




Dhikr Assemblies in Urban Palembang: Continuity of Malay Islamic Tradition and Socio-Religious Adaptation

Hidayat HT^{1*}, Abdullah Idi², Muhammad Noupal³, Pathur Rahman⁴, Nurseri Hasnah⁵
⁶Ahamakosee Kasor

^{1,2,3,4,5} Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, Indonesia

⁶ Fatoni University, Thailand

 hidayatht_uin@radenfatah.ac.id*

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of the 21st-century dhikr assembly in the city of Palembang, particularly changes in construction, the expansion of social roles, and the factors driving its transformation within the lives of Muslim urban communities. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological-sociological-based field study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation in May–June 2025, involving dhikr assembly supervisors, active congregations, religious leaders, community leaders, government officials, and social actors involved in assembly activities. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of transcription, repeated reading, initial coding, categorization, theme structuring, interpretation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that the dhikr assembly in Palembang has transformed from a ritual-spiritual space into a dynamic, adaptive, and multifunctional urban socio-religious institution. The transformation can be seen in changes in the role of the guide, variations in dhikr readings, more communicative processions, heterogeneous congregations, expansion of activity venues, use of digital media, and the development of social, economic, recreative, and public programs. This research also found that the dhikr assembly maintains the Malay Islamic tradition through ratib, sanad, guidebooks, assembly manners, verses, hadrah, haul, and pilgrimage, while adapting to the needs of urban communities through social activities, youth involvement, informal economic activities, spiritual tourism, and digital da'wah. This study concludes that the dhikr assembly in Palembang represents a pattern of continuity and change, serving as a space for spiritual adaptation, the preservation of local Islamic traditions, and the social negotiation among urban Muslim communities.

Keywords: The Dhikr Assembly; Urban Sufism; Malay Islam; Urban Muslim Community.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received
January 14, 2026
Revised
March 16, 2026
Accepted
April 30, 2026

Published by
ISSN

Website

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2774-7077

<https://attractivejournal.com/index.php/bce/>

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INTRODUCTION

The development of urban Muslim society in Indonesia shows that religion has not disappeared from public space but has taken on a more flexible, popular, and adaptive form through taklim assemblies, dhikr assemblies, prayer communities, and digital da'wah spaces (Asri et al., 2025; Atamimi & Sururi, 2025). The pressures of urban life, social mobility, and the need for spiritual tranquility encourage Muslims to seek religious spaces that foster a sense of religious identity, provide emotional support, and offer social solidarity (Hamid, 2025; Saude et al., 2026). In this context, urban Sufism evolved beyond formal order, becoming a popular religious practice that was inclusive, communicative, and accessible to modern society (Ridwan, 2024; Wahyudi, 2025). The dhikr assembly then serves not only as a medium for spiritual development but also as a space

for the formation of morality, social capital, and public participation among urban Muslims (Atamimi, 2025; Zulhazmi & Bakti, 2024). The development of digital media further expands the influence of religious assemblies by changing the pattern of da'wah, religious authority, and interaction between supervisors and congregations (Tabaika, 2025; Rachman, 2025; Taqwa, 2025).

Several previous studies have discussed urban Sufism, dhikr assemblies, and Muslim religious communities from diverse perspectives. An early study of urban Sufism in Indonesia confirms that Sufistic practices have shifted from formal tarekat to a community of dhikr and salawat that is more open, popular, and adaptive to urban society (Howell, 2008; Zamhari, 2013; Zamhari & Howell, 2012). More recent studies show that urban Sufism also flourished among the middle class and the younger generation as a space for spiritual quest, the formation of religious identity, and a response to rigid religious formalities (Sodik & Sujibto, 2023; YUSDANI et al., 2020). Other research shows that religious communities, such as taklim assemblies and dhikr assemblies, not only function as spaces of worship but also as arenas for social articulation, community empowerment, solidarity, and public participation (Atamimi & Sururi, 2025; Fadillah, 2023; Syahputri & Fathoni, 2023). Meanwhile, studies of religious elites and digital media show that contemporary religious authorities are increasingly influenced by charismatic figures, social networks, visualities, and digital platforms (Febrian, 2024; Yani et al., 2022).

Although these studies have made important contributions to understanding urban Sufism and Muslim religious communities, there remains a gap in the literature: the dynamics of the dhikr assembly in Palembang, a Malay-Muslim city with strong local religious traditions. Previous research has generally focused more on urban Sufism in big cities, tarekat communities, prayer assemblies, digital religious authorities, or the empowerment of religious communities in general. There has not been much research that specifically explains how the dhikr assembly in Palembang underwent changes in its construction, maintained Malay Islamic traditions, expanded social roles, utilized digital technology, and engaged with the social, economic, and political dynamics of urban society. Therefore, this research is important for filling this void by reading the dhikr assembly from the perspective of continuity and change.

