

Language and Symbol in the Works of Al-Jili: A Semiotic and Semantic Study

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ABSTRACT

The tradition of shalawat in the Malay Islamic archipelago is a rich cultural phenomenon with deep semiotic significance, playing a crucial role in religious expression and shaping the Muslim community's collective identity. This research analyzes the semiotic elements of the Malay prayer tradition, focusing on the symbolism that reflects spiritual and cultural values, and the tradition's role in reinforcing Islamic identity. Using a qualitative descriptive literature study, prayer texts such as Barzanji, Diba', and Marhaban were examined through cultural semiotics. The study finds that the shalawat tradition comprises three interrelated semiotic categories: linguistic, symbolic, and performative. Linguistically, it harmonizes Arabic and Malay elements; symbolically, it employs visual and audio cues to signify the Malay Muslim identity; performatively, it fosters social solidarity through collective rituals. The symbolic meanings of shalawat operate on three dimensions: spiritual, expressing love for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); cultural, blending local values with Islamic teachings; and social, strengthening community bonds. This tradition highlights Islam Nusantara's adaptability, accommodating local wisdom while preserving religious substance and promoting an inclusive, contextual form of Islam. In the modern era, shalawat shows strong potential for revitalization via digital media, serving as a dynamic tool for creative Da'wah that engages youth and sustains cultural-religious identity in a changing world.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Semiotics, Malay Shalawat Tradition, Nusantara Islam, Cultural Acculturation, Islamic Identity



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INTRODUCTION

Shalawat is a form of praise and prayer to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH which has become an integral part of the Muslim religious tradition in the archipelago. In the context of Malay Islam, prayer is not only a spiritual worship, but also a cultural medium rich in aesthetic values and symbolism (Adinugraha & Al-Kasyaf, 2025; Hati, Indra, Sikumbang, & Sitompul, 2025). *Shalawat* traditions such as *Barzanji*, *Diba'*, and *Marhaban* evolved into collective rituals accompanied by music, movement, and visual arts, creating unique symbols that represent Malay Islamic identity (Ai Samrotul Fauziah & Hilmi Hanafi, 2024). The existence of the *shalawat* tradition in the archipelago reflects a harmonious acculturation process between universal Islamic values and local wisdom. As stated in the study of Malay Islamic traditions, Islam that interacts with local culture tends to form a flexible and contextual socio-religious structure (Anam, Suprpto, & Faizah, 2025; Halijah, Hermansyah, & bin Tuah, 2025). This shows that Islamic *Da'wah* in the archipelago does not clash with local traditions, but creates synergies that enrich Islamic cultural treasures. In Malay regions such as Banjar, Lingga, and Minangkabau, the tradition of prayer has become an important medium in conveying Islamic teachings while maintaining cultural identity (Gozali & Rizky Novriandi, 2024).

The theoretical foundation linking signs in religious worship with cultural meaning theory can be traced to Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist semiotics and Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model of signification (Filipowicz, 2025; Keshavarz & Noshadi, 2025).

Saussure's concept of the arbitrary relationship between signifier (*signifiant*) and signified (*signifié*) provides a framework for understanding how religious symbols acquire meaning through social convention rather than inherent properties (Chandler, 2022). In the context of *shalawat*, the Arabic phrases, melodic patterns, and ritual gestures function as signifiers that point to deeper signified meanings—spiritual devotion, communal solidarity, and cultural identity. Peirce's triadic model, which incorporates the representamen (sign), object (referent), and interpretant (meaning in the mind of the interpreter), offers a more dynamic understanding of how *shalawat* signs generate multiple layers of meaning depending on the interpreter's cultural background and experiential context (Atkin, 2023). Furthermore, Roland Barthes's theory of denotation and connotation is particularly relevant for analyzing how *shalawat* traditions carry both literal meanings (praise of the Prophet) and culturally-specific connotative meanings (Malay Islamic identity, social cohesion, and resistance to cultural homogenization) (Allen, 2020). These theoretical frameworks establish that religious signs are not merely decorative or supplementary elements but constitute the very medium through which religious communities construct, negotiate, and transmit their collective identities and worldviews (Bhatti & Pardaev, 2025; McCrohan-Nyhan, 2025).

