

# SALAFI'S CRITICISM ON THE CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTHDAY OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

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**Abstract:** This article explains the standing of the Salafis on the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*mawlid*). It will also capture some opinions of the proponents of the *mawlid* against the understanding of the Salafis. The Salafis' criticism of the *mawlid* has been mainly built on their theological perspective due to three reasons. The *first* is the requirement of authenticity, as they argue that the *mawlid* has no argument (*dalil*) both in the Qur'an and ḥadīth. The *second* is the prohibition of innovation (*bid'ah*) due to the status of the *mawlid* as an act of innovation. The *third* is the reprehensibility of veneration and idolatry of the Prophet Muhammad. The proponents of the *mawlid*, on the other side, clearly reject these arguments. They admit that the *mawlid* is inauthentic. However, they argue that it falls under the category of good innovation (*bid'ah ḥasanah*). Therefore, it is allowed to be practiced. In addition, the Salafis also condemned some practices within the *mawlid*, such as serving food, the act of standing up (*qiyām*), the recitation of *mawlid* books, and the use of musical instruments. For the proponents, however, these practices are allowed as they do not violate any Islamic teachings (*shari'ah*) and they also represent a sincere expression of joy and happiness for the birth of the messenger of Allah and the noblest person, i.e., the Prophet Muhammad.

**Keywords:** Celebration of *mawlid*; criticism; Salafism.

## Introduction

The Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*mawlid*) is widely celebrated by Indonesian Muslims. It is regarded as a national holiday and is commemorated each year on the 12<sup>th</sup> of the Islamic month of *Rabi' al-Annwal*. On that day, there are many forms of celebrations: from an official program at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta to a cultural

program in a village. The governmental program often contains a speech by an official and a sermon by a well-known preacher (*kiai*) while the cultural event is more varied; it can range from a recitation from the book of *mawlid*, to inviting a group to perform a song of praise for the Prophet (*salawāt*).

These celebrations, however, have become controversial and have been contested by several Islamic groups. The opponents of this practice have been spreading their criticism widely through both offline and online media.<sup>1</sup> One of their central criticisms is that the *mawlid* celebration has never been practiced by the Prophet and his companions. According to them, it is important to exactly imitate the religious practice of the first three generations of Muslims.<sup>2</sup>

In this article, I discuss these criticisms. I will answer the following questions: What are the arguments of the proponents and the opponents of the *mawlid*? Why do the critics reject the *mawlid* celebration?

This article will mostly discuss the criticism of the *mawlid* from the Salafis. Salafism refers to the belief in the literal understanding of Islam as “strict adherence to the concept of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God) and ardent rejection of a role for human reason, logic, and desire”.<sup>3</sup> In their legal sources and methodologies, the Salafis refer to the Qur’ān, the Prophet’s sayings and deeds (*ḥadīth*) and the consent of the first three generations of Muslims (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*).<sup>4</sup>

In the Indonesian context, Salafi’s influence is growing rapidly. Its movement in Indonesia can be traced back to 1967 when the *Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia* (DDII, Indonesian Council for Islamic Propagation) was established by Mohammad Natsir, a former Indonesian Prime Minister, who was also one of the leading figures of

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<sup>1</sup> Hammad Abu Mu’awiyah, “Studi Kritis Perayaan Maulid Nabi” (Gowa: Al-Maktabah Al-Atsariyah, 2007); Salafy, “Hukum Memperingati Maulid Nabi,” 2007, <http://salafy.or.id/blog/2007/03/29/hukum-memperingati-maulid-nabi/> [Accessed 10 January 2017].; Yazid bin Abdul Qadir Jawas, “Peringatan Maulid Nabi Menurut Syari’at Islam,” 2009, <https://almanhaj.or.id/2586-peringatan-maulid-nabi-menurut-syariat-islam.html> [Accessed 10 January 2017].

<sup>2</sup> Buchari, *Mustasyar MWC NU Menggugat Maulid Nabi* (Surabaya: Laa Tasyuk! Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29 (2006), 207.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 8.

*Rābiṭat al-‘Ālam al-Islāmī*, a Saudi funded organization which aims to spread Salafi-Wahabi ideas across the Muslim World.<sup>5</sup> With the connection of his founder, DDII was able to link the funding for Saudi Arabia to local mosques for renovation (including university mosques), distributing new copies of al-Qur’ān and Islamic books, as well as training the Islamic preachers. DDII has not explicitly declared itself as a Salafi educational institution; however, it has an important role in facilitating the spread of the idea of Salafism in Indonesia. According to Hasan (2008, pp. 96–97), these activities had an impact, especially at universities at which students were more aware of Islamic teachings and their obligation to practice religious rituals.

Besides, through DDII, Salafi ideas are nurtured and spread through *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Bahasa Arab* (LIPIA, Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies) in Jakarta. This educational institution is established thanks to the Saudi funding in 1980. As indicated by its name, LIPIA focuses on the study of the Arabic language and Islam. In its early years, it only focused on the training of DDII preachers who studied Arabic before going to Saudi Arabia. In the following years, LIPIA opened the undergraduate program in Islamic law with more chances for talented students from Islamic boarding schools (*Pondok Pesantren*) and Islamic schools (*madrasah*) throughout Indonesia to study in Jakarta. Via this program, LIPIA provided scholarships, living allowance as well as books for the students. The best graduates from this Bachelor program were offered to continue their studies in universities in Saudi Arabia.

It was these graduates who subsequently played essential roles in the dissemination of Salafi teaching in Indonesia.<sup>6</sup> Upon returning from Saudi Arabia, these graduates created a public network by establishing new *pesantren*, social, and educational foundation (*Yayasan*) and *madrasah* at which the Salafi curriculum was adopted. Some of these graduates were Abu Nida, Ahmas Faiz Asifuddin, and Aunur Rafiq Ghufron.<sup>7</sup> Regarding the educational institution, one of the

<sup>5</sup> Audrey Kahin, *Islam, Nationalism, and Democracy: A Political Biography of Mohammad Natsir* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Jajang Jahroni, “The Political Economy of Knowledge: Shari’ah and Saudi Scholarship in Indonesia”, *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2013), 168.

