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The Polemic of *Nasab* and the Degradation of Habib's Religious Authority in Contemporary Indonesia

Sambirang Ahmadi
Pascasarjana Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia
ahmadisambirang@gmail.com

Fahrurrozi
Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia
fahrurrozi@uinmataram.ac.id

Abdul Wahid
Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia
abdulwahid@uinmataram.ac.id

Amir Aziz
Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia
ahmadamiraziz@uinmataram.ac.id

Adibah Sulaiman
adibah@usim.edu.my
University Sains Islam Malyasia

Abstract

This article examines the contemporary polemic surrounding the genealogy (*nasab*) of *habaib* in Indonesia and its implications for the transformation of religious authority in the digital age. The controversy was triggered by Imaduddin's study, which questioned the genealogical connection of *habaib* to the Prophet Muhammad, thereby challenging their status as *zurriyat*. As this issue circulated widely through digital media, it generated intense and contested public debates among Indonesian Muslims. Employing a netnographic approach, this study traces the dynamics of the genealogy polemic through online interactions across social media platforms, digital forums, and online sites. Data were collected through virtual participant observation, systematic documentation of online discussions, and qualitative content analysis of both supportive and opposing narratives. The findings indicate that, *first*, digital spaces have become primary arenas for negotiating and contesting religious authority and legitimacy; *second*, new media are strategically utilized to deconstruct the symbolic authority of *habaib* through discourses questioning the continuity of their lineage with the Prophet Muhammad; and *third*, the genealogy polemic is closely linked to political polarization since the Jakarta gubernatorial election and the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, which intensified ideological fragmentation between segments of *Nahdlatul Ulama* clerics and *habaib* in their views on the relationship between Islam and democracy. This article concludes that the genealogy polemic is not merely a genealogical dispute but reflects a broader process of reconfiguration of Islamic authority under conditions of digital mediatization and political fragmentation. By demonstrating how online platforms reshape religious legitimacy and public trust, this study contributes to wider debates on the transformation of authority and political polarization in contemporary digital Muslim societies.

Keywords: authority, ba'alawi Habib, *nasab* , netnogarfi, polemic

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji polemik kontemporer mengenai nasab habaib di Indonesia serta implikasinya terhadap transformasi otoritas keagamaan di era digital. Kontroversi ini dipicu oleh kajian maduddin yang mempertanyakan keterhubungan nasab habaib dengan Nabi Muhammad SAW, sehingga menguji status mereka sebagai zurriyat. Seiring dengan meluasnya sirkulasi isu ini melalui media digital, perdebatan publik yang intens dan kontestatif pun berkembang di kalangan umat Islam Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan netnografi, penelitian ini menelusuri dinamika polemik nasab melalui interaksi daring pada berbagai platform media sosial, forum digital, dan situs daring. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif virtual, dokumentasi sistematis terhadap diskusi daring, serta analisis konten kualitatif terhadap narasi-narasi yang berkembang, baik yang mendukung maupun menentang. Hasil penelitian

menunjukkan bahwa: pertama, ruang digital telah menjadi arena utama negosiasi dan kontestasi otoritas serta legitimasi keagamaan; kedua, media baru dimanfaatkan sebagai sarana untuk mendekonstruksi otoritas simbolik habaib melalui wacana ketidaktersambungan nasab mereka dengan Nabi Muhammad SAW; dan ketiga, polemik nasab memiliki keterkaitan erat dengan polarisasi politik pasca Pilkada DKI Jakarta serta Pemilihan Presiden 2014 dan 2019, yang memperkuat fragmentasi ideologis antara sebagian kiai Nahdlatul Ulama dan habaib dalam memandang relasi antara Islam dan demokrasi. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa polemik nasab tidak semata-mata merupakan sengketa genealogis, melainkan merefleksikan proses rekonfigurasi otoritas Islam dalam konteks mediatiasi digital dan fragmentasi politik. Dengan menunjukkan bagaimana platform daring membentuk ulang legitimasi keagamaan dan kepercayaan publik, studi ini berkontribusi pada perdebatan yang lebih luas mengenai transformasi otoritas dan polarisasi politik dalam masyarakat Muslim digital kontemporer.

Katakunci: Authority, Habib ba'alawi, nasab , netnogarfi, polemic

Introduction

Historically, *habib* authority in Indonesia was built on a foundation that was genealogical and elitist. In the context of traditional Muslim societies (grassroots *Nahdliyin*), these structures are not only recognized but also receive preferential treatment in the form of symbolic and social respect (Rijal, 2020a). But lately, the configuration of the authority has faced serious challenges when dealing with the digital media ecosystem. Social media platforms work through algorithmic mechanisms that emphasize visibility, public engagement, and the dynamics of the netizens' market that tend to be populist and prioritize mass excitement (McMullan, 2020; Yujie et al., 2022).

