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# THE BARZANJI TRADITION IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL STUDIES: EXPLORING THE DEBATE BETWEEN SUNNAH AND BID'AH

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the role of the famous Islamic literary work Barzanji in the context of cultural studies about concepts such as tradition, sunnah, and heresy in Islam. The Barzanji is a work that recounts the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with awe and affection and has become an integral part of religious traditions in many Muslim-majority countries. This article also aims to examine the importance of understanding tradition and sunnah in diverse cultural contexts, as well as addressing the potential issue of heresy in religious practices related to the use of Barzanji. This research uses a qualitative method with a cultural studies approach. The cultural studies approach was chosen because this research wants to examine the complex interaction between Barzanji and Muslim society. Overall, this study concludes that Barzanji plays an important role in upholding and strengthening religious identity in certain Muslim communities, especially through its recitation in religious events. That is the context of religious practice, change or innovation (bid'ah) is acceptable if it conforms to the basic principles of the Sunnah. That is, there are situations where bid'ah can be used to enhance or perfect the understanding and practice of the Sunnah. In this perspective, the concepts of sunnah and bid'ah do not have to be seen separately but can complement each other in the context of religious interpretation and practice.
**Keywords:** *Barzanji; Bid'ah; Sunnah.*

## INTRODUCTION

Islam as a proselytizing religion does not stand alone; rather, it interacts with various factors, such as deeply ingrained cultural practices within society. Successive generations of Muslims inherit traditions and culture from their predecessors. Societies possess diverse cultures that evolve (Sambas & Aripudin, 2017). Islam had a transformative impact on the cultural landscape of the Nusantara region, but it did not seek to eliminate cherished traditions outright. Rather, Islam aimed to integrate and refine existing customs and beliefs, adapting them to align with Islamic principles and values. This approach allowed for a harmonious coexistence of local traditions with the teachings of Islam, fostering a unique blend of cultural diversity within the Muslim communities of the Nusantara (Ramdhan, 2018)

Cultural studies discussed in this paper is a very complex field of study. The complexity is caused by the many aspects and values that shape it, one of which is religion. Religion and culture are considered as two things that cannot be separated like two sides of a coin. Research on culture, often involves religious aspects and values (Buhori, 2014), because religion plays a significant role in shaping the values, practices, and cultural norms within society. The relationship between religion and culture can be viewed through various perspectives:

1. Influence of Religious Values and Norms: Religion plays an important role in shaping moral values, ethics, and social norms in a society. Religious values can influence the way people think, act, and interact in everyday life.
2. Cultural Manifestations in Religious Practices: Religious practices such as rituals, celebrations, and ceremonies are an important part of the culture of a group or community. These religious

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practices reflect the identity and cultural values held by the community.

3. Symbolism and Cultural Representation: Religion is often used as a symbol and representation in culture, for example in art, architecture, music, and literature. Religion plays a role in shaping collective identity and creative expression in society.
4. Interaction Between Religion and Other Cultural Aspects: The study of culture also involves understanding how religion interacts with other cultural aspects such as language, tradition, art, and history. These interactions form a complex and diverse cultural landscape.

By integrating aspects of religion into cultural research, researchers can gain a more holistic understanding of cultural dynamics and the complexity of the relationship between religion and social life. It is also possible to explore how religion and culture mutually shape and influence each other in the context of diverse and multicultural societies.

Similarly, when facing external traditions, there is a principle that explains the importance of preserving the good old traditions and adopting even better new traditions (AlMuhafazhatu ‘Ala al Qadiimil al Shalih Wa al Akhzu Bi al Jadiidi al Ashlah). Recognizing that the purpose of adopting and developing culture is for improvement, this becomes an asset for the development of existing culture. Therefore, Islamic values are not confined to formal institutional authorities but also expand and become intrinsic to the cultural traditions within society (Negara, 2017).

Barzanji in the context of cultural studies raises views that develop in the study of Islamic theology, such as the existence of a dichotomy that considers sunnah and bid'ah as separate and opposite concepts, where sunnah is considered as practices that are by the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, while bid'ah is considered as innovations or actions that deviate from these teachings. The activity is part of the distinctive Islamic tradition within pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) that has been sustained since ancient times (Negara, 2017). Based on historical records in Islamic literature, the spreading of maulid Al-Barzanji was carried out by the Sayyid, an influential group of Arab society from Yemen, who played a significant role in the dissemination of Islam's mission. They have also influenced various ritual methods in Indonesia (Bachmid, 2014).

However, in cultural studies, the dichotomy can be seen as more dynamic and relational. Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary approach, one of which studies cultural reproduction, which refers to the way cultural norms, values, and elements are maintained and passed on from one generation to the next. In the context of Barzanji, this approach can provide an understanding of how Barzanji became part of local culture in certain regions of Indonesia.

