote that in the dawn of the 19th to first 20th centuries, the diaspora of Ḥaḍramī societies in the East Indies Netherlands reached its peak era. Here, we may assume that females from this group must have participated in education to transmit knowledge, such as Ms. Fatimah, the teacher. In fact, in the 1940s, she taught female youngsters religious education for the girls in her community—additionally, a Sundanese woman, Ustādha ‘Aisyah, who married Bā‘Alawī descendants, Ahmad b. ‘Abdullah Assegaf also taught Ms. Fatimah and her Ḥaḍramī friends basic arithmetic and other general subjects. Besides, she (Husein 2021, 175)⁹ also cited Boxberger’s work and mentioned that Shaykha ‘A’isha bt. Ahmad Ba Jamal

⁵ Rijal, *Performing Arab Saints*, 190.

⁶ Eva F Nisa. 2012. “Female Voices on Jakarta’s Da’wa Stage,” *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 46, no. 1 (2012): 56.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁸ Fatimah Husein, “PRESERVING AND TRANSMITTING THE TEACHINGS OF THE THARIQAH ‘ALAWIYYAH: DIASPORIC BA ‘ALAWI FEMALE PREACHERS IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA.” *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies*. Vol. 4 (2021): 171.

⁹ Husein, *Preserving and Transmitting*, 175.

and Shaykha Sultana bt. ‘Ali al-Zubaydi (d. 1440), who were admired for their piety, their mausoleums have been visited by people until now. Another important nine female saints figures have written their stories by ‘Ustādha Halimah, for instance, Hubāba Tifla and Hubāba Bahiyya in her books *Bidadari Bumi 1* (2009)¹⁰ and *Bidadari Bumi 2* (2020)¹¹. All these confirm that the females from Ḥaḍramī societies truly have contributed to religious education for their fellow female learners throughout history.

New religious authority raised from female Dāru az-Zahra Tarim

In the past, female Bā‘Alawī descendants from Ḥaḍramī circles have experienced limited access and private venues to attain religious knowledge and education. On the other hand, the shifting paradigm of a new authority that this Bā‘Alawī *sharā’if* gained by studying in Tarim, Yemen, under the supervision of Habīb ‘Umar b. Ḥāfīz, and his wife Hubāba Ummu Salim.¹² This fact led them to play as articulators as well as knowledge transmitters of *ṭarīqa* teaching to Bā‘Alawī and non-Bā‘Alawī audiences (Husein 2021, 186). Those females graduated in Tarim led by Habīb ‘Umar b. Ḥāfīz will have the authority to convey the religious message they have attained from Dar al-Zahra to the society. In this case, Ustādha Halimah is a part of its articulator as well as the knowledge transmitter who promotes the *ṭarīqa al-‘Alawiyya*. This *ṭarīqa* promotes the *mawlid* celebration of the Prophet Muhammad to get his *baraka* (blessings) and nurture the abundant love of the Prophet as commanded by Islam.

According to (Seise 2018, 12)¹³ pointed out that the *mawlid* celebration, which is conducted only for fellow females, at least posits four benefits for female Muslims, particularly the *sharā’if* side. First, it enables them to express religious practice emotionally. Second, it allows them to express their feelings physically through body expression. Third, it applies their special status among the laypeople as the Prophet’s genealogically linked. Furthermore, lastly, to strengthen their identity and Islamic practice understanding as Bā‘Alawī descendants to the fellow descendants and outside the Bā‘Alawī progenies. Therefore, we can assume that holding this special event will make every female Muslim who agrees to celebrate, especially among fellow female Ḥaḍramī people happier and healthier since it implies their emotional feelings and involves their physical expressions in expressing their love to the Prophet, also enforces their social status as the religious model role since they share the blood ties with the Prophet and, lastly, promote their Bā‘Alawī identity including their interpretation towards Islamic practice to other associated Bā‘Alawī heirs and outside them.

¹⁰ A book written by Ustādha Halimah on the nine mystical stories of female saints in Tarim, first published in 2006.

