



Takbiran Festival: Cultural Public Sphere and its Contribution in The Social Media Era

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Abstract

The Takbir festival has become an annual ritual for Muslims in Yogyakarta. Festivals are held in many places and organized by local communities. This research was conducted to investigate the Takbir festival by seeing it as a cultural public sphere and how it contributes in the era of digital media. The research used a qualitative field research approach. Data was collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. The research results show that the Takbir festival has exceeded its traditional function as a broadcast medium of Islam. On the contrary, the takbir festival has presented itself as a cultural public sphere where various cultures are displayed through various elements such as mascots, traditional clothing, musical instruments, and other ornaments used by each participant. These cultural expressions are the participants' interpretations in translating the festival theme, namely Caring for The World and Civilization. Participants translated the interpretation into various cultural expressions. These expressions basically display a political articulation of certain events, which are linked to their interpretation of the festival theme. There are two political positions that can be identified from the way the festival participants interpret the theme, namely Caring for the Nature Conservation and Maintaining the Cultural Pluralism. This research also found that festivals are an important medium for cultural learning between generations and contribute to building social integration. Through meetings between spectators and participants, the Takbiran festival can erode conflict and social divisions, especially those resulting from the spread of hatred on social media

Keywords: Takbir Festival, public sphere, cultural pluralism, social media, political articulation

Introduction

Studies on festivals generally position festivals as cultural events and are often approached from a policy perspective. In this perspective, festivals are considered a way to build participation, encourage cultural diversity, and also assemble social cohesion (Adiprasetyo & Vinianto, 2020; Perry et al., 2020; Snowball & Antrobus, 2021) and openness (Kurniawan et al., 2022). Other festivals are positioned as a space to express marginalized indigenous cultures (Phipps,

2010), and how festivals become spaces for dialogue and identity construction (Shin, 2004). Some studies have positioned festivals as spaces for negotiation and hegemony (Koefoed et al., 2022). In this perspective, festivals seen paradoxically. On the one hand, festivals are a means for social groups to shout their cultural identity, but on the other hand, they are a means to fight for hegemony. Meanwhile, studies on festival audiences are generally viewed based on their interest in watching the festival or emphasizing cultural

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experiences (Ikhroma et al., 2023; Marga & Puspa, 2021; Niu et al., 2023; Richards & King, 2022; Sukarni et al., 2021).

This study argues that festivals are cultural public spheres following McGuigan's (1996, 2005) idea and places festivals not only as "cultural expression spaces", but also looks at how cultural expressions reflect certain political articulations in viewing contemporary political issues.

The term "festival" itself comes from the Latina word "festus" means holidays, and from an IndoEurope word that has root of religion (Dadman & Madani, 2021). The Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI online) defines a festival as "a day or happy week in commemoration of important and historical events; a party of people."

In secular festivals (Dadman & Madani, 2021), the culture of a social group is expressed in its most complete form and exposed to the public. In this regard, festivals reflect the fundamental actions the community can show itself to others. Getz (2005, Marga & Puspa, 2021) defines a festival as a public celebration with a certain theme and concept.

Festivals can be divided into two forms, although they are often difficult to distinguish, namely religious and cultural festivals (Unesco, 2015). Religious celebrations focus on celebrating important spiritual moments, but they can also feature cultural practices or heritage as in the case of Divali and Holi.

In this research, festivals are seen as all-encompassing celebratory events (with some consideration for their commercial aspects). The aim is to examine how festivals offer public platforms where cultural performances spark meaningful discussions (Sassatelli, 2011). Unlike museums, festivals provide more immersive life experiences. In this sense,

festivals convey messages about authenticity and the emergence of sensory experiences that fully engage people in enjoyable activities (see Sassatelli, 2011).

As a cultural event, the *Takbir* festival has not been seriously studied by social researchers in Indonesia. Although some studies have been conducted, they are not sufficiently engaging since they use a literary approach (Anhar Syafiq Rusdianto, Erni Isnaeniah, 2022; Sobana, 2023). The controversy surrounding the *Takbir* Festival's usage of music is covered in other research (Damanik & Arifin, 2022). This is unfortunate because the *Takbir* festival has become a ritual and culture in Indonesia. On the other hand, the *Takbir* festival is a cultural public sphere, which refers to political and social issues as contested domains through aesthetic communication methods (Giorgi & Sasatelli, 2011). The cultural public sphere emphasizes the affective dimension, involving emotions and aesthetics. This is different from the public sphere which is more focused on the cognitive dimension of communication, prioritizing rationality (McGuigan, 2005, 2011).

McGuigan (2011) applies the idea of the cultural public sphere as a crucial framework to analyze the festival phenomenon, in addition to supplementing Jurgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere which differentiates between public sphere in literature and the political public sphere (Habermas, 2007; McGuigan, 2011). In the public sphere, emphasis is placed on agenda setting and information circulation.