Barzanji is one of the most famous Arabic-language Islamic literary works among Muslims, especially in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and has become an important part of the religious tradition in many Muslim-majority countries. It was written by Imam Sayyid Ja'far al-Barzanji and contains the life history of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with great admiration and affection. Discussions about Barzanji are not only limited to theological aspects, such asits existence as a nasyid in praise of the Prophet but also involve cultural debates.

In Indonesia, every 12th of Rabi'ul Awal, Muslims in Indonesia celebrate the Maulid of the Prophet Muhammad with strong nuances of local cultural traditions. This celebration is called "Mauludan" in Indonesia. For example, in Banten and Cirebon, thousands of Muslims visit the Banten Great Mosque complex and the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati to make a pilgrimage to the tombs of saints and sultans and take part in the procession of bathing heirlooms. The washing water of the heirlooms is believed to be blessed and is fought over among the visitors.In addition,


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areas with Islamic royal bases in Java, such as Surakarta and Yogyakarta, celebrate maulid with the term "Sekaten" which comes from the word "syahadatain," referringto the two sentences of the creed. The Sekaten procession begins with miyos gongso, the removal of the two gamelan instruments Kyai Nogo Wilogo and Kyai Guntur Madu from their storage in Sri Manganti Ward to Ponconiti Ward in North Kemandungan (Keben) on 5 Rabi'ulAwal. The gamelan is then sounded simultaneously for 7 consecutive days until it reaches itspeak on 12 Rabi'ul Awal.

The belief in rewards for participating in Maulid Nabi Muhammad celebrations is a testament to the profound respect and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) held by many Muslims in Indonesia. These beliefs, intertwined with various Maulid traditions, serve as a powerful reminder of the Prophet's legacy and the importance of seeking blessings and spiritual growth. (Srihardini, 2020).

The tradition of reading the Kitab Barzanji, also known as 'Berjanji' or 'Berjanjen', is one of the interesting traditions in local Islamic culture in Indonesia, especially among Muslims in various regions. Barzanji is an art form that reflects the nuances of Islam and serves as a means to spread the teachings of Islam, with the Kitab Barzanji as its main source (Wahyuningtiyas & Husen, 2023). Kitab Barzanji itself is an Arabic literary work written by Imam Sayyid Ja'far al-Barzanji, and its contents contain praise and history of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. In the 'Berjanji' tradition, the contents of the Kitab Barzanji are recited or chanted orally by performers or religious figures in various religious events or celebrations of the Prophet Muhammad's maulid.

The reading of the Book of Barzanji is accompanied by music and the singing of sholawat (barzanjen). This tradition is a means to increase the love and affection for the Prophet Muhammad, as well as to commemorate and celebrate his birth. In addition, the 'Berjanji' tradition is also a way to spread Islamic messages to the community through an interesting and impressive art form.

The tradition of reading the Book of Barzanji is part of the local Islamic cultural heritage in several regions in Indonesia that has been passed down from generation to generation. This tradition is often held in religious events, commemoration of the Prophet's maulid, and various other religious celebrations. For Muslims in Indonesia, the recitation of the Book of Barzanji and the chanting of sholawat (barzanjen) is an important moment to strengthen the relationship with the Prophet Muhammad and to remember his teachings.

However, until now, the validity of the recitation of barzanji as a tradition of celebrating the Prophet's birthday is still questionable. This is because the law of maulid celebration itself is still a matter of debate. Some scholars argue that the barzanji tradition is bid'ah, as it has no basis in religious law. From a theological perspective, these scholars consider that barzanji can lead to the cult of the Prophet Muhammad, which is actually prohibited in religious teachings. However, there are also some scholars who argue that the recitation of barzanji as a commemoration of the Prophet's maulid is sunnah because it will further improve and practice the teachings of Islam in accordance with what was inherited by the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

This debate then has an impact on the meaning of the barzanji tradition itself, whether it is stillrelevant to be carried out as a form of appreciation for the Prophet Muhammad who brought Islam as mercy for the entire universe (rahmatal lil alamin), or barzanji has implications for the cult of the Prophet, which can be interpreted as an attempt to consider the Prophet as thesavior of mankind, as the messianic teachings in Christian theology that consider the Prophet Isa AS as al-Masih. Surely this can have implications for the emergence of shirk among Muslims in Indonesia.

Some previous research on the tradition of Barzanji Sya'ban in the Bugis


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Wajo community in East Tanjung Jabung was conducted by Junaidi. This study aims to understand why the Bugis Wajo community recites Barzanji Sya'ban, how it is carried out, and what values can be taken from the recitation. The recitation lasts for a whole month, with different houses taking turns hosting the recitation. The purpose of the Barzanji Sya'ban recitation is to express gratitude to God for all the blessings given to them. Overall, M. Junaid's research highlights the Sya'ban Barzanji tradition and its meaning for the Bugis Wajo community in East Tanjung Jabung. The research provides insight into the cultural and religious practices of the community and highlights the importance of expressing gratitude to God (Junaidi, 2015). Bachmid in his work entitled "Kitab Barzanji in the Perspective of Muslim Communities in Manado, North Sulawesi," explained that the intralinguistic aspects of language are closely related to extralinguistic elements that intersect with social themes such as values of honor, togetherness, brotherhood, and appreciation. Furthermore, cultural themes contain values of tranquility, happiness, and gratitude, while metaphysical (philosophical) themes include trust, faith, and belief (Bachmid, 2014).

