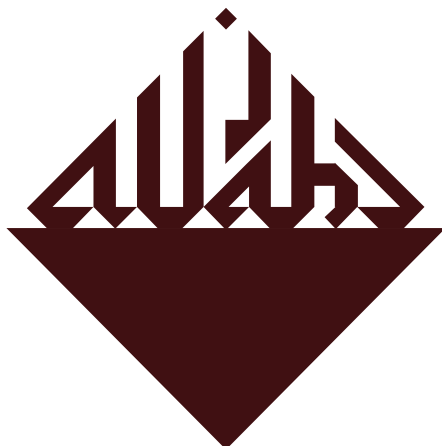


STUDIA ISLAMIKA

INDONESIAN JOURNAL FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

Volume 17, Number 1, 2010



THE MUSLIM MINORITY MOVEMENT IN SOUTHMOST THAILAND:
FROM THE PERIPHERY TO THE CENTRE

Ahmad Suaedy

PRAXIS AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN ISLAM:
THE CASE OF AHMAD DAHLAN, FOUNDER OF MUHAMMADIYAH

Hyung-Jun Kim

STUDIA ISLAMIKA

Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies

Vol. 17, no. 1, 2010

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STUDIA ISLAMIKA (ISSN 0215-0492) is a journal published by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta (STT DEPPEN No. 129/SK/DITJEN/PPG/STT/1976). It specializes in Indonesian Islamic studies in particular, and South-east Asian Islamic Studies in general, and is intended to communicate original researches and current issues on the subject. This journal warmly welcomes contributions from scholars of related disciplines.

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STUDIA ISLAMIKA has been accredited by The Ministry of National Education, Republic of Indonesia as an academic journal (SK Dirjen Dikti No. 83/Dikti/Kep/2009).

Hyung-Jun Kim

Praxis and Religious Authority in Islam: The Case of Ahmad Dahlan, Founder of Muhammadiyah

Abstrak: Otoritas tertinggi dalam Islam adalah *al-Qur'an* dan *hadis*. Namun pertanyaan akan siapa yang paling otoritatif untuk menafsirkan dua sumber hukum tersebut hingga sekarang terus menjadi perdebatan. Para ahli Islam setidaknya mencatat beberapa sumber otoritas dalam Islam. Pertama, karena sumber utama Islam berbahasa Arab, maka hanya mereka yang paham struktur gramatika, kosakata, semantik, dan retorika bahasa Arab sajalah yang dapat dan sah untuk menafsirkannya.

Kedua, di beberapa daerah, tradisi lokal memiliki peran cukup penting dalam penentuan otoritas keagamaan. Di Afrika dan Asia Tenggara, misalnya, otoritas keagamaan cenderung diberikan kepada seseorang yang memiliki atau menguasai kekuatan gaib tertentu. Sementara di daerah yang memiliki tradisi sufi cukup kuat, otoritas itu diberikan kepada seseorang yang berhasil memperoleh kekeramatan lewat praktik-praktik asketik, atau karena memiliki latar belakang genealogis dengan Nabi.

Ketiga, dalam konteks masyarakat modern, pendidikan dan penerjemahan kitab suci ke beberapa bahasa rupanya menjadikan konsep tentang otoritas dalam Islam mengalami perubahan yang cukup signifikan. Di masa ini, kapabilitas seseorang dalam menafsirkan urusan duniawi ke dalam istilah-istilah yang sangat Islami serta penegasan atas komitmen keislaman menjadi kata kunci untuk menentukan siapa yang berhak memiliki otoritas keislaman. Dalam konteks itu, seseorang yang meski tidak memiliki penguasaan ilmu-ilmu tradisional keislaman dan pernah belajar kepada ulama kenamaan dalam rentang waktu tertentu, namun memiliki kepekaan wacana Islam dalam berbagai urusan yang bersifat duniawi dapat dipandang sebagai orang yang memiliki otoritas keagamaan.

Konteks modernitas tersebut pada gilirannya menerbitkan sebuah pertanyaan bagaimanakah Islam melihat atau menilai praksis di ranah politik-ekonomi dan sosial-budaya serta peran apakah yang dapat dimainkannya dalam pembentukan legitimasi dan kepemimpinan keagamaan.

Untuk itu, tulisan ini coba memotret K.H. Ahmad Dahlan. Ia adalah sosok yang meski tak berlatar pendidikan Islam asuhan ulama besar dan tak memiliki kekuatan mistis sebagai sumber otoritas tradisional, berhasil mendirikan salah satu ormas Islam terbesar di Indonesia, Muhammadiyah. Otoritas keagamaan yang disematkan kepada tokoh kelahiran Yogyakarta pada 1868 ini lebih ber-sumber pada praksis dan dedikasinya di dunia pendidikan, reformasi pandangan keislaman tradisional, dan pemberdayaan ekonomi masyarakat kecil.

Di bidang keagamaan, Dahlan terpengaruh oleh pandangan reformis Islam Muhammad Abduh, Jamaluddin al-Afghani, dan Rasyid Ridha. Dari situ Dahlan berkeyakinan bahwa praktik keislaman semestinya dikembalikan pada ajaran al-Quran dan hadis. Ia kemudian berusaha membersihkan seluruh praktik keagamaan umat Islam Indonesia dari unsur budaya yang tidak Islami, sinkretis. Di bidang pendidikan, tidak seperti tokoh agama pada umumnya, ia sangat mengapresiasi ilmu pengetahuan modern dan capaian peradaban Barat. Ia keberatan dengan pandangan tradisional yang menyatakan bahwa Islam bertentangan dengan modernitas dan karenanya harus menolak semua pengaruh budaya Barat. Apresiasi terhadap Barat inilah yang di kemudian waktu menjadi alasan Dahlan untuk bergabung dengan Budi Utomo, sebuah organisasi modern yang salah satu konsentrasinya adalah memajukan pendidikan untuk kaum pribumi. Sementara di bidang ekonomi, Dahlan begitu mengutamakan kemandirian dan pemberdayaan kaum miskin. Ia sangat memperhatikan kaum yang disebut terakhir itu dan kerap membantunya hingga memiliki kemandirian ekonomi.

