



**FAITH, RITUAL, AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:
Community-Based Public Theology in the Haul
Guru Sekumpul**

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Abstract: This article examines the transformation of ritual piety into public theology through the Haul Guru Sekumpul in South Kalimantan, Indonesia. Employing ethnographic fieldwork combined with a hermeneutical approach, the study interprets religious practices as expressions of lived theology embedded in social life. Data were collected through participant observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews conducted during the 2025 and 2026 commemorations. The findings show that the haul functions not only as a devotional ritual but also as a site of collective ethical formation. Core Islamic values such as compassion, solidarity, and service are enacted through everyday practices, transforming faith from an individual experience into a shared social responsibility. The event also demonstrates a form of community-based moral governance, in which participants collectively organize public order and social welfare without reliance on centralized institutional control. This study contributes to Islamic public theology by showing that community-based religious practices can generate non-institutional moral authority and shape public ethics in socially embedded ways. It offers broader insights into the relationship between religion, society, and the public sphere in contemporary Muslim contexts.

Keywords: Islamic Public Theology, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, Civic Piety, Moral Agency

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Introduction

RELIGION has assumed an increasingly visible presence in public life across many contemporary societies, shaping not only

individual belief systems but also patterns of social interaction, collective identity, and moral orientation.¹ This renewed visibility reflects a broader transformation in which religious expression extends beyond private and institutional domains and becomes embedded in everyday social practices and large-scale communal gatherings.² In many Muslim contexts, mass devotional events attract millions of participants and generate forms of solidarity,³ mutual care, and shared responsibility that influence the organization of public life.⁴

Contemporary research in this area has also explored the connection between the religious sphere and its influence on public life in various socio-political contexts, illustrating the engagement of religion in the areas of ethics, politics, and community formation.⁵ Research into lived religion done by scholars such as Ammerman,⁶ Dandekar & Tschacher⁷ reveals that religion creates its meaning from the process of doing and interacting rather than from doctrine alone. In addition to this, scholars such as Kim,⁸ Nanthambwe and Magezi⁹ point out the

¹ Azhar Ibrahim, "The Need for Discoursing Social Theology in Muslim Southeast Asia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v4i1.1-23>.

² James B. Hoesterey, "Triangulating Faith: A Methodology for Integrating Theology, Policy, and Ethnography," *American Anthropologist* 124, no. 4 (2022): 789–803.

³ Mridha Md. Shiblee Noman and Md. Sayeed Al-Zaman, "The Use of Religion Online by Indian Political Entities during the 2024 Lok Sabha Election: Religiopolitical Propaganda on Social Media?," *Sage Journal* 44, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1177/08944393251319740>.

⁴ Valentina Pereira Arena, "A Latin American View of Lived Religion Proposal," *Social Compass* 71, no. 4 (2024): 674–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686241290699>.

⁵ Chanrith Ngin et al., "The Role of Faith-Based Institutions in Urban Disaster Risk Reduction for Immigrant Communities," *Nat Hazards* 103 (2020): 299–316, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11069-020-03988-9>.

⁶ Nancy T. Ammerman, "Lived Religion as an Emerging Field: An Assessment of Its Contours and Frontiers," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 29, no. 2 (2016): 83–99, <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2016-02-01>.

⁷ Deepra Dandekar and Torsten Tschacher, eds., *Islam, Sufism and Everyday Politics of Belonging in South Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁸ Sebastian Kim and Katie Day, eds., *Companion to Public Theology* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017).

emergence of public theology in the context of the world which goes beyond institutional models and emphasizes the practice dimension of religion in public life. Nevertheless, large-scale devotional assemblies in Muslim societies have been largely neglected and little attention has been paid to their potential for decentralized ethics and social order.

The absence of such an emphasis has been especially pronounced in research on Islam, which has often concentrated upon theological, juridical, and institutional aspects of religion. While more recent research has demonstrated the importance of popular religion, little consideration has been devoted to the manner in which large-scale devotional gatherings contribute to ethical formation. Likewise, although the term *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* has been frequently invoked when considering the ethical goals of Islamic jurisprudence,¹⁰ very little research has investigated its social application,¹¹ particularly at a community level.¹²

This article addresses focuses on shortcomings of previous studies by focusing on the Haul Guru Sekumpul in South Kalimantan, Indonesia, widely regarded one of the largest annual Islamic gatherings in Indonesia. This study employs a qualitative research design.¹³ Participant observation, in-depth interviews with a wide array of participants, as well as the documentation of the events in 2025 and 2026 have been considered to collect data

⁹ Patrick Nanthambwe and Vhumani Magezi, "Public within Public: Extending the Notion of Public Theology to Include African Public Praxis," *Religions* 15 (2024): 1–14.

¹⁰ Jasser Auda, *Reforming Islamic Studies: A Maqasid Approach* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press., 2016).

¹¹ Mohammad Eisa Ruhullah Norman, Nurul Ain, "Exploring the Ethical Dimensions of Fiqh: The Role of the Soul in Achieving Maqasid Al-Shari'ah," *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC)* 29, no. 1 (2024): 47–77.

¹² Haruna Babatunde Jaiyeoba et al., "The Implications of Maqasid Al-Shari' Ah for Integrated Sustainability Practices among Businesses: A Qualitative Inquiry," *Qualitative Research in Financial Markets* 17, no. 3 (2025): 511–31, <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRFM-09-2023-0222>.

¹³ Hoesterey, "Triangulating Faith: A Methodology for Integrating Theology, Policy, and Ethnography."

for this study.¹⁴ The Methodology employed through this approach can provide a detailed and nuanced analysis on how religion is understood, acted upon, and upheld in collective practice.¹⁵

The article proposes that the case study of Haul Guru Sekumpul is an example of public theology conducted in a communal way, where the values of religion are performed instead of being transmitted via institutional mechanisms. The example clearly illustrates that values such as compassion, solidarity, and service not only serve as symbols but also as practical actions affecting social behavior in terms of accountability and involvement. This case is important in the context of debates on religion in the public sphere since it allows rethinking the idea of Islamic public theology as an interactive process.