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of the 21st-century dhikr assembly in the city of Palembang, particularly regarding changes in construction, the expansion of social roles, and the factors driving its transformation within urban communities. Based on these objectives, this research is formulated in several main questions: how the dynamics of religiosity of the urban community of Palembang become the context for the growth of the dhikr assembly; how the transformation of the construction of the dhikr assembly occurs in the aspects of guidance, reading, procession, congregation, place, and activity program; how to expand the social role of the dhikr council in the spiritual, cultural, social, economic, recreative, and political fields; as well as what factors encourage changes in the dhikr assembly in Palembang City.

The contribution of this research lies in reading the Palembang dhikr assembly not only as a spiritual ritual space but also as a dynamic, adaptive, and multifunctional urban socio-religious institution. Theoretically, this study strengthens the perspective of *continuity and change* by showing that the dhikr assembly maintains the Malay Islamic tradition through ratib, sanad, guidebooks, majelis adab, poetry, hadrah, haul, and pilgrimage, as well as transforming through digital media, social programs, youth involvement, informal economic activities, religious recreation, and public participation. Practically, this research provides a basis for assembly supervisors, religious leaders, local governments, and managers of religious institutions to develop more inclusive, educational, transparent, and people-oriented governance of the dhikr assembly.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological-sociological-based field study design (Denzin & Giardina, 2024; John W. Creswell & Cheryl N. Poth, 2023). This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand in depth the dynamics of the 21st-century dhikr assembly in the city of Palembang, especially the changes in construction and the expansion of its role in the life of urban communities (Flick, 2022; Lim, 2024). The phenomenological approach is used to understand the religious experience of the congregation, while the sociological approach is used to read the dhikr assembly as a socio-religious institution that has changed in the context of modernization, urbanization, spiritual needs, and social dynamics of the Palembang community (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Flick et al., 2022).

Research Site and Context

The research was conducted in Palembang City, South Sumatra, from May to June 2025. The city of Palembang was chosen because it has strong historical roots in Malay Islam, a vibrant religious tradition, and a dynamic dhikr assembly. The research location includes several dhikr assemblies that fall into two main categories: those affiliated with the tariqat and those not directly affiliated with the tariqat, thereby enabling researchers to examine variations in the forms, practices, and roles of dhikr assemblies in urban society.

Participants and Informants

The research informants were determined by *the purposive sampling technique*, which is to select informants who are considered to have knowledge, experience, and direct involvement with the phenomenon of the dhikr assembly in the city of Palembang (Bouncken et al., 2026; Campbell et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2020). The informants consist of the dhikr assembly supervisors, active pilgrims, religious leaders, community leaders, the government, and social actors related to the activities of the dhikr assembly, because qualitative research requires participants who are deliberately selected as a source of data that is rich, relevant, and able to explain the phenomenon being researched in depth. To maintain the ethics of the research, the informant's name is disguised with initials, and the interview excerpt is accompanied by the interview date, month, and year to protect the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of participant data.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation. The interview was conducted to explore the informants' views on the dynamics of religiosity of the urban community of Palembang, changes in the construction of the dhikr assembly, the expansion of social roles, and the driving factors for change. Observation was conducted by directly observing the activities of the dhikr assembly, the atmosphere of dhikr, the role of the supervisor, the participation of the congregation, the use of guidebooks, hadrah, and digital media, as well as socio-economic activities. Documentation is carried out by collecting photos of activities, dhikr guidebooks, assembly profiles, activity posters, social media archives, and other supporting documents.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of data transcription, repeated reading, initial coding, categorization, theme preparation, interpretation, and conclusion drawing (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Naeem et al., 2023). The data from interviews, observations, and documentation are first read thoroughly, then coded based on important issues such as guides, readings, processions, congregations, places, programs, spiritual guidance, preservation of traditions, social concerns, politics, economy, recreation, charisma of guides, and the spiritual needs of urban communities. The codes are then grouped into four main themes that address the research focus, as thematic analysis aims to identify, organize, and interpret the patterns of meaning that emerge from qualitative data in a systematic manner.

Table 2. Research Thematic Coding

No.	Initial Code	Category	Tema Utama
1	Religiosity of the community, urban sufism, spiritual needs, inner tranquility, hijrah, urban religious space	The dynamics of the religious diversity of the people of Palembang	The Dynamics of the Religiosity in Palembang Urban Community
2	Dhikr guide, mursyid, ustaz, sanad, charisma, dhikr recitation, Ratib Samman, Ratib Al-Haddad, Ratib Al-Athas, procession, congregation, place, program	Changes in the elements of the dhikr assembly	Transformation of the Zikir Assembly Construction
3	Spiritual guidance, preservation of traditions, maulid, hadrah, compensation, donations, practical politics, MSMEs, spiritual tourism, religious recreation	Expansion of the function of the dhikr assembly	Expansion of the Social Role of the Zikir Assembly
4	Globalization, modernization, urban society, digital media, inner needs, charismatic figures, social structures, social change	Internal and external factors of change	Factors Driving the Change of the Zikir Assembly