Faktor-faktor di atas, terutama pengalaman di organisasi modern dan keinginan yang kuat untuk mewujudkan pendidikan modern, akhirnya memunculkan keyakinan Dahlan untuk mendirikan sebuah organisasi Islam bernama Muhammadiyah. Lewat pendirian organisasi inilah semua idealitas pandangan keagamaan Dahlan disuarakan. Dan dengan itu, otoritas keagamaan Dahlan pun semakin tak tergoyahkan.

Di atas segalanya, satu poin penting yang membuat otoritas keagamaan Dahlan diakui adalah pandangan keagamaannya yang berbasis pada sisi praksis. Baginya, memahami kitab suci tak bisa dilakukan hanya dengan menghafal dan menafsirkan. Lebih penting dari itu semua adalah aksi nyata, mempraktikkan ajaran ('amal). Dari perjalanan Ahmad Dahlan, tulisan ini menyimpulkan bahwa praksis di bidang politik-ekonomi dan sosial-budaya dapat menjadi salah satu sumber legitimasi bagi pembentukan otoritas keagamaan dalam konteks masyarakat Islam modern.

Hyung-Jun Kim

Praxis and Religious Authority in Islam: The Case of Ahmad Dahlan, Founder of Muhammadiyah

خلاصة: إن السلطة العليا في الإسلام هي القرآن والحديث؛ ولكن من هو أحق له أن يفسر ذينك المصدرين فإنه حتى الآن مازالت مثار الجدل، ويقوم خبراء الإسلام بوضع عدد من الكفاءات التي تتعلق بمصدر تلك السلطة في الإسلام، ومنها التمكن من اللغة العربية، نظرا لأن المصدر الرئيسي في الإسلام باللغة العربية، فكان أولئك الذين يفهمون قواعد اللغة العربية ومفرداتها ومعانيها وخطاباتها فقط هم الذين لهم أن يفسروهما.

في بعض المناطق تلعب التقاليد المحلية دورا هاما في تحديد من له السلطة الدينية؛ وفي أفريقيا وجنوب شرقي آسيا مثلا تعطى السلطة فيما يبدو لمن له قدرة أو سيطرة على قوى غيبية معينة؛ بينما في المناطق التي رسخت فيها التقاليد الصوفية فإن السلطة أعطيت لمن تحقق له الكرامات نتيجة مجاهداته أو كان له صلة بالنسب بالنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم.

ويختلف الأمر بالنسبة للمجتمع الإسلامي الحديث؛ فتعليم الكتاب المقدس وترجمته إلى عدد من اللغات قد غير مفهوم السلطة في الإسلام تغييرا كبيرا؛ وفي هذا العصر تمثل قدرات الشخص في إدخال الشئون الدينية إلى مصطلحات أكثر إسلامية والتأكيد على الالتزام الإسلامي المفتاح لتحديد من له حق السلطة الإسلامية، وفي هذا الصدد لئن كان المرء غير متمكن من العلوم الإسلامية التقليدية وكان قد تعلم على يد عالم مشهور خلال مدة معينة فإن له السلطة الدينية إذا استطاع أن يعرض الإسلام مندجما مع الأمور الدينية.

وأدى ذلك الإطار التحديتي بدوره إلى سؤال هو كيف ينظر الإسلام إلى التطبيق العملي في مجال السياسة والاقتصاد والاجتماعي الثقافي، وما هو الدور الذي يلعبه في تحقيق الشرعية والقيادة الدينية؟

هذا المقال يقدم صورة عن الشيخ أحمد دحلان، وهو شخصية وإن لم يكن له خلفية من تعلم الإسلام على يد شيخ كبير وليس له الكرامات التي تحول له السلطة التقليدية فإنه

نجح في إنشاء إحدى كبرى المنظمات الإسلامية باندونيسيا وهي جمعية الحمديّة؛ وإن السلطة الدينية التي أعطيت لهذه الشخصية المولود في مدينة يوغياكرتا عام ١٨٦٨م ترجع إلى تطبيقه العملي وتفانيه في دنيا التعليم وإصلاح الأفكار الإسلامية التقليدية وتمكين المجتمع اقتصاديا.

في مجال الدين يتأثر أحمد دحلان بالآراء الإصلاحية من مصر خصوصا من الشيخ رشيد رضى، فمنه يعتقد أحمد دحلان أن التطبيق العملي للإسلام ينبغي الرجوع به إلى القرآن والحديث، فحاول جاهدا من أجل تنقية جميع الممارسات الدينية للامة الإسلامية في اندونيسيا من العناصر الثقافية غير الإسلامية والعناصر التلقيفية؛ وفي مجال التعليم خالفا لرجال الدين عموما كان الشيخ أحمد دحلان يقدر العلم الحديث وما وصل إليه الغرب من تقدم، وكان يعترض على وجهة نظر التقليدية التي ترى تعارض الإسلام مع الحداثة وبالتالي يجب رفض جميع آثار الثقافة الغربية؛ وهذا الموقف من تقديره للغرب هو الذي استند إليه فيما بعد للانضمام إلى حركة بودي اوتومو Budi Utomo وهي منظمة حديثة كان من أهم أهدافها تحقيق التقدم في مجال التعليم للسكان الأصليين؛ بينما يفضل أحمد دحلان الاستقلالية في مجال الاقتصاد وتمكين الفقراء والمساكين؛ لقد أولى اهتماما كبيرا لهم وكثيرا ما قدم لهم المساعدات حتى يحققوا الاستقلالية الاقتصادية.

