THE UPSURGE OF MEMORY IN THE CASE OF HAUL: A Problem of Islamic Historiography in Indonesia

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Abstract: This essay investigates the reasons behind the proliferation of haul celebrations in Indonesia. The study focuses on the construction of haul as a ritual forging collective memory among a particular group of people in the Muslim community. The writer adopts Pierre Nora’s theory of the upsurge of memory which is caused by the acceleration and democratization of history. These two factors bring about the construction of an object which forms the passage of memory among those attending haul. It will be argued that the haul is a social construction by a noble community to demonstrate its existence and domination over others in the Muslim community. It will also be argued that the haul was a reaction towards modernity in the Muslim world and the rise of alternative historiography. The influential position of the aristocracy was based on the construction of collective memory of the people in haul celebrations, which are held all over Indonesia.

Keywords: Haul, Sadaq, memory, historiography.

Introduction

The tradition of haul¹ has been a fascinating phenomenon in Indonesia. Today, there are over fifty haul celebrations scattered throughout the Archipelago. There is little attention, however, paid to the study of the emergence of this religious festivity. This essay will look into the reasons behind the proliferation of this celebration, which began in the early Twentieth Century. In approaching the

¹ Haul linguistically means circuit. This term, however, is used to describe the annual pilgrimage to the shrine of a deceased saint.
subject matter, it will adopt Pierre Nora’s theory on the upsurge of memory. Nora believes that the upsurge of memory is caused by the acceleration and democratization of history. These two factors result in the construction of an object, which becomes the passage of memory. The study focuses on the construction of *haul* as a ritual, which forges collective memory about particular group of people. It will be argued that this construction was the result of the adoption of modernity in the Muslim world and the rise of alternative historiography. Therefore, from this point of view, *haul* can be seen as a reaction against the tide of modernity.

The *haul* ritual in Indonesia originated from the province of Hadramaut in the modern Yemen. In this region, society was stratified according to their ancestral background. At the top were the *Sa'ab* (sing. *Sayyid*) or the descendants of Prophet Muhammad, followed by the *Masha'yik* who were the descendants of well-known religious scholars and the *Qaab* who were tribesmen and finally the *Masa'ki* or those who were economically deprived without either religious or tribal affiliation. The *Sa'ab* and the *Masha'yik* restricted other social groups to have access to scholarship while the rest of the population struggled for their economic necessities. The position of the *Sa'ab* became vital because they were seen as the people with soul in a “soulless place.” Their piety and intellectualism became a model for others. Linda Boxberger states that “the ritual life of the community focused around a spiritual leader and often around the memory of a previous spiritual leader.” The *Sa'ab*, therefore, became a medium for intercessions, thereby establishing a cult of saints in Hadramaut. The proliferation of domed shrines throughout the valley became the material symbol of the *Sa'ab*'s religious authority.

Once a year a *haul* was held in each shrine where all tribes and scholars gathered together to honor a particular deceased saint. The

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3 Ibid.
haul was led by the successor of the Saḥāb and throughout the ritual there were a number of orations intended to recall the memory of the pious ancestors of the Saḥāb. In doing so, it stressed the continuous function of the Saḥāb and affirmed the authority of their descendants, who claimed to have acquired al-sultān al-ruḥānīyah (spiritual powers), derived from their ancestors.6 Paramount also to the consolidation of the collective memory of the pilgrims were the hagiographies of the Saḥāb, which praised the noble ancestry of this particular group.7 The hagiographies together with poems praising the Saḥāb were read during the haul. Therefore, the authority of the Saḥāb was derived from the memory of the past ancestral saints, which was collectivized in the haul ritual.

During the 19th century, emigration from Hadramaut to Southeast Asia reached its peak. The growth of capitalism in what were the Dutch East Indies and British Malaya attracted the Hadramis who were struggling for their economic conditions to come and participate. This rapid economic development in Southeast Asia came as a result of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.8 Hadramis from different social backgrounds took part in this mercantile project in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, many Saḥāb succeeded in the trade and enjoyed the respect and admiration of the indigenous people because of their blood relation to the Prophet. Despite the geographical distance between Indonesia and Hadramaut, the connection remained strong.9 This is because Hadramaut was regarded as the spiritual center of the Hadramis in Indonesia, bound by the cult of saints that was symbolized by the shrines of the Saḥāb’s ancestral lines. Hence, the status quo, which assured Saḥāb’s hegemony, was maintained in Indonesia during the 19th century.