The relevance of this research to previous studies lies in its cultural context, while its distinction lies in the specific focus of the investigation. Drawing on connections from previous research, this study will elucidate the processes and symbolic meanings of the marhabaan culture within the Nahdlatul Ulama community, precisely at Pondok Pesantren Al-Quwwah in Bandung City.

Furthermore, the culture of 'marhabaan' is a tradition that contains symbols that require deeper exploration. Symbols within the culture have concrete, general, and assimilated characteristics. On the other hand, religious symbols are believed to strengthen individuals' faith in their religion.

Hence, these cultural and religious symbols can be examined through an ethnographic approach. Ethnographic studies on 'marhabaan' culture attempt to investigate the processes and meanings of the symbols comprehensively, encompassing their readings (barzanji), interactions, the language used, experiences, beliefs, value systems, and more (Setiawan, 2020).

The history of thought indicates two very different meanings of this term. In the context of religion, ordinary symbols are considered visible representations of transcendent reality, while in logical and scientific thinking, the term is more commonly used in the sense of abstract signs. Bagus, explains that symbols are often limited to conventional signs, something constructed by society or individuals with specific meanings according to agreed-upon standards used by members of that society. It is essential to distinguish this notion of symbols from signals and signs" (Lorens, 1996)

The distinction between symbols, signals, and signs needs to be clarified. A signal is something communicated by a subject to an object so that the object becomes aware of it immediately. On the other hand, a sign is something that explains or informs the subject about the object. Therefore, the relationship between a symbol and its object is not as straightforward as the relationship between a sign and its object. There is a fundamental need for symbolization (Boogert, 2017).

As a final result, the barzanji tradition, or often referred to as berjanjen in the language of thecommunity, has become a competition for melodious voices in reading the book of barzanji. This shows that this tradition continues to live and develop in various aspects of community life, whether as a means of moral education, political resistance, or even as entertainment and art competition.

In this research, the author uses library research, which involves a series of activities to collect data from library sources. Library research is an approach to obtaining


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information by utilizing library facilities such as books, magazines, documents, historical records, or other research related to the object of research (Peter Mahmud Marzuki, 2016).

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a cultural studies approach. The qualitative method is used because this research aims to understand the role of Barzanji in the context of cultural studies related to tradition, sunnah, and heresy in Islam, as well as how this literary work affects the religious identity of Muslim communities.

The cultural studies approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of daily life, values, norms, and cultural practices that occur in society (Tjahyadi et al., 2020), as well as the study of cultural literature related to the research theme such as literary works, song lyrics, and historical texts. Researchers analyze these texts to understand the meaning, symbolism, and cultural representations contained in them.

Data is also obtained from relevant sources through online searches on websites discussing Barzanji. This includes sources such as academic websites, digital libraries, scholarly articles, and other information sources related to the topic of Barzanji. Online searches are conducted to gather necessary information for the analysis or research being conducted on Barzanji. Subsequently, relevant data is analyzed and interpreted according to the research objectives (Anugrah et al., 2021).

In cultural studies, religious celebrations that use the tradition of reading Kitab Barzanji are cultural phenomena that are observed. This allows researchers to explore in-depth details about the event or cultural practice in question.

The cultural studies approach was chosen as this research seeks to examine the complex interactions between Barzanji and Muslim society.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Debate on Tradition, Sunnah, and Bid'ah in the Context of Culture and Religious Practice

#### Barzanji Within the Scope of Tradition

Barzanji is recognized as a source of knowledge about the traditions and sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. It details his life from birth to death, important events in Islamic history, and the moral teachings he taught. It contains cultural and ethical values that guide Muslims in their daily lives. Through Barzanji, the traditions and sunnah of the Prophet are preserved and passed on from generation to generation, strengthening the religious identity of the Muslim community.

The tradition of barzanji, which essentially praises the Prophet Muhammad SAW, is a tradition that has existed since the early days of Islam, even while the Prophet Muhammad SAW was still alive. This tradition was introduced by three official poets of the Prophet, namely Hasan Ibn Tsabit, Abdullah Ibn Rawahah, and Ka'ab Ibn Malik. Riwayat Ibrahim al Bajuri in Hasyiyat al Bajuri 'ala Matn Qasidah al Burdah states that this tradition of praising the Prophet is a tradition that needs to be encouraged and preserved by Muslims in order to always obey Allah and His Messenger (Nashrullah, 2021).

