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ACCULTURATION OF HADRAH WITH TRADITIONAL MALAY PERCUSSION IN ARBAIN'S MAULID ACTIVITIES IN MEDAN

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Abstract

This research is entitled "Acculturation of Hadrah with Traditional Malay Percussion in Maulid Arbain Activities in Medan City". The main purpose of this study is to identify the form of Hadrah performance in Maulid Arbain activities, analyze the Hadrah playing technique that is acculturated with traditional Malay music, and examine the acculturation process as a whole. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation, and is analyzed based on acculturation theory. The object of the research was focused on the performance of Hadrah in the Maulid Arbain activity at the Darul Ibtihaj Islamic Boarding School, Medan City. The results of the study show that there is an acculturation process between Hadrah and traditional Malay percussion music, as seen in the similarity of musical instruments such as tambourine and marwas to Malay drums. Acculturation is also reflected in interlocking-based game techniques that combine Hadrah rhythmic patterns with the peculiarities of Malay rhythms. In addition, the involvement of participants from various backgrounds, such as entrepreneurs, students, and Malay percussion music practitioners who study Hadrah, shows that this acculturation process also forms a dynamic and inclusive space for cultural interaction in the community. This research found that Hadrah performance art during the Maulid Arbain celebrations in Medan City has undergone a significant acculturation process with traditional Malay music. This process is evident not only in the use of instruments such as the tambourine, bass hadrah, and marwas, but also in the playing techniques, which feature rampak and interlocking rhythmic patterns synonymous with Malay percussion music. Furthermore, the involvement of participants from diverse backgrounds, including the general public, demonstrates that Hadrah has become a platform for inclusive cultural expression. This acculturation enriches the aesthetic and spiritual values of Hadrah performances, without diminishing the Islamic religious identity that underpins the performances. The acculturation of Hadrah with Malay music occurs not only musically but also socially—uniting Islamic boarding schools and the community within a single, dynamic cultural space. The polyrhythms created by the interlocking techniques serve as a musical symbol of the meeting of two major traditions that complement and enrich each other. This research provides several suggestions that can serve as a foundation for various parties to support the continuity and development of Hadrah art, which has undergone a process of acculturation with local culture, particularly in Medan City. This recommendation is aimed at further researchers, artists, educational and cultural institutions, and local governments that have a strategic role in preserving cultural and religious values.

Keywords: hadrah, acculturation, Malay music, interlocking, Maulid Arbain, Medan

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural acculturation is an inevitable phenomenon in a multicultural society like Indonesia. This process involves the mixing or fusion of two or more different cultures, which occurs as a result of interactions between people. In Indonesia, with its diversity of ethnicities, religions, and cultures, acculturation is an integral part of the social and cultural dynamics of society.

One interesting form of acculturation to study is in the performing arts. Performing arts, including music, dance, and theatre, are often effective media for acculturation due to their expressive and adaptable nature. Through performing arts, elements from various cultures can be combined, creating new artistic forms that reflect intercultural encounters and dialogue.

Hadrah music, as a traditional Islamic performing art, is an interesting example of the acculturation process between Islamic and local Indonesian cultures. Hadrah, originally derived from Arabic traditions, has undergone a process of adaptation and transformation as it comes into contact with various local cultures in Indonesia. The result is a unique form of Hadrah music that reflects a blend of Arab and Indonesian cultural elements, both in the instruments used, playing techniques, and performance context.

According to Shihab (2001), in Hadrah performances, percussion is a key element, creating a spiritual atmosphere and religious fervour, accompanied by distinctive rhythms and beats. Hadrah combines musical elements with singing in the form of verses that express love and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad. This performing art is usually performed at Islamic religious events such as the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday, the Isra' Mi'raj (the journey of the Prophet), religious study groups (Masyarakat Taklim), and other religious celebrations.

In Medan, Hadrah has grown and developed within the community through the Maulid Arbain (40 nights). Researchers have observed the acculturation process with traditional Malay music. This is evident in the use of musical instruments that bear similarities to traditional Malay instruments.

