

IDENTITY CRISIS, CONTESTATION, AND CONFLICT WITHIN THE HADRAMI COMMUNITY OF AL-IRSYAD 1990-2007

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Abstract

At reformation era the identity crisis amongst the members of Al-Irsyad became manifest which directed to split in 2007. This article aims to analyze the Hadrami, the community of Arab descendent, at dealing the issues of Islam and the state at the period of 1990s – 2007. This research find out that at Reformation era, some members of Al-Irsyad suffered from disorientation manifested in the form of internal conflict, contestation, and then split in 2007. It started from the infiltration of the contemporary Salafi which causes its members diverted from the early goals of Al-Irsyad. These disorientated members, based on the Salafi ideology, made movement claimed as a kind of khittah, that is to restore the organization in line with the early goals of Al-Irsyad. This movement, then, created conflict and contestation within Al-Irsyad which 1n 2007 resulted in the split of organization into Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah and Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad.

Key words: Al-Irsyad, Hadrami community, identity crisis, Split, Salafi.

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Introduction

At the reigns of President Soekarno and Soeharto, political Islam groups had been marginalized so that for the purpose of their existence, they tried to adjust to the existing government policies (Imam B Jauhari, 2012: 189). Accordingly, the step down of President Soeharto had instigated them to declare their actual political identity and some of them offered *Syari'ah* as the solution to the contemporary Indonesia problems. Even, some of them mobilized masses to support their claim of formalization of *Syari'ah* (Bahtiar Effendy, 2011: 403). In the case of Al-Irsyad the issue of *Syari'ah* had split its members into the pro-*Syari'ah* and the Pancasila state. In this regard, the government, of course, support the last one, although the government knows that they have not had a clear understanding on the relationship between Islam and the state.

Ahmad Surkati established Al-Irsyad in 1914 after he quit from *Jami'at Khair* in 1912. Hasan Bahanan, one of Al-Irsyad leaders, argues that Islamic reformation done by Al-Irsyad have finished in 1970s since there is no longer the works of Islamic and intellectual thought produced by Al-Irsyad followers. Al-Irsyad was also no longer produce the clerics (*ulama*) as well as Islamic intellectuals. Accordingly, Al-Irsyad just referred to the products of the existing intellectual and Islamic thoughts such as by Syekh Ahmad Surkati, Umar Hubeis (2013), and Umar Naji (Hasan Bahanan, 22 October 2013). Last but not the least, within its organizational structure, there was no longer a kind of discussion forum to solve the social religious problems. In 1982 at the 32nd Al-Irsyad congress in Semarang, *Majlis Ifta' wa al-Tarjih*, a forum for disseminating Islamic thoughts,

was no longer active (Hasil Keputusan Mukhtamar 35, December 1990). This *Majlis Ifta'* had been established in 1951 to produce *fatwa* as a guidance for Indonesia Muslims to practice their religion based on the God's wills, free from *bid'ah* dan *khurafat* (AD/ART 1951, 1955: 5). At this situation and condition, Salafi started infiltrating and spreading amongst the followers of Al-Irsyad.

The collapse of the authoritarian Soeharto regime gave a good momentum the pro-Salafi members to take over the leadership of Al-Irsyad with the justification of restoring the original spirit of the establishment of Al-Irsyad. Indeed, they had abilities to speak and write in Arabic, the source language of Islam. They also emphasized their original Arab identities (Yusuf Utsman Baisa, 29 October 2013).

Early Infiltration of Salafy to Al-Irsyad

Generally speaking, from its inception, Al-Irsyad's efforts at reforming Islam is just limited to banning of religious practices considered as *takhayul* (superstition), *bid'ah* (religious innovation), and *khurafat* (myth), as well as limited adoption of Western model of education. This is also confirmed by Geys Amar, one of Al-Irsyad leaders (Geys Amar, 1990: 8). In this regard Ustadz Ahmad Salim Mahfudz argued that what has been done by Al-Irsyad is not related much to modernize Islam, but rather to follow and revive Islamic practices such as done by *ahl as-salaf*, namely the companions of Muhammad the Prophet, and the next generation as well as the continuing next generation (A.S. Mahfidz, 1996: 12). In line with this, I agree with Azyumardi Azra that apart of its claim of modern Islamic movement, Al-Irsyad is more a kind of *Salafi* movement. Accordingly, at

ideological level, it does not belong to a modern Islamic group (Azyumardi Azra, 2000: 115). Furthermore, Harun Nasution argued that what had been done by Al-Irsyad was not about fundamental issues of religion, but rather the secondary issues such as statue, picture, music, *kenduri* (ritual meal) (Harun Nasution, 1995: 153) Accordingly, Al-Irsyad was not responsive to the actual problems of Muslims at modern era.