In this barzanji tradition, praise and honor are addressed to the Prophet Muhammad as a form of deep love and longing of Muslims for their Prophet. The poets create beautiful and vibrant verses of praise, glorifying the virtues and noble personality of the Prophet Muhammad.

This tradition is not only a celebration and expression of love for the Prophet but also servesas a means to increase Muslims' awareness and adherence to the teachings of Islam. By singing praises and hymns to the Prophet, Muslims are reminded of his greatness and role model in practicing Islam.

Therefore, the barzanji tradition is


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considered a valuable heritage from the early days of Islamand an important part of Muslim culture and identity. By being preserved and encouraged continuously, this tradition remains a part of Muslim life in honoring and loving the Prophet Muhammad SAW, as well as strengthening the practice of Islamic religious values in daily life. This is indicated by an incident when the Prophet Muhammad praised Ka'ab Ibn Zubair for theqasidah of praise he had composed for the Prophet. After listening to Ka'ab's impressive praise, the Prophet was so impressed that he took off his robe and put it on Ka'ab's body as a gift and a sign of approval (Administrator, 2019).

This event shows how high the appreciation and appreciation of the Prophet Muhammad SAW for literary works that contained praise and respect for him. This appreciation emphasizes the importance of the barzanji tradition as an expression of Muslims' love and longing for the Prophet. The Prophet himself set a positive example by rewarding poets who composed praise about him, as a form of encouragement to continue to revive and honor this tradition.

This event also illustrates how the barzanji tradition was present and recognized in the Muslimcommunity during the early days of Islam. Praising and honoring the Prophet Muhammad through poetry and verse is one way to express affection, love, and respect for the Prophet as a religious leader and role model for Muslims.

With this event, the barzanji tradition became increasingly embedded in Muslim life, and the appreciation of the Prophet Muhammad gave legitimacy and support to continue to maintain and preserve this tradition as an important part of Muslim culture and identity. The qasidah ofpraise composed by three of the Prophet's poets (Hasan Ibn Tsabit, Abdullah Ibn Rawahah, and Ka'ab Ibn Malik) and Ka'ab Ibn Zubair has become a reference for Muslim poets in creating praise for the Prophet Muhammad. Their works inspired Muslim poets to be creativein conveying praise, both in verse (poetry) and prose, which later became known as "al Mada'ih al Nabawiyah" in Arabic literary studies.

Three famous works that circulate today and are important examples of al Mada'ih al Nabawiyah are Kitab Barzanji, Burdah, and Syaraf al Anam. These works have their own characteristics and characteristics, but their purpose is the same, which is to praise, honor, and glorify the Prophet Muhammad.

The three poets of the Prophet and Ka'ab have given birth to a special tradition of praise that characterizes Islamic Arabic literature. In al Mada'ih al Nabawiyah, the Prophet Muhammad isregarded as the main source of inspiration and an alluring subject to be expressed in the formof beautiful and alluring praise.

This tradition of al Mada'ih al Nabawiyah continued to develop over time and became an integral part of Islamic Arabic literary culture. Muslim poets from different times and places continue to produce works of praise filled with love, respect, and awe for the Prophet Muhammad. This shows how important the position of the Prophet is in the hearts of Muslims and how this tradition of praise has become a valuable legacy that continues to be championed and preserved in Muslim culture.

This tradition of praise to the Prophet Muhammad was later maintained and preserved by various Shi'a Islamic caliphates such as the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt, where the praise was required to be sung by the entire community when the celebration of the Prophet's birthday arrived in the month of Rabi'ul Awal. For the caliphs of this dynasty, this tradition of praise became part of the state's identity and also a tool of political legitimacy, asserting that the dynasty was an Islamic caliphate based on the Prophet's lineage.

Sunni Muslims also celebrate the Prophet's birthday by offering praise in areas such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Mosul, Mecca, and Damascus. However, this praise was done clandestinely to avoid accusations


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of bid'ah (new actions that are not based on Islamic teachings). After the Fatimid Dynasty ended, this tradition of praise was inherited and continued by Sultan Salahuddin Yusuf al Ayyubi (Saladin) of the Bani Ayyub Dynasty (1174- 1193 AD or 570-590 AH).

According to Sultan Salahuddin, the tradition of singing praises to the Prophet could strengthen faith and piety towards the apostle, as well as increase the spirit of struggle (jihad) and unity (ittihad) in the face of Crusade III against Christian troops from Europe who tried tocapture Jerusalem. Salahuddin also revived the tradition of celebrating the Prophet's birthday for the first time in 184 AH (580 AH) by organizing a competition to write a history of the Prophet and praise for the Prophet in beautiful language. Scholars and writers were invited to participate in the competition. Shaykh Ja`far al Barzanji came first in the competition with his famous Iqd al Jawahir (jeweled necklace), better known as the Kitab Barzanji.