McGuigan (2011), drawing on Nicholas Garnham's work, explains that the public sphere, which prioritizes information and public discourse, focuses on direct cognitive communication, influencing the press

and broadcasting. Conversely, affective communication is sidelined and even deemed detrimental as it replaces serious news with infotainment. McGuigan (2005) notes with regret that this is due to the public culture not only being cognitive, but also affective. McGuigan emphasizes that in the public sphere, open and rational critical debate is important. This means that good journalism and the quality of information become significant subject of discussion while aesthetic and emotional aspects of life are often considered as distorting news and thus overlooked by critical researchers.

McGuigan (2005) suggests that in the modern world, cultural public sphere includes not only "republican letters" and the public sphere of 18th century literature and art, but also encompasses serious, classical, modern, and even postmodern aspects. Cultural public sphere encompasses various channels and circuits through which popular mass culture and entertainment serve as intermediaries for reflecting on aesthetic and emotional aspects of how we live and imagine the good life. The concept of cultural public sphere refers to the articulation of political, public, and individual discourses through affective modes of communication (aesthetic and emotional) (McGuigan, 2005).

In the context of the *Takbir* Festival, the concept of the cultural public sphere offers a productive framework for analyzing how religious-cultural expressions operate within the public domain, not merely as vehicles for information dissemination but as affective and symbolic performances. The *Takbir* Festival, which involves processions, artistic displays, and collective acts of devotion, constitutes a space in which communities articulate religious identity

while simultaneously participating in forms of public communication mediated through aesthetic and emotional modalities.

Building on McGuigan's theoritization, the festival can be interpreted as a cultural practice that facilitates the circulation of collective affect, social imagination, and communal values via nondiscursive means such as sound, visual representation, and performativity. By applying the concept of the cultural public sphere, this study approaches the *Takbir* Festival not simply as a religious or ceremonial event but as a communicative practice that reflects and negotiates social aspirations, emotional investments, and latent tensions within the community. The festival exemplifies how the public sphere is constituted through cultural forms that exceed the cognitiverational emphasis of Habermasian theory. In this light, *Takbir* serves as a compelling instance of how aesthetic and affective dimensions contribute meaningfully to the production of public discourse, the reinforcement of social cohesion, and the articulation of politic and identity in a pluralistic society.

As a Muslim country, various Islamic festivals especially in Java have developed by the integration of local traditions with Islamic teachings (Hakam, 2015). Therefore, many Islamic festivals in Java usually reflect the rich cultural diversity of Indonesian society (Arif & Darwati, 2022). Rather than representing a break from religious orthodoxy, such practices demonstrate how Islamic expressions adapt to and engage with local cultural contexts. In this framework, events such as the *Takbir* Festival function not only as religious observances but also as spaces for expressing communal identity, cultural plurality, and shared social values. The vibrant performances and

regionally specific variations of the *Takbir* festivals underscore the dynamic relationship between religious devotion and local cultural creativity.

As a space for cultural expression, the *Takbir* festival is understood as an expression of public culture through various cultural elements such as mascots, clothing, music, and other elements brought by each participant. From a political perspective, expression through various cultural elements reflects certain political expressions and articulations. As shown by Minhus and Huie (2021) when studying the cultural heritage festival “Pohela Boishakh” in Bangladesh, their study shows that the unique phenomenon of participants’ fondness for wearing traditional clothing when participating in the festival reflects the spirit of tolerance and the vision of multiculturalism. This happens because festival audiences and participants can learn from each other. Dimova (2012) has also shown how the Ohrid festival has become a major pillar of contemporary politics in the Republic of Macedonia.

Festivals are also often paradoxical as shown by Koefoed et al. (2022) in their study of two festivals in Copenhagen, namely Kulturhavn (Cultural Harbor) and Smag Verden (Taste the World). In both events, the festival becomes a liberating space and calls the hegemony of power at once.

Over the decades, festivals have significantly grown throughout the world in various forms (Shin, 2004; Snowball & Antrobus, 2021). The economy, especially in order to encourage creative industries and tourism, is one of the important factors behind the spread of festivals throughout the world (Laksmi et al., 2023). Festivals are also a means of multifunctional policy (Richards &

Leal Londoño, 2022). So, many governments encourage festivals (Shin, 2004).

The rise of festivals throughout the world has encouraged festival studies with a variety of approaches and perspectives. Several studies have examined the economic perspective of viewing festivals (Laksmi et al., 2023; Perry et al., 2020). Audience or festivalgoers are also gaining attention among researchers. Some researchers, for example, examine the motives and satisfaction of festival visitors (Liu et al., 2023; Niu et al., 2023; Suwanto, 2017; Tanford & Jung, 2017) or their experiences when visiting festivals (Ikhruma et al., 2023; Marga & Puspa, 2021; Richards & King, 2022). Online festivals hold during the Covid19 pandemic have also attracted the interest of several researchers (Liu et al., 2023; Richards & Leal Londoño, 2022; Roessler, 2007; Shipman & Vogel, 2024).