Semiotics is the study of signs and meanings in various communication and cultural contexts. In the scientific tradition, semiotics developed through two major streams pioneered by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce (Rahmi et al., 2025). Saussure developed the concept of semiology with a structural approach that emphasizes the sibling relationship between signifiers (*signifiant*) and signified (*signifié*), while Peirce builds semiotic theory with a pragmatic approach through the concept of triadics involving representations, objects, and interpretants (Purnama, 2021). Roland Barthes then developed the theory of semiotics to a more complex level by introducing the concepts of denotative and connotative meanings, as well as cultural myths. Barthes argued that signs have not only a literal meaning, but also a cultural meaning that is influenced by social and ideological contexts. In the context of Nusantara Islam, Barthes's semiotic approach is very relevant to analyze how religious symbols undergo a process of significance influenced by local culture (Dewabrata, Fabri, Rahardjo, Syakina, & Habibah, 2025; Nata, Alfiansyah, Putrajip, Qatrunnada, & Lazuardi, 2025).

Cultural semiotics in Islam Nusantara reflect the integration of Islamic values with local culture, creating an aesthetic form of worship rooted in tradition. Recent research shows that Islam Nusantara has a distinctive characteristic in the form of flexibility in adopting local wisdom without eliminating the essence of Islamic teachings (Hendra Irwandi Siregar & Syafnan Syafnan, 2025). This acculturation process produces a unique symbolism, in which visual, audio, and performative elements in religious rituals become a medium of communication of spiritual and social values. In the *shalawat* tradition, this symbolism is clearly seen through the use of language, musical rhythms, costumes, and gestures which all carry a profound message about the love for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Islamic identity of the community.

The tradition of prayer in the archipelago has a long history that began with the entry of Islam into this region. Prayer not only functions as a form of vertical worship to Allah SWT through the glorification of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, but also as a means of *Da'wah* and horizontal social cohesion in Muslim society. There are several forms of *shalawat* tradition that are growing rapidly in the archipelago, including:

Barzanji or *Berzanji* is a hymn reading to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH compiled by Shaykh Ja'far bin Hasan bin Abdul Karim bin Muhammad al-*Barzanji*. This book is known by the full name 'Iqdul Jauhar Fî *Maulid* an-Nabiyyi al-Azhar'

and has become very popular in the Islamic world, including Indonesia (Nu Online, 2025). The contents of *Barzanji* talk about the life of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH starting from the genealogy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, to being appointed as an apostle, and tells the noble qualities that the Prophet possessed as an example of humanity. The *Barzanji* tradition is often used in religious events such as *Maulid*, weddings, circumcision, and various other religious celebrations. In various regions in the archipelago, *Barzanji* has its own uniqueness in its implementation, such as the Bugis people who consider this tradition to be very sacred and have a deep spiritual meaning.

Diba' is a *Maulid* book that contains praise to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, compiled by Abdurrahman ad-*Diba'*i. Meanwhile, *Marhaban* is a poem to celebrate the birth of the Prophet which is often combined with *Diba'* and *Barzanji* in the celebration of *Maulid*. These two traditions are in the form of poems combined with traditional Malay music using instruments such as tambourine, *Gambus*, and marwas, depicting the joy of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. This tradition not only develops among Islamic boarding schools and mosques, but also becomes part of the community's culture in various traditional rituals such as thanksgiving, salvation, and feasting. These three forms of the *shalawat* tradition show how Islam in the archipelago undergoes a creative contextualization process, where the universal values of Islam are integrated with local cultural expressions to create an inclusive and harmonious Islamic identity.

Recent research shows that *shalawat* in the Malay tradition has a multidimensional function. In the context of *Shalawat Dulang* in Nagari Saruaso, Tanah Datar Regency, *shalawat* has proven to be effective as a cultural *Da'wah* medium that combines traditional musical arts with religious verses (Gozali & Rizky Novriandi, 2024). Meanwhile, the *Barzanji* tradition among the Bugis and Lingga Malay communities shows how the ritual of reading the *Maulid* book is able to maintain its existence in the midst of modernization, even becoming a marker of the identity of the local Muslim community (Syam et al., 2024). From a semiotic perspective, the Malay *shalawat* tradition contains a complex system of signs. The semiotic approach is relevant to analyze how fashion, music, gestures, and language in prayer rituals communicate social and cultural messages. The study of semiotics of *Da'wah* communication shows that each semiotic theory—whether Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, or Roland Barthes—has a different framework in interpreting cultural signs and producing contextual interpretations (Nirwana et al., 2025).