Shaykh Ja'far al Barzanji, apart from being a Qodhi (judge) of the Maliki madhhab residing in Medina, is also a descendant (great-grandson) of the great scholar Muhammad bin Abdul Rasul bin Abdul Sayyid al Alwi al Husain al Musawi al Saharzuri al Barzanji (1040-1103 AH or 1630-1691 AD), who was the Grand Mufti of the Shafi'i madhhab in Medina. He was originallyfrom Shaharzur, a Kurdish town in Iraq, and traveled to various countries before finally settling in the City of the Prophet, Medina. There, Shaykh Ja'far al Barzanji learned from several renowned scholars, including Shaykh Athaallah Ibn Ahmad al Azhari, Shaykh Abdul Wahab at Thanthowi al Ahmadi, and Shaykh Ahmad al Asybuli. He also received certificates from several prominent scholars, including Shaykh Muhammad at Thoyib al Fasi, Sayid Muhammad at Thobari, Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Hasan Al A'jimi, Sayid Musthofa al Bakri, andShaykh Abdullah at Shubrawi al Misri.

Shaykh Ja'far al Barzanji played an important role in the Medina community. Apart from beingthe Mufti, he was also the khatib (preacher) at the Prophet's Mosque and taught in the mosque.He was famous not only for his knowledge, morals, and high piety but also for the glory and blessing of his prayers. The people of Medina often asked him to pray for rain during the dry season.

With his expertise in religious knowledge and good ethics, Shaykh Ja'far al Barzanji became a respected and valued figure in Medina. His contributions as a Qodhi, preacher, and teacher,as well as his charisma in prayer, earned him the respect of the local community. His involvement in various aspects of religious and community life made him one of the leading scholars in Medina during his time.

The history of the Prophet Muhammad is presented in the form of poetry, prose, and kasidah which is very interesting and beautiful. In summary, here is an overview of al Barzanji's presentation to him (Munawaroh, 2014):

1. The lineage of the Prophet is Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Abdul Muttalib bin Hashim binAbdul Manaf bin Qusay bin Kitab bin Murrah bin Fihr bin Malik bin Nadar bin Nizar bin Maiad bin Adnan.
2. Since his childhood, the Prophet Muhammad has shown many extraordinary features and signs in himself.
3. At the age of 12, he went on a trading trip to the Levant with his uncle.
4. At the age of 25, Rasulullah SAW married Khadijah.
5. He was appointed as a Messenger at the age of 40 and started preaching Islam from thenon until he reached the age of 62.
6. Rasulullah SAW died in Medina after his da'wah was considered to have reached perfectionby Allah SWT.

In the book, al Barzanji succeeded in presenting the story of the history of the Prophet Muhammad SAW with an alluring and beautiful language, so that it became an attraction for readers and listeners to get to


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know more about the life and struggle of the Prophet as an apostle and leader of Islam. Critical studies of the barzanji tradition in Indonesia are still limited to the normative level andhave not touched on the aspect of the debate about whether the barzanji tradition is sunnah or bid'ah.Further research on this issue is important because until now there has been no specific research that discusses it.

Cultural studies teach the importance of understanding traditions and sunnah in diverse cultural contexts. Barzanji not only introduces religious teachings, but also shows how these values interact with local cultures in various regions. The process of spreading Barzanji to different regions affects the way people respond to the traditions and sunnah of the Prophet.

The strong influence of local culture can also affect the interpretation and understanding of Barzanji itself. The entry of the barzanji tradition into Indonesia can be attributed to the influence of the Persians who previously lived in Gujarat and were of the Shia faith. They were the first to spread Islam in Indonesia. However, another scholarly opinion also states that the barzanji tradition was brought by Syafii-minded scholars, especially Sheikh Maulana Malik Ibrahim from the Hadramaut (Yemen) region, who played a role in spreading Islam in the coastal areasof East Sumatra and the North Coast of Java.

These scholars are known as the Wali Songo, who are renowned for their very tolerant and moderate da'wah, and for assimilating Islamic teachings with local traditions and culture. Therefore, the art of barzanji inspired Sunan Kalijaga, one of the Wali Songo, to compose songs such as "Li-ilir" and "Tombo Ati," which were very popular among Islamic boarding schools and used in his da'wah in the interior of Java (Welianto, 2022).

The combination of the barzanji tradition and Islamic teachings practiced in a tolerant mannerthat accommodates local culture has made an important contribution to the spread of Islam in Indonesia. It shows how cultural and artistic traditions can be effective proselytizing tools in spreading religious values and bringing Islam closer to local communities. In this way, Islam was able to be accepted more easily by Indonesians and became rooted in their culture and daily lives.

