

FERTILE SEEDBED FOR PLANTING HABAIB'S RELIGIOUS POLITICAL AUTHORITY

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Abstract: The Ḥaḍramī people in Indonesia, popularly called ḥabā'ib, are those of Arab descent who have contributed to the history of this nation. Their same origin does not necessarily make this community homogeneous, especially when it comes to Islam and Indonesianness. The vibrant tones that characterize this diversity can even be traced back to the colonial era. One of them is related to the struggle for the influence of ḥabā'ib's religious politics in the public sphere. The recent growth of their authority at the national level has drawn attention and prompted a key inquiry about what infrastructure and superstructure are conducive and supportive for this to occur. A heuristic analysis is conducted to explore the issue. This study reveals that ḥabā'ib's religious politics have grown in prominence in Indonesia because they have hospitable spaces to grow in accord with the construction of their identity as a social and religious elite group. Meanwhile, this phenomenon is difficult to develop in cultural settings that do not accommodate the expressions of supremacy based on race, ethnicity, or ancestry. The existence of cultural spaces with different inclinations in addressing ḥabā'ib's identity is still constitutionally permitted in Indonesia. Muslims have the wisdom as well as the resilience to manage the struggle for religious and political authority in their respective Islamic cultural environments. The state and government must continue to position themselves as the large tent for the diversity of their people.

Keywords: Cultural identity; Ḥabā'ib; Ḥaḍramī; religious political authority.

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Introduction

The Ḥaḍramī refers to those people who have ancestors from Hadhramaut, a geographical area that the people in Archipelago identify as part of South Arabia.¹ It is currently within the Republic of Yemen. The word *ḥaḍramawt* itself is closely related to the story about the words of the Prophet Hūd at the end of his life to the 'Ād people who could still not accept his preaching, that is, *baḍara al-mawt*, meaning that death has come, which is interpreted as a signal for the imminent arrival of death for him or at the same time the destruction of his people who had denied the truth.² These Ḥaḍramī have been present in the Indonesian archipelago for several centuries. The desire to take advantage of greater economic prospects was one of their main drivers, due to the less promising condition of their ancestral land that was politically always less conducive from the threat of inter-tribal conflict.³

They are thought to have arrived in two waves of migration. The first occurred between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, whereas the second occurred between the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ According to Mobini-Kesheh,⁵ the presence of

¹ L. W. C. van den Berg, *Hadramaut dan Koloni Arab di Nusantara* (Jakarta: INIS, 1989), 7.

² D. van der Meulen and H. von Wissmann, *Hadramaut: Some of Its Mysteries Unveiled* (Leiden: E. J. Brill Ltd., 1932), 4.

³ Huub de Jonge, "Discord and Solidarity among the Arabs in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900-1942," *Indonesia*, no. 55 (1993): 83-90; Saifuddin Ahmad Husin, "Becoming Local: Use of Malay and Dutch Loanwords in Arabic Correspondences of the Arabs in the 19th Century Indonesia," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Language and Religion Quo-Vadis Language and Literature in the Religious Life?* (UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, 2014): 153-170.

⁴ Rabith Jihan Amaruli, Singgih Tri Sulistiyono and Dewi Yulianti, "Preserving Memory, Campaigning Nationalism: The Haul of Habib Hasan bin Thaha and the Remaking of the Hadhrami-Arab Identity in Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (2022).

⁵ Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900-1942* (Cornell: SEAP, 1999), 21.

Arab traders in the thirteenth century cannot be proven as Ḥaḍramī. According to Van den Berg's notes, the first major wave of Ḥaḍramī migration to the archipelago took place in the latter half of the eighteenth century until they were able to establish Ḥaḍramī colonies in the main trading centres in North Java in the early half of the nineteenth century, and in the eastern region of the archipelago in the second half of the nineteenth century. Before the sixteenth century, Arab traders are said to have only frequented the archipelago's western part. Before 1500 CE, no Europeans, including Arab and Indian traders, traveled to the archipelago's eastern section as a centre for producing spices and aromata,⁶ although no one denies that Arab traders dominated this Eastern world trade route between the tenth and fifteenth centuries until the entrance of the Portuguese. Trade in Ceylon had been known to them since the second century BC. Canton also had a considerable colony of Arab traders in the mid-eight century.⁷

The Ḥaḍramī community has shown to be one of the elements that constitute the composite of Indonesian life after a long historical process from the pre-colonial era to today. There is a mutual influence process between Ḥaḍramī culture and local culture. Its traces can still be found in language, food, clothes and even architecture, indicating Ḥaḍramī migrants' capacity to adjust to their new surroundings.⁸ Another factor that cannot be overlooked is the presence of Arabs in Southeast Asia, which has aided in the introduction and spread of Islam in the region. The acceptance of Islam by the local populace may have occurred through conversion and adhesion or the combination of the two.⁹

⁶ Robin A. Donkin, *Between East and West: The Moluccas and the Traffic in Spices Up to the Arrival of Europeans* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 2003), xvii-xix.

⁷ T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith* (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1913), 363.

⁸ Mohammed Mustafa Ahmed bin Sumait, Hussein Ali Hasan al-Aidaros and Mohammed Ali Saeed Bladram, "The Impact of Indonesian Culture on Hadhrami Community (Language-Cuisine-Dress-Architecture)," *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research* 9, no. 4 (2020): 1786-1791.

