

Musical Expression of Islamic Identity: The Syncretism of *Blangikhan* Ritual in Lampung

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Abstract: The *Blangikhan* ritual underscores the significance of dignity within Lampung's culture, where the community is renowned for its hospitality and compassion towards one another. *Blangikhan* is a celebration and reflects community values, norms, and beliefs. This study aims to comprehend and explore the intertwined musical practices in the *Blangikhan* tradition of the Lampung community's religious and cultural identity. The researcher explores the correlation between the music produced in the *Blangikhan* tradition and the strengthening of Islamic identity among the community. The research utilized an ethnographic method. The data collection techniques were observation, interview, literature study, and documentation. The result concludes that music is an integral component of this event and reflects the Islamic Identity within Lampung's culture. The music in this ritual encompasses various genres, including *Hadrah* music, a religious musical tradition with *sholawat* lyrics, the music accompanying the *Bedana* dance that blends Malay-Islamic nuances, and even pop music with religious themes. This research delves deeper into how music in the *Blangikhan* ritual mirrors the Islamic identity and how the Lampung community incorporates Islamic elements into their performing arts. The study also considers how the production of this music influences the representation of Islamic identity within the *Blangikhan* ritual. This research holds significant relevance in comprehending how culture and religion can interact and shape identity within a cultural ritual context.

Keywords: *blangikhan* ritual, musical, Islam, islamic identity, musical expression

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A. Introduction

The *Blangikhan* tradition in Lampung is a cultural expression that combines music and elements of Islamic identity in local society. In a study conducted by Sari (2021), it was found that around 70% of Lampung Muslim people are involved in the practice of *Blangikhan*. This practice is not exclusively for entertainment but also as a medium to express religious values and strengthen community identity. *Blangikhan* shapes the religious awareness and cultural identity of the Lampung people. *Blangikhan* becomes an integral part of the social and spiritual life of the Lampung people.

Blangikhan tradition is a long-standing cultural ceremony in Lampung, dating back to the 14th century, before the arrival of Islam in the region (Ainin & Sabardila, 2022). The Lampung community performs this ritual in preparation for the holy month of fasting, Ramadhan. At its core, *Blangikhan* serves as a cleansing process to purify the body, both physically and spiritually, much like the act of bathing. In Islam, this ritual resembles the *full ablution* bath and is essential for performing specific religious duties such as prayer and fasting (Mohd Mokhtar & Sa'ari, 2015).

The music in the *Blangikhan* tradition in Lampung has distinctive characteristics, with religious themes in its musical accompaniment. According to an analysis conducted by Rahman (2020), around 80% of the total 100 songs studied in this tradition contain da'wah elements, such as praise to Allah and depictions of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. It indicates that music functions as entertainment and a means of moral and spiritual education, holding an important societal role. Participation in the *Blangikhan* tradition is higher among the younger generation. A survey by the Lampung Central Statistics Agency (2022) showed that around 65% of participants involved in this practice were under 30 years old. This phenomenon reflects that the younger generation in Lampung can preserve and adapt the *Blangikhan* practice to remain relevant to the changing social context. In a social context, *Blangikhan* also functions as a community bond. Research by Hasan (2022) reveals that 75% of respondents suppose that involvement in the *Blangikhan* tradition increases community members' sense of togetherness and solidarity.

Blangikhan is a prime example of the amalgamation of Lampung's long-standing culture with the later arrival of Islamic teachings, epitomizing what is known as "syncretism" the harmonious merging of cultural and religious elements from diverse sources into a unified whole (Mohd Mokhtar & Sa'ari, 2016). The *Blangikhan* ritual also reflects the importance of dignity within Lampung's culture, where the

people are renowned for their hospitality and care for one another. This ritual strengthens unity and solidarity among the community (Wakhid, 2019).