As a result, the barzanji tradition experienced rapid development among pesantren spread across Central and East Java. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which is considered a major pesantren,is regarded as an organization that preserves this tradition. The Shi'a influence in NU is very strong and deep. The habit of reading barzanji or Diba'i that characterizes the NU communitycomes from the Shi'a tradition. Therefore, Kiai Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur once stated that one of the influences of the Shi'a tradition in the Islamic style in Indonesia is the practice of chanting (or praise) before prayer, which is commonly practiced by NU residents. The chantcontains praise for "ahl albait" or the Prophet's family, a term that is very popular among Shi'a and NU members. The chant reads: "Li khamsatun uthfi biha, harra al Waba' al Hathimah, al Mushthafa wa al Murtadla, wa Ibnuahuma wa al Fatimah," which means: "I have five 'talismans' to extinguish the threatening epidemic; they are al Musthafa (i.e. the Prophet Muhammad), al Murtadla (i.e. Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's son-in-law, and cousin), Ali's two sons (i.e. Hasan and Hussein), and Fatimah (Ali's wife)." Gus Dur called this phenomenon "cultural Shi'ism" or the influence of Shi'ism in terms of culture, not in terms of creed.

The pesantren usually read barzanji as a tradition of reciting praise to the Prophet Muhammadby referring to the views of the fuqaha of the Shafi'i school of thought. One example is the opinion of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani who states that the tradition contains the meaning of virtue (Ibrahim & Wathoni, 2021).

They believe that by reading barzanji during the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, they willget the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad SAW on the Day of


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Judgment, in accordancewith the following hadith quote: "Whoever honors the day of my birth, then he will get my intercession in the hereafter." With this guideline, more and more people are reading, especially NU residents (Zahratana & Ridho., 2023).

In religious activities in village mosques, the worshippers usually sit on their knees in a circle.Next, someone recites the barzanji, and certain parts of the barzanji are responded to by other worshippers simultaneously. In the center of the circle, there is tumpeng rice and other snacks provided by local residents. Some community customs also associate the recitation of barzanji with certain events. For example, in some areas, the recitation of barzanji is done in conjunction with the transfer of anewly shaved baby in a circle. On other occasions, barzanji is also recited at various events, such as before a wedding, when moving into a new house, or when buying a new vehicle, aswell as in various other important moments.

In some traditions, the recitation of barzanji is used to ask for permission or as a prelude to an earth alms ceremony. For example, in the sadranan ceremony commonly performed by Javanese people in the month of Sya'ban, barzanji is used to pray for the spirits of deceased ancestors. The ceremony is performed at the graves of the ancestors, and during the event, the elders sit near the graves while being offered various types of village food, money, and flowers as part of the offering ceremony. As an Islamic literary work that tells the story of the life of the Prophet Muhammad, Barzanji has been integrated into the lives of Muslim communities for centuries. The tradition of recitingBarzanji in various religious events, such as the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, has become part of a strong religious identity for many Muslim groups. In this context, Barzanji serves as an important tool to maintain and keep alive their religious identity.

**Barzanji in the Scope of Sunnah Culture**

The word "sunnah" comes from the root letters sin (س) and nun (ن), namely (سن). Etymologically, the word "sunnah" means sawwara (picture). Ibn Manzur defines sunnah as al-tariqah (path) or as-Sirah (attitude), which refers to a straight path followed by people or a good attitude adopted by people (Mu'min, 2015).

According to the Indonesian Dictionary KBBI), sunnah or sunna is a religious guide based on everything that comes from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), including actions, words, attitudes, or habits that he never abandoned. In other words, sunnah simply refers to the way the Prophet lived his life in all aspects.

Meanwhile, "culture" comes from Sanskrit, namely "buddhayah", which is the plural form of "buddhi" (budi or reason). It is defined as things related to the human mind and intellect. In English, "budaya" is called "culture", which comes from the Latin word "colere" which means to cultivate or work, and can also be interpreted as cultivating the land or farming. The word "culture" is sometimes also translated as "Kultur" in Indonesian.

In the Indonesian language dictionary (KBBI) "culture" is explained as a mindset, customs, or something that has developed and become a habit that is difficult to change. In everyday use, people often use the word culture synonymously with tradition, which refers to the apparent or visible habits of a society (KBBI).

The barzanji tradition can be considered a form of sunnah worship because there are various reasons behind it, as follows. First, this tradition increasesthe spirit of love and the application of the value of piety towards the Prophet Muhammad as a role model for today's society. In this case, there is a transfer of noble values that can be taken from the figure of the Prophet to be used as guidelines in everyday life. Second, the barzanji tradition also functions as a means to strengthen ukhuwah islamiyah among Muslims. The barzanji reading event involves many people and the masses who


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witness it so in addition to providing educational value from the reading of the barzanji tradition, it also increases social interaction between fellow communities. Third, the barzanji tradition encourages individuals to improve certain religious practices, because those who routinely read barzanji in their spare time will directly practice one of the pillars of faith, namely faith in Allah's Messengers and Prophets (Hamid, 2021).