Traditional Malay instruments have a high-register rhythmic beat, providing more complex ornamentation and rhythmic nuances. This

principle is also evident in Hadrah performances in Medan, where instruments such as the Hadrah tambourine, Hadrah bass, and marwas play roles similar to those of traditional Malay instruments.

Monson (2003) asserts that register division in percussion music allows for the creation of rich polyrhythms, where the different rhythmic patterns of each register interlock and create compelling rhythmic complexity. This phenomenon is also found in Hadrah performances in Medan, where acculturation occurs not only in terms of musical instruments but also in playing techniques and rhythmic patterns.

This researcher will analyse the process of acculturation between Hadrah instruments and performances and traditional Malay music in Medan. Understanding this acculturation process is expected to provide new insights into the dynamics of Islamic musical culture in Indonesia, particularly in Medan, and its contribution to the richness of the Indonesian performing arts.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with an ethnographic method. Creswell (2013:90) defines qualitative research as an approach to exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to social or humanitarian issues.

The ethnographic method was chosen because, as explained by Spradley (2016:3), ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The primary goal of this activity is to understand a worldview from the perspective of the indigenous population.

Data sources are the entities or objects from which data are obtained. This data can be information, figures, facts, or evidence used to support, evaluate, or inform decisions in research, analysis, or studies. Data sources can take various forms and formats and can be obtained from various locations or entities.

Qualitative data is in-depth and detailed and therefore also lengthy. Primary data in this study were collected directly from primary sources using several qualitative data collection techniques, namely: 1) interviews, 2) observation, and 3) documentation.

Secondary data is data collected by researchers from existing sources. According to Mulyadi (2016), in this case, the researcher can

be described as second-hand. Secondary data sources in this study include documentation of Hadrah performances and various related literature that can support the research.

Creswell's phenomenological approach aims to understand participants' subjective experiences of a particular phenomenon. In this study, data analysis techniques focused on exploring the experiences of musicians, the community, and audiences regarding the acculturation of Hadrah with traditional Malay percussion during Maulid Arbain celebrations in Medan, with an emphasis on aspects of transformation and adaptation.

According to Creswell (2013:76–83), a phenomenological approach is used to identify the essence of the lived experiences of individuals directly involved with the phenomenon under study. The data analysis process in this approach involves identifying significant statements, grouping them into themes, and compiling textual and structural descriptions of participants' experiences. Thus, this data analysis process helps provide in-depth insights into the acculturation of Hadrah with traditional Malay percussion during Maulid Arbain celebrations in Medan, with an emphasis on aspects of transformation and adaptation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The History and Development of Hadrah in Indonesia

Hadrah is a form of Islamic art inextricably linked to the long history of the spread of Islam throughout the Indonesian archipelago. This tradition emerged alongside the gradual flow of Islamisation, driven by trade routes and the preaching of scholars from the Middle East who visited important ports in Southeast Asia. Over time, hadrah became not only a means of spiritual entertainment but also an integral part of the cultural identity of the Muslim community in Indonesia.

As explained by Azra (2002:33), the presence of hadrah in Indonesia is closely linked to the preaching process carried out by merchants and scholars from the Arab world. They not only brought Islamic teachings verbally but also introduced them through cultural approaches, one of which was through performing arts that combined music, poetry, and spirituality. Hadrah also became an effective preaching tool because it reached the hearts of the people through poems praising the Prophet

Muhammad (peace be upon him) and accompanied by rhythmic and touching percussion music.

As hadrah became known and accepted by local communities, it underwent acculturation, or a blending of pre-existing cultural elements. This process occurred naturally, allowing hadrah to develop into various forms unique to each region. For example, in Java, hadrah music often synergises with the sounds of gamelan, which have complex and layered musical structures. Meanwhile, in Sumatra, particularly along the east coast, hadrah was strongly influenced by more expressive and dynamic traditional Malay music.

Entering the 20th century, hadrah increasingly found its place in the religious and social life of Indonesian society, particularly within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). *Kyai* (Islamic scholars) and students (*santri*) used hadrah as a means to strengthen Islamic values and build solidarity among members of the *pesantren* community. Furthermore, hadrah also became a kind of "aesthetic madrasah" (school of aesthetics) that taught students to appreciate beauty in expressions of faith.

