

MAWLID CELEBRATION IN ACEH: Culture, Religious Expression, and Political Medium

Sehat Ihsan Shadiqin

Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh
Kopelma Darussalam, Kec. Syiah Kuala, Kota Banda Aceh, Aceh, 23111
Email: sehatihsan@ar-raniry.ac.id

Siti Ikramatoun

Universitas Syiah Kuala Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh
Kopelma Darussalam, Kec. Syiah Kuala, Kota Banda Aceh, Aceh 23111
Email: siti.ikramatoun@unsyiah.ac.id

Abstract: This study is an ethnographic note about the *Mawlid* celebrations in Aceh. In contrast to most studies by previous scholars who saw *Mawlid* as a medium for normative theological discourse, this article aims to narrate the *Mawlid* phenomenon by focusing on how the Acehnese celebrated *Mawlid*, how the religious expression was, and how *Mawlid* became a political medium. This study showed that the *Mawlid* celebration in Aceh is not just a tradition or an expression of love for the Prophet but a cultural construction inherent to the Acehnese society, religious expression, and political media. *Mawlid* as a cultural construction is manifested in various forms of unique food dishes, as a religious expression manifested in typical Dhikr and Lectures *Mawlid*, and as a political medium seen from the invitations of *Mawlid*, *Mawlid Pemda*, and *Mawlid* at home.

Abstrak: Kajian ini merupakan catatan etnografis tentang perayaan Maulid di Aceh. Berbeda dengan kebanyakan kajian sebelumnya yang melihat Maulid sebagai media wacana teologis normatif, artikel ini bertujuan untuk menceritakan fenomena Maulid dengan berfokus pada bagaimana masyarakat Aceh merayakan Maulid, bagaimana ekspresi keagamaannya, dan bagaimana Maulid menjadi media politik. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa perayaan Maulid di Aceh bukan sekedar tradisi atau ungkapan cinta kepada Nabi, melainkan sebuah konstruksi budaya dan ekspresi keagamaan yang telah melekat pada masyarakat Aceh, serta media politik. Maulid sebagai konstruksi budaya termanifestasi dalam beragam bentuk hidangan makanan yang unik, kemudian sebagai ekspresi keagamaan termanifestasi dalam bentuk Dzikir dan Ceramah Maulid yang khas, dan sebagai media politik terlihat dari ajakan Maulid, Maulid Pemda, dan Maulid di rumah.

Keywords: *Acehnese; Mawlid Celebration; Culture; Social Identity; Religious Expression; Political Medium.*

Introduction

The discourse about the acculturation of Islam and the local culture has become an important study to understand Islam in Indonesia. One of them is the *Mawlid* celebration to commemorate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. *Mawlid* has become an inherent socio-religious phenomenon and has always been celebrated by most Indonesian Islamic communities¹. In several regions in Indonesia, *Mawlid* was celebrated in different ways, but it generally takes in a public or particular place. People bring food to the field, mosque, or particular places agreed upon based on the customs in each region. They will recite Barzani and pray, then enjoy the prepared dishes. In urban areas, *Mawlid* celebrations are usually carried out more simply by inviting Ulema as a preacher. The preacher will explain his subjective perspective regarding the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his presence in the world².

Every *Mawlid* month comes, the theological debates among academics, ulama, and the wider community in Aceh almost always happen. Especially among some young people who are strengthening their religious knowledge about the validity of this celebration. The debate revolves around two things, whether *Mawlid* is a sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, or it is a redundant behavior that is not following Islamic teachings³. The most choice is, of course, the first one; *Mawlid* is a sunnah, and it's proved by the celebrations and commemorations held by the Acehnese in various places throughout Aceh. In contrast, some people who do not agree with the *Mawlid* celebrate it only by holding religious lectures. The main reason put forward by the group that declared *Mawlid* as a heretical practice (*bid'ah*) is because the Prophet Muhammad never did and exemplified it when he was alive and during his companions' time. The accusation of heresy is even greater when the *Mawlid*

¹ Ahmad Suriadi, "Akulturasi Budaya Dalam Tradisi Maulid Nabi Muhammad Di Nusantara," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 17, no. 1 (2019): 167–190, <http://jurnal.uin-antasari.ac.id/index.php/khazanah/article/view/2946/1997>; Kamaruddin Mustamin, Muhammad Gazali Rahman, and Arhanuddin Salim, "Tradisi Maulid Pada Masyarakat Muslim Gorontalo: Pertautan Tradisi Lokal Dan Islam (Maulid Tradition Among Gorontalo Muslim Community: The Link Between Local Tradition and Islam)," *Potret Pemikiran* 25, no. 1 (June 29, 2021): 91, <http://journal.iain-manado.ac.id/index.php/PP/article/view/1492>; Zulfa Jamalie, "Akulturasi Dan Kearifan Lokal Dalam Tradisi Baayun Maulid Pada Masyarakat Banjar," *El-HARAKAH (TERAKREDITASI)* 16, no. 2 (December 30, 2014): 234, <http://ejournal.uin-malang.ac.id/index.php/infopub/article/view/2778>; Zunly Nadia, "Tradisi Maulid Pada Masyarakat Mlangi Yogyakarta," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 12, no. 2 (July 22, 2016): 367, <https://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/ushuluddin/esensia/article/view/122-10>.