كانت تلك العوامل المشار إليها والخبرة في إدارة المنظمات الحديثة والرغبة القوية في تحقيق التقدم في مجال التعليم الحديث هي التي جعلت أحمد دحلان متأكدا من قراره لإنشاء منظمة إسلامية سميت جمعية الحمديّة، لتكون لسان صدق عن جميع آرائه الدينية وبذلك ازدادت سلطته الدينية رسوخا لا يتزعزع.

وفوق الكل، هناك نقطة هامة جعلت السلطة الدينية لأحمد دحلان مقررّة هي رؤيته الدينية المبنيّة على التطبيق العملي، فهو يرى أن فهم الكتاب المقدس لا يمكن أن يتم بمجرد الحفظ والتفسير، فالأهم من ذلك كله هو الفعل المتحقق والممارسة العملية؛ وانطلاقا مع أحمد دحلان ينتهي هذا المقال إلى أن التطبيق العملي في المجال السياسي الاقتصادي والمجال الاجتماعي الثقافي يمثل إحدى الأسس الشرعية لتكوين سلطة دينية في إطار المجتمع الإسلامي الحديث.

In Islam, the ultimate source of religious authority is the Qurān and ḥadīth. Muslims of every generation have acknowledged the universal and absolute position of these Scriptures in their religious life. In spite of this shared view, however, the question of who hold the legitimate authority to give the proper interpretations of these Scriptures to specific realities has been answered diversely. This question is especially challenging in societies where an institutionalized form of religious leadership is absent. There coexist competing criteria to determine who have the right to translate Allah's Words into those of human beings.

Scholars of Islam have noted the presence of plural sources of Islamic authority. As the Qurān is written in Arabic it cannot be easily comprehended by ordinary Muslims, a capability to command Arabic grammar, vocabularies, semantics, and rhetoric is admitted as the primary source for this understanding (Arkoun 1988: 62). As this knowledge can be obtained only after extensive religious trainings, a prolonged learning experience in prestigious institutions and/or under '*ulamā*' is a factor to give one the legitimacy to approach the Scriptures (Gilsnan 1982: 31-2; Hefner 2007: 4-7).

In some regions, local traditions matter. Muslim societies in North Africa and Southeast Asia tend to bestow religious authority upon 'holy' persons who can work miracles (Dhofier 1999; Geertz 1968; Rabinow 1978). In societies with a strong Sufi tradition, Muslims who attain sacredness with the help of ascetic practices, devoutness, or blood relationship with the Prophet are considered the 'friends' of Allah, and thus its bearers (Cornell 1998: 272-285). Political success, economic generosity, and social esteem are also viewed as qualifications (Eickelman 1989: 293).

In his study of Islamic change in modern society, Eickelman points out the emergence of a new factor that challenges traditional concepts of Islamic authority. He notes a gradual transformation in the nature of religious knowledge from material, which is mnemonically 'possessed' to that written in the Scriptures and thus in need of interpretation. This shift has precipitated a change in the basis of religious authority. Rather than a long apprenticeship under renowned scholars, a capability to interpret mundane affairs in Islamic terms and a claim to a strong Islamic commitment have become key factors to determine who belongs to the group of legitimate leaders (1978: 511-12). His study helps us to

appreciate the impacts of modern education and the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular on the nature of Islamic leadership. By putting too much emphasis on religious knowledge, however, his study does not present a systematic analysis of the role and the meaning of praxis, especially that carried out in 'non-religious' fields. Little attention is paid to such questions as what activities in non-religious fields are perceived as religious praxis (*'amal*), what meanings are attached to these activities, and how religious leadership is related to these.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of praxis in the formation of religious authority. Although not fully acknowledged in Islam, the separation of religious from non-religious domains has become sharper and more clearly discernable in modern society. Accordingly, it is relevant to ask how praxis in the politico-economic and socio-cultural domains is evaluated in Islamic terms and what roles it plays in accessing religious legitimacy and leadership.

The focus of this study is on Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of an Islamic mass-organization in Indonesia, the Muhammadiyah. Examination of his background reveals that he was not equipped with the traditional sources of authority. Born in a family of low-ranking officials in the mid-19th century, he did not have a blood relationship with renowned Islamic figures. He was not educated under famous Islamic scholars and did not prove his mystical power. He was also not in a position to wield politico-economic influence upon the masses. In spite of these, he successfully established an organization that has maintained its authoritative position until now. His case will give us a chance to appreciate the meaning and the role of praxis, especially in the non-religious domains.

The second part of this paper deals with Dahlan's life history. His view of praxis and his followers' attitudes towards him will be investigated in the next part. The fourth part discusses the ways emphasis on praxis has affected the development of the Muhammadiyah. With these, I will argue that praxis in the politico-economic and socio-cultural domains should be also considered as a legitimate source to obtain religious authority in modern Islamic society.

Ahmad Dahlan and the Muhammadiyah

Ahmad Dahlan was born in Yogyakarta in 1868. His father was a religious official in the Sultanate. He grew up in the Kauman, which

was domiciled by low-ranking officials and was famous for religious piety. After having received basic religious education,¹ he left for Mecca in 1883 and, for the next five years, continued his studies there.² Returning home at the age of twenty, he became a religious official, assigned to deliver a sermon once a month (Muhammadiyah 2000a: 9).

While in Mecca, Dahlan was exposed to a new trend of Islamic reformism or modernism proposed by Muḥammad 'Abduh, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, and Rashīd Riḍā. The biographies,³ however, do not clarify how and why he was attracted to this new modernist current or what it was. Only through his actions after returning from Mecca, we can assume that his religious perspective had changed dramatically (Junus 1968: 57).