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8 Engseng Ho, "Hadramis Abroad in Hadramaut: The Muwalladin," in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds), Hadrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen, p. 139.
The Acceleration of History: Pan-Islamism and The High Reforms

The challenge faced by the Sanad in Indonesia was inextricably linked to the tide of modernity. Rapid European progression, which was preceded by the advance of modernity, generated fear amongst Muslims in the Middle East. The reaction to this tremendous progress was the founding of the pan-Islamic movement by the Ottoman caliph Abdul Hamid II. This movement was intended to secure loyalties of the Muslims to the Ottoman caliphate amidst the rapid European penetration into the Muslim world. Furthermore, European domination resulted in the rise of modern Islamic movement, such as one that was devised by Jamaluddin al-Afghani. Afghani published a journal entitled al-’Urwah al-Wuthqa, by which he could spread his call for struggle against the hegemony of colonialism over the Muslim lands. His disciple, Muhammad Abduh, continued his work by decreeing the reform of Islam. Abduh believed that Muslims should adopt modernity in order to develop the Muslim community.

The ascension of Islamic modernism in the Middle East additionally affected the Hadramis in Indonesia. There were several factors that contributed to this. First was the dissatisfaction amongst the Hadramis in general with the Dutch authority as a result of an economic predicament in Indonesia. Secondly was the rise of Japan, which was the only newly modern Eastern contender that could compete with the Europeans. Japan became the inspiration for the non-Europeans to follow in order to develop their community. Thirdly was the awakening of the Indonesian Chinese population, who organized the first non-European modern organization, the Tiong Hoa.

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11 Ibid, p. 123.
And lastly was the availability of the reformist publication, notably the Egyptian journal al-Manar in Indonesia. The first three factors stimulated the Hadramis to take part in the developmental progression, while the last factor offered guidance to undertake a modernist stance.

Many Hadramis were enticed to adapt to the modernist agenda. This resulted in the ratification of pan-Islamism by many distinguished Hadramis. Moreover, many of the younger generation, mostly from the lower strata of the Hadrami society welcomed the reformist agenda, which preached for the equality amongst Muslims. This was most likely caused by the prolonged Sadah’s domination of the society, which needed to be reformed. Following this gradual shift towards modernity, the Hadramis in Indonesia became obsessed with development. Their aim was to educate the younger generation, thereby producing modern Muslim intellectuals. By this stage, the memory of the past Sadah was disregarded. The community mainly focused on the future, by establishing, among others, educational and publication institutions. Furthermore, as a result of the growing link to the Ottoman Empire through pan-Islamism, many Hadramis shifted their focus from Hadramaut with its cult of saints to Istanbul with its progress and modernity. This rearrangement was seen as a direct threat to the authority of the Sadah, which rested upon the memory of the deceased saints, symbolized by their shrines in Hadramaut. The only option available to the Sadah to retain their authority was to re-invoke the memory of their noble ancestors.

This period, which was termed as the nahdah (renaissance) witnessed the shift in the Muslim World from a traditional to a more modern society. The focus on progression, which was preached by the Muslim reformists, brought about tremendous alteration in Muslim societies. It gave birth to a teleological development within the Muslim

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world. The aim, which was development of the Muslims, became the ending point that must be pursued. Following Nora’s term, this period signaled the acceleration of history, where the rapid historical change challenged people on how to constitute the past.18 On the other hand, this progress also encouraged people to remember the past. The result was therefore an upsurge in the attempts to preserve memory, which was embodied in a particular site.19 This was vital for the Sa Españ in particular, who rested their authority on the memory of the past.

The Democratization of History: A Challenge in Historiography

The advance of modernity did not only bring about acceleration in history; it also resulted in the proliferation of education. In 1878, a renowned Sa Españ scholar and poet, ‘Ali al-Habsyi established a religious academy in Seiyun.20 People from around Hadramaut came to learn in the academy, thereby producing a higher number of educated people. Soon more academies were established in Hadramaut such as in Tarim (1887) and in Ghayl Bawazir (1902). The proliferation of education meant that the Sa Españ and Mashayikh ceased to be the only educated elite. As all strata enjoyed education, school of thoughts from outside successfully diffused into Hadramaut, thereby creating some dissatisfaction with a number of outdated customs.