¹¹ The second publication of her first published in 2020 on the same topic emphasized on mystical sides of those different nine saints.

¹² Her name is Hubāba Nur bt. Muhammad al-Haddar.

¹³ Claudia Seise 2018. “Women Remembering the Prophet’s Birthday: Maulid Celebrations and Religious Emotions Among the Alawiyyin Community in Palembang, Indonesia 1.” ASEAS 11 no.2 (2018): 217. <https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-0005>.

Currently, the rise of young female Ḥaḍramī Arab preachers along with their sermon groups (*majelis taklim*, and *majelis dzikir*) is highly increased and attracted Indonesian audiences. They are also called female contemporary Ḥaḍramī preachers. Let us say this bright Muslimah Arab preacher, Halimah Alaydrus, and her *majelis dzikir*, especially for *mawlid* events. Recently, she became a new public pressure to convey the message of Islam among the female listeners of Indonesians. She represented the old generation of Indonesian Bā‘Alawī women who study in Ḥaḍramaut (Husein 2021, 178).¹⁴ Every time she invites everyone to her *mawlid* event publicly, Muslima all over Indonesia, young and old, will participate sincerely and then crowd the event. The word ‘*mawlid*’ is derived from the word *وَلَدَ يَلِدُ-مَوْلِدًا*, the word *مَوْلِدًا* (*mawlidan*, has the same meaning with, *وَقْتُتُ الْوِلَادَةِ* time of birth) (Ali, Atabik & Muhdlor, 1989: 1867)¹⁵. Hence, this activity is much related to remembering when Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was delivered to this earth by his mother, Sayyida Amīna, as a blessing and rare event. This Ustādha is wearing a *niqāb*. Once she wants to convey a *da‘wa* (Islamic message) through a group of certain *majlis ta‘lim*, the place must be sterilized by any male. Then, she may open her full veils while interacting with her female audience during the sermon.

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The writer believes that female preachers who have persuasive skills are more influential in targeting female youth audiences in Indonesia. Therefore, to measure the phenomena *da‘wa* brought by this female Ḥaḍramī preacher, whether she is truly an influential preacher in Indonesia, uses qualitative research analysis. In this type of research, the writer uses qualitative methods, including participatory observation, by joining several public sermons conducted by Ustādha Halimah Alaydrus and other female Ḥaḍramī preachers such as Ustādha Amira Jindan and Ustādha Samirah al-Habsy, and textual analysis from books, published article journals which are relevant to the topic, also refereeing to open and unstructured interviews to support the remarks. The writer interviewed al-Mardhiyya leaders, Ummu Sa, in February 2020 and March 2023, including the committee members, such as Ummu Aqsa, Ummu Rafa, Bu Lisa, and Te Yan in February 2020. They used to hold this public event by inviting female preachers. Some secondary data was also acquired from her writing books such as “Assalāmu‘alaikum Tarim” and “Bidadari (Earth Angel) 1” and “Bidadari 2” and recorded videos from her YouTube and Instagram channels.

D. ANALYSIS

1. Having a genealogical link to the Prophet and Pious people made her an influential preacher in Indonesia

¹⁴ Husein, Preserving, 178.

¹⁵ Atabik Ali and Ahmad Zuhdi Muhdlor, *Kamus Kontemporer Arab-Indonesia*. (Yogyakarta: Multi Karya Grafika, 1989),1867.

Born in Indramayu on the 2nd of April 1979 from the Ḥadrami's religious family to a couple, Usman Alaydrus and Nur Assegaf.¹⁶ Raised in a religious family, her educational background was fully colored within Islamic religious schools such as Pesantren Dārullugah Wadda'āwiyah Bangil Pasuruan (1991-1995), Pesantren At-Tauhidian Tegal, West Java (1995-1996), Pesantren Al-Anwar Sarang Rembang¹⁷, Central Java (1996-1998) and lastly, Pesantren Dāruz Zahra, Tarim, Hadramaut, Yemen (1998-2003) (Alaydrus 2023, 151).¹⁸ This last Pesantren is designed especially for Muslim ladies who want to study Islamic knowledge. However, for men, it is called Dārul Mustofa, owned by H{abi<b 'Umar bin H{a<fiz, a famous Arab saint from Yemen who is well-known for his charismatic demeanor.