In the digital space, authority is no longer entirely determined by lineage but rather by the actor's ability to produce narratives, mobilize audiences, and leverage platform infrastructure. As a result, digital media has become an instrument used by various parties to affirm, sue, and even deconstruct the claims of *nasab habib*. The polemic about genealogical validity, which was previously relatively stable in the traditional social space, is now disrupted and open to wide debate by the public in the digital world.

The polemic of *nasab habaib* in Indonesia that emerged through the study of Imaduddin cannot be understood solely as a genealogical debate within the framework of classical *nasab* science. Rather, it is a socio-religious phenomenon that reflects the transformation of Islamic authority in the digital media era. This debate arises as the "mediatization" of religion through digital platforms by

various actors increases. Where the production and distribution of religious discourse are no longer monopolized by traditional institutions or authorities such as *Rabithah Alawiyah* and the *Habibs* but is open to various actors with diverse backgrounds, even groups that oppose the validity of the *nasab habaib* (Stuart, 2021; Zaluchu, 2024).

Heidi Campbell and Gary Bunt explained that the relationship between religion and digital media as a new social space is dynamic. Through the concept of digital religion, Campbell explained that the presence of religion in the digital world is not just a process of migrating religious practices into a technological medium (Campbell, 2010), but it is also a transformation that involves negotiations between traditional values and the logic of modern technology. Furthermore, Campbell explained that the boundaries between online and offline spaces are becoming increasingly blurred, so digital religious practices remain closely connected to religious life in the real world (Campbell, 2020).

Gary Bunt explained the phenomenon of digital religion in Islam can be called "*cyber Islamic environments*"; which became an arena for the contestation of various religious discourses (Setia, 2022; Starrett, 2007). The Internet does not only expand the reach of da'wah and communication of the people but it also creates new spaces for the production, distribution, and legitimacy of Islamic knowledge (Christensen, 2021; Colby, 2003). In the context of the *nasab* polemic, Bunt's idea can be used to see how digital media is used by various groups, both anti-habaib and pro-habaib. Cyberspace is the main locus of debate on the polemic of *nasab habaib*. It should be noted that digital media is not a neutral entity, but rather a space that actively shapes and is shaped by the practice and contestation of religious discourse. As Bunt said, digital media is the locus of authority and power contestation in Islamic digital culture (Bunt, 2018a, 2018b); (Afriansyah, 2021).

Through the digital space, the issue of *nasab* undergoes *a reframing* process with virality mechanisms, platform algorithms, and digital economic logic. Content related to *nasab* polemics is often packaged in a sensational, partial, and controversial format. So as to encourage the simplification of academic issues into narratives of identity conflict and symbolic delegitimization. As a result, scientific discourse that should take place methodologically and dialogically has been distorted into a digital public debate that is emotional and tends to be polaristic (Starrett, 2007).

This polemic also reflects the shift in the structure of religious authority in Indonesian Muslim society. Religious authority, which was previously built through scientific competence, genealogical legitimacy (*nasab*), and institutional networks, is now increasingly influenced by digital capital, such as visibility, number of followers, and audience engagement levels. In this regard, *nasab* is no longer solely positioned as a source of religious legitimacy but becomes an object of contestation in the arena of competitive digital discourse. This phenomenon shows the transformation from traditional authority to *digitally mediated authority* (Auction, 2023; Schäfer, 2019).

The emergence of *nasab* polemics shows the increasing critical power of the Muslim community towards religious figures. This is in line with the strengthening of the verification culture and public skepticism. For example, many Muslims criticize the content of the da'wah of the *habaib*, which over-the-top their *nasab* and over-worship their ancestors. The main consequence of this polemic is the erosion of symbolic legitimacy against the religious authority of the *habaib*, which historically has had a central position in the Islamic tradition in Indonesia, especially among *the Javanese Nahdliyin*.

In addition, the *nasab* polemic also produces various negative excesses in the social relations of Muslims. The fragmentation of identity between indigenous (archipelago) and *Ba'alawi* (Yemen) is getting stronger. In this *nasab* polemic issue, there is a discursive practice that contains elements of hate speech, stigmatization, and personal delegitimization between pro and con groups. Furthermore, this polemic also shows the tendency to instrumentalize religious discourse in the context of identity politics. Thus, the issue of nasab polemics in Indonesia represents the relational dynamics between religion, media, and power in contemporary Muslim society. This phenomenon reflects an epistemic transformation in the production of Islamic knowledge, a shift in the pattern of legitimacy of religious authority, and the increasing role of digital media in shaping public consciousness.

