

DIGITAL PIETY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM OF YOUTH *HIJRAH* MOVEMENT

Ali Ja'far

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Al-Anwar Rembang
email: ali.jafar@staialanwar.ac.id

Abstract: *This paper explains about hijrah, a popular term among urban youths; it refers not only religious, but also political transformation. This activity has been growing massively in the urban area through the internet and in the short after the fall of Soeharto regime where democracy and the technology has become more developed. Digitally, hijrah shapes the narration of being pious, religious and modern-fashionable look. Taking the data from field observation on the hijrah event and following the digital media, this paper attempts to investigate the historical root of hijrah and how the youth utilize modern technology to visualize and share their narration on being politically pious. Borrowing the idea from Birgit Meyer and Bayat about visualization and post-Islamism, this paper has found that although hijrah narration is close to fundamental religious activism and politically promotes Islamic political system, but the agenda has not succeeded. However, hijrah activity is successful in engaging youth through the events such as; sharing session, gathering, book review, festival and preaching which are specifically designed for youths.*

المخلص: يتناول هذا البحث عن الهجرة وهي مصطلح شائع بين شباب الحضر. ولا يشير هذا الموضوع الى التغيير الديني ، بل حتى التغيير السياسي. وازدهرت أنشطة الهجرة بعد سقوط سوهارتو بسرعة فائقة وكذلك الديمقراطية والتكنولوجيا . وكونت الهجرة في العالم الرقمي التقوى والدين والحداثة ايضا . آخذا المعلومات من المنهج الميداني مع تتبع الوسائل الهجرة الرقمية، تحاول هذا البحث التحقق عن جذور التاريخ وكيفية تعامل الشباب مع التكنولوجيا المعاصرة لتصور المسائل ونشر الروايات حول موضوع الصالح . نستعير فكر بيرجير ماير وبيات حول التصويرية وما بعد الاسلامية ، تكشف هذا البحث

موضوع الهجرة قريبة الى جذرية الدينية و من سياسيتها الى السياسية الشرعية ولكن لا تسير هذه الانشطة على ما يرام. ومن ناحية أخرى ، تربط أنشطة الهجرة مع الشباب كالمناقشات والمحاضرات ومراجعة الكتب والتجمعات ترابطا وطيدا وناجحا لأنها خصصت مصممة للشباب

Abstrak: *Tulisan ini menjelaskan tentang hijrah. Sebuah terma yang popular di kalangan anak muda urban. Terma ini tidak hanya merujuk pada istilah akan perubahan keagamaan, tetapi juga perubahan politik. Aktifitas hijrah tumbuh pesat setelah runtuhnya regime Soeharto dimana demokrasi dan perkembangan teknologi semakin maju. Hijrah dalam dunia digital juga membentuk narasi akan kesalehan, keagamaan, dan modernitas. Penelitian ini mengambil data dari observasi lapangan serta mengikuti media digital hijrah. Tulisan ini berusaha menginvestigasi akar sejarah dari hijrah dan bagaimana anak-anak muda menggunakan teknologi modern untuk memvisualisasikan dan menyebarkan narasi tentang kesalihan. Meminjam ide dari Birgit Meyer dan Bayat tentang visualisasi dan post-Islamism, tulisan ini mengungkap bahwa meskipun narasi hijrah itu sangat dekat dengan fundamentalisme agama dan secara politis mendukung sistem politik berlandaskan Islam akan tetapi agenda ini tidak berjalan dengan baik. Sebaliknya, aktifitas hijrah yang mengikat anak muda melalui berbagai event seperti, sesi diskusi, gathering, bedah buku, festival, dan ceramah keagamaan telah sukses mengikat anak muda karena aktifitas itu secara khusus didesain untuk anak muda)*

Keywords: hijrah, youth, visualization, democracy, post-Islamism.

INTRODUCTION

Youth, in term of biological or social category, plays an important role in the development of contemporary religious activism in Indonesia. With the advanced gadget on their hand, they can access and involve in some religious and political issues. To study phenomena in young generation, Basit made an important point that as Muslim students moved to the cities and town to study at universities, they also

involved in the *da'wa* movement,¹ such as becoming the member of Rohis (Rohaniawan Islam) at secondary level or becoming member of *da'wa* organization at university level. At this phase, the members often identify themselves as doing *hijrah*, a spiritual journey of personal transformation to be more pious and religious.