A major change in the development of hadrah occurred during the Reformation era. According to Rasmussen (2010:235), during this period, hadrah underwent a significant transformation. Originally performed only at religious events such as the Prophet's Birthday, the *Isra' Mi'raj*, or the commemoration of the saints, hadrah began to appear in wider public spaces such as arts and cultural stages and religious festivals and even entered the recording industry. Despite changes in form and performance medium, hadrah's spiritual essence remains intact: conveying religious messages and love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Today, hadrah is no longer considered a marginal art form. In many regions, it has grown into a rich and valuable part of cultural expression. The diversity of hadrah styles and forms across Indonesia enriches the national cultural heritage. Each region develops its own distinctive hadrah variant, reflecting local values harmonised with the spirit of Islam.

2. Overview of Maulid Arbain Activities in Medan

Maulid Arbain in Medan is more than just a series of religious activities; it is a spiritual breath that animates the local Muslim community for forty consecutive nights. This tradition is not new but has long been rooted in community life, taking place every night after the Isha prayer. What distinguishes Maulid Arbain from other commemorations of the Prophet's Birthday is its continuity—forty nights filled with prayers, remembrance of Allah (dhikr), salawat (prayer), and profound religious reflection.

Uniquely, this activity is not centred on one location but rotates from one mosque to another and even from one home to another. In each rotation, this activity symbolises spiritual mutual cooperation, demonstrating the community's unity in welcoming and honouring the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Each night, the host provides a venue, food, and a spirit of togetherness, demonstrating that love for the Prophet is expressed not only verbally but also through service and concrete involvement.

This ritual creates a sacred space amidst the hustle and bustle of city life. People from various backgrounds gathered: from ordinary citizens to Islamic students (santri), religious leaders, and even local officials. In this togetherness, the recitation of salawat (praise and thanksgiving) took centre stage. It served not only as spiritual entertainment but also as a means of developing religious character and strengthening the community's Islamic identity. The story of the Prophet's birth was recited with deep devotion, interspersed with sermons that touched on the spiritual and social aspects of the community.

In the quiet yet energetic atmosphere, Hadrah music played, adding to the solemnity and energy of the event. Hadrah was not merely a complement; it was an integral part of the Maulid Arbaeen celebration. The strains of tambourines, darbuka, and the thumping bass of the Hadrah created a strong religious atmosphere, melding with the hearts of the congregation as they chanted salawat.

One particularly moving moment was the reading of a maulid book, such as *Ad-Dhiyaul Lami* by Al-Habib Umar Bin Muhammad Bin Hafidh. This book contains a collection of poems praising the Prophet Muhammad (peace be

upon him). Every night of the Maulid Arbain celebration is filled with a profound spiritual atmosphere, but the most soul-touching and emotional part of the congregation is the "Mahallul Qiyam" segment. At this moment, the entire congregation stands solemnly, chanting salawat as a form of love and respect for the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The atmosphere becomes even more lively and vibrant as the rhythm of the Hadrah music accompanies it with a fast and dynamic tempo. The enthusiasm of the participants is soaring, accompanied by the echoes of salawat that blend harmoniously with the pounding of percussion. The emotional vibrations are felt so strongly, creating a profound spiritual experience for every individual in attendance. (Setiawan, 2022) This activity serves as a means to instil leadership values based on Islamic teachings, which teach the importance of mutual respect and love for one another.

3. The Function of Percussion Music in Hadrah Performances

In Hadrah performances, percussion music plays a far more important role than simply background accompaniment or an additional element in the recitation of poetry. In fact, percussion instruments such as the tambourine, marwas, tam, and basso Hadrah are the backbone of the atmosphere created in each performance. The rhythms they produce not only support the tempo of the salawat (praise) but also serve as the primary driver of the spiritual and emotional atmosphere that emerges during the procession.

This view aligns with that of A.J. Racy (2003:45), who stated that percussion instruments in Islamic traditions, such as the Hadrah, not only serve a musical function but also create a profound spiritual atmosphere. The rhythmic beats not only enliven the atmosphere but also serve as a bridge between the feelings, meanings, and appreciation of the values contained in the poetry of praise to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). They unite the performers and the congregation in a collective space filled with a spirit of togetherness and love for the Prophet.