² Rusman Rusman and Emi Heningsih, "Makna Tradisi Budaya Nganggung Di Kabupaten Bangka (Studi Pada Desa Kemuja Kecamatan Mendobarat Dalam Peringatan Maulid Nabi Muhammad Saw)," *Studia Komunika: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 2, no. 2 (2019): 43–62, <https://doi.org/10.47995/jik.v2i2.27>; M. Idris and Dinda Rizky Amalia, "Syariat Islam Dan Tradisi Di Aceh Darussalam," *Formosa Journal of Social Sciences (FJSS)* 1, no. 1 (May 2022): 11–24, <https://doi.org/10.55927/fjss.v1i1.457>.

³ Isn'an Anshory, *Pro Kontra Maulid Nabi: Mencari Titik Kesepahaman* (Jakarta: Rumah Fiqih Publishing, 2018).

practice showed something judged more harm than good. For example, in *Mawlid*, the people are required to provide a lot of food, yet, many are not eaten and become redundant, so it is considered an exaggerated practice in carrying out religion. Meanwhile, the people who agreed and supported the *Mawlid* celebration admit that the Prophet never celebrated his birthday for himself. But that does not indicate that the *Mawlid* should not be celebrated and commemorated. Because many things that are developing in the Islamic world today also did not exist when the Prophet Muhammad SAW was still alive. It's the same with performing Hajj using airplanes, printing the Koran, schools, and others, which the Prophet's life never did. They also give the reason that the *Mawlid* is essentially reminiscing about the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW to get the spirit of his struggle in living life and the spirit of carrying out religious teachings⁴.

Regardless of the theological discourse above, almost all regions in Aceh still celebrate the *Mawlid* annually. Even though it takes various forms, the “Khanduri or banquet” has become a hallmark of the Prophet's *Mawlid* celebrations in Aceh. Even so, the main essence is gratitude and love expression for the Prophet Muhammad SAW and, of course, refreshing the memories of Muslims to him and his struggle⁵. Another essential thing desired in the process of the *Mawlid* celebration is that the Muslim community imitates the life of the Prophet and the Islamic teachings he has brought into the lives of Muslim societies⁶.

In this regard, several previous studies on the practice of *Mawlid* in Aceh explained that the celebration of *Mawlid* in principle is similar, that is, the expression of love for the Prophet and manifested in a variety of traditional practices or local culture that has religious dimensions⁷. As an existing tradition, the *Mawlid* celebration for the Acehnese is something that is “required” because it is an expression of love and cultural heritage that can create

⁴Abd Samad Baso, “Studi Argumentasi Pembelaan Terhadap Perayaan Maulid Nabi Sebagai Sunnah Hasanah,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Islamic Resources* 146 18, no. 2 (2021): 146–57; AM Waskito, *Pro Dan Kontra Maulid Nabi* (Jakarta: Al Kautsar, 2014); Firman Arifandi, *Menjawab Hujatan Musiman Untuk Hajatan Musiman* (Jakarta: Rumah Fiqih Publishing, 2019); Thoha Hamim, “Tradisi Maulid Nabi Di Kalangan Masyarakat Pesantren,” *Religio; Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 4, no. September 2014 (2014): 234–60; Anshory, *Pro Kontra Maulid Nabi: Mencari Titik Kesepahaman*.

⁵Fakhrurrazi, “Akulturasi Budaya Aceh Dan Arab Dalam Keunduri Mulod,” *Forum Ilmu Sosial* 39, no. 2 (2012): 131–42; Faiqatul Khosyiah, “Living Hadis Dalam Kegiatan Peringatan Maulid Nabi Di Pesantren Sunan Ampel Jombang,” *Jurnal Living Hadis* 3, no. 1 (2018): 23, <https://doi.org/10.14421/livinghadis.2017.1363>; Nahdiyah and Saiffuddin, “Maulid Nabi, Antara Islam Dan Tradisi,” *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadits* Vol. 4, no. 1 (2021): lm. 149.

⁶Edi Kurniawan Farid, “Substansi Perayaan Maulid Nabi Muhammad SAW (Tinjauan Historis Dan Tradisi Di Indonesia),” *HUMANISTIKA: Jurnal Keislaman* 2, no. 1 (2016): 25–31; Siti Nur Khasanah, “Nilai Pendidikan Islam Dan Makna Ritual Ketan Rosul Pada Tradisi Maulid Nabi,” *Permata: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 3, no. 1 (February 2022): 77, <https://doi.org/10.47453/permata.v3i1.644>.