Trustworthiness

The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation, technical triangulation, *member checking*, and Sufficiency of documentation (Ahmed, 2024; Liang, 2019). Triangulation of sources is carried out by comparing information from the supervisors of the dhikr assembly, congregations, religious leaders, community leaders, and social actors (Johnson et al., 2020; Kyngäs et al., 2020). The technique of triangulation was carried out by comparing interview, observation, and documentation data (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Flick, 2022). *Member checking* is carried out by reconfirming important information to informants, while the adequacy of documentation is strengthened through photos of activities, dhikr guidebooks, assembly archives, and other supporting documents (McKim, 2023; Motulsky, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to the ethical principles of qualitative research by maintaining the confidentiality of informants' identities through the use of initials. The informant was informed that the data was used for academic purposes. Interview excerpts are chosen proportionally and are not used to harm informants or certain dhikr assembly institutions. The researcher also maintains a neutral attitude when reading about the diversity of practices within the dhikr assembly, both those affiliated with the institute and those not.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation conducted in May-June 2025, this study found that the dynamics of the 21st-century dhikr assembly in Palembang City have undergone significant changes, both in its construction and in its role in the lives of urban communities. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the stages of data transcription, repeated reading, initial coding, categorization, theme preparation, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. From the analysis, four main themes were identified: the dynamics of religiosity in the urban community of Palembang; the transformation in the construction of the dhikr assembly; the expansion of the social role of the dhikr assembly; and the driving factors behind the change in the dhikr assembly.

The Dynamics of Religiosity in Palembang Urban Community

The results of the study show that the religiosity of the urban community of Palembang in the XXI century is dynamic, conducive, and continuously developing. Palembang, as a Malay-Muslim city, has strong religious and historical roots. Islamic identity is not only seen in formal worship practices, but also present in the socio-religious traditions of the community, such as congregational dhikr, ratib, maulid, haul ulama, kubro pilgrimage, almsgiving, recitation, and various other religious activities. Thus, religion in the life of the people of Palembang functions not only as a belief system but also as a social identity, a source of morality, and the glue of community togetherness.

The condition of religiosity among the people of Palembang is also supported by the local government's attention to the community's religious development. The Palembang City Government sees religion not only as a private affair but also as part of the mental and spiritual development of the city's citizens. This can be seen in various religious programs, such as the congregational Fajr movement, the city government's involvement, support for community religious activities, and assistance for mosques, mushallas, and da'wah activities. MW informant stated that the city government's religious programs are intended to strengthen the community's social and spiritual relationships. He says:

"The Subuh movement program is an effort by the city government to establish closeness and togetherness in the framework of religion or ukhuwah. We compete in goodness by inviting the community directly to pray Fajr in congregation at the mosque." (Interview, MW, May 12, 2025)

The statement shows that the religiosity of the people of Palembang not only grows from the cultural layers of society, but also gains strength from the government's structural policies. In this context, religion is part of a social strategy to build togetherness, strengthen ukhuwah, and shape the character of urban society. The MW informant also explained that the city government involves Dai in community development through its Da'i program. According to him:

“With the Palembang Darussalam program, the Palembang City Government actively involves speakers or ustaz-ustazah through the City Government’s Da’i program.”
(Interview, MW, May 12, 2025)

Based on observations on May 12, 2025, religious activities in Palembang take place not only in mosques and mushallas but also in government activities, taklim assemblies, grand dhikr, and community social spaces. This phenomenon shows that religion has an important position in the public space of Palembang’s urban society. Religion is present not only as a ritual of worship but also as a moral symbol, a city identity, and a means of building social cohesion.

From the aspect of social harmony, the people of Palembang also show relatively harmonious conditions. Even though the majority of the population is Muslim, relations between religious communities continue to take place in a conducive manner. The RD informant stated:

“Even though adherents of Islam dominate or become the majority, the harmony between religious communities in Palembang is considered good.” (Interview, RD, May 14, 2025)

This statement was reinforced by the IR informant, who explained that social harmony does not come automatically but requires the active role of various parties. He stated:

“Safe and harmonious conditions do not materialize by themselves, but require efforts and active roles from various parties.” (Interview, IR, May 14, 2025)

Based on observations made on May 14, 2025, the socio-religious life of the people of Palembang is open. The Muslim community, as the majority, can still coexist with other religious and ethnic groups. This shows that the religiosity of the people of Palembang is not closed but remains within the framework of tolerance and social harmony.

In the context of urban society, the religiosity of the people of Palembang has also taken a different form. Urban people living under the pressures of modernity, high mobility, busy work, economic demands, and family problems need spiritual space to find inner peace. One of the spiritual spaces that is in demand is the dhikr assembly. The presence of the dhikr assembly is important because it can meet the needs of urban communities for tranquility, togetherness, and spiritual strengthening.

The activity of the dhikr assembly in Palembang shows that modernization does not eliminate religion from people’s lives. On the other hand, religion comes in a more varied, adaptive, and open form to social change. Dhikr activities no longer take place only in closed spaces or certain tarekat environments, but also occur in large mosques, halls, public spaces, government offices, and even on digital media. Thus, the religiosity of the urban community in Palembang shows signs of spiritual awakening intertwined with the dynamics of modern life.



