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THE POPULARIZATION OF *SYALAWAT DULANG* WITHIN CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Syalawat dulang is a genre of Islamic music developed in West Sumatra, Indonesia. The term *syalawat dulang* derives from its form which is a type of *syalawat*—a devotional chant in praise of Prophet Muhammad—performed with the accompaniment of *dulang*, trays traditionally used for gold panning. In its early development, this musical genre was performed exclusively in prayer rooms as a means of disseminating Islamic values. Today, however, *syalawat dulang* has become increasingly popular. It is performed at various events and now serves primarily as a form of entertainment. At the same time, its lyrics have expanded beyond praise of the Prophet Muhammad. They include other songs to attract the audience. The rise of the Islamic musical genre *syalawat dulang* has emerged as a notable cultural phenomenon within Indonesia's Muslim communities. This study aims to examine and clarify the process by which *syalawat dulang* performances have gained popularity. This study employs a qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation and in-depth interviews. The observations included both live performances and recordings available on YouTube. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, i.e. *syalawat dulang* performers. The results indicate that the popularization of *syalawat dulang* is reflected in the following forms: (1) the use of segments or acts; (2) dynamic interaction between performers and audiences; and the use of innovative musical arrangements. Based on these findings, the study recommends organizing festivals to increase public awareness of this musical genre, particularly among young people and schoolchildren.

Keywords: Islamic music; *syalawat dulang*; *salawaik dulang*; cultural hybridization

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic music, or music with Islamic themes, plays a significant role in the social and spiritual lives of many Muslims in Indonesia. To make Islamic music more accessible to a broader audience, musicians with a strong connection to the faith have adapted it to popular tastes. One form of Islamic music that has begun to develop is *syalawat dulang.* This music originated in the Minangkabau culture, one of the regions in Indonesia

with a Muslim majority. The popularization of *syalawat dulang* is intended to make Islamic messages or teachings more accessible to younger generations who may be more accustomed to modern music styles. This music is often performed in spiritual contexts, celebrations, and religious ceremonies.

Syalawat dulang, a musical tradition that has existed and evolved for many years, has not yet been the subject of extensive scholarly research. The most comprehensive work on the *shalawat dulang* was written by Firdaus (2023). This book discusses its meaning, history, development, and performance techniques. However, this study does not identify the factors that have enabled *syalawat dulang* music to survive and remain relevant to this day. Therefore, research on the popularization of *syalawat dulang* remains timely and relevant.

This study argues that the *syalawat dulang* genre, as a form of Islamic music in Indonesia, serves as a testament to the popularization of Islamic music within Muslim communities. This process of popularization has been ongoing since the 1990s. There are three key elements underpinning this popularization: first, its performance structure reflects contemporary popular performance formats; second, the interaction between performers and the audience; and third, its innovative musical arrangements.

Syalawat dulang also functions as a medium for *da'wah* that promotes Islamic ideology; the aesthetic impression it creates for its audience has been described as *pangajian nan taraso* (a religious gathering that touches the heart) or *da'wah* that can be felt, evoking a sense of religiosity. *Pangajian nan taraso* refers to the verses that are recited and sung, which convey spiritual messages as guidance for religious practice rooted in Sufi teachings and expressed through religious literary works. The performance incorporates the concept of *lagu nan sero* (a pleasant song) combined with theatrical elements, accompanied by *tapuak dulang geleang kapalo* (handclapping and head-nodding), resulting in a musical form that blends traditional elements with rhythms influenced by popular music.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Islamic music

Studies on Islamic music in general have been conducted by previous researchers. Research on Islamic music can be broadly categorized into three areas: music for *da'wah* purposes, the history of Islamic music, and Islamic music in relation to education. Research on art for *da'wah* has been conducted by Safitri et al. (2022) on the implementation of Islamic *da'wah* through musical art, and Sriwulan (2018) on the ideology of *da'wah* music. Research on the history of Islamic music has been conducted by Pratama and Annisa (2023) who examined the history of changes in genres and the purposes of religious music in Indonesia; Syafniati et al. (2019) who investigated the development of Islamic performances; and Anas et al. (2021) who discussed the aesthetic legacy of Sufism. Meanwhile, research on Islamic music with an educational focus includes studies on the effects of Islamic music therapy on anxiety in the elderly (Safitri et al.,2022), Islamic education (Firdaus et al., 2020), and Islamic music from the perspective of oral literature (Meigalia & Putra, 2019).