<sup>7</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2006), 44.

earliest *pesantren* that came out of this program was Ihya al-Sunnah which was founded in 1994 near Yogyakarta.<sup>8</sup> During the New Order regime, this *pesantren* remained under the radar and made an effort to eschew the suspicion of the New Order regime. After the collapse of the Soeharto regime, with the help of Saudi funding, the Salafis were quite successful in expanding and establishing many *pesantrens* in other regions. There is no exact number on these *pesantrens*. The ICG report in 2004 mentioned that there are 52 Salafi *pesantrens* in Indonesia, but it seems that the number is now exceeding the report's estimation.<sup>9</sup> Din Wahid, who is writing a dissertation about Indonesian Salafi *pesantren* at Utrecht University, also argues that the number of Salafi *Pesantren* Indonesia is unknown, but by far exceeds the figure presented by ICG report.<sup>10</sup>

In the following sections, I will first identify three theological arguments that are put forward by Salafis on their criticism of the *manlid*. They are the requirement of authenticity, the prohibition of innovation (*bid'ah*), and reprehensibility of veneration and idolatry. Second, I will explain four practices within the *manlid* that are criticized by the opponents with the help of these three theological arguments. The practices are serving food, the act of standing up (*qiyām*), the recitation of *manlid* books and the use of musical instruments.

## Theological Arguments

### Requirement of Authenticity

The first theological argument of the Salafis that is used for their opposition to the *manlid* celebration is related to the issue of the requirement of authenticity. The Salafis rely upon the Qur'ān and ḥadīth in order to judge whether a religious tradition is an authentic practice or not. This means that a tradition must have a textual basis (*dalil*) before it can be considered authentic. A *dalil* means a proof that

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<sup>8</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Salafi Madrasas of Indonesia," in Yoginder and Martin van Bruinessen Noor, Farish A; Sikand (eds.), *The Madrasa in Asia: Political Activism and Transnational Linkages* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 254; Noorhaidi Hasan, "Salafi Madrasahs and Islamic Radicalism in Post-New Order Indonesia," in Patrick Jory and Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad (eds.), *Islamic Studies and Islamic Education in Contemporary Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur, 2011), 98.

<sup>9</sup> ICG, "Indonesia Background: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don't Mix," *Asia Report*, Vol. 83, No. 13 (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Din Wahid, "Nurturing the Salafi Manhaj: A Study of Salafi Pesantrens in Contemporary Indonesia" (PhD Thesis--Utrecht University, 2014), 2.

is inferred from what is written either in the al-Qur'ān and the ḥadīth.<sup>11</sup>

According to Olivier Roy, “[Salafis] are prone to imitate the Prophet on all matters, including the most mundane ones, thus all actions, attitudes, and behavior should be referred to the religious norm”.<sup>12</sup> How this condition applies, and through what mechanism, is well explained by Adis Duderija in his work about the concept of authentic *Sunnah*:

“The concept of *Sunnah* in terms of its authenticity is defined as comprising numerous narratives documenting Prophet Muhammad’s deeds (*fiʿl*), utterances (*qawl*) and spoken approval (*taqrīr*) as embodied in various Ḥadīth compendia considered as ‘authentic’ or canonical according to the standards and criteria applied by the classical sciences of Ḥadīth criticism (*ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*)”.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the correctness of any small deed or ritual related to Islam must be confirmed whether the Prophet had performed such ritual or not through a process of authentication based on the evidence in one of the two foundational texts of Islam: the Qur’ān and ḥadīth. Based on this logic, it is almost impossible to allow a religious tradition ḥadīth to be practiced if it is not mentioned either in the Qur’ān or ḥadīth, because conclusively the Prophet had not performed or allowed that ritual to be performed. For the Salafis, this is the best and the easiest way to validate whether a ritual is authentic or not.

Consequently, this claim creates a basis for the Salafis to accuse other Islamic groups of having a lack of understanding of Islam, that they are hypocrites, inaccurate, heretical/innovation (*bid’ah*), and worst of all, unbelieving (*kufr*). In terms of the *mawlid*, this claim of authenticity is often used as the basis (*dalīl*) for opposing its celebration and practice. The objection to the *mawlid* is related to the presumed lack of authenticity of the story of the Prophet’s birth that

<sup>11</sup> S. van den Bergh, *Dalil*, 2012, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/dalil-SIM\\_1676?s.num=65&s.start=60](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/dalil-SIM_1676?s.num=65&s.start=60) [Accessed 22 January 2017].

<sup>12</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 244.

<sup>13</sup> Adis Duderija, “Evolution in the Canonical Sunni Ḥadīth Body of Literature and the Concept of an Authentic Ḥadīth During the Formative Period of Islamic Thought as Based on Recent Western Scholarship,” *Arab Law Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (2009), 391.

is recited during the celebration. Most of the *mawlid*'s opponents argue that the story is purely fabricated and has no authentic *dalil* in the Qur'ān or ḥadīth. An example can be seen in the comment of Ibn Taymīyah (1263-1328) on the first circulated *mawlid* book in Sunnī history. It was written by an Egyptian scholar Muḥammad b. Salāmah al-Quḍāī (d. 1062) who lived during the Fatimid caliphate. In that book is written that “the Prophet was a star (*kaṭkab*), or that the whole world was created from him, or that he existed before his parents were created, or that he knew the Qur'ān by heart before Gabriel brought it to him”. Ibn Taymīyah argued that this statement has no basis in the ḥadīth. He thought that the statement was created and spread by al-Quḍāī.<sup>14</sup>

### **Prohibition of Innovation (*Bid'ah*)**

The second theological argument, which was viewed as the opposite of authenticity, is innovation (*bid'ah*). This term is used for every practice or worship that is not authenticated either in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, or by the companions of the Prophet. The practice of innovation, according to the Salafis, is a grave sin and worse than other major sins.<sup>15</sup> Olivier Roy has demonstrated that Salafis are preoccupied with the term innovation (*bid'ah*) even if it is applied to something insignificant.<sup>16</sup>

The reason why Salafis use this term so often is that in their opinions, the Prophet had declared that every innovation in religion is bad, and whoever conducts *bid'a* is considered to be practicing a sin, which in the end will result in punishment in hellfire.<sup>17</sup> This statement is based on the following ḥadīth:

“In his khutbah, the Messenger of Allah used to praise Allah as He deserves to be praised, then he would say: Whomsoever Allah (SWT) guides, none can lead him astray, and whomsoever Allah sends astray, none can guide. The truest of word is the Book of

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<sup>14</sup> Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad; Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 8.