Religion in the Public Sphere: A Review of Scholarship on Lived Practice, Public Theology, and Ethical Formation

The contemporary literature on religion has also started to treat large-scale religious assemblies as social structures rather than simply ritual phenomena. For instance, as Su'arez et al.,¹⁶ Naido and Liutikas¹⁷ explore the pilgrimage culture, they show how social coordination can be achieved through norms and group activity rather than top-down governance. In the case of Southeast Asia, the relevant literature also underscores the importance of informal leadership and communal organization in

¹⁴ N. K Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research (4th Ed.)* (Sage Publications, Inc, 2018).

¹⁵ Angelo Nicolaidis Kleinhempel, Ullrich R., "Sacred Sites, Identity, and Resilience-on the Retrieval of Collective and Historic Identity across Religious and Cultural Difference," *HTS Theologiese Studies* 76, no. 3 (2023).

¹⁶ María Jos'é Andrade Su'arez, Manuel Docampo, and Ana Leiras, "Researching Links between Pilgrimage Tourism and Rural Development: The Emergence of Fistera as a ' New End ' of the Way," *Journal of Rural Studies* 119 (2025): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2025.103721>.

¹⁷ Perunjodi Naidoo and Darius Liutikas, "Memories, Traditions, and Sacred Landscape: Pilgrimage and Religious Identity at Maha Shivaratri, Mauritius," in *Creating the Sacred Landscape*, ed. D. Liutikas (Cham: Springer, 2025), 241–256, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-86232-8_15.

religion outside formal structures.¹⁸ However, such research hardly ever addresses Islamic devotional assemblies as arenas for ethical development and decentralized coordination at scale. This is especially important because there is a rising appreciation of religion as a device of social organization and ethical regulation in environments with weak institutions.¹⁹

In this context, recent debates on political theology emphasize that modern political concepts are deeply rooted in theological traditions, particularly through processes of secularization that transform religious ideas into political frameworks,²⁰ while contemporary studies further demonstrate that the influence of religion on political behavior operates through communicative processes in which exposure to and reception of messages within religious communities play a central role.²¹ This perspective underscores that the relationship between theology and politics is not merely conceptual but is actively produced and sustained through everyday communicative practices that shape how individuals interpret, negotiate, and enact their religious and political commitments.

In light of these dynamics, several important areas of study have been identified. First, many recent empirical studies examine the role that religion plays in the development of social ethics, social identities, and moral communities. Research conducted in Africa, South Asia, and elsewhere has revealed that religious life takes place through communal actions and informal networks which ensure solidarity and reciprocity within religious communities.²² In such situations, it appears that religion is

¹⁸ Ammerman, "Lived Religion as an Emerging Field: An Assessment of Its Contours and Frontiers."

¹⁹ Tshenolo J. Madigele et al., "Lived Religion and Lived Development in Contemporary Society," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 38, no. 2 (2025): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666500718>.

²⁰ Felix Steilen, "Juan Donoso Cortés and Political Theology," *The Review of Politics* 86, no. 194 (2024): 24–46, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670523000529>.

²¹ Paul A Djupe and Jacob R Neiheisel, "The Religious Communication Approach and Political Behavior," *Advances in Political Psychology* 43 (2022): 165–94, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12848>.

²² David Herbert, *Religion and Civil Society: Rethinking Public Religion in the Contemporary World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

practiced primarily through communal and relational processes rather than institutional ones.²³ Second, there has been considerable discussion regarding religion's impact on governance, especially when state structures are underdeveloped or challenged. Several works have considered the influence of religious leaders on alternative governance arrangements, while others have emphasized the importance of decentralized systems of coordination based on common norms and collective participation.²⁴ Third, recent research has examined the intersection between rituals and social structure by showing how collective acts of worship can be important for identity creation and ethics, as well as social interaction.²⁵ This has been demonstrated in studies conducted on piety movements in Islam through which rituals generate ethical dispositions that inform interpersonal interactions with family members and neighbors.²⁶

Several theories have influenced the development of these themes. Lived religion has been the primary theory which has guided the focus of scholarship towards the practice aspect of religion rather than doctrine, whereby people develop their own sense of religion through day-to-day actions.²⁷ The development of lived religion has further been complemented by its connection to larger themes such as development, decolonizing knowledge and environmental ethics.²⁸ Public theology is another theoretical tradition that is highly relevant to this paper, wherein religious traditions deal with the issue of ethics within society. This

²³ Sara Martinez-damia et al., "The Mediating Role of Migrant Community-Based Organizations : Challenges and Coping Strategies," *Voluntas* 35 (2024): 85–96, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-023-00572-0>.

²⁴ Arena, "A Latin American View of Lived Religion Proposal."

²⁵ Ruth Dowson, "Utilisation of Religious Spaces: Rituals, Practices and Community Engagement," in *Geographies of Religious Spaces and Sacred Landscapes*, ed. Darius Liutikas, 2025, 22–35, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035343829>.

²⁶ Arsalan Khan, "The Chronotope of Piety in the Contested Space – Time of Islamic Modernity in Pakistan," *Signs and Society* 13, no. 2 (2025): 136–53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/sas.2025.1>.

²⁷ Ammerman, "Lived Religion as an Emerging Field: An Assessment of Its Contours and Frontiers."