Dahlan discovered that the mosque of the Sultan's palace was not constructed properly and did not face Mecca. This implies that Muslims praying in it had not carried out their duty correctly. After his discovery, he painted slanted lines on the floor of the mosque in order to point out the right direction of Mecca. His action infuriated other religious functionaries of the Sultanate who subsequently erased all lines. Not discouraged by his failure, he built his own *langgar* facing Mecca, which was also destroyed.

This anecdote is considered a typical example of Dahlan's reformist orientation (Alfian 1989: 146-7; Noer 1980: 85). Based on the Qurān and ḥadīth, he tried to rectify the un-Islamic customs and accretions (*bid'ah*) that were practiced in the name of tradition. His effort to purify the faith could not help touching almost every aspect of religious practices, which had penetrated it through the so-called syncretism (Geertz 1960; Supatmo 1943). Consequently, his actions triggered strong reactions from established ulama (*kiyai*), who viewed him as a direct challenge to their authority.⁴

Another element in Dahlan's religious orientation was his favorable attitude toward modern sciences and Western civilization. He objected to the traditional view that Islam and modernity were incompatible and that influence from the West should be blocked. Instead, he proposed that, by appropriating modern science and technology, Islamic societies could regain political and economic dominance (Junus 1968: 15). His optimism stemmed from his conviction that modern scientific development was based on reason and rationality, both of

which are also basic tenets of Islam as inscribed in the concept of *ijtihad* (Mul Khan 1990: 203-4). He thought that the changing world should be interpreted and reacted to in Islamic terms, based on the rational interpretation of the Scriptures.

Dahlan's view on the compatibility of Islam and Western civilization was the reason he participated actively in modern organizations, one of which was the nationalist movement, Budi Utomo. As a member, he was given a chance to teach Islam to students in its schools. This experience prompted him to dream of a religious school where Islam was taught alongside secular subjects (Arifin 1987: 113). As a first step, he started to teach children in his house, which later turned into an informal school at the elementary level (Jainuri 1981: 29-30).

Dahlan's school was different from traditional institutions of Islamic teaching. What made it unique was not only the religious education itself but also the facilities used for teaching. It was equipped with chairs, desks, and a blackboard and students used notebooks and stationeries (Arifin 1987: 114). This scene, which looks common these days, however, shocked people who firmly believed that everything from the West derived from Christianity and thus should be prohibited. Dahlan received harsh criticisms. He was called *kiyai Kristen* or *kiyai palsu* and his school, *sekolah kafir* (Mul Khan 1990: 71).

His experience in modern organization and his desire for modern education motivated him to establish an Islamic organization. The Muhammadiyah was thus founded with the help of his fellow officials, students, and neighbors and was originally aimed at consolidating the basis of his school. Two years after its foundation, it obtained the formal recognition of the Sultanate and of the Dutch colonial government.

As a chairperson, Dahlan tried his utmost to strengthen the basis of the Muhammadiyah. With these, the number of members increased to 3,346 and when he passed away in 1923, 15 branches had been set up (Alfian 1989: 175; Jainuri 1981: 49). A blueprint of the organizational structure was also made, so that committees to deal with education, welfare, and mission, and affiliated organizations for women and male youth were established (Noer 1980: 90-94).

The period after Dahlan's passing witnessed the rapid expansion of the Muhammadiyah. In 1933, the number of branches had increased to 109 and there were 45,000 registered members (Alfian 1989: 187; Muhammadiyah 1934: 207-216). The pace of expansion accelerated

after Indonesian Independence. Its half-century anniversary book reported that it had 524 branches and 170,000 registered members (Muhammadiyah 1962: 59). In 2000, the number of branches had increased to 2,461 and its members to 860.000 (Muhammadiyah 2000a: 424).⁵

It is difficult to decide on Muhammadiyah's socio-political influence, especially in numeric terms. The official handbook estimates that Indonesian Muslims under its influence numbered 28 million (Muhammadiyah 2000b: 21). Foreign scholars usually use the number, 30 million (Aspinall 2005: 60; Hefner 1999: 40 Kingsbury 2005: 12), while an Indonesian scholar recently pushes it up to 40 million (Azra 2006: 61).⁶

The development of the Muhammadiyah from something of a neighborhood association to one of the largest Islamic organizations in the world could not have been possible without the strenuous efforts of its numerous leaders after Dahlan. It should be emphasized, however, that only Dahlan was located at the centre of its discourse and to have assumed his position as its key symbol. It is no exaggeration to say that without him, the Muhammadiyah would not have been imaginable. The reasons he has been treated so centrally, that his anecdotes have been consumed so intensively, and that his words and actions have been talked about repetitively are to be examined in the next section. This is at the same time an investigation into the basis of his religious authority.

Religious Authority Based on Praxis

Dahlan's teachings have not yet been collected or compiled into a book. Asking about the reason, several activists gave an interesting answer. They said it was because they followed Dahlan's wishes. He is said to have been worried about the possibility that, once gotten into print, his teachings would be fossilized, and no longer open to interpretations. Seeing that he regarded the closed gate of *ijtihad* (Gibb 1953: 97) as the main factor causing the decline of Muslim societies, his warning against the collection of his teachings is an example of how he tried to put his ideas into practice.

His praxis is another reason that may explain this absence. Attracted to his self-sacrificial and dedicated actions, his followers attached less significance to attempts to approach him through written materials.

Orally-transmitted anecdotes and short quotes may suffice to illustrate the core of his teachings.