As a public cultural sphere, festivals are open to debate about the meanings of cultural significance, and this often involves power struggles. Several researchers have therefore placed festivals as a means to fight exclusiveness (Kurniawan et al., 2022), to instill the values of multiculturalism or cultural pluralism (Adiprasetyo & Vinianto, 2020), and as a means of identity negotiation (Minhus & Huie, 2021; Shin, 2004).

Apart from the previously described studies, this research aims to explain the *Takbir* festival as a cultural public sphere through which culture is expressed and political positions are articulated in addressing contemporary problems such as conflict, pluralism, and the environmental crisis. By examining the *Takbir* festival as a space of cultural public expression, this research is expected to make important contributions

in festival studies from a new perspective. In this way, the *Takbir* festival is not just a festival seen as a "religious ritual" in modern society, bereft of its religious relevance as it changes into a spectacle, but it becomes a space for cultural expression that guarantees the existence of diverse cultural expressions and certain political attitudes. On the other hand, as rituals, festivals are also considered important in building social integration (see Couldry, 2005). This functionalism is essential because the "absence" in the era of social media has created a mass society and anonymity which tends to be harmful to the society's cohesion. As stated by Hardiman (2021), on social media, art must go viral to get attention. As a result, there is hyperpoliticization of works of art. Furthermore, Hardiman points out, "accessibility to the mass, autonomy and politicization of work of art does not just change the quantity of the subject of viewing works of art from individuals to the mass, but also the quality of perception and even their aesthetic experience."

Method

This study employs a qualitative field research approach, utilizing ethnographic methods. Data are collected by means of participant observation and semistructured interviews. Observations are particularly focused on the *Takbir* festivals in Pleret, Bantul, as well as in several places in the Sleman area such as Monjali, Gamping, and the Indonesian Islamic University on Jalan Kaliurang.

The choice of the three locations was based on the argument that each location represents a different diversity. Pleret is located on the outskirts and is known as the heritage area of the Sultan Agung Palace where the nuances

of Islam, both NU and Muhammadiyah, are distinct. The UII area represents the Modern Islamic education area, while the Jogja Kembali Monument (Monjali) is an area with a national monument. Observations in the three environments are awaited to represent the diversity of Yogyakarta. To gather more comprehensive data, interviews were conducted with participants of the *Takbir* festival. Seven informants were interviewed in the study, representing the participants. Interviews were mainly conducted with the chairperson or coordinator who could provide detailed information on the culture they displayed. Interviews focused on participants' motivations and thematic choices, particularly as expressed through mascots, costumes, and other performative elements, to interpret the underlying messages conveyed in the festival.

Result

The *Takbir* festival, held in several regions of the Yogyakarta Special Region or *Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta* (DIY), holds many meanings and functions for society, depending on the perspective used. One of the main functions of the *Takbir* is, of course, as a means for displaying Islamic values to the public. However, through observations and interviews in the field, it was found that the *Takbir* festival had gone beyond its basic function as a means of broadcasting Islamic teachings. On the contrary, the *Takbir* festival has become a medium of cultural expression, and through it, the participants articulate certain political positions.

Islam and Acculturation of Javanese Islam

The *Takbir* Festival serves as a platform for the people of Yogyakarta to showcase the Islamic teachings (*syi'ar*). It operates at

two levels. Firstly, *syi'ar* occurs through the continuous chanting of *Takbir* during the carnival. Secondly, the event that the festival celebrates, namely Eid al Fitri and Eid al Adha, creates a space for the society to make the event even more special. Additionally, the festival serves as a means of spreading Islam and carries cultural significance. For example, during the *Takbir* Festival in Monjali, participants from the Miftahul Jannah Mosque, Jongkang, Sariharjo, depicted the story of Sunan Kalijaga as a preacher who spread Islam in Java by combining Islamic and local cultural values. This is manifested through the participants wearing traditional Javanese clothing made from woven fabric, known as *Surjan*, along with *Blangkon* headgear and sashes around their waist. The participants wear all white clothes and carry *wayang*, a Javanese shadow puppet art, with the word "Allah" inscribed on them. They also walk alongside a mascot statue of Sunan Kalijaga, also dressed in *Surjan* and *Blangkon*, and holding a *wayang*. The story of Sunan Kalijaga and his preaching plays a significant role in the construction of the Miftahul Jannah Mosque. It emphasizes the meaning of the Islamic identity of the Javanese community, which still holds true to the fundamental values of its culture. The concept of acculturation is seen as the most tangible form of creating the Javanese Muslim community, as it involves incorporating Islamic teachings into various aspects of Javanese culture, such as dance, Javanese songs, and *gamelan* music.