Studies on *Habaib* have been carried out by many Indonesian scholars. Studies on the phenomenon of *Habaib da'wah*, pop culture, urban society, and commodification, for example, have been studied by Syamsun Rijal, Jamil, and Saepudin (2018) . Meanwhile, Susanto, Rosyid, Yun Masfullah, and Faizin wrote about the development of da'wah and the Shalawat movement of habaib, both in traditional and urban communities (Muhammad Luqman Faizin, 2017). The study of *Habib Da'wah*, especially digital Da'wah such as Youtube, was studied by Badruzzaman, Ali Mursyid, and Yun Musfifah. Meanwhile, Ahmad, Sholihah, and

Amarulli studied the haul tradition of the Habaib in Indonesia (Saepudin, 2018; Yun Masfufah, 2019). There is also a study on the relationship between *Habib* and politics, especially how the role of Rizieq in the dynamics of Indonesian politics is written by Pramono and Bamuallim (Bamualim, 2011). The study of tariqah alawiya, the dream of the wali, and how habaib ba'alawai transforms itself in the Indonesian narrative is widely reviewed in the works of Ismail Fajrie Alatas (I. F. Alatas, 2011, 2021).

Different from previous studies, this article seeks to highlight the *mediatization* and sociological dimensions of the controversy of *nasab habaib*. This study tries to examine how the polemic *nasab* transformed into public discourse through the *new media ecosystem.* In this context, this study highlights how framing the issue of *nasab* polemics on Facebook, online media, and YouTube amplifies discourse, public polarization, and symbolic delegitimization of *habaib* authority. Although such degradation is not always directly proportional to the reality of their authority in the offline social space. This focus allows the article to show that the polemic of nasab is not only a question of the authenticity of lineage, but also a new arena for the struggle for religious legitimacy in the contemporary digital Islamic landscape in Indonesia.

Amplification of *Nasab Habib*'s Polemic in *New Media*

Today, the internet has become an integral part of people's daily lives. Therefore, the internet is a window into seeing the portrait of people's social life and is a cultural artifact (Hine, 2012; Lefebvre, 2015). Furthermore, the presence of new media gives birth to a new public space in the lives of Muslims (Akmaliah, 2020). The new media culture also opens up access for Muslims to appear as agencies in the global online communication network, which gains freedom of thought, religion, and expression (Jinan, 2012). In the Indonesian context, new media has become an alternative space that is used in political and religious issues, such as Aksi 212 or 411 in the case of the Jakarta regional elections (Zahara, 2020). Social and political agencies have made religious issues a propaganda instrument that is massively disseminated through the new media to defeat Ahok in the case of the Jakarta gubernatorial election (Bamualim, 2011; Hidayat et al., 2023; Pramono, 2018). In this regard, the polemic of the Nasab Habaib in Indonesia has also experienced mediatization through social media, websites, and YouTube.

This article limits its discussion to some information available on Facebook, websites, and YouTube channels. These three flatforms were chosen because they are the main place to produce content about the polemic of the Nasab Habaib in Idonesia's digital spaces. In tracking the nasab habaib polemic in the digital space, this article found a Facebook group called "Nasab Study," 10 online media sites/websites, and 42 YouTube channels that routinely contain nasab polemic content, for examples, Duta Islam, RMI-NU Banten, Nahdlatul Ulama.com, Orbitindonesia.com, Anekafakta.com, Alif.id, Mahabbatuna.id, and others. These platforms not only serve as channels for disseminating information but also as an arena for articulating opinions, interpretations, and public debates involving a wide range of religious, intellectual, and public actors.

In the dynamics of this discourse, habaib authority is represented through three main patterns, namely as an object of criticism, defense, and symbolic legitimacy. Some media contain critical narratives that question the validity of nasab , moral consistency, and the social relevance of habaib in the context of Indonesian Muslim society, thus encouraging the deconstruction of traditional authority. At the same time, these media also provide space for defensive narratives that affirm the importance of nasab as a source of historical and spiritual legitimacy and place habaib as the guardian of Islamic traditions. In addition, a number of articles and opinions explicitly praise the role of habaib in da'wah, education, and the formation of the ummah, which serve to reproduce symbolic capital and strengthen their position in the religious hierarchy. The structure of the discourse map on the issue of the nasab polemic issue published in several online media can be seen in the picture below:



The image above explains the dynamics of the flow of discourse related to *nasab* and *habaib* authority, which has undergone significant transformation in the digital era. In the early stages, the discourse departs from traditional authorities, namely *habib* figures or scholars who historically have genealogical, scientific, and cultural legitimacy. However, in the digital space, discourse is no longer single, but fragmented through various types of media. *First*, the media-ideologue. This media usually reinforces the positions of certain groups (the pros and cons) with narratives that tend to be affirmative and defensive. *Second*, alternative media. It plays a role in amplifying conflict through the logic of virality, sensationalism, and algorithms that encourage emotional engagement. *Third*, mainstream and cultural media. This media tries to present moderation by reinterpreting discourse in a more balanced and contextual way.