2. The 39th Prophet's descendants

As one of the Bā'Alawī's descendants, Halimah is the 39th of the Prophet's descendants¹⁹, his grandfather Habib Abdullah bin Abu Bakar Alaydrus was a writer of "*Kibritul Aḥmar*"²⁰ book, a very beneficial spiritual wayfaring book for a new beginner in the spiritual path. Famous as the first person who got this 'Alaydrus's epithet, which means a dignified and noble lion. He is also one of the most well-known Habib Abu Bakar Assakran sons²¹, *as-sakran* (السَّكْرَان) derived from the Arabic word (سَكْر) ²² sa-ki-ra means drunk (Ali, Atabik & Muhdlor, 1989: 1073). Nevertheless, 'intoxication' here means smashed with the love of Allah. Instead of using *khamr* which is prohibited in Islam, he chose to pray while undergoing a backache operation by doctors. Through solemn praying, he did not feel any discomfort during the surgery process (Alaydrus, 2023, 31).²³

As a granddaughter of the writer of "Kibritul Aḥmar," she has successfully written some spiritual motivation books such as "Bidadari Bumi 1 and 2" (Earth Angels), "Muḥāsabah of Love," "Kata Kita" (Our Saying) and "Assalāmu'alaikum Tarim." Furthermore, she became an Arabic translator book for Habib Umar bin Hafidz's "Khuluḡuna" (Our Akhlak) and Imam al-Ghazālī's "Ayyuhal Walad" (My Dear Son).²⁴ This confirms that as one of the descendants of famous pious people, she has a great capacity to follow in the footsteps of his great-grandfather in the same virtues.

¹⁶ <https://www.jatimnetwork.com/hiburan/pr-435227195/siapa-halimah-alaydrus-ini-profil-dan-biodata-ustadzah-yang-viral-di-tiktok-ada-umur-orang-tua-suami-ig> (accessed on 7th of November 2023)

¹⁷ A legend pesantren built by K.H. Maimoen Zubair (d.2019) in 1965 called al-Anwar, Sarang

¹⁸ Alaydrus, Assalāmu'alaikum Tarim (Jakarta: Wafa Production, 2023), 151.

¹⁹ See the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TS3mTagzcs> (accessed on 16th of November 2023)

²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/Muwasala/photos/red-sulphur-al-kibrit-al-ahmar-by-imam-abdullah-ibn-abi-bakr-al-aydarusthe-red-s/1212312868798128/> (accessed on 11th of November 2023)

²¹ Habib Abu Bakar Assakran is very popular with his mystical story; when he had back pain and wanted surgery, the doctor used wine to relieve the pain, but he refused. Instead of using wine, he asked to have surgery while he was praying so that he would not feel the pain.

²² Ali and Muhdlor, *Kamus Kontemporer Arab-Indonesia*, 1073.

²³ Alaydrus, Assalāmu'alaikum Tarim, 31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 152-153.

3. The use of social media in supporting her da‘wa movements

Moreover, this female preacher uses social media in conventional as well as modern (digital) ways. As the writer mentioned before, she published several books to support and convey her *da‘wa* messages. Besides, she used to hold offline gatherings to meet the audiences directly face-to-face. The ways are considered traditional methods of *da‘wa* as described (Husein 2021, 181). Currently, in the modern era, she maximizes the digital method of callings such as the use of Instagram, YouTube channels, Facebook accounts, and so on. Thus, the use of digital social media allows her to share valuable information only, not to renew her status. Social digital media plays a big role in sharing good information (Husein 2021, 181).²⁵ From these figures, we can see her YouTube subscribers are about 592.000²⁶, her Instagram account @halimahalaydrus²⁷ has around 2.1 million followers, and her @muhasabahcintaevent²⁸ has about 118.000 followers.