Hijrah is a popular term among youth in a daily conversation. It appears on many social media platform, and shown on the entertainment program at television, especially on the *dakwahtainment* (the TV programs presenting Islamic lessons along with entertainment). Many entertainers have been also following the trend of *hijrah* lifestyle and drastically changed their appearance, such as having long beard for men and wearing a *syar'i* long dress, attending religious sermon and looked more pious than before. Interestingly, this kind of urban Islamic visualization is now spreading to rural villages through the communication technology. Appadurai called this as *technoscapes* to point out the exchange interaction through the technology that also mediated the massive exchange of culture and political discourses.²

In the Indonesian context, these phenomena have been growing rapidly immediately after the fall of the Soeharto regime in the 1998s. Fealy mentioned these phenomena as the changing landscape on the development of politic and the religious life of Indonesian. He also mentioned about the way of Indonesian Muslims expressed their faith, such as wearing Islamic dress, buying *halal* products, saving their money in the *sharia* bank, watching influential preachers, undertaking pilgrimages, consuming Islamic herbals, dating in *sharia* cafes-hotels and the most importantly posting these activities on their social media accounts.³ This is part of young Indonesian generation where religious expressions and deeds are becoming public matter.

From the above phenomena, this paper then tries to depict the narration of piety and the transformation of political activism among

¹ Abdul Basit, "The Ideological Fragmentation of Indonesian Muslim Student and Da'wa Movement in the Post-Reformed Era," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 2 (n.d.): 1–26.

² Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7-3, 1, no. 2 (1990): 295–310, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026327690007002017>.

³ Greg Fealy, Sally White, and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, eds., *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, Indonesia Update Series (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), 12-20.

youth involved in the Youth *Hijrah* Movement (Gerakan Pemuda *Hijrah*) henceforth will be mentioned as YHM, a movement that was initiated by Hanan Attaki (well known as UHA). Hanan is a popular preacher for the *hijrah* movement who inspires millions of young Muslim to share their ideas about *hijrah*. He started to find Shift, an English name for his digital platform that literally means moving or change; it is equivalent with *hijrah* in Arabic. This platform aims to share ideas and videos about *hijrah*, youth motivation, podcast and playlist video from the popular preachers, such as Salim Fillah and Felix Siauw, and also information schedule for preaching of numerous affiliating ustadz. Numerous accounts for *hijrah* then appear in various digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter with various segmentations, such as Pemuda *Hijrah*, Makna *Hijrah*, Asiknya *Hijrah* and so forth. Hanan, Felix and Salim are popular among young audiences for the *hijrah* programs. This segmentation is different from the other popular preachers, such as AA Gym whose audience is mostly *ibu-ibu* (group of mother),⁴ or Ustad Abdus Shomad whose audience varied across ages and religious originations, including NU and Muhammadiyah.

The discussion on making youth as a specific category has flourished academic discourses. The *hijrah* activity and piety among youth have been already discussed by many scholars. *Hijrah* is linked to the fundamental groups as a Muslim linked to fundamental religious group such as Salafi, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), and Jamaah Tabligh (JT) as revealed by Sunesti⁵ and Wahib⁶ and the motivation among youths to involve in *hijrah* is not monolithic, vast and varied. However, they still need an adequate environment to support their commitment for *hijrah*.

A similar research is from Nisa⁷ who discusses the *hijrah* and Islamic populism. She argues that *hijrah* is linked to popular

⁴ James Hoerstey, *Rebranding Islam: Piety, Prosperity, and a Self-Help Guru*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Stanford University Press, 2015), 17-19.

⁵ Yuyun Sunesti, "Young Salafi-Niqabi and Hijrah: Agency and Identity Negotiation," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, 8, no. 2 (2018): 173-97, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v8i2.173-197>.

⁶ Ahmad Bunyan Wahib, "Being Pious Among Indonesian Salafists," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, no. 1 (June 26, 2017): 1-26, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.551.1-26>.

⁷ Firly Annisa, "Hijrah Milenial: Antara Kesalehan dan Populism," *MAARIF* 13, no. 1 (June 20, 2018): 38-54, <https://doi.org/10.47651/mrf.v13i1.11>.

consumption in which the symbol and attribute, such as *niqab* (Arabian Style of veil), and *syar'i* dress are not only an aspiration on being pious but also popular trademark and part of lifestyle from artist, entrepreneur and influencer. Youth are following the lifestyle either based on the religious preference, fundamental ideology or following Islamic trend of populism. Another profound research is from Dayana, where she observes youths in Bandung who actively shares their religious experience through cyberspace. According to Dayana, this social media interaction is a new site of Islamic socialites where the youths express piety. Indeed, the youths engaged within community are actively sharing and motivating each other to maintain the zeal of piety (*semangat taqwa*).⁸

Using the data from field observation, since 2018-March 2020, by following the *hijrah* programs, such as attending the program held by YHM, following book review and listening to the preaching by recommended Ustad from YHM, this study also aims to re-examine how the youth involved in the *hijrah* movement (YHM) visualize their piety on the online media and how they aspire and negotiate their political preference and Islamic ideology.

