



# Hijra Trend Among Youth in Contemporary Indonesia: Identity Construction and Negotiation

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**Abstract** -- This article analyzes the phenomenon of the development of hijra among youth in Semarang City and their strategies in dealing with new habits in their daily lives. The phenomenon of hijra among young people has recently been extensively spreading in various regions. The trend of young people doing hijra has attracted the attention of researchers to look further into the daily life of this group. In the city of Semarang they are referred to as "cah hijrah". Studies on migration in Indonesia have not been carried out in depth. The method used in this research is a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The theory used in this research is 'accommodating protest'. This theory was popularized by Macleod about everyday politics and power relations. This research found that the negotiations are experienced by millennial youth that did hijra in the city of Semarang in today's modern world. Macleod said this is a part of accommodation and also protesting, "cah hijrah" in Semarang City have experienced life as a millennial identity negotiation. It can be said that the concept of hijra for millennial youth shows a process of negotiation that is not easy between following the teachings of the classical *salaf* strictly and looking for an instant way. It can be said that with the concept of hijra, they changed what they said was an un-Islamic past into what they called the life of a good *salaf* follower. This new identity can change the way they see themselves and their surroundings, how they act, how they make friends, and how they imagine their future. With Macleod's theory this research confirms the spirit of millennial struggle to accept the teachings of the *salaf*, but on the other hand they also find alternatives for youth learning in their own way.

**Keywords** -- hijra, accommodating protest, construction, identity negotiation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Hijra is a newly popular religious phenomenon that is currently in trend among Indonesian youth. It is increasingly popular in urban communities especially among the middle class due to the presence of public figures who did the hijra. Hijra is a spiritual term that refers to an individual who has become better religiously [4]. The rising of this phenomenon cannot be separated from the increasing religious conservatism in Indonesia, including on social media [5]. Instagram and YouTube are often used as media to promote the idea of hijra [8]. The growing number of hijra community members can be seen from the increasing number of followers of some social media account such as Youth Hijrah Shift Bandung (IG: 9.5 JT and Youtube 567 K), Jakarta Musawah Study (IG: 964 RB and Youtube 341 K), Yuk

Koran Semarang (IG: 5,814 K and Youtube 136 K), The Strangers Al-Ghuroba Jakarta (IG: 116 RB and Youtube 64.3 K), Terang Jakarta (IG: 74.1 RB and Youtube 7.45 K) and Cah Hijrah Semarang City (GI: 31.5 RB and Youtube: 17K).

Based on the research done by Center for Islamic and Community Studies/Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat (PPIM) UIN Jakarta, using social media, using young people's way to communicate, and following trends are used as effective methods to uncover followers of hijra communities from various social classes [13]. The trend of hijra is presented with ways that are enchanting and easily accepted by millennials. The movement is spread across many cities in Indonesia, one of them being Semarang City in Central Java. One significant Islamic studies community in Semarang is called "Cah Hijrah". Established in 2017, the community grew in Semarang by carrying out contemporary studies/discourses and initiating popular Islamic culture with issues that are relevant to young people. In a survey on the hijra movement conducted by the IDN Research Institute, 72.8% of millennial young individuals had decided to do hijra [12]. The goal of the movement is to commit to Islam as their religion while still being able to enjoy modern culture. This is what makes the trend attractive to young millennials.

In this paper, authors examine the presence of "Cah Hijrah" in Semarang City. Semarang is one of the cities in Indonesia where hijra communities gather. Ar-Rayyan and Dawwam communities merged later on (2018). Furthermore, The Cah Hijrah community in Semarang is involved in Moslem Youth Movement (Smooth), One Day One Juz, Rilaman Doaqu, Hooray Heroes, Klink Nikah Semarang [16]. The community uses social media to recruit members. Public figures and local celebrities from Semarang also have important roles in the process of Islamic preaching. Thus, Cah Hijrah has two figures in its movement, virtual figures, and real-life figures. These two figures can attract millennial youth.

The hijra movement in Indonesia provides a positive offer for one to achieve a better life according to the principles of Islam. Other than that, this movement allegedly is vulnerable to exclusivism. This can be seen from da'wah contents and Islamic interpretations that are delivered with a more conservative approach [11]. Support is also shown for the implementation of Islamic law normatively, the development of exclusive Islamic housing, and the strict use of Islamic banks.