<sup>15</sup> Salafi Publication, “Notes on the Evils of Innovation,” 2010, <http://www.salafipublications.com/sps/sp.cfm?subsecID=BDH02&articleID=BDH020001&pfriend> [Accessed 02 February 2017].

<sup>16</sup> Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 244.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, “Is Every Innovation (*Bid'ah*) Worse and More Serious than Every Major Sin?,” *Islam Question and Answer*, 2016, <https://islamqa.info/en/237360> [Accessed 10 February 2017].

Allah and the best of guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. The worst of things are those that are newly invented; every newly-invented thing is an innovation and every innovation is going astray, and every going astray is in the Fire”<sup>18</sup>

This ḥadīth contains five basic statements. The first is that the Qur’ān and ḥadīth are the only reliable sources. It implies that any religious practice must conform to these two sources. The second refers to the point that creating new practices is reprehensible when not found in either source. This leads to the third statement that creating new practices denotes innovation. The fourth account states that innovation leads to erroneous practices. The final powerful statement says that whoever performs erroneous practices, will be punished in hellfire.

For the Salafis, those five statements are important basic principles. They believe that Muslims must stand with the Qur’ān, follow the *Sunnab* of the Prophet and must oppose innovation. Anyone—who does not follow the Qur’ān and *Sunnab*—is designated as ‘people of innovation’ (*ahl al-bid‘ah*).<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, this stance is used by the Salafis to condemn the *mawlid*. This can be seen, for example, in the opinion of a famous Salafi Saudi scholar ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Bāz (1910-1999). He criticized the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday for several reasons: *first*, the Prophet and his companions never celebrated anyone’s birthday, let alone gathering people and creating a festival out of it. This means that the *mawlid* is not only an innovation but also pointless because the Prophet never celebrated any birthday. *Second*, Muslims already have two big annual celebrations, that is, the festival of breaking the fast (*‘id al-fīṭr*) and the festival of sacrifice (*‘id al-aḍḥā*). Creating a new celebration with no basis in the Qur’ān and ḥadīth is *bid‘ah*. *Third*, one should not show love for the Prophet by celebrating his birthday, but rather by following his words and deeds and, for instance, by submitting oneself to the Qur’ān and by acting in accordance with the *Sunnab*. In his statement, Ibn Bāz also added that the *mawlid* was firstly created by the Shī‘ī caliphate in Egypt to honor the birthday of Shī‘ī figures such as Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and Fāṭimah. For him,

<sup>18</sup> Nasiruddin al-Khattab, *English Translation of Sunan al-Nasā’i*, Vol. 2 (Riyadh: Maktabah Darussalam, 2007), 438.

<sup>19</sup> Ehud Rosen, *Modern Conceptualisations of Bid‘a: Wabbābīs, Salafīs, and the Muslim Brotherhood* (London: University of London, 2015), 196.

celebrating *mawlid* is not only regarded as an innovation, but it also implies practicing polytheism (*shirk*) by idolizing those figures.<sup>20</sup>

However, the opinion of Salafis regarding innovation is not accepted by other Muslim groups, especially by followers of the Shāfi'i school of Islamic law (*madhhab*). They mention that innovation is not necessarily bad. They base their arguments on the opinion of the founder of the Shāfi'i *madhhab*, Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'i (767-820), who classified innovations into good innovation (*bid'ah maḥmūdah*) and bad innovation (*bid'ah ḍalālah*):

“There are two types of novelties (*muḥdathāt*). The *first* type is the novelty which contradicts the Qur'ān, the Sunnah of the Prophet, the example of his Companions and Successors (*athār*), or the consensus (*ijmā'*); this is an innovation which is an error (*fa-bādhīh al-bid'ah al-ḍalālah*). The second type is something new introduced which is not evil in itself and does not contradict the above-mentioned authorities: this is an unobjectionable novelty (*fa-hiya muḥdathah ghayr madhmūmah*)”<sup>21</sup>

In this statement, al-Shāfi'i declared that not all innovations are blameworthy, but should be assessed in relation to their compatibility with Islamic law. Therefore, according to al-Shāfi'i, some innovations are good if they are in line with the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Al-Shāfi'i's opinion is based on the following ḥadīth:

“Narrated Ibn Shihāb: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd al-Qārī said, ‘I went out in the company of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb one night in Ramaḍān to the mosque and found the people praying in different groups. A man praying alone or a man praying with a little group behind him. So, ‘Umar said, ‘In my opinion, I would better collect these (people) under the leadership of one *Qārī* (Reciter) (i.e., let them pray in congregation!)’. So, he made up his mind to congregate them behind Ubay b. Ka'b. Then on another night, I went again to his company and the people were praying behind their reciter. On that, ‘Umar remarked, ‘What an excellent *bid'ah* (i.e., innovation in religion) this is; but the prayer which they do not perform, but sleep at its time is better than the one they are offering.’ He meant the prayer in the last part of the night. (In those days) people used to pray in the early part of the night”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>21</sup> Maribel Fierro, “The Treatises against Innovations,” *Der Islam*, Vol. 69 (1992), 205.

<sup>22</sup> Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Translation of the Meanings of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 3 (Riyadh: Maktabah Dār al-Salām, 1997), 135.



According to al-Shāfi'ī, this ḥadīth provides reliable evidence that the Prophet's companion, Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, agreed to perform a religious practice that was not performed by the Prophet. The night prayer (*ṣalāt tarāwīḥ*) in the month of *Ramaḍān* was practiced by the Prophet alone, but Umar suggested that they pray together by calling it an 'excellent innovation (*bid'ah*)'. From here, al-Shāfi'ī concludes that Umar's statement is a precedent for establishing new practices (innovation) as long as it does not contradict Islamic law.<sup>23</sup>

This opinion was then spread among the followers of al-Shāfi'ī. One of them is the famous Egyptian Shāfi'ī jurist, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (1445-1505) who published a religious opinion (*fatwā*) in supporting the *mawlid* celebration. He followed al-Shāfi'ī's stance by saying that the *mawlid* is a good innovation and people who perform it will be rewarded by God. Nonetheless, this argument is rejected by the Salafis by stating that there is no such thing as a good innovation (*bid'ah ḥasanah*). For them, al-Shāfi'ī's understanding to interpret the ḥadīth of 'Umar on the *tarāwīḥ* prayer is subjective and misleading. In their argument, every innovation must be apprehended under the saying of the Prophet that "every new thing is an innovation (*bid'ah*), every innovation is an error (*ḍalālah*), and every error (ends up) in hellfire." For them, this ḥadīth is clear and comprehensive that no innovation is allowed in Islam.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, the *mawlid*, as a practice that was never performed by the Prophet, is illegitimate and prohibited.