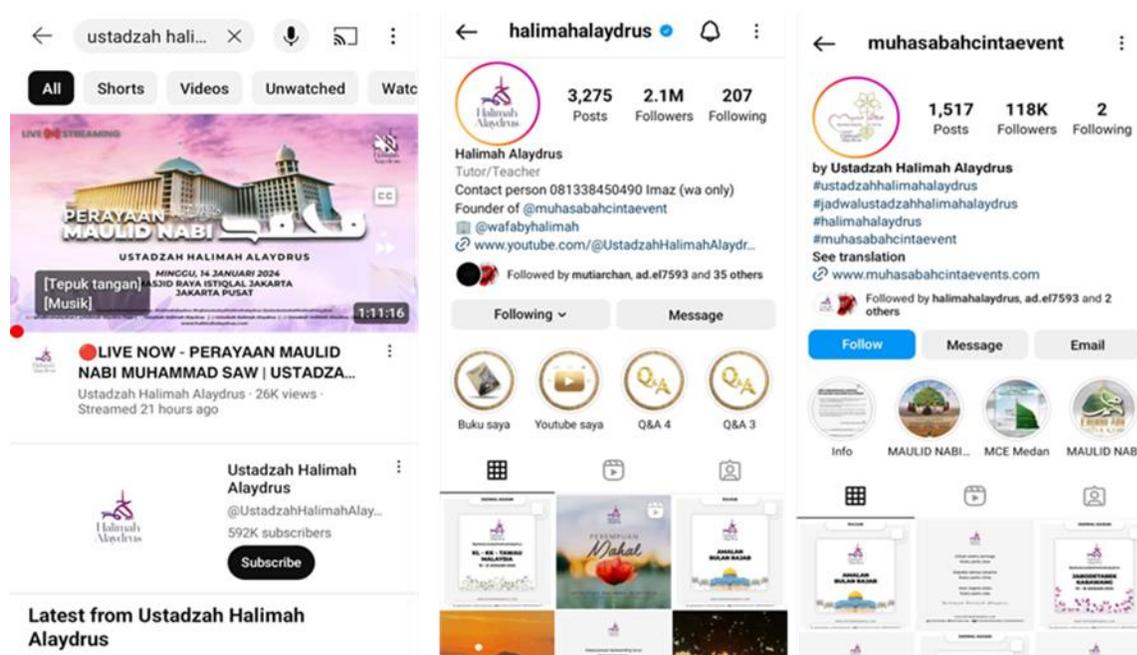


Figure 1. The Instagram and YouTube followers of Ustādha Halimah

On the other hand, (Pattana Kitiarsa 2008, 35)²⁹ cited Kelley (1977), said that the demand wanted by the members (the Indonesian audiences) is considered more important than the religious message contents. When conservatism in religion is proliferating, the other side (in this case, the value of liberalism in Christianity) must be retreating. An assumption she derived while

²⁵ Ibid., 181.

²⁶ YouTube: Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus (accessed on January, 14, 2024).

²⁷ Instagram @halimahalaydrus (accessed on January, 14, 2024).

²⁸ Instagram @muhasabahcintaevent (accessed on January 14, 2024).

²⁹ Kitiarsa, Religious Commodifications, 35.

conducting on consumer lifestyle, individualism, choice, and religion. For that reason, based on Kelley's assumption of religion as a consumer's style, we can adopt that the public demands on Islamic calls brought by this female preacher are more critical and successful key in the view of her listeners than the religious content message delivered. Moreover, the writer's perspective assumed that Indonesian audiences tend to perceive Islamic messages more quickly if the preacher is from the genealogy of the Prophet Muḥammad; at the same time, it has also become their public demand. Therefore, the closer linkage to the Prophet Muḥammad and religious people has become a supporting factor in realizing the general need for *da'wa* among Muslim members. The author here strongly disagrees with Kelly's opinion while saying that the public's demand was more essential than the substance of the message itself. This does not prevail in the case of this female preacher. Her current activities as a religion teacher, motivational speaker, and translator in several sermons and Islamic courses domestically and abroad qualified her to master the content messages in her field.