Figure 1. Activities of the Zikir Council as an Expression of Religiosity of the Palembang Urban Community

Source: Research documentation, June 18, 2025.

This picture captures the atmosphere of the Shay’ir Munajah Al-Hidayah Dhikr Council, attended by the congregation in the mosque room. This documentation shows that the religiosity of the urban community of Palembang is evident not only in individual worship but also in collective involvement in dhikr, recitation, and spiritual development. The presence of pilgrims at the activity strengthens the finding that the urban community of Palembang has strong spiritual needs amid the dynamics of modern life.

Transformation of the Zikir Assembly Construction

The results of the study show that the construction of the dhikr assembly in Palembang City has transformed several important elements, namely dhikr guides, dhikr readings, dhikr

processions, congregation composition, places of activities, and assembly programs. This transformation does not necessarily mean breaking with old traditions, but it indicates a process of continuity and change. Some dhikr assemblies maintain traditional patterns of tarekat, sanad, and processions, while others develop a more flexible, open, and appropriate format for urban society.

In the tradition of Sufism and tarekat, the dhikr guide is commonly called a mursyid, which is a spiritual teacher who guides students on a spiritual journey to Allah. However, the study's results show that not all dhikr assembly supervisors in Palembang in the XXI century hold the status of mursyid tarekat. Some supervisors place themselves as ustaz, kiai, habib, or assembly supervisors who guide dhikr as part of da'wah. The HT informant stated:

"I am not a mursyid of a certain order. The dhikr activities that are nurtured are part of the da'wah media." (*Interview, HT, May 20, 2025*)

This statement indicates a shift in the dhikr guide's position. The dhikr guide is not always understood as a murshid in the sense of the tarekat, but rather more broadly as a religious figure with religious knowledge, da'wah ability, charisma, and the congregation's trust. Nevertheless, there are still dhikr assemblies that maintain relationships with certain orders. The US informant explained:

"I received the mandate to continue the dhikr guidance after my father died. This dhikr Ratib Samman is the legacy of previous teachers that must be practiced, broadcast, and preserved." (*Interview, US, May 25, 2025*)

Based on observations on May 20, 2025, the dhikr guide plays a central role as a ritual leader, counselor, program director, and exemplary figure of the congregation. This role shows two main patterns, namely a mentor based on sanad tarekat and a mentor who functions more as a driver of urban da'wah

Transformation is also seen in the recitation of dhikr. Some congregations maintain recitations of the sanad, such as Ratib Samman, Ratib Al-Haddad, Ratib Al-Athas, and dhikr TQN, while others use simpler, easier-to-follow popular readings. The US informant explained:

"The recitation of Ratib Samman dhikr that we guide is a dhikr received from previous teachers. The previous teachers were murshid of the Sammaniyah order, and their sanad genealogy continues to the Prophet PBUH." (*Interview, US, May 25, 2025*)

However, in practice, sanad recitation is not always the main consideration for the congregation. Some in the congregation emphasized the ease of following the reading, the assembly's atmosphere, trust in the guide, and the inner impact felt after participating in dhikr. The NB informant stated:

"For us, it is not really a consideration whether the recitation of dhikr in the assembly is followed by the sanad or part of an order or not." (*Interview, NB, May 27, 2025*)

Based on observations on May 22, 2025, the congregation paid more attention to the assembly's atmosphere, the ease of following the readings, trust in the guide, and the inner peace gained from participating in dhikr activities. This shows that urban people tend to choose dhikr assemblies that provide spiritual comfort and ease of worship.

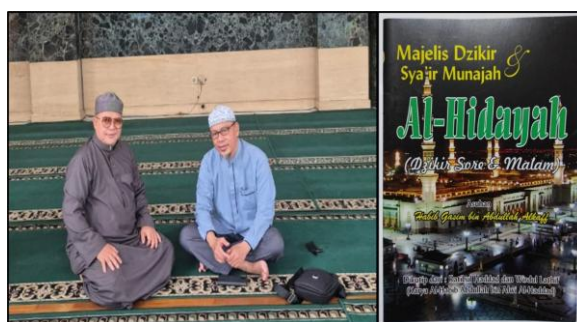
The next transformation is evident in the dhikr procession. Assemblies affiliated with the tarekat tend to maintain the procession as it was inherited from the previous master. However, technical adjustments are still made to suit the conditions of today's pilgrims. Informant AH explained:

"The format of this assembly's activities has not changed. This is the legacy of the previous murshid that must be preserved and its originality maintained. However, there is a change in the length of time of mujahadah." (*Interview, AH, May 25, 2025*)

The data show that the tradition is maintained, but adjustments have been made so that today's congregations can still observe the assembly activities. On the other hand, there is an assembly that packages the dhikr procession more creatively with the addition of verses, hadrah, shalawat, tausiyah, and explanations of the meaning of the reading. The GK informant stated:

"The format of the assembly procession was created with additional lectures from the recitation of Wirdul Lathif, poems, and hadrah art." (*Interview, GK, June 18, 2025*)

Based on observations on June 18, 2025, the dhikr procession, interspersed with verses, hadrahs, and explanations of the meaning of the readings, made the atmosphere of the assembly more communicative, interesting, and less monotonous. Thus, the dhikr procession is no longer understood solely as a rigid ritual but also as an educational, emotional, and recreational da'wah space.