### Reprehensibility of Veneration and Idolatry

The third theological argument used to condemn the celebration of the Prophet's birthday is the reprehensibility of the veneration of the Prophet and idolatry (*shirk*). According to the Salafis, the celebration of the Prophet is a practice that exaggerates the position of the Prophet and compares him to God. This stance is expressed by Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb who said that the *mawlid* celebration is an activity of "devotional expression" and veneration of the

<sup>23</sup> Raquel Ukeles, "Innovation and Deviation: Exploring the Boundaries of Islamic Devotional Law" (PhD Thesis--Harvard University, 2006), 78.

<sup>24</sup> Adis Duderija, *Neotraditional Salafism: Its Main Proponents and Its Manhaj. In Constructing a Religiously Ideal "Believer" and "Woman" in Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 60.

Prophet which violates the concept of monotheism that put God in an exclusive position to be worshipped.<sup>25</sup>

In every Islamic ritual that is practiced by Muslims, including the *mawlid*, the Salafis emphasize the idea of monotheism (*tawhīd*) and warn Muslims to be careful not to violate this notion. In their stance, the essence of God's monotheism is really important because God is the only one who has the right to be worshipped. In the Salafi's theological argument, veneration and religious practices that use religious figures as intercessor with God are disobedient acts. More particularly they are an expression of the sin of idolatry (*shirk*), which is considered the gravest sin.<sup>26</sup> Any Muslim who is committing a sin other than idolatry can always repent for that mistake. But idolatry is unforgivable. This judgment is based on the verse in the Qur'an Surah al-Nisā' [4]: 48:

“Verily, Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with him in worship, but He forgives except that (anything else) to whom He pleases, and whoever sets up partners with Allah in worship, he has indeed invented a tremendous sin”.<sup>27</sup>

The reprehensibility of the veneration and idolatry related to the belief that the Prophet is present during the *mawlid* celebration. His presence is not physical but through the notion of the light of Muhammad (*Nūr Muḥammad*) which is described in most *mawlid* books. According to Schimmel (1985), this idea is firstly introduced by Iraqi Sufi, Sahl al-Tustarī (818-896) who stated:

“When God willed to create Muhammad, He made appear a light from his light. When it reached the veil of the Majesty, *ḥijāb al-‘azamāh*, it bowed in prostration before God. God created from its prostration a mighty column-like crystal glass of light that is outwardly and inwardly translucent”.<sup>28</sup>

By this statement, al-Tustarī obviously said that Prophet Muhammad is created from the light of God. In another statement, al-Tustari expressed that Adam, Angels, and this world are created from the light of Muhammad.

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<sup>25</sup> Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*, 171.

<sup>26</sup> Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” 208–9.

<sup>27</sup> Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan, *The Noble Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Madina: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 1998), 116.

<sup>28</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 125.

As books of *mawlid* comprise the narrative of the Prophet's birthday, many of them start with the story of the light of Muhammad. In some versions of the *mawlid* books, it is illustrated how the mother of the Prophet (Amina) was alone when she gave birth to the Prophet. She was then assisted by four women who were claimed to be the guests of Paradise, some of whom were Sarah (the wife of the Prophet Ibrahim) and Maryam (the mother of Jesus). After the Prophet was born, his body was luminous, and it sparked the room.<sup>29</sup> It is from this understanding that the light of Muhammad was created from God, through which Adam and this world were created. Based on this idea, the participants of the *mawlid* believe Prophet Muhammad is present through his light (spirit) during the celebration.

The Salafis oppose the claim of the existence of the light of Muhammad, let alone the presence of his spirit in the celebration of the Prophet's birthday. This notion is discussed in a Salafi website when a person asked for a *fatwā* on that particular issue:

"In our locality, there are people who hold celebrations of the birthday of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) every year. They think that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is not like the rest of mankind, but that he is light from the Light of Allah Himself, that he is present and watching in every place, and that he himself attends every gathering held to celebrate his birthday, he hears what the people say about him, and he is there with them. For that reason they stand up and say in unison: "*Yā Nabī Allah, yā Rasūl Allah, yā Ḥabīb Allah, salām 'alayk*" (O Prophet of Allah, O Messenger of Allah, O Beloved of Allah, peace be upon you)." They call out to him as if he were present and ask for his help and support. What is the Islamic ruling on this? Is it correct or not? Is it *Sunnah*, *bid'ah*, or what?"<sup>30</sup>

The Salafi scholar who answered this question, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Munajjid, stated that the creed claiming Prophet Muhammad is not like another human being is misleading, not to mention that he is the

<sup>29</sup> Marion Holmes Katz, "The Prophet Muhammad in Ritual," in Jonathan E. Brockopp (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 42.

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, "Is Muhammad Peace and Blessings of Allah Be upon Him) Created from Light? What Is Wrong with Celebrating His Birthday?," 1998, <https://islamqa.info/en/1196> [Accessed 02 February 2017].

light from the light of God. He added that this view contradicts the many verses in the Qur'ān. One of them:

Surah al-Kahf [18]: 110

“Say (O Muhammad): I am only a man like you. It has been inspired to me that your *Ilāh* (God) is One Ilah (God i.e., Allah). So whoever hopes for the Meeting with his Lord, let him work righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of his Lord”.<sup>31</sup>

Al-Munajjid maintains that the verse clearly explains that Prophet Muhammad is like any other person. He is not created from the light of God but through Adam and Eve (*Hawwā*), the first man and woman in the world. Therefore, according to al-Munajjid, stating that the Prophet is present and is able to watch in every *mawlid* celebrations is false because it has no basis in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth.<sup>32</sup>

He argues that calling the Prophet and asking for his help in the *mawlid* celebration is highly forbidden because it is considered an act of idolatry (*shirk*). He continues to say that Muslims should follow the command of God, instead of creating innovation like the *mawlid*. For him, innovation is a serious action and God never forgives it. He then concludes that it is true and important to respect and honor the Prophet, but it is not permitted to venerate him in the same position as God.<sup>33</sup>

In overall, the reprehensibility of the veneration of the Prophet and idolatry along with the prohibition of innovation and the requirement of authenticity is the main theological arguments of the Salafi in criticizing the *mawlid*. In the following sections, I will give examples of how the Salafis use those arguments in attacking some activities that are practiced during the celebration of the Prophet's birthday.