This paper uses the concept of visibility and visualization on the media introduced by Birgit Meyer⁹ and Post-Islamism as the transformation of religious political activism introduced by Bayat.¹⁰ Both Meyer and Bayat overlooked Post-Islamism in the context of Iran and Egypt to conceptualize the intermingled relation between media, Islamism and the transformation of political religious activity. Based on the idea of Meyer and Bayat, this paper would like to explain three keywords. *First* is visualization, it is a term that refers to the idea where pleasure, attraction, and mode are delivered through visual media. Visualization is not natural look, it always comes along with mediation and brand to create a personal branding on how

⁸ Dayana Lengauer, "Sharing *Semangat Taqwa* : Social Media and Digital Islamic Socialities in Bandung," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (January 2, 2018): 5–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1415276>.including religious practice. Based on ethnographic online and offline research among Muslim groups, this article enquires into contemporary expressions of piety (*taqwa*)

⁹ Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, eds., *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 35-40.

¹⁰ Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, 1st ed., vol. 1, Muslim World (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 20-30.

a person wants to be seen, and be perceived on the desired image. The branding is an effective media to influence the mass and attract the attention through visualization. Media also plays an important role to create such reality in which the engaged audiences also perceive the visualization as reality. *Second*, it is about contestation on the new public sphere, a state of narration where media becomes a contest arena for religion and politics. In this point, media is not neutral; it is utilized to facilitate mass mobilization, social mediation and also produce mass identities that create mass cultural organization. As Meyer said

“That are circulated instead through popular networks can also greatly impact the formation of new religiously based identities. In Egypt cassette sermons have popularized a particular mix of personal and political virtues and have been employed by the Islamic revival movement to claim its own public sphere. Simultaneously state television has acknowledged the importance of religion, and in programs such as Ramadan riddles, religion makes its appearance in the realm of commerce and entertainment.”¹¹

The *last* keyword is Post-Islamism. This term is still debatable among scholars. For example, Muller, through examining consumerism, popular culture and Islamic political agenda in Malaysia, prefers to use the term Pop-Islamism to see the popular culture as religious-political persuasion.¹² However the writer uses post-Islamism to point out the shifting strategy of Islamist from political agenda to cultural appropriation. Bayat introduced this term to point out the transformation of Islamism and the turn of negotiation between Islamic fundamental political activism and secular system. According to Bayat, Post-Islamism refers to the idea where the Islamist (such as *salafi*, and other fundamentalism group) has already recognized about their weaknesses and incapability to succeed the agenda of Islamism. He stated that post- Islamism is:

“Political and social condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy and sources of legitimacy of

¹¹ Meyer and Moors, *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, 42.

¹² Dominik M. Muller, “POST-ISLAMISM OR POP-ISLAMISM? Ethnographic Observations of Muslim Youth Politics in Malaysia,” *Frobenius Institute*, 2013, 261–84.

Islamism get exhausted even among its once-ardent supporters. Islamists become aware of their system's anomalies and inadequacies as they attempt to normalize and institutionalize their rule."¹³

Multiple failures of fundamental Islamist movements, such as in Turkey, Egypt and other Islamic countries have paralyzed the idea of political Islamism. Anyway, it is also still debatable. However, Bayat's thesis has gone in completing Tibi's discourse on Islamism. Tibi mentioned that Islamism was closer to political agenda instead of introducing Islam as a devoted religion. Islamism, as Tibi's concept, also embraces religious fundamental teaching as set of political values and criticizing human invention on the profane order.¹⁴

Unlike Islamism, that according to Tibi tends to be more political, Post-Islamism concerns on the young moral behavior, especially in the urban area. Here, post-Islamism views that religious activism is no more stressing on the political agenda, rather stressing on the moral behaviors. Bayat portrays the moral behaviors from the fundamentalist group by narrating Qur'anic verse for *ya 'murūna bil ma'rūfi wa yanhauna 'an al-munkar* (QS 03:104) which literally means (enjoining good and opposing vice).¹⁵ This paper is aware that the boundaries between Islamism and post-Islamism are still unclear. One of distinction made is that post-Islamism takes Islamism as point of critiques. This means that the prefix post- in the post Islamism does not refer to a period or historical event, but as critiques on the point of departure of Islamism. This paper uses post-Islamism to analyze the transformation of political activism of youth involved in the activity of YHM since the youth affiliating in this group has no single affiliation on the political system, but rather emphasizing on the personal transformation on being pious.

In short, this paper then made attempts to link mediated religion and political activism to argues that media is a space or arena of

¹³ Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, 65.

¹⁴ Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism Political Islam and the New World Disorder*, vol. 1, Comparative Studies in Religion and Society (University of California Press, 2002), 23-25.

¹⁵ Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera, eds., *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4-10.

contestation in which the contestation for power relation, domination and political activism are vividly visible on the mediated religion. Furthermore, visual imagery also creates brand for piety and political activism. As the contestation happens, in the political matter, the youth are also negotiating their Islamic ideology into secular ideas, such as democracy and nationalism. However, this negotiation has also a strict purpose that is internalizing Islamic ideology on the body of nation.