Source: Research documentation, June 18, 2025.

Figure 2. Guides and Guidebook of the Dhikr Council of Sya'ir Munajah Al-Hidayah

This image shows documentation of the interview with the supervisor of the Dhikr Council, Sya'ir Munajah Al-Hidayah, as well as the dhikr guidebook used in the assembly activities. This documentation strengthens the finding that the construction of the dhikr assembly has transformed, as evidenced by the presence of a supervisor, a clearer assembly identity, and a more organized reading guideline. The existence of the guidebook shows that dhikr activities not only occur orally but are also institutionalized in written texts to make them easier for the congregation to follow.

Changes are also seen in the composition of the congregation. If previously the dhikr assembly was often associated with parents, practitioners of the tarekat, or certain groups, now the congregation of the dhikr assembly in Palembang is increasingly heterogeneous. The congregation consisted of young women, teenagers, workers, officials, students, traders, and the general public. The HT informant explained:

“At this dhikr assembly, many young people were present. Because they have a strong desire and spirit, they are involved in training activities to become da’i.” (Interview, HT, May 20, 2025)

Based on observations on May 27, 2025, young pilgrims were seen actively participating in readings, helping with technical activities, playing hadrah, documenting activities, and disseminating assembly information through social media. These findings suggest that the dhikr assembly has transformed into a more inclusive spiritual space. Pilgrims are no longer limited by age, gender, social status, or affiliation with a particular order.

The place of dhikr activities has also expanded. In the past, congregational dhikr was more often held in scholars’ homes, at Islamic boarding schools, in mushallas, or in mosques. Currently, dhikr activities take place in halls, meeting halls, public spaces, government offices, religious tourist attractions, and even digital media. The GK informant stated:

“Live streaming during the dhikr assembly at least helps those who want to do dhikr but are hindered by long distances, unhealthy body conditions, or other illnesses.” (Interview, GK, June 18, 2025)

Based on observations on June 18, 2025, photo documentation, videos, and live broadcasts are part of the dhikr assembly’s da’wah strategy. Digital media does not completely replace physical presence but expands the assembly’s reach to worshippers who cannot attend in person.

The last transformation is evident in the assembly activity program. The dhikr assembly in Palembang is no longer limited to reciting dhikr. Some assemblies develop social programs, education, regeneration, compensation, Friday Barokah, spiritual tourism, guardian pilgrimages, humanitarian fundraising, and economic activities. The ME informant stated:

“The dhikr assembly that we fostered does not stop at dhikr activities. Pilgrims are encouraged to live the values of ESQ 165 in a real way.” (Interview, ME, May 27, 2025)

Thus, the transformation of the construction of the dhikr assembly shows that the dhikr assembly in Palembang in the XXI century is moving from an exclusive, limited, and ritual-oriented pattern to a more open, adaptive, varied, and multifunctional pattern. This change shows that the dhikr assembly not only maintains continuity with Islamic spiritual traditions but also adapts to the needs of an urban society that is more dynamic, practical, and open to diverse forms of religious expression.

Expansion of the Social Role of the Zikir Assembly

The results of the study show that the dhikr assembly in Palembang in the XXI century has experienced an expansion of social role. The dhikr assembly functions not only as a medium for spiritual development but also for the preservation of religious traditions, the strengthening of social awareness, practical politics, economic activities, and religious recreation. This expansion of the role shows that the dhikr assembly has developed into a social-religious institution influential in the lives of urban communities.

The main role of the dhikr assembly remains as a medium for spiritual development. Urban societies facing the pressures of life need spiritual space to find calm, faith-strengthening, and inner balance. The NH informant stated:

“We need to rest the fatigue of the soul. The problems that are being faced seem to be answered in the dhikr assembly.” (*Interview, NH, May 27, 2025*)

Based on observations on May 27, 2025, the congregation seemed to follow dhikr solemnly. Some of the congregation were seen crying, raising their hands during prayer, and following the readings with appreciation. This shows that the dhikr assembly remains the primary space for the inner development of urban communities.

In addition to fostering spirituality, the dhikr assembly also acts as a medium for preserving religious traditions. Traditions such as Ratib Samman, Ratib Al-Haddad, Ratib Al-Athas, Prophet’s Birthday, shalawat, and hadrah are kept alive through the activities of the dhikr assembly. The U.S. informant stated:

“Ratib Samman has become an inseparable part of the customs of the Palembang Malay community. Therefore, this dhikr assembly is the guardian and preserver of religious traditions.” (*Interview, US, May 25, 2025*)

Based on observations on June 18, 2025, religious traditions are maintained not only through reading but also through rhythms, poems, assembly manners, clothing symbols, and patterns of congregational togetherness. This shows that the dhikr assembly is an important space for preserving Malay Islam in Palembang.