⁷Muhammad Yunus, “Tradisi Perayaan Kenduri Maulid Nabi Di Aceh Besar,” *Jurnal Adabiya* 22, no. 2 (2020): 32, <https://doi.org/10.22373/adabiya.v22i2.8142>; Dewi Juliyati and Abdul Rahman, “Maudu Lompoa: A Tradition to Welcome The Birth of The Prophet Muhammad Saw,” *International Journal of Social Service and Research* 1, no. 3 (November 2021): 189–97, <https://doi.org/10.46799/ijssr.v1i3.33>.

solidarity and social cohesion in Acehnese society⁸. Unlike the literature mentioned, this study argues that the *Mawlid* celebration in Aceh is not just a tradition or an expression of love for the Prophet. However, the *Mawlid* celebration is a cultural construction inherent to the Acehnese society. Not only a celebration but also a religious expression and political media. The authors argue that the *Mawlid* celebration has become a part of Acehnese identity. Hence, this article aims to narrate the *Mawlid* phenomenon by focusing on how the Acehnese celebrated *Mawlid*, how the religious expression was, and how *Mawlid* became a political medium for Muslims in Aceh.

Methodology

This article was qualitative research based on an ethnographic observation result concerning the celebration and commemoration of the Prophet's Mawlid in Acehnese socio-cultural and political life. This study focuses on Aceh Besar and Banda Aceh communities and some additional examples from other communities in Aceh, such as Pidie and North Aceh districts. The data collection technique in this study was direct observations and in-depth interviews. Direct observations were conducted by participating in several Mawlid celebrations, enjoying Maulid dishes, listening to Mawlid's lectures, and observing what the community does in celebrating and commemorating the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Meanwhile, in-depth interviews were conducted with several people who were involved in the Mawlid celebration and could interpret it not only from a cultural aspect but also from a spiritual and political aspect. The results of ethnographic data collection in this study were analyzed in several stages according to the ethnographic data analysis technique introduced by Spradley (1979).

Results and Discussion

The birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW is a great and glorious event, so most Indonesian Muslims and the world celebrate it with great fanfare. In the Islamic calendar, the month of Mawlid is only one month, but the Acehnese commemorated it for three months. In Indonesia, Aceh is the only one that commemorated Mawlid for three months. It indicates that Mawlid for Acehnese was tremendous and special. Therefore, when the month of Mawlid

⁸ Bustami Abubakar, Ikhwan Ikhwan, and Sugiarto Sugiarto, "Strengthening of Social Cohesion in the Practice of Liké Geleng among the Aneuk Jamè Ethnic Group in Aceh," *JSW (Jurnal Sosiologi Walisongo)* 5, no. 1 (2021): 15–30, <https://doi.org/10.21580/jsw.2021.5.1.5479>; Dara Fatia, R Nunung Nurwati, and Bintarsih Sekarningrum, "Tradisi Maulid: Perkuat Solidaritas Masyarakat Aceh," *SosioGlobal/ : Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Penelitian Sosiologi* 5, no. 1 (2021): 61–72; Syarifuddin and Abdul Manan, "Religious Messages of Dikee Molod Verses during the Celebration of Maulid Nabi in Aceh Besar, Indonesia (A Case Study of Group Dikee Molod of Dayah Tgk Chik Digla)," *KnE Social Sciences* 2020 (November 2020): 601–14, <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v4i14.7918>.

came, Each Gampong (village) in Aceh certainly celebrated it, even though it is on a small scale. The glorious of Mawlid for the Acehnese made them prepare it well in advance⁹. In a sermon at the Lambhuk village mosque in Banda Aceh in 2018, a Tengku, in a speech, loudly said:

“If last year we sacrificed two cows to celebrate Mawlid, then try to sacrifice three cows this year. If this year is three cows, it is four cows next year. This proves our love for our lord Prophet Muhammad SAW. The treasure is meaningless compared to our love for our Prophet”.

The speech above proved that *Mawlid* is special, so the communities are suggested to carry out the *Mawlid* celebration on a large scale according to their abilities. In this regard, the following is a narrative of how the Acehnese celebrated *Mawlid*, how the religious expression was, and how *Mawlid* became a political medium for Muslims in Aceh.

Cultural Construction

Islam and customs in Acehnese society cannot be separated from each other because it was integrated into the view of life, social systems, culture, and Islamic values¹⁰. Many dimensions of *Mawlid* celebrations are a cultural construction associated with religious spirituality, especially the aspect of *Khanduri* or eating together in celebrating *Mawlid*. When the author was a child, I lived with my grandmother. A few weeks after Eid al-Adha, my grandmother prepares several chicks to be specially raised, especially the roosters, because they usually grow more significant and the meat is dense. He feeds more and takes care of it more seriously than other chickens. One day I asked him to slaughter a chicken for frying. Then she said: “Take it in the cage but do not take the red-haired “*manok agam*” (rooster). “*Nyan manok molod* (that’s chicken for *Mawlid*),” she said.

