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Wahid Hasyim And The Transformation of Hajj Travel Accessibility in Post-Independence Indonesia By Ministry of Religion Affairs: A Leadership Analysis

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Abstract

The Hajj journey is a spiritual journey for Muslims as the fifth pillar of Islam, therefore performing the Hajj pilgrimage must have sufficient knowledge, physical, and material provisions. Hajj travel from Indonesia since the colonial era has become a complex problem because Hajj travel is often used as a business field without paying attention to the scientific aspects of performing it. This article looks at how the transformation of the Hajj journey was handled by the Ministry of Religious Affairs through Wahid Hasyim's brilliant ideas as Minister of Religious Affairs. The method used in this article is the 5-stage historical research method as expressed by Kuntowijoyo and uses a hermeneutic approach. Wahid Hasyim's writings contained in a book entitled "Menudju Perbaikan Perdjalana Hadji" spearheaded the transformation of the hajj journey in Indonesia by the Ministry of Religion. The resolution of problems such as the intellectuality of Indonesian pilgrims, the provision of knowledge during the journey to Mecca, to providing a fleet to dispatch Indonesian pilgrims was carried out by Wahid Hasyim's intelligence.

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Introduction

The Ministry of Religious Affairs is a government agency tasked with regulating and administering all religious matters in Indonesia. The official religions in Indonesia are Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The freedom of every individual to practice their religion according to their own beliefs is enshrined in Article 29, paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution, which states, "Every citizen has the right to freedom of religion and to worship according to his or her religion." This verse affirms that every individual is given the freedom to practice their religion without discrimination. The majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), Muslims make up 87.2% of Indonesia's population, with the remainder being Protestants, Catholics, and other Christian denominations. This is further supported by Deliar Noor's book, which states that in 1926/1927, approximately 52,000 people traveled to Mecca (Noer, 1983b). The data obtained explains that Muslims have a religious obligation to strive for in addition to performing the five daily prayers, namely the Hajj.

The issue of accommodating the departure of Hajj pilgrims has existed since the colonial era. The root of the problem is that many individuals exploit the Hajj period as a highly profitable business opportunity by manipulating Hajj travel costs. Furthermore, the Saudi Arabian government's limited Hajj quota, in contrast to the large number of Indonesian Muslims seeking to perform the pilgrimage, is cited in an article by Wisber Wiyanto in his review of Deliar Noer's book (Wiryanto, 2020). During the early days of Indonesian independence, the Dutch offered easy Hajj travel because they controlled the seas and had ships capable of transporting pilgrims to the Holy Land. However, this was rejected by nationalist groups. Although two Hajj committees, or travel agents, emerged in West Java, causing chaos during the Hajj journey due to the lack of government oversight of this issue. Born in Jombang on June 1, 1914, to KH Hasyim Asy'ari and Nafiqah, Wahid Hasyim was a renowned scholar, politician, and religious figure during his heyday, known for his contributions to various national issues during the Old Order era.

Various studies and journals have been published discussing Wahid Hasyim's thoughts and struggles during his lifetime. One such study is "The Thoughts of K.H. Abdul Wahid Hasyim on Islamic Education Reform" (2013). It discusses the thoughts of K.H. A. Wahid Hasyim as a form of inclusive education, in other words, education that is not closed off and limited to aspects of religious education, but rather responsive to current developments (Mughni, 2013). Umi Musaropah also discussed in his article entitled National Education in Islamic Boarding Schools from Wahid Hasyim's Perspective which revealed Wahid Hasyim's perspective on how important it is for students to master various languages and accompanied by strengthening local culture in order to add and foster a sense of nationalism in the students (Musaropah, 2019).

In 2018 Rohmah also wrote Wahid Hasyim's thoughts on Islamic Education and found that Wahid Hasyim's efforts in advancing Islamic education that we can feel until now, namely the inclusion of religious lessons in public schools, and the inclusion of general lessons in Madrasah, Wahid Hasyim also developed the existing education system, for example the establishment of PGA (Religious Teacher Education) and PTAIN (State Islamic College) which later became the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) and some later changed to State Islamic University (UIN) (Rohmah, 2018). The research previously presented on Wahid Hasyim certainly differs from this study, as it will reveal how the transformation of the Hajj pilgrimage in Indonesia, which is regulated and provided by the state through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, was initiated by Wahid Hasyim's thinking.