⁹ Carool Kersten, *A History of Islam in Indonesia: Unity in Diversity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 23. In A. D. Nock's terminology, "adhesion" means an acceptance of new worships as useful supplements and not as substitutes, while "conversion" refers to the reorientation of the soul of an individual. See

Adaptability is clearly undeniable for the Ḥaḍramī community to maintain their identity that sets them apart from other communities in this country. Such can be seen from their Islamic features that they maintain. Sayyid or *ḥabīb* is one of the Ḥaḍramī social levels, which believes in a bloodline tie with the Prophet Muhammad. This claim enables them to culturally occupy the pinnacle of Hadhramaut's social structure as esteemed religious leaders. They appear to have social capital that helps them gain position and benefits in the host country. Their sphere of influence is increasing beyond economic operations to include social and political dimensions.¹⁰ However, the impression of exclusivity in some of their religious traditions still raises doubt on the authenticity of their full integration into the Indonesian nation—a problem that should have been addressed when Indonesia was established. They can gain enormous mass support as figures with religious authority and even as political influencers by presenting their religious, aristocratic image. This phenomenon then opens the door to examine further the factors that enable them to occupy positions of religious and political leadership in this country.

***Habā'ib*-ness in the Ḥaḍramī Community**

Huub de Jonge concludes that the Ḥaḍramī community experienced a shift in their orientation during the decades leading up to Indonesian independence, from being predominantly Arab-oriented to Indonesian-oriented.¹¹ Nonetheless, the issue of Indonesianness, or more specifically, of Indonesian nationalism, has not gone away. Societal and national dynamics involving ethnic Arab descendants continue to raise concerns about their sense of nationalism and Indonesianness, whether they have fully integrated into the country or remain as immigrants or foreign visitors with ties to their motherland. According to Al Amin and Mahzumi,¹² the Ḥaḍramī community in Indonesia will continue to face an identity

Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), 7.

¹⁰ Imam Subchi, "The History of Hadrami Arabic Community Development in Southeast Asia," *Episteme* 14, no. 2 (2019): 229-256.

¹¹ De Jonge, "Discord and Solidarity," 83-90.

¹² Ainur Rofiq Al Amin and Fikri Mahzumi, "The Identity Dilemma of Arab Descendants in Indonesia," *KEMANUSLAAN* 29, no. 2 (2022): 157-176.

dilemma in the Indonesian context, with exclusive practises still maintained by some of their communities. However, when compared to other migrant minority communities, the Ḥaḍramī community has fared far better in “merging” into local people.

The fact that these Ḥaḍramī migrants were men facilitates this process, since it is considered bad-mannered for Ḥaḍramī women to appear in public and travel long distances at the time. Accordingly, there was intermarriage between Ḥaḍramī men and local women. The identity of Ḥaḍramī as Muslims also became the important factor. Ethnic mixing could then occur relatively naturally, especially among people of the same religious affiliation. As a result, the Ḥaḍramī community has found it easier to integrate into the Indonesian nationalist identity as Islam is the religion of the majority of the country's population,¹³ which is luxury that other non-Muslim minority groups, such as Chinese, do not have. Leif Manger says:

“In general terms, Hadramis play out identities that are appropriate to the context they are in, which again is defined by who the significant ‘others’ are, and what the interaction is about. But after generations in the diaspora and intermarriage with local women, there are fewer phenotypical differences between Hadramis and local populations.”¹⁴

However, the process of their assimilating into Indonesia does not necessarily result in the loss of their Ḥaḍramī identity. They appear to have succeeded in retaining a cultural identity that makes them as Ḥaḍramī unique, although they have integrated into Indonesianness. They have proven to be quite effective in constructing their identity as Ḥaḍramī diaspora through cultural strategies that help preserve their cultural identity in the diaspora.¹⁵ It includes preserving cultural markers or traditional practises such as using the term “sayyid” and family names, visiting Ḥaḍramī saints' tombs, displaying family tree and collections of canonical texts as expressions of self-affirmation as a member of a certain social and cultural status with great pride. Other practices they use to maintain

¹³ Yamaguchi Motoki, “The Transformation of al-Irshad in the Emerging Nation-State: Indonesian Arabs and Accommodation to the Host Society,” *The Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko* 75, (2017), 143-176; Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening*, 23-24.

¹⁴ Leif Manger, *The Hadrami Diaspora: Community-Building on the Indian Ocean Rim* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 112.

¹⁵ Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 323.

their Ḥaḍramī identity are endogamy and the use of certain Arabic words.¹⁶ Endogamy is frequently regarded as an indicator of exclusivity in the Ḥaḍramī community, particularly among sayyids. This is connected to the *kafā'ah* issue. For this reason, sayyids commonly refuse or are hesitant to marry their daughters to non-sayyid men.