For some Acehnese, *Mawlid* is prepared long before the month of *Mawlid* arrives. Likewise, chicken and several other necessities are prepared long before. The authors once met a middle-aged mother who was peddling a typical pandan hood used to cover *Mawlid*'s

⁹ Fauzi Abubakar, “Interaksi Islam Dengan Budaya Lokal Dalam Tradisi Khanduri Maulod Pada Masyarakat Aceh,” *Akademika/ : Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 21, no. 1 (2016): 19–34.

¹⁰ Abidin Nurdin, “Integrasi Agama dan Budaya: Kajian Tentang Tradisi Maulod Dalam Masyarakat Aceh,” *El-HARAKAH (TERAKREDITASI)* 18, no. 1 (June 10, 2016): 45, <http://ejournal.uin-malang.ac.id/index.php/infopub/article/view/3415>; Sri Astuti, “Agama, Budaya Dan Perubahan Sosial Perspektif Pendidikan Islam Di Aceh,” *Jurnal MUDARRISUNA: Media Kajian Pendidikan Agama Islam* 7, no. 1 (2017): 23; Cut Muthia, Rachmat Effendi, and Nandang HMZ, “Nilai-Nilai Agama Islam Dalam Budaya Dan Adat Masyarakat Aceh,” *Jurnal Riset Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam* 1, no. 1 (2021): 52–60; Muhammad Arifin and Khadijah Binti Mohd Hambali, “Islam Dan Akulturasi Budaya Lokal Di Aceh (Studi Terhadap Ritual Rah Ulei Di Kuburan Dalam Masyarakat Pidie Aceh),” *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 15, no. 2 (February 1, 2016): 251, <http://jurnal.ar-raniry.ac.id/index.php/islamfutura/article/view/545>.

dishes in the village of Sibreh, Aceh Besar. It was not the month of *Mawlid*. When we ask, is it appropriate to peddle the pandan hood long before *Mawlid*? she said the community would buy the hood because they will celebrate *Mawlid* every year and constantly prepare for it. Badruzzaman, who then served as the Aceh Customary Council (Majelis Adat Aceh/MAA) chairman, argued that the *Mawlid* celebration was a stimulus to economic development in the community. A community preparation made long before the *Mawlid* celebration will provoke creativity and enthusiasm to create an economic activity that generates money. *Mawlid* as a big celebration will bring in many people and will cost much money. This way, the *Mawlid* was an economic and work stimulus. However, social change makes the perspective above no longer contextual in the current Acehnese society. One of the reasons is the availability of necessities for *Mawlid* in the market, which can be obtained instantly. People no longer need to prepare for their own needs because they can buy. The assumption that *Mawlid* can be a stimulus for the community's economy is doubted if we look at the current conditions. *Mawlid* is no longer prepared long before its implementation, but whenever he comes, all necessities have available in the market.

Furthermore, the observation result showed that cultural construction closely related to the *Mawlid* celebration in Aceh is dishes or food parties manifested as eating together or a banquet. This unique tradition was inherent to the *Mawlid* celebration as a cultural product that is simultaneously present with *Mawlid* celebration, such as *Bu Kulah*, *Bu Lawok & Kuah Tuhe*, *Kuah Beulangong*, and *Idang Linto*. Those products were an outcome of the cultural construction of the Acehnese in interpreting *Mawlid* and then became a cultural and social identity. *Mawlid* celebrations without these cultural products will be seen as a practice that is not following the identity of the Acehnese people.

Bu Kulah

Bu Kulah is rice wrapped in a banana leaf in the shape of a pyramid and separate from the side dish¹¹. The contents are almost identical to the rice purchased at the restaurant, either wrapped in paper or a box. The banana leaves used as rice wrappers hover over the fire until they wilt and give off the aroma of the heated leaves, then cut into squares to fit the desired size of the rice pack and used to wrap the rice. Nevertheless, it takes a special skill to do that because banana leaves are easy to tear, and wrapping rice in it also needs

¹¹ Imam Hadi Sutrisno et al., "Documentation of Ritual Plants Used among the Aceh Tribe in Peureulak, East Aceh District, Indonesia," *Biodiversitas* 21, no. 11 (2020): 4990–98, <https://doi.org/10.13057/biodiv/d211102>; Salman Ishak, Bambang Satriya, and Praptining Sukowati, "Encouraging and Inhibiting Factors in the Tradition of Commemoration of the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW Community in Pidie District, Aceh Province of Indonesia," *International Journal of Advances in Scientific Research and Engineering (Ijasre)* 6, no. 12 (2020): 76–82, <https://doi.org/10.31695/IJASRE.2020.33944>.

to see the level of softness of the rice. If the rice is too hard, it is a bit difficult to arrange it in the leaves.