²⁸ Madigele et al., "Lived Religion and Lived Development in Contemporary Society."

tradition has evolved in response to the privatization of religion and as a means to promote dialogue between religions and secular entities.²⁹

Recent scholarship highlights the social dimensions of theological knowledge production. According to Page's interpretation of Longino, theological deduction is underdetermined and socially reliant, involving interpretation in social interactions in interpretive communities. This view fits well with this study, which considers the Haul Guru Sekumpul as an embodiment of lived theology, where Islamic ideals are practiced collectively rather than abstracted as dogmas. The same notion is expressed by research on religion-based peacebuilding, which recognizes theological reformation as key to political coexistence. As observed by Schvarcz and Billig³⁰ pluralistic views of Judeo-Islamic theology imply that peace should be religious, too, mirroring the understanding of participants in the haul that service and collaboration are religious responsibilities. Generally speaking, modern theories place ethics as the basis of religion. As Hoston³¹ demonstrates through Levinas and Wang Yangming, ethical practice is constitutive of belief.

In Islamic studies, the notion of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* is extensively applied as a theoretical model in explaining the ethical purposes of Islamic laws, especially regarding the preservation of life, religion, intellect, and social welfare.³² Attempts have been made in recent scholarship to apply the model empirically, such as the construction of social well-being indicators based on *maqāṣid*.³³ Although these attempts are considered as

²⁹ Kim and Day, *Companion to Public Theology*.

³⁰ Benjamin Schvarcz and Miriam Billig, "The Froman Peace Campaign: Pluralism in Judeo-Islamic Theology and Politics," *Politics and Religion* 15 (2022): 559–78, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048321000365>.

³¹ Germaine A Hoston, "A Neo-Confucian 'Theology of Liberation' ? Humanism and Ethics in Levinas , Liberation Theology , and Wang Yangming," *Harvard Theological Review (Cambridge University Press)* 1, no. 2025 (2025): 85–109.

³² Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (London and Washington: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2008).

³³ Houssein Eddine Bedoui, "Sharī'ah-Based Ethical Performance Measurement Framework and Relevant Data to Measure Development in Light

breakthroughs in their own ways, most writings tend to be more normative than empirical in nature and fail to sufficiently incorporate the realities of social practice into their analysis. Socio-legal approaches attempt to tackle this problem through the study of legal norms in actual social settings.³⁴ Nonetheless, empirical research on the application of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* in daily social practices is still limited.

As for methodology, empirical studies of religion in public life have been gradually replaced by text-oriented and institutional studies with empirical research methods. While previous empirical studies were based on text analysis and case studies of institutions, recent scholarship utilizes ethnography more widely through field observation, intensive interviews, and field documentation.³⁵ This approach has proved to be efficient at revealing the complexity of real religious practice and the dynamics of meaning formation in such situations.³⁶ At the same time, it frequently addresses only small groups and places. Large-scale religious events in Muslim communities remain largely understudied.

While these advancements have considerably enriched the field of studying lived religion, there are also limitations that need to be noted. Much of the current research conducted from an ethnographic perspective is still based on localities and small communities, favoring deep personal experiences over analyses of complicated social formations. The potential for religion to become involved in large-scale operations and processes, especially when we are talking about gatherings involving millions of people, is thus largely ignored. These limitations are quite relevant when researching Muslim societies in particular, where the phenomenon of big religious gatherings occurs rather frequently. Yet even these

of *Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah*," in *Towards a Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah Index of Socio-Economic Development*, ed. Salman Syed Ali (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 55–123, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-12793-0_3.

³⁴ Jaiyeoba et al., "The Implications of Maqasid Al-Shari ' Ah for Integrated Sustainability Practices among Businesses : A Qualitative Inquiry."

³⁵ Arena, "A Latin American View of Lived Religion Proposal."

³⁶ Terry Root, "Alan Richardson ' s Biblical Theology , ' Faith Principle ' and Attempts to Protect Public Faith," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 21 (2023): 296–312, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355322000067>.

gatherings that involve numerous participants rarely attract scholars' attention as examples of how ethical coordination is achieved and collective responsibility organized in practice.

Comparatively speaking, prior research has been carried out in relation to large-scale religious occasions like pilgrimages, festivals, and devotional congregations. Research on the Hajj³⁷ and the Kumbh Mela,³⁸ for example, highlights the role of ritual in generating collective identity and organizing large populations. However, most of these studies have concentrated on issues such as symbolism and rituals, with little emphasis placed on the manner in which these gatherings are used as mechanisms for developing moral subjects or decentralizing social structures. As far as Islam is concerned, there has been a considerable amount of research on topics related to public Islam and the religion in everyday life, as well as piety movements and ethical subjectivities.³⁹ Yet empirical studies that link large-scale devotional practices with moral agency and community-based forms of organization remain underdeveloped.⁴⁰

In sum, a number of key gaps are identified in this literature. While the role of religion as a vibrant social force transcending formal institutions has become increasingly clear, there is still a lack of synthesis between ritual performance, social ethics, and public engagement in communities. Specifically, the connection between religion as lived practice and the normative structures of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* needs to be better understood through empirical

³⁷ Syafiq Hasyim, "Beyond the Official Hajj: The Politics of Neglected Ziyarat in Contemporary Indonesia," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 40, no. 3 (2021): 421–444.

³⁸ Vanshika Shukla, "Faith, Tradition, and Community: The Social Impact of Kumbh," *International Multidisciplinary Research Journal Reviews (IMRJR)* 2, no. 1 (2025): 37–42, <https://doi.org/10.17148/IMRJR.2025.020105>.

³⁹ Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere," *Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 3 (2009): 229–250, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-009-0096-9>.

⁴⁰ Nanthambwe and Magezi, "Public within Public: Extending the Notion of Public Theology to Include African Public Praxis."

research.⁴¹ Furthermore, forms of mass and extra-institutional religiosity are not well represented in global debates on public theology, which still tend to reflect the Western context in which religion is strongly institutionalized and has a structured public voice.⁴² It is through such gaps that the need for empirical and theoretical research becomes apparent; a research which can serve to bridge the gap between normative discourse and social practice.

