



Maulid and the Making of Public Religious Subjects: Ritual Pedagogy, Kyai Authority, and Social Reproduction in Madurese Islam

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Abstract

This study examines the celebration of Maulid, the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, as a cultural-pedagogical practice that shapes public religious subjects in Madurese Islam. Moving beyond interpretations of Maulid as merely commemorative or symbolic, it investigates how ritual participation transmits Islamic values, reproduces kyai authority, and sustains communal identity across generations. The study employed a qualitative, multi-sited ethnographic design in Camplong District, Sampang, Madura. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews with kyai, community elders, adults, adolescents, and younger attendees, as well as documentary analysis of ritual materials. Data were analyzed thematically using NVivo 15 through open coding, thematic clustering, and code co-occurrence analysis. The findings indicate that Maulid functions as lived religion, informal religious education, situated learning, and cultural pedagogy. Participants learn religious norms through observation, imitation, repetition, bodily discipline, Barzanji and shalawat recitation, food sharing, and communal labor rather than through formal instruction. Kyai authority is reproduced relationally through ritual leadership, spatial centrality, and communal recognition. Maulid also cultivates emotional attachment to the Prophet, social solidarity, respect for authority, and religious habitus. The study concludes that Maulid is a significant mechanism of Islamic social reproduction in Madurese society. It contributes to scholarship on lived religion, religious education, and ritual studies by showing how communal ritual shapes religious identity through embodied, affective, and intergenerational practice.

Keywords: *Maulid; Madurese Islam; Lived Religion; Ritual Pedagogy; Kyai Authority; Social Reproduction.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji perayaan Maulid Nabi Muhammad sebagai praktik pedagogis-kultural yang membentuk subjek keagamaan publik dalam Islam Madura. Melampaui pemahaman Maulid sebagai peringatan atau simbol semata, penelitian ini menelaah bagaimana partisipasi ritual mentransmisikan nilai-nilai Islam, mereproduksi otoritas kyai, dan mempertahankan identitas komunal antargenerasi. Penelitian menggunakan desain etnografi multisitus kualitatif di Kecamatan Camplong, Kabupaten Sampang, Madura. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipan, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan kyai, tokoh masyarakat, orang dewasa, remaja, dan peserta muda, serta analisis dokumen ritual. Data



dianalisis secara tematik menggunakan NVivo 15 melalui pengodean terbuka, pengelompokan tema, dan analisis ko-okurensi kode. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Maulid berfungsi sebagai agama yang dihayati, pendidikan keagamaan informal, pembelajaran tersituasi, dan pedagogi kultural. Norma keagamaan dipelajari melalui observasi, imitasi, pengulangan, disiplin tubuh, pembacaan Barzanji dan shalawat, berbagi makanan, serta kerja komunal, bukan terutama melalui instruksi formal. Otoritas kyai direproduksi secara relasional melalui kepemimpinan ritual, posisi sentral, dan pengakuan masyarakat. Maulid juga menumbuhkan keterikatan emosional kepada Nabi, solidaritas sosial, penghormatan terhadap otoritas, dan habitus keagamaan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Maulid merupakan mekanisme penting reproduksi sosial Islam di masyarakat Madura serta memperkaya kajian agama yang dihayati, pendidikan keagamaan, dan ritual dengan menunjukkan pembentukan identitas melalui praktik tubuh, afeksi, dan partisipasi lintas generasi.

Kata Kunci: Maulid; Islam Madura; Lived Religion; Pedagogi Ritual; Otoritas Kyai; Reproduksi Sosial.

INTRODUCTION

Religious rituals remain central to the formation of Muslim social life, not only as expressions of belief but also as practices through which communities produce meaning, transmit values, and sustain authority across generations. Among these rituals, Maulid the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday brings together devotional recitation, collective memory, public gathering, food sharing, and moral instruction. In Indonesia, where Islam is embedded in diverse local cultures, Maulid has become an important arena in which Islamic piety, local identity, and communal belonging are continually negotiated (As'ad, 2021; Djamaluddin et al., 2024; Katz, 2007).