### **Criticism of the *Mawlid* Practice**

In this section, I will now look at the criticism of the *mawlid* practice. In order to do so, I will describe how a typical *mawlid* celebration is performed by presenting most of its common practices, i.e., serving food, the act of standing up, the recitation of *mawlid*

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<sup>31</sup> al-Hilali and Khan, *The Noble Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*, 442.

<sup>32</sup> Saalih al-Munajjid, “Is Muhammad Peace and Blessings of Allah Be upon Him) Created from Light? What Is Wrong with Celebrating His Birthday?”

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

books and the use of musical instruments. In the description of each practice, I will also address the arguments that oppose and support the *mawlid* celebration.

### Serving Food

Serving food is a practice that is commonly performed in the *mawlid* celebration. People gather in one place, expressing happiness by reciting and singing *ṣalawāt*. After the closing prayer, the food is distributed by the host. Throughout time, whenever the *mawlid* is organized, serving food has become a necessary part of the celebration.

This serving of food was practiced even in one of the earliest *mawlid* celebrations. Al-Suyūfī mentioned in his book *Husn al-Maqṣid fī 'Amal al-Mawlid* that during the *mawlid* celebration which was arranged by Muẓaffar al-Dīn Kokburī (1154-1233), the host served 5000 roast sheep, 10.000 chickens, 100.000 dishes and 30.000 sweets for the participants who came not only from Iraq but also from abroad.<sup>34</sup> Another early *mawlid* celebration in Arbela, Northern Iraq, was reported by a Shāfi'ī jurist, Ibn Khalikān (1211-1282), who referred to the same activity when he visited that place in 1207. He enunciated that the host of the *mawlid* had prepared a large number of sheep, goats and cows that were butchered and served for the participants of the *mawlid* celebration.<sup>35</sup>

As the *mawlid* practice spread around the Muslim world, it is likely that it replicates the habit of distributing food to the *mawlid* participants. This is evident in the work of Nico Kaptein (1992) which sets out the visit of Ibn Baṭūṭah in Mecca in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Ibn Baṭūṭah said that the then head judge (*qāḍī*) of the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* of Mecca, Najm al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Imām Muḥy al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī (n.d.), circulated foods to the Prophet's descendants and to other people of Mecca. Remarkably, this habit was continued until several centuries later. Snouck Hurgronje, in his monograph about Mecca in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, depicted the *mawlid* as a means to make a party in which people can have a delightful time.

<sup>34</sup> Nico Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday Festival: Early History in the Central Muslim Lands and Development in the Muslim West until the 10<sup>th</sup>/16 Century* (Leiden: Brill, E.J., 1993), 50.

<sup>35</sup> Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 145.

The host invited family and friends by serving dishes of rice with various decorations.<sup>36</sup>

According to al-Suyūfī, one of the prominent Shāfi'ī scholars who supported the *mawlid*, expressed that distributing a banquet is the good thing of the *mawlid*. Even though he admitted that food distribution is an innovation, it is a good one (*bid'ah ḥasanah*). Therefore, he advised Muslims to provide food for *mawlid* participants.<sup>37</sup>

For the opponents of the *mawlid*, the food distribution in the celebration is not a good activity because, *first* and foremost, it is innovation. *Second*, distributing food means that the host has to prepare the money to hold the program. This disapproval is stated by Tāj al-Dīn al-Fakihānī (d.1331), one of the earliest scholars who opposed the *mawlid*, and issued a *fatwā* in refusing *mawlid* celebrations. His full statement is as follows:

“The permitting of it is also excluded, because according to the consensus of the Muslims innovation in religion is not permitted. So, it cannot be otherwise than reprehensible or forbidden. Because this is so, the discussion on it is divisible into two parts, in which two condition have to be distinguished. The first (condition) occurs when a man observes it at his own expense for his relatives, friends, and family without doing more at this gathering than eat food and abstain from anything sinful. This is what we have characterized as reprehensible innovation (*bid'ah makrūbah*) and repulsive deed, which was not observed by any of the obedient people of times past, in as far they were the *fuqahā'* of Islam the '*ulamā'* of humanity, the lights of the ages (in which they live) and the ornaments of the places (where they lived). The second (condition) occurs if the committing of a transgression (*jināyah*) enters into it and this is committed with total abandon, to such extent that one of them receives something which gives rise to qualms of conscience as a result of the pain in the evil he is experiencing. For the '*ulamā'* have said: Whosoever accepts money in shame, is like the one who appropriates it by the sword”.<sup>38</sup>

In this *fatwā*, there are three important elements regarding the disapproval of Fakihānī on the *mawlid* celebration. *First* is the innovation argument that the *mawlid* is not performed by the Prophet

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<sup>36</sup> C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 132.

<sup>37</sup> Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday Festival*, 48.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

and only introduced later by Muslims. Due to the fact that the *mawlid* is an innovation, there are only two legal rulings: it is reprehensible or forbidden. *Second*, if the food was distributed by the host's expense, then Fakihānī judged it reprehensible (*makrūh*). Third, if the *mawlid*'s host collected money from the participants, then it is regarded as forbidden (*ḥarām*). Analyzing Fakihānī opinion, both of them are the same in the sense that they are reprehensible (*makrūh*) and forbidden (*ḥarām*) deeds, practices that Muslims must avoid.

Another argument is expressed by a Salafi scholar, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Munajjid (b. 1960) for criticizing the food distribution in the *mawlid*. In his online *fatwā* forum, islamqa.info, there was someone who asked him about the permissibility of eating food that is served in the *mawlid* celebration. Regarding this question, al-Munajjadi gives the following answer:

“There is no festival in Islamic sharī‘ah that is called “The Prophet’s Birthday”. Neither the Sahaabah nor the Taabi’een nor the four imams nor anyone else recognized such a day as part of their religion. Rather this festival was introduced by some ignorant Baatini innovators, then the people began to follow this innovation, but the imams have denounced it in every time and place. Based on this, everything that the people do especially for this day is regarded as haraam, innovated actions, because they intend thereby to keep alive a festival that has been introduced into our religion, such as holding parties, offering food, and so on”.<sup>39</sup>

In this *fatwā*, al-Munajjid obviously uses the argument of innovation in determining whether food distribution is prohibited in the *mawlid* celebration. His reason is based on the ruling that the *mawlid* is an innovation. Therefore, any activity including serving food is deemed unlawful.