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The research problem formulation in this study is the life journey of KH Wahid Hasyim until he became an Indonesian politician, how the Hajj issues in Indonesia from the colonial period to post-independence, and how Wahid Hasyim viewed the very complex Hajj issues as Minister of Religious Affairs. The purpose of this research is to discover the role of figures behind the accessibility of Hajj departures in Indonesia, which is accommodated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, which has been in existence since the Sjahrir II Cabinet was established through Government Decree No. 1/S.D. dated January 3, 1946 (29 Muharram 1365 AH), which reads: "The President of the Republic of Indonesia, Considering: the proposal of the Prime Minister and the Working Body of the Central National Committee, decides: To establish a Ministry of Religious Affairs." This research will also dissect the meaning of the results of Wahid Hasyim's thinking.

Methods

The method used in this research is the historical method according to Kuntowijoyo, which consists of five stages. Determining the topic is the first step in starting historical research. The author decided to write about "K.H. Wahid Hasyim and the Transformation of Accessibility of Hajj Pilgrims in Post-Independence Indonesia by the Ministry of Religious Affairs: A Leadership Analysis." The second stage is collecting sources. This is done by reading books, journals, personal notes of figures, and past news. Internal and external source criticism is carried out by checking the authenticity of the historical sources used and re-checking whether the content of the sources found is credible and accountable. Next is interpretation and writing of the history to produce a useful piece of writing that adds insight into Indonesian history, especially the transformation of accessibility of the Hajj pilgrimage in Indonesia (Kuntowijoyo, 1994). In addition to using historical research according to Kuntowijoyo, this study also employs a hermeneutic approach that focuses on understanding the text, emphasizing the importance of the author's context and historical background in interpreting the text (Schleiermacher, 1998). Because this research will reveal and interpret Wahid Hasyim's book of thoughts entitled Towards the Improvement of Hadji's Journey.

Results and Discussions

1. Profile of KH Wahid Hasyim

a. Family Background and Education

KH Hasyim Asy'ari is a well-known figure among Nahdliyyin (Nahdlatul Ulama), or members of the Nahdlatul Ulama congregation. He is the founder of one of the most widely followed organizations in Indonesia. He married Nafiqah and had 10 children: Hannah, Khoiriyah, Aisyah, Azzah, Abdul Wahid, Abdul Hakim (Abdul Kholik), Abdul Karim, Ubaidillah, Mashuroh, and Muhammad Yusuf. Wahid Hasyim was the fourth of 10 children (Aboebakar, 1957). In the biography of KH A and the following essay, it is explained that Wahid Hasyim was born in Jombang Regency, specifically in Tebuireng, on Friday, June 1, 1914. Wahid Hasyim was born with the name Muhammad Asy'ari, taken from his grandfather. Nahdlatul Ulama members themselves believe that if a baby is named after a grandfather or a pious person, they will receive blessings. This was also the practice of Wahid Hasyim's parents at the time. However, as Wahid Hasyim grew older, several factors, such as frequent illnesses, led to his name being changed to Abdul Wahid. His mother often called him Mudin, and his nephew called him Pak It (Aboebakar, 1957).

For a Nahdlatul Ulama cleric like KH Hasyim Asy'ari, religious education for his children is paramount, given that for NU clerics, providing Islamic boarding school education for their sons and

daughters is mandatory so they can continue the leadership of the pesantren. From the age of five, Wahid Hasyim began learning to recite the Quran from his father after the Dzuhur and Maghrib prayers. In the morning, Wahid Hasyim received religious education at the Salaifiyah Madrasah in the Tebuireng Complex, studying several books such as Fathul Qarib, Minhajul Qarwim, and Muhamminah. This activity continued until he entered his teens (Sutjianingsih, 1983). His father's education piqued his interest in Arabic literature, leading him to explore various Islamic boarding schools in East Java, such as the Siwalan Islamic Boarding School in Sidoarjo and the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School in Kediri, to gain knowledge.

His love of Arabic literature did not prevent Wahid Hasyim from forgetting his Latin studies, although he considered it too late, having only started studying Latin at the age of 15. Quoting from a written statement by KH Syaifuddin Zuhri, contained in a book by Sutjiatingsih, it is known that at that time, Wahid Hasyim became a regular visitor to the Surabaya library, reading all the books available (Sutjianingsih, 1983). This encouraged him to read extensively beyond the religious studies he had already studied, given that Wahid Hasyim was born and spent his teenage years before Indonesia's independence. Wahid Hasyim received a religious education, traveling to Mecca with his cousin, KH M Ilyas, to study religion. His love for Indonesia did not stop there, but pushed him beyond simply becoming the heir to the Tebuireng Islamic boarding school. He went beyond this, and instead took steps to contribute to Indonesia's development.