TARGETING YOUTH ON POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

In the next decade, Indonesia will experience a demographic bonus where the number of youth is sizable, a predicted moment where religious and political issues are still close each other. Youths differ from their previous generation in the sense that they could access unlimited information from religion to fashion, from politic to entertainment easily through their online gadget. Online media is an effective tool utilized by youths to create their own connection for social and cultural space, creating their own subculture community and keeping the innovation for their future life. Seeing the dynamic ability of youth in adjusting with the social condition, youths often become a primary target of religious and political contestation. For example, according to Alvara research center¹⁶ in 2016 and 2019 and PPIM UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and Pascasarjana UIN Yogyakarta conducted research in 2017,¹⁷ the youths categorized as millennial (Born between 1981 to 1996, or what so call as gen Y) and post-millennial generation (1997- onward or gen Z) are the most active on the internet and social media. The research explains that in 2016 more than 102 million user of internet are youth from urban middle class families and it was predicted for more 133 million in 2019. This number covers 47% of total Indonesian population. Interestingly, public access to religious issues, popular Islamism, politic Islam and online fatwas were sky-rocketed during 2014. Focusing on the matter

¹⁶ Hassanudin Ali, *Indonesia 2020: The Urban Middle-Class Millennial*, 1 (Alvara Research center, 2016), 10-15.

¹⁷ Noorhaidi Hasan, et all, *Literature Keislaman Generasi Milenial; Transmisi, Apropriasi dan Kontestasi*, Literature Keislaman (Pascasarjana UIN Sunankalijaga, 2018), 1-28.

of religion, post millennial generation (gen Z) are the most active on the internet that they prefer to read, ask and search the instant answer of any religious and political matter, through their online devices. Unfortunately, this research also reveals that the popular digital media consumed by youth is dominated by intolerant and radical view on religion. The idea was transmitted through school religious organization, teacher, and text book literatures on religion.

Targeting the youth as a new agent of spreading the radical view has historical narration. In the Soeharto regime, Muslim youths in the urban area were involved in the *da'wa* movement such as Lembaga Dakwah Kampus (campus dakwah institute, abbreviated as LKD) that aims at proselytizing Islam through small group discussion (*halaqah*) and small group for Islamic preaching (*liqa'*). This organization is mostly inclined to *tarbawi* ideology that linked to Ikhwanun Muslimin in Egypt. Inside the *da'wa*, there also *salafi* and *tahriri* ideology that reproduces the issues Islamic puritanism, secularism, western influence on Muslim culture, and economic narration. According to Aspinnal, the activity of *da'wa* in the Soeharto regimes was still underground and powerless, but the activities were significant in proselytizing and disseminating the *tarbawi* and *salafi's* idea for *da'wa*.¹⁸

As political protest against the repressive regime, the youths involved in the *da'wa* organization reproduces the idea of "*Islam kaffah*" that means Islam as total solution for all social problems, from economic inequality, limited job opportunity, western infiltration on the culture and the lifestyle of young Muslims. Hasan said that in facing the uncertainty of the future, the *da'wa* organization offered performing Islam in the all aspects of life. He emphasized the emergence narration on "*Islam kaffah*" or "*Islam is the solution*" was part of Islamic resurgence among youths that also linked to the transnational movements.¹⁹

¹⁸ Edward Aspinnal, "Indonesia: Moral Force Politics and the Struggle against Authoritarianism," in *Student Activism in Asia Between Protest and Powerlessness*, 1st ed., vol. 1, Government and Politics of Asia and the Pacific (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 153-180.

¹⁹ Noorhaidi Hasan, et all, "The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere," *Springer, Contemporary Islam*, 3 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-009-0096-9>, 232-234.

After reformation, many religious organizations in Indonesia embracing Islamic revivalism have appeared publicly such as Front Pembela Islam (FPI) or Forum Umat Islam (Islamic Community Forum) that sets as hard line Islamic group, and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) that motivates to reform religious-political system. Specifically, HTI grabs national attention after numerous mass rallies on supporting *khilafah* for the glory of Islam and criticizing Indonesian ideology of Pancasila, a basic principle for the Indonesian state. Within the HTI's view, the weaknesses of Islam and Muslim countries are based on western domination in politic, economy, and culture, otherwise Muslims are also reluctant on implementing Islamic teaching. Considering the ideology as a threat for Pancasila and democracy, the government then issued Perpu (Government Regulation in Lieu of Law) No 2 of 2017 concerning on Community Organizations that has passed into Law Number 16 of 2017 on 22 November, 2017.²⁰ As a consequence, a transnational political group that promoted Islamic unity under one umbrella (*khilafah*) was banned. The government also warns to disband any religious organization that threatens Indonesian democracy.

However, according to Wai Weng, it is not the idea of caliphate HTI narration attracted young Muslims mainly not on the idea of caliphate, but on the strategy they made and they designed to target attention of youths.²¹ In agreement with Wai Weng, this paper also argues that youth involvement in the *hijrah* activities is not directly linked to fundamentalism, but more on the process of negotiating and transforming their identity on being young and Muslim. It means that although HTI's propagation for establishing Islamic political system is widely spreading among youth and youngster, the religious and political activism is more concerning on the moral behavior.