### **The Act of Standing Up (*Qiyām*)**

In relation to the notion of venerating the Prophet, there is one distinctive practice that is always performed in the middle of the *mawlid* celebration. It is standing up (*qiyām*), which is regarded as an act to honor the Prophet as if he is actually present and watches the gathering. It is not known when the *mawlid* participants started using

<sup>39</sup> Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, “Eating Food That Is Distributed on the Prophet’s Birthday,” 2013, <https://islamqa.info/en/89693> [Accessed 02 February 2017].

*qiyām* as standard practice during the celebration. But, according to Marion Katz,<sup>40</sup> *qiyām* became popular in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. In some of the sources she found, a manuscript written by Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥalabī (d. 1549), the *qiyām* was viewed as compulsory. An Ottoman legal expert (*muftī*), Abū al-Su'ūd (d. 1574), even issued a *fatwā* saying that anyone who refused to stand up during the *mawlid* celebrations is suspected to be an unbeliever because he did not respect the Prophet.

Regarding the reason why there is a practice of *qiyām* during the *mawlid* celebration, there are at least two arguments: first, *qiyām* is an act expressing admiration and respect for the Prophet who appears in the *mawlid* celebration. On this matter, contemporary Pakistan scholar, Ṭāhīr al-Qadrī (b. 1951), declares:

“In the gatherings of *mawlid* Nabi, sending one’s salutations on the most praised Prophet in the standing position is the hallmark of the lovers; it is a praiseworthy deed. Just as in the most revered Prophet’s life, respect and reverence for his person were compulsory upon the believers-noble Companions were very cautious in maintaining their reverence and respect. Similarly today, the same respect and reverence are compulsory. In the *mawlid* gatherings or in the assemblies of poetical praise, standing whilst ending one’s salutations on the most esteemed Prophet is a continuation of this show of respect and reverence. The gatherings in which the *qiyām* is performed are certainly blessed by the descent of Divine Light and *baraka*!”<sup>41</sup>

The second argument is to express the feeling of joy and happiness declared by one of the most prominent scholars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century who defended the *mawlid* celebration, Muḥammad ‘Alawī al-Mālikī (1944-2004). He wrote one specific book which discussed the reason behind the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday. Concerning *qiyām* in relation to joy and happiness, he puts his thought in the following manner:

“Standing in the Prophetic *mawlid* is not necessary (*wājib*) nor *Sunnah*, and to believe that is not correct whatsoever. It is only an action done by people expressing their happiness and joy. So when it is mentioned that Messenger of Allah (PBUH) was born and came into the world, the listener pictures at that time that the

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<sup>40</sup> Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*, 129.

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, *Mawlid al-Nabi Celebration and Permissibility* (London: Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications, 2014), 466.



entire universe shakes in happiness and joy by this blessing, so they stand to show their happiness. Thus, it is purely an act of custom or convention, not religious. Indeed, it is neither worship (*'ibādaH*), commanded in the Sacred Law, nor *Sunnah*. It is simply the custom of people that is performed".<sup>42</sup>

In this argument, al-Maliki first clarifies the legality of *qiyām* by describing that standing up during the *mawlid* is not a compulsory action (*wājib*) or recommended (*sunnah*). It is only an expression of joy and happiness because of the birth of the Prophet. In that statement, al-Mālikī explicitly said that the act of standing is not a religious practice. It is only a custom of people who feel blessed with the presence of the Prophet in this world.

On the first argument, the Salafis contend that performing *qiyām* with the intention of respecting the presence of the Prophet is obviously an innovation. It is also considered an act of exaggeration of honoring the Prophet which was forbidden even during the Prophet's life. They refer to a ḥadīth:

"Anas b. Mālik said: No person was dearer to them than the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), but when they saw him, they did not stand up for him because they knew that he disliked that".<sup>43</sup>

Another ḥadīth is mentioned by Ibn Bāz concerning the prohibition of standing up and venerating the Prophet.<sup>44</sup> The ḥadīth is as follows:

"It was narrated that Abu Umamah said: The Messenger of Allah came out to us leaning on a staff, and we stood up for him. He said: Do not stand up as the Persians stand up to venerate one another".<sup>45</sup>

Both of the *ḥadīths* are used to attack the practice of *qiyām* by saying that the companions had never stood up whenever the Prophet came to one place because he forbade that particular practice. The first ḥadīth mentions that the Prophet disliked it and the second

<sup>42</sup> Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki, *On Celebrating the Birth of the Prophet* (Chicago: Imam Ghazali Institute, 2015), 54.

<sup>43</sup> Abu Khallyl, *English Transmission of Jami' at-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 5 (Riyadh: Maktabah Dār al-Salām, 2007), 132.

<sup>44</sup> Abd al-Aziz Ibn Bāz, "The Meaning of 'al-Ma'iyah' and Standing up in Honor of Another," The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', 2005, <http://www.alifta.net/Fatawa/FatawaChapters.aspx?language=en&View=Page&PageID=95&PageNo=1&BookID=14> [Accessed 10 February 2017].

<sup>45</sup> Nasiruddin al-Khattab, *English Translation of Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 5 (Riyadh: Maktabah Dār al-Salām, 2008), 469.

explains that the Prophet did not want his companions to venerate him like the way the Persians did their leaders.