In its development, Islamic music has adapted to social and cultural needs. Through a Sufi approach (*tasawuf*) and supported by historical evidence of the effectiveness of *da'wah* through the arts, religious music—which represents the transformation of musical art in this era—has become a highly effective medium for *da'wah* in disseminating Islamic values among children, youth and the broader public (Riyadi & Amrullah, 2022). Music is regarded as a branch of knowledge in Islam that should be grounded in *tawhid*, as it is a form of beauty that ultimately leads to obedience to God (Jamil, 2022). In Islamic boarding schools, music is also utilized as a means of enhancing and supporting the personal and social development of students (Sulasman & Ainusyamsi, 2014). Furthermore, songs with Sufi themes reflect a deep spiritual connection in the composers and performers, making them a form of *da'wah* that is easily accepted by the community (Pradana & Emalia, 2020).

2.2 *Syalawat dulang*

Syalawat dulang, also known as *sholawat dulang* or *salawaik dulang*, is a form of traditional Minangkabau performing art that combines music with praise for the Prophet Muhammad and the teachings of Islam. The term *syalawat dulang* derives from the word *syalawat*, meaning prayer, and *dulang*, a copper plate used for panning gold that serves as a musical instrument that regulates both tempo and rhythm (Fathurahman, 2008). The *syalawat* is expressed in the form of poetry and delivered through song. The sung verses contain Islamic teachings (Meigalia & Putra, 2019). Musically, the melody of the verses is enhanced by rhythmic patterns produced by striking the *dulang* (Rahman, 1992).

The recitation of verses accompanied by the striking of the *dulang* in the performance is carried out by two groups (Anas et al., 2021). The two groups engage in friendly competition, to demonstrate their aesthetic abilities. They showcase their skill in presenting the material aesthetically. The narrative is structured in the form of questions and answers. The questions typically relate to the teachings of Islamic values. Each

group presents poetic verses and songs accompanied by the rhythmic beating of the *dulang* and synchronized head movements. To remain relevant and popular among the community, this traditional performing art has adapted to public tastes by incorporating elements of entertainment. One such element is the use of humor, which captures the audience's attention and elicits laughter (Meigalia & Putra, 2019). In addition to conveying Islamic teachings, the *syalawat dulang* verses embody the noble cultural values of the Minangkabau people, which have been passed down and preserved as part of their cultural heritage. These values include teachings on doing good, working hard, and upholding the values of equality and solidarity (Meigalia & Putra, 2019). *The syalawat dulang* performance has become a form of expression representing Sufi teachings for adherents of the Syatariyah order in Minangkabau (Anas et al., 2021). Over time, *syalawat dulang* has shifted in function from a ritual practice to a performing art.

2.3 Cultural hybridization

The term hybridization refers to the negotiation that occurs between cultures, rather than to their intersection (Raditya, 2020). According to Sintowoko (2021), cultural hybridization has the potential not only to bring about modifications in cultural values, norms, traditions, and rituals, but also to foster the development of new cultural products. These changes and newly created cultural products can adopt new forms and meanings, thereby fulfilling cognitive, pragmatic, and moral purposes within society (Coskuner-Balli & Ertimur, 2016). Gaeta (2021) and Koryakova and Panteleeva (2021) argue that hybridization can arise from various factors such as paradigm shifts, conceptual advances within geopolitical boundaries, population migration, and climate change. This perspective suggests that cultural hybridization is essentially a dialectical process between cultures that possess fundamental differences (Triatmodjo et al., 2023).

Cultural hybridization involves the process of adapting and integrating different cultures to achieve a shared understanding without undermining either culture (Hernández Paz et al., 2022). This process leads to the formation of a hybrid identity. Hybridization between two groups can occur through accommodative social interaction and communication by setting aside fanaticism toward each group's ideologies, norms, and symbolic identities (Mubah & Anabarja, 2020). The existence of diverse traditions within a pluralistic society gives rise to a struggle for social space. This competition can result in two distinct patterns: one that reinforces each group's identity, and another that leads to the fusion of identities across groups. According to Hadi (2020), the first pattern can lead to social conflict, while the second can facilitate cultural hybridization that fosters social harmony. The deliberate and more inclusive management of cultural hybridization can further strengthen social harmony. This is exemplified by the *wayang climen* performances in Javanese society (Putra et al., 2025).