In general, the barzanji tradition as part of cultural rituals has experienced rapid development in various circles, including pesantren, nahdlyyin circles, traditionalist Islamic circles, and kejawen Islamic circles. This happens because the barzanji tradition, along with other mauludtraditions, is a form of cultural shia teachings that honor and commemorate the role and services of the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and descendants who played an important role in spreading Islam as a religion of mercy for all nature in the form of cultural expressions and cultural products.

A hadith states that reciting the barzanji as a form of love for the Prophet is an obligation for all Muslims. The hadith records the Prophet saying: "A person's faith will not be complete until I become more beloved to him than his children, his parents, and all humanity" (HR Bukhari). Examples of *Barzanji* lyrics that are considered sunnah:

*"Such a beautiful you I've never seen Such a cheerful face Thou sun, thou full moon Thou light upon light Thou jewel beyond measure Thou lamp of every heart O beloved, O Muhammad O beautiful bride Osturdy one, praiseworthy one O imam of the two Qiblahs"* (Najieh, 1987).

The meaning to be conveyed in the poem is to describe the greatness of the Prophet Muhammad SAW that cannot be matched by anyone in this world. The Prophet, as the beloved of Allah SWT, is exalted because of his extraordinary piety and faith. This poem is often sung in various religious activities in Islamic boarding schools and rural communities. Atthe end of the poem, we read shalawat and praise to the Prophet, which echoes when recitingbarzanji in commemoration of the maulid of the Prophet Muhammad. It reads: "Ya Prophet salam to you, Ya Rasul salam to you, Ya Habib salam to you, Shalawat Allah upon you."

It is essential to emphasize that the duration of reading a literary text should not be extended, as it is imperative for the reader to connect with its emotional allure and sustain interest (Folorunsho & Iyanda, 2022).

From a cultural perspective, the sunnah dimension of the barzanji is not only seen in the social aspect but also acts as a means to increase religiosity and encourage the attitude of social piety exemplified by the Prophet to be followed by his people. Various soft and colorful songs in the recitation of barzanji serve as a tool for moral education. This is an absolute matter for pesantren and nahdliyyin circles, where barzanji along with shalawatan, wirid, and so on, plays a role in preserving the cultural traditions that developed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad until now (Bachmid, 2014).

Sunnah construction in barzanji is considered good and highly recommended because it doesnot contradict the values of the literal teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. The tradition of barzanji recitation carried out in the month of Maulid and certain events, by quoting the three main sources of al-Barzanji, al-Diba' or Syaraf al-Anam, is directed at da'wah and social aspects, with the aim of awakening the spirit of religious life in families and communities and increasing the appreciation and practice of religious teachings. These activities vary accordingto the needs and orientation of the implementing institution, such as lectures, competitions, discussions/seminars, mass circumcisions, free medical treatment, cheap markets (bazaars), and visits to orphanages.

In fact, the barzanji tradition can be considered a sunnah because it encourages the improvement of various aspects of social


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life for the community. Although barzanji indirectly becomes an exclusive cultural product for the four groups as its identity, in reality, the practice of barzanji is actually inclusive because it involves a process of cultural deliberation that takes place in it.

Moreover, the barzanji ceremony has transcended its original purpose and now serves as a cohesive force, fostering social unity among the people through its frequent and communal observance. The event takes place regularly, whether in mosques, musallas, or designated homes, as various households take turns to host this cherished occasion (Fattah, 2008).

It is this factor that has kept the barzanji alive and thriving among traditionalist Muslims, as they see preserving the traditions of the Prophet as something good and in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. Therefore, calling barzanji a deviation is irrelevant because this tradition has existed since the time of the Prophet and was allowed by the Prophet himself as a form of cultural expression to love Allah and His Messenger. Therefore, the barzanji recitation ceremony is considered a religious rite that is intended as worship, namely as a form of getting closer to Allah SWT and seeking His pleasure. For traditionalists,barzanji as a cultural product has an important role in practicing Islamic teachings through the real dimensions of social life, not only fixated on the lexical teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith alone which are considered rigid and conservative by some people. Through the barzanji tradition and other traditions originating from the time of the Prophet, the teachings are dynamized through cultural expression. For traditionalists, this is a form of sunnah in practicing Islamic teachings in everyday life.

**Barzanji within the Scope of Bid'ah**

The use of Barzanji in religious practice invites debate among scholars regarding the issue of bid'ah. Some may consider the use of Barzanji as something in the time of the Prophet, thus categorized as heresy.

However, there are also views that assert that Barzanji has important historical and cultural values, and serves as a means to remember and honor the Prophet Muhammad. This debate reflects the complexity of understanding and dealing with the issue of heresy in religious practice. In relation to the concept of bid'ah, Barzanji is a controversial work among scholars. Althoughit aims to strengthen the practice of the sunnah, some consider the use of Barzanji in religious practice as heresy. However, from a cultural studies perspective, the debate about heresy offers an opportunity to understand the social and cultural dynamics of accepting change and innovation in a religious context.