In Ie Masen Kaye Adang villages in Banda Aceh, which are generally inhabited by immigrants from various other regions in Aceh, there was a “noise” because of the instructions of the Keuchik (Village Head) which required rice for *Mawlid*’s dish to be *Bu Kulah*. The instruction is considered burdensome because not everyone can make *Bu Kulah*, especially in Ie Masen Kaye Adang, which is an urban community. However, because the instruction had become a joint decision, some families were forced to pay someone else to make the *Bu Kulah*.

Bu Kulah has become one of the important identities in the *Mawlid* celebration. At every *Mawlid* event in Aceh Besar and several other areas in Aceh, the dish that uses a *Bu Kulah*-like rice package will always be there. Many people feel that the aroma produced when opening *Bu Kulah* can increase appetite. Because the smell of warm rice mixed with wilted banana leaves creates its own aroma that makes people love it. With *Bu Kulah*, the *Mawlid* celebration will be closer to “Achenese custom” and more “*meu-Aceh*.” The term *meu-Aceh* has an important cultural meaning because this term refers to the thing that is only practiced by Acehnese. Thus, *Mawlid* without *Bu Kulah* will be interpreted as not part of Acehnese customaries. In addition,

Bu Lawoek and Kuah Tuhe

Besides *Bu Kulah*, *Mawlid* celebrations in Aceh are also characterized by dishes and foods only available at *Mawlid* celebrations, such as *Bu Lawoek* and *Kuah Tuhe*. In Pidie District, *Bu Lawoek* is a popular dish at the *Mawlid* celebration. *Bu Lawoek* is the tradition of eating at a *Meunasah*/mosque where gravy beef (*Kuah Sie Leumo*), fish, chicken, shrimp, and other dishes are added to a plate of rice. The congregation of *Mawlid* sat cross-legged with plates of rice in front of him. Then, the *Mawlid* committee will distribute the side dishes on their rice plates. The mix of various food and side dishes on the plate then is called *Bu Lawoek*. The atmosphere of this distribution was eagerly awaited by the *Mawlid* congregation, especially the children. Because only once a year they get a meal with a big dish like in *Mawlid*.

It is different in Aceh Besar. This area is known for serving *Kuah Tuhe* at every *Mawlid* celebration. People say it is “less blessing” if the *Mawlid* celebration is without *Kuah Tuhe*. *Kuah Tuhe* is coconut milk cooked and mixed with bananas, ripe jackfruit, and sweet potato cut into small pieces and spiked with a little sugar and salt to have a savory taste¹². *Kuah*

¹² Suci Fajarni, Suci Dihanna, and Taslim H. M. Yasin, “Khanduri Apam: The Representation Of Theological Values In Aceh’s Local Culinary Banquet Traditions,” *The 1st Proceedings of the International of Conference on Social and Islamic Studies (SIS) 2021* (September 29, 2022), accessed November 11, 2022, <https://proceedings.uin-alauddin.ac.id/index.php/sis/sis2021/paper/view/565>.

Tuhe is served and eaten with sticky rice cooked separately. Although simple, *Kuah Tuhe* has a delicious taste and aroma and is only prevalent during *Mawlid* celebrations. In *Mawlid* Celebration contexts, *Bu Lawoek* and *Kuah Tuhe* were also cultural products that reflect the custom identity of Aceh.

Kuah Beulangong

All areas in Aceh celebrating the *Mawlid* will slaughter a cow (*Sie Leumo*) to make *Kuah Beulangong* (Gravy). *Kuah Beulangong* is not specifically a feature of the *Mawlid* celebration because this type of food is almost always present at every party or meal in Aceh.¹³ However, in the context of *Mawlid* celebration, the number of cows slaughtered is a measure of the size of a *Mawlid* celebration because it is related to the number of cauldrons used to cook *Kuah Beulangong*. A commonly heard dialogue in this regard is as follows:

“We want to have *Mawlid* next week.”

“Oya? How many cows were slaughtered?”

“Five Cows.”

“Wow... that means 15 villages.”

That dialogue is often heard in the month of *Mawlid* to describe the grander *Mawlid* celebration and the number of villages invited. The more cows slaughtered, the bigger and grander the *Mawlid* celebration.

The cooking of *Kuah Beulangong* in the *Mawlid* event starts early in the morning if many cows are slaughtered. A team was formed by the *Mawlid* committee, specifically tasked with slaughtering until cooking it. In some places, the tool for cooking *Kuah Beulangong* is a stove made of used drums cut in half. In it, wood pulp is inserted and then two continuous holes are made, from the bottom side to the middle and from the bottom to the top, so that it is in the shape of the letter ‘L’. By simply inserting a piece of wood in the bottom hole and burning it, the fire will burn and enough to cook and heat a cauldron of mixed meat with jackfruit.