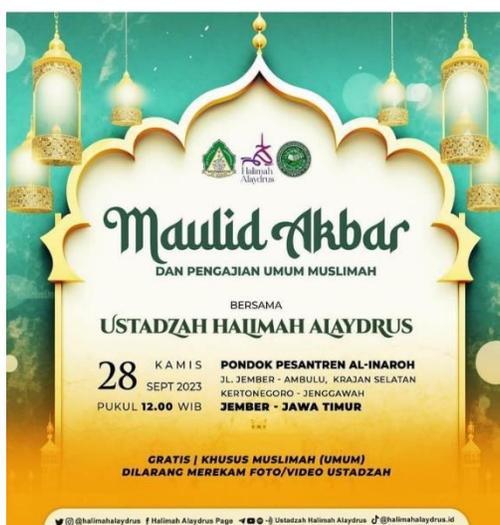


Figure 2. The sample of Mawlid invitation, no photo and video allowed during the sermon³⁰

4. Preaching without forcing

Whenever she preaches about Islam, she talks about the importance of being '*taqwa*³¹' as the goal of *da'wa*, and many highlight the love for the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). Therefore, during her sermons, she will lead the audience to send *ṣalawat* often to the Prophet. Directing *ṣalawat* with several distinctive pronunciation texts (*lafz*) and Arabic forms of words (*shīgoh*) can generate love for the Prophet. These habitual actions continuously tend to follow the Prophet's sunna (Maftuhin et al. 2019, 194)³². This kind of *ṣalawat* is often brought by mostly

³⁰ Source: Instagram @halimahalaydrus (accessed on 15th of January 2024)

³¹ The meaning of *taqwa* found in S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 133

³² Maftuhin, et al. *Pesan Cinta Mbah Moen* ed. Fajar Diana Safitri and Ariza Fahlaivi. 1st ed. (South Jakarta: Rene Islam, 2019), 194.

habāib and *sharīfa*³³ in their majlis *dzikr* accompanied by *hadrah*. It is instrumental music played by several players with 1 to 2 or more singers. This music performance mainly emphasized *ṣalawat lafẓ* in different *shīgoh*³⁴, sometimes also Arabic couplets in the form of songs from the words of previous scholars '*nashīd*'. Besides, it is often used as a break for preaching message and entertainment, so listeners do not get bored. The author of this paper has attended several sermons led by this Ustādha from 2019-2023. She found that many audiences came to nearby cities or places where the speeches were held.

Moreover, hundreds, even thousands of female listeners attended with pleasure. Perhaps this is what Ismail Alatas means, that the authority of an Islamic religious leader (in this case, the female preacher) who has a past or is closely related to the history of the Prophet Muhammad will make it easy for her to express the Prophet's teachings without coercion to other people (Alatas, 2021,4).³⁵ The author agrees with this point. From her participatory observations during the majlis with her and listening to her recorded speeches via YouTube and Instagram, she found that this Ustādha has excellent articulation. She delivered her speech in a moderate, polite, and persuasive tone, discussing the most relevant cases many female listeners face, such as finding a mate, household matters, and educating children. These facts confirm that she used a persuasive approach to convince the audience of her.

According to Ross (1994, 8)³⁶ cited Herbert Simons (1994), persuasion is involved in communication. It is influencing others towards an object or goal but not forcing it. Persuasive messages try to incline the recipients about what information process they want to choose or decide. This point is evident that Ustādha Halimah must understand her persuasive intention in the message so that the audience can concentrate on her aim and message. He (1994, 7)³⁷ defined it as concerned with social influence and human motivation. It is a much more restrictive term and an arbitrary one. However, a change process results from a shared, symbolic thinking activity. In this case, persuasion involves an interaction and, of course, the communication process. Therefore, how this female Ustādha interacted during the majlis time has influenced the behavior of her recipients step by step. From the interview session, the author learned that some *majlis* participants felt that their love for the Prophet became more abundant after attending her event. They tended to send *ṣalawāt* more often than before, especially on the mid-day of Thursday and Friday. Hence, their mood of being participatory in these kinds of sermons highly increased, at least by voluntarily providing some snacks, food, and drinks for the 'guest of the Prophet,' a term they call for the attendee of that *majlis dhikr*.