Another social role is to strengthen social awareness. The dhikr assembly encourages pilgrims to participate in orphan compensation, assistance for people experiencing poverty, Friday Barokah, disaster donations, and humanitarian assistance. Informant IN said:

“The congregation is invited to realize these values, among others, by imitating the nature of Ar-Rahman through compassion for others, solidarity, and social concern.” (*Interview, IN, May 27, 2025*)

These findings show that the dhikr assembly can mobilize the congregation’s social solidarity. The emotional and spiritual network formed in the assembly facilitates the raising of aid for humanitarian activities. Thus, dhikr does not just stop as a verbal activity, but is manifested in social actions.’



Source: Research documentation, May 22, 2025

Figure 3. Dhikr and Prayer Handbook of the Al-Asmaul Husna Dhikr Council as a Congregational Development Media.

This picture shows the documentation of the Al-Asmaul Husna Dhikr Council supervisor and the dhikr guidebook used in the assembly’s activities. This documentation shows that the dhikr assembly serves not only as a ritual space but also as a medium for coaching, religious education, and the spiritual strengthening of the congregation. The guidebook helps pilgrims follow the recitation of dhikr more easily and in an orderly, sustainable manner.

The expansion of the role of the dhikr assembly also touches the practical political area. Some dhikr assemblies support certain candidates, give space to political candidates, or direct the congregation's political choices. The GK informant stated:

"In the 2024-2029 regional head election, we invited the congregation at the dhikr assembly to vote and give support to one of the candidates." (*Interview, GK, June 18, 2025*)

These findings show that the dhikr assembly has political appeal because it has a large congregation, a charismatic guiding figure, and a strong emotional bond between the guide and the congregation. However, political involvement also suggests a potential shift in the assembly's orientation from sacred space to profane interests.

The dhikr assembly is also a space for economic activity. The presence of large numbers of pilgrims opens opportunities for small traders, MSME actors, sellers of food, beverages, herbal products, prayer books, and worship equipment. Informant QD stated:

"This dhikr assembly is a blessing in itself for traders. We can sell without having to pay the rent of the stalls." (*Interview, QD, May 27, 2025*)

Thus, the dhikr assembly also functions as an informal economic space. However, these economic activities still need to be directed to become a more organized, transparent, and sustainable economic empowerment program.

The expansion of the role of the dhikr assembly is also seen in the recreative function. Some of the assemblies held spiritual tours, guardian pilgrimages, visits to historical mosques, prayers, hadrahs, and religious verses. The activity provided spiritual entertainment for the congregation. The NB informant stated:

"We need refreshment or recreation. We get peace and happiness through spiritual tourism programs or walks with dhikr guides." (*Interview, NB, May 27, 2025*)

These findings show that the dhikr assembly is not only a place of worship but also a space for psychological and emotional recovery for urban communities. Thus, the expansion of the social role of the dhikr assembly shows that it has developed into a multifunctional socio-religious institution, serving as a spiritual, cultural, social, political, economic, and recreational space.

Factors Driving the Change of the Zikir Assembly

The results of the study show that changes in the construction and role of the dhikr assembly in Palembang City do not occur suddenly, but are influenced by several main factors, namely the spiritual needs of urban people, the charisma of dhikr guides, the practical and open character of urban society, the development of digital technology, and socio-political and economic dynamics. These factors are interconnected and form the change of the dhikr assembly from a relatively exclusive ritual space to a more open, adaptive, and multifunctional socio-religious space.

The first factor is the spiritual needs of urban people. Urban people live under the pressure of modernity, busy work, family problems, economic competition, and rapid social change. This condition causes inner anxiety and the need for spiritual space. The dhikr assembly serves as a space for tranquility, togetherness, and the strengthening of one's sense of meaning in life. One of the pilgrims stated:

"In the midst of the tiring hustle and bustle of daily life, various household problems, and changing children's problems, this situation sometimes makes a person depressed, stressed, and restless. We need to rest the fatigue of the soul. The problems being faced seem to be addressed in this dhikr assembly. The dhikr assembly is the right place to find peace of mind." (*Interview, NH, May 27, 2025*)

The quote shows that the dhikr assembly is a space for inner recovery for urban people. The need for peace of mind is one of the main reasons why the people of Palembang are interested in participating in the dhikr assembly. In this context, the dhikr assembly serves as a spiritual oasis amid dense, competitive, and exhausting city life.

The second factor is the charisma of the dhikr guide. The supervisor has a central position in determining the direction, form, and development of the assembly. The supervisor not only leads the recitation of dhikr, but also determines the procession, builds a network of pilgrims, develops social programs, and forms pilgrim loyalty. One of the assembly leaders stated:

"This dhikr assembly is not affiliated with one institute. So we are only dhikr guides, not murshid, although the practices that are invited to the congregation may be the same as the ratib or wirid of an order." (*Interview, KM, May 22, 2025*)

This statement shows that the dhikr guide in urban society is not always in the position of a mursyid of the tarekat, but still has religious authority in the eyes of the congregation. The authority is built through knowledge, example, da'wah communication skills, and emotional closeness to the congregation. The supervisor's charisma is an important factor encouraging change in the assembly, especially in the packaging of readings, processions, and activity programs to suit the congregation's needs.