Before noon, people bring pots to the mosque/*meunasah* to take *Kuah Beulangong*. The pot will be filled by the committee and taken home for consumption alone or with family. Then, the pot is brought back to the mosque or where the cow is cooked at noon or late afternoon. This time the contents will be served with *Mawlid* dishes prepared from home. The *Mawlid* committee carries out distribution with a long spoon (*aweuk*) to take the gravy from the cauldron and then put it into the people’s pots one by one. Each pot that has been

¹³ Dewi Turgarini and Fitri Abdillah, “Introducing Aceh Traditional Culinary As Tourist Attractions,” *Journal of Business on Hospitality and Tourism* 2, no. 1 (January 6, 2017): 287, <https://jbhost.org/jbhost/index.php/jbhost/article/view/65>.

put in is taken by the owner and served to *Mawlid* guests. Although it is not a typical food in *Mawlid* celebrations, but *Kuah Beulangong* is a type of food that must be present because, without *Kuah Beulangong*, the *Mawlid* celebration is not so meaningful.

Idang Linto

In Lambhuk village, Banda Aceh city, a man who had just gotten married to the village had to bring out a special dish called *Idang Linto Baroe* (the groom's dish). The dish was specially given by a man who married into the village in the first year he lived there. Generally, *Linto* dishes appear to be larger than dishes from other members of the community. If people fill food and drinks in ordinary containers with special lids, the *Linto* dish is still added with a circle the size of a tray that is about one cubit high. Thus, the contents of the dish become more and look bigger. Then, the dish is wrapped in a special cloth lace with golden threads and red or yellow velvet. At first glance, the *Linto* dish looks luxurious and big compared to other dishes given by the general public.

We (the author) once asked a groom (*Linto Baroe*) who brought food for a *Mawlid* celebration; why the dishes seemed bigger than the dishes of other members of society. He replied that it was a sign of "introduction" between him as a new person in the village and community members. When fellow *Linto Baroe* dishes are placed in the same place during *Mawlid* celebrations, they will be noticed by other community members. They will be identified and recognized as part of the new members of the community in the village. It is important for their future social life there. Getting to know people is a way to ensure they have a good social position in society.

Religious Expression in Mawlid

Based on observation, some activities in the celebration of the *Mawlid* Prophet Muhammad SAW in Aceh are religious expressions that have a spiritual dimension. However, not everyone is involved in these activities as actors, more as mere followers. Two things stand out from the *Mawlid* celebration in Aceh related to the religious expression: *Like* (Dhikr) *Mawlid* and *Mawlid* lectures.

Like Molod (Dhikr Mawlid)

Like Molod (also known as a *Dike*, derived from the Arabic 'dhikr') is the reciting *Dhikr* and prayer by a group of people during the celebration of *Mawlid*, the *Dhikr* text is taken from the book *Barzanji* by Sheikh Ja'far al-Barzanji bin Husen bin Abdul Karim. If the *Mawlid* celebration is carried out cheerfully, the *dhikr* recitation is usually done before the *Asr* prayer until after praying and starting the *Khanduri*. If the *Khanduri* is done at night, then *Dhikr* is done after the *Isha* prayer. The *Like Molod* is presented as a prayer

recitation in various versions and rhythms. In some places in Aceh, *Like Molod* is done by a group. They could have come from the village where *Mawlid* was held, or it could be from another village that was deliberately invited.

In South Aceh, if the *Mawlid* celebration invites guests from neighboring villages, those who come also do the *Like Molod*. The *Like Molod* is done by each village together in one place but separated by a veil of cloth. The *Like* participants are divided into three; reciter (consisting of young people who can read books), followers (general public), and movement regulators (some middle-aged people). When the reader hums the recitation of *Like Molod*, the participants move with special and very varied movements according to the recitation of the *Like*. After the reading is finished, the congregation repeats the reading by continuing to move. The movement gets faster until it changes to other reading stanzas. This movement can be done while sitting or standing.

In Krueng Kluet Village, South Aceh, *Like Molod* is held at night after the Isha prayer. Men and women come to the mosque with food wrapped in banana leaves or baskets. All the men entered the mosque's main hall and stood in layers in a "U" pattern. On the front side, some people will recite the *Like Molod*. On the sidelines of the line stood several middle-aged people organizing their movements. The congregation holds hands or links their elbows so that their movements are balanced and simultaneous. The *Like Molod* reciting is not only in Arabic, but there are Acehnese stanzas that are always repeated. For example:

“Ka’batullah timang peut sago
in teungoh nanggroe in the center of donya
ureung islam keunan meu saho
the five geujak peu shampoo rukon.”
(Ka’batullah is square
Located right in the center of the world
Muslims are there to be docked
To fulfill the fifth Islamic pillar)

This stanza continues to be repeated while performing certain movements and is accompanied by another stanza in Arabic. During the movement together and loud shouts made by the congregation in reciting *sholawat* to the Prophet, someone often fainted. If someone faints, the community says “*katroeh*” (it’s arrived). It means that a person who faints has reached the peak of appreciation of his closeness and love for the Prophet. He felt so amazed, loved, close, and united with the soul of the Prophet that he arrived at the mortal. But it could be someone fainted because the air is sweltering and jostling in the mosque room, which is sometimes not too big for many worshipers.