3. METHODS

The focus of this study is the process of popularization of *shalawat dulang* music within Muslim communities. The research was conducted in Padang, West Sumatra, the homeland of the Minangkabau people, among whom Islam forms an integral part of cultural identity. Around the 18th century, two Sufi orders—the Naqshbandi and Shattari—were active in Minangkabau and played an important role in teaching Islamic beliefs. The culture that developed within Minangkabau society was shaped by the teachings of Islamic Sufi orders (*tarekat*) (Sjarifoedin Tj. A, 2011). These orders emerged as a response to the need to establish a closer connection with God. Religious practices performed in a *surau* (a small mosque), include reciting *zikr*, sending blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad, and singing various devotional songs (Dobbin, 1992).

This study employs a qualitative research method. Data were collected through observations of *syalawat dulang* performances and in-depth interviews. Observations were conducted on six selected *syalawat dulang* groups: Arjuna Minang, Langkisau, Alang Babega, Sinar Laser, Sinar Barapi, and Topan Singgalang (Table 1). The observations were conducted from November 2023 to August 2025. They were carried out during the groups' performances, including both live performances and performances available on YouTube.

Table 1: The *syalawat dulang* groups

No.	Group	Address	Established
1	Arjuna Minang	Gunuang Rajo	1988
2	Langkisau	Saruaso Detail	1989
3	Alang Babega	Saruaso	1990
4	Sinar Laser	Saruaso	1995
5	Sinar Barapi	Paringan Detail	2010
6	Topan Singgalang	Singgalang	2022

The sources of information in this study were the informants, most of whom were performers of *syalawat dulang*, either as lead or supporting performers. Lead performers played the principal role in the performance, while supporting performers complemented the musical storyline presented by the lead performer. Twelve informants were interviewed (Table 2). Before conducting the interviews, the researcher informed the informants of the purpose of the interviews. All informants agreed to participate as they were already well acquainted with the researcher.

Table 2: List of informants

No.	Name	Age	Role
1	Firdaus Arjuna	62	Lead
2	Rian Handika	28	Supporting
3	Jon Cakra	45	Lead
4	Ilham Malik	48	Supporting
5	Zalman	50	Lead
6	Sabri	46	Supporting
7	Risman Z	49	Lead
8	Syahrir	52	Supporting
9	Jamhur	66	Lead
10	Zuljadi Jek	62	Supporting
11	Mailizar	61	Lead
12	Khamaruddin	54	Supporting

Data collection began with a review of secondary sources, namely performance recordings available on YouTube. This was followed by in-depth interviews with key informants, including the leaders of the *syalawat dulang* groups, the performers, and the audience members. Observations were focused on the groups' performances, including both live performances and those recorded and uploaded to YouTube. Most of the interviews were conducted after the informants had performed. Some interviews were conducted individually; whereas others involved up to three informants sharing their views simultaneously. In other words, some interviews resembled focus group discussions (FGDs) as the views expressed reflected shared knowledge and experiences among the informants.

The data collected through observations and interviews were analyzed using a qualitative approach, which involved describing, explaining, and interpreting the phenomena under study as comprehensively as possible. Data obtained from interviews and the literature were systematically categorized according to the information obtained from the informants. These categories were then organized to address the research questions. Data analysis was conducted in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification. These three activities were carried out interactively, with data collection and analysis forming a continuous cycle.