In Madurese Islam, Maulid extends beyond ceremonial commemoration. It is practiced across households, mosques, pesantren, and village spaces, involving kyai, families, elders, youth, and wider community networks. Its significance lies not only in remembering the Prophet but also in shaping how Madurese Muslims learn to participate publicly in religious life. This perspective is consistent with scholarship on lived religion, which understands religion as enacted through bodies, spaces, objects, emotions, and relationships rather than only through formal doctrine or institutional authority (Alrubaishi et al., 2021; Ammerman, 2020; McGuire, 2008).

Existing scholarship has examined Maulid as a devotional, historical, and theological practice. Katz (2007) explains how Mawlid traditions express Sunni devotional piety, while studies of Indonesian Muslim communities discuss Maulid and Barzanji recitation in relation to local Islamic cultures and communal identity (As'ad, 2021; Djamaluddin et al., 2024; Fuadi et al., 2024). Other studies address theological contestation, including critiques of Maulid as bid'ah and its defense as an expression of love for the Prophet (Sharif, 2017). These approaches are valuable, but they tend to give less attention to the everyday social processes



through which ritual participation forms religious dispositions, learning practices, and public religious subjects.

This gap matters because religious learning does not occur exclusively through formal instruction, doctrinal teaching, or institutional education. Children and young people may learn by watching elders, following recitation, sitting in particular spaces, assisting with preparations, and gradually internalizing appropriate conduct. Such processes are consistent with situated learning, in which competence develops through participation in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and with research on informal and incidental learning through experience and social interaction (Marsick & Fassler, 2015; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Maulid can therefore be examined as a cultural-pedagogical practice through which religious values are learned and performed in public communal life.

Several theoretical perspectives help explain these processes. Giroux's concept of public pedagogy shows how cultural practices teach values, identities, and social responsibilities beyond formal schooling (Giroux, 2004). Practice theory draws attention to the routinized configurations of bodies, objects, knowledge, emotions, and social relations through which social life is reproduced (Reckwitz, 2002). Bourdieu's concept of habitus explains how repeated participation can form durable dispositions toward piety, authority, and communal responsibility (Bourdieu, 2020), while Mahmood (2011) highlights the role of embodied discipline in the formation of religious subjects. Studies of kyai authority further show how Islamic leadership is sustained through recognition, trust, and social presence (Dhofier, 1999; Turmudi, 2006). These perspectives are especially relevant in Madura, where language, authority, and hierarchy are important dimensions of religious and social life (Fikriyati et al., 2021).

Despite these contributions, Maulid has rarely been examined as a multi-site system of informal religious education and social reproduction in Madurese Islam. In particular, more attention is needed to how ritual participation shapes public religious subjects: people who learn how to recite, listen, sit, serve, respect authority, express love for the Prophet, and participate in communal Islamic life. This study addresses that gap by examining Maulid in communities across Camplong, Sampang, through a qualitative multi-sited ethnographic approach. It shifts the analytical focus from what Maulid symbolizes to what it does: how it teaches, forms dispositions, reproduces authority, and sustains communal identity through participation, repetition, affect, and relational authority (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Marcus, 1995).

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative, multi-sited ethnographic design to examine Maulid as a lived religious, social, and pedagogical practice. Fieldwork was conducted in Camplong District, Sampang Regency, Madura, with Prajjan as the primary site and additional observations in Dharma Camplong, Tambaan,



Banjar Talela, Banjar Tabulu, Madupat, Rabasan, Anggersek, Plampaan, Pamolaan, Batukarang, Sejati, Dharma Tanjung, and Taddan. Observations followed Maulid activities across households, mosques, pesantren, courtyards, and village spaces from Safar to Rabi al-Thani. Approximately 45 participants were recruited through purposive sampling, including 26 kyai and religious figures, community elders, adults, adolescents, and younger attendees. The design was intended to capture how the practice circulates across connected locations and social networks, consistent with ethnographic and multi-sited approaches (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Hine, 2007; Marcus, 1995). Purposive sampling was used to identify information-rich participants, with recruitment continuing until recurring patterns were evident (Coyne, 1997; Palinkas et al., 2015; Guest et al., 2006).