The third factor is the character of a practical, open, and selective urban society. Urban people tend to choose religious activities that are easily accessible, less binding, and directly beneficial to their lives. Therefore, dhikr assemblies that are too exclusive and rigid tend to be less in demand, while assemblies that are open, communicative, varied, and provide spiritual experiences are more readily accepted. One of the pilgrims stated:

"For us, it is not really a consideration whether the recitation of dhikr in the assembly is followed by the sanad or part of an order or not. The important thing is that we can follow familiar dhikr readings, feel calm, and follow dhikr guides who can be trusted scientifically and morally." (*Interview, NB, May 27, 2025*)

The quotation shows that urban society emphasizes more spiritual experience, ease of reading, and trust in the guide than the formal aspects of the tarekat. This is one of the drivers behind the emergence of a more flexible dhikr assembly, less tied to the tarekat's structure and open to pilgrims from various backgrounds.

The fourth factor is the development of digital technology. Social media, video documentation, and live broadcasts have expanded the reach of the dhikr assembly. Assembly is no longer limited to physical spaces, but is also present in digital spaces. One of the assembly supervisors said:

"Live streaming during the dhikr assembly at least helps those who have the desire to dhikr but are hindered by long distances, unhealthy body conditions, or other disabilities. Through this social media, they can still participate in congregational remembrance." (*Interview, GK, June 18, 2025*)

Based on observations on June 18, 2025, several dhikr assemblies have used digital media to document and disseminate activities. This shows that technology is an important factor in expanding access, strengthening existence, and increasing the reach of the dhikr assembly. Technology does not replace the physical presence of pilgrims but serves as an additional means of expanding da'wah and reaching a wider community.

The fifth factor is socio-political and economic dynamics. Large congregations, influential guiding figures, and strong social networks make the dhikr assembly attractive to political actors and economic actors. In the political context, the dhikr assembly can be a space for consolidating support, political education, or even mobilizing choices. One of the mentors stated:

"In the 2024-2029 regional head election, we invited the congregation at the dhikr assembly to vote and support one of the candidates, both for mayor and governor. We consider this as political ijtihad because the candidate is seen as having a commitment to Islamic da'wah and the interests of the ummah." (*Interview, GK, June 18, 2025*)

Economic dynamics also affect changes in the dhikr assembly. The assembly activities attended by many pilgrims created opportunities for trade and informal economic empowerment. One of the traders stated:

"This dhikr assembly is a blessing in itself for traders. We can sell without paying the stall's rent. In addition to getting benefits, we can also introduce Islamic products to the congregation." (*Interview, QD, May 27, 2025*)

The quote shows that the dhikr assembly cannot be separated from the socio-economic dynamics of society. The presence of a large number of pilgrims creates economic opportunities for both small traders and certain business actors. Thus, the change in the dhikr assembly is driven not only by spiritual factors but also by the social, political, and economic realities surrounding it.



Source: Research documentation, May 25, 2025.

Figure 4. The Book of Uquudul Jumaan in the Zikir Assembly of TQN Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School

This image shows documentation of interviews with the supervisor of the TQN Zikir Council and the book *Uquudul Jumaan*, which serves as a reference for daily dhikr practices, khataman, tawassul, and the genealogy of the Qadriyah wa Naqsyabandiyah Tarekat. The documentation emphasizes that the change in the dhikr assembly in Palembang does not break the continuity of the tarekat tradition, but rather occurs through a process of preservation, adjustment, and development in response to the needs of the urban community. Thus, the driving factors behind the change in the dhikr assembly are a combination of the spiritual needs of urban pilgrims, the charisma of the guide, the social character of urban society, the development of digital technology, and social, political, and economic dynamics. From the perspective of *continuity and change*, these changes show a tradition that persists as well as adapts; while Giddens' structuring theory and Weber's charismatic leadership help explain that the transformation of the assembly was born out of the mutual relationship between religious actors, urban social structures, and the guiding authority of remembrance.

DISCUSSION

The 21st-century dhikr assembly in Palembang City has transformed from a spiritual ritual space into a multifunctional urban socio-religious institution. The transformation can be seen in changes in the assembly's construction, the expansion of social roles, the involvement of digital technology, the diversity of the congregation, informal economic activities, religious recreation, and the entry of some assemblies into the practical political space. These findings are in line with previous studies that urban Sufism in Indonesia developed in response to the spiritual needs of urban communities through more flexible, open, and functional assemblies of dhikr, salawat, and Sufi communities that serve to strengthen spirituality, religious identity, and social solidarity (Miichi, 2019; Sodik & Sujibto, 2023; Zamhari, 2013; Zamhari & Howell, 2012). This study shows that the spiritual needs of urban communities drive changes in the dhikr assembly in Palembang, including changes in the guide's charisma, the congregation's practical-open character, the development of digital technology, and social, political, and economic dynamics. However, this transformation did not completely break the old tradition, because some assemblies still maintained ratib, sanad, dhikr guidebooks, assembly manners, and the continuity of tarekat practices. According to Howell (2008) Sufisme urban menunjukkan kemampuan spiritualitas Islam beradaptasi dengan modernitas. Dalam konteks Palembang, majelis zikir menjaga tradisi Islam Melayu sekaligus menyesuaikan diri dengan kebutuhan masyarakat urban.