4. RESULTS

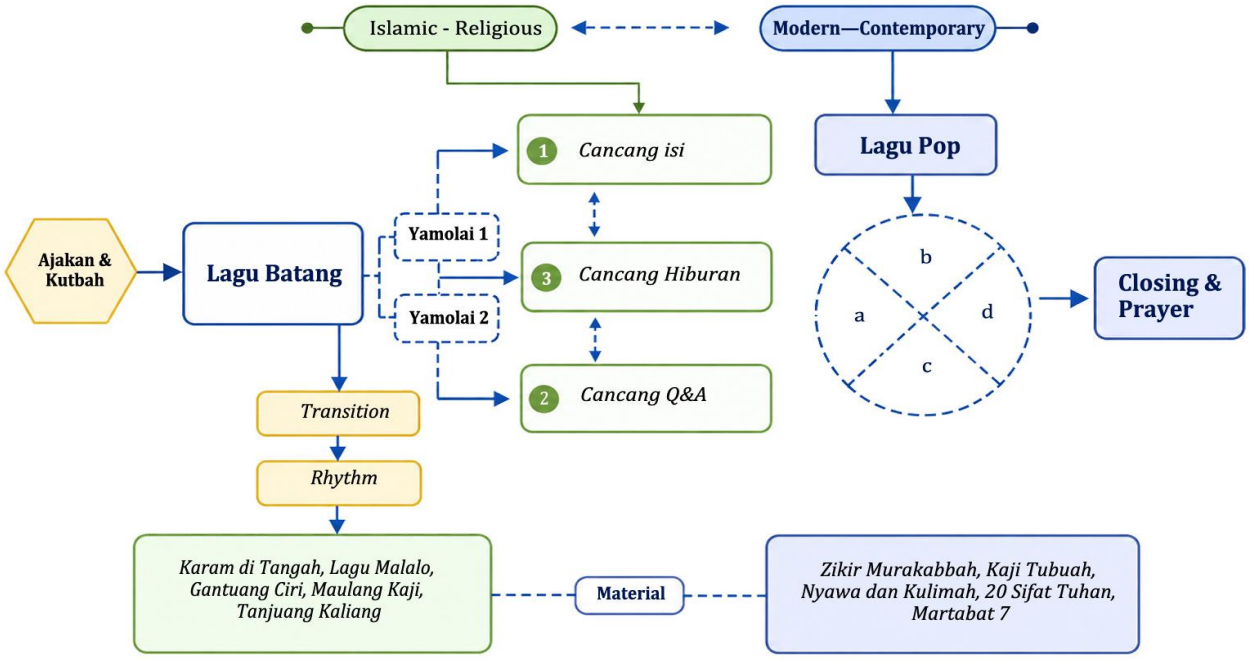
Based on these findings, three main forms of popularization of *syalawat dulang* were identified, namely: (1) the use of segments or acts; (2) interaction with the audience; and (3) the use of innovative musical arrangements.

4.1 The use of segments or acts

In the past, when the *syalawat dulang* was performed only in *surau* or mosques, the performance did not include segments or acts. Today, the performance is divided into several segments or acts, each with a specific theme. This segmentation is designed to provide a clear structure and narrative flow. The arrangement of performance segments is coordinated by the organizing committee together with the participating groups. One segment may focus on praise and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad, while another may address focus on moral values or social aspects of community life. This division helps maintain the audience's interest and provides a more dynamic structure.



Figure 1: Performance by Arjuna Minang



Notes on the Cancang;
a = question from the opposing group
b = request from the audience
c = reason for continuing the story
d = request from the audience

Figure 2: Structure of the *syalawat dulang* performance

The performance (Figure 1 and 2) usually takes place from 9:00 PM until just before dawn. During the intermission an auction is usually held, and is interspersed with commentary by the performance director regarding issues raised by the *syalawat dulang* performers lasting approximately 30 minutes. The time allocated to each performance by a group is called *one salabuahan,* two performances are called *dua labuahan*, three performances are called *tiga labuahan,* and so on (Figure 3). The performance begins with an invitation to listen to religious teachings (*ajakan & kutbah*), an invitation to listen to the main song (*lagu batang*), praise for the Prophet Muhammad (*yamolai 1 & yamolai 2*), followed by a medley conveying religious teachings (*cancang isi*), songs presented in the form of questions to be answered by another group (*cancang Q & A*), and concludes with an entertainment song (*cancang hiburan*).