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and documentary analysis. Field notes recorded ritual sequences, spatial arrangements, kyai presence, recitation patterns, age- and gender-related participation, food preparation, and interactions before, during, and after events. Interviews explored participants' interpretations of Maulid, memories of participation, understandings of kyai authority, and perceptions of intergenerational value transmission; Barzanji texts, shalawat books, permitted field photographs, and local records provided additional context. Observation and interview procedures followed established qualitative approaches (Kawulich, 2005; Mulhall, 2003; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Jamshed, 2014). Data were analyzed thematically in NVivo 15 through open coding, clustering related codes into nine themes, and examining code co-occurrence. The process followed thematic-analysis procedures for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). NVivo supported organization, retrieval, and comparison of coded material but did not replace interpretive judgment (Deterding & Waters, 2021; Hutchison et al., 2010; Welsh, 2002).

Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation of interview, observation, and documentary data; reflexive memo writing; prolonged field engagement; and systematic coding. Because the researcher was culturally familiar with Madurese society, reflexive notes were used to examine assumptions and document interpretive decisions. Ethical procedures included informing participants about the study's purpose and voluntary nature, respecting their right to withdraw, protecting confidentiality through pseudonyms or generic identifiers, and avoiding intrusive recording during sensitive ritual moments. The study's reporting also considered qualitative transparency and ethical sensitivity (Finlay, 2002; Tracy, 2010; Tong et al., 2007; O'Brien et al., 2014).



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis identified nine interrelated dimensions of Maulid: lived religion, informal religious education, situated learning, cultural transmission, kyai authority, embodied and affective practice, social solidarity, religious habitus, and cultural pedagogy. The code co-occurrence matrix shows the strongest overlaps between participation and informal learning (19), ritual practice and participation (18), informal learning and cultural transmission (18), and religious values and emotional attachment (18). These patterns indicate that ritual participation is closely connected to learning, value transmission, and affective attachment. Table 1 presents the code co-occurrence matrix, while Table 2 summarizes the thematic structure and representative codes.

Table 1. *Code Co-occurrence Matrix*

N o.	Code / Theme	Ritu al Prac tice	Particip ation	Infor mal Lear ning	Kyai Auth ority	Family Socializ ation	Got ong Roy ong	Cultural Transmi ssion	Religi ous Value s	Emotio nal Attach ment
1	Ritual Practice	–	18	14	15	10	13	16	17	12
2	Participation	18	–	19	11	13	17	15	14	13
3	Informal Learning	14	19	–	9	16	10	18	13	11
4	Kyai Authority	15	11	9	–	8	7	13	14	10
5	Family Socialization	10	13	16	8	–	9	17	12	11
6	Gotong Royong / Social Solidarity	13	17	10	7	9	–	12	11	14
7	Cultural Transmission	16	15	18	13	17	12	–	15	13
8	Religious Values	17	14	13	14	12	11	15	–	18
9	Emotional Attachment	12	13	11	10	11	14	13	18	–

The matrix shows the frequency of co-occurrence among major codes identified in the qualitative dataset; higher values indicate greater thematic overlap. The strongest relationships are between Participation and Informal Learning (19), Ritual Practice and Participation (18), Informal Learning and Cultural Transmission (18), and Religious Values and Emotional Attachment (18). These relationships support the interpretation of Maulid as a participatory



learning space in which religious values and communal continuity are reproduced through repeated practice.