“All Saiyids are united on the issue of *kafā'ah*, eligibility in marriage. That is that they will never marry their daughters to anyone but a Saiyid or Sharif [...] Wherever they go, Saiyids seek to maintain their interpretation of *kafā'ah*.”¹⁷

Shahab emphasizes that the practise of endogamy can be beneficial in terms of maintaining ethnic identity. Thus, endogamy is an effort in Hadrami's private sphere to confirm their traditions without being interpreted as a form of group exclusivity in the public sphere.¹⁸ Endogamy is still the most common marriage practise among Ḥaḍramī in Indonesia.¹⁹ The issue of *kafā'ah* is actually rooted in the belief that the status of their lineage is connected to the Prophet Muhammad. The pride in the lineage stems from the belief that the blood of the Prophet flows in their veins, giving them a sense of superiority over those who do not. As a result, their social class appears to be elevated above those of other social classes, including Ḥaḍramī who are not sayyid or *ḥabib*. They frequently do positive amplification and exposure to this status through the media they have.²⁰ This is even recognized as a distinguishing feature of Ḥaḍramī literature, which tends to emphasize the pride of their lineage, which

¹⁶ Zeffry Alkatiri and Nabel A. Karim Hayaze, “Critical Literature Study on Habaib Identity in the Constellation of Islamic Studies in Indonesia from the Colonial Period to the Present,” *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 9, no. 1 (2022); Mona Abaza, “Markets of Faith: Jakartan Da'wa and Islamic Gentrification,” *Archipel* 87, (2004): 173-202; Husin Saifuddin Ahmad, “Trade Jargon Hadrami Arabic in Martapura: Arab Identity Maintenance and Allegiance,” *Khazanah* 4, no. 5 (2005): 470-486.

¹⁷ R. B. Serjeant, *The Saiyids of Hadramawt: An Inaugural Lecture* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies University of London, 1957), 21-23.

¹⁸ Yasmine Zaki Shahab, “Exploring Uniting Factor for Multiculturalism Policy: Portrait of Hadrami, Arab Community in Indonesia,” *International Conference on Social and Political Issues (The 1st ICSPI, 2016)*, in “Knowledge and Social Transformation,” *KnE Social Sciences* (2018): 650-680.

¹⁹ Frode F. Jacobsen, *Hadrami Arabs in Present-day Indonesia: An Indonesia-Oriented Group with an Arab Signature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 69.

²⁰ Kazuhiro Arai, “The Media, Saints and Sayyids in Contemporary Indonesia,” *Orient* 46, (2011): 51-72.

is connected not only to the sacred saints from among them, but also to the Messenger of God. Non-sayyid individuals or groups, on the other hand, are frequently reduced to “a faceless and nameless mass.”²¹ This assertion of nobility can also be interpreted as a trump card that ensures superiority in the face of religious authority.

This *habā'ib*-ness has rewarded the Ḥaḍramī sayyid group with privileges throughout the nation's long history.²² At the time, the Dutch East Indies was a promising migration destination because of discriminatory policies that gave a special place to foreign descendants, including Arabs, in the social and economic structure of society during the colonial era.²³ They were classified as Foreign Orientals (*vreemde oosterlingen*), alongside Chinese and other Asian minorities. Their social status exceeded that of native people or *inlanders*.²⁴ Some of them, such as Sayyid 'Uthmān and others, were given special positions in the colonial government structure,²⁵ although this was due to other factors as well, particularly the authority of religious knowledge.

During the period of independence, large pockets of traditional Muslims in Indonesia became a fertile ground for socio-religious and even political advancement for the *habā'ib*. As of now, traditionalist Muslims give them a high position and respect within their belief structure and religious traditions. In fact, the *habā'ib* are frequently elevated above local religious leaders (*kyais*). However, the Ḥaḍramī ethnicity is commonly perceived as closer to the source of Islam and thus regarded as more authentic in their understanding and practice of Islam. Besides, their recognition as relatives of the Prophet Muhammad makes them considered to bring blessings to their

²¹ Alexander Knysh, “The Sada in History: A Critical Essay on Hadrami Historiography,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 9, no. 2 (1999): 215-222.

²² Michael Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma below the Wind* (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 43.

²³ Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening*, 13-18.

²⁴ Motoki, “The Transformation of al-Irshad,” 143-176; Sumit K. Mandal, *Becoming Arab: Creole Histories and Modern Identity in the Malay World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 76.

²⁵ Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, “Pengantar: Nasihat-Nasihat Snouck sebagai Sumber Sejarah Zaman Penjajahan,” in *Nasihat-Nasihat C. Snouck Hurgronje Semasa Kepengawaiannya kepada Pemerintah Hindia Belanda 1889-1936*, vol. 1, ed. E. Gobebe & C. Adriaanse, trans. Sukarsi (Jakarta: INIS, 1990), 57; Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 141.

lovers.²⁶ Therefore, historically, Ḥaḍramī religious practises have not been free of cult or superstition,²⁷ moreover the socio-economic behavior of usury and rent-seeking among the Hadrami community which is actually contrary to Islamic teachings.²⁸

They gain advantages not only in terms of prominent social status, but also in terms of economic access and political power. As a result, the lineage claim is sometimes contested and disputed, like the old story about the struggle for lineage claim between the Zayd and ‘Awn families for Hijaz leadership in the nineteenth century. ‘Abd al-Muṭalib b. Ghālib asserts that Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Mu‘īn was not a *sharīf*, but came from a family whose lineage was not respected or *majhūl al-nasab*.²⁹ At this point, titles and designations used to indicate lineage distinctions, such as “sayyid” (referring to descendants of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī), *sharīf* (referring to descendants of Ḥasan b. ‘Alī)³⁰ or *ḥabīb*, are efforts to perpetuate social and even political class. The establishment of religious cultural practices like the Ḥaḍramī traditions of *majlis ta‘lim*, *majlis mawlid*, *ḥawl* and *ratib* reading has also contributed to the institutionalization of this asymmetrical structure. Such traditions are not only pious or religious expressions of those who claim to be the descendants of the Prophet, but also a tool for consolidating the privileges they have enjoyed for so long.