As a concrete example, the repetitive playing of the tambourine with its simple yet powerful rhythmic patterns can stimulate emotional resonance within the listener. When combined with the rapid and varied playing of

the marwas, the musical dimension becomes even richer, creating a lively, flowing, and spiritually touching performance dynamic. Music in Hadrah is not just to be heard but to be felt—a form of dhikr in movement and sound.

The presence of percussion in Hadrah also reinforces the sense of togetherness. Each performer acts as part of a larger body: a collective harmony that moves in unison, not only in rhythmic regularity, but also in intention and devotion. This collective energy is the distinctive strength of Hadrah performances—a form of musical worship that engages body, mind, and soul simultaneously.

Thus, it can be said that percussion in Hadrah is the soul of the entire performance. It not only enhances beauty but also deepens meaning. It not only enlivens but also soothes and strengthens the spirit. Thus, in every beat, there is a vibrating love; in every chime, a whispered meaning; and in every performance, there is a longed-for hope for the Prophet's intercession. (Rahwan, 2022) Therefore, percussion music in Hadrah is not merely an aesthetic element but a medium that unites souls and evokes spiritual feelings in every performance.

4. Form and Structure of Hadrah Performances

In an in-depth interview with Ustadz Rahmad Al-Aziz, Ustad, Hadrah's trainer, who is also known as an active player in the city of Medan (Figure 4.3), I gained many insights that illustrate how important Hadrah's role is in implementing Mawlid Arbain. He not only explained from a technical perspective but also invited me to understand the depth of the spiritual and cultural meaning contained therein. According to him, Hadrah is not just a musical performance that beautifies the atmosphere but is a means of preaching that is alive, full of spirit, and a link between the hearts of the people and the Prophet Muhammad.

In every Mawlid Arbain celebration, Hadrah is present almost throughout the event. He accompanies the reading of salawat, chanting praises to the Prophet, and also the study or reading of Maulid books such as *Ad-Dhiyaul Lami*, the masterpiece of Al-Habib Umar bin Muhammad bin Hafidh. This book is full of poetic verses that describe the glory, majesty and love of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. During the recitation of the holy book, the

Hadrah serves not only as accompanying music. It seems to weave the atmosphere, connecting the sacred text with the emotional vibrations of the attendees. The Hadrah is able to enliven the atmosphere without losing its serene feel. It stirs the soul but does not disrupt the reverence; instead, it strengthens the love and longing for the Prophet Muhammad.

The culmination of the activity, the Mahallul Qiyam ritual, is the most sacred moment, incomplete without the presence of the Hadrah. In this session, all participants stand enthusiastically, chanting salawat while holding a deep sense of emotion and love. It is at this moment that the Hadrah instruments play a crucial role in creating a powerful collective rhythm. The rebana, darbuka, tam, keprak, and even the Hadrah bass—all come together harmoniously, creating a spiritual vibration that penetrates the hearts of everyone present. The sound of the percussion is not only heard but felt—mingling with the spirit and sincere intentions of the sholawat chanters.

Each instrument in the Hadrah ensemble has its own unique musical responsibilities. The Hadrah tambourine, for example, serves as the rhythmic foundation, maintaining a stable and consistent tempo. The darbuka provides sharp and distinctive rhythmic accents, enriching the dynamics of the performance. The Hadrah bass, with its deep and powerful beat, emphasises the rhythmic pattern and serves as a kind of anchor within the overall musical structure. The tam and keprak, though sometimes viewed as complementary, actually play an essential role in adding sound colour that enriches the Hadrah musical layers. Their presence makes Hadrah performances feel full, not monotonous, and can stir the spirit and soul of the audience.