b. KH Wahid Hasim's Role in Indonesian Politics

Early in his career, Wahid Hasyim focused solely on modernizing the Tebuireng Islamic boarding school, renaming it Madrasah Nizamiyah, so that Tebuireng could become a pioneer of modernization among Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools. However, shortly after his role in modernizing the Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School, Wahid Hasyim became a clerk at the Cukir Jombang branch of Nahdlatul Ulama. When Wahid Hasyim chose to become a clerk at the Cukir branch of Nahdlatul Ulama, which began in 1938, his career rose to become a member of the Jombang branch of Nahdlatul Ulama. From there, he was elected to the Surabaya branch of Nahdlatul Ulama and became a representative of Nahdlatul Ulama when the Indonesian Supreme Islamic Council was founded (Aboebakar, 1957). His meteoric political career cannot overshadow the fact that Wahid Hasyim was born into a privileged family and father, which facilitated his political career. He was also known for his critical, visionary, and integrity in addressing the problems of the Indonesian nation, particularly the Muslim community. Wahid Hasyim was elected to the Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya membership in 1940. In 1940, Wahid Hasyim was elected as a member of the Ma'arif section of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU).

2. Hajj Problems in Indonesia

a. Language Barriers and the Low Intellectual Capacity of Indonesian Hajj Pilgrims

Wahid Hasyim was once interviewed by a Solo journalist regarding the complex issues of the Hajj and explained the numerous cases of fraud involving Indonesian Hajj pilgrims. Language barriers are one of the factors that make it difficult for Muslims to perform the Hajj. Not only is there a language barrier, but knowledge about the Hajj is also very limited, as most Muslims performing the Hajj to the Holy Land are merchants with minimal religious knowledge. Wahid Hasyim, in his writing, stated that the intellectual capacity of Hajj pilgrims sent by other countries differs greatly from that of Indonesia, as some Indonesians who perform the Hajj consider the Hajj to be a luxurious spiritual journey (Hasyim, 1956). However, this is far from the case. The Hajj should be performed solemnly and with a sense of reverence, not merely for the sake of receiving the title "Haji" upon returning home. Indeed,

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the tradition of calling people by the name of "haji" after completing the Hajj pilgrimage has been an inseparable part of Indonesian pilgrims since ancient times.

A book written by Wahid Hasyim also reveals that there was a case of fraud where Indonesian pilgrims were lured into buying the Kaaba and then gave their money to a stranger (Hasyim, 1956). The lack of education regarding the Hajj pilgrimage poses a complex problem, especially since the Hajj pilgrimage during the colonial era was very expensive and difficult due to the rigorous and lengthy process, as the Hajj was seen as a form of resistance by the Indonesian people.

b. The Decline of Hajj Travel Agencies in Indonesia

A journal written by Rosyid states that in the 16th century, when did the Jepara-made Nusantara (Indonesian archipelago) sail the Indian Ocean for the Hajj? Beginning in the 17th century, the Indian Ocean route to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf opened. From there, Dutch ships dominated the Muslim Hajj pilgrimage. Unfortunately, in 1803, three pilgrims developed the Padri teachings, purifying Islamic teachings. This was suspected by the colonial government as a form of resistance (Rosyid, 2018).

In 1825, the Dutch issued an ordinance that resulted in the exorbitant cost of the Hajj, reaching 110 guilders. Furthermore, the Dutch government monitored the activities of pilgrims in Mecca. Seeing the high enthusiasm and enthusiasm of Muslims, the government exploited the Hajj for business, as Muslims simply complied when the colonial government raised the Hajj fee (Rosyid, 2018). The problems with Hajj departures continued until independence, as many illegal Hajj brokers and agents employed various methods to turn the Hajj into a business venture. According to well-researched sources, the Indonesian Hajj pilgrimage around 1940 was facilitated only by ships, without adequate knowledge or education about the Hajj (Hasyim, 1956). The complex issues surrounding Hajj education and departure became a very complex and significant task for the Old Order government in the early years of independence, given that Indonesia had the largest Muslim population.

c. Damage to Hajj Travel Agencies in Indonesia

Reporting from a journal written by Rosyid that in the 16th century when the archipelago made by Jepara was able to sail the Indian Ocean on the Hajj trip. Starting in the 17th century, the Indian Ocean route to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf was opened, from here Dutch ships dominated the pilgrimage of Muslims. Unfortunately, in 1803 there were 3 pilgrims who developed the teachings of Padri or purified the teachings of Islam, suspected by the colonial government as a form of resistance (Rosyid, 2018). In 1825 the Dutch issued an ordinance that had an impact on the very high cost of Hajj reaching 110 guilders, not only that the Dutch government also supervised the activities of the pilgrims in Makkah. Because of the very high enthusiasm and interest of Muslims, the government even took advantage of Hajj to do business because Muslims only obeyed when Hajj was increased by the colonial government (Rosyid, 2018).