In the era of globalization and modernization, the Malay prayer tradition faces the challenge of preservation as well as revitalization opportunities. The integration of Islamic values with local traditions creates distinctive forms of Islam in various regions of the archipelago (Harahap, 2025). Therefore, this research addresses a critical gap in understanding how semiotic systems function in religious-cultural contexts to construct and maintain collective identity in the face of modernization pressures.

The primary aim of this research is threefold: (1) to systematically identify and categorize the semiotic elements—linguistic, symbolic, and performative—contained within the Malay Islamic Nusantara *shalawat* tradition, employing Barthesian and Peircean semiotic

frameworks; (2) to analyze how the symbolism embedded in *shalawat* practices reflects and reinforces the spiritual values (*mahabbah* / love for the Prophet), cultural values (acculturation of Arab-Malay identities), and social values (communal solidarity) of the Malay Muslim community; and (3) to examine the role of the *shalawat* tradition as a mechanism for strengthening and transmitting Islamic identity across generations in the archipelago, particularly in the context of contemporary challenges such as globalization, secularization, and cultural homogenization.

This research offers significant benefits across theoretical, methodological, and practical domains. Theoretically, it contributes to the expanding field of cultural semiotics by demonstrating how religious signs operate within complex systems of meaning-making that simultaneously engage spiritual, aesthetic, and social functions. The study advances semiotic theory by illustrating the interplay between Saussurean structural analysis, Peircean pragmatic semiotics, and Barthesian myth analysis in a non-Western, Islamic cultural context. Methodologically, this research provides a replicable framework for analyzing religious-cultural traditions through integrated semiotic analysis, offering scholars a systematic approach to studying symbolic communication in ritual practices. Practically, the findings can inform cultural preservation policies, Islamic education curriculum development, and *Da'wah* strategies that are culturally sensitive and contextually relevant. By documenting the semiotic richness of the Malay *shalawat* tradition, this research supports efforts to revitalize and adapt these practices for contemporary audiences, particularly younger generations who may be disconnected from traditional religious expressions. Furthermore, the study has implications for interfaith and intercultural dialogue by demonstrating Islam Nusantara's capacity for cultural accommodation and synthesis, offering a model of religious flexibility that maintains doctrinal integrity while embracing local wisdom. Finally, in the context of Indonesia's national identity, understanding the semiotic dimensions of regional Islamic traditions contributes to appreciating the diversity within Indonesian Islam and strengthening the discourse of Islam Nusantara as a distinctive and valuable expression of global Islamic civilization.

Through a cultural semiotic approach grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Saussure, Peirce, and Barthes, this research examines the tradition of *shalawat* as a complex communication system that functions simultaneously as an expression of prophetic love, a symbol of social unity, and a manifestation of spiritual aesthetics that strengthen the Islamic identity of the Malay archipelago in the contemporary era.

METHOD

This research used a library research method with a qualitative descriptive approach. The qualitative approach aimed to describe and analyze cultural phenomena in depth using texts, documents, and literature related to the *shalawat* tradition in the Malay Islamic Nusantara context. The analysis employed cultural semiotic methods to uncover how cultural values, ideologies, and symbolism were conveyed through elements of the *shalawat* tradition. This qualitative and interpretive semiotic analysis involved understanding the context and interpreting signs in the research objects.

The research stages included data collection through literature studies by gathering relevant sources such as books, scientific journals, articles, and classic texts on *shalawat*, including prayer texts like *Barzanji*, *Diba'*, and *Marhaban*, as well as literature on semiotics,

Islamic culture, and religious traditions in the archipelago. The collected *shalawat* texts were analyzed focusing on linguistic aspects, narrative structures, and ritual contexts. The researcher also examined performative aspects such as music, movement, and rituals to understand how the texts and performances formed a system of signs communicating spiritual and cultural values.

Semiotic signs were classified into three categories: linguistic signs (Arabic and Malay verses, their denotative and connotative meanings); symbolic signs (visual decorations, traditional clothing, rhythms, melodies, and instruments); and performative signs (collective movements, sitting positions, and ritual procedures reflecting social values). Using semiotic theories from Saussure, Peirce, and Barthes, the symbolic meanings of signs were interpreted within the archipelago's Islamic cultural context, considering spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions.