Table 2. *Thematic Structure of Analysis and Theoretical Interpretation*

No.	Theme	Sub-dimension	Representative Codes	Number of Codes
	Maulid as Lived Religion	Religion as everyday communal practice	Lived religion; devotional practice; everyday Islam; collective piety; religious experience	5
	Maulid as Informal Religious Education	Learning outside formal institutions	Informal learning; incidental learning; learning by doing; participation-based learning; non-formal religious education	5
	Situated Learning in Ritual Context	Gradual movement from observation to participation	Legitimate peripheral participation; observation; imitation; gradual incorporation; community of practice	5
	Cultural Transmission of Islamic Values	Transmission of norms across generations	Intergenerational learning; inherited tradition; family socialization; elder guidance; continuity of values	5
	Kyai and Relational Authority	Religious authority as socially recognized practice	Kyai leadership; following kyai; religious legitimacy; symbolic authority; community recognition	5
	Embodied and Affective Practice	Learning through body, sound, rhythm, and emotion	Embodied learning; shalawat rhythm; bodily discipline; emotional attachment; love for the Prophet	5
	Social Solidarity and Communal Cohesion	Ritual as a medium of social bonding	Gotong royong; togetherness; food sharing; collective labor; social cohesion	5
	Habitus and Religious Disposition	Repetition as formation of religious character	Religious habitus; repeated practice; internalized norms; habitual piety; respect for authority	5
	Cultural Pedagogy and Social Reproduction	Maulid as a system of learning and continuity	Cultural pedagogy; social reproduction; religious reproduction; communal identity; learning through culture	5
	Total			45

Table 2 maps the empirical codes generated in NVivo 15 to the study's analytical themes. The structure connects lived religion, informal and situated learning, cultural transmission, relational authority, embodied and affective practice, social solidarity, religious habitus, and cultural pedagogy. Taken together, the themes show that Maulid operates as a learning environment outside formal classrooms and as a setting in which communal identity and religious dispositions are sustained across generations.

Maulid as Lived Religion

Participants described Maulid as an ordinary but deeply meaningful part of communal religious life rather than only as a formal ritual obligation. One interviewee stated, "Maulid is a form of love for the Prophet." Another explained, "If we do not attend, it feels like something is missing." These accounts indicate that Maulid is experienced through devotional feeling, family memory, social expectation, and collective participation. During gatherings, people arrived after



Maghrib and filled mosques, courtyards, and pesantren halls. Some recited the Barzanji text, while others listened attentively or followed familiar phrases. Religion was therefore enacted through bodily presence, sound, movement, and shared space.

These findings are consistent with the lived-religion perspective, which locates religious meaning in everyday practices and relationships rather than exclusively in doctrine or formal institutions (Alrubaishi et al., 2021; McGuire, 2008). They also resonate with Ammerman's (2020) practice-oriented approach. The Madurese case adds that lived religion can be collective, repetitive, and socially organized: households, mosques, pesantren, kyai, food sharing, and recitation work together to sustain a recognizable communal practice.

Maulid as Informal Religious Education

The observations and interviews indicate that Maulid functions as informal religious education even though the ritual has no formal curriculum, classroom, or explicit lesson plan. One participant stated, "No one tells us to learn, but by following, we come to understand—when to read, when to be quiet." Children were observed holding Barzanji texts without fully following the recitation; some imitated phrases and rhythms, while adolescents helped arrange seating and distribute food. These activities show that religious norms and practical responsibilities are acquired through participation rather than through direct explanation alone.

The finding supports research on informal and incidental learning, which emphasizes the role of experience, observation, and social interaction in learning beyond formal educational settings (Marsick & Fassler, 2015; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). It also broadens the scope of Islamic religious education by identifying communal ritual as a site where participants learn respect, attentiveness, hospitality, and responsibility. Maulid does not replace formal Islamic education; rather, it complements it by connecting religious values with repeated social practice.

Situated Learning in the Ritual Context

Children and young participants often begin at the margins of the ritual setting and gradually acquire competence through observation, imitation, and repeated involvement. An observation excerpt describes children sitting near older participants, watching how they held the text, when they recited, and when they remained silent. Older participants sometimes corrected posture or timing through subtle gestures rather than formal instruction. This pattern illustrates how the ritual makes room for different levels of competence and participation.

The process resembles legitimate peripheral participation, through which newcomers become more competent members of a community of practice over time (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In Maulid, participants learn not only the technical sequence of recitation but also religious comportment, timing, silence, voice, and social positioning. Situated learning therefore contributes to the formation of



public religious subjects: participants gradually learn how to take part in a shared religious world and how to make their participation recognizable to others.