Although slightly different in details, several biographies of him unanimously highlight his praxis, commitment, and sacrifice. The significance of the praxis he tried to carry out is said to be epitomized in a story related to Surah 107, al-Mā'ūn. Delivering a morning sermon, he repeated this passage for several days until his student asked him for his reason. He questioned the student whether he understood it properly. Hearing that his student had been already memorized it, he asked the following question, “did you put it into practice?” The student answered positively, saying he recited it several times during prayers. Upon hearing this, he gave a comment on the true meaning of praxis (Junus 1968: 60).

[The meaning of] praxis is to carry out and to act [something]! According to my view, you have not yet carried out [the teaching of al-Mā'ūn]. Go outside and look for a poor person. If you find one, take him home, let him bathe with fragrant soap, and give him clean clothes and food. After these, provide him a place to stay in your house.

As is revealed in the quote, Dahlan was convinced that an understanding of the Scriptures should include action and not only memorization and interpretation. The praxis he envisioned was to be carried out not only in religious domain but also in non-religious, everyday mundane life.

His praxis overwhelmed his neighbors, in that he practiced religious teachings in a way, which was almost unimaginable at the time. In order to manage his school, he sold out household belongings such as kitchen utensils and clothes. He paid so much attention to the poor that he frequently took beggars home, taking care of them until they could be economically independent (Junus 1968: 58-66).

His praxis was accompanied by his strong will to disseminate his understanding of Islam. He was even brave enough to visit people who had threatened to kill him. He was willing to meet Christian pastors and ministers, paying no heed that he was being called *kāfir* by others (Solichin 1963: 55-57). He sometimes expressed his attempt to correct traditional customs in a ‘reckless’ manner (Arifin 1987: 93-101; Junus 1968: 21-22):

He came to realize that the end of the Fasting month estimated from astronomical calculation (*hisāb*) and observation of the moon

(*ru'yah*) fell a day ahead of the date promulgated by the Sultanate.⁷ This implied that Javanese Muslims could not observe the fasting as enjoined by the Qurān. After great pains, he knocked on the door of the palace and asked for an audience with the Sultan. Although he was a low-ranking official, the urgency of the matter and because the Sultan was broad-minded and magnanimous, an audience was granted. Listening to Dahlan, the Sultan made a decision: you are permitted to end the fasting in accordance with your own calculation, but people in Yogyakarta would do so in accordance with tradition.

In order to understand this anecdote properly, we need to appreciate the position of the Sultan and the function of religious ritual in the early 20th century. At the time, the Sultan was not only the head of the Sultanate but Allah's representative on earth (Moertono 1974: 28). As the sole medium to connect human beings to Allah, the Sultan had absolute religious and political authority. Commoners endowed him with limitless respect and accepted his words almost unconditionally (Selosoemardjan 1962: 17-21). Religious rituals in the Sultanate were the loci where the position of the Sultan as the axis of the world was manifested and confirmed, so that officials and commoners were commanded to attend at these (Moertono 1974: 99). In order to have legitimacy and efficacy, the rituals should proceed as they had been done before (Selosoemardjan 1962: 28).

Given the Sultan's position and the significance of the rituals, it is quite obvious that Dahlan's action was extraordinary and radical. By demanding a shift in the day of the ending the fast, he challenged the norm of the unconditional obedience to the Sultan. By pinpointing the mistake in the tradition, he questioned, although indirectly, its political legitimacy. His action illustrates how strong his will was to put his religious ideas into practice.⁸ He risked his life to attain an Islamic cause.⁹

The Muhammadiyah was the vehicle to fulfill his desire for reform at the collective level. Realizing that a modern organization would be the most effective means to disseminate his religious ideals, he made efforts to solidify its basis. Whenever there was a request for a sermon, he readily accepted it, propagandizing the new organization. His struggle continued after his health had proceeded from bad to worse. In spite of his doctor's advice to take a rest, he made 17 long journeys outside Yogyakarta 1922, just a year before his death (Solichin 1963: 27-30). Lack of proper means of transportation meant that his journeys were

burdensome and hard to make even for the young. This case illustrates the notion of praxis to which he stuck.

With his praxis and dedication, Dahlan was able to draw on the strong religious authority and leadership from the first generation of Muhammadiyah members. Even after death, his authority continues to the extent that his actions and words are at the centre of its discourse until now. In spite of this, however, it is difficult to find materials that reveal the attitudes and the emotions his followers had toward him. Biographies of Muhammadiyah's prominent leaders almost invariably mention that they learned directly from Dahlan and that they were his faithful followers (Chasanah 2005: 24-25; Masruri 2005: 27-28; Suratmin 1999: 8-9), but they fail to present what they thought of him personally.¹⁰ A similar trend is found in biographies of his life. Anecdotes presented in these works are mere collections of facts and lack the appraisals of the authors and contemporaries. A comparison of two versions of the same story can clarify this lack of personal evaluation of Dahlan. The first is from a semi-official biography written by Junus (1968: 58-9).

Participants to his sermon in East Java casted criticisms and cursed him. Later, a letter was delivered to him saying that he would be killed if he would visit the place again. In spite of his family's objections, he made a revisit. His sermon did not cause any problem.

The quote describes facts without further explanation or appraisal. However, a book introducing the history of the Muhammadiyah from a personal perspective presents the story differently. The author highlights Dahlan's charismatic leadership and authority, which were strong enough to overwhelm his opponents (Puar 1989: 57-9).

When he went to the station to revisit the place, his friends, and followers saw him off in tears. On arrival, he was surrounded by the police who demanded a cancellation of his visit. When his sermon began, however, a dramatic change took place. Those who were hostile to him were gradually overwhelmed. They threw out their weapons and concentrated on his words. At the end of the sermon, they turned into enthusiastic followers.