Several YouTube channels regularly discuss the issue of lineage, both pro such as Wafi Responds, Ahbaabul Musthofa, and Islamic Brotherhood TV and contra-lineage, Fort Nusantara, Arya, and Aziz Jazuli, Lc. MH. This article confirms that the polemic of *nasab habaib* has undergone a process of *mediatization of religion*, namely the transformation of religious practices, discourse, and authority through the logic of digital media (Yujie et al., 2022). In this context, debates about *nasab* no longer only take place in traditional authoritative spaces such as Islamic boarding schools and seminars but are mediated by platform algorithms, visual content, and virality culture. These issues developed in response to the symbolic dominance of *habaib* and served as a mechanism for renegotiating Islamic identity in Indonesian Muslim society (Muzayana, 2023).

In the framework of mediatization, the logic of the media influences the way the issue of *nasab* is represented and debated. Content that raises the superiority of indigenous Muslims, the genealogical delegitimization of *habaib*, and the reinterpretation of Islamic history is often packaged in a persuasive and sensational form to attract the attention of the audience (Gary R. Bunt, 2022; Slama & Hoesterey, 2021). New media functions as *a framing device* that deconstructs the meaning of *habaib* authority. Within this framework, *Habaib* is no longer positioned solely as a tradition-based authoritative figure but as a discursive actor who continues to maintain his legitimacy through claims to be a descendant of the prophet.

One of the criticisms that is quite harsh against the *nasab* and authority of *habib*, for example, comes from Gus Fuad Flered's YouTube channel. Fuad led the discourse that the status of the *Ba'alawi* clan became *a "public enemy."* This

case shows that the validity of genealogical claims in the digital era is challenged through scientific verification tests through historical, philological, and genetic approaches. For example, according to Gus Fuad, DNA test results show that the majority of *Ba'alwi* clan members are in Haplogroup G. Genetically, this profile shows a connection with the population in the region associated with Jewish ancestry (Roudhoh, 2023). Meanwhile, the YouTube channel Pamitnya Ngantor (Rumail Abbas), which is pro-Habaib, presented a fairly argumentative review in refuting the cancelers of nasab Ba'alawi. In a video, Abbas criticized the methods of those who tried to nullify the *Nasab* of Ba'alawi by dishonestly cutting out literary quotations. He highlighted how statements from the book Ar-Raudul Jali by Murtadha az-Zabidi are often misunderstood because of the disregard for the possibility of other manuscripts belonging to Al-Ubaidili that have not been accessed. Through the verification of various manuscripts, Rumail Abbas emphasized that great scholars such as az-Zabidi explicitly acknowledged the identity of Ba'Alawi as a descendant of the Prophet. Furthermore, Abbas emphasized the importance of maintaining the scientific integrity of the historiographic study of Ahmad bin Isa's migration from Basrah to Yemen.

Resistance to the Religious Authority of *Habaib*

In the 19th century, the emigration of the Hadrami people increased dramatically to Southeast Asia, including to Indonesia, due to various factors (Feener, 2004). Some of them are the increasing transportation and economic networks in the Indian Ocean due to the increasing hegemony of the British, political instability in the area of origin of the emigrants, and the difficult natural conditions that make agriculture difficult (Brehony, 2017). In addition, the majority of Yemeni immigrants (*habib*) remain in touch with their families in Hadramaut and wish to return someday. However, some choose to live and have families in the destination land, for example, like many *habibs* in Indonesia (Burhanudin, 2014).

Respect for *Habaib* in Indonesia is very strong in the tradition of NU's followers. The reverence arose because it was based on Islamic religious texts, such as the Qur'an, hadith, and *qaul* ulama', which explain the virtue of glorifying the descendants of the Prophet. These texts are narrated repeatedly by the habaib, kiai, and ulama, then received by the Muslim ummah, thus forming a habitus of respect for habaib (Rijal, 2020a). *The status of Que* habaib in Indonesia was institutionalized through Rabithah Awaliyah (founded in 1928) through *the institution of Maktab Daimi*, which is the institution that records the

descendants of *the Alawiyyin* in Indonesia. The descendants of Alawi bin Ubaidillah bin Al Imam Ahmad Al Muhajir (the grandfather of the Indonesian habaib) consist of 114 clans with a total of about 1.2 million people in Indonesia (Warnk, 2011).

With the status of being a descendant of the prophet, the *Habaib* occupy a high social class in the social structure of Indonesian Muslim society (Arai, 2017; Kazuhiro, 2012). The relationship of the indigenous Muslim community with *habaib* can be seen in the *kawula-gusti* pattern. The social segregation created by the colonials against the ethnicities in Indonesia seems to be perpetuated by *habaib*, because they have a special village called *Pekojan;* even the Ba'alawi are not allowed to marry the natives because they are considered not "*sekufu"* (Jihan Amaruli, 2016). However, along with the emergence of the nasab polemic, some NU circles began to doubt the status of *habib* as *the zurriyat* of the apostle. This doubt is massively amplified by some circles and amplified through new media, such as Facebook, YouTube, and websites.