Nowadays, the *Blangikhan* tradition has evolved into a more modern and formal event, yet its core message and values remain unchanged. It is a means by which the Lampung community celebrates the holy Ramadhan enthusiastically and delivers a tribute to their cherished cultural heritage. In this context, music plays a pivotal role in the *Blangikhan* ritual. Music is an integral part of the event, reflecting the Islamic Identity within Lampung's culture. The musical components of this ritual span various genres, including *Hadrah* music, a tradition of religious music with *sholawat* (Islamic) lyrics, the music accompanying the *Bedana* dance, which incorporates Malay-Islamic culture, and even religious-themed pop music (Moshinsky, 1959).

Music in the *Blangikhan* tradition strengthens individual religious identities and social cohesion among community members. This research provides valuable insights into the interaction between culture, religion, and identity and the importance of preserving traditions in an increasingly diverse society. This research explores how music in the *Blangikhan* ritual reflects the Islamic Identity and how the Lampung community combines Islamic elements in their performing arts. Additionally, the study will consider how the production of this music influences the representation of Islamic Identity within the *Blangikhan* ritual. This research holds significant relevance in understanding how culture and religion can interact and shape Identity within a cultural ritual context. Furthermore, it can assist the Lampung community in preserving and respecting their cultural heritage.

B. Methods

This study aims to comprehend and explore the intertwined musical practices in the *Blangikhan* tradition of the Lampung community's religious and cultural identity. Additionally, the study will consider how the production of this music influences the representation of Islamic Identity within the *Blangikhan* ritual.

The research utilizes an ethnographic method. Ethnography is one of the qualitative research methods that tries to describe cultural analysis based on intensive fieldwork (Harrington, 2023). The data collection process began with participant observation, where researchers were directly involved in *Blangikhan* tradition activities. Researchers conducted open interviews with *Blangikhan* artists, traditional leaders, and cultural experts. The data obtained were then recorded as field notes, photos, and videos to strengthen the data. After data collection, analysis was carried out simultaneously with data collection, using various qualitative

analysis techniques. Researchers applied domain analysis to gain an overview of musical practices, followed by taxonomic analysis to detail the elements present in the tradition.

Furthermore, componential analysis was used to explore the relationships between elements, while cultural theme analysis helped conclude the values in the *Blangikhan* tradition. Data presentation was done in a narrative and descriptive manner. Triangulation methods were used to verify the data. Triangulation was carried out by comparing information from various sources, including interviews with different informants and secondary data, to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the research findings.

C. Results and Discussion

In its implementation, the *Blangikhan* ritual is always accompanied by performing arts routines using Islamic music as their background song (Aswir & Misbah, 2018). Islamic nuance can be indicated through the signs in the musical components, including the instruments operated, the music model, the lyrics or poems played, and the performance. Stuart Hall emphasizes that Identity is not fixed, natural, or essential but is socially constructed, negotiated, and shaped by historical, cultural, and social contexts (Hall, 1997). He emphasizes the role of power, representation, language, and hybridity in identity formation, highlighting identity construction's complex and dynamic nature. Identity is influenced by factors such as race, gender, social class, and religion. Identity can also be considered how individuals and groups position themselves in society (Jhally, 1997).

Related to this argument, Islamic musical offerings in the *Blangikhan* ritual, i.e., *Hadrah* music, are played during the procession. *Hadrah*'s music originated from the Middle East (Iswanto, 2015). *Hadrah* music is identic as Islamic art due to its presentation, which is always accompanied by the lyric of *sholawat* poetry or recitation of *dhikr* accompanied by the drumming of the tambourine as the main instrument in *Hadrah* music (Indrawan, 2012). This music has a distinctive rhythm pattern, with improvised songs to blend the atmosphere and momentum of the event. *Hadrah* music is generally played in Muslim communities as an arrangement of praise and prayer towards God and the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Sasongko, 2018). In practice, *Hadrah* music can vary in diverse regions and different cultures. Some variations in instruments, songs, and performance styles exist among Muslim communities worldwide. *Hadrah* music originates from Islamic traditions in several world regions, especially in the Middle East and Southeast Asia (Fikri, 2014). This

music is usually used in religious events or certain celebrations in Islamic culture. *Hadrah* music often strengthens a sense of togetherness and love of religion (Aswir & Misbah, 2018). *Hadrah* performances allow audiences to express their religious feelings and participate in a shared spiritual experience (Iswanto, 2015).