Notably, the preaching of Sunan Kalijaga is perceived as a creative approach to spreading Islam, intertwining it with Javanese cultural practices. This is illustrated through the performance of Javanese dance and songs, such as *Lirilir*, accompanied by *gamelan* music

during parades. It is important to note that the presence of Islam in Java does not seek to replace ancestral cultures but exists alongside them.



Figure 1. Sunan Kalijaga and Islamic acculturation in Javanese tradition.

Source: Researchers documentation

Different groups interpret the story of Sunan Kalijaga in their own unique ways. For instance, in the Nandan parade, Sunan Kalijaga is depicted wearing a white robe and *turban*, symbolizing his role as a devout Muslim preacher. Additionally, the Nandan portrays Sunan Kalijaga's followers as men dressed in attire representative of the time, carrying spears to illustrate their willingness to defend their people and beliefs when necessary.

Both the Jongkang and Nandan *Takbir* festivals highlight the value of pluralism in their parades, reflecting the inclusive nature of Javanese Muslim identity. This value is expressed through the combination of cultural elements such as clothing and art, demonstrating the harmonious coexistence of Islam and Javanese culture without

negating each other. Ultimately, the story of Sunan Kalijaga serves as a theme for various community groups, emphasizing the integration of Islam with Javanese culture as a means of nurturing the world and civilization.

Cultural Expression as a political articulation

The *Takbir* festival in Yogyakarta is not only a means of spreading Islam or a form of entertainment for modern society; it also reflects certain political attitudes and views. These political attitudes are closely related to the festival's theme of caring for the world and the Islamic civilization. Participants express their interpretations of this theme through cultural elements, reflecting their attitudes and political beliefs. The festival's theme represents the committee's interpretation of current events, and participants are expected to express it through various cultural elements. The process of reinterpretation by the participants reflects their attitudes and political views.

Hall (1986; Babalola, 2023) introduced the term 'articulation' to refer to something that is spoken, expressed, or articulated. Hall (Clarke, 2015) then used the metaphor of a truck to illustrate articulation as a way of conveying or expressing a particular meaning. According to him, a truck has different parts, both in form and function, such as the cabin and the trailer. These parts are interconnected and work together to form a functional whole. However, these parts can also change their configuration. This truck metaphor reflects that articulation is a form of connection between ideological elements, which, in a particular context, come together in a specific discourse (Clarke, 2015). However, these connections between

ideological elements are not permanent; they are discursive and dependent on specific historical contexts. Hall's view of articulation (Babalola, 2023) further allows us to think about how ideology empowers people, enabling them to understand or experience their historical situation without reducing that understanding to their socioeconomic position, class, or social location.

In general, there are two articulations of the politics of the festival participants expressed through the hybridization of cultural elements. First, participants express their awareness towards the world and the Islamic civilization. Then, this awareness manifests in the willingness of the community to maintain cultural pluralism.

Caring for The World and Civilization as Caring For The Nature and Life

Many festival participants interpret the theme of caring for the world and civilization as caring for the environment. This connection is evident in their discussions about the environmental problems caused by industrialization, deforestation, land conversion, and environmental pollution (see figure 2). The ongoing discourse on environmental crises, including global warming, cannot be ignored. In Javanese society, "universe" refers to both the environment and the self. The big universe encompasses nature and invisible beings, while the little universe includes the self and the human mind. Some participants have narrowed down the meaning of caring for the universe to caring for the environment, which contrasts with the Javanese cultural understanding of caring for the entire natural world and oneself. The festival participants express their interpretation of caring for

the universe and civilization through a combination of Minangkabau and Javanese culture, as well as through the protection of plants and forests. The festival coordinator emphasized that caring for the world means caring for the environment, and this message was conveyed through a symbolic tree adorned with LED lights, representing the continuous protection of nature. In Indonesian society, candles symbolize life, hope, and wisdom, and this symbolism is integrated into the *Takbir* festival as a way to communicate the importance of protecting nature.

In Javanese philosophy, the world is divided into two realms: *jagat gede* and *jagat cilik* (Kayam, 1987). *Jagat gede* is referred to as the macrocosm, while *jagat cilik* is referred to as the microcosm. *Jagat gede* encompasses the entire environment in which a person lives, whereas *jagat cilik* includes the physical body and the soul. In another sense, *jagat gede* includes the entirety of nature, including unseen beings such as spirits, ethereal entities, and the spirits of village founders. By interpreting the act of taking care the *jagat* as environmental preservation, participants have actually reduced the meaning of *jagat* to simply caring for the environment. However, in Javanese culture, caring for *jagat* means caring for the entire universe and even oneself.

Figures 2 and 3 depict one festival participant's interpretation of maintaining the *jagat* and the Islamic civilization. While the term "civilization" is understood as a culture expressed through the fusion of Minangkabau

and Javanese cultures (Figure 2), maintaining the *jagat* is expressed through the protection of nature and its elements (Figure 3).