Mawlid Lectures

Lectures are an activity that is always present in every *Mawlid* celebration. In several locations in Banda Aceh and Aceh, Besar, the lectures are an integral part of the *Mawlid* celebration. Lectures usually occur at night because the previous day was filled with other *Mawlid* events with invitations. In other places, lectures are held separately from the celebration of *Mawlid*, and the committee only provides snacks and mineral water for attendees.

In villages in Aceh, choosing preachers for *Mawlid* Lectures requires deliberation. Not all Tengku or Ulema can become *Mawlid* preachers even though they understand the essence of *Mawlid* and have extensive knowledge of religion. Peoples prefer that *Mawlid*'s preachers are people who can convey *Mawlid*'s messages in Acehnese, light and not patronizing. And more importantly, the preacher can make small jokes with funny stories tucked between *Mawlid*'s messages. Not many preachers have this capacity. Therefore, the preachers sometimes come from different regions, even outside the district. So several preachers are famous in Aceh because of their ability to lecture while entertaining their listeners. In his daily life, this preacher is not a "big scholar/ulema," but he is special on the *Mawlid* stage.

If the preachers have been appointed and contacted, the committee will announce to the surrounding area to notify the event. In the past, announcements were by bicycle, motorbike, and now by car, but It's the same way. A microphone is set up and placed at the front of the vehicle. Then, there was a driver and a talker who announced the event. Usually, the announcement sounds as bellow:

"Saudara-saudara kaum muslimin sekalian. Kamo brite, enteuk malam di gampong kamo, gampong (disebutkan nama kampungnya) akan geupeuget ceuramah Mawlid Nabi geutanyo, Nabi Muhammad SAW. Ceuramah akan geu bie lhe yang mulia Teungku (disebutkan nama penceramah) dari (disebutkan nama asal penceramah). Jak keuh geutanyo beu rame-rame tahadiri ceuramahnyan. Bek tuwo, si go teuk kamo bri the.... Dan seterusnya."

"All Muslim brothers and sisters. We announce that tonight in our village, the village of ... (name of the village) will be held a *Mawlid* lecture of our Prophet, Prophet Muhammad SAW. The lecture will be delivered by the Honorable Teungku ... (mentioned name of the preacher) from ... (mentioned name of origin of the preacher). Come in groups, we attend the lecture. Don't forget, once again we announce... And so on."

In essence, the announcement is about *Mawlid*'s lecture that would be held in their village and invited the community to attend.

Generally, *Mawlid*'s lectures discuss issues related to the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Some preachers insert jokes and funny stories to make the audience laugh and not sleep. Preachers also often relate it to events in the community and provide direction by quoting the hadith of the Prophet and verses of the Qur'an. Therefore, the celebration of *Mawlid* is an attempt to remember the purpose of the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad

SAW to the world. With the spirit of *Mawlid*, it is hoped that they will get a new spirit to carry out religious teachings.

Political Medium

Generally, the political aspect attached to the Mawlid celebration is actually not something surprising because, in history, Mawlid indeed relates to events that have a political dimension with a different meaning.¹⁴ In the context of Aceh, besides the cultural and spiritual aspects, as explained, the political aspects of Mawlid celebrations are also common. Mawlid becomes a political medium for some political actors to build social networks with political interests through Mawlid celebration events. In the author's observation, several parts of *Mawlid* in Aceh implicitly show this aspect: the *Mawlid's* invitation, *Mawlid* Pemda, and *Mawlid* at home.

Mawlid Invitation

In every *Mawlid* celebration by a village, they will invite several neighboring villages. The size of the *Mawlid* celebration can also be measured by how many villages they invite to the celebration. Usually, a village is invited along with the number expected to come. For example, a village was invited by 20 people, so only that number was "entitled" to come. The *Mawlid* committee is not responsible if a village comes more than the invitation and they don't get enough food. This rarely happens because the Keuchik (Head of Village) has controlled its members who will come. However, some regions invite an unlimited number of neighboring villages. Usually, those who attend *Mawlid's* invitation are adult men, teenagers, and children brought by their parents and siblings.

For each invited village, a special place and special dishes are available. The place is a stretch of the mat with enough food in the middle for all guests. The dish is brought by members of the *Mawlid* host village community. Therefore, each invited village will get a different menu according to what is in the dish. But we can be sure the "standard" is the same because *Mawlid's* dishes are special compared to ordinary dishes cooked daily at home.