³³ Female *habāib*

³⁴ format

³⁵ Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* ed. Fred Appel, Jenny Tan, and James Collier (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021), 4.

³⁶ Raymond S. Ross, *Understanding Persuasion* 4th ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc, 1994), 8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

Additionally, O’Keefe (1990, 15)³⁸ wrote about persuasion, a successful intentional effort at influencing another mental state through communication in a circumstance where those persuaded have some measure of freedom. There are six common features of paradigm cases of persuasion by O’ Keefe in his book: 1. When someone has convinced a person, the successful attempt to influence is identified, 2. The existence of a goal and some correlative intent to reach it is found 3. There is an intention from the persuader to achieve that goal, 4. The effects of persuasion result from communication (may vary from the medium language), and lastly, 5. A change of behavior involved in the mental state of the destination’s part. All these six attributes seem apparently found in the conduct of those who have attended such events several times.

5. The Magnet of Tarim as a distinctive city of the saints of Allah

According to Alatas (2021, 3)³⁹ Muslims interpret the *sunna*⁴⁰ as a foundational source of Islamic divinity, law, ethics, and mysticism. He defines the sunnah like that because he is probably one of the Bā’Alawī’s descendants. However, the value of the mystical is related strongly to the people of Tarim. Many things there happen beyond reason, for example, the story of Masjid Asseghāf’s establishment. While building this mosque Habib Abdurrahmān Asseghāf, the founder of the masjid, saw the died Four Caliphs in Islam; Abu Bakr, Umar al-Khaṭṭab in every corner of its four pillars⁴¹. For that reason, this masjid built with the four pillars represented the earliest guided Caliphs after the Prophet’s demise.

As one of Tarim graduates, she must be surrounded by the life of *habāib* and *hubābah* during her years of study and teaching in Dāruz Zahra. Tarim is the best city of Sayyid Muḥammad bin Ali Ba’ālawy, the most outstanding scholar of his time and the 16th descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. He was also the grandfather of most *habāib* clans throughout the world. He was born in Tarim in 574 Hijriyah and died in 653 H in the same city. Whoever visited Tarim must have visited his grave in Zanbal, Tarim, Yemen. Tarim is also called the city of a thousand saints because more than tens of thousands of saints have died there, and some are still alive. The unique, mystical story about this city seems to show that it is indeed a city belonging to thousands of saints.

On the other hand, the rejection concept of saints, believed mainly by the Tarim people, came from another Muslim scholar. According to Philips (2005: 178),⁴² who acknowledges himself as a part of the the *ahlus sunna wal jama’ah (aswaja)* group, the word ‘saints’ is derived from the Arabic language *wali* (pl. *Awliya*), which means close friend ‘ally’ of Allah, as mentioned in (Qur’an 8: 34),

“... Verily His (Allah’s) *awliyā’* are only those with *taqwa*, but most people do not realize that.”

³⁸ Daniel J. O’ Keefe, *Persuasion Theory and Research* ed. Jesse G. Delia (California: Sage Publication, Inc, 1990), 15.

³⁹ Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?*, 3.

⁴⁰ The second source in Islamic law

⁴¹ Alaydrus. *Assalāmu’alaikum Tarim*, 152-153

⁴² Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed (Islamic Monotheism)* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2005), 178.

There are two conditions of being in a divine relationship becoming His *awliyā'*; faith (*īmān*) and piety (*taqwa*) as found in the Qur'ān (10: 62-63),⁴³

“Behold! Certainly, no fear nor grief shall overcome that Waliya of Allah, those who believe and have taqwa.”