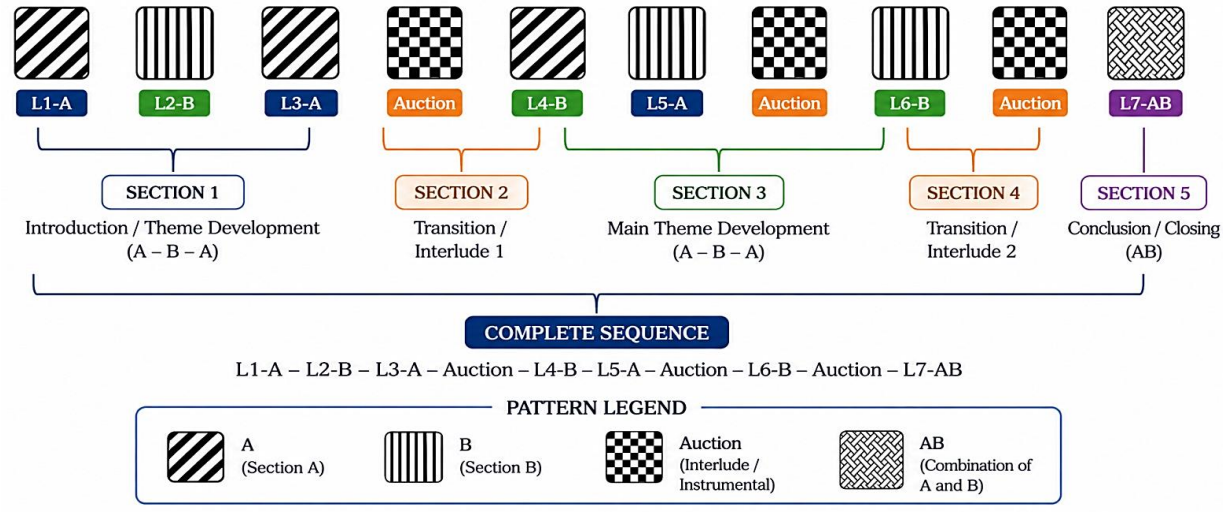


Figure 3: Time segments in a *syalawat dulang* performance

Figure 3 illustrates the aesthetic clash between the two groups. In the seventh act (L7), the two groups perform together as a form of synthesis that represents the conflict they have experienced throughout the performance. The Q&A topic can be chosen from one of the following four topics: *Zikir Murakabah, Kaji Tubuh, Nyawa dan Kalimah, Twenty Attributes of God*, etc. Here are some examples of questions posed by the Arjuna Minang group and answers from the Topan Singgalang group (Figure 4).



Figure 4: The 7th labuahan. Firdaus from the Arjuna Minang group (left) and Risman Z from the Topan Singgalang

Question from the Arjuna Minang group

Apo nan dikaji dalam kaji tubuah
Apo nan dicari dalam diri
Kalau tubuh hanyo daging jo darah
Dimano rahasio nan hakiki?

[What is examined in the study of the body
What is sought within oneself
If the body is only flesh and blood
Where is the true secret?]

Answer from the Topan Singgalang group

Nan dikaji diri manusia
Nan dicari asal kejadian
Tubuh bukan hanyo daging jo darah
Tapi ado ruh nan manghidukan badan

[What is examined in human nature
The origin of creation is sought
The body is not merely flesh and blood
But there is a spirit that gives life to the body]

Question from the Topan Singgalang group

Apo nan dikaji dalam kaji tubuah
Apo nan dicari dalam diri
Kalau tubuh asalnyo tanah
Apo nan hiduik dalam diri?

[What is examined in the study of the body
What is sought within oneself
If the body originates from the earth
What lives within oneself?]

Answer from the Arjuna Minang group

Nan dikaji hanyo tubuh lahia
Nan dicari tinggi badan
Nan hiduik dalam diri manusia
Hanyo darah jo tulang badan

[What is studied is only the physical body
What is sought is height
That which lives within a human
Is merely blood and bone]

The songs conveying the main content and the question-and-answer session are always preceded by a transitional song (serving as an interlude) before the performers choose one of four rhythms. There are five rhythms commonly chosen: *Karam di Tangah, Lagu Malalo, Gantuang Ciri, Maulang Kaji,* and *Tanjuang Kaliang*. The teaching themes typically presented cover one of the following five topics: *Zikir Murakabah, Kaji Tubuh, Nyawa dan Kulimah, 20 Sifat Tuhan* (the Twenty Attributes of God), and *Martabat 7* (the Seven Dignities).

Zikir Murakabah relates to the inner awareness that Allah is always watching over humanity. *Murakabah* means continuously reflecting on and sensing Allah's presence in the heart. *Kaji Tubuh* relates to the study of self-knowledge, the nature of humanity, and the relationship between the body and the spirit or spirituality. This concept is deeply rooted in the traditions of the *surau*, *tarekat*, and Islamic mysticism study circles in Minangkabau. *Nyawa dan Kalimah* pertains to the essence of human life, spirituality, and the relationship between the spirit and zikir. The Twenty Attributes of God relate to the science of *tawhid*, particularly within the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah tradition as developed in Islamic mysticism study circles and *surau* (small mosques) in Minangkabau. This concept is used to understand Allah theologically and spiritually. Among the 20 attributes of God are the ma'ani attributes—seven attributes of Allah found in humans—namely: 1) *sami'un* (hearing); (2) *basyirun* (seeing); (3) *qudrat* (power); (4) *iradat* (willing); (5) *'alimun* (knowing); (6) *hayat* (living); and (7) *kalam* (speaking).