This restraint from emotional appraisal of Dahlan is related to the reformist orientation he tried to uphold. He criticized the traditional practices of worshiping religious leaders and visiting tombs to obtain blessings (Solichin 1963: 35-36). In line with this view, he was worried

he himself would become an object of worship after his death and he vehemently opposed any attempt to make himself sacred. His followers seem to have shared his attitude, which results in the minimization of personal and emotional assessment by the authors of his biographies.

The congress held just after his death also illustrates how anxious the Muhammadiyah activists were about his possible deification. What permeated the atmosphere of the congress was not a tribute to his struggle, achievements, and contributions, but the need to overcome him. The chairperson after him who was his brother-in-law, Ibrahim, put forward in his inaugural speech that (Muhammadiyah 1923: 113):

Dear members of the Muhammadiyah! Were our achievements made so far because of Dahlan or because of Allah? If it was because of Dahlan, we no longer need to continue our struggle ... in that he has already passed away. ... If our achievements have been because of Allah, Allah does not leave this world ever.

The excessive emphasis on the need to surpass Dahlan was grounded on fears that he might become an object of respect and worship. This prompted leaders to reject proposals by delegates from branches. The requests to take care of his tomb properly, to distribute his picture to members, to make the day of his death a school holiday and to look for ways to commemorate him were dismissed. The leaders reminded the delegates of the fact that showing respect to the dead is not permitted in Islam. Instead, they maintained that it is not Dahlan himself but his intentions that should be followed (Muhammadiyah 1923: 113-119). The message they tried to convey by differentiating him from his intentions was clear. The latter, which pervaded the programs of the Muhammadiyah, should be retained, but objects and activities, which reminded of him as a person should be prohibited. What they wanted to succeed to was not Dahlan himself but an impersonalized praxis of him.

Praxis and the Muhammadiyah

Muhammadiyah members have strictly observed Dahlan's will not to deify him. His tomb in an ordinary graveyard has not received any special treatment, and many do not even know its location. The school building into which he poured his energy is locked and remains as if in ruins. The *musholah* in the front yard of his house is still in use but it is hard to trace its former glory except for small pictures of him

and his wife. From time to time, there have been proposals to build a museum for him but they have never been treated seriously. He has existed actively in the discourse of the Muhammadiyah but any concrete objects, which might commemorate him, have almost totally been ignored by later generations.

The fact that Dahlan's authority is based on praxis has influenced the development of the Muhammadiyah. In terms of routine activities, it has developed into an educational and social movement. In terms of organizational structure, leadership in it tends to be given to those who participate energetically in these activities. In the following, both developments will be examined in detail.

Dahlan's efforts to consolidate the organizational basis of the Muhammadiyah witnessed the establishment of 15 branches outside Yogyakarta. His struggle was aimed at expanding not only its mass base but also its activities in the educational and social fields. The close relation between expansion at the organizational level and that at the educational and social levels can be attributed to its member's shared view at the time: branches could be opened on the condition that they would initiate educational and/or social programs (Alfian 1989:186-193). A few years after their official opening, branches tried hard to open schools and, if possible, welfare facilities and clinics. The school was perceived to be a requisite, so that the branches, which were unable to open one, declined gradually and disappeared eventually.¹¹

The establishment of educational and social programs was thought to realize the very idea of Dahlan. This branch was not only the arena where new religious ideas were distributed and debated but also the container where actions should be put into practice. Likewise, school buildings and facilities were perceived as symbols embodying the spirit of reformism he tried to disseminate among Indonesian Muslims.

The emphasis on praxis and the significance of school resulted in a rapid increase in educational institutions. In 1937, it managed 220 primary and secondary schools (Alfian 1989: 310-311). In 1960, the number reached 1,078 and in 1980 rose to 1,782 (Muhammadiyah 1980: 7-13; Solichin 1963: 61). In 2000, it had 1,128 schools at the primary, 1,937 schools at the secondary and 132 institutions at the tertiary level (Muhammadiyah 2000a: 424).

In addition to education, the Muhammadiyah also engaged in medical and welfare programs. In 2000, it managed 312 clinics and drug-

stores, 240 orphanages, 19 small credit associations, and 808 cooperatives (Muhammadiyah 2000a: 424). As the data indicate, activities in the non-educational field have not been as vigorous as those in education. They were perceived, however, as essential fields of its operation and have functioned as embryos for new trials.¹²

A distinctive feature of the educational and social programs is that their establishment and management are not initiated and led by Muhammadiyah headquarters but are planned and carried out autonomously and self-sufficiently at each organizational level. The role of the headquarters is limited to providing ideational guidelines and managerial expertise.

Financial independence allows the branches to have relative autonomy, which demands sacrifices of its members. They have to donate for programs and spend substantial time and energy to manage them. This shared experience of praxis helps to strengthen group solidarity among those who are willing to sacrifice themselves. At the same time, it also establishes a tradition in which those unable to spend money, time, and/or energy are gradually marginalized until, whether voluntary or indirectly forced, they become non-active. In other words, the status of activists can be secured in as far as one is able to do something for the organization.

The significance of praxis has also affected membership and leadership. Members who can raise their voices are those who have been actively involved in routine programs. As a corollary, religious knowledge is relatively less important. Deep religious understanding is respected and highly evaluated, but is not in itself a sufficient condition to maintain one's membership or to be acknowledged as a leader. Only those who keep sacrificing material and non-material resources are regarded as 'good members' and ultimately as 'good leaders'.

