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Cultural System of Cirebonese People: Tradition of Maulidan in the Kanoman Kraton

Sistem Budaya Masyarakat Cirebon: Tradisi Maulidan dalam Kraton Kanoman

Abstract

This paper examines the construction of Maulidan ritual in the commemoration of Prophet Muhammad’s birth at the Kanoman's palace (kraton) Cirebon. Although the central element of the maulid is the veneration of Prophet, the tradition of Maulidan in Kanoman reinforced the religious authority of Sultan in mobilizing a massive traditional gathering by converging Islamic propagation with the art performance. It argues that the slametan (ritual meal with Arabic prayers), pelal alit (preliminary celebration), panjang jimat (allegorical festival), asyrakalan (recitation of the book of maulid) and the gamelan sekaten can be understood as indexical symbols modifying trans-cultural Muslim ritual into local entity and empowering the traditional machinery of sexual division of ritual labour. The study focuses on the trend of Muslim monarch in the elaboration of maulid performance to demonstrate their piety and power in order to gain their legitimacy. Its finding suggests that religion tends to be shaped by society rather than society is shaped by religion. I emphasize that the maulidan tradition is capable of creating meaningful connections between the imperial cult and every segment of Cirebon people; other than those Islamic modernists and Islamists who against it in principle. Based on the literature, media reports and interview materials, I argue that the meaning of rites may extend far beyond its stated purpose of venerating the Prophet since the folk religion has strategically generated the old power and religious authority. This study attempts to capture the cultural system of the religious-based rituals where the practice of local Muslims has shown distinctive manifestation from the Muslim heartlands in the Middle East.

Keyword: maulid, slametan, religion, belief, ritual,

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