However, he denounced people who consider an ally of Allah as those who can perform miracles, called *karāmāh*. To distinguish from the Prophet’s *mu’jizāt* notion that poorly informed masses have recognized. Therefore, Muslims should not define some believers as being *awliyā' of Allah*. He also mentioned a prominent feature, a hierarchy level of Sufi circles, where the lowest level, around 300 members, called *akhyār* (selected), and the upper to *akhyār*, called *abdāl* (substitute) who number 40, the upper to *abdāl* is, *abrār* (religious) around seven persons, then *awtād* (hooks) numbering four persons, then *nuqabā* (guards) the three, and the greatest saint in the time, called *qutb* (pole), and at the peak is, *ghawth* (relief). According to this belief, the upper three levels in the hierarchy can be present in Makkah lively during prayer time. Dr. Bilal Philips (2005) believed that all these are a part of mythology borrowed from Christianity. Moreover, for him, the mawlid celebration is a kind of Christmas celebration by Christians. Here, Philips (2005) strongly disagrees with the hierarchy level in the circle of Sufi and the mawlid celebration that is identically and found in the city of Tarim. Here, the author of this paper could not reject or accept this notion since this knowledge is beyond the reach of human nature.

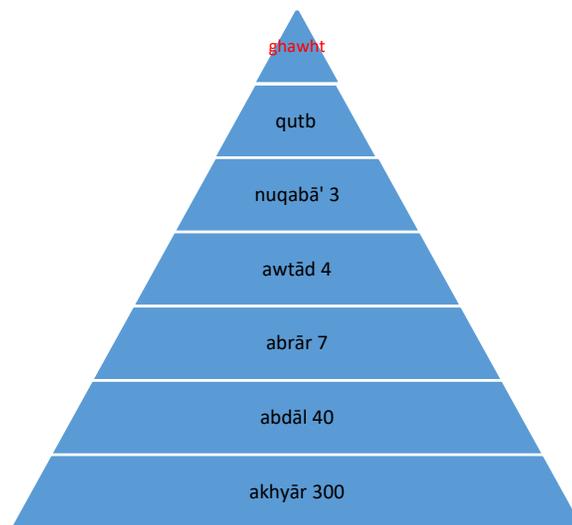


Figure 3. Sufi hierarchy level, according to Philips’ opinion

Nevertheless, to counter the argument on this, Rijal (2024: 58),⁴⁴ on his new book “Defending Traditional Islam in Indonesia: The Resurgence of Hadhrami Preachers,” said that the Salafis, in this case, plays as an opponent of traditional authority (the Habāib Hadhrami reverends) have a

⁴³ Su<ra (10): verse 62-62.

⁴⁴ Syamsul Rijal. *Defending Traditional Islam in Indonesia: The Resurgence of Hadhrami Preachers* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 58.

weakness, which is lack of transmission authority (*sanad*) in their religious knowledge. Therefore, the traditional authority, in this case *aswaja*, who rely more on the religious authority of *habāib* or *kiais* must revive their traditional religious authority through revitalizing knowledge. Linking knowledge with a historical basis that makes the prophet the final path will legitimize the knowledge conveyed by the Prophet. Consequently, the importance of a certificate (*ijaza*) from the teacher to his and her student, along with the blood connection that innates the Prophet’s baraka (blessing), will raise her religious authority in specific fields in front of the public. The writer believes she has a legitimate license from H{abi<b ‘Umar b. H{a<fi<z to spread Islamic knowledge to Indonesian audiences since she always mentions his name as her teacher during her speech. The writer's observation found that she is the only female preacher among the *sharīfa* whose voice can be recorded and distributed publicly. Besides, maybe, based on her opinion, by involving herself in the study circles of her teachers’ religious education system and performing *khidma* (service to the teacher), she will gain the *baraka*, the essential goal of every educational degree achievement. This fact, at least, is what has been said by H{abi<b Mah{mu<d al-H{a<mi<d during the interview session, as found in the book of Rijal (2024).