The influence of praxis on leadership became increasingly clear in the 1990s. Before this time, the top leadership of the Muhammadiyah consisted of people who shared a similar background.¹³ Many originated from Yogyakarta and were scholars endowed with deep religious knowledge, but their exposure to Western education was minimal (Karim 1985: 79; Peacock 1978:50-51). Since the 1990s, the background of its leaders was different and all chairmen had received tertiary education in Indonesia and had continued their graduate study abroad.¹⁴ The educational background of those sitting at the central board, for

example, between 2000 and 2005 was not dissimilar. Many undertook their graduate study either at domestic or foreign institutions.¹⁵ Most of them received extensive Islamic education under traditional and modern Islamic institutions and obtained their university degrees with topics related to Islam. Their major tools of study, however, were based on the scholarly tradition of the West, and thus their approach to Islam differs from that in Indonesia and in Arabic countries.¹⁶

One of the reasons why members with Western education could emerge as leaders was the importance of praxis. As active involvement in organizational programs and social reputation were perceived as central elements in leadership, they could be selected as leaders without blood relationships or shared cultural backgrounds with former prominent figures and without religious knowledge proven by a prolonged education under famous Islamic scholars and institutions.

Religious authority based on praxis impacts on the relationships between leaders and followers. As personal and emotional attachment is tabooed and voluntary participation is highlighted, the development of an attitude of submission to leaders, elaborate etiquettes to pay respect to them, and patron-client relationships was avoided. The difference among members is perceived to be based on the functional division of labor, and not by placing the various kinds of labors in a hierarchical relation.¹⁷

Praxis has also brought negative effects. The problem that has been discussed intensively is bureaucratization (Abdullah 1998: 2-3; Imron 2000: 164-172; Karim 1985: 81-83). The introduction of a bureaucratic structure seems to have been inevitable, in that the growth of branches and institutions has been dramatic. It was also accompanied with the problems are commonly ascribed to bureaucracy, namely, ever increasing complexity of administrative structures, decreasing flexibility and increasing formality in the decision-making process, slow pace of information flows and priority to efficient management of existing programs over the formulation of new ones.

Another negative effect is the routinization of activities and the subsequent upsurge of conservatism in the interpretation of praxis. Educational and social programs initiated by Dahlan were based originally on his new interpretations of Islam. Schools, orphanages, and clinics were not modern facilities *per se* but objects imbued with his ideas and praxis, thus rendering concrete examples to illustrate what

these were. The fixation of turning the spirit of reformism into visible symbols, however, brought a tendency to put stress on its form rather than on its content. This has been especially so when the first generation passed away and organizational interactions went beyond face-to-face contacts. Praxis is interpreted more and more in a restricted manner, namely to build and renovate educational and social institutions.

The conservatism of the Muhammadiyah can be demonstrated by comparing the major programs at the time of Dahlan and those after him. There have been almost no changes, so that branches, as they did before, spend much of their time and energy in planning and managing schools, orphanages, and clinics. This does not mean that no attempts have been made to start new programs. From time to time, headquarters has taken initiatives to explore new arenas and agendas for praxis. These, however, proved not to be fruitful and in the end were abandoned.¹⁸

The inertia in looking for new programs and the failure in maintaining them can be attributed to the difficulty of applying Dahlan's spirit to changing circumstances. As the mode of praxis he exemplified was imprinted too strongly, later generations have not been brave enough to cast it aside and the mode which was progressive and revolutionary enough at the early twentieth century is no longer so now.

Concluding Remarks

In modern society, ordinary Muslims have increasingly more opportunities to come into contact with the Scriptures. The spread of the mass media, the decrease in illiteracy, and the translation of the Scriptures into local languages, among others, have helped to increase this contact. This signifies that the chances by which Islam becomes a subject of 'objectification' (Eickelman 1992: 643) have also widened. In other words, religious teachings, which were taken for granted and thus were not objects of conscious questioning have become those of conscious examination by a wider circle of Muslims (Horvatich 1994). This shift has affected the nature of religious authority. The capacity to interpret changing realities in Islamic terms and to resolve various issues in modern society have also been incorporated as elements to support a person's claim as a religious leader.

The case of Dahlan shows the impact of praxis on religious authority. Based not on traditional sources of authority but on self-sacrificial

praxis, Dahlan was able to attract a substantial number of followers and to found a modern Islamic organization. This importance of praxis has prompted his followers to carry out what was exemplified by him. In this process, those who can demonstrate their commitment and their sacrifice are acknowledged as leaders and acquire the legitimacy to lead the organization. Consequently, the recent leadership of the Muhammadiyah has increasingly been recruited from among activists whose exposure to Western education surpasses that of traditional ways of learning.

The discussion also points out the negative effects of praxis. The mode of Dahlan's praxis originated from his painstaking struggle to look for the right interpretations of Islamic teachings and for the appropriate ways to apply these to the new situation. The spirit inherent in it, however, has not been easily appropriated by the later generation who focused more on its outward manifestation. To many, the effective management and expansion of educational and social programs tend to be perceived to represent what praxis is.

In spite of these negative effects, it cannot be denied that praxis in non-religious domains has provided a new model for expressing religious commitment and piety. In this respect, Dahlan's case shows that praxis can work as a legitimate source of religious authority in a modern Muslim society.