Barzanji should not be considered solely as a product of Islamic culture or a symbol of traditional identity. Instead, it can be understood as a literary work in the form of poetry and prose lyrics, without being accompanied by worship rituals during its recitation (Najamuddin, 2018). The cultural criticism launched by modernists and Wahhabis through the verdict of bid'ah tends to focus on theological aspects. However, we should see it as a form of literary criticism that is commonly used by writers to criticize certain literary works based on the analysis of the thoughts that form the basis of their criticism.

Let us consider this verdict of heresy as literary criticism and not as theological criticism that leads to endless debate. The cultural criticism built into the paradigm of heresy by modernist Muslims stems from three things: (1) their thinking is derived from the texts of the Quran and Hadith, making their critical approach more conservative and rigid, (2) their focus on affirming worship in the realm of religious symbols and rituals causes cultural products outside this area to be considered heresy, and (3) their criticism tends to be monologue, emphasizing one-way rather than two-way dialogue.

The modernists actually focused more on criticizing the literary narratives in the


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barzanji that were considered fictional and had no factual basis based on the Quran and Hadith. They see these narratives as an exaggeration in praising the Prophet Muhammad, similar to the way the Christians praised the Prophet Jesus. Modernists prefer the barzanji books that present historical narratives of the Prophet Muhammad's history that are valid according to the Quran and Hadith (Nadhiroh, 2016).

It needs to be emphasized once again that the dimension of heresy in barzanji criticism according to modernists is related to hyperbolic, fictional, and metaphorical lyrics that have nobasis in the Quran and Hadith, such as inviting to be kind to the Prophet. According to modernist cultural criticism, these lyrics are considered wrong because the hadith narrated byImam Muslim does not mention this.

Modernists try to reconstruct the meaning of the barzanji as a great literary work and not as the result of the ijtihad of unverified scholars. This is the reason why modernists and wahhabisare so enthusiastic about condemning barzanji as bid'ah, as a form of cultural criticism. Barzanji indeed narrates the life of the Prophet Muhammad from birth to death and is interpreted as his biography so that his struggle and example can always be followed by Muslims around the world. Therefore, the cultural studies perspective in looking at the construction of heresy does not always lead to the affirmation or prohibition of certain entities. On the contrary, heresy is seen as a form of literary criticism carried out by modernists, which is also an indicator of thevalidity of the teachings of the Koran and Hadith in writing literary works such as barzanji. The meaning of bid'ah in cultural studies does not aim to reduce or eliminate cultural expressionsin Muslims but instead provides clear boundaries about religious teachings in a cultural product.

The discussion above reflects how Barzanji has become one of the most influential Islamic literary works in shaping the religious identity of Muslim communities and how it is accepted and interpreted in the context of diverse local cultures. The debate on the issue of heresy also shows the dynamics that exist in accepting change and innovation in religious practice. All these aspects make Barzanji an interesting subject to study from a cultural studies perspectiveand understand how tradition, sunnah, and heresy coexist in Islamic culture.

Barzanji as part of the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday may be seen by some as an attempt to approach the sunnah (tradition) of the Prophet. Adherents of this view argue that the Barzanji can be an expression of love and respect for the Prophet Muhammad, who is historically believed to have celebrated the day of his birth with joy. They believe that the Barzanji reflects a sense of love and joy for the Prophet's presence in Islamic history.

## CONCLUSION

Cultural studies on Barzanji: Tradition, Sunnah & Bid'ah reveal the complexity and significance of this work of Islamic literature in Muslim culture. Barzanji has an important role in reinforcing the traditions and sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as in maintaining and strengthening the religious identity of the Muslim community.

It is important to recognize that barzanji, as a form of mauludan tradition, has Shia cultural roots. However, this cannot be used as an excuse to consider Barzanji as an innovation that deviates from Islamic teachings. Understanding the concepts of sunnah and bid'ah in cultural studies requires a broader view, where both are not analyzed in terms of contestation between Sunni and Shia because both have different philosophies, theologies, and histories. In this research, the author tries to provide another dimension in understanding sunnah and bid'ah, where both complement and correct each other.

In the context of this research, the author would like to suggest that the concepts of sunnah and bid'ah have a complex and


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interrelated relationship. Sunnah refers to the actions, words, and customs taught and practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), who is considered an example and role model for Muslims. On the other hand, bid'ah refers to innovations or changes in Islam that have no basis or legitimacy in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. However, this study sees the relationship between sunnah and bid'ah as more dynamic. The author argues that in some contexts, changes or innovations (bid'ah) in religious practice can occur and even be accepted if they do not contradict the underlying principles of the Sunnah. In other words, there are situations where bid'ah can be used to correct or refine the understanding and practice of the sunnah, where the concepts of sunnah and bid'ah are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but can be complementary in the context of religious interpretation and practice.

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