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

Ismail F. Alatas
The National University of Singapore

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*, *Sadah*, memory, historiography.

Introduction

The tradition of *haul*[1] 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

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[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.[2] Nora believes that the upsurge of memory is caused by the acceleration and democratization of history.[3] 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 *Sadah* (sing. *Sayyid)* or the descendants of Prophet Muhammad, followed by the *Mashayikh* who were the descendants of well-known religious scholars and the *Qaba'il* who were tribesmen and finally the *Masakin* or those who were economically deprived without either religious or tribal affiliation.[4] The *Sadah* and the *Mashayikh* restricted other social groups to have access to scholarship while the rest of the population struggled for their economic necessities. The position of the *Sadah* 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."[5] The *Sadah*, 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 *Sadah*'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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[2] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les lieux de memoire," *Representation*, 26 (1989).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Sylvaine Cameline, "Reflections on the System of Social Stratification in Hadramaut,",in Ulrike Freitag and William G. Clarence-Smith (eds), *Hadrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s* (New York: Brill, 1997), p. 148

[5] Linda Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire:Hadramawt, Emigration and the Indian Ocean, 1880s-1930s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 153.

haul was led by the successor of the *Saḍah* and throughout the ritual there were a number of orations intended to recall the memory of the pious ancestors of the *Saḍah*. In doing so, it stressed the continuous function of the *Saḍah* and affirmed the authority of their descendants, who claimed to have acquired *al-sulṭa al-ruḥḥah* (spiritual powers), derived from their ancestors.[6] Paramount also to the consolidation of the collective memory of the pilgrims were the hagiographies of the *Saḍah*, which praised the noble ancestry of this particular group.[7] The hagiographies together with poems praising the *Saḍah* were read during the *haul*. Therefore, the authority of the *Saḍah* 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 *Saḍah* 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 *Saḍah*'s ancestral lines. Hence, the status quo, which assured *Saḍah*'s hegemony, was maintained in Indonesia during the 19th century.

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[6] Abdalla S. Bujra, *The Politics of Stratification: A Study of Political Change in a South Arabian Town* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 28.

[7] Alexander Knysh, "The Cult of Saints and Islamic Reformism in Early Twentieth Century Hadramawt," *New Arabian Studies*, 4, (1997), p. 145.

[8] Engseng Ho, "Hadramis Abroad in Hadramaut: The Muwalladin," in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds), *Hadrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen,* p. 139.

[9] Ulrike Freitag, "Hadramaut: a Religious Center for the Indian Ocean in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries?" *Studia Islamica* (1999), p. 182.

The Acceleration of History:
Pan-Islamism and The High Reforms

The challenge faced by the *Sadah* 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.[10] 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.[11] 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.[12]

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.[13] Secondly was the rise of Japan, which was the only newly modern Eastern contender that could compete with the Europeans.[14] 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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[10] William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Second Edition (Boulder: Westview Press: 2000), p. 118.

[11] Ibid, p. 123.

[12] Ibid, p. 124.

[13] Sumit K. Mandal, "Natural Leaders of Native Muslims: Arab Ethnicity and Politics in Java Under Dutch Rule," in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds), *Hadrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen,* p. 187.

[14] Ibid, p.187.

Hwe Koan.[15] And lastly was the availability of the reformist publication, notably the Egyptian journal *al-Manar* in Indonesia.[16] 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.[17] 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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[15] Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900-1942* (Ithaca: South Asia Program Publication, Cornell University, 1999), pp. 35-38.

[16] Peter G. Riddell, "Religious Links between Hadramaut and the Malay-Indonesian World, C.1850-C.1950," in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds), *Hadrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen,* p. 225.

[17] Sumit K. Mandal, "Forging a Modern Arab Identity in Java in the Early Twentieth Century," in Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein (eds). *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), p. 166.

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 *Sadah* 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 *Sadah* scholar and poet, 'Ali> al-H{bshi> 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 *Sadah* 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 *Sadah*. A.S. Bujra noted that one important effect of

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[18] Nora, "Between Memory and History," p. 8.

[19] Ibid, pp. 11-12.

[20] Novel Muhammad Alaydrus, *Sekilas Tentang Habib Ali bin Muhammad Al-Habsyi: Mualif Simtud Duror* (Solo: Putera Riyadi, 2000), p. 47.

the Islamic reform movement was the rise of new historiography, which sought to politicize the *Sadah*'s authority.[21]

The most famous amongst these emerging intellectuals was Salah al-Bakri. Al-Bakri came from the *Qaba'il* background, hence he was an *avant-garde* of erudition from this strata. In his book, *The Political History of Hadramaut*, al-Bakri accused the *Sadah* of manipulating religious superstition in his homeland in order to establish power.[22] By doing so, the *Sadah* successfully established a religious aristocracy. Al-Bakri believed that the *Sadah* preserved their authority through the construction of shrines, which became the material symbols of their power and through the *Sadah*'s tradition of hagiography, which helped to consolidate collective memory of the past *Sadah*.[23] Therefore, it is clear that historiography was used by the reformists to destroy the memory of the *Sadah*'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 *Sadah* scholar, Uthman ibn Yahya. Uthman was a learned Islamic jurist and he was appointed as the *mufti* of Batavia by the colonial government. Uthman was undoubtedly the leader of the conservative *Sadah* in the turn of the century. Sadly, Uthman was highly criticized by the nationalist circle for a number of reasons.