The congregation of the dhikr assembly in Palembang tends to choose religious practices that are open, easily accessible, and provide direct inner peace. Their choice is no longer primarily determined by the tarekat's sanad but by the ease of reciting dhikr, the comfort of the assembly, trust in the guide, and the spiritual experience they feel. This is in line with several recent studies that show that urban Sufism is developing as an expression of the religious diversity of urban society that is flexible, inclusive, communicative, and responsive to the spiritual and psychological needs of modern society (Asri et al., 2025; Hakim et al., 2024; Jaenuri, 2022; Thohri & Hadisaputra, 2022). In the context of Palembang, the dhikr assembly is not only a space for spiritual recovery for urban communities who face work, family, economic, and psychological pressures, but also serves

as a medium for the preservation of Malay Islamic traditions through ratib, poetry, hadrah, guidebooks, haul ulama, pilgrimage, and congregational dhikr that remain alive in the local religious culture.

In addition, findings on the expansion of the social role of the dhikr assembly show that dhikr does not remain merely an oral ritual activity but develops into a social energy that fosters care, solidarity, and community participation. Activities such as compensation for orphans, assistance to people experiencing poverty, Friday Barokah, humanitarian donations, spiritual tourism, and support for informal economic activities demonstrate that the dhikr assembly has a broader social function. These findings are in line with previous research showing that urban religious communities not only serve as spaces for religious learning and religious identity formation, but also as an arena for strengthening solidarity, social empowerment, public participation, and political mobilization when religious authority and congregation loyalty meet specific socio-political interests (Anwar et al., 2023; Fadillah, 2023; Febrian, 2024; Yani et al., 2022).

The novelty of this research lies in reading the Palembang dhikr assembly not only as a ritual-spiritual space but also as an urban socio-religious institution undergoing transformation and expansion in its role in people's lives in the XXI century. Different from previous studies that generally highlight urban Sufism, tarekat, or dhikr assemblies as an expression of piety and the fulfillment of spiritual needs, this study emphasizes the existence of a pattern of *continuity and change*, namely the continuity of Malay Islamic traditions through ratib, sanad, guidebooks, assembly manners, poetry, hadrah, haul, and pilgrimage, as well as changes towards a more open, digital, inclusive, social form of assembly, economic, recreative, and in certain contexts in contact with practical politics. Thus, this study offers a new perspective: the dhikr assembly in Palembang functions as a space for spiritual adaptation, the preservation of local traditions, and the simultaneous social negotiation among urban communities.

The implications of these findings suggest that the dhikr assembly should be understood as a dynamic socio-religious institution rather than merely a static ritual space. Theoretically, this research strengthens the perspective of *continuity and change* because the dhikr assembly in Palembang maintains traditional elements such as ratib, sanad, guidebooks, assembly manners, and guiding authorities, while developing new forms through live streaming, digital documentation, spiritual tourism, social programs, youth involvement, and informal economic activities. In practical terms, these findings affirm the importance of governance of the dhikr assembly that is inclusive, educational, transparent, and oriented towards the benefit of the people. However, this study has limitations because it focuses only on the dhikr assembly in Palembang City and because data collection was conducted in the May-June 2025 timeframe, so it does not fully capture long-term changes. This study has also not quantitatively measured the impact of the dhikr assembly on the congregation's spiritual welfare, social behavior, political orientation, and economy. Therefore, further research needs to conduct comparative studies across regions using a longitudinal approach and develop mixed-methods to measure the social, spiritual, digital, political, and economic impact of the dhikr assembly in greater depth.

CONCLUSION

The 21st-century dhikr assembly in Palembang City has transformed from a spiritual ritual space into a dynamic, adaptive, and multifunctional urban socio-religious institution. This change can be seen in the increasingly open form of the assembly, the variety of congregations, the expansion of da'wah media, and the development of the assembly's function in fostering ruhiyah, preserving Malay Islamic traditions, strengthening social solidarity, empowering the people, promoting religious recreation, and fostering public participation. Despite the adjustment to the needs of urban society and the development of digital technology, the dhikr assembly still maintains traditional elements such as ratib, sanad, guidebooks, assembly manners, and the continuity of tarekat practices. Thus, the dhikr assembly in Palembang shows a pattern of continuity and change, namely, maintaining the spiritual heritage of Malay Islam while responding to the dynamics of the city community's life in a more open, practical, and contextual manner.

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