Political Representations

Although the construction of Ḥaḍramī culture in Indonesia has undergone adaptation and even reform, it cannot be said to have completely disappeared. Along with the claim of their lineage connected with the Prophet, they have preserved their culture, identity and privileges. The sayyid group, as revealed by van den Berg, has been considered to be at the top of the pyramid of social

²⁶ Syamsul Rijal, *Habaib dan Kontestasi Islam di Indonesia: Antara Menjaga Tradisi dan Otoritas* (Depok: LP3ES, 2022), 4.

²⁷ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century: Daily Life, Customs and Learning, the Moslems of the East-Indian-Archipelago*, trans. J. H. Monahan (Leiden: Late E. J. Brill Ltd., 1931), 96-97.

²⁸ La Ode Rabani and Artono, “Komunitas Arab: Kontinuitas dan Perubahannya di Kota Surabaya 1900-1942,” *Jurnal Masyarakat dan Budaya* 7, no. 2 (2005): 113-130.

²⁹ ‘Alī al-Wardī, *Qisṣat al-Asbrāf wa Ibn Su‘ūd* (London: Alwarrak Publishing Ltd., 2013), 48.

³⁰ Novel bin Muhammad Alaydrus, *Jalan Nan Lurus: Sekilas Pandang Tarekat Bani ‘Alawi* (Surakarta: Taman Ilmu, 2006), 19.

structure. For instance, their hands are kissed in public places by people to obtain blessings; they are always given special seats at banquets in recognition of their high status; and marriage between sayyid women and non-sayyid men is forbidden. Since the Arab Kapitein Shaykh ‘Umar Manqūsh refused to kiss the hand of Sayyid ‘Umar b. Sālim al-Atṭās, Aḥmad Sūrkatī’s fatwa appeared to justify the marriage of sayyidahs to non-sayyids;³¹ And the rise of the Irshadi who limited the use of the title sayyid only to Ḥaḍramī who claimed descent from the Prophet was inclusive to everyone who was respected,³² but the sentiment of superiority and the desire to enjoy privileges never died out. The remarks made by several *ḥabā’ib* during Jokowi’s era about the superiority and nobility of ignorant sayyids over non-sayyid educated (*‘ālim*) are not surprising when viewed through the lens of Ḥaḍramī culture among sayyids. In fact, it can be interpreted as confirmation that their belief in primordial stratification is correct and must be upheld and respected. This phenomenon appears to recall Sayyid ‘Uthmān’s understanding of *kaḥfū’ah*,³³ as well as Abdullah Dahlan’s belief in *tafaḍḍul ahl al-bayt* when responding to Aḥmad Sūrkatī’s belief in *musāwāh*.³⁴

It is acceptable for a certain individual or group to hold certain beliefs. They are free to think whatever they want, such as that they are better than other people. However, even a “Muslim aristocrat” will face accusations of haughtiness when this “noble” inequality is exposed to the public, particularly in a democratic country that upholds and ensures the equality of all citizens. Nonetheless, the society’s natural reaction to this haughtiness is considered normal. This seems to be the context for the denial of the Ba ‘Alawī’s genealogy by some Nahḍliyyīn intellectuals, who claim that it is invalid, disconnected, and rejected (*mardūd al-nasab*).³⁵ It is a reaction to the behavior of some *ḥabā’ib* who exalt themselves as better than others, particularly than local Muslims, only due to their lineage being connected to the Prophet Muhammad and his blood flows being in

³¹ Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening*, 92.

³² Ibid, 103-107. See also Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadramant* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2003), 255.

³³ Mandal, *Becoming Arab*, 195.

³⁴ Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening*, 96-97.

³⁵ Imaduddin Utsman al-Bantanie, *Terputusnya Nasab Habib kepada Nabi Muhammad Saw* (Banten: Maktabah Nahdlatul Ulum, 2023), 40.

their blood. Such a mindset and conduct are what the *ḥabā'ib* themselves acknowledge as improper.³⁶ In their refutation, the question is likely posed as follows: How can we truly practice equality if we actively promote inequality in our minds? If we secretly believe that social classes are predetermined based on race, nationality, gender and religion, how can we claim to value humanity?

One should take note of the incident involving Front Pembela Islam (FPI) group, which was led by Sayyid Ḥaḍramī and caused animosity among Indonesian Muslims.³⁷ In addition, in response to the impression of haughtiness on the part of some Ḥaḍramī sayyids who emphasize the specialness of their lineage, a discussion has been started regarding the veracity of the Ba 'Alawī family's lineage claims based on the study of genealogy (*'ilm al-nasab*) and philology, and there has even been a DNA tasting challenge—a challenge that might provoke a big question regarding their Indonesianness.³⁸ The Prophet said, “There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab nor for a non-Arab over an Arab. Neither is the white superior over the black, nor is the black superior over the white, except by piety.” Mark Woodward et al.'s study of the *da'wah* approach patterns of two Ḥaḍramī sayyids, namely Habib Syech through the Majelis Ta'lim, Zikir and Shalawat Ahbaabul Musthofa, and Habib Rizieq through FPI in building their religious authority among the people. Both of them can get quite militant supporters even though the packaging of their *da'wah* is relatively contradictory. The first emphasizes love of God, the Prophet Muhammad, his family and compassion for humanity, while the second emphasizes fear and hatred of those who are regarded as evil parties.³⁹ The reality has opened the eyes of the

³⁶ Alwi Alatas, “Sadah Ba'alawi dan Pemerintah Kolonial Belanda di Indonesia,” *Hidayatullah*, June 26, 2023, <https://hidayatullah.com/artikel/2023/06/26/253744/sadah-baalawi-dan-pemerintah-kolonial-belanda-di-indonesia.html>.