Grabbing youth's attention is the main strategy *tahriri*, *salafi* and *tarbawi* affiliated groups. The figures affiliated within these ideologies are also close each other and often appear together on one stage. For instance, Felix Siauwh who is close to HTI and Salim Fillah

²⁰ Fatmawati, "Observing HTI's Dakwah Movement Following Perppu Number 2 of 2017 Concerning on Community Organization," *Essensia, Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuludin UIN Sunan Kalijaga* 20, no. 1 (2019): 20.

²¹ Wai Weng Hew, "THE ART OF *DAKWAH*: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siauwh," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (January 2, 2018): 61–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757>.

and Hanan Attaki who are prone to the ideology of *tarbawi* and Adi Hidayat who supports *salafi* are preaching Islam together. Although the organizations and the figures are having different affiliations, but they have similar narration for targeting and recruiting young Muslim to be actively involved in their movement, such as producing the term *hijrah* (moving to be more Islamic) and making a specific program that designed for youths such as making the program of Indonesia Tanpa Pacaran (Indonesia Without Dating), meet and greet with the author of *Dalam Dekapan Ukhuwah* by Salim Fillah, *Udah Putusin Aja* by Felix Siau, and so forth. This narration points out that youths, with their entire problem, is the primary target in spreading Islamism.

Hijrah becomes point of departure where the youth transforms their religious and also political view. In the *halaqah* (religious gathering), *liqa* (religious lecturing) or other preaching model and events, youth involved in the *hijrah* also talks about non-Islamic political system, non-Islamic culture, government failure in eradicating corruption, poverty, and also continuous discrimination to Muslim after reformation. A vivid portrayal about this narration is reflected from the series of massive Jakarta protest for blasphemous issues on 2 December (called as 212 protests) which charged Basuki Cahya Purnama (a.k.a Ahok) into jail, or religious issues in the Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2017. As the Islamic revivalist movements were often considered threatening the democracy and national security, the government then issued Perppu No 2 of 2017 to disband HTI, and in 2018 the government established Badan Pembina Ideologi Pancasila (BPIP/Agency for Pancasila Ideology Education) to safeguard and disseminate the ideology of Pancasila and also to prevent the dissemination of radical ideology.

Here, although HTI as organization had already been banned, but the ideology of *tahriri* has been still growing up. Together with *salafi* and *tarbawi*, Tahriri continuously targets youths by making series of events that engaged youth and youthfulness. For the example, Felix Siau as leading HTI's preacher is often appear by wearing batik and casual jeans, while Salim Fillah, *tarbawi* inclined preacher, is wearing *blankon* (Javanese headdress), and Hanan is wearing skullcap hat. The preachers also use western media, such as Facebook, Instagram and Youtube to spread their idea. Indeed, these preachers also use

casual language (*bahasa gaul*) to communicate with young audience. One of interesting point is that these preachers also close to Ustad Abdus Shomad, a traditionalist inclined preachers.

Apparently, these preachers want to be seen in more Indonesian look than Arabian style. The *hijrah* followers are also do the same, such as the girls are wearing hijab syar'i, but the *hijab* is still colorful and stylish, the boys are wearing jeans and often using English words on their program. These appearances are both personal and political strategy in which according to Bayat there is a slightly change from hardline Islamic group to accept and respect what so called as secular idea and custom.²² Of course, this is still problematic and contradictory since the *hijrah* religious groups are continuously narrating Islamism stressing the importance of symbol and attribute, but they also utilize democracy, and western custom to facilitate their strategy and get the youths engage in their political mobilization.

According to Hasan and Bayat,²³ this contradiction is a kind of strategic of adaptation where Islamic political religious activity in Indonesia, as in Egypt and Iran, is no longer resisting to secular ideas such as democracy, entertainment, and nationalism. The religious political activity comes along with accepting 'secular invention', yet still preserving the agenda for the Islamic ideologies at the same time. Also Wei Wang narrated this as 'a strategic ambiguity' where the model of expression and preaching was adjusting and adapting the development of trend, but still holding firmly to the basic ideological foundation.²⁴

In the context of *hijrah*, this paper then argues that making youths as target of ideological dissemination is due their flexibility in adopting and improving the ideas. Indeed, the political transformation and the advance of digital technology keep the youth as the main target of Islamism, although institutionally, a revivalist institution had already been banned, but the ideology, the model of proselytizing in targeting youths is still continuing even transforming into more modern and stylish one. Here, the Youth Movement for

²² Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, 5-8.

²³ Asef Bayat, ed., "Post-Islamist Politics in Indonesia," in *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, Post-Islamism (Oxford University Press, 2013), 15-18.

²⁴ Hew, "THE ART OF *DAKWAH*", 12-13.