At this stagnant intellectual climate, pro-Salafi members offered some ideas to revive the role of Al-Irsyad at modern era (*Keputusan Mukhtamar ke-38 Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah di Jakarta*, 2006: 45). It started around 1990s with the coming of Ja'far Umar Thalib, Yazid Abdul Qadir Jawwas, and Yusuf Utsman Baisa. All of them graduated from di LIPIA at the era of 1980s. The establishment of LIPIA in 1980 was apart of Saudi Arabia's efforts of spreading *Wahabism*, a manifestation of Islam such as interpreted by Ibn Wahab. Saudi Arabia also supported DDII (*Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia*, Missionary Council of Indonesian Islam) which, then, became its ally at *Rabithah al-'Alam al-Islami (Liga Islam Dunia*, League of Islamic World). Of course, Saudi Arabia disguised its mission of spreading Wahabism such as in the form of Muslim solidarity, fraternity, and piety. For that purpose, Saudi distributed some amount of money to the targeted countries, including Indonesia, through the projects of mosque, Islamic school, and missionary (Noorhaidi Hasan, 2009: 124).

In 1990s Salafi movement within AL-Irsyad became so intense with the arrival of Ja'far Umar Thalib, Yazid Abdul Qadir Jawwas, and Yusuf Utsman Baisa, the alumni LIPIA of *Hadrami* descendent, from Middle East

(Noorhaidi Hasan, 2008: 66-68). Ja'far Umar Thalib is the first generation of LIPIA alumni and become the initiator of Salafi movement in Indonesia. After finishing LIPIA, he went to Yaman in 1991 to study with Syaikh Mukbil ibn Hadi al-Wad'i, in Dammaz. Mukbil was one of puritan Salafi leader which is anti to *Ikhwanul Muslimin*, *Hizbut Tahrir*, and *Jamaah Tabligh*. This stand point have descended to Ja'far Umar Thalib. Meanwhile Yusuf Utsman Baisa went to Saudi Arabia to study with Syaikh aṣ-Ṣahwah al-Islamiyah which is sympathetic to *Ikhwanul Muslimin* and accordingly his religious political view is rather different from Ja'far (As'ad Said Ali, 2011).

Regarding Al-Irsyad school at the time of Surkati taught all subjects by means of Arabic language, these three Salafi initiators tried to revive Arabic in Al-Irsyad. For that purpose, they established *Pesantren Al-Irsyad* in Tenganan, Semarang (As'ad Said Ali, 2011). From the above statement, we understand that some members of Al-Irsyad suffered from crisis identity so that they tried to find identity on Arab through its education at Pesantren Tenganan. They also established an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) in Salatiga, Semarang, and Bondowoso. Of course, this movement was not conducive to the efforts of assimilation carried out by some of its members (Natalie M Kesheh, 1999: 78). Besides teaching, these three Salafi initiators (Ja'far Umar Thalib, Yazid Abdul Qadir Jawwas, and Yusuf Utsman Baisa) took an important role on spreading Salafi teachings either to the students or Muslim generally. They were active attending invitation from their followers at some cities, especially Semarang, Yogyakarta, and Solo (Noorhaidi Hasan, 2008: 103). Accordingly, Pesantren Al-

Irsyad Tenggaran had expanded from its original goal of developing education into supporting Salafi mission. Then, Pesantren Al-Irsyad Tenggaran developed networking with some religious institutions which have the same mission. For example, it tied cooperation with Saudi Arabia for sending and receiving delegates every year. Al-Irsyad sent students and teachers for the purpose of improving the mastery of Arabic language as well as religious knowledge in general. Once Saudi Arabia sent 2 teachers to help learning and teaching process (Kerjasama..., 7 April 2013).

Under leadership of Yusut Utsman Baisa, Pesantren Al-Irsyad Tenggaran was used to support the activities of *Ihya at-Turas*. *Ihya at-Turas* is an organization built based on *manhaj Ikhwani*, that is implementing the methods of *hizbiyyah*. *Hizbiyyah* methods included *bai'at* (tied its members with oath), involved in political practices, participated in Parliament, spreading the thoughts of Quthbiyyah and Abdurrahman Abdul Khaliq (Leader of *Ihya at-Turas*) (Abu Karimah Askari, 2012).