The problem of hajj departure continues until independence because of the number of illegal hajj brokers or agents in various ways to make hajj travel a business. From the sources that have been observed, the Indonesian hajj journey around 1940 only facilitated ships, not equipped with good knowledge or education about Hajj (Hasyim, 1956). Complex problem after problem regarding Hajj education and its departure has become a very complicated matter and a big task for the government in the old order era of early independence considering that Indonesia is the country with the most citizens who embrace Islam.

3. Ministry of Religion as a Solution to Improve the Accessibility of Hajj Travel in Indonesia through the Thoughts and Dedication of the Minister of Religion KH Wahid Hasyim

a. Journey to Solve the Problem of Hajj Travel

Hajj constitutes the fifth pillar of Islam and holds significant religious, spiritual, and social importance for Muslims worldwide. In Indonesia, the pilgrimage has developed into a complex religious institution shaped by geographical distance, economic conditions, colonial policies, and administrative challenges. During the Dutch colonial period, the increasing number of Indonesian pilgrims travelling to Mecca demonstrated the importance of Hajj in Indonesian Muslim society. Vredenbregt (1962) documented the historical development of Indonesian pilgrimage practices, including the substantial number of pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land during the early twentieth century. Beyond its religious significance, Hajj also provided opportunities for transnational interaction and the circulation of Islamic ideas, contributing to broader developments in religious identity and political consciousness (Laffan, 2003; Tagliacozzo, 2013).

The organisation of Hajj during the colonial period was closely associated with transportation, financial accessibility, and political supervision. Long-distance maritime travel made the pilgrimage expensive and difficult, particularly for Muslims with limited economic resources. Dutch colonial authorities also exercised considerable control over pilgrimage transportation and monitored transnational Islamic networks because of concerns about anti-colonial and pan-Islamic movements (Alexanderson, 2014). Colonial shipping arrangements consequently reflected both commercial interests and political strategies. Studies by Baihaqi (2016), Rohmatulloh (2017), and Wulandari et al. (2024) further demonstrate that pilgrimage arrangements in Indonesia were influenced by changing transportation systems, colonial regulations, and the relationship between religious communities and political authorities.

Following Indonesian independence, improving pilgrimage administration became an important concern. In 1950, the Yayasan Perjalanan Haji Indonesia (PHI) was established to support the organisation of pilgrimage services and strengthen Indonesian participation in managing Hajj transportation. The organisation, chaired by Haji Sudjak, reflected efforts to develop greater national responsibility for pilgrimage arrangements (Noer, 1983). Nevertheless, the difficulties encountered by Indonesian pilgrims extended beyond transportation and administrative management. Religious knowledge, practical preparation, and access to reliable information remained essential concerns that required systematic educational intervention.

Wahid Hasyim identified inadequate religious knowledge and insufficient preparation among prospective pilgrims as fundamental problems in Indonesian Hajj administration. In his discussion of pilgrimage reform, he emphasised that undertaking Hajj required more than financial capacity; pilgrims also needed adequate understanding of religious obligations, pilgrimage procedures, and the social circumstances encountered in Mecca (Hasyim, 1950). His concerns illustrated the distinction between the numerical growth of pilgrims and the quality of their religious preparation. This perspective highlights the importance of integrating education into pilgrimage administration rather than treating Hajj exclusively as a matter of transportation and logistics.

Wahid Hasyim's concerns were particularly relevant to the vulnerability of pilgrims with limited religious knowledge and literacy. Historical accounts describe cases in which Indonesian pilgrims were exposed to deception and exploitation during their journey. In Wahid Hasyim's account, illustrative anecdotes included a pilgrim allegedly deceived into purchasing the Kaaba and another who

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misunderstood the meaning of Arafah (Hasyim, 1956, as cited in the manuscript). Although these specific anecdotes require verification against the original publication, the broader problem of fraudulent practices affecting Indonesian pilgrims is supported by Suryadi et al. (2024), who examined critical accounts of Hajj experiences during the colonial period. Such experiences demonstrate that religious enthusiasm without sufficient preparation could expose pilgrims to financial exploitation and difficulties in performing pilgrimage rituals correctly.