In the entertainment segment, the performance features various pop rhythms that are currently trending within the community. In the final segment of the performance, both groups perform simultaneously, presenting a rhythm they have mutually agreed upon. Each group is represented by a lead performer (*induk*) or a supporting performer (*anak*) in a concluding reconciliation segment that symbolizes the resolution of the earlier competition. The performance concludes with the recitation of a prayer, signifying its completion.

4.2 Audience participation

During the performance, audience participation plays a crucial role in creating a warm and engaging atmosphere. Forms of participation include verbal responses, clapping, singing along, offering prayers and well wishes, interacting with the performers, and making donations (Table 3).

Table 3: Audience participation in the *syalawat dulang* performance

No.	Audience participation	Form of reaction	Description
1	Verbal responses	Saying "Amin" or "Syalawat" when the *syalawat* is recited, or joining in with the rhythm of the chant	Adding enthusiasm and warmth to the performance
2	Clapping and body movements	Clapping in time with the music or making simple body movements	Following the tempo and rhythm of the traditional music
3	Singing along	Joining in singing during the *syalawat* sections or widely known songs	Fostering a sense of togetherness and active participation
4	Offering prayers and hopes	Collectively expressing prayers or hopes	Concluding the performance in a solemn and meaningful manner supporting
5	Interaction with the performers	The performers interacting directly with the audience by engaging in brief dialogue or offering comments that invite a response	Strengthening the bond between the performers and the audience
6	Making donations	Making donations as a form of support for the performance and its organizers.	Fostering a sense of community and shared participation supporting



Figure 5: Gestures of female audience members during the *syalawat dulang* performance



Figure 6: Audience members making donations



Figure 7: Audience donations consisting of food wrapped in cloth (left) and monetary donations arranged in the shape of trees (right)

Audience participation in the performance creates a dynamic and interactive atmosphere, making the viewing experience richer and more memorable for everyone involved (Figure 5, 6, and 7). It is not uncommon for a Q&A session to be held after the first group has finished its performance (Figure 8). During this session, audience members can ask questions about the meaning of the *syalawat* recited or other aspects of Minangkabau culture. This session provides an opportunity for learning and deepens the audience's understanding of the performance.



Figure 8: A *syalawat* performer (wearing a black cap and standing) is explaining the message of the *syalawat* being recited in a QA session.

All of this creates a stronger sense of togetherness and engagement. Aesthetically, the interaction is not limited to the recitation of *syalawat* in the form of traditional songs. Spontaneously, whenever a currently popular song is performed, audience members join in singing along to the rhythms played by the *salawat dulang* performers. They join in singing the verses of the pantun being performed in the styles of, such as in Minang pop, Sundanese pop, Javanese pop, and others (J. Cakra & I. Malik, personal communication, June, 2024).

4.3 Innovative arrangements

The innovative musical arrangements in *syalawat dulang* performances are evident in the increasingly varied and dynamic rhythmic patterns played on the *dulang* compared with their traditional forms. In traditional performances, the *dulang* rhythm tends to be stable and repetitive, serving as the primary accompaniment to the vocals. In recent developments, *syalawat dulang* performers have begun to develop

rhythmic variations through syncopation, tempo changes, and enhanced dynamics in specific sections, such as the *cancang* segment and the performance's climax. These variations create a more lively and communicative musical atmosphere, while also demonstrating musical creativity in sustaining the audience's interest.

Innovation is also evident in the development of vocal techniques that are increasingly expressive and improvisational. Whereas vocals were previously flat and focused on conveying the text of the sermon, *syalawat* performers now employ more varied melodic techniques and spontaneous improvisation that adapt to the audience's response or that of the opposing group. This creates a more dynamic and engaging musical interaction. Vocal innovation in traditional religious music is a crucial strategy for ensuring the sustainability of performances, where vocal improvisation serves as the primary form of creativity in maintaining the aesthetic appeal of traditional music.

Innovative arrangements are evident in the increasingly flexible and adaptive performance structure, tailored to the context of modern performances. *Syalawat dulang* performers have begun adjusting song durations, speeding up certain sections, and creating more intense patterns of musical dialogue between the two groups of performers. These innovations signal a shift from a rigid performance structure toward a more dynamic and communicative form. Changes in performance structure are a key indicator of innovation in traditional music, where the flexibility of arrangements and musical interaction reveal the artists' creative process in adapting tradition to evolving social contexts. Thus, the innovative arrangements in the *cancang* segment of the *syalawat dulang* demonstrate the artists' creative adaptation in crafting performances that are more dynamic, communicative, and engaging without compromising their traditional musical identity.