³⁷ Maurisa Zinira, “The Movement of Islamic Defenders Front and Its Socio-Political Influence on Indonesian Society,” *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, 5, no. 2 (2015).

³⁸ Chaider S. Bamualim, “Islamic Militancy and Resentment against Hadhramis in Post-Suharto Indonesia: A Case Study of Habib Rizieq Syihah and His Islamic Defenders Fronts,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 267-281.

³⁹ Mark Woodward, Inayah Rohmaniyah, Ali Amin and Samsul Maarif, “Ordering What is Right, Forbidding What is Wrong: Two Faces of Hadhrami Dakwah in

public that the internal group of *ḥabā'ib* is actually the source of divisions between the senior and junior, the preacher and the practical politicians and the Shia and Sunni *ḥabā'ib*.⁴⁰ The “political” sayyids are seen as playing a public communication strategy, both “driving” and “riding” the waves. They ignite and at the same time endorse and amplify certain issues. Even they act as “issue-owners”, not just taking advantage of issues that have emerged in the public domain.⁴¹

The *ḥabā'ib*'s religious political authority, however, does not grow in a cultural vacuum. If we pay attention, it cannot be ignored that, in addition to their religious knowledge, there also exists cultural capital, namely the status of their lineage, which the *ḥabā'ib* possess to gain and maintain the influence of their religious leadership among non-sayyid audiences. Although it must be acknowledged that some *ḥabā'ib* gain public recognition and have influence over people not by selling their status. M. Quraish Shihab is one of the most prominent examples which is proof that his religious authority is based more on intellectual capacity and moral integrity, not on claims of genealogical superiority. Nevertheless, there are also the *ḥabā'ib* who still make their claim to nobility as descendants of the Prophet to strengthen their influence. That is to say, there are at least two forms of social appointment in gaining religious authority. There is fertile ground for planting the seeds of their respective influences. On the one hand, it prioritizes aspects of appropriateness in the field of religious scholarship, while on the other hand it relies more on aspects of supremacy according to race, ethnicity or descent.

Seedbed Fertility

According to the results of surveys and interviews with several sources in Sidoarjo, East Java, who have NU and Muhammadiyah cultural backgrounds, it is found that there is a communal perception that *ḥabib* is a descendant of the Prophet. People pay respect to *ḥabā'ib* because of their lineage, besides their religious knowledge. This supports the view that the term *ḥabib* is related to his identity as

Contemporary Indonesia,” *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 46, no. 2 (2012): 105-46.

⁴⁰ Alkatiri and Hayaze, “Critical Literatur Study on Habaib,” 11.

⁴¹ Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar, “Riding the Wave and Claiming Ownership over Issues: The Joint Effects of Advertising and News Coverage in Campaigns,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 58, (1994): 335-357.

ahl al-bayt, descendants of the Prophet. Although some say that this respect does not mean that they have to give special treatment to those who are different from others, it is a fact that they give honorable status to *ḥabā'ib* on account of their lineage. The current reality is of course not like the indigenous Acehnese people in the past, as explained by Alfian,⁴² that the sayyids always had a high position in their midst. Sayyids were glorified as they are believed to be descendants of the Prophet. Even there were people who would like to give for their living, and their children also received this respect.

This cultural structure encourages us to elaborate on several concepts that may be relevant. This is not a causal justification, but rather an effort to identify factors that might contribute to fertilizing the soil for sowing the seeds of religious political authority that relies on ethnic, racial and hereditary sentiments. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a possibility that also hinders the growth of the seeds of religious political authority based more on the intellectual ability and integrity of the person concerned. These factors include *inlander* mentality, soft nation character, new feudalism, peripheral Islamic mindset, closed tradition of *tariqa*, cult of *ahl al-bayt*, saint veneration tradition and religious insecurity.

Under colonialism, the native people of the archipelago were placed at the lowest social strata. In this colonial era, social stratification was based more on a racial perspective rather than a religious one.⁴³ It also explains why the colonial government, when appointing officials to manage and bridge their interests with the Arab community, did not have to choose sayyid or *ḥabīb*. Hence, the social stratification in Hadhramaut was not completely copied verbatim in the archipelago. In this diaspora country, Ḥaḍramī from different social strata backgrounds equally had the opportunity to succeed in similar professions.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, this colonial segregation was certainly enjoyed more by social groups placed in higher strata than natives. Therefore, when Ḥaḍramī people felt superior and distinguished from native ethnic groups, they viewed native ones as

⁴² Ibrahim Alfian, *Perang di Jalan Allah: Perang Aceh 1873-1912* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1987), 52-53.

⁴³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 164-170.