In response to these challenges, Wahid Hasyim considered several alternatives for improving the quality of Indonesian pilgrimage services. These included allowing existing practices to continue, encouraging educated Muslims to undertake Hajj and support other pilgrims, restricting departures until adequate preparation had been completed, and integrating systematic education into pilgrimage arrangements. The fourth approach offered a more practical direction because it sought to improve pilgrims' knowledge without unnecessarily restricting their opportunity to fulfil religious obligations. His reform-oriented perspective therefore placed education alongside administrative improvement as an essential component of pilgrimage management. This approach was consistent with broader efforts to reorganise Hajj administration following Indonesian independence (Noer, 1983).

Wahid Hasyim's ideas demonstrate that improvements in Hajj administration should address both institutional arrangements and the educational needs of pilgrims. The integration of religious instruction, practical guidance, and awareness of potential risks could strengthen pilgrims' preparedness throughout their journey. The historical experiences discussed by Vredenbregt (1962), Noer (1983), and Suryadi et al. (2024) further indicate that pilgrimage management cannot be separated from wider questions of religious literacy, economic accessibility, and institutional responsibility. Consequently, Wahid Hasyim's educational perspective provides an important historical foundation for understanding Hajj reform in Indonesia, particularly the relationship between religious knowledge, pilgrim protection, and the development of more systematic pilgrimage services.

b. Transformation of the Accessibility of Hajj Travel in Indonesia by the Ministry of Religion Through the Thought and Integrity of KH Wahid Hasyim

The various possible solutions presented by Wahid Hasyim are an effort to solve the problems of Muslims in Indonesia on the Hajj journey as a perfect worship as a devout Muslim. Although in practice there are many incidents that are beyond the control of the government and result in unconduciveness in the Hajj journey, this is certainly a concern of the government at that time. In order to solve the problem of hajj travel in a newly independent country. The fourth possibility that has been described above is the solution that will be used to describe and try to overcome the problem of hajj. Wahid Hasyim emphasized that solving the problem of hajj is the responsibility of the state, not just a handful of Muslims. Wahid Hasyim thinks that if the departure of Hajj can be accommodated by the state which will be handled by the Ministry of Religious Affairs it will be very good because this can build two aspects; First, of course, the religious aspect, the second is the state aspect.

The fourth plan designed by Wahid Hasyim is implemented using a ship called "Kapal Tarakan" as a hajj transportation accommodated by the ministry of religion. Pilgrims who have high knowledge are made as squad leaders and group leaders who will foster pilgrims who are considered lacking in knowledge of worship. The hajj journey using a sea ship ranges from about 16 days, in the first 5 days the pilgrim leaders are required to form groups and squads led by Kyai or pilgrims with qualified knowledge who participate in the group and the remaining 11 days of travel to Mecca. The pilgrims were equipped with knowledge about the hajj and state which had been arranged in such a way by the minister of religious affairs Wahid Hasyim.



Figure 1. Wahid Hasyim Talks with the Captain of the Tarakan Ship
Source: Menudju Pebaikan Perdjalanan Hadji)

The debriefing materials provided to pilgrims during their journey to Mecca covered several important topics, including Islam and its resistance to colonialism, the significance of national independence, the need to address development across various sectors, the eradication of illiteracy, and the revitalisation of people's cooperatives to strengthen economic independence and community welfare.

Conclusion

The fact that the problem of hajj in Indonesia is a very complex problem until the establishment of the Ministry of Religion at the beginning of independence proves that the government is indeed serious about taking care of and overseeing the worship of religious people, especially Muslims in Indonesia. Wahid Hasyim as an intellectual as well as the minister of religion saw how complicated the problem of hajj was before Indonesia saw that the state should play a big role in an effort to implement the first precept of the one and only Godhead. Problem after problem that exists in the departure of Hajj ranging from designing good and correct Hajj education and training for Hajj pilgrims to the fleet used to sail the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea is designed in such a way that the Hajj journey is not only a journey to get a Hajj title carried out, but the Hajj journey can also be applied as a worship that does not only focus on material preparation and physical health. But more than that, the hajj must be prepared mentally, emotionally, and with knowledge about worship which is included in the 5th pillar of Islam. Wahid Hasyim as the first minister of religion to initiate the hajj trip is regulated by the government through the ministry of religion. Through his expertise in handling this problem, Wahid Hasyim is a figure full of ideas in solving various community problems. Wahid Hasyim also emphasized that the Hajj should not just be a trip to Mecca and then return home with the frills of 'Hajj' but the Hajj should be used as an individual spiritual journey in getting closer to the creator.

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