Conflict, Contestation, and Al-Irsyad

The arrival of pro-Salafi Al-Irsyad cadres who tried to restore the identity crisis by identifying to their Arab descendent had caused internal conflict within Al-Irsyad. Geys Amar of contra-Salafi gave statement that: They came to Al-Irsyad to divide and conquer...At 36th congress in 1996 in Pekalongan they insisted on having their representation at the level of central leadership. At that time, my popularity was still high and I became a chief of central leadership, but I accommodated their insistence as I want to know what actually they want to do. When I took them to Al-

Irsyad's branches, I knew that they were good in front of me, but they tried to persuade the branches to support the Salafi (Geys Amar, 9 August 2016).

In this context, Awod Maretan (former head of Pekalongan branch of Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah) also confirmed that the virus of Salafi had infiltrated the central leaderships since 1996 in Pekalongan. He also argued that this Salafi virus was different from *mabda* (ideology) of Al-Irsyad adopted up to now. They made uses of school and pesantren Al-Irsyad to spread Salafi and made uses of hospital to fund their activities (Awod Maretan, 2005: 9). Indeed the early infiltration of Salafi had happened with the arrival of three initiators of pro-Salafi which managed to establish Pesantren Al-Irsyad in 1990.

When Geys Amar became the chief leader of Al-Irsyad at the 4th period (1996-2001) it was not at easy as the previous periods. In the middle of his leadership, it appeared an open conflict which directed to the terminology of "growing different power within the existing power system" (Zeyd Ali Amar, 2005: 6).

Following the conflict, on 20 March 1998 the central leaderships of Al-Irsyad had a meeting attended by all members of the central leaderships except the leaders of Education Committee and of Student and Youth Committee. This meeting had a single agenda of reshuffle in order the organization to run effectively. At that time there were some efforts by the senior members of Al-Irsyad to mediate the conflict between the chief leader Geys Amar and vice-chief leader Muhammad Bawazir. The first effort was held in Jakarta on 23rd June at office of the Foundation of the Support Funding to

Institutions of Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah (*Yayasan Dana Bantuan Perguruan-Perguruan Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah*, YBPP), on Salemba Raya No. 23rd Jakarta Pusat. Mediators of this meeting were Asad Baredwan, Faisal Ba'asir, Husein Badjerei, Faris Nahdi, and Ali Binnur (in *Muktamar Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah ke-37*, 2000). This mediation was fail and Geys Amar reshuffled those who were pro-Salafi in the name of securing the ideology of the organization. On 11 November 1998 he issued SK PP Number: 104-K-1419 concerning *reshuffle*. There were four members of board of executive that were Muhammad Bawazir (vice-chief of board of executive), Masdoen Pranoto (secretary general of board of executive), Awod Makky (vice-secretary general of board of executive), and Mohamad Harharah (vice-treasury of board of executive) (*Laporan Pertanggung Jawaban PP Al-Irsyad Masa Bakti 1996-2001*, 2000) (in *Muktamar Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah ke-37*, 2000).

Muhammad Bawazir and Masdoen Pranoto challenged the decision of reshuffle and organized a meeting amongst the pro-Salafi on June 3rd 1999 which annulled the SK PP No. 104-K-1419 and issued the new SK No. 105-K-1420. This SK disqualified the leadership of Geys Amar (Zeyd Ali Amar, 2005: 8).

The second effort to reconciliation had been held by Ali Harharah on June 26th 1999 at a building on Jalan Slamet Riyadi No. 19 Jakarta Timur. He was able to had Geys Amar and Muhammad Bawazir met to find some solution. At that meeting Geys Amar offered the post of vice-chief executive which is still vacant with the condition not reinstalling Awod Makky and Mohamad Harharah into the board of executive. At that time Muhammad

Bawazir accepted Geys Amar's offer and would consult the issue of Awod Makky and Mohamad Harharah. The issue of Awod Makky and Mohammad Harharah continued to exist so that the reconciliation was fail again. Then, Muhammad Bawazir together with some friends claimed the leadership of Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah and occupied the office of secretary with its important documents (in *Laporan Pertanggung Jawaban PP Al-Irsyad 1996-2001*: 6).

Muhammad Bawazir, then, held an extra-ordinary congress (*Muktamar Luar Biasa*, MLB) in Tawangmangu, Solo on 16 and 17 October 1999 which chose Farouk Zein Bajabir as the chief executive board and at the same time disqualified the leadership of Geys Amar. This is an early moment of rising the dualism of leadership within Al-Irsyad, a part from the belief of Masdoen Pranoto of pro-Salafi that dualism of organization had taken place since 1996, following the 36th congress (in *Laporan Pertanggung Jawaban PP Al-Irsyad 1996-2001*: 6).