A comparable phenomenon also happened in Indonesia. Many Hadrami migrants, who came to the Archipelago, were exposed for the first time to more liberal Islamic thoughts. Many admired reformist teachings, which were prevalent in the Muslim world at the time. The result of this educational development was the emergence of intellectuals amongst Hadramis from the lesser strata. These intellectuals started the new tradition of historiography of Hadramaut. Through their historiography, these intellectuals challenged the authority of the Sa Españ. A.S. Bujra noted that one important effect of

18 Nora, "Between Memory and History," p. 8.
19 Ibid, pp. 11-12.
the Islamic reform movement was the rise of new historiography, which sought to politicize the Sa‘\dah’s authority.21

The most famous amongst these emerging intellectuals was Sa\la\makecell{\scriptsize{a}}\hbox{\textrangle} al-Bakri\makecell{\scriptsize{\rangle}} Al-Bakri\makecell{\scriptsize{\rangle}} came from the Qaba\makecell{\scriptsize{\rangle}} background, hence he was an avant-garde of erudition from this strata. In his book, The Political History of Hadramaut, al-Bakri\makecell{\scriptsize{\rangle}} accused the Sa‘\dah of manipulating religious superstition in his homeland in order to establish power.22 By doing so, the Sa‘\dah successfully established a religious aristocracy. Al-Bakri\makecell{\scriptsize{\rangle}} believed that the Sa‘\dah preserved their authority through the construction of shrines, which became the material symbols of their power and through the Sa‘\dah’s tradition of hagiography, which helped to consolidate collective memory of the past Sa‘\dah.23 Therefore, it is clear that historiography was used by the reformists to destroy the memory of the Sa‘\dah’s ancestors which was the raison d’être for the latter’s authority.

The proliferation of education not only resulted in the rise of reformist historiography, but also gave birth to the nationalist movement in Indonesia. Throughout the early 20th century, Indonesia witnessed the emergence of nationalist movements, which sought to get independence from the Dutch.24 For this group of intellectuals, the focus of development was the establishment of modern Indonesian nation-state. Similar to the reformists, this group also involved themselves in historiography project. Yet, in contrast, the nationalists attempted to differentiate between what is acceptable and what is not from a nationalist ideological point of view.

One of the targets of the nationalist historiography was a well-known Sa‘\dah scholar, Uthman ibn Yahya. Uthman was a learned Islamic jurist and he was appointed as the mufti\makecell{\scriptsize{\rangle}} of Batavia by the colonial government. Uthman was undoubtedly the leader of the conservative Sa‘\dah in the turn of the century. Sadly, Uthman was highly criticized by the nationalist circle for a number of reasons.

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Firstly was his intimate relationship with the famous Dutch orientalist Snouck Hurgronje. For the nationalists, Snouck was seen as a scholar, whose academic interest in Islam and Indonesia was based on an ambition to preserve European domination over the colonized land. In the words of Edward Said, Snouck’s interest in Islamic scholarship was based on the intention to extend ‘European suzerainty… over Asia’. In this regard, Uthman not only befriended Snouck, but also assisted him in his research. Thus, in the eyes of the nationalists, Uthman was seen as a native informant of the colonial regime.

Apart from helping Snouck, Uthman often acted in a controversial manner. Most famous of these was a prayer that he composed and read in honor of the new Queen of the Netherlands, Wilhelmina. For this, he received a medal of honour from the colonial government. This event led to many strong reactions against Uthman, which undoubtedly damaged his credibility. Furthermore, one nationalist writer, Hamid Algadri attacked Uthman for two reasons. Firstly was for Uthman’s condemnation of Islamic insurgencies against the Dutch. Secondly was for his suppression of pan-Islamism. Hence, for the nationalists, Uthman as the undisputed leader of the Sa’dah, was accused of having attempted to preserve the status quo. In effect, all these controversies surrounding Uthman’s behavior created indigenous antipathy towards the Hadramis in general.

Uthman was just one case of this kind. Indeed according to a Dutch Orientalist, Van den Berg, there are many cases in which Hadramis of Sa’dah background used their religious authority to help the Dutch against the indigenous Indonesians who revolted against the

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26 Huub De Jonge, "Contradictory and Against the Grain: Snouck Hurgronje on the Hadramis in the Dutch East Indies (1889-1936)," in de Jonge and Kaptein (eds), Transcending Border, p. 231.
colonial authority. From a nationalist perspective, a number of Sađah committed the “cardinal sin” of collaboration with the colonialists. This behavior of certain people partly destroyed the Sađah’s credibility as the source of religious authority. For this reason, the Sađah needed to restore their credibility in order to remain to be the beloved of the indigenous Muslims.