### **The Recitation of *Mawlid* Books**

Recitation of the *mawlid* narrative is an inseparable part of the *mawlid* celebration. It is likely that the book is always cited whenever the *mawlid* is performed. There are standard elements of the content of the book. These elements consist of supplications and praises to God, the creation of the light of Muhammad and historical narratives on the life of the Prophet.<sup>46</sup> The narrative is a combination of stories from some prophetic traditions (ḥadīth) and a prophetic biography (*al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah*) which highlights supernatural occurrences during his life.<sup>47</sup> Another part of the narrative is eulogy stories of the Prophet, which contains rhymed prose and odes (*qaṣīdah*) related to the Prophet's life.<sup>48</sup>

Nowadays, there are four *mawlid* books that are widely used by *mawlid* participants: the first is *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* (Poem of the Mantle) of Muḥammad b. Sa'īd al-Būṣīrī (1211–1294). The second one is *Iqd al-Jawhar fī Mawlid al-Nabī al-Aẓḥar* (The Jeweled Necklace of the Resplendent Prophet's Birth) by Ja'far b. Ḥasan al-Barzanjī (1716–1765). This book is known as the *mawlid* book of al-Barzanjī. The third is the *mawlid* book of *al-Dībā'ī* by 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Dībā'ī (d. 1537), and the last one is *Simṭ al-Durar fī Akhbār Mawlid Khayr al-Bashar* (The Pearl Necklace of the Best Human's Birth) by 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥabashī (d. 1912). During the *mawlid*, the leader of the celebration recites the *mawlid* book, and the participants repeat his recitation. Most of the time, the recitation is performed with a musical tone and resembles a song. In a big ceremony like a *ṣalawāt* performance, the recitation of the *mawlid* book is accompanied by an ensemble of tambourines to embellish the event.

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<sup>46</sup> Andrea L. Stanton, "Celebrating Muhammad's Birthday in the Middle East Supporting or Complicating Muslim Identity Projects," in Udo Merkel (ed.), *Identity Discourses and Communities in International Events, Festivals and Spectacles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 199.

<sup>47</sup> Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam Hani Walker (eds.), *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God* (Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 366.

<sup>48</sup> Lois Lamya'al Faruqi, "The *Mawlid*," *The World of Music*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1986), 83.

For opponents of the celebration, reading *mawlid* books are forbidden due to the status of the celebration which is deemed as innovation. This opinion is stated by the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Iftā' (*al-Lajnah al-Dā'imah li al-Buḥūth al-ʿIlmiyah wa al-Iftā'*), a governmental organization in Saudi Arabia with the task of issuing *fatwā* on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). On its website, someone asks a question on the ruling of reciting *mawlid* books during the *mawlid* celebration. The board of the organization gives his opinion as follows:

“Celebrating the Prophet’s birthday in *Rabi‘ al-Awwal* or any other month is a prohibited *bid‘ab* (innovation in religion). The same applies to read books on the Prophet’s birth in *Rabi‘ al-Awwal* or on such occasions like wedding ceremonies, delivery of a child, holding *‘aqiqah* (sacrifice for a newborn), or any occasion of the sort”.<sup>49</sup>

To support that opinion, the organization emphasizes that the Prophet, the companions or the generation after them, did not perform the *mawlid*. This practice is not based on the authentic report and therefore “considered as newly-invented *bid‘ab*”.

Another argument is mentioned by an Indonesian Salafi scholar, Abu Ahmad Zainal Abidin (n.d.). He specifically discusses the content of the *mawlid* book of *Barzanji*, which he asserts contains five mistakes. The first is on the issue of the Prophet’s parents. According to Abidin, the *Barzanji* provides a description that both of the Prophet’s parents will be saved from the hellfire. He clarifies this account as untrue because both of the Prophet’s parents lived before the coming of Islam. The second is based on the book’s argument that the Prophet is present during the celebration. Therefore, everyone must stand up to welcome his coming. Abidin rejects this idea because according to him, the Prophet has passed away and so it is impossible for him to be present in the celebration. The third mistake is based on the topic of venerating the Prophet in which the people respect the prophet as if he is God. In this statement, Abidin argues that the Prophet forbade the attitude of comparing him with God. The fourth concerns the praise of the Prophet (*ṣalamāt*) which according to Abidin is not authentic. Most of the *ṣalamāt* in the book

<sup>49</sup> The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Iftā', “Reciting the Birth Narrative of the Prophet in Rabi’ 1 or on Marriage Occasions,” 2005, <http://www.alifta.net/Fatawa/FatawaChapters.aspx?language=en&View=Page&PageID=228&PageNo=1&BookID=10> [Accessed 10 February 2017].

*Barzanji*, he argues, are innovations. The last issue is based on the topic of the light of Muhammad. Abidin states that this belief is an act of idolatry because the first human created by God is Adam instead of the light of Muhammad, as is written in the book of *Barzanji*.<sup>50</sup>

Regarding the recitation of the Prophet's biographical stories, the proponent of the celebration, on the contrary, argues that reciting the book of *mawlid* is allowed. The website of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU, the awakening of the '*ulamā*'), an organization of the followers of the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* in Indonesia, posts an article on the questions and answers related to the celebration of the Prophet's birthday. The article firstly answers a question as to the definition of the *mawlid*. It explains that the *mawlid* means celebrating the Prophet's birthday by reciting the Qur'ān and stories about the life of the Prophet in the book of *mawlid*. This book contains poems and the praise of the Prophet. The article also provides an answer concerning the question on the ruling of the *mawlid*, including the recitation of the Prophet's biography. It explains, that, according to the agreement of some '*ulamā*', the *mawlid*, as well as some practices within the celebration, are allowed, such as reciting the Qur'ān, reciting *mawlid* books, standing up, reciting poems of the Prophet in the mosque, prayer of supplication to God and rhythmic repetition in the name of God (*dhikr*).<sup>51</sup>

### The Use of Musical Instruments

Another part of the celebration of the Prophet's birthday is the use of musical instruments in accompanying the recitation of poems and praise of the Prophet. The instrument that is widely used in the celebration is a tambourine (*rebana*), a percussion instrument made of wood or plastic resembling a small drum with small metal disks around the edge. The number of tambourines used in the celebration varies according to the size of the festival; the bigger the celebration, the greater the number of tambourines. Consequently, the use of

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<sup>50</sup> Ahmad Zainal Abidin, "Barzanji, Kitab Induk Peringatan Maulid Nabi Shallallahu Alaihi Wa Sallam," 2009, <https://almanhaj.or.id/2583-barzanji-kitab-induk-peringatan-maulid-nabi-shallallahu-alaihi-wa-sallam.html> [Accessed 11 February 2017].

<sup>51</sup> NU Online, "Tanya-Jawab Ilmiah Sekitar Perayaan Maulid Nabi," NU Online, 2015, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/64373/tanya-jawab-ilmiah-sekitar-perayaan-maulid-nabi> [Accessed 15 February 2017].

tambourines gives a joyful and colorful festive atmosphere along with the recitation of the poems and proses from *mawlid* books.