Figure 4. Mawlid's invitation where the voice and video recording and taking a photo are prohibited

According to (Kurniawan, Hasan, and Arifin 2019, 312)⁴⁵ cited the work Maḥfūz Al-Tarmasī⁴⁶ on the attack of supernatural phenomena (*karāma*) that Allah has granted upon His saints. Due to their closeness to Allah, the saints have obtained certain degrees to have it (as the perfection of the Prophet’s miracles); at the same time, ordinary people must live in the community as usual in a general way. Therefore, he must hide his miracle unless there is a public interest presence (*mašlaha*) in appearing it. He pointed out that those who disagreed with the saints' values were acknowledged by traditional religious authority as someone who had never experienced the

⁴⁵ Ade Fakhri Kurniawan, Noorhaidi Hasan, and Achmad Zainal Arifin, “Wali And Karama: A Discourse and Authority Contestation in Al-Tarmasi’S Bughyat Al-Adhkiya” Al-Jami’ah 57 no.2: (2019), 312. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2019.572.287-328>.

⁴⁶ The ulama of Indonesia who lived and experienced the impact of Wahhabiya in Mecca

actual spiritual experience of the Sufis. Hence, those *karāmas* are not given to the *fuqahā*⁴⁷ unless they take the path as Sufis did. The truth about sainthood is only for those who believe in it. And those who do not believe, the supernatural experience will not be revealed except by following the path of the Sufis.

D. CONCLUSION

Ustādha Halimah al-Alaydrus is a new phenomenon in the da‘wa stage of Indonesia

To describe the actual phenomenon brought by this Muslimah preacher seems more in line with the sociological concept, a new paradigm about religion invented by Max Weber (1864–1920) named “Religion Sociology (1966).” In this notion, he has differentiated two coined terms about religion; mass religion and *virtuosi* religion (Pattana Kitiarsa 2008, 37).⁴⁸ In the religion of mass, ordinary people, men and women, need a holy saint’s figure to meet their needs and to live comfortably with God. Meanwhile, in the *virtuoso*, the spiritual information becomes their ethical condition to be lived in a religious way of life. Based on Weber’s view on religion, Ustādzah Halimah became the actor in the mass religion to pursue comfort towards God; at the same time, her calling messages into Islam represent the fulfilled demand for virtues. This kind of religious phenomenon also supported the definition of the word ‘religion’ by Emile Benveniste (the expert in Indo-European Language and Society). She said religion could mean ‘*relegere*’ and ‘*religare*’ (Pattana Kitiarsa 2008, 36)⁴⁹. Even though both words look the same, each has a different meaning. First, *relegere* means to assemble, and *religare* is to stick together. For that reason, in this case, religion is turned into a product of the market not just to meet the market demand but also as a rendezvous in which all the buyers can bond together as one entity.

The phenomenon of this female from the al-Alaydrus clan in the field of *da‘wa* among young Indonesians reveals that the transmission of religion needs to be done in ways that align with market demands. The pressure from the public to present her as a bright star of religious message senders shows that the religious commodification aspect is working here. Supported infrastructure such as YouTube, Instagram, and other channels is part of the commodification of religion in a new package that suits today’s consumers. However, the new packaging of this commodity does not conflict with the belief system or create a new religion. It is more about spreading the faith through market products involving moral functions and spiritual shields for humans and the surrounding environment.

On the other hand, this woman preacher becomes significant among her listeners because she has three crucial factors innate in herself, such as blood connection to the Prophet and pious great ancestors, and she has persuasive skills and persuasion to influence her viewers. Lastly, she has a religious and educational background of Hadramaut, also known as the City of Thousand Saints, making her different from other lay preachers in Indonesia. Nonetheless, the dispute from the opponents of Sufi circles also appears in this paper. Those who do not believe in the traditional

⁴⁷ The fiqh expertise, in this paper refer to those who used to criticize the Sufi sect.

⁴⁸ Kitiarsa, Religious Commodifications, 37.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 36.

cultures of the Tarim people may never feel or watch the spiritual marvel directly. In sum, this Muslima Arab saint, Ustādha Halimah al-Alaydrus, has enhanced a new phenomenon in religious commodities, particularly in Indonesia. Hence, this paper confirms that a female preacher with persuasive skills is more influential in targeting female audiences.

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