The Muslim Identity in the *Blangikhan* ritual accompanies another musical beat called the *Bedana* dance. This dance is presented with a Malay-Islamic nuance. *Bedana* dance is believed to have developed along with the history of Islam in Lampung and depicts the friendly life and culture of the Malay people of Lampung. Aligned with its Islamic history, the dancers also wear clothing that combines traditional clothing styles with Islamic dress styles.

In its presentation, *Metahuman Bedana* music also uses lyrics or *sholawat* poems arranged to the strains of music like *zap* in popular music among the Malay community (Moshinsky, 1959). The instruments found in the accompanying music for the *Bedana* dance include the tambourine, *banjo*, keyboard, and percussion (drum, cymbals, and tambourine) (Aprilia, 2019). The *Blangikhan* ritual activity also presents band music that performs and plays Lampung pop songs and Indonesian pop songs with religious themes. The popular religious song, specifically with the Holy Month theme, is considered part of Islamic music and represents Islam in the *Blangikhan* ritual content due to its lyrics.

In *Blangikhan* ritual activities, music is an important part of entertainment for all people who attend the activity, especially the Muslim community. Islamic music is one of the elements or performances of performing arts displayed in *Blangikhan* ritual activities that become a marker of the Muslim Identity representation in Lampung. It can be seen from the signs of 'Islam' in the music, which features *Hadrah* music and the chanting of *sholawat* accompanied by tambourine beats.

Tetabuhan music accompanies *Bedana* dance, which also presents *sholawat* in a musical arrangement combined with Malay rhythms, and the last one is band music that performs religious pop songs i.e., "Ramadhan Tiba".

The multi-ethnic life of Lampung society triggers cultural crossover or hybrid processes in the context of music. The interaction between the native Lampung and immigrant communities develops the musical pattern occasionally. Musical easily identifiable factors include musical instruments, scale systems, harmony systems, ensemble form, and methods for producing musical works. Moreover, Lampung's traditional artists have their way of creating a performance that combines traditional or modern types of music with 'Islamic' elements.

Furthermore, how music can be said to be 'Islamic' music or not can be noticed based on the arrangement of the music itself (Jamil, 2022). This music is part of a tradition produced by the Lampung people themselves. The types of music such as *Hadrah* and *sholawat* played in the *Blangikhan* ritual indicate that this music is a part of 'Islamic' art (Aswir & Misbah, 2018). Lampung *Hadrah* music is played with tambourine instruments using traditional Lampung drumming patterns known as *Tikol* drumming patterns. This drumming pattern is a basic rhythm that accompanies the sung prayer-poems (Iswanto, 2015). The *Bedana Kreasi* music is composed and arranged functions to accompany the modern and development of the traditional *Bedana* dance. The Lampung traditional artists produced works of art that presented the needs and developments in the community's cultural context. It has been explained previously that Lampung society is strongly influenced by Malay-Islamic tradition. Therefore, the performances, whether the public can enjoy music or dance more efficiently, are presented in these ritual activities.

The last one is related to the regulatory aspect, precisely, a process of setting or implementing rules, regulations, or policies by the government or other regulatory institutions to control or direct the behavior of individuals, groups, or sectors in society. The main goal of regulation is to create an acceptable, safe framework that functions well for the benefit of the community. Rules include financial regulations governing banking activities, environmental laws governing industrial waste disposal, traffic regulations governing road use, and more. In the *Blangikhan* ritual, this activity is organized by the local community, namely the Batu Putu village community, together with Lampung Sai, the Lampung Traditional Balancing Council (MPAL), and the Lampung Community Communication Forum (Fokmal). This traditional institution supports community activities to preserve Lampung's cultural traditions. Therefore, the *Blangikhan* ritual also presents performing arts characteristic of Lampung cultural traditions.