The study concluded by outlining the semiotic elements of the Malay *shalawat* tradition, its symbolic reflection of community values, and its role in strengthening Islamic identity in the archipelago. This method provided a comprehensive understanding of the semiotic meanings of the *shalawat* tradition among Banjar Islamic Malays, contributing to Islamic cultural studies and the preservation of local religious traditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Semiotic Signs in the Malay Prayer Tradition

The tradition of prayer in the context of the Malay Islamic Nusantara is a complex cultural phenomenon and rich in symbolic meaning. A semiotic analysis of this tradition reveals the various layers of signs that make up a unique system of spiritual and cultural communication. As explained in semiotics theory, signs in culture not only serve as physical representations, but also carry deep meanings that express the values and identity of the community (Putri et al., 2025). In the context of Malay prayer, semiotic signs can be categorized into three main dimensions: linguistic, symbolic, and performative.

1. Tanda Linguistics (Verbal)

The linguistic dimension in the Malay *shalawat* tradition features an interesting language acculturation between Arabic as a religious language and Malay as a local language. The use of Arabic phrases such as *Ya Nabi Salam Alaika* or *Ya Rasulullah Salamun 'Alaik* combined with Malay expressions creates a distinctive language identity. This linguistic combination reflects the harmonious process of acculturation of Arabic and Malay cultures, where universal Islamic values can be accepted and practiced in the context of local culture without losing the essence of Islam (Fauzi & Salikurrahman, 2024).

The phenomenon of language acculturation in prayer is in line with the process of Islamization in the archipelago which takes place peacefully and adaptively. Islam arrived in the archipelago through a long process of acculturation, integrating religious values with pre-existing local culture (Fauzi & Salikurrahman, 2024). In the linguistic context of *shalawat*, the use of Arabic is not rigidly forced, but is integrated with the Malay language so that it is easily understood and accepted by the local community. This linguistic adaptation process shows the flexibility of Islam Nusantara in accommodating local wisdom while maintaining the substance of religious teachings.

The hermeneutic study of local cultural texts shows the importance of understanding historical context, interpretation of meaning, and cultural context in analyzing traditional texts (Putra et al., 2023). In the Malay prayer text, the grammatical interpretation of the Arabic phrases used is not only understood literally, but also contains deep technical and cultural meanings. For example, the use of the words *Salam* (peace) and mercy (affection) in the chanting of prayers is not only a verbal praise, but also as a prayer and hope that the values of peace and compassion of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH can be implemented in people's lives.

Furthermore, language in the *shalawat* tradition functions as an effective *Da'wah* medium. Research shows that *shalawat* hadroh al banjari as a form of Islamic art Banjar is a very effective *Da'wah* communication tool with a dominant positive impact (Ramadhani & Hariyanto, 2024). The use of simple but meaningful language in the chanting of prayers makes it easier to convey religious messages to the wider community, regardless of their level of education or religious understanding. Thus, linguistic signs in Malay prayer not only function as an aesthetic medium, but also as an instrument of Islamic education and *Da'wah*.

2. Symbolic Signs (Visual and Audial)

The symbolic dimension in the Malay prayer tradition includes visual and auditory elements that are rich in meaning. Visual elements such as mosque decorations, traditional ornaments, and traditional Malay clothing used in the *shalawat* ritual depict a deep reverence for the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Semiotic analysis of traditional Malay house ornamentation shows that decorative elements not only enrich aesthetics, but also represent Malay cultural identity and the influence of Islamic values (Hamzah et al., 2024). Motifs such as flora, fauna, calligraphy, and geometry that are often found in the decoration of the prayer place contain deep cultural and religious values.

The Arabic calligraphy that adorns the prayer ritual room, for example, is not just an aesthetic decoration, but a visual representation of the Divine presence and a reminder of the majesty of the name of Allah SWT and His Messenger. The symmetrical and harmonious geometric motifs reflect the concept of perfection and balance in Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, the use of certain colors such as green (symbolizing freshness and spiritual life), white (purity), and gold (glory) in decoration creates a solemn spiritual atmosphere. In terms of audio, the rhythm and melody of prayer using traditional instruments such as tambourine, *Gambus*, and marwas create a symbol of harmony between art and spirituality. The rhythmic sound of the tambourine and melodious melodies not only beautify the chanting of prayers, but also evoke spiritual emotions and feelings of love for the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

The visual and auditory symbolic elements in the prayer also serve as a sign of the identity of the Malay Muslim community. Like the Umbung Kuteui tradition that uses traditional objects, ceremonial clothing, and symbolic rituals to express the values of gratitude and solidarity (Putri et al., 2025), the Malay prayer tradition also utilizes various symbolic elements to strengthen social ties and cultural identity. Malay traditional clothing worn in *shalawat* rituals, such as baju kurung, songket, and skullcaps, serve as visual markers that distinguish the Malay Muslim community from other ethnic groups, as well as show pride in the cultural heritage of their ancestors.