Based on online observations, the content of *nasab* polemics in the digital space mostly occurs among Nahdlatul Ulama followers. In resolving this polemic, they were divided into two groups: supporters of Imaduddin and supporters of *habaib*. There are at least several factors that trigger doubts about the validity of the *nasab* Ba'alawi. Such as the emergence of *habib* individuals who glorify their fate excessively. They feel superior and more special than *Bani Jawi*. In fact, some *habaib* circles in the lecture demean the kiai of the archipelago and curse the government. Therefore, there was resistance from the cultural NU group to this arbitrary attitude. The resistance agenda of the NU kai-kiai aims to invite indigenous Muslims to stop being "slaves" of Yemeni immigrants (*Habaib*). The names who pioneered this movement are Imaddudin, Gus Fuad Plered, Abbas Buntet, Syarif Rahmat, Yusuf Al-Mubarok, KIhyak, Hanif, Gus ADHA, Teungku Jauhar, Lubis, and others (Riyadi, 2023).



Gus Abbas Buntet Cirebon Terbaru " TEGAS BONGKAR KEPALSUAN HABIB BA'ALAW



TEMBUS BATAS TRADISI‼️KH. SYARIF RAHMAT Nasab Harus Dibuktikan, Bukan



BISIKAN RHOMA # 143: KH NUR IHYA: KALO DI 5 KITAB INI ADA NAMA ALWI BIN UBAIDILLAH SAYA AKAN NYERAH!



Kyai Yusuf Banten: Kitab Syajarotul Mubarokah Menolak Nasab Ba'alawi Dzuriyyat

The kiai showed a critical attitude towards Habaib individuals in order to defend the dignity of the *Kiai-Kiai Nusantara* and the indigenous people of Islam. Thus, the Imaduddin Cs movement aims to make the indigenous people of Islam aware of the fact that they are not colonized by the doctrines of Habaib whose fate is still doubtful. K.H. Yusuf Al-mubarok, for example, stated:

> *"Enough of the Dutch colonizing us, no longer can those who refer to the grandson of the Prophet colonize us. If there are habibs who are too arrogant who claim to have the blood of the apostle flowing in their bodies, then he curses others at will, then he must be resisted, even expelled from Indonesia."*

Challenges to *the status of que nasab habaib* also arise from two descendant registration institutions, namely *Naqobah Ansab Auliya' Tis'ah* (NAAT) and *Salatin Asyraf Azzahro*. These two institutions were established by the descendants of the prophet through the Walisongo route and the Islamic sultanates in the archipelago. The presence of these two institutions can be read as a challenge to the authority of *the Daimi maktabah,* which has been monopolizing the recording and ratification of the descendants of the prophet in Indonesia. In response to the two institutions, the Alawiyah Rabithat did not acknowledge the authority of the institution in recording the dzuriyat of the prophet (Amaruli et al., 2022; Jihan Amaruli, 2016) *Saadatu al-asyraf.* At this point, it can be seen how the claim of the validity of the *nasab* occurred between the Ba'alawi clan (Yemen) versus the Jawi (the Wali Songo clan).

According to Imaduddin, in an effort to verify the nasab of the Alawiyyah Rabitah institution, it only relies on genealogical books written by scholars whose truth is not valid. Imaduddin emphasized that *the majhul* of the connection of the Ba'alawi *nasab* (descendants of Alawi) based on the data in the

book of *nasab* has never been answered by the RA institution. Imad's criticism through the study of the *nasab* books dismantles the establishment of the nasab habaib, which has been considered final. In fact, according to Imam, the *nasab* ba'alawi is performed through dreams, not scientific evidence (Imaduddin Albantani, 2023); (Nurul Azizah, 2023).

Abbas Buntet, one of the NU's Kiai who criticizes the political orientation of some Ba'alawi figures. In his view, *habaib* political affiliation in Indonesian elections and regional elections cannot be separated from the strategy of reproducing social influence through support for certain candidates who are considered able to accommodate their interests. The political support is an effort to maintain and expand *nasab* -based symbolic capital in the arena of power. In addition, the association of some habaib with transnational ideology is an indicator of a political orientation that is not entirely in line with the framework of Indonesian nationalism. Gus Abbas's criticism shows that the *nasab* polemic has gone beyond the theological and cultural realms and entered a wider area of ideological and political contestation (Bamualim, 2011; Hidayat et al., 2023).