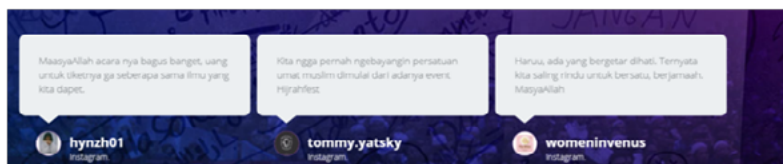
hijrah and various *hijrah* activities are part of religious and political transformation in which the Islamic revivalist groups are adapting and adopting a modern strategy in making their ideas accepted among youth, such as making close relation with traditional 'Ulama, accepting democracy, accepting western lifestyle by wearing jeans, playing skateboard, and often using English and causal language on their program, such as "Hangout" and "Gathering". In Bayat's language, this strategy is to adopt youthfulness where Islam and modernity are side aside. However, this paper sees that the acceptance of western ideas and culture does not mean that Islamism has stopped and then transformed into the narration of youth's *hijrah*.

DIGITAL HIJRAH: A NEW TREND ON BEING POLITICALLY PIOUS

As *hijrah* becomes the common link from various religious ideologies to engage youths, it is also a medium of connection among youth to hold the ideologies, to express their identities and narrative on being *hijrah*. Personally, my early intensive involvement with the *hijrah* community and YHM comes in 2018, was attending an annual even of *Hijrah* Festival (*Hijrah* fest) that was held in Jakarta Convention Center on 9-11 November. The schedule of the fest was to present a popular preacher such as Hanan Attaki (UHA), Ustad Abdus Shomad (UAS), Felix Siauw, and also popular artist such as Dimas Seto, Irwansyah, Teuku Wisnu, Baim Wong, Dude Harlino and Arie Untung who called themselves as the team of "*hijrah squad*". The ticket was quite expensive for low class economy; it is about IDR 80.000, and the visitors were crowded. It was reported on its website that about 12.000 tickets were sold during the event.²⁵ Inside the *Hijrah* fest were numerous display booths and stands to exhibit the products such as Zoya, (a first brand for halal veil), Wardah (a brand of halal cosmetic) and many products with Islamic-syar'i branded label beside numerous pamphlets of digital apps which were also on the display such as One Day One Juz (ODOJ), Yuk Ngaji Community, Tahfidz Online, Kajian Islam Online, and so on. Seeing these digital platforms on the market of *Hijrah* fest, this paper sees that there was an open market to mobilize the youth to become more pious on the public sphere.

²⁵ <https://www.hijrahfest.com/> accessed on 20 May 2020.

Literally the term *hijrah* means moving from one place to another, exodus, leaving, journey, or crossing. Historically, the term was used to point out the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Habasyah in the first migration and from Mecca to Medina in the second. The migration is intended to avoid the persecution and oppression from Arab-Quraish tribe. In Medina, the prophet Muhammad had successfully created the ideal Islamic community (*ummah*) that then also liberated Mecca from the infidels. As the second *hijrah* becomes a point of departure for the glory of Islam, this moment is also used to establish Islamic lunar calendar.



Picture 1: a testimony from *Hijrah* fest event in 2018

In Indonesian contemporary narration, this historical event is then used by *tarbawi* inclined preacher, Hanan Attaki and Salim Fillah to establish YHM and to encourage the Muslim to move from state of less Islamic and ignorance (*jahiliyyah*) to accept total Islam (*kaffah*). Similarly is Felix who interprets *hijrah* as leaving western culture, western political system to be more Islamic and more Qur'ani. It means that *hijrah* introduced by these preachers are like a conversion and commitment of Muslim for obeying Islamic doctrines and against secular system and secular way of life.

To succeed the commitment of *hijrah*, numerous programs are held, conducted and organized by YHM, such as book review and seminar, where hundreds of youths are gendered separately (*ikhwan* for male and *akhwat* for female). These programs were taking place at the mosques, sport stadium, and even at an expensive Hotel. The girls were wearing stylish *syar'i* dress and the boys were wearing jeans, the trouser above the ankle and many also wearing sarong and batik. The place, the outfit and visualization was well designed to create crowd and sense of pride on being part of *hijrah*.

Hanan, as the initiator, often said on his preaching that he wants to make the youths proud on their gathering and it should be designed in such a way, such as placing camera on the crowded angel

and posting the activity through digital media.²⁶ In giving sense of youthfulness and creating the intimate relationship, Hanan, Salim and Felix often opens a space of encounter with the audience. They build the intimacy by appearing with casual images, wearing and using casual language (*bahasa gaul*). It means that the gathering, the camera and the visualization are well designed and intended to attract and engage more audiences. Apparently, the crowd and mass mobilization are the goal of visualization that according to Meyer is part of making the preaching visible on the media.²⁷

After *Hijrah* fest event, I was also invited to join numerous program of *Hijrah*. Such as in 14th February 2020, an invitation to join a stadium general in Bogor under the theme “Mitos dan Tahayyul, Loe Gue End” (Myth and superstition, you and I end) conducted by eLSI (Lembaga Studi Islam/Islamic Study Institution) came in my WhatsApp. Before that invitation, I also received many invitations for attending book review in Yogyakarta and Semarang with UHA, Salim Fillah and Felix Siauw. At the beginning of many sessions, the host reminded those who could not attend, they could participate from home and give a support by clicking ‘like and subscribe’ on their channel.