Hadrah music is not simply a combination of several percussion instruments but a complex form of performance. Each instrument does not play in isolation but rather integrates with each other in a structured yet dynamic structure. Interaction between players is crucial, as harmony cannot be achieved without mutual understanding and listening. This is what makes Hadrah not only an artistic performance but also a symbol of togetherness, collective work, and a deep spiritual spirit. Through Ustadz Rahmad Al-Aziz's narration, I increasingly understood that the Hadrah during Maulid Arbain is not merely an aesthetic expression or a tradition passed down through

generations. It is a manifestation of the people's love for the Prophet Muhammad, a haven for prayers and hopes, and a medium that unites the voices of the heart, body, and soul in one rhythm: the rhythm of love for the Prophet.

5. Acculturation of Hadrah Music with Traditional Malay Percussion

The Maulid Arbain tradition held in Medan is not merely a religious ceremony but also a vibrant cultural space where various cultural expressions rooted in the history and customs of the community converge. Within this space, one of the most prominent features is the interaction between two musical forces from different yet complementary backgrounds: Hadrah music, originating from Middle Eastern Islamic traditions, and traditional Malay percussion music that grew and developed within local Sumatran communities.

These two musical styles not only enrich the community's spiritual experience but also create a cultural dialogue that strengthens local identity amidst the tide of modernisation. Through the collaboration between Hadrah music and Malay percussion, the Maulid Arbain tradition serves as a platform for preserving cultural values that can endure the changing times. (Iswanto, 2019)

The meeting of these two traditions does not occur within a rigid framework or is imposed by any particular institution, but rather grows organically through musical practices passed down, learnt, and performed collectively by the community across generations. This occurs in a very unique setting: when the community gathers, chanting praises to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and creating a warm and solemn spiritual atmosphere. This is where the acculturation between Hadrah and Malay percussion takes concrete form.

This phenomenon is evident in various aspects. First, from a technical perspective, the Hadrah's rhythmic patterns and striking style are beginning to be enriched with techniques commonly found in Malay percussion ensembles, such as rampak patterns and the rhythmic sweep of the *zapin*. Second, there are similarities in instrumentation: several instruments, such as the tambourine, *marwas*, and *tam*, are not only found in the Hadrah tradition but also share similar forms and functions in traditional Malay music. Third, and

no less important, is the background of the performers. They come not only from Islamic boarding schools but also from the general public, students, artists, and private sector workers, all of whom feel a spiritual and cultural connection to this performance.

Thus, Maulid Arbain serves not only as a place to commemorate the Prophet Muhammad but also as a socio-musical space reflecting local cultural dynamics. This acculturation demonstrates how music can act as a bridge connecting religious values with regional cultural expressions, creating a harmony that not only sounds beautiful but also feels deeply spiritual and cultural.

6. Community Response and Role in Hadrah Performances

Community involvement in Hadrah performances during the Maulid Arbain celebrations in Medan is not merely passive participation but rather a tangible manifestation of the emotional and cultural attachment that has developed within the community. Hadrah is now seen not only as an art form developed within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) but also as an integral part of the community's collective cultural identity. The participation of a wide range of people from various social backgrounds—from religious leaders and youth to housewives and percussion artists—brings a distinctive colour to the implementation of this tradition.

In-depth interviews with K.H. Muhammad Ridwan and several Hadrah performers from various communities revealed that a collaborative spirit and openness are key to the development of Hadrah beyond the walls of Islamic boarding schools. They stated that community participation is not only valued but also a crucial element in broadening the meaning of Hadrah. What was once considered exclusively for students (*santri*) and *ustadz* (Islamic teachers) is now open and inclusive, welcoming contributions from anyone who shares a love for Islamic traditions and local cultural values.

This phenomenon reflects the expansion of Hadrah's meaning. It is no longer merely a rigid religious practice or limited to mere ritual functions but has transformed into a vibrant and dynamic platform for cultural communication. Performers from outside Islamic boarding schools feel familiar when playing Hadrah

instruments, as the rhythms and playing patterns bear a strong resemblance to the Malay music they have known since childhood. These familiar strains form a musical bridge between Hadrah and traditional Malay music, indirectly strengthening the spiritual connection between the performers and their cultural roots.