The music in the *Blangikhan* ritual certainly has a form of presentation in a series of processions. There are three parts in the *Blangikhan* ritual procession series, including the opening part, the core part, the watering or bathing ritual, and the closing part, which enters the entertainment program. It also refers to the form of music played. The first part of the *Blangikhan* ritual processions usually begins with a gathering of traditional elders and religious figures, regional officials, and the community in the Nuwo Balak courtyard. A procession is carried out towards the Kali Akar river, which is the location of the ritual. In this procession involving *mekhanai* (singles) and *muli* (girls) who are participants in the core ritual procession and as a symbol of self-purification, the two bridal couples as symbols who wear

clothes from two major Lampung traditions, namely *Saibatin and Pepadun*, and the *Pencak Silat* (Martial Arts) players. In this procession, *Hadrah* music is played to mark the beginning of the series of ritual processions and as musical accompaniment to the spectacle until it arrives at the ritual location.

Six tambourine players generally play *Hadrah* music in the procession. The tambourine game uses several interlocking patterns, making the sound more complex. The patterns used in *Hadrah* music are the *Tikol* and *Kiccat* percussion patterns. *Tikol* percussion has three interlocking percussion patterns consisting of *Sikhang*, *Kelabai*, and *Tikah*. The *Tikol* pattern is usually played after one of the leaders begins with a vocal shout,

"Allahumma sholli a la Sayyidina Muhammad,"

Then, other musicians greeted it with answers or shouts:

"Allahumma sholli wasallim wabarik 'alaih."

After the opening greeting, the *Tikol* percussion pattern begins to be played simultaneously according to the division of each way. The *Sikhang* pattern (pattern 1) is played by tambourine 1 and tambourine 2. The *Kelabai* pattern (pattern 2) is played by tambourines 3 and 4. Then, the *Tikah* pattern (pattern 3) is played by tambourines 5 and 6. As for percussion, the *Kiccat* pattern is played in unison or *rampak* on a tambourine instrument and is played after the *Tikol* percussion pattern. The *Kiccat* percussion pattern accompanies the prayer songs in the procession of the *Blangikhan* ritual. The vocals played in *Hadrah* music are songs or prayer poems sung in unison, with constant tambourine accompaniment. The songs sung are a form of prayer and praise for Allah SWT and the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

Hadrah music in the *Blangikhan* ritual is performed by standing or walking, holding a tambourine in the left hand, and beating with the right hand while chanting *sholawat* poetry. The sound or tone color of the tambourine instrument is "*Tak*," which is struck in the middle with the hand or fingers open, thus producing a high-middle sound. As for "*Dung*," it is hit in a half circle of the tambourine with the hand or fingers closed so that it creates a low sound and is the center of gravity. In this regard, the musicians' clothes when playing *Hadrah* music are decorated with motifs from Tapis Lampung, such as jackets, headbands (*kopiah*), *sinjang tumpal* cloth, and black trousers.

The tambourine is a traditional musical instrument originating from the Middle East (Meftahi, 2016), and spread to almost all regions in Indonesia. This musical instrument belongs to the group of membranophone musical instruments, meaning sound is produced through vibrations on a membrane or skin mounted on a wooden

frame. A tambourine usually consists of a shell stretched over a wooden or metal ring, with several additional strings attached to the edge. The tambourine is generally played by hitting it with the hand or a wooden stick. The sound produced can vary depending on how the player plays and adjusts the tension of the skin over the frame. Tambourines are often used in traditional events such as weddings, cultural festivals, and religious activities such as traditional ceremonies and recitations.

Tambourines are also often used in *Gambus* art (Berg, 2011; Hidayatullah 2020), which is a type of traditional Arabic music that has been adapted in Indonesia. The tambourine musical instrument is one of the important instruments in *Gambus* art, and it is combined with guitar, psaltery, and vocals. The sound or tone color of the tambourine instrument is "Tak", which is struck in the middle with the hand or fingers open, thus producing a sound. The "Dung" is attacked in a half circle of the tambourine with the hand or fingers closed to have a sound, which is also the center of gravity. The *Hadrah* music stopped playing when the procession group arrived at the ritual location.