What if a village has been invited but doesn't come? Several sub-districts in Aceh Besar have a unique punishment system. The dishes that have been provided for the village will be brought together to the house of the head village who did not come. At the Head village

¹⁴ Abdul Manan, "Diskursus Fatwa Ulama Tentang Perayaan Natal," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman* 40, no. 1 (June 1, 2016), <http://jurnalmiqotojs.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/jurnalmiqot/article/view/213>; Olga Bush, "Integrating Aesthetic and Politics: The Mawlid Celebration in the Alhambra," *Reframing the Alhambra* (May 1, 2018), accessed November 11, 2022, <https://academic.oup.com/edinburgh-scholarship-online/book/33424/chapter/287576399>; Philippe Bourmaud, "The Political and Religious Dynamics of the Mawlid Al-Nabawi in Mandatory Palestine," *Archiv Orientalni* (January 1, 2009), accessed November 11, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/5098768/The_Political_and_Religious_Dynamics_of_the_Mawlid_al_nabawi_in_Mandatory_Palestine.

house, the dish will be put in a plastic bag and asked to be distributed among its residents. Henceforth, the village will not be invited again for *Mawlid* celebrations in the following years. However, several people the author has asked about this matter admit that they have never encountered such a case. It is almost certain that all invited villages always fulfill the invitation. It is a form of solidarity between villages that cannot be ignored. If a village does not attend *Mawlid's* invitation, it becomes a big disgrace for the head village and its citizens.

Mawlid Pemda (Mawlid by the local government)

Since the 90s, local governments at both the district and provincial levels have also held *Mawlid* celebrations on behalf of the government. The Aceh provincial government held a *Mawlid* celebration in Banda Aceh, which focused on the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque. The celebration of *Mawlid* involves institutions or local companies collaborating with the government. In addition, every district in Aceh sent its *Mawlid* team to Banda Aceh. They came with a whole group, consisting of a cook and the *Like Molod* group. Both those who come from the regions or institutions in Banda Aceh provide food dishes that are included in an animation of a particular building, usually adapted to the institution's identity. For example, the Marine Service Office made an animation of a fishing boat decorated with various ornaments and flowers and then filled the food (rice and side dishes), fruits, drinks, and so on. Likewise, the Educational Office made an animated school building and put food in it for the *Mawlid* celebration. Even in a big celebration, the animation is directly attached to a car because there are times, before *Mawlid* celebrations, the institution conducts a parade around the city of Banda Aceh together (with a route that has been prepared).

In *Mawlid Pemda*, the invitees are the general public and are not limited in number. Everyone who could attend could be there to participate in the celebration. Suppose the celebration is in Banda Aceh, not only the residents of the city of Banda Aceh who follow it, but also people from Aceh Besar who come there by renting a truck or pick-up car. For the order, the event's locations are usually provided according to their respective regions. That's where the guests carry out the dhikr of *Mawlid* before eating the dishes that have been provided. This event indirectly has a political dimension because involving the government and political actors in its management.

Mawlid at Home

Since the 2000s, Aceh's urban communities have tended to hold *Mawlid* in their own homes by inviting friends and co-workers. There are no dhikr or *Mawlid* lectures in *Mawlid's* activities at home. Guests come only to eat, make small talk with the host (if they have time because often the host is very busy serving guests), then go home or return to their workplace. In this context, what is called *Mawlid* is just eating. The host provides food

with the main menu of beef gravy plus various other menus. Usually, the host also provides desserts such as *Tapai* and fruits.

Mawlid at home is different from other *Mawlid* events where the invitees come without bringing anything. *Mawlid* at home “obliges” the guests to carry something for the host, and it has become a tradition. Usually, guests get sugar, bread, cake, or other food. The invitees are not used to carrying money like in weddings or circumcisions. The goods were handed over directly to the host, who was usually waiting in front of his house in neat clothes. Next, the invitation goes straight to the dining table to take the food served buffet model.

Conclusion

The essence of all *Mawlid* celebrations in Aceh is how the Acehnese commemorate and express their love for the Prophet Muhammad SAW. However, *Mawlid* celebrations, in reality, have become inherent to Acehnese culture, not just a tradition but also a cultural construction, religious expression, and political media in the name of love and obedience to the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Cultural products accompanying the *Mawlid* celebration have shown a cultural construction, such as *Bu Kulah*, *Bu Lawok & Kuah Tuhe*, *Kuah Beulangong*, and *Idang Linto* dishes. *Mawlid* as religious expression was reflected in Dhikr and *Mawlid*'s Lectures, and as a political medium can be seen from *Mawlid*'s invitation, *Mawlid Pemda*, and *Mawlid* at home. This study concludes that the *Mawlid* celebration in Aceh is not just a “tradition” but also a part of Acehnese identity in the name of love for the prophet. Cultural products accompanying the *Mawlid* celebration were inseparable phenomena from the Acehnese religious expressions in the *Mawlid* commemoration. These are thick with customary nuances and become one of the Acehnese's social, religious, and political identities.

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