From Devotion to Civic Faith: The Transformation of Ritual Piety into Public Theology

As observed in field work done in the Haul Guru Sekumpul of 2025 and 2026, it is noted that the activities in the event extend past religious performance to create continuous social interaction. It was found from interviews that religion creates a sense of duty towards others in dense settings with little structure.

A neighborhood head who organized a rest area for pilgrims in 2025 (R5)⁴³ explained that serving visitors was part of religious duty. He put it simply: "We take blessings from serving Abah Guru Sekumpul's pilgrims." This perspective is echoed in the experiences of participants in 2026. R10,⁴⁴ a pilgrim from Banjarmasin, witnessed this firsthand. "Without being asked," he said, "pilgrims work together to maintain security and order. This is proof that when hearts are united by love for a righteous person, the community can become guardians of peace."

The same spirit of voluntary service was evident across multiple locations. Residents who were not officially assigned as volunteers nonetheless opened their homes, provided drinking water, and offered rest spaces to tired pilgrims. One resident explained that this was not done for recognition but because they saw the pilgrims as guests entrusted to them by God. Similarly,

⁴¹ Jaiyeoba et al., "The Implications of Maqasid Al-Shari' Ah for Integrated Sustainability Practices among Businesses : A Qualitative Inquiry."

⁴² Dan Smyer Yü, "A Public Theology of the Anthropocene: The Earth's Deep Freedom," *Religion and Development* 2, no. 3 (2023): 353–80, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30965/27507955-2023003006>.

⁴³ Respondent 5, "Interview" (January, 4, 2025).

⁴⁴ Respondent 10, "Interview" (January, 11, 2026).

R15⁴⁵ emphasized this point in his local dialect: “*Iman kada cukup disimpan di hati sorangan*” – faith is not enough if kept only in the heart. “It must be visible in attitude and social responsibility.”

Further accounts reinforce this pattern. R13⁴⁶ put it this way: “Compassion no longer stops at concepts. It appears in concrete actions.” One participant observed that maintaining awareness of others in crowded conditions is itself a form of religious practice (R13),⁴⁷ while another described acts of assistance, such as helping strangers and sharing resources, as integral to participation in the haul (R8).⁴⁸ These statements indicate that participants interpret everyday interactions as expressions of religious commitment rather than as separate social obligations.

These accounts are supported by field observations conducted during both years. “Field notes from January 2026, for instance, documented how participants along the main access routes to Martapura organized themselves into lines without any visible direction from authorities.” The participants would frequently queue, share space, and help each other even when the crowds were highly congested at different entry points. This occurred despite the large number of people who attended; this process went on without any form of coercive action but rather seemed to be guided by shared values.

From the above studies, a common trend is evident in that ritual engagement is strongly linked to social participation.⁴⁹ Religious piety is practiced through activities that maintain order in the community and promote the welfare of other people.⁵⁰ In such a situation, involvement in the haul constitutes a transition from an inward practice of piety to one that is socially motivated.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Respondent 15, “Interview” (January, 13, 2026).

⁴⁶ Respondent 13, “Interview” (June 9, 2025).

⁴⁷ R13.

⁴⁸ Respondent 8, “Interview” (January, 12, 2026).

⁴⁹ Ibrahim, “The Need for Discursing Social Theology in Muslim Southeast Asia.”

⁵⁰ K.A Shinde, “Religious Tourism and Urban Transformation: The Impacts of Pilgrimage on Infrastructure,” *Tourism Geographies* 22, no. 5 (2020): 867–88.

⁵¹ Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

This process implies that religious devotion, as perceived by the participants, cannot be separated from a sense of duty to others.⁵² This observation offers an empirical ground for analyzing the process of emergence of forms of public religiosity, which are built not only on expressed ethical values but also on their practical implementation.⁵³

It raises more questions regarding the way in which the actors perceive and explain the ethical values guiding their behavior. This issue will be discussed in the next section, where we will look into the actual implementation of the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*.

Rethinking *Maqāṣid* and Moral Agency: Islamic Legal and Theological Responses to Ethical Crisis

The research results, based on the theoretical framework provided above, suggest the need to re-evaluate the application of ethical norms inherent in the Islamic worldview. Although the subjects did not use specific legal concepts while describing their behavior, their narratives and behavior patterns are consistent with the purposes of the *sharī'ah*, especially regarding life preservation, social welfare, and collective prosperity.

From a hermeneutical perspective, the meanings attributed to the haul are not fixed but are continuously interpreted through participants' experiences and social interactions. For instance, when respondents describe acts such as distributing food or assisting strangers as "part of worship" (R8),⁵⁴ this reflects an interpretive process in which ritual devotion is extended into the domain of social ethics. While meanings are often derived from textual doctrine, there is an alternative way to seek and understand the meaning, as the teachings are reinterpreted considering the situation on the ground of the event, which entails coordination, care, and mutual responsibilities among many

⁵² Ibrahim, "The Need for Discursing Social Theology in Muslim Southeast Asia."

⁵³ David M. Boan et al., "Faith and Social Capital in Disaster Recovery: A Comparative Study," *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 28, no. 4 (2020): 386–98.

⁵⁴ Resoindent 8, "Interview."

individuals. Likewise, the use of terms such as *musyāwarah* and *fardhu kifayah*, as stated by⁵⁵ and R13,⁵⁶ respectively, shows that Islamic principles, rather than normative rules, were interpreted and used in practice. In this regard, the haul is a hermeneutic place through which meanings related to religious teachings are dynamically performed in practice.

Interview data indicate that participants understand religious commitment as inseparable from responsibility toward others. R8⁵⁷ noted that “Muslims can build an orderly and just social order through faith awareness, solidarity, and moral example” – even when state support remains limited. This perspective suggests that ethical responsibility is not perceived as an external obligation but as an intrinsic dimension of religious life.