What happened in the two cases above was what Nora termed as the effect of democratization of history. With the proliferation of education, many from the formerly marginalized background were suddenly able to contribute to the historical discourse. The Sađah, who used to monopolize historiography in the form of hagiography, suddenly faced a serious challenge from others, as scholarship became accessible to wider community. The challenge to the Sađah’s domination came mainly from two different schools: nationalists and religious reformists. Their attacks on the Sađah were based on their ideological construction of what was acceptable and what was not. What was acceptable for the reformists does not mean that it was acceptable for the nationalists. It was this ideological standard that constructed each historiography. This challenge which had partly destroyed the Sađah’s credibility needed to be acted upon. For this reason, the Sađah launched a counter attack in the form of an attempt to revive the memory of the Sađah’s illustrious ancestors.

An Upsurge in Memory: The Haul Celebration

The acceleration and the democratization of history have challenged towards the formerly unquestionable authority of the Sađah. The Sađah’s authority, which rested on the memory of the past saints, needed reaffirmation and rehabilitation. Without reaffirmation of the memory of their ancestors, the Sađah could be in danger of losing influence and authority over the masses. This phenomenon, in using Nora’s words, is what is called by the upsurge of memory. Thus, what happened was that the Sađah organized the haul commemoration, which was similar to the one they held in Hadramaut. The tombs of some Sađah scholars became the sites of memory, where people came from different places to commemorate the deceased scholars and their


31 Nora, "Between Memory and History," p. 15.
noble ancestry. During the celebration, prayer was offered to the soul of the Sadaqah’s ancestors, while their hagiography was read loudly. Speech after speech followed the prayer emphasizing the qualities of the Sadaqah and poems in honour of them were read.32 Both the tombs and festivals became what Nora calls the sites of memory because ‘memory attaches itself to sites’.33

Haul, therefore, became a ritual where collective memory of the past Sadaqah was formed. People who did not have prior knowledge about the Sadaqah would come out from the ritual as a man who is grateful and respectful of the Sadaqah. Haul is a ‘vehicle of memory … which come to denote the representation of the past and making of it into a shared cultural knowledge by successive generation’.34 As a result, the authority of the Sadaqah was totally consolidated. Indeed, this method was also used by the Fatimids Caliphate in Egypt to retain their right to the throne of Egypt. The Fatimids, who were the descendants of the Prophet, established annual pilgrimage to the shrines of their illustrious ancestors, in the hope of harboring loyalty from the people to their government.35 It seems that the collective memory, which was constructed for power purposes proved effective for the justification of the Sadaqah’s authority.

Conclusion

Today the authority of the Sadaqah is unquestionable. People’s respect for their religious position is tremendous. The upsurge of memory in the form of haul has consolidated the Sadaqah’s religious authority as the descendants of the illustrious ancestors all the way until the Prophet. One has to notice, however, that the formation of haul in Indonesia was a reaction rather than an action. During the early 20th century the Sadaqah’s authority faced challenges from two main factors. The first was the acceleration of history in the form of the

32 Sources of information regarding the haul are mainly drawn from my personal experience having attended haul many times.
33 Nora, "Between Memory and History," p. 22.
emergence of modern Islamic movements. For these movements, history became a teleological progression to reach their aim. This resulted in the forgetting of the past because the focus, which was formerly faced to the past, is now changed to the future. Therefore the Saadah's authority rested on the past needed reaffirmation.

The second factor was the democratization of history, in the form of challenge towards the Saadah's hegemony through historiography. Formerly, the Saadah reserved access to scholarship and historiography for themselves. The Saadah's historiography was created to assure their religious credibility, which was likely in the form of hagiography. The proliferation of education resulted in the emergence of historiography from different perspectives. Two main opponents of the Saadah's historiography were the reformists and the nationalists. This new historiography forced the Saadah to rehabilitate its name in order to be able to retain their authority.

These two main factors resulted in the upsurge of memory and the establishment of the sites of memory. This was implemented in the baul celebrations, which proved effective in forming the collective memory on the Saadah. Today, in sum, the influential position of the Saadah was based on the construction of collective memory of the people in the baul celebrations, which are held all over Indonesia.[]

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