Endnotes

1. Biographies of Dahlan do not describe the course of his religious training in detail. Only a few names of *kiyai* in Yogyakarta and Mecca are mentioned. This is usually attributed to his lack of intensive training in a *pesantren* or under a *kiyai*. This explanation, however, does not seem to be persuasive, in that religious education in a *pesantren* was almost a requisite at that time, and the student-teacher bond thus created was crucial for one's career as a religious scholar (Kumar 1985). It is more reasonable to assume that his education in a traditional institution has been ignored in the biographies. In order to emphasize his independent and creative process of learning, it is likely that, his apprenticeship has been downplayed.
2. There is no consensus on the length of Dahlan's stay in Mecca. Jainuri reports that he went to Mecca in 1890 and stayed there for a year (1981: 25), Junus, without giving a clear chronological record, writes that he stayed there for several years (1968:7) whereas Nugroho (2009: 19-22) maintains he went there for the Hajj. The data in the text are from the official document of the Muhammadiyah published in 2000 (2000a: 9).
3. Biographical writings of Dahlan dealt with in the text include Hadjid (n.d.), Junus (1968), Mulkhan (1990), Nugroho (2009), and Solichin (1968).
4. For example, he severely criticized such traditional customs as *slametan*, *ziarah*, *tablilan*, and *jimat* (Arifin 1987: 105-8). These belonged to what traditional Islamic leaders was practised and guided.
5. Under the Dutch colonial regime, the main organizational structure consisted of its headquarters (*pusat*) and branches (*cabang*), although units to coordinate branches (*konferentie*) and sub-units of branches (*ranthing*) existed. After Independence, it established a finely tuned hierarchical structure after the administrative levels of the state. For the convenience of our discussion, branches are chosen to show the pace of the organization's expansion.
6. The figures used by scholars are just estimations, but recent data on election show that these are not totally groundless. The presidential candidate in 2004 election, Amien Rais, who received full support from Muhammadiyah at the organizational level, obtained approximately 18 million votes. Although assessed conservatively, this makes it possible to assume that its influence reaches more than ten million.
7. In the Sultanate of Yogyakarta, the end of the Fasting month was determined by the traditional way of calculation which fixed it on a combination of certain days of the Arabic and Javanese calendar every 8 years. The date calculated from the traditional way was usually different from the date derived from astronomical calculation and the observation of the moon (Arifin 1987: 91-93).
8. In the biographies, there is no consensus about the reason the Sultan gave his permission to Dahlan. Junus, for example, connects it to the Sultan's mercy (1968: 21-22), while Solichin highlights his revolutionary spirit to reform traditional religion (1963: 45-46).
9. Peacock argues that Dahlan's struggle was a peaceful one, carried out within the boundaries of existing social norms. Peacock's evaluation is based on a comparison of Dahlan with Luther who is said to have been brave enough to challenge the established authority directly (1978: 34-38). At the surface level, the comparison between the two may lead to an acceptance of Peacock's conclusion. Taking the Javanese cultural context into consideration, however, the comparison is misleading. His gentle and refined posture cannot hide the very fact that he challenged absolute authority and in that sense, he also risked his life, much like Luther.

10. An exceptional case appears in the biography written by Mansur, a chairperson of the Muhammadiyah between 1937 and 1943. He describes the moment he first met Dahlan as follows (Aqsha 2005: 31): “[Returning from Arabia] I visited Dahlan and introduced myself. A few minutes after meeting him, I could feel that my heart was attracted to him. Soon, a word, ‘respect’, appeared from my true heart. My heart was submitted to him.” As this description illustrates, its early members seem to have paid enormous respect to him. However, it is not easy to find writings where authors’ attitude toward him is presented at a more emotional and personal level.
11. In the early phase of the development of the Muhammadiyah, closedowns of branches seems to have been as common as their openings, although the latter far exceeded the former. *Suara Muhammadiyah*, for example, reports that 30 branches and groups (*ranthing*) ceased operating between 1933 and 1934, and 31 between 1937 and 1939, against the opening of 125 and 138 new ones in the same periods (Muhammadiyah 1934 & 1939). No further explanations were provided, but it may be assumed that the burdens of initiating and carrying out almost mandatory programs, especially educational ones, were certainly of a major significance.
12. The expansion of educational programs was directed at establishing institutions of higher education, while that in the social field was directed at setting up cooperatives and companies in the hope of strengthening the economic position of Muslims. No programs, however, have ever proved successful or to have been applied to all branches.
13. The thirteen members of the central board are elected by delegates from local branches. The chairman and the vice-chairman are nominated. Later, several were recruited as board members by consensus of the 13 elected ones.
14. Amien Rais, who was the chairperson between 1993 and 1998, was from Solo and obtained his PhD from the University of Chicago. Syafii Maarif from Sumatra received his PhD from the same university. Din Syamsuddin who was elected in 2005 was born in Sumbawa and obtained his PhD from UCLA.
15. Of 19 members, 15 undertook graduate studies and eight of them received their degrees abroad. This differs sharply from the educational background of those who already had been sitting at the central board for about twenty years. Of the 20 board members between 1978 and 1985, only nine completed their undergraduate studies in domestic universities (Muhammadiyah 1977).
16. Their reliance on the Western scholarly tradition may be demonstrated by the materials they use to articulate their views. For this, references in the speeches delivered at the time three chairpersons were inaugurated as full professors were analyzed. The three writings include 112 references in total, which consist of 84 written in English, 20 in Indonesian and 11 in Arabic (Maarif 2005: 340-2; Rais 2005: 204-207; Syamsuddin 2005:111-2). This composition provides sufficient evidence that their academic activities draw heavily on the scholarly tradition of the West.
17. The relation between leaders and followers can also be applied to that between headquarters and branches. As branches and institutions are managed autonomously and independently and the role of the center is confined to giving examples and guidelines, the relation between them are more horizontal and cooperative rather than vertical and hierarchical.
18. A recent attempt to reinterpret the concept of praxis and to apply it to the changing reality is a program called *Dakwah Kultural*, aiming to utilize local cultural tradition to facilitate the process of the religious education of the masses. It is based on a radical shift in perspective to look at local tradition, which has long been considered as anti-Islamic and thus an object of purification. Due to this revolutionary character, it

invited heated debates among its members. It was acknowledged as an official program in 2003 but it does not have the full support at the grass-roots level. It is likely that the program will be embraced only by a limited circle and will be given up eventually. For more about the program and the reactions against it, see Jabrohim (2005) & Mu'arif (2009).

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