Furthermore, the spiritual experience of Hadrah performances deepens because it is grounded in a sense of togetherness. The performers not only play the instruments but also channel their love for the Prophet Muhammad through the pounding of percussion and the chanting of salawat (prayer). This is not just an artistic performance but a form of worship fused with local cultural identity. In this spirit, Hadrah becomes a shared space, where Islamic values and Malay culture intersect and strengthen each other.

Hadrah's openness to various groups also demonstrates the warm and embracing face of Islam's inclusiveness. During Maulid Arbain, Hadrah serves not only as a means of preaching or religious commemoration but also as a joyful space for social interaction and cultural exchange. This is where the people of Medan demonstrate that diversity is not a barrier but rather a richness that enriches their artistic and spiritual expression.

Thus, in the context of Maulid Arbain, Hadrah is not simply a traditional heritage to be preserved but also a living stage that continues to evolve through active community participation. It serves as a bridge between religious values and cultural expression, as well as an open space that encourages dialogue between generations, backgrounds, and traditions. In its diversity, Hadrah has grown into a symbol of harmony between Islam and local culture, upholding the values of unity, respect, and love for the Prophet.

CONCLUSION

This research found that Hadrah performance art during the Maulid Arbain celebrations in Medan City has undergone a significant acculturation process with traditional Malay music. This process is evident not only in the use of instruments such as the tambourine, bass hadrah, and marwas, but also in the playing techniques, which feature rampak and interlocking rhythmic patterns synonymous with Malay percussion music.

Furthermore, the involvement of participants from diverse backgrounds, including the general public, demonstrates that Hadrah has become a platform for inclusive cultural expression. This acculturation enriches the aesthetic and spiritual values of Hadrah performances, without diminishing the Islamic religious identity that underpins the performances.

The acculturation of Hadrah with Malay music occurs not only musically but also socially—uniting Islamic boarding schools and the community within a single, dynamic cultural space. The polyrhythms created by the interlocking techniques serve as a musical symbol of the meeting of two major traditions that complement and enrich each other.

This research provides several suggestions that can serve as a foundation for various parties to support the continuity and development of Hadrah art, which has undergone a process of acculturation with local culture, particularly in Medan City. These recommendations are aimed at future researchers, artists, educational and cultural institutions, and local governments, which play a strategic role in preserving cultural and religious values.

For future researchers, it is important to broaden the analytical approach beyond historical and sociocultural perspectives to include technical and musical perspectives. In-depth research using detailed musical score analysis can be a valuable contribution in demonstrating how cultural acculturation in Hadrah art manifests itself at the level of musical structure. This approach will make it easier to uncover the process of blending traditional Hadrah musical elements with the distinctive characteristics of Malay or other local music, such as rhythm, melody, or instrumental percussion patterns.

Meanwhile, for Hadrah artists and performers who are at the forefront of preserving this art form, it is important to remember that Hadrah's success in surviving and developing depends on its ability to absorb local elements without losing its original spirit. Therefore, maintaining a balance between cultural innovation and adherence to Islamic values is a noble challenge. Hadrah performers are expected to not only maintain an aesthetically appealing performance style but also to maintain the spiritual intent behind

every salawat chant and tambourine beat. Hadrah is truly a form of worship and love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) expressed through art, and this spirit must not fade amidst the changing times.

For educational and cultural institutions, it is time to give Hadrah its proper place in the curriculum and extracurricular activities. Systematic documentation and the provision of training in Hadrah arts that have undergone acculturation can be a concrete form of preservation. This way, the younger generation will not only recognise Hadrah as a historical heritage but also as a living part of a cultural identity that is relevant to contemporary life. Such activities also open up space for intergenerational and intercultural dialogue within the educational environment.

Finally, it is fitting for local governments to fully support activities such as the Maulid Arbain celebrations that involve Hadrah in its acculturated form. This support could take the form of facilitating event organising, funding assistance, and official recognition of Hadrah as a regional cultural heritage. This kind of support not only strengthens the existence of local Islamic-based culture but also enhances Medan's image as a region capable of maintaining harmony between religion, art, and tradition.

With close collaboration from various parties, Hadrah art will not only survive but also thrive as a symbol of inclusive, spiritual, and cultural power that remains relevant in the dynamics of modern society.

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