Further insights emerge from the way participants describe collective action. R11⁵⁸ pointed to a concrete example of this coordination: the slogan “*Datang bersih, pulang bersih*” (Come clean, leave clean), which mobilizes pilgrims to maintain order and cleanliness throughout the event. He noted that this process relies on mutual agreement rather than rigid directives, allowing participants to align their actions through shared understanding rather than hierarchical control.⁵⁹ This mode of coordination reflects a form of ethical deliberation that is embedded in practice rather than formal institutional structures.

Similarly, R13⁶⁰ put it this way: “Compassion no longer stops at concepts. It appears in concrete actions. This is *fardhu kifayah* and care for public welfare.” He emphasized that what emerges during the gathering is a form of care oriented toward public welfare, in which compassion is no longer limited to abstract discourse but becomes visible in concrete action. Acts such as assisting strangers, maintaining order, and providing essential

⁵⁵ Respondent 11, “Interview” (June, 05, 2025).

⁵⁶ Respondent 13, “Interview” (March, 03, 2026).

⁵⁷ Respondent 8, “Interview.”

⁵⁸ Respondent 11, “Interview” (January, 12, 2026).

⁵⁹ Malek Bader, “Religious Tourism in Jordan: Current Situation, Future Developments and Prospects: A Case Study on Islamic and Christian Holy Sites” (Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, 2012).

⁶⁰ 13, “Interview,” 2025.

services are thus understood as fulfilling a shared moral obligation.

This interpretation is reinforced by other participants. R15⁶¹ emphasized this in his local dialect: “*Iman kada cukup disimpan di hati sorangan*” – faith is not enough if kept only in the heart. “It must be visible in attitude and social responsibility.” Such accounts suggest that moral agency is experienced as practical engagement within a shared social environment rather than as abstract reasoning.

An ustadz who has attended the Haul for decades (R12)⁶² explicitly connected these practices to Qur’anic teaching by reciting Surah Al-Mā’idah (5:2): “*Wata’āwanū ‘alā al-birri wa al-taqwā*” (help one another in righteousness and piety). For him, it was more than just a theological concept because it could actually be witnessed as something practical within the setting of the meeting. What he stressed was the empirical aspect of the verse which is manifested in the congregation’s conduct of practical things like serving, sharing, and assisting each other. Here, the teachings of the Quran are not merely spoken or read out but practiced.

This act of enactment is consistent with the underdetermined nature of theological inference noted by Page,⁶³ whereby the link between the source material and theology is not determined solely through the formal process of textual exegesis but by social interaction within a community of interpreters. In the case of the Haul Guru Sekumpul, actors engage with scripture not just through textual literalism but through the interpretation of theological terms like *mushāwarah* (consultation) and *fardhu kifayah* (collective obligation) with regard to their local social setting. As pointed out by Page⁶⁴ it is within the process of community interaction rather than the formal relations of language that the relevancy of scripture, tradition, and experience becomes known.

⁶¹ Respondent 15, “Interview” (January 13, 2026).

⁶² Respondent 12, “Interview” (January 12, 2026).

⁶³ Meghan D Page, “Theology as Social Knowledge,” *Religious Studies* 61 (2025): 173–90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S003441252510098X>.

⁶⁴ Page.

The January 2026 field notes, for example, showed how volunteers regulated traffic flow at an important junction without the intervention of any police force, resorting to hand signs and consensus agreement.⁶⁵ These acts did not emanate from any form of authoritative command but rather sprang spontaneously from mutual social conventions and moral obligations,⁶⁶ indicating that ethical conduct was exercised through participation and not coercion.⁶⁷

Taken together, these findings point to a form of moral agency that is socially embedded and collectively enacted.⁶⁸ Rather than emerging from individual interpretation alone, ethical conduct is shaped through interaction,⁶⁹ shared norms, and coordinated practices within the community.⁷⁰ In this sense, moral responsibility is not understood as a purely personal obligation but as a relational process that unfolds through participation in collective life.⁷¹

This pattern further indicates that ethical principles associated with *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* are not merely articulated at the level of legal theory but are operationalized through everyday practices that sustain social life.⁷² Accordingly, *maqāṣid* may be understood not only as a normative framework but also as a lived ethical orientation, realized through interaction, cooperation, and shared

⁶⁵ Z. Falahi and A. Yusuf, "The Paradox of State Absence in Indonesia's Islamic Mass Gatherings: Between Spiritual Autonomy and Public Neglect," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 51, no. 2 (2023): 89–107.

⁶⁶ Norman, Nurul Ain, "Exploring the Ethical Dimensions of Fiqh: The Role of the Soul in Achieving Maqasid Al-Shari'ah."

⁶⁷ Norman, Nurul Ain.

⁶⁸ Rana Khalaf, "Local Governance at the Intersection of Peace and State Formation in Syria: The Case of Al-Raqqa's Revolution-Induced Areas of Limited Statehood (2011-2022)" (The University of Manchester (United Kingdom), 2024).

⁶⁹ T. Thelen et al., "Sacred or Sacrificed Placemaking: A Contested Fan Pilgrimage Site for Rural Tourism Development," *Tourism Geographies*, 2025, 1–24.

⁷⁰ Auda, *Reforming Islamic Studies: A Maqasid Approach*.

⁷¹ K. Knott, "Religious Infrastructure and the Performance of the Public: The Haul and the Reconfiguration of Sacred Space," in *Religion and the Public Sphere: New Conversations*, ed. A. Day and J. Montgomery. (London: Routledge, 2017), 45–63.

⁷² Nanthambwe and Magezi, "Public within Public : Extending the Notion of Public Theology to Include African Public Praxis."

responsibility.⁷³ This interpretation also aligns with the religious communication approach, which emphasizes that social and political influence emerges not simply from religious identity but through communicative interactions within religious gatherings.⁷⁴

If *maqāṣid* could be realized through communal practice in this specific case, how might this influence scholarship in relation to Islamic Public Theology more generally? The subsequent section explores the wider relevance of the *Haul* in this regard.”