Bayu, the coordinator of the festival participants who carried this theme, stated that caring for the *jagat* means caring for the environment. In the context of the *Takbir* festival, Bayu mentioned that this is symbolized through the Lilin dance originating from Minangkabau. The candle flame is replaced with a tree adorned with LED lights. The message is that nature must be continuously protected by preserving its elements i.e. trees, plants, and so on (see Figure 1). In Indonesian culture, a candle symbolizes life, hope, and even wisdom that overcomes darkness.

The dominant interpretation among festival participants in the Pleret, Bantul area when translating the meaning of *merawat jagat* (taking care of the universe) focuses on environmental preservation. There are numerous expressions, often in the form of mascots, that depict the current environmental crisis and emphasize the importance of our concern for maintaining environmental sustainability.

In addition to environmental preservation, taking care of universe and civilization are also interpreted as maintaining the harmony of life. Harmony implies the absence of conflict or, at the very least, minimizing conflict as much as possible. Consequently, social relations should emphasize unity and mutual respect (Kayam, 1987).



Figure 2. Festival Participants in Minangkabau traditional costume. The message of preservation is expressed through candles and visualizations of candles and plants.

Source: Researchers document

In the festival in Pleret, Bantul, the interpretation of taking care the universe and civilization as maintaining social harmony is notably influenced by current global conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Palestine conflict. The symbolism of the wounded horse by participants from Kedaton Kidul reflects this interpretation. The festival participants are not necessarily taking sides in these conflicts but are instead emphasizing a broader aspiration for peace. The idea of peace here is closely tied to the absence of conflict, which resonates deeply within the community, especially given the ongoing sensitive issues surrounding Palestine.



Figure 3. The mascot of the traditional house is combined with elements of Javanese culture and plants as an expression of caring for nature and pluralism.

Source: Researchers document

The wounded horse mascot was chosen because, as explained by Alif Ramadan, the group leader who proposed this theme, the horse has long been utilized throughout the history of warfare. By presenting the war horse as a mascot, this group wanted to convey the importance of maintaining peace. In the participants' understanding, war threatens human civilization. Alif Ramadan (interview, June 19, 2024) stated, "War in our civilization will achieve nothing."

The interpretation of the participants in Pleret differs when compared to the articulation of participants in other areas. At Balecatu Field, Gamping, Sleman, the political articulation of war and sympathy for the Palestinian people was expressed by the youth group from the AlMuttaqin Mosque. This group specifically raised the issue of 'colonialism' against Palestine. The participants carried Palestinian flags, both waved along the road using small sticks and draped over several drum instruments. In addition to expressing their political stance towards Palestine through physical cultural attributes, this group also presented a short theatrical performance depicting the cruelty of Israeli soldiers who came and ravaged the Palestinians' lands.

The AlMuttaqin Mosque youth group began their theatrical performance by depicting the situation before the arrival of the Israeli soldiers. In the scene, several youths acting as Palestinians are shown in a peaceful situation. Some are depicted as children happily playing jump rope, and others as residents reciting Quranic verses. However, a few moments later, several men wearing vests and carrying firearm replicas entered the scene. In an instant, these Israeli soldiers shoot the Palestinian residents and then take selfies while smiling proudly over the crimes they have committed. After the soldiers leave, several people representing Indonesians arrive. They then lift the bodies lying on the ground, accompanied by the song "Atuna Tufuli" (a song that describes the suffering of the Palestinian people) as the closing of the theatrical performance.

Through this short theatrical performance, the AlMuttaqin Mosque youth group sought to send a message and express their political stance in support of the

Palestinian people's struggle. The scene clearly depicts Israel as the oppressor and Palestine as the oppressed, while the (Muslim) Indonesian citizens as the rescuers. A similar concept was also presented by the youth of AnNuur Mosque in Monjali and TPA Miftahul Jannah, Kopatan, during the *Takbir* festival at the Islamic University of Indonesia. Both conveyed the concept of Indonesians, especially the Muslims, as the helpers of the Palestinian people. This narrative was reinforced by the informants interviewed in this study. The informants emphasized that they wanted to build the notion that brotherhood among Muslims must always be maintained despite differences in nationality,

so that if a fellow Muslim is facing adversity, other Muslims should come to their aid.



Figure 4. The theatrical scene by festival participants from AlMuttaqin Mosque showcasing their political stance on the IsraelPalestine conflict

Source: Researchers document

Nurturing the Universe and Civilization as Nurturing Pluralism

In addition to environmental conservation, upholding cultural pluralism is another stance and political position expressed by *Takbir* festival participants. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate how cultural pluralism is conveyed by the participants. The mascot from Kerto Lor, Pleret, depicted in Figure 2, merges elements of Minangkabau culture (represented by the Rumah Gadang) with Javanese cultural elements. Meanwhile, in Figure 4, Balinese cultural elements are prominently displayed through mascots like the *Barong*, *Naga Banda*, and *pajēng* (a traditional Balinese umbrella).