⁴⁴ Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening*, 26-27.

inferior. Arab *mission civilisatrice* was intertwined with this pride in racial superiority.⁴⁵ The price that native Muslims had to pay then was a feeling of inferiority and lack of self-confidence when dealing with social groups that were regarded and validated by colonial authorities as higher and superior. The cultural resistance conducted by Tjokroaminoto not to bow to Europeans and choose to sit on an equal seat with colonial rulers was at the time an expression that the domestication of *inlander* mentality in the face of foreign groups is a historical fact.⁴⁶ Likewise, national movement figures rejected Ḥaḍramī leadership because of segregationist sentiments among them.⁴⁷

This *inlander* cultural mentality is certainly far from the cultural mentality described by Tome Pires in his *Suma Oriental*.⁴⁸ As for Javanese society, he asserts, “Do not make a gesture towards a Javanese from the navel upwards, nor make as if to touch its head; they kill for this.” They have a very high opinion of themselves as a fearless nation that does not fear death. At the level of nobility, they believe themselves to be incomparable. In the social stratification structure of local communities in Java during Majapahit and Demak Bintara eras, the majority of the population had indeed been accustomed to being social objects who must have obeyed those who had a higher caste or social class strata. This is a stretch of fertile land similar to that enjoyed by the sayyids in their hometown. In a new place, their position can be converted into the Brahmin or religious caste in the local structure of Javanese society.⁴⁹

The conversion to a sense of inferiority of the nation's people became the target of criticism by Soekarno. He considered it a change from the old Hindu-Buddhist feudalism pattern to the new Islamic feudalism pattern, which did not empower the lower classes of society.⁵⁰ This structure tames them and makes the nation less

⁴⁵ Sumit K. Mandal, “Natural Leaders of Native Muslims: Arab Ethnicity and Politics in Java Under Dutch Rule,” in *Hadrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s*, eds. Ulrike Freitag and William G. Clarence-Smith (New York: Brill, 1997), 194.

⁴⁶ H. O. S. Tjokroaminoto, *Islam dan Sosialisme* (Yogyakarta: Tride, 2003).

⁴⁷ Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening*, 32.

⁴⁸ Armando Cortesao, *The Summa Oriental of Tome Pires and the Book of Francisco Rodrigues*, vol. 1 (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1944), 175.

⁴⁹ Agus Sunyoto, *Atlas Wali Songo* (Tangerang: Pustaka IIMaN, 2016), 409.

⁵⁰ Soekarno. *Mentjapai Indonesia Merdeka*. Jakarta: Pentja, 1957.

resilient. This reality later also becomes the object of criticism from Myrdal by calling Indonesia a soft state where one of the root causes is unequal, inegalitarian social stratification. Even though education public increases, inequality remains.⁵¹

The relationships that have been built in society since the pre-colonial and colonial periods seem to confirm the thesis that there exists a structure of inferiority of local Muslims before migrant Muslims, creating an asymmetrical relationship that places local Muslims in a lower position than that of migrant Muslims from the Middle East or Hadhramaut. Local Muslims have low self-confidence when dealing with Muslim migrants from Hadhramaut. The perception of local Muslims that Indonesia is a “receiving” area of Islam places local Muslims in a peripheral category compared to the “carrying” area of Islam where migrant Muslims come from. The Middle East, which was positioned as the center, is then perceived as having the privilege of authority, superiority and also the purity of religiosity. Meanwhile, Islam in the archipelago is the part that is perceived otherwise.⁵²

Supported by colonial policies that legitimized the asymmetric pattern between Middle Eastern migrant Muslims and local Muslims in the Dutch East Indies era, the perception of religious inferiority seems to have been justified by manifestations of inequality in economic status and religious politics between them. These aspects also indicate that diversity within the Muslim community is not only a matter of differences in ethnicity and religious understanding, but also in the social and cultural hierarchy among Muslim communities owing to differences in ethnic and national backgrounds.⁵³ This aura of inferiority perception still seems to carry over to this day, which is called, in the words of Martin van Bruinessen, “the reluctance of Indonesian Muslims to seek the international limelight.”⁵⁴ Indonesian Muslims still like to be consumers of ideas produced in other

⁵¹ Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 35, 358 and 361.

⁵² Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakeing*, 23-24.

⁵³ Amika Wardana, “The Unequal *Umma*: Assessing the Muslim Relationship Form between Indonesians and Others,” *The First International Graduate Conference on Indonesia (IGSCI)*, Gadjah Mada University, December 1-2, 2009.

⁵⁴ Martin van Bruinessen, “Indonesian Muslims and Their Place in the Larger World of Islam,” *The 29th Indonesia Update Conference*, Australian National University, Canberra, September 30-October 2, 2011.

countries rather than exporting their ideas to teach Muslim brothers in other countries. The internationalization of Indonesian Islam as a form of expression that is different from that of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula still seems to be limited to sexy jargon, when in fact Indonesian Islam can arguably be the historical accomplishment of how Islam is presented as a worldview that maintains the diversity and authenticity of the Islamic mission which is a blessing for the world and humanity.