Global Perspectives: *Haul* Guru Sekumpul and the Future of Islamic Public Theology

The field findings gathered by the *Haul* Guru Sekumpul reveal that participants understand the significance of the ritual beyond its local practice. Instead of viewing the haul as a ritual practice associated with expressing respect for an individual within a religious context, some interviewees provided deeper ethical and social meanings associated with the ritual beyond its immediate context.

Another participant, R9,⁷⁵ a pilgrim with long experience in the *Haul*, saw the importance of this practice as universally oriented. He recalled a popular hadith, mentioning that those who exercise mercy in their life will be granted mercy by the Almighty. To this participant, the haul has nothing to do only with devotion to a certain saint; rather, he sees the haul as an act of care not just towards the saint but towards all of God’s creatures. From such perspective, the ritual practice is perceived as something that goes beyond communal concerns and becomes related to a wider moral dimension. Another example of such perspective was offered by participant R3,⁷⁶ who reported that her sibling comes to the haul annually from Jakarta and that she covers a distance of more than one thousand kilometers. The recurring travel demonstrates dedication beyond the call of duty, and is indicative of a highly

⁷³ Madigele et al., “Lived Religion and Lived Development in Contemporary Society.”

⁷⁴ Djupe and Neiheisel, “The Religious Communication Approach and Political Behavior.”

⁷⁵ Respondent 9, “Interview” (January, 12, 2026).

⁷⁶ Respondent 3, “Interview” (2 Januari, 2025).

developed sense of belonging and loyalty.

A comparable pattern emerges in accounts of cross-community interaction. R14,⁷⁷ a female pilgrim, was struck by an unexpected sight. “I was very impressed and grateful,” she said. “Our non-Muslim brothers and sisters also opened rest areas for the pilgrims. This motivated me.” She expressed both surprise and appreciation, noting that such gestures motivated her to reflect more deeply on the meaning of care and hospitality. The field observation conducted in January 2026 proves that the non-Muslim inhabitants around the routes used to reach the sacred place willingly offered water, parking space, and some assistance to the pilgrims without any organization or even without expecting any rewards.

These descriptions suggest that the forms of interaction generated through the haul are not confined to a single religious group.⁷⁸ Practices of care, hospitality, and cooperation extend beyond intra-group relations and involve a wider range of participants engaged in the event.⁷⁹ In this sense, the social dynamics that emerge during the haul are shaped not only by religious affiliation but also by shared conditions of participation and collective presence, which create opportunities for interaction across social and religious boundaries.⁸⁰

The same sort of community-based spatial organization has also been noted within an urban setting, where public space is informally remade through everyday activities and uses. The process frequently creates an overlap between the public and the private domains, as the space is creatively adapted to fit the needs of the moment.⁸¹ This shows that social order and coordination can

⁷⁷ Respondent 14, “Interview” (Palangka Raya: January, 13, 2026).

⁷⁸ Charles Marsh, Peter Slade, and Sarah Azaransky, “Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 23, no. 1 (2017): 1–20.

⁷⁹ Respondent 1, “Interview” (April, 18, 2025).

⁸⁰ Neng Nur Annisa and Nabila Tabassum, “Challenges of Multiculturalism: Integration of Religion in State Policy,” *Religion and Policy Journal* 1, no. 1 (December 2023): 8–15, <https://doi.org/10.15575/rpj.v1i1.433>.

⁸¹ Karina Pradinie, Ardy Maulidy Navastara, and KD Erli Martha, “Who’s Own the Public Space?: The Adaptation of Limited Space in Arabic Kampong,”

occur through practices, rather than regulation or institutional arrangements.

In general, this study reflects the contemporary academic research that challenges the rigid division between politics and theology. These researchers believe that secular methods cannot fully explain the complexities of social issues, especially in situations of conflict, coexistence, and reconciliation.⁸² Within this framework, the haul exemplifies how religiously-based actions can aid in social engagement processes that go beyond mere rituals and into deeper forms of social interaction.

It is apparent that the moral concerns related to the haul gathering go beyond the confines of the religious group and determine social interactions patterns.⁸³ Non-Muslim people participate in such an activity on account of situational ethics based on shared values of humanity instead of theological doctrines.⁸⁴ In such circumstances, social cohesion results not from consensus on religious views but from cooperation and interaction within the dynamic and crowded environment.⁸⁵

These interactions can also be seen as examples of relational ethics, since there is a process of cooperation through proximity and interdependence as opposed to an explicit agreement.⁸⁶ The coming together temporarily of different people within one spatial area leads to the emergence of a situation that makes it possible for ethical responses to be generated.⁸⁷ here is a response to what is

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 227 (2016): 693–98, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.06.134>.

⁸² Shinkyu Lee, "The Political Vs . the Theological : The Scope of Secularity in Arendtian Forgiveness," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 50, no. 4 (2022): 670–95, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12414>.

⁸³ Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction: Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action* (mit Press, 2001).

⁸⁴ Ibrahim, "The Need for Discoursing Social Theology in Muslim Southeast Asia."

⁸⁵ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (USA: Penguin Books, 1966), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315775357>.

⁸⁶ Bedoui, "Sharī'ah-Based Ethical Performance Measurement Framework and Relevant Data to Measure Development in Light of Maqāsid Al-Sharī'ah."