In a broader framework, Gus Abbas's call for the "independence" of the indigenous Muslims from the influence of Habaib represents an effort to reconstruct Islamic identity based on equality and epistemic autonomy. This discourse serves as a symbolic strategy to deconstruct the religious hierarchy that is considered "feudal" and opens up space for the redistribution of religious authority. However, at the same time, the emancipatory narrative also has the potential to produce new ethnic-based polarization, which can strengthen the internal fragmentation of Indonesian Muslims, especially among the NU. Therefore, Gus Abbas's criticism not only reflects resistance to the symbolic dominance of habaib but also shows the complexity of the relationship between religion, identity, and politics in contemporary Indonesian Muslim society.

Bani Alawi versus *Bani Jawi*: Contesting Genealogical Authority between the Descendants of the *Wali Songo* and the Hadrami-Yemeni Lineage

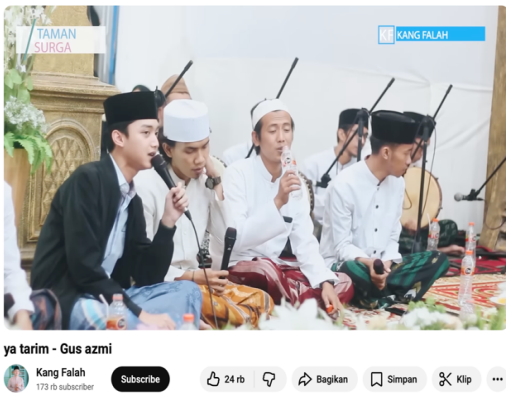
The controversy over the *nasab habaib* was quickly channeled through online sites and new media. As a result, this polemic expanded and gave rise to other derivative issues. One of the issues that arises is "the Bani Alawi versus the Bani Jawi". This phrase appears on a number of YouTube channels, especially on the Manacem Ali YouTube channel and the Guru Gembul YouTube account. The feud between these two camps gave rise to racial sentiments: *Pribumi-Indonesia versus Yemeni Immigrants (Roudhoh, 2023)*.





Based on online findings, the Jawi people consider that there is an effort to "Ba'alawisasi" the historical narrative of Indonesia. For example, Hasan Muhdor said, "Indonesia *bintu* Tarim"; Indonesia (the island of Java) belongs to the *auliya' Tarim*. In fact, there is a qasidah, "*Ya Tarim,*" which contains praises for the city of Tarim as the city of the guardians. This Qasidah in particular also praises the scholars from the *Ba'alawi* clan who are claimed to have contributed greatly to da'wah in Indonesia. On the YouTube platform, this qasidah has become very popular, covered by many circles. Especially by students from the *Nahdlyin circle*. But recently, from anti-Habib circles, several videos have also emerged that refute this claim, for example, in the accounts of YouTube misteri.realita and Misbahudin Tegal. These two accounts deny the content of the *qasidah*.





Along with that, the trend of Indonesian students to continue their studies in Tarim, Yemen is growing. There are thousands of Indonesian students studying at Al-Ahgaff University, Darul Musthafa, and Ribath Tarim University.

This shows that *the influence of the Yemeni connection* is expanding in Indonesia and further strengthens the religious authority of the habaib in Indonesia (Rijal, 2020b).

In the historical context, the Habibs who were initially present in the Dutch East Indies initially had uncertainty; on the one hand, they needed to maintain their identity as prominent Hadramaut Arabs. But on the other hand, they clash with culture and the need to merge into Indonesia. In this uncertainty, reformist and nationalist Islamic ideas began to influence young people of Arab descent in Indonesia. Some of the Hadresmi Arabs, one of whom was Ahmad Surkati, founded the Al Irsyad organization in 1914. This organization is a forum for the aspirations of Arabs, both Sayyid and non-Sayyid. "These reformist Arabs stated that there was no longer any pure blood of Habib; all that existed now was Peranakan (*muwallad*)," explained Muhammad Iqbal Syauqi in *Contesting the Influence of the Habaib and Arab Hadrami in Indonesia* (De Jonge, 2021; Talib, 2023).

According to Iqbal, this statement is quite promising and seems to be a kind of power struggle among the descendants of the Arabs of Hadrami. Equality between Arabs, he explained, is one of the most vocal issues. In the current of nationalism, Iqbal said that the Hadrami people also founded the Indonesian Arab Association (PAI) in 1934, which tried to include Arabs with the national movement, becoming a party (Miftahuddin, 2017).