Another determinant that fosters the growth of the religious political authority of the Ḥaḍramī is *tariqa* tradition. In Islamic culture, it is known to practice a closed relationship between a master (*murshid*) and his pupil (*murīd*). Such a relationship is characterized by a very obedient attitude of the pupil to his master. Due to strict spiritual discipline and deep devotion, the influence of a *murshid*, especially one who is considered to have a miracle (*karāmah*), is very large. In a political context, the impact of mobilization by a charismatic *murshid* can be very surprising. Records of resistance during colonialism also show that some of the resistance were led by individuals educated in Sufi and *tariqa* tradition. One of the most prominent examples is the struggle of Prince Diponegoro accompanied by Maja who was the follower of the *Tariqa Shattariyah*.⁵⁵

Nico J. Kaptein concludes that the prejudices and concerns of the Dutch East Indies colonial government towards those who followed *tariqa* were stronger than towards the Arab community in general.⁵⁶ The appointment of Sayyid ‘Uthmān as their Advisor for Arab and Indigenous Affairs can be proof of this. It is known that he was a Ḥaḍramī intellectual figure who was critical of the practices of Sufism and *tariqa* in the Dutch East Indies. He saw a great deal of abuse and manipulation by the *murshid* against his pupils. Such exploitation is often economically oriented for the *murshid's* financial gain. However, due to the asymmetrical relationship structure, the pupils' subordination to the *murshid* puts the *murshid* in a position of having a political orientation and large influence on his followers. The *murshid's* followers' behavior can be considered irrational. Machasin

⁵⁵ Peter Carey, *The Power of Prophecy: Prince Dipanagara and the End of an Old Order in Java, 1785-1855* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2008), 111.

⁵⁶ Nico J. Kaptein, "Arabophobia and Tarekat: How Sayyud ‘Uthman Became Advisor to the Netherlands Colonial," in *The Hadrami Diaspora in Southeast Asia*, eds. Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk & Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2019), 44.

says, “There are always segments in society that are more inclined to irrational behavior and those who take advantage—involuntarily perhaps—of this inclination.”⁵⁷ From the history of Sayyid ‘Uthmān, it is understood that there are differences in the articulation of Sufism between local Muslims and Ḥaḍramī Muslims. The Ḥaḍramī community is known to have a tradition of ‘Alawīyah religious beliefs, which in Hadhramaut is attributed to the figure of ‘Alawī b. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā al-Muhājir.⁵⁸ However, the main characteristic in their religious tradition is that they still have closeness. It encompasses pupils’ respect for *murshid*, the glorification of the descendants of the Prophet or *abl al-bayt* and the tradition of worshipping saints. The current phenomenon, that is, the proliferation of saints’ tombs throughout the archipelago, especially in Java, seems inseparable from this tradition. There are always those who take advantage of this to deceive the public, such as the existence of fake tombs. The fruit of the evil practice of “grave x-rays” is carried out by irresponsible shamans.⁵⁹

A phenomenon that should not be ignored is feelings of threat or worry due to the presence of different or conflicting alternative religious groups or ideas. It is undeniable that the long history of religious interaction between traditionalist and modernist groups has been an example of the growth of the religious sentiment within the Muslim community in Indonesia. In Rijal’s study, due to the intensity of the transnational *da’wah* movement, it has been proven that religious insecurity in interactions between Islamic groups has not died out.⁶⁰ Interestingly, in this new landscape, the *haba’ib* group is able to adapt and even transform itself into a popular conservative force in defending the traditional religious style of Islam against rivals such as Salafī and other transnational groups, as well as Shia groups and liberal Muslims. In the new existing context, they can indeed gain

⁵⁷ Machasin, “Struggle for Authority: Between Formal Religious Institution and Informal-local Leader,” in *Varieties of Religious Authority: Changes and Challenges in 20th Century Indonesian Islam*, eds. Azyumardi Azra, Kees van Dijk, and Nico J. G. Kaptein (Singapore: ISEAS, 2010), 124.

⁵⁸ Munīr b. Sālim b. Sa’d Bazuhayr, *al-Tariqah al-‘Alawiyah al-Ḥaḍramiyah: Al-Nashab wa al-Imtidād* (Tarim: Maktābah Tarīm al-Ḥadīthah, 2014), 29.

⁵⁹ Imaduddin Uthman al-Bantani, “Ronsen Kuburan: Wali atau Dukun,” *RMI-NU Banten*, November 1, 2023, <https://rminubanten.or.id/ronsen-kuburan-wali-atau-dukun/>.

⁶⁰ Rijal, *Habaib dan Kontestasi Islam*, 174 and 254-255.

religious authority through the use of media, internet technology and popular culture. Nonetheless, the privilege of the title “*ḥabīb*” as cultural one undeniably has many social contributions. The seeding field for cultural influence as well as religious politics in Indonesia for Ḥaḍramī seems to be increasingly widespread and fertile in the landscape of the world’s new civilization today. “And the good land, its vegetation emerges by permission of its Lord; but that which is bad, nothing emerges except sparsely, with difficulty,” says the Quran.⁶¹

Indonesian-ness

The political-religious representation of *ḥabā’ib* does not appear instantly. The power of ideas, networks, culture, economics and politics are intertwined to support the landscape of this ethnic presence in the structure of the Indonesian nation. One of the keys to Hadrami success in the diaspora is the element of *aṣabīyah* among them, especially the sayyid group. Apart from the impression of exclusivity that appears, their insistence is not only on “the physical genealogy,” but also on “the spiritual genealogy” of the Tariqa ‘Alawīyah. The rigidity of principles as seen through the implementation of the concept of *kaḥfā’ah* for their daughters’ marriages can be accompanied with the flexibility of their polygynous practices with local women. Apart from that, the tradition of using family names also maintains their social and cultural identity. Likewise, there exist the factors of similar beliefs with local residents and their tendency to build Ḥaḍramī community or regionalization in diaspora places.⁶² It is said that “all Hadramis are brothers; they sincerely support each other and refer trustable third parties to fellow Hadramis.”⁶³ Culturally, these Ḥaḍramī people are relatively familiar with differences. According to the history of the Hadhramaut nation, there was a ceasefire agreement on civil conflict at the beginning of the twentieth century, with a number of signatures ranging from 1300 to 1400 representing interested parties. This is an indication of how

⁶¹ Q.S. al-A‘rāf [7]: 58.