The program of *hijrah* on the digital media is widely accepted among urban youths for the need and the concern of urban community where they demanded lighter and non-time in consuming religion nowhere.²⁸ In the discourse of symbolic visualization, YHM, has created collective branding to attract wider audiences through displaying numerous religious preachers and to reconstruct narration about *hijrah*. In the process of branding, YHM shares and uploads the narration of pious young going to mosques, wearing fashionable outfit, going international, followed with thousand advices from the affiliated preachers. For UHA, this branding had successfully attracted more than 1.31 Million subscribers on the Youtube and more than 8 million followers on his Instagram account. Also, Salim Fillah gets more than 1 million followers on his Instagram. In the

²⁶ Hanan Attaki, on *Nongkrong Bareng Ustadz Hanan Attaki*, Al-Lathif mosque, 19 March 2019.

²⁷ Meyer and Moors, *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, 31-35.

²⁸ Noorhaidi Hasan, et al, “The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere,” 12-15.

context of marketing branding and visualization, YHM has promoted visual piety, a narration where religious expression is shared through digital media. In visualizing the piety, the figure does not work alone; it is done through team work from visual making to visual spreading.²⁹

This paper sees that successful narration of *hijrah* is by putting youth as a primary target of consumption and creating appealing visualization for the branding. Hanan, visualizes himself as a stylish youth wearing fashionable skullcap hat, hoodie, as a coffee shop lover, playing skateboard and always posted his activity on the Youtube and Instagram, a kind of youth urban middle-class lifestyle. Visualization becomes an important element and an effective sign to communicate with the follower. This strategic branding is also done by popular preacher such as AA Gym,³⁰ and Felix Siau.³¹ Through deepening visualization effect, YHM target is mainly urban middle-class youths. Visual branding on being piety, besides creating an attractive image, is also creating a deep fantasy about modern Muslim life living in the modern world. In this point, YHM is both producer and consumer image who spreads the images between and among the audiences.

The shared images and visual branding deliver an abstract message to the audience that the YHM and the affiliated figures represents the ideal image of being young urban and pious millennial. Unfortunately, among the youth this branding has a consequence that is distorting the boundaries between the fact and the image. Borrowing the term from Meyer, the visual branding had created a visual pleasure and a persuasive narration that present hyperbolic visual images.³²

This paper sees that in the digital *hijrah*, there is an intended attempts to attract the youth through digital visualization. Being pious digitally is not free from political matter; it is heavily linked to the narration of opposing less-Islamic political system in Indonesia. Digital media becomes a new public sphere for contestation, a place

²⁹ Muzayyin Ahyar, "Islamic Clicktivism: Internet, Democracy and Contemporary Islamist Activism in Surakarta," *Studia Islamika* 24, no. 3 (2017): 435–65, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v24i3.4859>.

³⁰ Hoestercey, *Rebranding Islam: Piety, Prosperity, and a Self-Help Guru*, 23.

³¹ Hew, "THE ART OF DAKWAH," 13.

³² Meyer and Moors, *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, 34.

where youths expresses their religious preferences and political choice.

HIJRAH FOR FREEDOM, FAITH AND FUN

Hijrah is not only having a religious layer, or matter of individual choice, but it is also political. In the context of Islamism discourse, the ongoing democratic process has been utilized by youths involved in the Islamism activity to spread the narration against democratic system. The openness of democratic society made the spreading activities run effectively.³³ However, according to Bayat, the modern construction of religiosity among youth is coming up with connecting religious and secular activities together. It means that although modern youths are still contesting between what is religious and secular, but the contestation is not *vis a vis*, it refers to the varieties of position made.³⁴ In the context of *hijrah*, the secular idea such as democracy is utilized by youth to get an individual freedom in expressing their religiosity on the public sphere and to get wider audiences.

In the attempts of getting large audience, various events, online and offline, are made. During my intensive involvement with *hijrah* activity and attending series of event conducted by YHM at Bogor, Jakarta and Yogyakarta, I met with many youth around 20-30 years from various backgrounds; many are students from reputable university, such as Gadjah Mada University (UGM), Bogor Agriculture Institution (IPB), Bandung Institute of technology and Indonesian University (UI). However many are also unwell educated, and finished the Junior High School only. They also have different jobs, from medical doctors, educational, media information, to hard laborer of factory, or machine repair shop. Considering the education and economic side, youths involved in the *hijrah* community are large and varied, from low to middle class family.