In an interview with the researcher, the team coordinator explained that the choice of Balinese cultural mascots such as the *Barong*, *Naga Banda*, and *pajēng* was due to the dominance of Balinese and Javanese cultures in Indonesia. Therefore, this particular group (participant number 11) also included Javanese culture, represented by dancers accompanying the mascot.

Beyond the *barong* and other cultural elements, Balinese culture was also presented

through music, specifically the *gamelan*. An interesting fusion occurred as the *Takbir* chants were accompanied by the lively rhythm of Balinese *gamelan*. In this context, the participants sought to showcase cultural pluralism through three key elements: Javanese culture (represented by the dancers behind the mascot), Balinese culture (primarily through *gamelan* and the mascot), and modern culture (represented by the drum band). By doing so, the festival participants endeavored to demonstrate cultural plurality by featuring various cultures within a single procession. Notably, this "fusion" or "hybridization" drew from cultural elements that might, theologically, be very different—Islam on one hand and Hinduism on the other. However, within the cultural sphere, these differences were expressed harmoniously. Through such a combination, the participants' political articulation became very clear, particularly in their view of cultural plurality.

The discussion of cultural pluralism has long been rooted in liberal thought traditions (Helly, 2002; Singh, 1987). Thus, its core idea revolves around respect for individual differences. In the cultural context, pluralism means that cultural differences exist and coexist within society (Singh, 1987).



Figure 5. The mascot which emphasize the prevalence of Javanese culture as a form of cultural prularism expression.

Source: Researchers documment

The merging of various cultural elements as an interpretation of nurturing civilization as nurturing pluralism was a common practice among almost all participants. In addition to Balinese, Minangkabau, and Javanese cultures, other cultures such as Dayak and Middle Eastern were also represented, as shown in figure 5. These practices highlight how the *Takbir* festival has become an important cultural public sphere for fostering pluralism and cultural dialogue. In this way, festival participants also conveyed their political stances and articulations in addressing contemporary issues like war and cultural pluralism.

Takbir Festibal as Learning Process

In addition to serving as a cultural expression and political articulation, this study also found that the *Takbir* festival has become an important means of intergenerational learning and dialogue. This learning process is particularly evident when participants must showcase cultures other than their own, such as Balinese, Dayak, or Minangkabau cultures. Since these cultures are not inherently theirs, participants had to engage in learning when they decided to present them. Bayu, the coordinator of the Kerto Lor team, which showcased Minangkabau culture in their mascot, mentioned that nurturing civilization means representing culture. The choice of Minangkabau culture was made through a research process aimed at discovering both the unique aspects of the culture being presented and the culture itself. In this context, the research unfolded in two layers: first, identifying the unique cultural elements to be showcased, ensuring they stood out from those of other participants; and second, conducting research on the chosen culture after its uniqueness had been identified.

If culture is understood as a learning process (Koentjaraningrat, 2009), then the *Takbir* festival has effectively demonstrated the learning process among its participants. This learning process occurs when participants must represent a culture other than their own. Without this learning process, there is a high possibility of misrepresenting other cultures. Therefore, each participant must deeply study the culture they want to present. As shown in images 3 and 4, the participants were able to depict detailed elements of each culture they showcased, indicating their commitment to the cultural learning process.

However, the learning process did not stop with their own culture or the culture they presented. Instead, participants also learned about history (as in the case of *da'wah* represented by Sunan Kalijaga's mascot) and tolerance of cultural differences. This is crucial because tolerance involves respecting differences (Ciptadi, 2024), which is beneficial for a plural society like Indonesia that often faces issues of disharmony (Prasetyo Nugroho & Nawawi, 2023).

The Ritualistic Nature of *Takbir* and Social Integration

In the context of cultural and religious diversity, this study argues that the *Takbir* festival can contribute to bridging differences and creating social integration in modern society, especially in the digital era. The widespread presence of social media has brought about various issues, including the spread of disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation, commonly known as hoaxes. In the political realm, this has led to the phenomenon widely recognized as posttruth, where the lines between lies and truth become blurred (Marshall & Drieschova, 2018; Salgado, 2018; Speed & Mannion, 2017).

In politics, posttruth has resulted in social divisions within societies, as seen in various contemporary political phenomena, from Donald Trump and Brexit to the widespread *cebong* and *kampret* labelling phenomena in Indonesian politics. Some analyses conclude that posttruth politics has detrimental effects on democracy and social life, such as political polarization (Kelkar, 2019; Lewandowsky et al., 2017), declining trust in political institutions (Marshall & Drieschova, 2018), and even threatening social resilience (Mateusz, 2022).