As I have explained previously, the *mawlid* according to the Salafis is forbidden because of the lack of proof (*dalil*) from the Qur'an and the ḥadīth. In regards to the use of musical instruments, the Salafis in general forbid the pleasure of music as well as listening and playing musical instruments, let alone that this practice is performed during the *mawlid* celebration which is viewed as completely forbidden. Ibn Bāz mentions this in one of his *fatwās*:

“In addition to being *bid'ah*, it (*mawlid* celebration) often includes intermixing between men and women, the use of songs and musical instruments, alcohol, drugs, and other evil practices in the celebrations of the Prophet's *mawlid*”.<sup>52</sup>

In terms of the ruling of listening to songs and music, Ibn Bāz provides a separate *fatwā* as follows:

“Listening to songs is *Ḥarām* and *Munkar* (that which is unacceptable or disapproved of by Islamic law and Muslims of sound intellect). It causes disease and hardness of the heart and ultimately diverts people from Dhikr (Remembrance of Allah) and performing Salah (Prayer). Many scholars explain Allah's saying: And of mankind is he who purchases idle talks (i.e., music, singing, etc.) to mean singing. ‘Abd Allah b. Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with him) used to swear that the idle talk here refers to singing. It is even more detestable if singing is accompanied by a musical instrument, such as Rababa, lute, violin, or drums. Some scholars state that singing accompanied by musical instruments is unanimously forbidden”.<sup>53</sup>

In this *fatwā*, it is clear that the Salafis declare music forbidden. With the ruling of the *mawlid*, which is also considered *ḥarām*, it is not surprising that the Salafis condemn the celebration of the Prophet's birthday with the use of the musical instruments. This opinion is followed by Salafis in Indonesia. One of them is Yazid bin Abdul Qadir Jawas (n.d), who stated that there are many illegal and

<sup>52</sup> Ibn Bāz, “Ruling on Celebrating the Prophet's Mawlid and Other Events,” The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Abd al-Aziz Ibn Bāz, “Ruling on Singing and People Gathering to Listen to Musical Instruments and Songs,” 2005, <http://alifta.net/fatawa/fatawaDetails.aspx?languagename=en&BookID=14&View=Page&PageNo=1&PageID=238> [Accessed 16 February 2017].

idolatrourous acts in the *mawlid* celebration. Some of them are the mix of men and women, singing, and the use of musical instruments.<sup>54</sup>

Regarding the opinion of the proponents of the *mawlid*, a *fatwā* was issued by a Shāfi'ī *mufti* of Mecca, Aḥmad b. Zaynī Dahlān (1817-1886). The *fatwā* was published with other *fatwās* from several scholars in a book entitled *Muhimmāt al-Nafā'is fī Bayān As'ilat al-Ḥadīth* (the precious gems treating the explanation of questions about current topics). In this *fatwā*, someone asked about the permissibility of using tambourine in the *mawlid*. Dahlān answered this question by saying that beating a tambourine in the celebration of the Prophet's birthday is recommended under the condition that the practice is not complemented with anything that is against Islamic law.<sup>55</sup>

A more recent *fatwā* was issued by the Jakarta-based *dhikir* group of *Majelis Rasulullah*. This group is well known for its activities in promoting Islamic piety among grassroots people in Jakarta through *salawāt* and *dhikir*.<sup>56</sup> Its official website includes an article based on a question from a person named Ridwan on the ruling of beating a tambourine in the *mawlid* celebration. The question is answered by Munzir al-Musawa (1973-2003) who said that the tambourine according to the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* is allowed. He continues to explain that the benefit of playing the tambourine is to attract Muslims to go to the mosque to sit and repent to God through the singing of the praise of the Prophet.<sup>57</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

Theologically, according to the Salafis, the discourse of the *mawlid* criticism is based on three arguments; the requirement of authenticity, the prohibition of innovation (*bid'ah*), and the reprehensibility of veneration and idolatry. The requirement of authenticity means that every religious practice must rely upon the

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<sup>54</sup> Jawa, "Peringatan Maulid Nabi Menurut Syari'at Islam."

<sup>55</sup> Nico Kaptein, *The Muhimmat Al-Nafa'is: A Bilingual Meccan Fatwa Collection for Indonesian Muslims from the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Jakarta: Indonesian-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS), 1997), 156.

<sup>56</sup> Arif Zamhari and Julia Day Howell, "Taking Sufism to the Streets: Majelis Zikir and Majelis Salawat as New Venues for Popular Islamic Piety in Indonesia," *RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (2012), 47-75.

<sup>57</sup> Majelis Rasulullah, "Dalil Diperbolehkan Memukul Rabana / Marawis," Majelis Rasulullah, 2007, <https://www.majelisrasulullah.org/forum-majelis/balas/redalil-diperbolehkan-memukul-rebanamarawis/> [Accessed 17 February 2017].

explanation in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. If a practice does not have a proof (*dalīl*) in one or both sources, then it is forbidden. The second argument is the prohibition of innovation that indirectly follows from the one on inauthenticity. So, inauthentic practices are innovation and they are prohibited. The final argument is the reprehensibility of veneration that refers to the exaggeration of honoring the Prophet as if the Prophet has the same position as God. This equity is deemed as idolatry which is considered as the gravest sin. These three arguments are the reasons of the Salafis in rejecting the *mawlid* celebration. Those arguments are applied whenever the critics disapprove of the *mawlid* or some practices within the celebration.

The practices of the *mawlid* that are most criticized are the serving food, the act of standing (*qiyām*), the recitation of *mawlid* books and the use of musical instruments. In terms of the serving food, the Salafis's standing based on the argument that the ruling that the *mawlid* is an innovation, therefore, any activity including serving food is deemed unlawful. For the second practice of *qiyām*, there are two explanations of the Salafis' criticism. First, the Salafis contend that performing *qiyām* with the intention of respecting the presence of the Prophet is obviously an innovation. And second, it is also considered an act of exaggeration of honoring the Prophet which was forbidden even during the Prophet's life. On the recitation of the *mawlid* books, the Salafis' argument is the same as their criticism of the serving food. They argue that the reading of *mawlid* books is forbidden due to the status of the celebration which is deemed as innovation. On the last practice of the use of musical instruments, the Salafis claim that music is forbidden, let alone it to be practiced in a religious program that they deemed innovation such as the *mawlid* celebration.

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