Intergenerational Transmission of Islamic Values

Maulid also transmits Islamic values across generations through family habituation and ritual memory. Participants described the practice as “a habit from the past,” emphasizing how repetition turns inherited tradition into part of everyday life. One participant recalled, “Since I was small, my parents always took me; over time, it becomes part of life.” Another explained, “This has been here since long ago from our elders, then to us, now to the community.” These statements show that continuity is maintained through repeated attendance and the presence of children alongside parents and elders. Barzanji texts and printed shalawat books also help maintain continuity by guiding the sequence and form of recitation across village settings.

These findings support the view that repeated social practices form durable dispositions (Bourdieu, 1993, 2020). Yet what is transmitted is not only a cultural memory or a set of ritual procedures. It also includes love for the Prophet, respect for kyai, communal responsibility, and a sense of belonging to the Madurese Muslim community. The transmission of values is therefore simultaneously social, embodied, and affective.

Kyai Authority, Ritual Space, and Social Hierarchy

Kyai occupy central positions in Maulid gatherings. They lead recitations, shape the ritual rhythm, and serve as moral reference points. One informant explained, “What people do usually follows the kyai.” Observations showed kyai and senior male participants occupying front and central areas, while younger participants sat behind or at the margins. When a kyai arrived, participants adjusted their attention and bodily posture. Authority was thus enacted through spatial arrangement, bodily orientation, ritual leadership, and communal recognition.

This finding extends scholarship on kyai authority in Indonesian Islam (Dhofier, 1999; Turmudi, 2006) by showing that authority is not only institutional or doctrinal; it is relational, spatial, mobile, and performative. Communities renew kyai authority by inviting, hosting, following, and recognizing religious leaders across multiple events. At the same time, this organization is not socially neutral. Visible ritual authority is often associated with kyai and senior men, while women’s contributions may be concentrated in household preparation, hospitality, and supporting labor. The pattern is consistent with attention to hierarchy in Madurese religious culture (Fikriyati et al., 2021) and cautions against interpreting ritual authority as socially undifferentiated.

Embodied and Affective Practice

Maulid teaches through body, sound, rhythm, and emotion. Repeated recitation of shalawat and Barzanji creates a shared devotional atmosphere. An observation excerpt describes a continuous sonic environment marked by



repetition and cadence: some participants recited fully, others followed intermittently, and others listened with bodily attentiveness. Participants may not understand every textual meaning in the same way, but they participate through voice, posture, silence, and collective presence. The ritual consequently offers different forms and degrees of involvement rather than requiring uniform participation.

This finding supports Mahmood's (2011) argument that piety is cultivated through embodied practice and is consistent with practice theory's attention to bodies, objects, knowledge, emotion, and motivation (Reckwitz, 2002). At the same time, the variation in participation cautions against portraying religious practice as wholly uniform or deliberately disciplinary. As discussed in relation to Schielke's critique, Islamic practice should not be portrayed as overly coherent, uniform, or purely disciplinary. Maulid produces religious dispositions through varied levels of participation: some participants recite fully, some listen, some imitate, and some help with logistics. This unevenness is not a weakness of the ritual; it is part of how the ritual accommodates different participants.

Social Solidarity and Communal Cohesion

Maulid is sustained by gotong royong, collective preparation, food sharing, and mutual assistance. One participant stated, "During Maulid, there is togetherness everyone contributes." A kyai added, "Everyone helps, so even a big event feels light." Observations recorded collective cooking, cleaning, arranging spaces, distributing food, and welcoming guests. These tasks were performed cooperatively and formed an integral part of the ritual rather than a separate logistical activity.

The findings resonate with Turner's (1977) account of ritual as a source of *communitas* and shared experience. However, they also complicate a purely harmonious interpretation of ritual cohesion. Solidarity exists alongside age, gender, and authority hierarchies: kyai and senior men occupy visible ritual centers, while other participants contribute through supporting roles. Maulid therefore reproduces both social connection and differentiated social positions. Its pedagogical force lies partly in teaching that religious participation includes serving, hosting, giving, receiving, and working together.