The posttruth phenomenon is a consequence of the advancements of social media, which facilitates the ease of information exchange. Before the era of social media, information generally had to pass through a filtering mechanism based on standards of appropriateness, value, and accuracy before reaching the public (Rianto, 2016). For example, in news media, there are editors and editors in chief who serve as gatekeepers, ensuring that information is suitable for public consumption. However, the rise of social media has shifted the gatekeeping role increasingly into the hands of social media users themselves, as individuals can connect with other audiences, consume content from around the world, and share what is meaningful to them (see Garrett, 2019). This situation creates a posttruth phenomenon where people consume and distribute news without a critical attitude, often prioritizing personal or group preferences over the truthfulness of the information (Faturahmi, 2020). This condition is exacerbated by the fact that social media has become a platform for identity politics, which divides society, especially during elections (Prasetya, 2019). It is no surprise that the presence of social

media over time has contributed to shaping a society vulnerable to division.

In the face of the vulnerabilities of modern society due to social media, the *Takbir* festival can contribute in establishing social integration in two ways. First, through interaction and societal learning processes. In the *Takbir* festival, physical presence is a requirement for participants and for the audience who wish to enjoy the festival. Physical presence, which is not a primary concern in the realm of social media, plays a significant role in the context of the *Takbir* parade. The physical presence of participants and spectators allows for intergenerational dialogue and interaction among people from various cultures and beliefs. Therefore, the *Takbir* festival is not merely an annual ritual; it is a ritual that integrates meanings of plurality and unity, creating social integration when the different elements in society are arranged to achieve functional harmony (Hendry Ar., 2013).

Second, through public participation. Interaction occurs because the *Takbir* festival requires the presence of participants. This includes the participants involved in the *Takbir* itself and the spectators. Social interaction is a prerequisite for efforts to build social integration. Referring to Dayan and Katz, ritual ceremonies as "liminal" moments serve as a break from routine. These ceremonies offer society the opportunity to explore alternatives to their choices and, in doing so, partially express the anxieties, chaos, and joys of their origins (Coman & Rothenbuhler, 2005).

On the other hand, participation involves several age groups. Observations of the participants found that each contributed by three age groups: the old group, the young

group, and the children. They line up with children mainly at the front, then teenagers and parents. During the preparation process, they practice for several weeks in a way that interaction between generations happens. The study of Peng Xie et al. (2022) in the context of migrant communities has confirmed this. Using a social capital perspective, Xie concluded that social participation is favorably related to social integration.

Discussion

This study employs the approach proposed by Jim McGuigan (2005, 2011) to view festivals as a cultural public sphere. Unlike Jurgen Habermas's political public sphere, the cultural public sphere emphasizes the dimension of affective communication. In McGuigan's (2005) view, affective communication helps people think reflectively about situations in their own lives and how to negotiate with systems that may seem beyond their control. The cultural public sphere offers people a way to think, feel, imagine, and debate in controversial ways.

The result of this study indicates that festivals not only function as a means of leisure but also as a space for participants to reflect, imagine, and construct their feelings about various ongoing social and political situations. The position of the *Takbir* festival in the cultural public sphere is seen in how it provides a space for participants to articulate their political stances through more personal and collective forms of expression. In this context, the festival functions as a medium for the community to express and introduce their perspectives on social issues, such as environmental conservation and pluralism. Therefore, the cultural expressions that emerge in this festival reflect political and

social positions related to the values they believe in.

This study also argues that positioning the festival as a cultural public sphere means imagining culture as a process rather than as a product or a mere noun (Kleden, 1987). By treating culture as a process, culture requires efforts to resist change and maintain its identity, but it also needs change and the development of its identity. Thus, culture experiences a movement of integration, disintegration, and reintegration. Values are accepted, then rejected, and finally, new values are adopted (Kleden, 1987). In the context of the *Takbir* festival, the process of integration, disintegration, and reintegration of values explained by Kleden is not only reflected in the formation of new values as environmental preservation and appreciation for cultural diversity but also in the dynamics of acculturation between local culture and Islamic values as well. This festival shows how participants accept local traditional elements, and then reinterpret them within the framework of Islamic religiosity. The acculturation of local culture with Islam in the *Takbir* festival is an example of how culture transforms a process of collective negotiation. This is reflected in the story of Sunan Kalijaga which became the exhibition theme of several groups. The story of Sunan Kalijaga is often seen as a historical illustration of how culture experiences the process of integration, disintegration, and reintegration. In his efforts to spread Islam in Java, Sunan Kalijaga rejected the path of confrontation with local traditions but adopted a cultural approach that accommodated local cultural elements instead. He utilized art, such as *wayang* and *gamelan* music, as a medium of preaching, wrapping Islamic teachings in cultural forms,

already familiar to the community. Within the framework of the cultural public sphere, the *Takbir* festival is apparent as a cultural public space where this story about the negotiation of acculturation takes place through rational discourse, emotional, aesthetic, and symbolic expression.