3. Performative Signs (Rituals and Movements)

The performative dimension in the Malay prayer tradition includes aspects of rituals and gestures that have a deep symbolic meaning. Collective movements in chanting *shalawat*, such

as sitting in a circle (*Halaqah*) or marching in a *Maulid* procession, create a symbol of unity and togetherness of Muslims. The circular sit-in formation that puts all participants in an equal position reflects the value of egalitarianism in Islam, where there is no difference in social status before Allah SWT. This collective performance also reflects the value of togetherness and respect for the Prophet Muhammad PBUH as a unifying figure for the people.

In the context of religious anthropology, rituals such as prayer not only function as vertical worship to Allah, but also as a means to strengthen horizontal social ties within the community (Manopo et al., 2025). Research on the symbolic transformation of the Mayang Twins ritual shows that traditional rituals that have undergone cultural Islamization can still function as expressions of gratitude, harmony, and meaningful cultural heritage. Similarly, the Malay *shalawat* tradition involving the collective participation of the community serves as a medium to strengthen social solidarity, especially in major events such as *Maulid* celebrations, weddings, and circumcision.

The performative aspect also includes non-verbal communication that occurs in the *shalawat* ritual. As explained in the study of Javanese traditions, non-verbal communication through gestures, gestures, and ritual symbols can serve as a means of binding and strengthening community identity (Fitria & Rachman, 2024). In the ritual of prayer, movements such as standing together when saying the name of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), raising hands when praying, or nodding the head as a sign of respect, all contain symbolic meanings that are collectively understood by the community. The procedure for carrying out the structured prayer ritual—starting from the opening with the recitation of the holy verses of the Qur'an, the chanting of the core prayer, to closing with collective prayer—reflects the value of order and purity in worship. This consistent ritual structure also serves as a mechanism for cross-generational cultural transmission, where the younger generation can learn and inherit traditions from the older generation through direct participation in the ritual.

The Symbolic Meaning of Prayer in Malay Tradition

Analysis of semiotic signs in the Malay *shalawat* tradition reveals three interrelated dimensions of symbolic meaning: the spiritual dimension, the cultural dimension, and the social dimension.

1. Spiritual Dimension

In the spiritual dimension, prayer reflects deep love for the Prophet Muhammad PBUH as a spiritual example for Muslims. The chanting of prayer serves as a medium to strengthen the vertical relationship between individuals and Allah SWT through the reminder of His mercy that has been bestowed upon mankind through prophetic treatises. The tradition of prayer also teaches spiritual values such as patience, sincerity, and *tawakalan* exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH throughout his life. The practice of chanting prayers regularly, both in religious rituals and in daily life, helps Muslims to always remember Allah (*Dzikrullah*) and emulate the morals of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

2. Cultural Dimension

In the cultural dimension, the symbolism of prayer reflects local values such as respect, togetherness, and harmony that are integrated with Islamic teachings. The Malay tradition of prayer shows how Islam can adapt to the local cultural context without losing the essence of its teachings. Like the *Megengan* tradition in Java that acculturates Islamic values with local

culture through the ritual of salvation and the distribution of blessings (Shufya, 2022), the Malay *shalawat* tradition also integrates local music, literature, and rituals as part of religious expression. Cultural acculturation in the *shalawat* tradition reflects the tolerance and flexibility of Islam in the archipelago. This tradition does not impose rigid and uniform forms of ritual, but rather provides room for creativity and adaptation according to the characteristics of the local culture. This is in line with the Islamic principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy for all nature), which accommodates cultural diversity as long as it does not conflict with the Islamic creed and sharia. Cultural values such as cooperation, mutual respect, and togetherness manifested in the *shalawat* ritual also strengthen the identity of the Malay Muslim community. This tradition is a medium to pass on the noble values of Malay culture to the younger generation, as well as instilling an understanding that Islam and local culture are not two opposing entities, but can synergize in harmony.