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[21] A.S. Bujra, "Political Conflict and Stratification in Hadramaut I," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 3, no. 4 (1967), p. 363.

[22] Alexander Knysh. "The Cult of Saints and Religious Reformism in Hadramaut," in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds), *Hadrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen,* p. 205.

[23] Ibid*,* p, 206.

[24] J.D. Legge, *Indonesia,* Third Edition (Sydney: Prantice-Hall, 1980), pp. 128-135.

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'.[25] In this regard, Uthman not only befriended Snouck, but also assisted him in his research.[26] 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.[27] Furthermore, one nationalist writer, Hamid Algadri attacked Uthman for two reasons.[28] 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 *Sadah,* 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.[29]

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 *Sadah* background used their religious authority to help the Dutch against the indigenous Indonesians who revolted against the

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[25] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 256.

[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.

[27] Nico Kaptein, "The Sayyid and the Queen: Sayyid Uthman on Queen Wilhelmina's Inauguration on the Throne of the Netherlands in 1898," in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 9, no.2 (1998), pp. 170-171.

[28] Mr. Hamid Algadri, *Politik Belanda Terhadap Islam dan Keturunan Arab di Indonesia* (Jakarta: C.V. Haji Masagung, 1988), p.86.

[29] Azyumardi Azra, "A Hadrami Religious Scholar in Indonesia: Sayyid Uthman," in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds), *Hadrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen,* p. 252.

colonial authority.[30] From a nationalist perspective, a number of *Sadah* committed the "cardinal sin" of collaboration with the colonialists. This behavior of certain people partly destroyed the *Sadah*'s credibility as the source of religious authority. For this reason, the *Sadah* 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.[31] With the proliferation of education, many from the formerly marginalized background were suddenly able to contribute to the historical discourse. The *Sadah*, 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 *Sadah's* domination came mainly from two different schools: nationalists and religious reformists. Their attacks on the *Sadah* 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 *Sadah*'s credibility needed to be acted upon. For this reason, the *Sadah* launched a counter attack in the form of an attempt to revive the memory of the *Sadah*'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 *Sadah*. The *Sadah*'s authority, which rested on the memory of the past saints, needed reaffirmation and rehabilitation. Without reaffirmation of the memory of their ancestors, the *Sadah* 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 *Sadah* organized the *haul* commemoration, which was similar to the one they held in Hadramaut. The tombs of some *Sadah* scholars became the sites of memory, where people came from different places to commemorate the deceased scholars and their

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[30] L.W.C van den Berg, *Le Hadramout Et. Les Colonies Arabes Dans L'Archipel Indien*, translated by Rahayu Hidayat (Jakarta: INIS, 1989), p. 117.

[31] Nora, "Between Memory and History," p. 15.

noble ancestry. During the celebration, prayer was offered to the soul of the *Sādah*'s ancestors, while their hagiography was read loudly. Speech after speech followed the prayer emphasizing the qualities of the *Sādah* 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 *Sādah* was formed. People who did not have prior knowledge about the *Sādah* would come out from the ritual as a man who is grateful and respectful of the *Sādah*. *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 *Sādah* 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 *Sādah's* authority.

Conclusion

Today the authority of the *Sādah* is unquestionable. People's respect for their religious position is tremendous. The upsurge of memory in the form of *haul* has consolidated the *Sādah*'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 *Sādah*'s authority faced challenges from two main factors. The first was the acceleration of history in the form of the

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[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.

[34] Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems and Methods," *The American Historical Review,* 102, no. 5 (1997), p. 1386.

[35] N.J.G. Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday Festival: Early History in the Central Muslim Lands and Development in the Muslim West until the 10th/16th Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill: 1993), p. 27.

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 *Sadah*'s authority rested on the past needed reaffirmation.

The second factor was the democratization of history, in the form of challenge towards the *Sadah*'s hegemony through historiography. Formerly, the *Sadah* reserved access to scholarship and historiography for themselves. The *Sadah*'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 *Sadah*'s historiography were the reformists and the nationalists. This new historiography forced the *Sadah* 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 *haul* celebrations, which proved effective in forming the collective memory on the *Sadah*. Today, in sum, the influential position of the *Sadah* was based on the construction of collective memory of the people in the *haul* celebrations, which are held all over Indonesia.[]

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