⁸⁷ Thelen et al., "Sacred or Sacrificed Placemaking: A Contested Fan Pilgrimage Site for Rural Tourism Development."

happening immediately, such as offering directions or making movement possible through offering assistance with water.⁸⁸

From a broader analytical perspective, these patterns suggest that the haul functions as a site in which ethical relations are enacted through interaction rather than prescribed through institutional norms.⁸⁹ It is the coming together of these various actors that creates a social context where cooperation is required and eventually normal.⁹⁰ The normalization of this process of care implies that ethics can develop through social interaction and without any form of structured coordination at all.⁹¹

From a comparative perspective, these findings provide an important point of engagement with broader discussions on religion in the public sphere.⁹² Studies of lived religion have emphasized that religious meaning is produced through everyday practice and interaction. The present findings support this perspective while extending it by demonstrating that such processes can operate within settings characterized by very large-scale participation. The capacity of the individuals involved to maintain cooperation and solidarity in the face of high density provides a real-life example of how social order may come into being through interaction.

In addition to these observations, the case of the haul highlights a distinctive feature that is not always visible in other contexts. While similar patterns of cooperation can be observed in large-scale gatherings elsewhere, the ethical practices observed in the haul are consistently framed by participants as part of religious responsibility. It would mean a deeper connection between moral acts and theology, since the daily act of caring can be seen more as an act of faith than an act of society.

⁸⁸ Dandekar and Tschacher, *Islam , Sufism and Everyday Politics of Belonging in South Asia*.

⁸⁹ Auda, *Reforming Islamic Studies: A Maqasid Approach*.

⁹⁰ Hoston, "A Neo-Confucian ' Theology of Liberation ' ? Humanism and Ethics in Levinas , Liberation Theology , and Wang Yangming."

⁹¹ Norman, Nurul Ain, "Exploring the Ethical Dimensions of Fiqh: The Role of the Soul in Achieving Maqasid Al-Shari'ah."

⁹² Schvarcz and Billig, "The Froman Peace Campaign : Pluralism in Judeo-Islamic Theology and Politics."

Collectively, these studies position the Haul Guru Sekumpul as an important empirical case through which the relationship between religion and society can be re-examined in a global context. Rather than functioning merely as a site of reflection, the haul generates relational dynamics that demonstrate how religion shapes social interaction in complex settings.⁹³ In this sense, it contributes to ongoing discussions on the future of Islamic public theology, particularly in relation to its capacity to operate beyond institutional boundaries and engage broader forms of social life.⁹⁴

Against this background of empirical observations, classical political theology, as elaborated within European scholarship, typically holds the assumption that the political concept is grounded on a theological foundation. Yet, based on what has been discovered in Haul Guru Sekumpul, the possibility of a different trajectory becomes apparent, whereby the concept of theology is not merely transplanted into the political but is realized through practice by its participants.⁹⁵ This observation highlights that the interrelation between theology and politics is realized not only at the conceptual level but also through social practice.

What patterns of organization make this possible? The following section identifies three key features of the haul's community-based paradigm and examines their implications for the development of Islamic public theology.

Globalizing Islamic Public Theology: Community-Based and Non-Institutional Paradigms

Collectively, the findings from this study suggest an alternative paradigm for Islamic public theology centered on participatory engagement and organizational structures that are not institutionalized. Instead of depending on institutional hierarchies of power, the case of Haul Guru Sekumpul reveals how ethics and social order can be developed through common

⁹³ M Slama, "Muslim Pilgrimage in Indonesia: Haul and the Sacred Economy of Sufi Saints," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 31, no. 2 (2020): 245–67.

⁹⁴ McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*.

⁹⁵ Steilen, "Juan Donoso Cortés and Political Theology."

rules, collective consciousness, and constant interaction. Within this framework, coordination does not come from outside, but from actions that have been collectively validated and consistently performed.

This orientation is not only analytically constructed but explicitly stated by the respondents themselves. For instance, R8,⁹⁶ stressed that faith manifests itself not only in personal acts of worship but also but is actualized in unity and solidarity. According to him, Muslims are able to create a socially cohesive order through faith awareness, solidarity, and exemplary living regardless of whether the state provides any formal assistance. The same line of thought was shared by R10,⁹⁷ who pointed out that when people act together in accordance with their ethics, then community policing becomes possible without institutional coercion.

Based on the above observations, the following three elements of the developing paradigm can be highlighted.⁹⁸ Firstly, social coordination is achieved by virtue of common normative standards rather than by coercion because people coordinate their actions in recognition of their own ethical responsibilities to one another. Secondly, organizational activities occur at a dispersed level, involving volunteers and local communities instead of being performed by established organizations. Finally, ethical values are not only recognized but also embodied in terms of social action.

This paper contributes to scholarship in the domain of Islamic public theology in three major ways. To begin with, it proves that massive religious assemblies have the potential to create moral orders that are entirely independent of any institutional arrangements, thus contradicting the premise that there is a need for mediating authority through which public religion must operate. Further, the paper presents *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* not just as a legal framework for ethics but as a way of life that is lived by virtue of social interactions among members of the religious community. Finally, the paper empirically illustrates an example

⁹⁶ R8, "Interview."

⁹⁷ Respondent 10, "Interview" (January 11, 2026).

⁹⁸ Steilen, "Juan Donoso Cortés and Political Theology."

of social coordination based on an idea of self-organization.

The practice paradigm is also reflective of general changes in religious studies that extend beyond institutionalized accounts to focus on the experience of practice itself.⁹⁹ Instead of identifying public theology in institutional frameworks or elitist discourses, this research indicates that ethics may be supported through participatory practices that occur during ordinary social interactions.¹⁰⁰ This phenomenon has also been identified in larger religious events like the Kumbh Mela in India and pilgrimages in Latin America, where coordination frequently occurs due to common norms.¹⁰¹ The unique characteristic of the Haul Guru Sekumpul lies in the explicit nature of its ethics that is deliberately practiced within its religious framework.