The legalization of Indonesia's historical narrative also occurred in determining the date of Indonesia's proclamation of independence. According to some *habaib* circles, the originator of the 17th as the date of the proclamation was Ali of Kwitang. Ali claimed to be the one who whispered to Soekarno to proclaim Indonesia's independence on August 17, 1945. This is as published on the *Ahlussunnah waljama'ah* YouTube channel. This discourse then received a response from anti-Habib circles; they tried to refute the claim on many YouTube channels, one of which was through the Hasan Channel135 account:





Ba'alawi is also considered to distort the history of NU. According to Luthfi, Hasyim Asy'ari asked for guidance from two figures when he wanted to establish NU, namely Hasyim bin Yahya and Kholil Bangkalan. This narrative is different from the narrative of As'ad Syamsul Arifin, which has been familiar to *Nahdliyin*. As'ad Syamsul Arifin's version, Hasyim Asy'ari, only asked permission from Kholil Bangkalan. Therefore, according to Syarif, there is an effort to obscure the history of NU by highlighting the role of *Habaib*. Therefore, Luthfi is considered to distort the history of the establishment of NU (Riyadi, 2023).



The *Bani Jawi* also oppose the narrative of "Indonesia bintu Tarim." The phrase is considered to hurt the feelings of the indigenous people of Indonesia. Therefore, a number of cultural NU kiai strengthen the narrative of the revival of indigenous Muslims on YouTube channels. This jargon is campaigned through content that contains the role of the archipelago's scholars in Islamic da'wah, the national revolution, and nation building. On the other hand, the *Jawi* people exposed Usman bin Yahya's conspiracy with the Dutch colonialists, such as his collaboration with Snouck Hurgrounje and his appointment as mufti of Batavia by the Dutch, and his prayer offering to Queen Wilhelmina (Abushouk, 2014; Abushouk & Ibrahim, 2009).

Haul Ritual and Tomb Ownership: The Politics of Memory of the Ba'alawi

In traditional societies, graves are monuments, and *haul* is ritual. These two things have a function to take care of the collective memory of the Muslim community. In Islamic tradition, *haul* is a ritual to commemorate the anniversary

of someone's death (Sholihah, 2009). In the context of this research, grave monuments, the tradition of grave pilgrimage and the commemoration of the haul of the habaib ba'alawi are a political phenomenon in the memory of the habaib (Kyrchanoff, 2022; Malinova, 2021).

The haul tradition has recently become morelively in Indonesian cities, especially by *Habaib*, such as Gresik haul, Solo haul, Pasuruan haul, and hauls in other areas (Amaruli et al., 2022; Sholihah, 2009). The event is usually attended by thousands of people from various regions. In this regard, the haul ceremony is used as a politics of memory for figures from the *Ba'alawi*. This haul celebration was quite effective in influencing Muslims to remember the grandfather of the *habaib ba'alawi*. This article argues the haul of *habaib* was a form of the politics of memory, which uses past history as a symbolic resource to legitimize the role and character of *habaib* figures in the life of Indonesian Muslim people. Through ceremonial haul, the *Habaib* generations continuously narrate the merits and heritage of previous *Habaib*. Habib, both in the context of Islamic da'wah and nationality (Amaruli et al., 2022). In addition, from the aspect of pop culture, the haul can also be seen as a commodification of blessings so that it can present to thousands of Islamic masses.



In the chaos of the *nasab* polemic, grave monuments and hauls cannot be separated from the dominant narrative that aims to build authority of a group,

namely Hadrami. The memory shaped by the politics of memory as a collective memory can be seen as a social framing that integrates the understanding of the individual in a cultural context. In this case, how to frame habaib figures as *waliyullah*, the source of barakah, and how they have merit for the prosecution of Islam in Indonesia. So far, the habaib ba'lawi group is the dominant group in organizing haul ceremonies in Indonesia. They routinely carry out hauls in various cities that present thousands of masses. The *habibs* use *a mythscape*, where the mythological stories of the habaib's *karomah* are constantly produced, transmitted, negotiated, and reconstructed to the Muslim community. So, the Indonesian Muslim community will remember the majesty and sacred stories of the *habaib* figures. On the other hand, the haul ceremony also serves to conceive a national narrative (nationalism), for example, the commemoration of Hasan's haul, which functions to form an Arab-Hadrami identity in the Indonesian space (Birchok, 2015; Syaefuddin, 2018).

However, since the emergence of the polemic of nasab *habaib ba'alawi*, there have been efforts to present a counter-haul celebration, namely the commemoration of the *Walisongo* haul. This haul was initiated by the *zuriyat* of *Walisongo* (kyai-kyai from the Nahdlatul Ulama circle) and the descendants of Islamic sultans in Indonesia. For the first time, this haul will be held in 2023 at the Istiqlal Mosque, Jakarta. The holding of the *Walisongo* haul can be seen as a counter ceremony in an effort to seize the hegemony and dominant narrative that has been controlled by the haul of the *Ba'alawi*.