However, these youths, not to say all, are coming mostly from 'secular' background. It means, they have less religious education in their past-lives or have less experiences in the intensive study of Islam and Islamic sources. For the youth that I met, generally they

³³ Muzayyin Ahyar, "Islamic Clicktivism: Internet, Democracy and Contemporary Islamist Activism in Surakarta," 436.

³⁴ Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, 45.

can read the Qur'an, and but only few are able to translate or know the meaning of the verses in the Qur'an. Some of youths involved in the *hijrah* have also 'dark side' on their past lives, such as ex-member of punk community, having experience with alcohol, tattoo, or "criminal experience". They follow *hijrah* step as their faith to become better Muslim and seeking Islamic way of life. They also recognized that what they do on their past lives was full of sin and what they do now is part of redemption on their sin (*taubah*).

The narration of *taubah* is also becoming youth faith for following the *hijrah* activities and events. On the SHIFT website, the aim of YHM is inspiring the youth to follow what so called as Islamic guidance, lifestyle, Islamic way of life, and making Islam as a total solution for the entire problem of Muslim life. For example, one of key program of YHM is sharing session where the youths are gathering and one of them is exploring his or her personal life, such as being betrayed or cheated in their relationship after losing the virginity that then destroyed their future, or experiencing far away from religious teaching. At the end of sharing session, the *ustadz* will encourage the youth to *hijrah* and to tackle and endure the risk on being 'true' Muslim by giving motivation and inspiration according to Islamic teaching. The inspiration also comes up by narrating the life of historical figures in Islamic history, such as the life of 'Aisyah, the wife of the prophet, the life of Umar and also by quoting the Qur'anic verses.

In addition, to avoid sinful activities such as dating, YHM also encourage young marriage, say no to dating, submitting only to God, and do *taubah* (exclamation of regret) soon.³⁵ As the *hijrah* theme goes on the encouragement of doing *taubah*, remembering the death, but the youth involved on the *hijrah* does not necessary leaving their sprinkling world, exclusive and self-alienated. The youth that I observed within the *hijrah* activities were accepting and also supporting the modern ideas on the equal opportunity for education, job and leadership between girls and boys. Both of them also shared their fun activities on their Instagram account, but mostly the girls would crop or hide their faces. The cropping and the hiding of face

³⁵ Sharing session under theme "Darah Muda," on Shift Weekend program at Al-Lathif mosque, Bandung, 2020.

are part of pious expression as their faces are *aurah* (part of covered body) that should not be exposed publicly.

The fun activity of YHM members is similar to the *hijrah* preacher, such as Hanan who always shares their fun activities of travelling, gathering and go to mosque on his Intagram account. The visual image shows that *hijrah* has a new fashionable look, fun and fresh but still Islamic. The Instagram account of *pemudahijrah* managed by YHM is keeping uploading pictures on the new lifestyle that being pious also be stylist, following the latest trend and getting comfortable. For example, during YHM trip to Balikpapan, one of their members gives a solution to the youth to keep wearing their expensive shoes when they go to the mosque without worry. That is by placing pair of the shoe separately. The advices and the narration are like encouraging the youth to be more religious and also stylist at the same time.

To sum up, this paper argues that as *hijrah* activity is becoming youth's faith on being pious and fun. Sharing the activities is also linked to the youth acceptance on the system that respects the freedom on individual choice. The system liberates young generation to choose religious affiliation they prefer to and liberates them to express their faith publicly. In term of freedom, Bayat narrated that although youth were supporting democratic system for their individual expression, but the expression was still coming up with their religious emotion.³⁶ It means that, youth is accepting the democracy for it provides a room for youth to express their religiosity on the public sphere.

CONCLUSION

Youths and their activities on *hijrah* in the offline and online media have been shaping the development of religious and political transformation in Indonesia. Although formerly the movement was initiated and supported by inclined fundamental group such as *salafy*, *tarbawi* and *tahriri*, the *hijrah* has transformed into a new lifestyle instead of ideological base. By deepening on the visualization and seeing the historical narration of *hijrah* activity, this paper draws attention to some important points.

³⁶ Bayat and Herrera, *Being Young and Muslim*, 34-49.

Historically *hijrah* activity in mobilizing the youth had already appeared in the New Order regime as *da'wa* group where they were criticizing poverty, inequality in education, secular culture and western domination on Muslim society. After reformation, this group have been transforming into a movement that utilize digital media to perform their activity and to engage more audience, especially youth. However, although the *hijrah* communities and the preachers are inclined to fundamental religious organization, but they also utilize secular ideas such as democracy and western culture in one hand and holds fundamental Islamic ideology on the other hand. It shows about a negotiated contestation where religiosity and secularity are coming together.

In attempts to attract wider audience, the preacher and the youths of *hijrah* movement create and share visual images through digital media and making what so called as 'a new public sphere'. Within the media, the pious expressions are narrated and visualized with fun activities and fresh look that make *hijrah* attractive to the youths.

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