These arrangements create a hybrid musical work that is both engaging and relevant to contemporary audiences. Audience members often request songs featuring rhythms they enjoy, such as Minang pop, Indian pop, and Sundanese pop—like the rhythms of songs such as "*Dewek-dewek-an*" (Figure 9). "*Dewek-dewek-an*" is a Sundanese song typically performed in a relaxed and humorous style, sometimes containing elements of social satire. The word "*dewek-dewek-an*" literally means "individually, or doing something on one's own" or "acting independently," which is often used to describe someone who behaves individualistically or without a sense of community.



Figure 9: *Dewek-dewek-an* notation

5. DISCUSSION

Research findings indicate that the popularization of *syalawat dulang* music represents an aesthetic and functional transformation of traditional Islamic art within modern Muslim society. *Syalawat dulang*, which initially developed as a Sufi-based medium for religious preaching, has undergone significant changes in its musical style, lyrics, and performance function. In terms of music, this popularization is evident in the shift toward faster, more rhythmic, and more varied rhythmic patterns. *Syalawat dulang* performers have developed new, more dynamic arrangements while adopting popular musical styles to make the music more appealing. Additionally, vocal improvisation has become more flexible with the incorporation of melodic techniques resembling religious pop music and modern nasyid. These musical changes have made *syalawat dulang* more communicative and easily accepted by the general public.

From the perspective of the lyrics and the *da'wah* content, the research findings indicate that the content of the *syalawat* has become simplified. Whereas it previously focused extensively on Sufi studies, Islamic philosophy, and profound concepts of gnosis, the material presented today is simpler, more communicative, and closer to everyday life. Humor related to religious matters, social criticism, and moral messages have become dominant elements in modern performances. This indicates a shift in function from profound Sufi *da'wah* toward a more accessible, popular form of *da'wah*. In terms of performance, this popularization is also evident in changes to the duration and format of the performances. Overall, this study demonstrates that the popularization of *syalawat dulang* is an inevitable process of cultural transformation within modern Muslim society. While this popularization, on the one hand, expands the reach of *da'wah* and preserves the continuity of tradition, on the other hand, it presents challenges in maintaining the spiritual depth and traditional aesthetic identity of sy*alawat dulang*.

The popularization of *syalawat dulang* music has emerged within the social context of Muslim communities undergoing cultural transformation driven by modernization, digital media, and changing youth preferences. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the context of religious performances, which have moved from traditional spaces such as surau, mosques and village gatherings toward public stages and digital platforms. This shift supports Yahya et al.'s (2020) argument that transformations in traditional religious arts are closely linked to changes in the cultural landscape of Muslim societies, which are increasingly shaped by popular media and the demand for more communicative forms of religious expression. Such adaptation or performance reformatting arises from the need to sustain artistic practices in a modern context, where traditional artists engage in aesthetic innovation to maintain relevance among younger audiences and within an evolving social environment (Prasetya et al., 2024). Moreover, the growing demand for more accessible and popular forms of *da'wah* encourages artists to continue innovating both musically and aesthetically within an increasingly dynamic cultural environment.

This study supports theories of cultural transformation and the popularization of religious art, which suggest that religious traditions adapt to modern social contexts in order to sustain their relevance and existence. Changes in rhythm, the simplification of *da'wah* content, and the use of digital media indicate that *syalawat dulang* is undergoing an adaptation process consistent with the theory of cultural hybridization (Triatmodjo et al., 2023). In this process, local Islamic artistic practices are popularized through the incorporation of elements of popular culture to broaden their audience reach while maintaining their religious function (Alfurqan et al., 2025). These findings support Putra et al. (2025) and Kanoksilapatham et al. (2023) that audience participation is an important aspect in the popularization process. In this regard, musical transformations within religious traditions support the proposition that aesthetic innovation functions as an adaptive strategy employed by artists to ensure the sustainability of tradition within a modern environment. Accordingly, changes in musical and performative structures serve as indicators of broader socio-cultural transformations influencing religious musical practices (Barton, 2018). Therefore, the popularization of *syalawat dulang* reinforces the view that modernization does not necessarily diminish tradition but rather fosters the emergence of a hybrid cultural form that preserves its *da'wah* function while responding to the aesthetic demands of contemporary society.