This article discusses the phenomenon of hijra among millennial youth in Semarang, known as "cah hijrah". Exploring what hijra means for them, what expressions they show, and what kind of agency they have as part of the millennial generation. Taking a look into this issue is important in order to understand the movement of the hijra community in the aspect of the values and norms taught to the followers which then lead to the meaning of hijra in accordance with Islam, the strategy for disseminating the teachings carried out by the Cah Hijrah community in Semarang, and seeing the diverse spectrum of the massive hijra movement. Moreover, this article aims to acknowledge the various strategies, forms of agency used by young people in the Cah Hijrah community of Semarang City in expressing their commitment to *manhaj salafi*, and their young spirit all at the same time. Awareness of this matter will be useful for policy makers as well as supporting religious moderation in determining attitudes and strategic steps in responding to the hijra movement.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method that focuses on field findings that are collected through in-depth interviews. The research was conducted on The Cah Hijrah community in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. This community was chosen because of its massive movement in voicing hijra in the city of Semarang. Semarang being a strategic location for the existence of religious communities that take part in filling the various religious patterns in Indonesia is the reason behind this research. In-depth interviews were conducted with the founder of the Cah Hijrah community, the head of the Cah Hijrah community, and 4 millennial youths who did the hijra and are active in studies conducted by the Cah Hijrah community. Informants were selected using purposive technique. This research uses the accommodating Protest theory developed by Macleod, and the data obtained was analyzed using an inductive approach.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Youth and Contemporary Religiosity Style

Youth are those aged between 16 and 30 years of age (UU No. 40 tahun 2009). Referring to this limitation, generation Z or the generations that are born between the year of 1995 and 2010 are included and considered as youths according to the provisions of the law. Generation Z are often called the real digital native generation because they have been exposed to the internet and social media since they were young [9]. As a generation born in the internet era, digital media, especially social media, is the main reference for generation Z [3]. The same thing applies to their religious matters, the internet has become an important reference for generation Z to study religion. This is different from previous generations who studied religion from traditional institutions such as pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), *pengajian*, kyai or ustadz who were seen as authoritative in providing religious explanations [14].

Amid the increased religious spirit after the restraints in the new era and the emergence of new media (social media) which have taken over the communication medium, online-based da'wah media plays an important role in shaping the

style of how younger generations implement their religious practices. Among the important phenomena of digital-based religion practices is the hijra movement. This trend has emerged since the 1980s along with the development of the transnational Islamist movement that accompanied the homecoming of Indonesian students studying in the Middle East [1]. The hijra movement or the movement to live a more religious life is getting more intense with the development of the internet. Online-based hijra da'wah presents the phenomenon of micro celebrities or public figures who act as providers of religious messages on social media [6]. This figure is often referred to as an influencer and has an important role in influencing the religious lifestyle of youth in the current era. Hijra influencers have even more influence when they are also celebrities. Celebrity figures who often become role models for their fans have great power in encouraging fans to follow the hijra trend popularized by their idols.

Not only is it a matter of how the influencers influence their fans, digital da'wah has also boosted the surfacing of products that are labeled halal or sharia as an indicator of a religious life. This implies that the hijra trend is not only about living a more religious life, but also about economic turnover. Hijra is also about clothing, food, cosmetics, and other accessories [2]. Previously, the halal label was only for food to be consumed, but now halal is also used for other products in order to fulfill the desire to live a more religious life, even tourism also has a halal label.

### "Cah Hijrah" Semarang Hijra Construct

To understand the meaning of hijra, one cannot separate it from the beginning of Islam, where hijra was carried out by the Prophet Muhammad SAW as the starting point for the birth of Islam as a religion with social ethos that created an egalitarian and democratic society [15]. The hijra of the Prophet Muhammad SAW from Mecca to Medina was done for him to do da'wah. In present time, hijra is not only seen as a territorial move, but also a process of moving in terms of one's deeds [11]. The term hijra is now increasingly popular with the spread of various hijra communities in Indonesia. In Indonesia, the term hijra was first popularized by Darul Islam with Kartosuwiryo who argued about the hijra policy during the time we had to face the Dutch colonists. However, it was rejected with the consequence of limitation to the movement of the Islamic Sharia Party/Partai Syariat Islam which was considered to be less moderate [7]. In 1980, the word hijra reappeared and was used by the followers of the Negara Islam Indonesia/Islamic State of Indonesia (NII), with the presence of Abdul Qadir Baraja's work entitled "Jihad dan Hijrah/Jihad and Hijra". In his work, hijra is interpreted as an attempt to escape from the enemies of Islam, but in practice NII followers exile themselves to Malaysia [7].

The phenomenon of hijra that came up in the current era offers da'wah that includes trends among young people (millennials). Observing the hijra trend in Indonesia, it can actually no longer be considered as a new movement. The movement can even be considered as a part of an extension of Islamic revivalism that surfaced in the reform era, after the fall of the Orde Baru/New Order. But at that time, the terminology of hijra was not very popular and was not used as a growing movement as it is now. What distinguishes the hijra movement from previous movements is certainly the approach used which is more attractive to young millennials,

for example the use of social media with a variety of looks and captions that are more modern.

It can be said that hijra has been reinterpreted by different groups with various interpretations as well. There are two interpretations of hijra, political interpretation and spiritual interpretation. The new hijra movement sees hijra in the spiritual direction, connected to a personal level which ends up becoming a collective movement that has a significant influence in society, especially among young people. Political groups interpret hijra according to the group's momentary interests. The meaning of hijra could seem scary when interpreted to justify intolerance in the name of religion. Therefore, those are the construction of the meaning of hijra by groups who feel like they are part of the hijra movement.