This Extra-Ordinary Congress in Tawangmangu can be said as the ultimate conflict of Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah. According to Geys Amar's bloc, this congress was initiated by the four reshuffled members of board of executive and neglected the decision of 36th congress in 1996 in Pekalongan which stated that the next congress would be held in Bandung (MABDA, 1999: 9).

In this conflict, according to Ridho Baridwan (one of Geys's follower), YBPP, which has an important role to fund the organization, was involved in supporting the Extra-Ordinary Congress in Tawangmangu. In his view, it was not appropriate for YBPP to be partisan in this conflict as its main function is to fund all schools affiliated to Al-Irsyad.

Ridho argued that in one article of its Statutes it was stated that this YBPP had a closed tied to *Yayasan Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad al-Islamiah* and *Yayasan Perguruan Al-Irsyad* which had missions to maintain peace and the unity of Al-Irsyad, to guarantee security, and to establish welfare. He also explained that this YBPP should become an protagonist in developing cooperation with other institutions either within Indonesia or foreign countries for the purpose of developing education and Islamic missionary (Ridho Baridwan, 2005: 13).

Al-Irsyad had occupied the building on 25 Kramat Raya Street, Central Jakarta which functioned to run the organization. With the occupation of that building by Farouk Zein Badjabir, Geys Amar was forced out at post-MLB Tawangmangu in 1999 (Ridho Baridwan, 2005: 16). For that purpose, Badjabir tried to find justification from a letter of Ministry of Home Affairs, Number 350 Year 1999/DIV, signed on 30 November 1999. Another justification was a letter of YBPP, numbered 55/Yayasan BPA/Adum/Umum/XII/99, signed on 2 December 1999 by Faisal Ba'asir (Head Office of YBPP) and Muhammad Bawazir (its secretary). Following that occupation, Geys Amar continued running its organization from Thalib Makky's house and then moving to Ali Harharah's pavilion on 19 A Slamet Riyadi Street I East Jakarta (in Laporan Pertanggung Jawaban PP Al-Irsyad 1996-2001: 17).

In this situation, Geys Amar tried to reconcile with Badjabir by carrying out the National Congress on 3-6 June 2000 in Bandung, which is prior to the 2001 planned national congress. At that congress Hisyam Thalib was elected as the chief leader of board of executive and Geys Amar was elected as its

general secretary. On other hand, Badjabir's bloc of MLM Tawangmangu denied their participation at the national congress and he argued that Amar's bloc and their followers at the branches which had held the national congress in which Amar was degraded into the general secretary and Hisyam Thalib became the chief leader of board of executive. In this regard, the status of Hisyam Thalib as the chief leader of Al-Irsyad was supported by the annulation of a registered letter at Ministry of Home Affairs and Regional Autonomy. This annulation was issued by this ministry following a letter of protest by Hisyam Thalib, with number 210080031/PP, as a chief leader of board of executive of Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah, Hisyam Thalib. Accordingly, this ministry issued a letter with number 220/2928/SJ.

Although the Ministry of Home Affairs had tried to solve the problem of Al-Irsyad, the internal conflict was not subsided and even became more intense. For the purposes of challenging the validity of MLM Bandung in 2000 as well as of obtaining reconciliation, Farouk Zein Badjabir, Masdoen Pranoto, and their friends of MLB Tawangmangu carried out national congress on 22-23 March 2002 in Cilacap. This congress, then, chose Zein Badjabir as a chief leader of the board of executive of AL-Irsyad. The decisions of this national congress was not concluding as it was not accepted by all Irsyadi. In this regard, Hisyam Thalib issued a letter of statements which challenged the validity of MLM Cilacap. This letter was supported by a legal letter of Pengadilan Negeri Jakarta (Farouk Z Badjabir, 2003: 4) which nullified the decision of Putusan Pengadilan Negeri East Jakarta on 30 June 2003 Number 283/Pdt.G/2002/PN.JKT.TIM. A legal letter of

Pengadilan Negeri Jakarta stated that the board of executive of Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah resulted from 37th national congress in Bandung was the only valid leadership to represent Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah.