⁶² Ulrike Freitag, “Reflections on the Longevity of the Hadrami Diaspora in the Indian Ocean,” in *The Hadrami Diaspora in Southeast Asia*, eds. Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk & Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009): 17-32.

⁶³ Mohammad Bahareth, *101 Hadrami Laws of Trade, Second Edition* (Jeddah: Kinde KDP, 2019), 38.

divided this country is into various tribes and interested parties.⁶⁴ This cultural capital certainly helps them when they are forced to adapt to the diversity in a new country such as the diverse archipelago. This confirms Leif Manger and Engseong Ho's statements regarding the adaptability of Ḥaḍramī migrants.

The cultural superiority has in turn made a major contribution to Indonesia as a nation and state. The involvement of the Ḥaḍramī community in the process of the birth of Indonesia cannot be denied. The historical momentum that gave birth to the phenomenon of the Ḥaḍramī revival (*nabḍah al-Ḥaḍramiyah*), with at least three social institutions that were developed, namely organizations (*jam'iyah*), modern schools (*madrasah*) and publishing (*jarīdah*)⁶⁵ is a fact of their presence in the history of Indonesia. These participation and contribution steps should continue and be directed at strengthening national awareness of unity in diversity. The Ḥaḍramī community must be an important part of strengthening cosmopolitan culture, where Indonesian society is one in harmony with solidity through mutual trust, solidarity in the face of injustice and the development of morality as well as civilized values based on Pancasila.

Indonesia is a country that does deny perpetuating structures that favor certain groups because of their ethnic background or biological lineage. The glorification of ethnicity and lineage should no longer pollute the public space of the nation and state. Nowadays, it is no longer the era of Dutch colonialism which indulged certain ethnic groups through a discriminatory social structure. In a country that was not built on the basis of the conquest of one ethnic group over another, one religion over another religion or one lineage over another lineage, the history of conflict and differences in religious views as has occurred between two Ḥaḍramī groups—namely the 'Alawīyīn who are concentrated in Jamī'at Khayr and non-'Alawīyīn who consolidate themselves in al-Irshād⁶⁶—has to stop, and they

⁶⁴ W. H. Ingrams, "The Exploration of the Aden Protectorate," *Geographical Review* 28, no. 4 (1938): 638-651.

⁶⁵ Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, "The Arab Periodicals of the Netherlands East Indies, 1914-1942," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 152, no. 2 (1996): 236-256. See also Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening*, 52.

⁶⁶ 'Alī b. Muḥsin al-Saqāf, *al-Istidbādah min Akhbār al-Sādah* (Oman: Dā'irah al-Maktabah al-Waṭaniyah, 2009), 1370-1392; Saqāf 'Alī al-Kāf, *Ḥaḍramawt: 'Abr Arba'ah Ashr Qarnan* (Beirut: Maktabah Usāmah, 1990), 120-126.

should complete their Indonesian identity as equal children of the nation.

Indonesia, especially Islam in Indonesia, must be a friendly home for existing diversity. Various thoughts and beliefs will still have free space to be discussed. All of this must be placed as a pillar that supports unity as one nation. The aim is certainly not to create a new aristocracy class justified by primordial or traditional sectarian claims, but to foster a democratic and progressive egalitarian society. The national and state lessons of two Indonesian Muslim intellectuals from Jombang, East Java, namely Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid) and Cak Nur (Nurcholis Madjid), should be used as an enlightening source on how differences in religious views must still be subordinated to the common great ideals of the Indonesian nation.⁶⁷ The peaceful, culturally friendly, non-political, and moderate characters of Indonesian Islam⁶⁸ should remain a common platform for diversity and religious life in this country. All forms of extremity, including those cloaked in Islamic religious ideology, are seeds that must not be allowed to grow in and poison this nation.

Conclusion

There are intrinsic factors in the cultural and religious structure of this nation that are not only compatible but immensely conducive for *habā'ib* with the privilege of having a noble lineage and Islamic knowledge to develop their religious political authority. Definitely, their religious and political representation does not materialize overnight. The presence of the Ḥaḍramī people in the composition of the Indonesian nation is supported by the interwoven strength of ideas, networks, culture, economics and politics.

With all the advantages they have, it is believed that *habā'ib* will continue to contribute and play important roles in the development of Islam in Indonesia. Anybody is entitled to participate in the current religious market, regardless of which Islamic categorization boxes

⁶⁷ Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Defining Indonesian Islam: An Examination of the Construction of the National Islamic Identity of Traditionalist and Modernist Muslims," in *Islam in Indonesia: Contrasting Images and Interpretations*, eds. Jajat Burhanudin & Kees van Dijk (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013): 25-47.

⁶⁸ Azyumardi Azra, "Distinguishing Indonesian Islam: Some Lessons to Learn," in *Islam in Indonesia: Contrasting Images and Interpretations*, eds. Jajat Burhanudin & Kees van Dijk (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013): 63-74.

these *habā'ib* fall into, provided that their religious expression does not undermine the cohesiveness of this country. The struggle for religious dominance in politics is but one of many possible arenas.

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