The hijra group in the city of Semarang, known as "Cah Hijrah", interprets this movement as part of the spirituality of a new life for those who are new to or wish to have better understanding of their religion. Cah Hijrah builds relationships and friendships through social media to facilitate the introduction of the meaning behind hijra, besides that this group also approaches and invites the members to the community directly. These approaches are used as instruments for the Cah Hijrah group on doing their da'wah.

#### **Hijra: Becoming The Ideal Muslim**

Hijra can be interpreted from two points of view, the first is from a historical point of view and from a metaphorical point of view. Hijra in history describes the movement of Muslims from Mecca to Medina due to the extraordinary pressure they experienced in Mecca. Hijra in this perspective is part of the process of building the collectivity of Muslims in the early days, therefore hijra is also seen as a political strategy of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in assembling the unity of the ummah [14].

In contrast to the historical meaning of hijra, today hijra is interpreted metaphorically to describe the process of individual repentance. Hijra is the process of a Muslim leaving bad deeds and immorality to good deeds [14]. Hijra in history has a collective meaning, while now it has an individual meaning. Hijra in the current context is also related to how a person dresses, chooses a mate, travels, eats and so on.

#### **"Cah Hijrah" Identity Constructions and Youth Negotiations**

The phenomenon of hijra has become a trend in the current millennial era, it became a new religious phenomenon for Indonesian Muslims by carrying out a religious vision of making the followers better individuals after doing it. Hijra is used as a lifestyle for young people through Islamic studies/discourses and wearing clothes that cover most of their body in an Islamic style, such as wearing a large headscarf, veiling, or growing out beard for men [4]. These symbols are used as an indication of someone that did the hijra. Social media is the right instrument to use to access hijra studies online. The use of the internet and social media to get to know and learn about Islam is dominated by young people. The Cah Hijrah community is also very favored by them.

The symbols used in the hijra movement used by millennials in this research symbolize the young millennial's strong commitment to the choices they've made at a very young age and their determination in dealing with difficult situations they have to face in this society. Kabeer said that although they are faced with opposition from others, individuals who have the ability to choose their own lives and pursue their own goals can be considered to have agency. Members of Cah Hijrah, for instance, said that their choice of doing hijra was difficult at first because they had to leave their previous routines, hobbies, goals and friendships. They even face conflicts within themselves and with their close friends, connections with the opposite sex is an example of what could be different after doing hijra. This shows that the hijra trend and their studies/discourses provide classical Islamic understandings which were and still are rare to find practiced among young Indonesian millennials.

Several informants interviewed in this research revealed that they experience boredom while staying at home and dread interacting with people. With some parts of the society that are still not familiar with the Cah Hijrah community, there are perceptions and accusations about the community being a radical group. An issue that goes around claims that this community is an association for terrorists, radicals, and others. Continuing hobbies they had before hijra is also a challenge for the Cah Hijrah members. The community tries to solve this by facilitating the hobbies and habits of young people, holding several activities that are familiar and popular among young people such as camping, futsal, archery, and others. As Rohmah said, "I have archery as a hobby, apart from being able to practice archery for free here, it is important to do it for Allah's sake. I also see this hobby as a part of how to express my young side and a way of broadcasting the sunnah of the Prophet. And I also try to campaign that archery is cool, it's not something radical as people have said with the presence of the Cah Hijrah community". In line with what was stated by Rohmah, young people who did the hijra wanted to study religion because they can express their young spirit. This was experienced by Leedan Setyandika who after doing hijra is still able to express his young side through his interest in coffee shops. For Leedan, the Cah Hijrah community is filled with people that keep up with trends but still understand the boundaries they have with their religious belief.

Therefore, the hijra carried out by millennial youth face tough challenges in their daily lives. Some young people admit that they can't change completely into what ideal followers are like after hijra, but they continue to strive to become true Muslims. Along this path, young people who did the hijra must hold a negotiation between their former and new identities. In a sense even though they seem to accept the symbols worn from what they use after hijra, they also indirectly carried out their agency. The agency is in the form of their battle to negotiate their interests, emotions and desires under the Cah Hijrah Semarang community. These negotiations have become a sort of alternative way of dealing with situations they cannot fight with, but at the same time they cannot succumb to [10]. Through its journey, The Cah Hijrah Semarang Community experienced and faced various kinds of obstacles that needed to be negotiated by its members when they were face to face with the society.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The concept of hijra for young people shows a complex negotiation process between following the trend of hijrah and them pursuing their youth. With the concept of hijra, they change what they call their non-Islamic past to what is called the *kaffah* Islamic way. This new identity changes how they see themselves and their surroundings, how they behave, and how they envision their future. Seeing it with Macleod's theory of accommodating protests perspective, the negotiations of young millennials justify their battle between accepting the concept of hijra on one hand, and other alternatives in the identity search for young people on the other hand.

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