The phenomenon of *nasab* polemics also spreads to the issue of accusations of forgery of graves by the *Ba'lawi* clan. According to the *Walisongo* breed group, there has been a process of "*ba'alawisasi*" of old and sacred tombs in various places in Java. Such as the tomb of Mbah Priok, Jakarta, which is recognized by the *Ba'alwi* as the tomb of Al-Haddad, who is portrayed as the guardian of Batavia. The narrative of Al-Haddad's guardianship is reproduced continuously, so that the tomb is crowded with Muslims visiting it. According to historical records, Al-Haddad was an ordinary merchant, not a scholar or *waliyyullah*. Even he is said not to be buried in Priok. According to historians, the tomb of Priok existed long before it was claimed as the tomb of Alhaddad by the *Ba'alawi*. In fact, *Al-Haddad* was never buried there because he died on a ship when he was about to go to Sulawesi for business (Channel Islam Nusantara, 2023).

Ba'alawization of the tomb also occurred in Tegal, namely on the tomb of Prince Purboyo, which was later claimed to be the tomb of one of the *habaib*. A

similar thing also happened to the tomb of Kalbakal, later claimed to be the tomb of *Habaib*. Even in the Probololinggo area, there are three tombs that are claimed to be habaib tombs; the tomb of the sacred *kiai*, the tomb of *Kiai* Ja'far became Ja'far, and the tomb located behind the Bayuangga stadium was used as the tomb of Assegaf (Channel Islam Nusantara, 2023). The phenomenon of determining the identity of a grave is usually carried out through dream clues, for example, what Luthfi did on several previously unidentified graves in Central Java (I. F. Alatas, 2020). Luthfi's practice of visiting tombs in various places such as Central Java, West Java, Kalimantan, and Singapore shows Luthfi's involvement in creating a historical narrative of Islam in the archipelago through the identification of graves. Through Luthfi's dreams, many tombs were restored and then became monuments that were crowded with Muslim people (I. F. Alatas, 2011; S. F. Alatas, 2015).

After the *Nasab* Polemic, some people who have believed in the identification of tombs through Luthfi's dreams began to doubt. There have even been accusations that Luthfi is a forger of many tombs in Indonesia. For example, the claim against Sumudinigrat domestic violence known as Keramat Djati, on the instructions of Luthfi Yahya, the grave was later claimed as Hasan bin Toha bin Yahya (ARAH_9, 2023); this claim is opposed by the Javanese (Channel Islam Nusantara, 2023).



The polemic of *Nasab Habib* and the degradation of Habib's religious authority in contemporary Indonesia illustrate the socio-religious dynamics in Indonesian Muslim society. *Habaib*, who has a special position in the traditional

religious structure in the archipelago and is considered the heir to the spiritual and moral authority of Muslims, especially in the network of *tarekats*, pesantren, and traditional Islamic communities. However, now their status and position are being questioned as the public's critical awareness of hereditary-based authority increases.

The phenomenon of degradation of Habib's religious authority is caused by several factors. For example, there are behaviors of a small number of *habaib* that are considered not to reflect the morals of the ulama, such as involvement in practical politics, moral controversies, and exclusive religious practices. In addition, access to Islamic knowledge through formal education and digital space also expands religious authority to non-*habibs*, who are based on scientific competence, not heredity. In this context, the Muslim public began to judge that religious authority was formed on the basis of intellectual capacity and personal integrity, not solely on the basis of *nasab*. As a result, there is a counter-narrative from Muslim intellectuals and some Muslims in shaking the symbolic dominance of *habaib*. Thus, the polemic of *nasab habib* is not only a matter of social legitimacy but also touches on the issue of religious authority in contemporary Islamic society in Indonesia.

Conclusion

The polemic of *nasab* and the degradation of *habaib's* religious authority in Indonesia shows the occurrence of structural transformations in the socio-religious landscape of contemporary Indonesian Muslims. *Habaib's* special position is now increasingly criticized by the public. The process of delegitimizing the authority of *habaib* is influenced by several things: *first,* the internal dynamics among *habaib*; for example, some *habaib* overemphasize the superiority of *nasab* as the main source of legitimacy without being balanced with scientific capacity and example. Therefore, the tendency of some *habaib* to exalt ancestral figures, accompanied by a condescending attitude of the archipelago's scholars, has also encouraged the emergence of strong resistance from some circles. In this context, the authority of *habaib* is no longer understood as a universal representation of Islamic values but as a particular and feudal identity of the *Ba'alawi* group*. Second, the* attitude of some *habaibs* who display resistance to government and democracy, as well as the tendency to theological justification, also weakens their image of moral authority in the public sphere. In the context of a pluralistic democratic society, this kind of discursive orientation is often considered inadaptive to the dynamics of nationality and Indonesianness.

Third, the legitimacy of religious authority in the digital era no longer relies solely on the origin of *nasab*. Therefore, the future of *habaib* authorities will be largely determined by the extent to which they are able to construct their social role adaptively without making claims of superiority based on *nasab* .

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