Conflict continued to exist as Badjabir's bloc requesting an appeal to the supreme court. However, Supreme Court did not approve this request by issuing a legal decision with number 1702K/PDT/2004. As the follow up, the Supreme Court sent the copy of the legal decision to a team of lawyers of Hisyam Thalib of the national congress in Bandung on 30 May 2005. Responding to the decision of the Supreme Court, Badjabir's bloc declared some statements on 24 December 2005 in Pekalongan, that were: (1) stating a vote of no confidence to the board of executive justified by the decision of Supreme Court with number 1702K/Pdt/2004. (2) establishing Presidium of board of executive as mandatories to resolve the issues, to take policies and to implement them, (3) appointing Drs. Ahmad Baraas, M.Si., Khalid Abdullah Seff, Fauzi Ali Assewet, SE., Ir. As'ad MN, Said Awod Azis, SH., Ust.Yusuf Utsman Baisa, Lc., Dr. Abeng, MMR., Drs. Amin Radjab, Ir. Farhat Umar, M.Si. as Presidium of board of executive with the tasks as follow: (a) as the only representatives of regional and provincial branches of Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah all over of Indonesia to lead the organization at national level, (b) executing the tasks of board of executive either internal or external affairs, (c) restoring organization to the early goals (*khithah*) in 11914, that "Al-Irsyad; ...

For the group which agreed with Salafi (Badjabir, Pranoto, Baisa, and their friends), they stated that the legal decision of Supreme Court will not effect on the decisions of MLB

2000 in Cilacap. They based their arguments on the fact that the decisions of the national congress as the highest institution can not be annulled by other institution, including that of the Supreme Court. On contrary, Hamid Abud Attamimi (board of executive of Regional Brach of Cirebon) and other Al-Irsyad activists of anti-Salafi argued that Badjabir's bloc just believed that something is true just because of its congruence with their vested interest (Hamid A Attamimi, 2005: 6).

In conclusion, the internal conflict of Al-Irsyad taking a long time and costly had been finalized by legal decision of the Supreme Court with number 1702K/PDT/2004 in April 2005 which recognized the validity of Geys Amar and Hisyam Thalib's leadership. In fact this conflict had been resolved completely as both blocs continued in quarrel to acquire the possession of organization's asset and symbols. Indeed, Badjabir's bloc had established a new organization, namely "Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad" in 2007. In this regard, Hisyam Thalib issued a letter to regional and provincial branches as well as Al-Irsyad Foundation in order not to release the asset to "Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad".

Before Al_Irsyad split into two, in 2006 Hisyam Thalib, pro-Salafi, held the 38th national congress. For him, this congress had a strategic significance as being able to dualism of leaderships which, of course, had negative impact to the development of organization. On the following year in 2007 there existed two organizations with the name of Al-Irsyad that are Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah (the original organization) and Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad (the new orgaization), in which both had different manifestations on their actualization of the

identities (in Panduan Mukhtar ke-38, 2006: 6).

The existence of Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad has been registered at the Ministry of Home Affairs with SKT Number: 99/D.III.2/XI/2007 on 14 November 2007. At its first congress in Pondok Gede, Jakarta on 30 March 2009 Perhimpunan Al-Irsyad has been compiled a statute (Anggaran Dasar/Anggaran Rumah Tangga). What is surprising is that the organization based on the national ideology of Pancasila and the Indonesian Constitution of 1945 (AD/ART, 2013). On other side, Al-Irsyad al-Islamiah, since 37th national congress in 2000 in Bandung have changed its philosophical foundation from Pancasila to Islam (Hasil Keputusan Mukhtar ke-37, 2000).

Conclusion

Based on the above elaboration of the history of Al-Irsyad from 1990 to 2007, we can conclude that the contemporary intrusion of Salafi to Al-Irsyad had caused conflict and contestation amongst the Hadrami community in Al-Irsyad which culminated in its split in 2007. Generally, there were some factors perpetuating the conflict amongst the Hadrami community in Al-Irsyad between Geys Amar's bloc and Yusuf Utman Baisa in 2007. First was the infiltration of Salafi to Al-Irsyad by some pro-Salafi cadres which had received education from Middle East. They campaigned slogan of *khithah* which want to return to the early goals of the organization such as formulated by Ahmad Surkati. For that purpose, they had a strong support from Saudi Arabia. They tried to take over the leadership of Al-Irsyad and accordingly it arose conflicts between those who were pro-Salafi and those of contra-Salafi. Second was the issue of

welfare amongst its members. As you know, Yayasan Dana Bantuan Perguruan-Perguruan Al-Irsyad (YBPP) as the organization's source of funding was involved in the conflict. Regarding YBPP received support of funding from Saudi Arabia, the pro-Salafi under the leadership of Yusuf Utsman Baisa controlled YBPP. It was not surprising that the activities of pro-Salafi can run well. In line with this, some members of Al-Irsyad joined with pro-Salafi group because of the issue of welfare.

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