3. Social Dimension

In the social dimension, the tradition of *shalawat* serves as a medium to strengthen social solidarity in the Muslim community. The celebration of the Prophet's Birthday accompanied by the chanting of *Barzanji*, *Diba'*, or *Marhaban* prayers is a momentum for people from various social, economic, and educational backgrounds to gather. In these events, there are no barriers between rich and poor, old and young, ulama and layman—all united in one goal to glorify the Prophet Muhammad SAW. As with the *Megengan* tradition which has the meaning of sharing with others through the distribution of blessing rice and *Apem* cakes (Shufya, 2022), the *Maulid* celebration accompanied by prayer is also usually accompanied by the provision of dishes and food that are distributed to the participants as a form of gratitude and sharing happiness. The social function of the *shalawat* tradition is very important in maintaining social cohesion and harmony in the Malay Muslim society. In the midst of the challenges of modernization and globalization that tend to erode the values of togetherness, the tradition of prayer is one of the fortresses that maintains social ties and community identity. This collective ritual provides an opportunity for community members to meet, interact, and strengthen the bond of friendship.

The Relevance of the *Shalawat* Tradition in the Modern Era

In the modern era marked by globalization, secularization, and the development of information technology, the Malay prayer tradition faces various challenges as well as opportunities. The main challenge is how to maintain the relevance and authenticity of tradition in the midst of the rapid modernization current. However, the *shalawat* tradition also has great potential to be revitalized and developed as a creative *Da'wah* medium that is attractive to the younger generation.

1. Revitalizing Local Islamic Culture

The Malay prayer tradition can be a means to introduce inclusive and harmonious Islamic values in the context of globalization. In an era where identity is often questioned and local culture is threatened by global homogenization, the tradition of *shalawat* can serve as a powerful marker of identity for the Malay Muslim community. The revitalization of this tradition does not mean maintaining rigid and inflexible forms of ritual, but rather adapting the tradition to the modern context without losing its spiritual substance and meaning. The use of digital media and modern technology can be an effective tool to document, disseminate, and

preserve the tradition of *shalawat*. As research shows that the use of digital media can facilitate the transmission of traditions across generations (Manopo et al., 2025), the tradition of prayer can also be disseminated through social media platforms, mobile applications, and other digital channels to reach a wider audience, especially the younger generation who are more familiar with technology.

2. Creative *Da'wah* Tools

Through music and art, the tradition of prayer can attract the younger generation to know and love the Prophet Muhammad SAW. *Da'wah* approaches that use art and culture have proven to be more effective in conveying religious messages to modern society that tends to avoid dogmatic and rigid *Da'wah*. *Shalawat* hadroh al banjari, for example, has proven to be a very effective *Da'wah* communication medium with a dominant positive impact (Ramadhani & Hariyanto, 2024). Creativity in packaging the *shalawat* tradition—both in terms of musical arrangements, choreography, and visual presentation—can increase the attractiveness of this tradition for the younger generation. Collaborations between traditional artists and modern musicians, for example, can produce contemporary *shalawat* works that still retain spiritual substance but are packaged in a more attractive and relevant form to the tastes of the younger generation. In addition, the integration of the *shalawat* tradition in formal and non-formal Islamic education can be an effective strategy to instill love for the Prophet Muhammad SAW from an early age. Learning about the history, meaning, and practice of the *shalawat* tradition in the religious education curriculum can help the younger generation understand the rich cultural heritage of the archipelago and strengthen their Islamic identity.

CONCLUSION

The tradition of prayer in Malay Islam Nusantara embodies complex semiotic meanings across spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions. This research found that linguistic elements demonstrate a harmonious blending of Arabic and Malay, reflecting Islam Nusantara's flexibility in embracing local wisdom. Symbolically, visual and auditory features like ornamentation, traditional attire, and musical instruments mark Malay Muslim identity and serve as aesthetic expressions of faith. Performatively, *shalawat* rituals foster social solidarity through collective movements and structured ceremonies, reinforcing communal bonds. Traditions such as *Barzanji*, *Diba'*, and *Marhaban* not only express love for the Prophet Muhammad PBUH but also act as effective cultural *da'wah* media, transmitting Islamic values across generations. This shows Islam Nusantara's capacity to integrate universal religious teachings with local culture, preserving spiritual essence while fostering an inclusive and rooted Islamic identity. Future research could explore the adaptation of these semiotic traditions in digital media and how this influences youth engagement and identity formation in contemporary Malay Muslim communities.

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