In a broader context, this study demonstrates that the popularization of *syalawat dulang* forms part of the wider dynamics of Islamic cultural transformation in modern society. Its popularization not only reflects shifts in musical aesthetics but also illustrates how Muslim communities negotiate the tension between traditional values and the demands of modernity. Transformations in traditional Islamic art forms indicate that art-based religious practices continue to be reconstructed to maintain social relevance and to expand the reach of *da'wah* within an increasingly modern society (Amran et al., 2025). Moreover, the popularization of local religious music reveals a broader global pattern in which traditions undergo hybridization with elements of popular culture. Thus, this transformation demonstrates that cultural identity is not static but evolves through ongoing interactions between tradition, technology, and social change (Tri, 2024). In this sense, the

popularization of the *syalawat dulang* represents a broader process of Islamic cultural adaptation, demonstrating that traditional religious art remains vibrant through innovation while reflecting shifts in the cultural identity of Muslim communities in the contemporary era.

This study also makes a significant contribution to the field of Islamic ethnomusicology and the study of religious art transformation by demonstrating that the process of popularization affects not only musical forms but also the function of *da'wah*, the construction of cultural identity, and strategies for sustaining tradition. This research broadens existing perspectives by examining the phenomenon of popularization within the context of popular culture and digital media. Aesthetic transformations in traditional religious music serve as key indicators for understanding the dynamics of contemporary Muslim identity (Fauzi & Hamzah, 2023). Recent studies of religious music focus on analyzing the relationship between musical innovation and social transformation, with particular attention to the role of digital media and the creative economy in reshaping traditional art forms (Yahya et al., 2020). Accordingly, this research contributes to advancing scholarly knowledge of *syalawat dulang* as a form of *da'wah* art that is not only traditional but also a dynamic expression of contemporary popular Islamic music, evolving through aesthetic adaptation, technological mediation, and the dynamics of modern Muslim society (Otterbeck, 2025).

6. CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study indicate that *syalawat dulang* has transformed from a medium for teaching Sufi traditions in *surau* and mosques into a form of performing art. This transformation embodies two musical aesthetic concepts: *pangajian nan taraso* (a spiritual gathering experienced through feeling) and *lagu nan sero* (an engaging and enjoyable musical form characterized by rhythmic striking of the *dulang* accompanied by head movements). These elements have been integrated into the rhythms of popular music.

This form of music plays an important role in strengthening both the cultural and religious identities of young people. By offering a mode of expression that is both enjoyable and aligned with their beliefs, it fosters a deeper connection to their cultural heritage and religious values. Furthermore, *syalawat dulang* can contribute to countering negative stereotypes about Islam among non-Muslims by presenting a more positive, peaceful, and culturally rich image of Islam through music, thereby encouraging greater cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.

In this context, youth training programs and systematic digital documentation are crucial for ensuring the sustainability of this traditional religious music. Thus, action plans to support the continued popularization of *syalawat dulang* should therefore include innovation-based preservation policies, strengthened cultural education, and the strategic use of digital media. Local governments, educational institutions, and artist communities need to develop conservation programs that not only safeguard traditional forms but also promote innovation while preserving Sufi values and cultural identity. The effective preservation of traditional religious art requires an integrative strategy that balances the conservation of tradition with creative innovation, to ensure the art remains relevant in modern society. However, this study is limited by the relatively small number of songs analyzed. Further research incorporating a broader corpus of Islamic music is therefore recommended. The study also recommends that local governments and educational institutions organize youth festivals or cultural programs to support the continuity and regeneration of *syalawat dulang* performers.

DECLARATION

1. Conflict of interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

2. Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process
The manuscript was written by the authors. Generative AI tools (ChatGPT-4 and Grammarly) were subsequently used only to assist with language and the visual layout of conceptual figures. All analytical content, interpretation, and conclusions were developed by authors who take full responsibility for the manuscript.

3. Data availability statement
All data supporting the findings of this study are included within the article.

4. Ethics statement

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Institut Seni Indonesia Padangpanjang in Indonesia where the data were collected. All informants provided written informed consent prior to their involvement in the study.

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6. Contributor Role Taxonomy (CRediT)

Andar Indra Sastra: Conceptualization, Data curation, Writing – original draft.

Hanggar Budi Prasetya: Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing.

Wilma Sriwulan: Methodology, Visualization, Data curation

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