Based on this empirical basis, the case provides a critique of classic versions of political theology, which stress conceptualizing theology in terms of its transformation into politics on the contrary, what the case shows is that ethical and social order can result from embodied and participatory acts.¹⁰² This leads us to conclude that political theology does not only have to do with conceptual frameworks but also with action.¹⁰³

The other aspect of this perspective is that it challenges us to reflect upon the dominant paradigms in the field of public theology that have historically focused on mediation, discourse, and/or state engagement as primary ways in which religion makes its presence felt in public life.¹⁰⁴ As demonstrated in the haul example, the actions taken by people in their communities can create types of moral authority that are not only socially

⁹⁹ Madigele et al., "Lived Religion and Lived Development in Contemporary Society."

¹⁰⁰ Nanthambwe and Magezi, "Public within Public: Extending the Notion of Public Theology to Include African Public Praxis."

¹⁰¹ Shukla, "Faith, Tradition, and Community: The Social Impact of Kumbh."

¹⁰² Herbert, *Religion and Civil Society: Rethinking Public Religion in the Contemporary World*.

¹⁰³ Lee, "The Political Vs. the Theological: The Scope of Secularity in Arendtian Forgiveness."

¹⁰⁴ Yü, "A Public Theology of the Anthropocene: The Earth's Deep Freedom."

efficacious but also religiously legitimate. In this way, public theology is not just defined through discourse but through social action.

In a broader sense, such an approach has important consequences for studies on religion in modern society. This is because it indicates that communal organizations are central to an analysis of the way that religion works in societies where the number of participants and the complexity of social relationships are great.¹⁰⁵ The Haul Guru Sekumpul proves that ethical behavior, social coordination, and collective activity can be maintained through decentralized systems based on belief and practice.¹⁰⁶

This paradigm also resonates with broader currents in liberation theology, which emphasize the inseparability of faith and ethical action.¹⁰⁷ As Hoston¹⁰⁸ argues, theological understanding is realized through engagement with the Other and through practices that embody moral responsibility. These features are evident in the haul, where participants consistently interpret service, compassion, and solidarity as integral to religious life. In this sense, the haul exemplifies a form of lived public theology in which belief is inseparable from practice and ethical commitment is expressed through collective action.

At the same time, this model raises important questions for future research. It remains necessary to examine how community-based forms of organization evolve in relation to increasing institutional involvement, state regulation, and processes of commercialization. Further inquiry is also needed to explore the sustainability of decentralized coordination over time and its applicability across different cultural and religious contexts.

In sum, these findings suggest that Islamic public theology

¹⁰⁵ Arena, "A Latin American View of Lived Religion Proposal."

¹⁰⁶ Matteo Benussi, "Emancipating Ethics: An Autonomist Reading of Islamic Forms of Life in Russia," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 28 (2021): 30–51, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13649>.

¹⁰⁷ Root, "Alan Richardson 's Biblical Theology , ' Faith Principle ' and Attempts to Protect Public Faith."

¹⁰⁸ Hoston, "A Neo-Confucian ' Theology of Liberation '? Humanism and Ethics in Levinas , Liberation Theology , and Wang Yangming."

should not be understood solely as an institutional or discursive formation but as a socially embedded practice that emerges through collective religious life. The case of the Haul Guru Sekumpul provides an empirical foundation for this perspective, demonstrating how religious values can be translated into forms of social organization that are participatory, decentralized, and ethically grounded.

Conclusion

The paper clearly shows how the Haul Guru Sekumpul constitutes a model for living Islamic public theology wherein faith is translated from the private practice of devotion to a socially and morally active force that sustains the ethics of the community. The main conclusion drawn from this research indicates that through rituals of devotion within the Haul, faith has been able to transform into a model of civic faith whereby acts of *khidmah*, *ukhūwah*, and *amanah* embody the essence of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. The paper therefore explains how the private practice of spiritual devotion has led to social morality in the absence of any institutions by fostering moral governance and cooperation.

The combination of the three theoretical models, specifically *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* as Theological Ethics, Public Theology and Ethics of Responsibility Theory, and Communicative Action Theory, employing the framework of *shūrā*, has been effective in addressing the research questions posed. The convergence of these theories highlights how law, theology, and social practices create a framework for a participatory approach in faith-based ethics. The interpretative approaches of theology-in-action (Marsh and Slade), religion-in-living (McGuire), and action hermeneutics (Ricoeur, together with al-Ghazālī's *ilm al-mu'āmalah*), offered sufficient analysis in proving that theology, practiced socially, is essentially an ethical discourse between divine purposes and human actions.

The discussion in this research shows clearly that Indonesian Islam, in its manifestation through the Haul Guru Sekumpul ritual, makes for an excellent example of civic piety and theology that brings together the religious and social aspects of faith. The reinterpretation of the concept of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as a theology of ethical values rather than a juridical concept shows how it is

possible for faith-based communities to create moral order by means of voluntary virtue and mutual accountability among members of these communities. This proves once again the thesis that Indonesian Islamic theology possesses enormous potential for social transformation as a lived theology.

The implications of this research go beyond the academic sphere of religion. For event planners, the haul presents an example of decentralized coordination that is based not on hierarchy but on norms. For the state, it proves that large-scale events can be organized efficiently by engaging the community; therefore, The findings indicate the need for further discussion regarding the appropriate extent of state involvement in regulation., and more effort should be made to assist people in organizing such events themselves. Lastly, for religions, the haul provides a good example of how devotion could be turned into ethical behavior in society.

But there are some limitations within this study. The particular local context on which this study focuses might limit its implications for Muslim societies formed in different socio-historical settings. Future studies might find it helpful to conduct comparative analysis on other major religious conventions or longitudinal studies that can help understand the dynamic nature of theological ethics of the Haul. There is still a need for research on the difficulties associated with moral governance within a faith context, especially regarding the reconciliation between spiritual transcendence and worldly involvement in the contemporary world. In spite of these limitations, this study contributes significantly to the burgeoning area of Islamic public theology in showing how collective faith practice brings moral power into the public space.

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