The event continued with the *Bedana* dance performance. Some rituals involve dance or movement as a form of presentation. These gestures can have symbolic meaning and are used to honor spiritual entities or to achieve unity with nature or God. As previously explained, this dance is accompanied by *zapin* music, which includes the Prophet's prayer lyrics. Apart from being performed at *Blangikhan* ritual events, this creative *bedana* dance is often served at other events, such as weddings. Related to the musical accompaniment of the *Bedana* dance, this creation was composed or arranged using the strains of Lampung *Bedana* music or, more impressed by Malay *zapin* music. The instruments found in the accompanying music for the dance include the tambourine, *bano*, keyboard, *talo balak*, and percussion (drum, cymbals, and tambourine).

The third part of the *Blangikhan* ritual procession is the closing part. After the main march has been completed, everyone continues to eat together. In some traditions, special foods are served as part of the ritual. These foods often have symbolic meaning and may be consumed by ritual participants to draw energy or blessings from spiritual entities. In other words, this procession is the end of all the ritual processions. We will enter a free event, namely enjoying entertainment from a music band performing regional Lampung pop songs and Indonesian pop songs. According to available information, the band is a musical group brought in at the request of the organizing committee. In previous years, this band's music was not

included in the *Blangikhan* ritual activities. It has become a phenomenon due to shifts and developments in community activities, such as the *Blangikhan* ritual.

D. Conclusion

The *Blangikhan* ritual is an essential cultural practice with a significant musical element intertwined with Islamic Identity. In this discussion, we explore how music in the *Blangikhan* tradition embodies 'Islamic' characteristics and how this representation is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural context of Lampung, Indonesia. In the context of the *Blangikhan* ritual, music plays a pivotal role in representing the Muslim Identity of the Lampung community. It does so through traditional *Hadrah* music, lyrics, and specific instruments.

Islamic Music in *Hadrah* originates from the Middle East and is considered an Islamic art form. It is characterized by using the *rebana* drum as the primary instrument, traditional rhythm patterns, and the recitation of *sholawat* (blessings for the Prophet Muhammad). *Hadrah* is traditionally played during religious events and is a praise and prayer to Allah and the Prophet Muhammad. It can vary in style across different Muslim communities worldwide.

The diverse musical elements in the *Blangikhan* ritual incorporate various musical elements. In addition to *Hadrah*, there is the *Bedana Kreasi*, a Melayu-Islamic style dance with music played by instruments like the *rebana*, *bebano*, keyboard, and various percussions. These elements blend tradition with a distinctive Islamic touch.

Representation of Islamic Identity which played in *Blangikhan* through the *Hadrah's* use of *rebana* and *sholawat*, *Bedana kreasi's* fusion of Melayu and Islamic elements, or the modern music from bands performing religious-themed songs like "Ramadhan Tiba" by Opick, music becomes a symbolic marker of the Lampung community's Muslim Identity.

Lampung's multicultural society has led to cultural hybridization, where different traditions and influences blend. Musicians and artists adapt and create unique artistic expressions that resonate with their Islamic Identity. It is evident in the traditional *Hadrah* and the more modern *Bendana Kreasi*. The role of music in rituals holds a significant place in the *Blangikhan* ritual. It serves as both entertainment and a means of expressing faith and unity. It connects people from different backgrounds and helps them collectively engage in the spiritual experience.

Musical Structure and Phases of the Ritual consist of three main phases - the initial procession, the central tradition of cleansing, and the closing ceremony with

entertainment. Each stage has its distinctive music. The parade begins with *Hadrah* music featuring six rebana drummers, and the ritual continues with *Bedana Kreasi* accompanied by a Melayu-Islamic-inspired ensemble. The closing ceremony involves a modern band playing religious-themed songs, marking the end of the practice. The *Blangikhan* ritual showcases how traditional or modern music plays a pivotal role in expressing and representing the Lampung community's Islamic Identity. It is a testament to how cultures adapt and evolve while maintaining their distinct religious and cultural essence.

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