Habitus and Religious Disposition

Repeated participation forms practical religious knowledge: knowing when to sit, when to recite, how to listen, how to respect kyai, and how to behave in a sacred communal space. These dispositions are rarely taught explicitly, yet they become familiar through repetition. The interview phrase "from following, we come to understand" captures this gradual internalization. Participants learn what is expected by participating and observing others, until particular forms of conduct feel natural and appropriate.

This pattern supports Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as durable dispositions formed through repeated practice (Bourdieu, 1993, 2020). The findings also



suggest that habitus is not reproduced mechanically. It is sustained by memory, devotion, emotional attachment, and a sense of social belonging. The feeling that “something is missing” when one does not attend shows that religious habitus is animated by affect as well as by social structure and repetition.

Cultural Pedagogy and Social Reproduction

Taken together, the themes show that Maulid teaches through culture. Ritual practice, family involvement, kyai authority, food sharing, recitation, and communal labor form a pedagogical system without a formal curriculum. This interpretation is consistent with Giroux’s (2004) concept of cultural pedagogy, in which cultural practices become sites for learning, identity formation, and value transmission. Maulid shapes public religious subjects by teaching participants how to speak, listen, sit, serve, show reverence, and belong within communal Islamic life.

The findings suggest a cyclical process: existing social relationships and religious authority organize participation; participation enables observation and informal learning; repeated practice supports the internalization of values and dispositions; and those dispositions help reproduce communal identity and ritual authority across generations. This does not mean that Maulid simply preserves an unchanged tradition. The ritual continues through active participation, varied levels of engagement, and the repeated recognition of authority. It is therefore both a devotional practice and a mechanism of social and religious reproduction.

Theoretical Contributions, Practical Implications, and Limitations

The study contributes to Islamic studies, the anthropology of religion, religious education, and Madurese cultural studies by reconceptualizing Maulid as a cultural-pedagogical mechanism through which public religious subjects are formed. Its main contribution is to connect lived religion, informal learning, situated learning, relational authority, embodied affect, habitus, and social reproduction within one ethnographic account. The findings extend approaches that treat Maulid primarily as a historical, theological, or symbolic practice by showing how participation produces religious dispositions, communal belonging, respect for kyai authority, and intergenerational transmission of Islamic values.

For Islamic education, the findings suggest that educators, pesantren leaders, and community institutions can recognize ritual traditions as meaningful sites of value formation. Maulid may support character education, love for the Prophet, social responsibility, respect for elders, and communal solidarity when community members and young participants are actively included. For cultural and religious policy, local rituals should be understood not merely as heritage performances but also as systems of social learning and community cohesion. The practices of gotong royong, food sharing, and collective preparation may inform grassroots approaches to social trust, religious moderation, and cultural resilience.

The study has several limitations. The sample of approximately 45 participants was drawn from selected villages in Camplong, Sampang, and cannot



represent all Madurese Muslim communities. Findings may differ in other Madurese regions or urban settings. The interpretation is also shaped by participants' narratives and the researcher's cultural familiarity with the field. In addition, the observed public ritual space was strongly male-centered; women's roles in domestic preparation, hospitality, and possible female devotional spaces warrant further investigation. Finally, NVivo supported coding and comparison but did not replace interpretive analysis, so the numerical co-occurrence patterns should be treated as analytical aids rather than objective measurements of meaning.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Maulid in Madurese Muslim communities functions as more than a commemorative celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Through recitation, bodily conduct, intergenerational participation, kyai leadership, food sharing, and communal labor, it operates as lived religion, informal religious education, situated learning, and cultural pedagogy. Participants acquire religious norms and dispositions through observation, imitation, repetition, and affective involvement, while kyai authority and communal identity are renewed through ritual recognition and participation.

The central contribution is to demonstrate that ritual pedagogy forms public religious subjects while reproducing both solidarity and social hierarchy. Maulid sustains love for the Prophet, social responsibility, and communal belonging, but participation is differentiated by age, gender, and authority. Understanding these dynamics broadens the study of Islamic education beyond formal institutions and highlights the role of everyday cultural practice in transmitting religious values across generations.

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