In addition, the *Takbir* festival also provides another lesson that was not widely discussed by McGuigan, namely how festivals function as a learning medium. This study supports the idea of Saputro and Hermanto (Saputro & Hermanto, 2024), who argue that festivals are a medium for a culture to learn about itself and how culture can adapt to internal and external changes.

Learning about personal culture through the *Takbir* festival opens space for diverse ideological expressions that reflect how communities understand and negotiate their collective identity. The *Takbir* festival also serves as a cultural arena where people reexplore their cultural heritage, the Sunan Kalijaga figure in this case, and reinterpret them into narratives aligned with their group's values and beliefs. As seen in the contrast between the Jongkang and Nandan groups, representations of a similar historical figure, Sunan Kalijaga, elevate different narratives. Jongkang emphasizes the harmony between Islam and Javanese culture through gentle and inclusive acculturation, while Nandan presents a more assertive religious narrative that combines local symbols with a spirit of defending the faith. In particular, the *Takbir* festival invites its participants to discover more about their respective cultures and the culture they display in the festival.

In addition, interpreting history and ideological expression in the *Takbir* festival is also present in the form of awareness of

contemporary humanitarian issues. One concrete form of this is the emergence of expressions of support for Palestine manifested through short theatrical performances and orations during the festival. This support is a statement of solidarity with the suffering of Muslims in Palestine and reflects how local communities integrate global awareness into their cultural practices. Attributes such as the Palestinian flag, orations, and performances that emphasize the message of liberation, become a form of political affirmation of society ideologically. Thus, the *Takbir* festival becomes a space where historical narratives, local identities, and ideological positions on global issues intersect. This festival shows that Islam expressed in public spaces is not only related to the past and local culture but is also open to transnational solidarity and critical attitudes towards world injustice.

On the other hand, by positioning the festival as a ritual activity, this study also supports the ideas of anthropological thinkers like Emile Durkheim (Couldry, 2005), who see the function of rituals in society. In Durkheim's view, rituals contribute to producing and maintaining social integration. In the social media era filled with hoaxes and posttruth, festivals become even more significant as they prevent art and cultural expression from falling into the trap of sensationalism, horror, and terror on social media (see Hardiman, 2021).

The integrative function of the *Takbir* ritual and how the issue of pluralism or harmony with nature is articulated by the participants is an interesting antithesis when compared to the reality on social media. As concluded by research by Octavianne et al. (2024; see also Rehmat & Mnazoor, 2023; Temby, 2020), identity politics and

polarization have become serious problems in contemporary Muslim countries, especially in the context of general elections, social media, and global dynamics such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. General elections exacerbate polarization when identity politics and religious issues are used to garner votes. Meanwhile, a study by Setiawati et al., (2023) in Indonesia and the Philippines found that students perceived social media as a source of negative political news. The conclusions of several studies show the potential damage of social media and simultaneously confirm the potential of festivals in campaigning for diversity, encouraging harmony, and articulating politics in responding to contemporary problems so the government can be more involved in facilitating such activities.

This study highlights cultural expression and how it articulates certain political attitudes. To articulate means to express (Clarke, 2015). Consequently, researchers must conduct ethnographic analysis to find the meaning behind cultural expression through various cultural artifacts displayed by participants. As stated by Geertz (1992), cultural analysis is interpreting meanings, interpreting those guesses, and concluding.

However, festivals involve audiences at all times and, the meaning is always with the audience. Therefore, analyzing reception is decisive for future research (McGuigan, 2011). Cultural expression in festivals is a discourse and consequently opens to a diversity of meanings (Hall, 1996). Reception analysis will open up the space for audiences to interpret the discourse presented by participants through cultural expressions. By analyzing the audience's reception of the public culture expressed by participants,

the role and function of festivals in modern society can be more easily investigated based on audience reception and interpretation.

Conclusion

This study positions the *Takbir* festival as a cultural public sphere, an approach that is relatively rare among social researchers examining festivals. Through the cultural public sphere, festival participants express a range of cultures through the cultural elements they showcase. These cultural expressions simultaneously reveal the political articulations of the festival participants through their interpretations of the festival's theme, which is about nurturing the world and civilization.

The study also concludes that in an era of social media saturated with hoaxes, the *Takbir* festival plays a crucial role in building social integration. By facilitating physical presence among festival participants and audiences, social interaction is made possible. This social interaction allows people to learn from each other and maintain social harmony, in contrast to the nonphysical interactions on social media.

Finally, the study suggests the importance of researching audience reception of the discourse constructed by festival participants through the public cultural expressions they present. This approach would better identify the role and function of festivals in modern society, rather than merely placing festivals within the contexts of economics and tourism.

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